"A GREAT TELLING":

AUDIENCE AS CO-CREATOR OF STORY

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes theories and enactments of story-reception in Indigenous texts. I consider the audience or reader of stories to possess an influential power that constantly functions in their interactions with storytellers and texts. Despite the constant presence of the story-receiver in acts of story-creation and story-exchange, their influence is not typically perceived, especially in narrative forms that include some material and/or temporal distance between the storyteller and their audience or reader. The lack of awareness of this network of creative influence surrounding a given story suggests an often-missed opportunity for audience members and readers to consider their own inherent roles as collaborators and to enact this collaboration intentionally. I focus on contemporary performance-based texts by Indigenous authors from Turtle Island that actively treat the audience or reader as co-collaborators and foreground this treatment in the structures of their texts, thus making the influence of the story-receiver visibly present.

I analyze Cliff Cardinal's *huff* and Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* in order to find traces of the influence of the story-receiver by identifying the methods by which Cardinal and Long Soldier draw attention to and engage with this influence. Cardinal uses extreme and interruptive audience participation in order to draw the audience's attention to their own presence as well as their own role in relationship with Cardinal. Long Soldier textually signals the presence of the reader through spatial dynamics on the page, and through her treatment of borrowed congressional language demonstrates the possibility of transforming harmful texts through relational engagement. I conclude that there is a need for a methodological shift in how the role of the story-receiver is treated in literary scholarship, which holds potential for conscious engagement in reading and viewing practices that may typically be enacted unconsciously in order to access a deeper register of textual relationship with a vast network of collaborators in story-creation.

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More than anything else, this project has taught me that I am connected to a vast network of relationships, literary and otherwise. As such, I owe gratitude to more people and stories than I have the space or the understanding to name, without which this work would be neither possible nor relevant. Before naming the individuals who had the closest involvement with my project, I wish to express my thanks to the countless stories, storytellers, and story-receivers to which I am connected in my own writing and reading.

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Preface

I engage with Indigenous literatures as a Mennonite-Irish settler on Turtle Island; in an attempt to do so responsibly, I wish to consider the active presence of my own context and history in the set of literary relationships I have entered into as both a reader and writer in the process of creating this thesis. Living my whole life thus far in Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis, I grew up surrounded by my namesake – the Caragana plant – and could see it every day through the window above my desk as I wrote this thesis. Caragana is a shrub with sweet-tasting yellow flowers that bloom in the spring; the blossoms turn to peapods that twist and crack open in the fall, and are sharp as thorns when you step on them with bare feet. A European species noted for its hardiness and deep roots, the Caragana plant was brought to Turtle Island by settlers to use in shelterbelts and windbreaks during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, representing both a lifesaving technique for starving farmers and an effort by settlers to assimilate the prairie landscape into productive farmland. My parents, both artists, used Caragana wood to carve walking sticks in the sculpture studio we lived in, which they built in the forest near Big River and Blue Hair First Nations. Our most immediate sense of community was with other white artists who wished, in some way, to be removed and apart from common society. The stories I received about my name were about the walking sticks, the yellow flowers, and the pea pods. For the most part, I was not asked to consider the ways the Caragana plant changed and continues to change the land it was planted in by the people who stole (and steal) that land.

Unless I consciously challenge myself, I read as the academic setting taught me to, assuming myself to be a neutral, receptive presence, without regard for a concrete or ongoing relationship between myself and the text. However, I had the privilege of being introduced to the process of critically examining stories and my presence in relation to them in spoken word communities in Saskatoon, in which I became involved as a performer and audience member when I was a teenager. As a guest in an art form rooted in oral storytelling, I was expected to consider and negotiate my presence there, and to carry that accountability forward into the relationships formed with other artists outside of a performance context. The structure of spoken word also allowed me an increased awareness of the active presence of the audience. Viewers of a spoken word performance are encouraged to be noisy, responsive, disruptive, and to continue their relationship with the performer after they have left the stage. Since much of the audience at

spoken word events is other spoken word artists, participants are typically used to inhabiting the dual roles of both performer and audience member. The barrier between these two roles is thin, and as an audience member you are aware of this lack of division, of your own presence in the space, and how that presence affects and is affected by other viewers.

