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How to describe my experience? Some Indigenous peoples have prescribed, specific protocols around introductions, but this is not the case where I'm from. Or, if it was this way in the past, we've lost the knowledge of those introductory protocols. I respect that we should give space to those who have Indigenous ways of introducing themselves. As an Alutiiq woman who lives in a kind of diaspora from my island home of Kodiak in Alaska— and my villages of Port Lions and Afognak—I don't always know how to describe my experience. I am an artist. I live in Canada. I make dance, video, photos, texts.

Slow Scrape (2012–2015)

In 2012, I turned my attention towards my location in northern Ontario, where I live with my family in the traditional territory of Nipissing First Nation and other First Nations within a two-hour radius. We make our home not far from the traditional territory of my husband, Treaty no. 9 of northern Ontario. Like many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada in the winter of 2012 and 2013, I watched as the Idle No More movement unfolded on social media and news outlets across the country through teach-ins and civil disobedience to the omnibus bill, Bill C-45, legislation that would impact the Indian Act, Fisheries Act, Navigable Waters Act, and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (Coulthard 2014, 160).

As I watched Idle No More sweep the country, I was particularly moved by round dances, a cultural event that I understand to be Plains Cree and Anishnaabe with accompanying ceremonies, feast, and giveaway. Round dances are held in winter and are a way of honoring our ancestors. Hand drum singers stand and sing at the center and are surrounded by the community, dancing, holding hands. Round dance country is primarily Saskatchewan and Alberta, and as I lived in Alberta for nine years, I had the privilege to attend many round dances, which are held nearly every weekend in winter in First Nations, as well as in schools, universities, and community centers. Several cities organized what could be called flash mob–style round dances in shopping malls at the height of the Christmas shopping season. Watching documentation of these dance interventions on social media was profound, as they created a way for Indigenous peoples to be visible and heard. The locations, shopping malls, and the timing became an intervention to the capitalist system with the bodies of Indigenous peoples, but through a distinctly Indigenous way: the songs and dances meant for winter time that honor our ancestors and celebrate community.

Other images of note at the time that have stayed with me were the signs documented at many walks and protests that told the Canadian public: "We are all treaty people," acknowledging that treaty is the foundational relationship within Canada. In Northwest Territories another sign proclaimed: "Moose hide tanners against fascism," which speaks to the labor we enact and embody on the land.

Amidst the Idle No More movement, in the winter of 2012–2013, Chief Theresa Spence from Attawapiskat First Nation, James Bay, Ontario, began a hunger strike in Ottawa, a forty-four-day

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political action centered on treaty (Lukin Linklater in Turions 2014). Inspired by her, on the twenty-first day, I wrote.

Chief Spence's hunger strike was documented through photos on social media, on YouTube, and in televised press engagements. I noticed that she often wore James Bay moosehide mitts, hanging on a braided string made of yarn around her neck. I began to consider Chief Spence's leadership, her stance for treaty, and her sacrifice, as well as the women in my extended family who labor on the land in James Bay, who labor in their homes, and who have a very specific and real relationship to treaty in their everyday lives. This interest partly grew out of my ongoing interest in women's work, and Alaska Native, Canadian First Nations, and Metis women's "craft" and their "intricate designs passed on from their relatives, sewing smoked moose hide into moccasins, and fur into mukluks, mitts, toques. This functional art is practiced in the intimacy of … home," but also can become a kind of performance of women's work, of cultural work, as I've written about elsewhere (Lukin Linklater in Swensen 2013). Yet "craft" is de-valued within art hierarchies due to its association with domesticity, culture, and utilitarianism. Beading, specifically, as an action and as art object interest me. As I've discussed, "trade beads conjure a past of ill-gotten land gains in the Americas, international trade routes, and Indigenous women's appropriation of trade beads in indigenous designs. We are reminded of a historical global economy through the intimacy of women's work" (Lukin Linklater in Swensen 2013).

In response to Chief Spence's hunger strike, I interviewed Agnes Hunter, Marlene Kapasheshit, and Lillian Mishi Trapper, my husband's relatives, regarding the process for making traditional James Bay mitts based on their experiences trapping, hunting, tanning hides, sewing, and beading. The interviews with these relatives became an honoring of oral traditions and learning. I listened and learned across geographical distance, calling, and asking how they learned to sew, from whom, and to describe their first sewing projects. I heard stories of relationships of daughters to mothers and nieces to aunties. I heard about the physical labor of fixing the hides of caribou and moose. I heard about the relationship to objects, such as sewing patterns from their mothers, that the women experienced. *I asked them about what they thought about when they scraped hides or sewed.* I heard stories about processing grief while laboring on the hide of a moose through the seasons, and feeling their late relatives close to them while they sewed. I listened to stories about the meditative, repetitive qualities of sewing and beading, and the closeness to God they experienced in these practices handed down from their women relatives. I also felt tremendous encouragement from my husband's grandmother, who told me it was not too late to learn to sew and bead. *I understood myself in relation to my relatives, my extended family, to generations of women in James Bay.*

