With Respect To Change:

A report on *TRACKS*—the 7th Canadian Community Play and Art Symposium

By Will Weigler

Vancouver, BC /Coast Salish Territory May 10-12

Enderby, BC/Secwepemul'ecw Territory May 13-15

A six-day national symposium produced by Vancouver Moving Theatre, Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre and the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation in collaboration with Runaway Moon Theatre (Enderby BC) and Jumblies Theatre (Ontario)

Vancouver Moving Theatre, the Roundhouse, Vancouver Park Board, Runaway Moon Theatre and Jumblies Theatre acknowledge and honour that this event took place on the ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səlilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations and Secwepemul'ecw

Protocol Enacted
Arlene Roberts (Nisga'a/Tsimshian/Tlingit Nations) and jil p. weaving (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation) at Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre, 10 May 2015 Photo credit: Tom Quirk

—Preface—

Notes from Will Weigler, rapporteur

My name is Will Weigler. On my father's side, my family is from Eastern Europe; on my mother's side my family has lived on this continent (Turtle Island) for seven generations. I have been a community-based theatre director, producer, playwright, and actor for many years, and I'm also the author of a couple of books on theatre.

I have been invited to serve as one of two rapporteurs for the TRACKS symposium. I get to share this responsibility with my colleague Kwasuun Vedan, who is from the Cree, Ojibwa, Saulteux and Secwepmec Nations and is Artistic Associate at Full Circle: First Nations Performance, based in Vancouver. Savannah Walling of Vancouver Moving Theatre, on behalf of the TRACKS symposium organizing family, invited Kwasuun and me to share the role of rapporteur so that we might bring our two different worldviews to this report on the symposium.

The word *rapporteur* comes from Old French. It means, "to bring back." When people come together to share what they know and hear ideas from others, it's the responsibility of a rapporteur to be witness to the events and then tell the story of what happened both for those who were there and for to those who were not. A rapporteur listens, watches, and asks questions. What are the common concerns and aspirations here? What are some of the compelling details that might help to express what has meaning for the people who are here? What are the hard questions these people are asking, and what significant insights emerge from the time they spend together?

Kwasuun and I are, of course, both shaped by our respective cultural heritage, our gender, and other layers, but hers should not be seen simply as "the First Nations' perspective" or "the woman's perspective" any more than mine should be seen simply as "the Settlers' perspective" or "the man's perspective. Writing from our individual perspectives as two caring human beings, as writers, and as professional theatre artists, Kwasuun and I will offer you what it was that stood out for each of us at the symposium according to what had meaning for us personally.[1]

[1] Will attended and reported on both phases of the symposium, and continued on the Train of Thought all the way to the PEI, while Kwasuun remained in Vancouver and wrote about her perspectives on the events there.

Will Weigler's reflections on the symposium

If I were asked to find one single word in English that embodied all of what was shown and seen, spoken, sung and heard over the course of the TRACKS symposium, that word would undoubtedly be "relationship." What is our relationship to each other as Indigenous peoples from different nations and non-Indigenous peoples from diverse cultural backgrounds? What is our respective and collective relationship to the land, to our separate and mutual histories, and to our future together? Everything else that emerged followed from questions like these. Panelist Sharon Kallis shared with us a Squamish word that she herself had only recently learned from Rebecca Duncan. For the Squamish people, Rebecca told her, the word *eslhélha7k̲whiws* expresses who we are together, how our lines touch—and are connected to each other, to the land, to the plants and to our ancestors who were here before us. The entire TRACKS symposium was grounded in an intention by the artists and cultural workers who were there to make a sincere effort, with humility and determination, to nurture our collective understanding of what *eslhélha7k̲whiws* represents.[2] Over the course of several days, this is some of what I witnessed and learned.

Time is of the essence

Sandy Cameron's prose poem "One Hundred Years of Struggle," is about the people's history of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. It closes with the line: *Memory is the mother of community*. Leith Harris read these evocative words at the Big House.[3] They were repeated and discussed several times during the symposium, perhaps because many of us recognize the truth that they hold. In our work we have seen how community is built and strengthened when individuals learn about and feel connected to the lives of those who have come before them. We have seen how people make their own individual and collective memories in the very act of working, playing, and creating art together. These memories serve to build and strengthen a sense of a shared community. When I hear *Memory is the mother of community*, I can't help but think of someone else's line, a second century Roman philosopher who wrote, *Truth is the daughter of time*.[4] One truth heard at the symposium again and again was that time is one of the most important requirements for building relationships between people across cultural lines, and building relationships with the land, the water and other living creatures.

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[2] For readers unfamiliar with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), the symbol or glyph used to indicate a glottal stop (as in the English uh-oh) looks like a question mark with no dot at the bottom. Since many typographical fonts do not have this character, the number 7 is often used in its place.

[3] May 9 The Big House: Memory is the Mother of Community. Leith Harris, presenter of Sandy Cameron's poem "100 Years of Struggle."

[4] The philosopher was Aulus Gellius, who was recalling the words of a poet considered ancient in his lifetime. Francis Bacon later referenced Gellius when he wrote, "Truth is the daughter of time, not authority."