Consciously or not, the introduction to the critical reception of stories that I first learned from Saskatoon's spoken word community informed the questions I would ask during my postsecondary career. In varying ways throughout my undergraduate degree, I often tried to explore the role of the reader and specifically how that role impacts and interacts with the text itself. I wanted to understand the enacted relationship between the reader and the story, and how the story itself responds to the reader's presence. Through encountering Indigenous theorists and writers such as Leslie Silko, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, LeAnne Howe, Lee Maracle, and Daniel Heath Justice, I learned that the possibilities for additive response from the reader were vastly more complex, deep, and tangible than I had thought, and furthermore that these collaborative dynamics were already being variously discussed and enacted by the theorists/artists I was reading, as well as others. I was motivated to start this project, in part, as a way to learn more about my own responsibilities as a reader, which I slowly began to understand are inextricable from my responsibilities as a creator and a collaborator. I was also motivated by certain limitations I was noticing in academia, such as a myth of neutrality that allows settler scholars to view ourselves as a non-presence in a literary scholarship context that for the most part does not have a framework or a language for considering readership on the basis of relational accountability. I believe this lack I perceive in what is asked of me as a settler scholar in engaging with my presence as a reader has serious implications in terms of the effect an unconscious or unaware response has on a set of literary relationships. Since this is the context in which I learned to write and research, I myself have these limitations in undertaking this project, no matter how diligently I challenge them.

In undertaking this project, I inhabit dual roles simultaneously: I act as a receiver of the works of the multiple Indigenous thinkers on which the thesis is based, and I act as a synthesizer of this material in a single document according to my own specific understanding, thus contributing to the project of new knowledge production. That is, I participate in the same processes of collaboration and exchange that are discussed in the thesis itself. The approach to story-reception I write about in this thesis is one I was learning by writing and reading about it,

so it only began to come into clarity for me as I was reaching the final stages of the project, and even then it is a dynamic that resists my full comprehension or mastery. As such, I have not enacted it perfectly. The process of trying to access a collaborative approach within a non-collaborative (and often anti-collaborative) academic context and background is a tension that, whether I like it or not, is a part of my additive response to the works I receive and is an element of how I am in relationship with these works. Undertaking this project during the Covid-19 pandemic also proved challenging to approaching these texts on the basis of relationship, since I did most of this work in isolation. Although much of the project is based on performance-based texts, I was not able to witness or participate in audience responses and relied instead on the texts themselves as indicators of collaboration.

Had methodologies like those I discuss in this thesis been applied in the classroom during my own undergraduate studies, I believe I may have developed and practiced the skills to read from an engaged awareness of my own presence, to consider that presence in relationship to the text and to other readers, and to determine when and how to best respond in the context of these relationships. That is, my literary presence may have been a more respectful and constructive one. As a settler student of literary scholarship, I was not taught these skills, and had I not been introduced to a love of stories through spoken word or been lucky enough to have a few very good teachers, I likely would not have sought them out. As such, although I began (and ended) this project feeling discouraged and frustrated with academia, I felt a responsibility to challenge these lacunae in my own skillset as a reader, and to respond to this unexpected direction that my research took me. My hope is that this work finds its way into the hands of people who are attempting to cultivate more ethical or engaged reading practices, whether in the classroom, in their research, or in any other context where they receive stories. I hope also that those who find fault with my work will be inspired by its shortcomings to remedy those faults by making their own contribution to this line of thinking, and I look forward to what those contributions may be.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> I believe we are not alone in our reading, and so not alone in our writing. We write into and out of a great telling that brings us stories and songs, that teaches us to look and listen.
> — Heid E. Erdrich, "'Name': Literary Ancestry as Presence"