I began to translate my understanding of their experiences into visual poems that became a kind of bead-work on the page. In a way, this is my tribute to the women as I haven't been taught (yet) by my women relatives this practice of fixing hides, sewing or beading. So, instead I use language and what they shared with me as the basis for the work. The poems integrate Cree language, with translation from my husband and his grandmother, as she worked for many years as a translator on published texts and is a former Cree language teacher of school-aged children in northern Ontario. I use direct quotes from the interviews in the poems, as I want to honour their voices, the cadence of their speech.

Yet, I always intended that the poems would become objects in a gallery because I am interested in both publishing the poems, so that they can be held in someone's hand and read, but also so that they may be experienced in other ways—as an art object (as I cannot craft). I'm also interested in the ways in which people read, individually and collectively through public signs, for example. I chose to fabricate banners with canvas tarp that one uses to create a shelter on the land. This choice is bound up in the concreteness of the relationship between the women and the land, and that the land is always a part of the conversation. These visual poetic works are a small form of activism, a series of reflections on Indigenous women's work that consider treaty, family and place.

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The text was further extended when excerpts of "The Harvest Sturdies" became the basis for a negotiated performance between myself and Montreal-based dancer, Daina Ashbee, in April 2014 at SBC Gallery. I chose to exhibit three banners, which were three pages of the text that structured the performance and became a movement score. In this situation, my choreographic approach was to share the structural, textual, and conceptual ideas for the project with the dancer, who presented me with video documentation of her improvisations, as she was in Montreal and I was in northern Ontario, about six hours away. I viewed the documentation and made choices based on what she sent. We met via Skype and I sent her choreographic notes via e-mail. When I arrived in Montreal, we had one day to rehearse in the gallery space, where the choreography was set in relation to the gallery's dimensions, the art objects in the space, and the audio that spilled over into the space (from a time-based work), which became the soundscape for the performance, as well as the shuffling bodies and murmurs of audience. SBC Gallery is a small gallery space, made smaller by the large table constructed of found fences exhibited by Maggie Groat, an Indigenous visual artist, in the gallery. We worked in relation to these objects and in relation to the bodies of those who came to view the performance.

In January–March 2015, I furthered my relationship to the text as substrate for the development of seven drawings in an exhibition, *Reading the Line*, at Western Front, an artist-run-center, in Vancouver with works by women filmmakers, sculptors and artists investigating the line through weaving, drawing, performance, and film. I do not have a regular drawing practice. Initially, the drawings resembled constellations as I traced the poem's visual configuration over and over. Eventually, I distilled the drawings to a series of dots, like beads, that line the page and become smaller. I was concerned with structure and how we make structure, or how we live our lives within structure—structures of treaties, structures of traditional governance, structures of the land, or constellations. I repeated the numbers, forty-four, ten, and seven, in these drawings—for various reasons, including that forty-four is the number of days that Chief Spence fasted. These drawings, as well as the poem "The Harvest Sturdies," became the basis of a new negotiated performance with Vancouver-based dancer/choreographer, Ziyian Kwan, at Western Front.

I sent the text and iPhone shots of the drawings on my kitchen table in advance of our rehearsals in Vancouver. We spoke on the telephone once and I described the conceptual ideas of the work. Upon my arrival to Western Front, I read "The Harvest Sturdies" to Ziyian, and we began a movement investigation in the gallery.

I honor the bodies and processes of the dancer(s) I work with. They are generous with me, bringing improvisation backgrounds and generating movement. I work quickly as an outside eye making choices succinctly. I do not see myself as placing movement on a dancer, but offering suggestions for movements at times. The relationship between myself and the dancer is crucial. I build trust and honor the process. After the performance, several people ask me how I knew I could make the work; I arrived in Vancouver, not knowing what the work would look like and had the timeframe of two days to work within. I don't understand the question as I wait to encounter the dancer, to encounter the architecture of the gallery, and the objects in the exhibition, as well as the people who are there to support the work, including curator, Pablo de Ocampo, before determining what the work can or will become. And all of these relationships, to space, to object, to people, become a part of the process.

In terms of structure for the performance, I utilize the structure of the drawings. The dance is in seven sections, as there are seven drawings, laid on a long table against one wall of the gallery. I also investigate the spaces between the drawings with Ziyian: they become transitions between sections practically, but also mini-movements or states of being unto themselves.