Sharon Kallis is an artist who works with plants. She has to be attuned to time since, as she explained, "We deal with timelines coming from the land itself. We can't dictate a timeline. It is a humbling experience because there is a particular time that things happen and if you miss it, you have to wait until the next year."

Panelists and curators Jordon Wilson and Sue Rowley described feeling constrained by institutional timelines and deadlines that typically fail to take into account the large amount of time that it really takes to do meaningful work in communities. Reporting on their exhibit at the Vancouver Museum of Anthropology, *c̓əsnaʔəm, the city before the city*, Jordon insisted, "conversations need to happen at length and not by institutional deadlines. Those who have the honour of listening [to Elders] have the responsibility to be active listeners to respond in ways that acknowledge what is shared."

Dancers/Choreographers Karen Jamieson and Margaret Grenier have both come to understand that "only time builds trust; only time can change your mind." When Karen, a Settler Canadian artist, tried to characterize her own experience of slowly coming to grasp Indigenous ways of understanding, she described her mind as gradually "creaking open" over time. Margaret, who is Gitxsan and Cree, describes her deep relationship with time: "Time periods of thousands of years that go back and through these practices have led me to where I am here today…I always feel that I am accompanied by this process and how it has transformed through time."

The thread that runs through all of these experiences is that if we are willing to allow ourselves to be changed by our encounters, we must be willing to take the requisite amount of time for that change to affect us. Symposium delegates heard from jil weaving about her definition on the nature of community arts. Like many of us she believes that if a project looks at the end just as we imagined it would at the start, then it's not community arts. Authentic engagement between artists and communities means that a project will be shaped by the learning that happens along the way and that it will change through the process. What emerged from the conversations at this symposium was an affirmation that there is a link between this change and what is called *decolonization*. It's not simply that the end product—the performance or the artwork—is different from the original plan, but more significantly that our very perceptions have changed as we have worked on it. Savannah Walling affirmed that over years of collaborating with Indigenous artists and cultural teachers such as Renae Morriseau, participating in the Uts'am Witness Project, learning from other teachings from First Nations, and observing the collaborations between Runaway Moon and the Splatsin community, her own personal understanding and her professional practice at Vancouver Moving theatre have been profoundly influenced.

The effort to take the time required to allow for speaking and hearing and witnessing was a thread woven through the entire conference. At the Big House community gathering and cultural feast, each day brought guests and presenters together with opportunities that allowed time to celebrate both the cultural histories and the living and breathing cultural present of everyone in the room. Throughout the symposium, at post-presentation audience talkbacks, around intimate discussion tables and large dialogue circles, and at the invitations to reflect as witnesses, there were opportunities to be with one another, to share, and to connect.

Naming names: moving beyond shadow of colonialism

Over the course of several days, symposium delegates heard variations on a valuable and practical means of actively decolonizing our relationships, our lives, and our work as non-Indigenous artists. Very simply, it involves the ways in which the names we use for things either support or contest the legacy of colonialism.

As I have already mentioned, I am writing this report from my perspective as a Settler Canadian. The term "settler" is considered contentious to some non-Indigenous people who feel that Canada is their home: their family's home. Perhaps it has been their family's home for generations and they reject the premise that they are not of this place. To me, the term settler can enfold both the feeling that this is my home while simultaneously acknowledging that my presence here is in relation to the people who are indigenous to this place. When I think of myself simply as "Canadian" the issue of my relationship with First Peoples doesn't necessarily come up. But when I choose to name myself as a settler, the very act of that naming affects how I think about the place I call home. For example, it leads me down the path of wanting to know the stories of this place. One of the panel moderators, Kamala Todd, a filmmaker of Métis, Cree and German origin who lives on the Sunshine Coast observed, "We need to know the stories of where we stand." Wendy Grant John told her that for those who live here as a guest on this land, the Musqueam stories are their stories as well. "To know that history, to know the stories of where you live, is essential," she says. "If you live here, you need to know this place."

During the Big House cultural feast, we heard presenter Sharon Kallis offer a metaphor to clarify the significance of naming:

> Invasive plants are those introduced species not participating in a community but instead monopolizing and controlling the surrounding environment. Introduced plants are not always invasive. It's how they participate in the community. I myself am an introduced species: I chose to be here, to call this place home. I also choose to work with those around me, to learn from others,

> to teach others and to share what I know openly with respect and compassion. I am grateful to be given this honour. . . [5]

Her intriguing image brought this idea into focus, demonstrating how a name can open up alternate perceptions. For settlers to see themselves metaphorically as 'introduced plants' prompts them to pose questions. What must we do in order to not behave as 'invasive plants'? What contribution are we making to co-exist honourably and respectfully in this place with the 'native plants' that have been here from time immemorial? Terry Hunter noted the colonial implications embedded in the use of words like "uncovering" or "discovering" stories. He insists on the point that although stories may be new to some people who hear them for the first time, they are not hidden; they are real for people who live here and they are part of this place. These and other insights we heard made it clear that cultivating a heightened awareness about the implications carried by words and names deserves more than to be shrugged off as "political correctness." The use of words and names shift our awareness.