This thesis is concerned with the actions of storytelling and story-receiving as a single collaborative, co-creative process of story-exchange. In particular, my focus is on the influential potential of the reader or audience in their relationship to the teller and the text. I approach story as a web of creation, co-creation, and re-creation, thereby exploring the multiple relationships that inform the transmission, reception, and repetition of a given narrative as enacted by contemporary performance-based texts from Turtle Island. These texts specifically draw out a common impulse wherein the audience members are treated as collaborators in processes of story-creation. This treatment is enacted in story-exchange practices directed by the storyteller and is grounded in a conceptualization of story itself as the process and the result of collaboration between the teller and the audience. The dynamics of the primary texts under discussion do not treat storytelling as a unidirectional exchange, wherein one party exclusively functions additively while the other exclusively functions receptively. Rather, storytelling is treated as a dynamic, cyclical, and reciprocal process. These acts of storytelling demonstrate and invite the active participation of readers, audiences, and listeners, whose role as co-creators of story are the focus of my textual interpretations and theorization of story reception as a productive act of interruption and relationality.

My interest lies in the structural elements of stories and story-exchange practices that foreground interactive and enacted reception, and that encourage an awareness in the audience member or reader that they are a participant in a relational process of creation. I engage with theories and acts of storytelling drawn from Indigenous authors, as they emphasize a web of textual, paratextual, and extratextual relationships arising from performances of story. Within these theorisations, story is created by and through relationships, suggesting the possibility of consciously engaging in story-exchange processes on the basis of relationship, and of considering one's role in the exchange of a story as one may consider their needs and responsibilities in a relationship. Such a theoretical engagement with story is foregrounded by a shift from

conceptualizing story as a product to regarding story as a process. That is, the audience of a story does not receive a self-contained product but rather participates in a continual process of creation. The scope of my research thus concerns the functioning of relationship and the influence of the receiver in the *process* of story exchange rather than the impact of this influence on the story as a self-contained, stable product. Following Stanley Fish and the interventions of reader-response theory, this project is more interested in what story *does* than what it *means*, and furthermore, what is done *with* and *to* story by those who engage with it. The work of the Indigenous theorists informing this project highlights the practices used to create meaning through relationship and the very embeddedness of the story-receiver in these practices rather than the meaning that is made.

The thesis works from Leslie Marmon Silko's (Laguna Pueblo) model of language and expression as "something like a spider's web" (236), which, while grounded in Silko's Puebloan context and consciousness, is nonetheless a generative model for theories of storytelling generally and theories of Indigenous performance-based storytelling specifically. My starting point is that a given story is embedded in a web of influence and sits at the nexus of multiple impulses: the narrative, the material, the social, the cultural, the personal. The textual relationships preceding the creation of a story can be tracked on this web, as can the mutable stages of story-creation themselves – from the story as embodied/conceived by the teller, to the oral or written variant that is shared with a specific audience or series of audiences, to the material mechanisms of performance, such as the room in which a play is performed. What is less visible on this web is the creative and interruptive potential of the receptions of story, a network of influence functioning silently in between the other points of the web that takes the form of imaginative responses, theorisations, repetitions, audience participation, and, crucially, interpersonal negotiations of relationship. This lack of visibility of the creative functioning of the audience is a central issue of my thesis, particularly within performance contexts that do not prioritize participation, as well as in non-performance forms where any participation from the reader exists at a distance from the writer and is therefore extratextual. In an effort to identify this co-creative dynamic, I focus on the practices of storytelling, reading, and reception that draw attention to the often invisible creative influence of the story-receiver.