I see my role as the artist as embodying or activating a relational process. I am in relation to the dancer. We are in relation to the text. We are in relation to the ideas—the ideas of treaty, the

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land, women's work, women's leadership. I am in relation to the structure of the movement score. The movement is in relation to the structure and to possibility—to the space of improvisation that can be vast. Ziyian explains to me that in stage dance she feels that in order to communicate with the audience, she projects her body and projects her energy outward. However, in this space and in this work, the more she experiences the text, or allows it to drop into her body so that her body responds to the text and responds to the structure, the more she feels the viewer drawn in to the performance. In this performance, she whispers and speaks "seam thread needle hem" well over forty-four times, which is a phrase repeated in a section of the text, and whispers and speaks counts to ten, forty-four, and seven.

While I honor the body of the dancer, I understand her as materiality—I do my best to understand the possibilities of her physicality and also the constraints. I work with her materiality: What are her possibilities? What are her limits?

The performance as a whole is in relation to the architecture of the gallery—with extremely high ceilings, wooden floors, one window, two doors, and white walls in a rectangular shape. This work, like much of my previous work, is intimate. The Western Front space is small. Perhaps forty people attend the performance. I feel heat emanating from the body of the man next to me. I move across the gallery, as does the curator, Pablo De Ocampo, as he video documents the performance. The audience does not move. Ziyian becomes in relation to the people in the gallery, yet she has to complete the choreography, which includes the walls, window and objects in the gallery.

The idea or remnant of the Two Row Wampum is present in the gallery space as Maggie Groat exhibits a blanket and small photographs and text centered on the Two Row Wampum. I am grateful for the presence of this art object as it addresses treaty. I have limited understanding of the Two Row Wampum, but have heard Maurice Switzer and Fred Bellefeuille, of the Anishnabek, speak about the Two Row Wampum at the Union of Ontario Indians and Nipissing University. My understanding is that it symbolizes a parallel relationship between First Nations and Euro-Canadians built on a co-existence and a reciprocal recognition of sovereignty while extending peace and friendship in the space between the two.

At one point Ziyian is to step backward toward Maggie Groat's shelf that contains the wampum belt blanket, and no bodies move out of her way. She steps gently with her heel onto a man's foot, lifts her heel, he moves his foot only directionally—turning it out, but does not back up—and she continues the movement there, within inches of his body. Ziyian sews. Her gesture becomes a sewing of seven points on the torso, down and up; she repeats the movement twice, and it makes me reflect in the moment on how the treaty is held in the body. She draws almost two lines on her body and it reminds me of the Two Row Wampum. She then continues to jump forty-four times in place, all within close proximity to the body of a man who won't move during the performance. This refusal to move, except for the foot, makes me think about how he's also close to other bodies and objects, and more broadly I consider how all of our bodies are in relation to others including the treaties and other governance structures.

Ziyian then draws a straight line along the wall, with a gesture like writing. She is supposed to trace it one direction and return, but again, the bodies of people are in the way. So she almost draws on their bodies, then gently nudges them so she can access the wall, and on her second gesture along the wall, about six inches lower, she punctuates the movement by a kind of gestured mark-making of seven dots followed by a closer engagement with the wall, where both hands touch the wall—her right hand leads and her left hand trails, sort of like an echo, or a smudge of the mark—I instruct her to look back and forward. By looking forward and behind, the dancer is acknowledging future and previous generations. I explain to Ziyian that time can operate simultaneously in Indigenous ways of being—that past, present, and future operate simultaneously.

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After this movement, she reaches upward, two arms in relation to one another, at different lengths at different times, reaching toward a window. The two arms in relation to one another remind me of the Two Row Wampum, and I begin to imagine that she is making an invisible mark of the Two Row Wampum on the wall and also in her body. This movement is repeated later along another wall, as she counts to forty-four, walks and reaches with her palms and her heels lift again.

After the performance, comments include that the performance activated the objects in the exhibition and through the body, activated an affective or emotional state for the objects. Others saw the body in relation to the objects as a kind of claiming the objects, which was okay given that claiming space engages the idea of treaty. Yet, I see treaty as a relationship centered on sharing and generousity. To me, this performance embodies the ideas of relationality and sharing. David Khang, a performance artist in Vancouver who attended the performance, and who has seen me perform in Edmonton in the past, said, "I wanted to see you perform and not your ideas perform." When I mentioned that to Duane Linklater and Wendy Red Star, Indigenous visual artists, Duane responded: "I wanted to see your ideas perform."

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