Cathy Stubington is the Artistic Director of Runaway Moon Theatre in Enderby. It is clear when you talk with Cathy that she has a very personal love of the place where she lives and works—the land and the water, the plants, and the creatures that share the place she calls home. Her current projects with Runaway Moon reaffirm community arts as a conduit through which one makes a deeper connection to the place where one lives. Partly through her collaborations with Rosalind Williams and other members of the Splatsin Band she has, over the years, expanded her definition of what community arts looks like. During the storytelling and musical tour of Enderby/Splatsin nation sites where collaborative projects have taken place since 1998, she told us about Runaway Moon's Calendario project: "a local calendar based on the timing of events that take place around us, rather than on numerical dates." Runaway Moon welcomes people from all around the area to contribute to the creation of an actual calendar that implicitly invites them to re-imagine how they think about time. For example, as she explains, when you notice that the first daffodils are blooming, that means it's time to pick nettles. The process of noticing and gathering observations as part of collectively creating the Calendario reconfigures the ways in which many of us in the 21st century have become accustomed to marking the passage of time over the course of a year. And it is based on *re-naming*.

Historians have a term for this. It's called "periodization." When writing about history, they choose to chronicle eras according to markers that are actually quite arbitrary: the beginnings

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[5] May 8-10, The Big House. Sharon Kallis, presenter: *Plant and Human Communities Working Together*. Sharon is the author of *Common Threads: Weaving Community Through Collaborative Eco-art*. (New Society Publishers, 2014). http://www.newsociety.com/Books/C/Common-Threads.

and ends of wars for example, or the reigns of monarchs, or the terms of office for Prime Ministers. These choices establish a lens through which we are encouraged to think about our past, present, and future in a particular way, perhaps without even realizing we're doing it. We 'naturally' think about the year in terms of twelve months, or fifty-two weeks, four seasons, or indeed even a solstice and an equinox. The Calendario is an arts-based project that gently reorders our perception of time according to indicators that are intimately tied to indigenous ways of knowing and seeing.

At the open-air swawllc (fish) block-printing workshop led by Secwepemc artist Tania Willard at the Tsm7aksaltn Teaching Centre, the symposium delegates learned that each year the Grandmothers at the Centre were asked, "what should we be teaching the kids this year?" The Grandmothers felt that teaching the order of the arrival of fish in the river and their names would be good for the young ones to learn. With cultural knowledge from the Grandmothers, a set of cardboard fish was created to teach the children at the Centre. Songs and prayers for the continued appreciation and continued return of the fish were developed and taught. Some years later when Cathy talked with Rosalind about the Calendario concept, Rosalind acknowledged that this reminded her of the way things had always been recognized. Cathy and Rosalind connected Calendario with the "Order of the arrival of the fish" project, and decided to create a set of banners to celebrate them. With artistic and technical support from Tania, forty community residents of all ages learned the names of the fish and created lino block prints that represent eleven of them presented in the order of their return to the river: seven in the spring and four in the fall. This work has since made its way out to the general public and, through Runaway Moon Theatre, into public schools so that this traditional knowledge is shared with an even broader base.

Photo of Swawllc banners by Bev Peacock

Tsqwtsitsi: Red Mouth Sucker
Tsq'mus: Sucker
Pisell: Trout

Ck'múl'ecw: Ling Cod
Q'wa7k: Carp

Llq'llallq't: Larger Carp
Mámelt: Whitefish

Kekásu7: Chinook Salmon
Tsxayqs: Coho Salmon

Sqleltn7úw'l: Sockeye Salmon
Keknácw: Kokanee Salmon

Surely this is the strength of theatre performance, song, and visual art: to enable those who see and hear it to perceive what they feel they already know in a new way, in a fresh light. In this context, being conscious about the names we use for places, animals, activities and concepts, builds an active stance of indigenization into our work.

Working apart and working together.

> We do this work for better days. We do this work to honour the ancestors. The way that I give back is through the work that I do. I do very little of this work for myself. I am honoured to do it. I am humbled to do it. And most of it is fun. So I am grateful for that. But sometimes it's dangerous. Sometimes it's scary. And sometimes you just have to keep going on the belief—on the complete knowledge—that what you're doing isn't just right, but it's putting things to closer to how they were intended to be in the beginning.[6]

sχɬemtəna:t / Audrey Siegl

I am from Musqueam. The late χʷəyχʷiqtən, Stephen August, and Celina August are my Grandparents.

[6] May 10: The Big House: We are Living on Shared Territory. sχɬemtəna:t / Audrey Siegl, presenter: *To Wake Oneself Up*.

sχɬemtəna:t / Audrey Siegl spoke these words at the Big House event on May 10, the day I attended. I feel compelled to include them here because what she says resonates so deeply for me as community-engaged theatre artist. In my experience of over more than three decades, I have consistently found among my colleagues a sense of dedication to what we have always called "the work." In our field, there is an undeniable sense of being *summoned* as an artist to produce theatre performances or other creative events in collaboration with, for, and by people from various communities. It borders on what I can only describe as a spiritual calling. So when I heard her commitment to her practice as an Indigenous woman, I recognized in her something extraordinarily familiar to me. As a white, male, privileged settler theatre artist and cultural worker, I fully understand that my practice is not the same as hers. The stakes, also, are far higher and riskier for her than they are for me. And yet we have something in common: an intuitive need to do the work that we feel called to do in service to and in partnership with our communities.