Since the creativity of the audience or reader typically functions in the exchange practices of a story rather than a story's definitive textual variant, this influence is generally overlooked

within the field of academic literary scholarship, as well as in the typical conceptualization *by* readers and audience members as to their role in story-exchange. Thus, while acknowledging the influence of reader-response theory, as exemplified by Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, and Roland Barthes, my focus is not the act of interpretation as much as the ways through which this interpretation functions additively within a relational network of collaborators. While crucially demonstrating the role of the reader as an active subject, reader-response theory also overstates the distinction between the composite roles in an assemblage of story-exchange and does not consider them to be dynamically shared to the same degree suggested by the Indigenous theorists that inform this project. The stakes of a theoretical framework that prioritizes the internal, imaginative work of the reader remains limited to the individual. My interest is in a shift towards considering the stakes of the enacted participation of the reader spanning multiple levels of textual engagement, impacting the story itself as well as the larger network of collaborators, textual elements, and cultural contexts surrounding it. Story-practices and scholarship that make visible this inherent influence of the story-receiver enable an engagement from all participants in story-exchange to participate consciously and actively, with an awareness of the textual relationships of which they are a part as well as the responsibilities they have to the entire collaborative network surrounding a given story. It is this awareness that allows for responsible and constructive collaboration.

I explore the influence of the audience and the reader through two texts by Indigenous writers from Turtle Island that depend upon methods of collaboration with the audience and rupture the perceived hierarchy between storyteller and story-receiver. The first of these is Cree playwright Cliff Cardinal's one-actor play *huff* (2017), which utilizes extreme spectacle and disruptive audience participation to continuously draw the audience's attention towards their own and Cardinal's relational engagement. A significant amount of audience interaction is written into the text of the play, as are certain allowances for what this interaction will do to the play. Cardinal makes the presence of collective participation evident *to* its participants within the play's very structure. Cardinal begins the play with a shocking disruption of the conceptual divide between audience and performer when he, playing the character Wind, comes on stage with a plastic bag taped over his head and his hands bound, eventually approaching an audience member and asking them to remove the bag in order to save his life. This moment exemplifies how extreme Cardinal's involvement of his audience is, both emotionally and physically. As the

audience member participates to save the life of both character and actor (who is in genuine danger of suffocating), the influence of the audience is not only made visible, but also unavoidable, and the audience as a whole is left to contend with this knowledge of their fundamental involvement in the story for the remainder of the play. Such an extreme inclusion of the audience is complicated by Cardinal's own methods of participation in the relationship, both through his use of violent spectacle and his assertion that he doesn't care what people think about the show (Cardinal 8). Cardinal's at times troubling collaborative story structure permits consideration of a central concern of my thesis: the ways in which the reciprocity and co-creativeness of story-exchange are relationally complex and require constant negotiation, adjustment, and awareness for constructive and healthy collaboration to take place. These dynamics also allow for a consideration of the passively innocent position of the settler through the text's refusal of inaction. *huff* stages the damaging implications of refusing this challenging demand for enacted responsibility. From my own position as a settler scholar working with Indigenous art, it seems that one characteristic of damaging literary relationships is an inability or unwillingness on the part of settlers to engage actively in difficult or painful relational encounters. *huff* also demonstrates the physical and conceptual instability of the story through its deconstruction of physical and emotional boundaries between audience and performer, which allows for a deeper understanding of the ways a story can be conceptualized as multiply embodied, enacted, and re-created across an ever-changing web of relationship.

The second text I study is Layli Long Soldier's (Oglala Lakota) poetry collection *Whereas* (2017), which, although not itself a performance text, continuously signals the presence of the reader *to* the reader. The text can also be understood within a larger context of Long Soldier's collaborative art installations that allow her viewers to independently create their own stories from the building blocks given to them by Long Soldier. I engage also with Long Soldier's public readings of her poetry to trace the ways in which space operates orally as silence in those moments of enacted text. Long Soldier provides a similar framework in *Whereas* itself, subtly inviting active and intentional participation from the reader through the visual structure of her text, as well as through her own active engagement with the web of relationships embedded in the stories and acts of storytelling. Long Soldier makes clear, both explicitly and implicitly, that the reader must make room in themselves for the text and that the text will in turn make room for the reader, creating a dynamic that is cyclically reciprocal. Long Soldier guides the reader in how to