During the TRACKS symposium, as symposium delegates considered how we might better forge alliances between Indigenous and Settler community-engaged artists, I came to believe that this shared dedication represents a natural affinity and an enormous potential for rich and rewarding collaborative work between us. Indeed, TRACKS Symposium Coordinator Damara Jacobs-Morris of the Squamish Nation explained that by honouring the traditions of the Coast Salish peoples, including acknowledgement of place and calling of witnesses, the symposium could be seen as traditional "work" as it is understood by First Peoples.

In the panel presentations, conversations, and performances, I saw two sides of a coin on how the creative work of Indigenous and Settler artists meet. In some instances these artists support each other to work apart, while in others they integrate their respective knowledge as they work together.

An example of supporting each other to work apart could be seen in the project that Krystal Cook and I presented—our experience as co-facilitators working with a community ensemble of Settler Canadians to develop the script and staging for an immersion theatre performance about reconciliation. In the panel presentation I described how I have personally been influenced by my study of decolonization in New Zealand where it is quite common for the Pākehā (European New Zealanders) to work on their own self-decolonization efforts independently, in parallel with or even sometimes in advance of working alongside the Maori. Our project, *From the Heart: enter into the journey of reconciliation*, offered what Krystal and I called a "creative container" for the participants to take initiative to examine their own relationships with the legacy of colonialism in Canada. Reading books by Indigenous authors and others, and looking into our own lives and family histories, we found the stories that opened our eyes and our hearts to better understand the lived experience of

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and their relations with settler/immigrant communities. [7]

Krystal, who is Kwakwaka'wakw from the Namgis First Nation of Alert Bay, worked with me closely. As an Indigenous theatre artist and facilitator of healing through the arts, Krystal saw her role as being there to support the work we Settlers were doing.

> Part of my role was really to support people to pick up their creative tools and support them to empower themselves to speak about their feelings and their thoughts and views and about their own ancestry, and where they've come from. What happened around their dinner table? How have people come out of university and not known about residential schools? How have people grown up to be grandmothers and never had an Indigenous friend?
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> The impulse for me—which was interesting—was around great restraint. Because it wasn't my job to educate everybody, to be the expert, to do all the cultural awareness work. I supported Will in allowing him to take responsibility for doing that. It wasn't about bringing in a bunch of Indigenous people, because I could have opened my Rolodex and invited in a whole bunch of people to touch and move people very deeply, but I was aware that it wasn't my role to rescue or to do it for them; my role was to be there as witness to the process and to support them to continue to turn inward to honour their own rich stories inside their body memory and the rich history that they have brought to Canada.

Krystal and I offered an analogy that characterized Krystal's role: the image of a spotter at a gym. The cast was taking responsibility for doing our work as Settler Canadians—what Paulette Regan calls "[turning] over the rocks in our colonial garden."[8] We could move forward with a degree of confidence because we knew that if we started to veer off track, Krystal would be there to offer her guidance and insights to help us understand what we were missing. She was there when we needed her to get us back on track. Without her support, we would simply be re-enacting colonial behaviour, forging ahead believing that we could do it all on our own.

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[7] To learn more about this project, see *From the Heart: How 100 Canadians Created an Unconventional Theatre Performance about Reconciliation* by Will Weigler (VIDEA, 2015). www.from-the-heart.ca

[8] Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (UBC Press, 2010), 236-237.

Symposium delegates also heard about the Uts'am Witness Project from Squamish carver Tawx'sin Yexwulla/Aaron Nelson-Moody who is called "Splash" by his friends, and Settler artist/photographer Nancy Bleck (in 2001 the Squamish Nation recognized Nancy with the name 'Slanay Sp'ak'wus'). For ten years starting in 1997, the Uts'am Witness Project created opportunities for Coast Salish peoples and Settlers to spend weekends camping at *Nexw-áyantsut* on the banks of Sims Creek where they could "walk, sleep, eat, make art, have conversations, and participate in ceremonies on this disputed territory." Nancy photographed the project extensively.[9] As a Settler artist in this collaborative project, her attitude during that time, like her attitude during the panel presentation, was to show restraint. She described it as "doing a good job of getting out of the way." The moderator for their panel, Mique'l Dangeli (Tsimshian), recognized the significance of Nancy's impulse to create opportunities and then step aside. "What does that take to step aside?" she asked. "What does that take to have trust in the process and trust that we will do what needs to be done? In stepping aside you are supporting our self-determination." Someone remarked, "You don't have to stay on the stage. Leaving the stage is powerful too." Dale Hamilton, the Artistic Director of Everybody's Theatre Company in Ontario added, "It's very important to know when to get out of the way." Cassondra Barnaby, a Mi'gmaq woman from Listuguj First Nation in Quebec, summed up the essence of being present without taking over. "It's about listening with the intent [not to respond], just to take it in." In these instances, we work together by being conscious of creating space for care, by learning with humility, by listening, and trusting that the process will allow for creative new work to emerge.

Apropos of creating opportunities, Sharon Kallis expressed gratitude for jil p. weaving who, as an artist herself, has been working for more than twenty years within the administration of the Vancouver Parks Board providing opportunities for so many other artists to flourish in their work to create community. Many others in the room joined her in thanking jil for all she has done.

The other side of this coin can be described as Indigenous and Settler artists integrating their respective knowledge as they work together. Several outstanding examples were presented as models. For example, panelists Renae Morriseau and Savannah Walling spoke of their long-standing and mutually valued relationship, working side by side on projects such as the Downtown Eastside Community Play *In the Heart of a City (2003), Storyweaving (2012), and The Big House (2015).*

Sharon Kallis and Squamish weaver Sesemiya/Tracy Williams began to work together in 2013 sharing their plant material inquiries and gathering knowledge in collaboration with

[9] See *Picturing Transformation: Nexw-Áyantsut* by Nancy Bleck, Katherine Dodds and Chief Bill Williams (Figure 1 Publishing, 2013). http://figure1pub.com/project/picturing-transformation

community. Since 2014, they have worked on *Urban Cloth: Terroir,* a community engaged project that weaves together First Nations gathering traditions, early settler agricultural methods and contemporary environmental art practices through shared investigations for urban cloth production. The land becomes a keystone, bringing together Tracy's research into her ancestral traditional foraging practices with Sharon's investigations of invasive plant species and current research into growing flax for a local linen supply. Tracy describes what she brings to her collaborations with Sharon: "I come from a long line of basket weavers. Cedar weaving makes me feel like I am walking in harmony with our Ancestors. There is a special responsibility that comes with gathering our natural plants and materials and taking care of our environment. My prayer is that our people will continue to love and enjoy this unique and spiritual art form."

During their panel presentation, they related the story of something that seemed like such a minor event yet, in the telling it stood out as truly revelatory. Sharon described going out into the brush with Tracy to harvest some plants:

> We went to forage for Himalayan blackberry, which are invasives and we went to harvest the fibre—and I am just in there with my garden shears and I'm just hacking away because I'm gathering—I'm just going to gather as much as I can, and I turn around and Tracy is pulling out her tobacco pouch and is beginning to do a ceremony of asking the plant for permission. And I had this moment of *oh shit, what have I done?* [they both laugh] and it was this realization of two different worlds that we have come from. Tracy who comes from a place of having respect for the plants and asking the plants' permission and developing that relationship with the plants beforehand, and I come from a world of gardeners and working with ecologists where we're going in and we're ripping out invasives—we're getting rid of weeds and we're not being respectful to the plant at all.

In my most recent book, I have a quote about some valuable advice I've been given: "My mother has taught me many things," I wrote. "Among them, she's taught me that we all make mistakes. What matters, she says, is what you do next."[10] I believe that what Sharon did next embodied the very essence of what we, as Settler artists, can aspire to emulate. Sharon continued her story.

> So for me, that was a real daunting moment—how do I bridge this? I don't see myself getting to a point where I'm going to carry a pack of tobacco—[getting to a point where this ceremony] is going to feel is something I can take on. It

[10] *From the Heart,* page 80.

> doesn't feel true to me—to my culture—and it doesn't feel like something that's a fit. But the idea of an offering or a gift does make sense.

What she chose to do instead was to put wheels in motion for her organization to commission a song—a work song—that "could be used as a way to teach people about reconnecting to the plants and asking the plants' permission, and thanking them for the knowledge that they were going to share with us." It became an opportunity for her to bridge two cultures.

As moderator of the panel, Mique'l Dangeli called our attention to the important implication of what Sharon did. Rather than co-opt or appropriate a practice that was from someone else's culture, Sharon took in what she experienced as an opportunity to expand her sense of how she, as a non-Indigenous person working in collaboration with an Indigenous partner, might deepen her relationship with the land and those living on it. It was an honourable and respectful way to integrate what she learned from working alongside Tracy. We learned that now Sharon and Tracy are taking it to the next step. They are building protocol around this new song, determining how it will be introduced; how it will be given a name; and how an intention will placed upon the song. This is an example of working together.