participate in a conscious, intentional way through the first section of the collection in her use of defamiliarizing page layouts that compel the reader to make individual choices about how they will engage with each poem. In this way, Long Soldier invites the reader to be aware of their own contribution to the means of story-exchange and to the negotiation of the relationship between writer and reader. Long Soldier also visually signals the space she makes for the presence of the reader through literal negative space on the page, which not only surrounds but also disrupts the text of the poems, once again asking the reader to make decisions about how they will contend with and inhabit this space. The visual structures of Long Soldier's collection allows for an exploration of the kinds of spatial dynamics (whether in a room or on a page) that encourage active and respectful collaboration. In such techniques, Long Soldier also theorises a shift from empathetic to relational reading practices, both through the kind of engagement she asks of the reader and the engagement she models in her own additive response to the text of the U.S. Congress's 2010 "Apology to Native Peoples of the United States," which she enacts across the last two sections of *Whereas*.

My analyses of *huff* and *Whereas* are informed by Indigenous theorists from Turtle Island who draw out a common impulse of actively treating the audience and storyteller as collaborators. Theorists such as Silko, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Nishnaabeg), LeAnne Howe (Choctaw), Heid E. Erdrich (Ojibwe), and Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) are foundational to this thesis and to my understanding of the role of the story-receiver, as I address their varying conceptions of the mutual relationship between storyteller and audience, and of the role of the audience in co-creating the story within and beyond the moment of its telling. Silko, as well as Maria Campbell (Métis), Matthew Wildcat (Plains Cree), and Karyn Recollet (Cree) provide embodied models of networked relationships, which help to make the structure of creative networks of story-reception materially apparent. Erdrich also provides an expansive, embodied model for understanding the influence of the story-receiver, visioning the story as a landscape in which every collaborator leaves signs of their presence. Natalie Diaz (Mojave) and Jill Carter (Anishinaabe/Ashkenazi) deeply inform my understanding of the distinction between identification and relationship in their theorisations of the kinds of relationships formed between audience and performer as well as the necessity of action-based engagement. I also look to Janice Cindy Gaudet's (Métis) and Dylan Miner's (Métis) work on the methodology of visiting, which further nuances the kinds of relationships possible between audience and

performer and the ways they can be made consciously evident in physical and textual space. Justice's work as well as Warren Cariou's (Métis) works are also important to this thesis in creating a deeper understanding of what engagement with story can look like beyond the moment of exchange, prioritizing the individual re-embodiment and re-enactment of stories and the ways this enactment connects an individual story-receiver to a larger network of relationships.

I propose that although the influence of the audience or reader continually functions in any set of textual relationships, certain story practices make visible their receiver's often invisible creative influence. Furthermore, these story practices dictate what kind of relationship will be created between storyteller and story-receiver. This receptive influence is particularly active in dynamic repetitions, with each repetition of story acting as a retelling and a re-creation. My aim in this project is to discover the ways the presence of the story-receiver is made conspicuously visible through interruptive audience engagement in performance-based texts, to what degree these acts of generative story-reception function in non-performance forms, and ultimately how an awareness of our participation in this collaboration makes us more responsible literary relatives[1], particularly in the field of literary analysis. My approach to dynamic repetitions of performed texts is guided by Erdrich's use of the Anishinaabe word *name'*, which she uses to mean "landmarks of literature, signs of presence" (14). In my analysis of Cardinal and Long Soldier's texts, I aim to trace the landmarks themselves that are embedded in the texts, which draw attention to the intended presence of the reader. These landmarks function as invitations for participation written into the structure of the texts themselves, to which audience members and readers can locate and to which they can anchor their own additive responses. For Cardinal, these landmarks often take the form of stage directions indicating audience participation. For Long Soldier, many landmarks are depicted visually with swaths of white space or defamiliarizing textual formatting, and verbally through the silences she enacts in public readings.