Those who came to witness "Protocol Enacted" that opened the work of the symposium on Sunday evening were present also to experience an astonishing example of collaborative performance work. *Raven Tales* was the result of an ongoing collaboration between Standing Wave, Vancouver's celebrated new-music ensemble, Mike Dangeli a visual artist and carver from the Nisga'a Nation; Mike's wife: dancer and art historian Mique'l Dangeli from the Tsimshian Nation (who recently earned her PhD from UBC writing a dissertation called *Dancing Sovereignty: Protocol and Politics in Northwest Coast First Nations Dance*[11]); and composer Marcus Goddard. Standing Wave connected Mike Dangeli and Marcus Goddard and commissioned Marcus to compose a five-part suite inspired by Mike's paintings, drums and carvings. Mike and Marcus also drew inspiration from the Nisga'a trickster figure, Txamsem. Mique'l literally took the collaboration to the next step, working with the *Raven Tales* suite as music in her choreography for a new dance work with Git Hayetsk Dancers, the internationally renowned Northwest Coast First Nations mask-dancing group led by the Dangelis. Raven Tales premiered in May of 2012 and was remounted with new choreography as part of the Opening Protocol for TRACKS. On Sunday evening, the frisson in the audience was palpable as the Git Hayetsk Dancers filled the space with their bodies, regalia, and masks, dancing to Marcus' music performed live by Standing Wave Ensemble.

When it comes to identifying a model for Settler/Immigrant and Indigenous artists and communities working together, I can think of no better example anywhere than the legacy of work that has come from Vancouver Moving Theatre (VMT) and their long-standing

[11] Mique'l Dangeli's doctoral dissertation is available online at: http://hdl.handle.net/2429/52981

relationship with Coast Salish peoples and with organizations and cultural groups in the Downtown Eastside. Led by Savannah Walling and Terry Hunter in the culturally diverse hub of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, the theatre company embodies what it means to commit to respectful, equitable creative collaborations and partnerships. Relying on relationships built over the course of a decade, VMT began in 2005 to expand their definition as producers of theatre. Building on a residency concept and performative feast structure originated by Ruth Howard and Savannah Walling, VMT became host of a series of invitational theatrical feasts called *The Big House Project*.[12]

> In the indigenous traditions of our neighbourhood's founding communities, feasts are a time for nourishing relationships, marking important events, offering gifts and acknowledgements, sharing learning and teaching: a storehouse of memories for the future. *The Big House* is re-creating feasting in an urban context. We will mark memories of our communities coming together; acknowledge land, waterways, and gathering places that keep our community strong; share cultural teachings around food and hospitality; mourn what has been displaced, lost or forgotten; listen to youth and elders, and honour the neighbourhood's continuity, its wisdom. We are weaving together oral history and cultural teachings, poetry and song, drumming and design, theatre and dance with culinary art. Witnessing and creating shared memories, we celebrate who we are, *acknowledge where we come from,* what's left behind, what's preserved; we *stand facing the future*.[13]

This is what hybridity or fusion can look like. In legal jargon there is a term known as *sui generis*. It's used to categorize something for which there is no existing category—to categorize something that has not been seen before. The collaboration between Standing Wave and Git Hayetsk that led to *Raven Tales* and Vancouver Moving Theatre's Big House Project and their many other projects over the years shows us the potential there is for Indigenous and Settler artists to co-create *sui generis* works when we meet in a place of honour and respect, offering the best of what we have to each other.

Speaking personally, I see this as a critical challenge of the highest order. Those of us who are Settler artists have to ask, what are the choices we make in our work that distinguish between integrating our learning about Indigenous ways, and appropriation? Consent, co-operation, and collaboration as we work through what this means are obviously key. Building

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[12] For more about the work of VMT, see *From the Heart of a City: Community Engaged Theatre and Music Productions from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside* by Savannah Walling, Terry Hunter and graphic designer John Endo Greenaway (Vancouver Moving Theatre, 2015). http://heartbook.vancouvermovingtheatre.com/introduction

[13] http://vancouvermovingtheatre.com/2014/09/the-big-house-a-downtown-eastside-theatrical-feast (Italics in original)

relationships is key. Listening to and truly hearing what our Indigenous collaborators tell us is key. The path to defining what constitutes equitable hybrid or fusion artistic creations across cultures must certainly run parallel to the work of navigating protocol. Both require thoughtful, deliberate processes. Working together as Indigenous and Settler artists, we hold the potential to lead the way in showing what ethical engagement looks like and to enact it as a model for others. Together we can shape the terms for agencies like the Canada Council, provincial arts councils, and other funding bodies to adopt as policy. Working collaboratively, we are the experts here. It's up to us in partnership to step up to that challenge.

The paradox of the mis-step

The fear of making an inadvertent transgression; the stumble that leaves bruises; the history of appropriation and hurt that has damaged goodwill; all these and other impediments to healthy collaborative creation between Indigenous and Settler artists surfaced in different ways during the symposium. In the anecdotes they told, delegates illuminated details of how the path to collaboration has been, and remains, fraught with challenges. Karen Jamieson described how, in 1986, she visited the Vancouver Museum of Anthropology. Inspired by the powerful images, ideas, and concepts she encountered there, she responded by creating a new choreographed work called *Rainforest*. She was proud of it and it was exceptionally well received by audiences. Karen was invited to bring *Rainforest* to the Museum of Anthropology. She was then summarily uninvited by the Director of the Museum, Michael Ames. He explained that Gitxsan artist and writer Doreen Jenson had counseled him to withdraw his support for it because she felt it was "utterly, utterly inappropriate."

Tswum / Rosalind Williams helped found and construct the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn Teaching Center in 1991. Today, the Tsm7aksaltn houses a daycare centre, an afterschool program and a Language and Cultural wing where she still meets regularly with the fluent speakers of the Tribe. On her panel presentation, Rosalind told of a time years ago when she learned of a woman from Enderby who had been coming around to her community wanting to hear stories about the place. Apparently, this lady was told that she should come and talk to Rosalind. This is Rosalind's description of that initial encounter:

> That was my first meeting with Cathy Stubington of Runaway Moon. And I'm going to have to admit that when I first met her I was thinking to myself, "here we go again." And I really wasn't interested in sharing our stories at that point with the outside community. My focus was on the children in the community and what we can do to help them.

Two emerging First Nations artists, Chrystal Sparrow and Senaqwila Wyss, shared a panel presentation with jil p. weaving, Arts Coordinator with the Vancouver Park Board, to talk about a conflict of understanding that developed during a project led by muralist Melanie Schambach, a five-panel "Granddaughter's Mural."[14] It was to be installed on the side of the Nature House in Stanley Park near Lost Lagoon to replace a mural that had been damaged by flooding. The mural was commissioned by the Stanley Park Ecology Society (SPES) with support from the Vancouver Park Board's Neighbourhood Matching Fund. The call had invited artists to propose a process involving people in the community that would focus on connecting people with nature and with each other.

As part of their creative process, the artists had visited with three Elders from the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh nations to solicit their insights on what they felt should be included in the mural. In an effort to welcome broad participation in bringing forward history that has been silenced, the artists created opportunities for the general public to contribute ideas for images and quotes that could be incorporated into the artwork.

The artists laboured to create the panels of a mural that would sincerely and artistically reflect what they had heard and learned. When they presented the nearly completed mural, it included imagery of Indigenous knowledge about berries in the park, traditional medicines, and the history showing Stanley Park as an Indigenous cultural hub—shared territory and home to many villages from the three nations. It also included imagery and statements about issues such as the Residential Schools and the struggles to stop the oil pipelines. The artists were deeply distressed when they were told that the Ecology Society felt they could not accept the artwork that had been created through their process.

To help navigate the impasse, SPES and the artists turned to jil p. weaving and asked her to step in and try to find a mutually agreeable solution. At this point both sides had compromised as much as they were willing to. jil explained the impasse as she saw it:

> When I came in I saw that there were many shadows of colonialism that were affecting all of these good people who cared about Stanley Park. When the artists went to see the Elders in their communities they heard stories of the impacts of colonialism and they felt compelled to tell those stories, to express their responsibility to what they had just heard. […]

[14] Melanie Schambach was working in Europe at the time of the symposium and not able to attend the panel presentation. She was able to contribute to the planning of the presentation by Skyping into the preparatory meetings. Two other young artists also worked on the team: Mutya Macatumpag and Rachelle George.

> [Although] the Society really appreciated this commitment to indigenous knowledge of the area and its representation in the images of nature, they felt that their volunteers who work at the Nature House—and who know a lot about the problems of the salamanders and the insects that are disappearing from the park; who know a lot about the invasive weeds that are choking Beaver Lake, and other ecological information—that their volunteers couldn't actually provide the appropriate context to the images and statements in the murals regarding some of the destructive impacts of colonialism on First Peoples. There were also concerns we heard from the community that a lot of these issues are so fresh (for example the Residential Schools), that should some Elders, and other individuals who had personally experienced some of these impacts, come across these images at the Nature House there would be no support or place of sanctuary, to be and think and move through what might be brought up for them. There wasn't any of that support available at the Nature House.

Karen Jamieson was distressed and outraged when *Rainforest* was cancelled at the Museum of Anthropology. In response, she initiated what became an extended correspondence with Director Michael Ames, which soon included Doreen Jenson. Through continued conversations over the course of three years, they began to come to an understanding of what kind of process would be involved for them to collaborate in a way that would *not* be considered inappropriate. These three full years led ultimately to a ground breaking work called *Gawa Gyani* and a collaborative working relationship between the three of them that also included Alice Jeffrey (Gitxsan), Evan Adams (Coast Salish), Chief Kenneth Harris (Hagbegwatku,) hereditary chief of the Fireweed clan of the Gitxsan Nation, and with Chief Harris's daughter Margaret. Karen considers her initial transgression to have been a key to what became an extraordinary breakthrough. It is a paradox that she felt is important for us to examine. Fear of making a mistake, she told us, or of not knowing what to do, should not stop you from trying. "Had I not blundered in without knowledge and without understanding," she said, "I would not have met Michael Ames; I would not have met Doreen Jensen; I would not have met Ken Harris; I would not have met Margaret. *Gawa Gyani* would not have happened."

Margaret Grenier, who presented alongside Karen at the symposium, was a 17-year-old dancer in the late 1980s when she entered into what would become a long, mentored professional relationship with Karen. Twenty-five years later, that relationship that has been a source of mutual enrichment for both women as they have come to learn from each other as choreographers and as dancers. Margaret spoke to the many ways that this relationship has affected her and her family.