Although the dynamics I discuss in this thesis are already widely theorised and enacted in the above texts (as well as countless others), my aim is to suggest a vocabulary that is lacking in the field of academic literary scholarship to express or engage with this reciprocity

[1] This consideration is informed by the question Daniel Heath Justice asks in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, "How Do We Behave as Good Relatives?"

and its ethical stakes or foregrounding of relationality and responsibility. I hope to synthesize existing ideas about story-reception, relationship, and collaboration from Indigenous theorists and artists to suggest possible methods of analyzing story structure as a way to account for the role of story-receivers and the implications of their influence.

Chapter 2: Theorising Co-Creation

The acts of storytelling that are my focus demonstrate and invite the active presence of readers, audiences, and listeners who act as co-creators of story, particularly in forms of storytelling that invite this kind of mutual participation. To position my approach, I draw together the theorists whose works have shaped this project's understanding of storytelling, the structures through which stories interact, the mutually creative nature of these interactions, and the specific story-practices that make this mutuality tangible. I will first define some frequently used terms, most of which relate to how I articulate and conceptualize story within this project. Story itself is a vast and complex concept, which I will return to later in the chapter, if not to define, then at least to describe according to the elements central to my own understanding of this work of analysis. For now, I will explain how I am using several terms adjacent to *story*. I use "story-receiver" or simply "receiver" as a catch-all term for the reader, the listener, the audience, the receptive conversational partner, etc. The story-receiver is the one the story is being told *to* in whatever form it may take. Similarly, I will use "storyteller" or simply "teller" as a catch-all term for the speaker, the writer, the performer, the actor, etc. The storyteller is the vehicle through which the story is delivered. Both of these figures are participants in a process of "story-exchange," which I use as a general term for any process by which a story is in some way told and in some way received. This could mean the orating of a story to a listener, the reading of a text, the viewing of a play by an audience, etc. "Story-exchange" is related to and overlaps with "story-creation," or the process by which a story is brought into being, but the terms are conceptually distinct. While I frame the exchange of stories to be at the same time a re-creation of stories, it is occasionally useful to distinguish the initial moment of story-creation from its subsequent processes of exchange between teller and receiver, although these exchanges are themselves creative. I use "storied" as an adjective to describe any of these roles, relationships, or processes guided by and in service to story. The term "un-text" is central to this thesis and is used to refer to the network of roles and relationships creatively surrounding a given story, and which function collaboratively within and beyond the exchange of the story. I discuss the un-text at greater length later in this chapter.

While the co-creative relationship between teller and receiver is already modeled and enacted in the texts I study, the field of academic literary scholarship lacks vocabulary to express or engage with this reciprocity. Reader-response theory as exemplified by Stanley Fish,

Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes, and Janice Radway, engages with certain elements of this expansive and long-established storied dynamic, and must therefore be addressed for its presence in the field of literary scholarship as well as its overlap with my work. Most applicable to this thesis is the reader-response assertion that the reader is a subject rather than an object in the exchange between teller and receiver, taking seriously the role played by the reader in the act of creating meaning. Fish, for example, asks us to consider not what a text *means* but rather what it *does*, placing the onus of meaning-creation on the reader and their interaction with the text rather than on the writer and their intentions when creating the text. In describing his approach, Fish notes that his "method" is about an encounter, and thus hinges on an intention to

> slow down the reading experience so that 'events' one does not notice in normal time, but which do occur, are brought before our analytical attentions … [T]he value of such a procedure is predicated on the idea of *meaning as an event*, something that is between the words and in the reader's mind, something not visible to the naked eye but which can be made visible (or at least palpable) by the regular introduction of a 'searching' question (what does this do?). (28)

However, there are significant differences between the theories in which my work is grounded and reader-response in the framing of how the relationship between teller and receiver (and text) functions, as well as in how and where meaning is created. Perhaps most significantly, my focus is not so much on the act of interpretation by readers as it is on the status of story itself and the receiver's role in story-creation.