> Being a young dancer, to have experienced collaborating with Karen's company—I saw that it put my family on a new trajectory. I saw that there was something that transformed within us and I know that I owe a lot to that collaboration for what is now the Dancers of Damelahamid [Margaret's current performance company] and the work that I continue to do.

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For Rosalind Williams, her initial wariness about Cathy Stubington softened with time.

> But Cathy was insistent. She kept coming back and because she kept coming back and she seemed to genuinely be interested in our stories and in the history of the area and of the tribe, I started to trust her. I began to establish a trust relationship with her. And that was the first step of us beginning to work together, and beginning to open up and share those stories with her. And also, in that process, [I saw] that the stories could now be told—the stories could now be acted out—by those young people that I was first focused on. They could become part of that process. So in all of the collaborations that we've done, the children of the community, and the people from the community themselves have become involved in the process and therefore they have learned those stories and now they can carry those stories forward themselves.

Mique'l Dangeli reinforced the significance of time in terms of the relationship time has with protocol.

> Giving these conversations the time that they deserve not only enriches the process and the product, but most importantly it strengthens the relationships that are built. Our peoples are still primarily oral societies, so protocol happens face to face, in front of witnesses at private ceremonies, public events, and in our homes every day—in our relationships every day across kitchen tables. It is not negotiated over e-mail. Permission does not come in the form of official letterhead. Protocol is a living, breathing entity. It lives and breathes in us. With a foundation of ancient ways of knowing, being, and being in relation to each other and territories, we enact protocol purposefully to carry our ancestors' ways forward in contemporary existence.

These stories told by Karen and Margaret, and by Rosalind and Cathy represent a looking back at the road they traveled to get to where they are now. They serve as examples for how an impasse is not the same as a failure. In both these cases there was patience, persistence and a sincere resolve to engage again. This is the paradox we face. It is precisely through the stumbles and bruises that we all ultimately come to a deeper understanding of how to move

forward. For Senaqwila Wyss, Chrystal Sparrow, and jil p. weaving, the story is unfolding in the present. Senaqwila described it from her perspective:

> It was an interesting process for me watching everything play out. Where can [the murals] be allowed to be seen? What is an appropriate venue? How can we and the artists who contributed feel comfortable with the art being displayed?

At the time of the symposium, they had not yet found a solution to their conflict, and feelings were still raw. There are no easy answers here. At the end of their panel, jil summed up her sense of it:

> We recognize that we are on a journey together and we don't know exactly where it's going. We know what we're looking for, but we've got a road ahead that isn't entirely clear. We know we're going to be talking to a lot more people, and we know that we're going to be back (at the Roundhouse) in September and the murals are going to be exhibited here, and we'll have another chapter of our journey to talk about at that point.

Looking forward

In the early evening of our second day in Secwepemul'ecw territory, I was having a conversation at the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn Teaching Center with Daniel Joe, whose spirit name is Flaming Arrow. Daniel is a man who is easy to like. He comes across as thoughtful and kind and he shares his sense of humour freely. A member of the Band Council, Daniel is clearly dedicated to the people he serves. I told him about the TRACKS symposium and the intention behind Train of Thought, in particular the intention from a Settler's perspective. He said it made him think of a group of guys from a sports team who go up to talk to their coach and say, "Hey Coach, we get it—we get what we did to mess up that last play. Do you think we can we get a do-over?" It was clear to me that if we non-Indigenous Canadians were prepared for it, Daniel was keen to join us in a do-over. A lighthearted little analogy like this does not come close to taking into account the storm and stress of centuries of colonial oppression. But in its own small way, it touches the heart of what we're hoping to find. By looking back with clear eyes at our nation's history of denial, cultural appropriation and downright theft, we can be mindful of it as we look forward. With honour, respect and humility, we can then create a climate in which partnerships between Indigenous and Settler artists routinely lead to creative works the likes of which we have never seen.

Looking back at what was said and seen during the days and evenings we sat and walked and worked together, the way forward seems surprisingly clear. In both the heart of the city and the heart of the open country, the clues telling us what to do were everywhere.

This clue says: commit to building relationships. “For the Squamish people [. . .] the word *eslhélha7k̲whiws* expresses who we are together, how our lines touch—and are connected to each other, to the land, to the plants and to our ancestors who were here before us.”

This clue says: know that this work will take time. “If we are willing to allow themselves ourselves to be changed by our encounters, we must be willing to take the requisite amount of time for that change to affect us.”

This clue says: local stories and language is important. “…for those who live here as a guest on this land, the Musqueam stories are their stories as well. ‘To know that history, to know the stories of where you live, is essential. [. . .] If you live here, you need to know this place.’”

This clue says: sometimes we step back in support; sometimes we step together: “…we can work together by doing a good job of getting out of the way . . . and alternatively by integrating [our] respective knowledge as [we] work together.”

This clue says: accept the paradox that mistakes and mis-steps can lead to breakthroughs. “The fear of making a mistake [. . .] or of not knowing what to do, should not stop you from trying.”

This will be a long, challenging, and ultimately rewarding journey. Are we ready to keep going?

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