Iser sees the reader and the text as functioning in relationship to each other, with active reading positions enabled by the text through a basis of three main textual elements: "the process of anticipation and retrospection, the consequent unfolding of the text as a living event, and the resultant impression of lifelikeness" (296). Through an engagement with these textual elements (the degree to which they are present in the text determining the level of the reader's participation), the reader imaginatively realizes the text. Iser defines this relationship between text and reader as the "virtual dimension," which "is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination" (284). In response to gaps in the text, the constant interaction of memory and perception, and the negotiation of illusion and reality, the reader contributes imaginatively to their own perception of the text. This creative

space that Iser describes somewhat resembles my own understanding of the un-text, both the "virtual dimension" and the un-text representing a process through which the structure of a text allows for creative engagement by readers. However, while the "virtual dimension" creatively interacts with a text, it exists in abstraction within the mind of the individual reader, dislocated from the text itself, the writer, and the wider community of fellow readers. My distinction is that the un-text is a creative field of relationships surrounding a text, of which an individual reader is one component and contributive part. Rather than existing in dislocated abstraction, the un-text allows the reader to contribute additively to the text itself.

For Barthes, the subjecthood and creative influence of the reader depends upon whether the text they receive is "readerly" or "writerly" (5), that is, whether the text adheres to standard signifying practices and encourages the reader to act passively, or whether the text is in some way non-standard and forces the reader to take on an active position in determining meaning. By Barthes's estimation, most texts are readerly texts that leave the reader idle: "instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to … the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text" (4). The distinction Barthes draws between types of texts supports the specific modes of story-exchange I notice, including texts that make visible the influence of the story-receiver and that enable an active and creative reader or viewer. However, Barthes places the text as the primary deciding factor as to the level of engagement the reader will have, while I suggest that the reader is inherently creative, and – although certain storytelling practices encourage, force, or define intentional engagement – it is ultimately the receiver themself and, crucially, their *relationship* with the teller or text that determines their level of influence. I suggest that the issue Barthes notices is a cultural lack of awareness by readers of their own continual and inherent influence, rather than a lack of the influence itself. According to this line of thinking, Barthes also clarifies that reading is "not a parasitical act;" it is not extractive. Instead, the reader is "irrecoverable" from the text (10). I suggest, however, that reading is not only "not extractive," it is additive. The reader is not subsumed into the text, nor do they remove meaning from it; instead, the reader and the text (and the teller, although Barthes hardly mentions this role) are in mutually contributive relationship.

Radway's main focus is the act of reading (specific kinds of readings done by specific kinds of readers) as it responds to and affects other areas of readers' lives. Like Fish, Radway

asks what reading *does*, and in particular, how women "use traditionally female forms" of literary production "to resist their situation *as women* by enabling them to cope with the features of the situation that oppress them" (12). While her work is interested in what reading does with, to, and in the lives of readers, my project is motivated by what the reader does with, to, and in the stories they interact with. My focus is the act of story-reception less as it affects the lives of story-receivers (although this is a crucial and integrated part of the process, since most acts of story-reception and enactment take place deeply rooted *in* the lives of receivers), and more as it affects and changes the story itself in its creation and in its continued repetition.

For the most part, while these theorists consider the reader to be an active part of textual meaning-making, they also place the reader's activity as dislocated from the text and the writer, as well as from other readers, functioning only within the self. Furthermore, they see the roles of all story-exchange participants to be distinct and static (if interrelated) rather than dynamic and shared. My focus, however, is reliant on the continual relationality between teller, receiver, and story in every act of story-creation and story-exchange. The reader(s), the text, and the writer dynamically co-create, constantly negotiating shifting roles of additive and receptive response through the relational structure of the act of story-exchange. While significant in its focus on the reader as a source of meaning, reader-response lacks key aspects of story-reception engaged with and theorised by the Indigenous theorists I look to most closely in this thesis. My focus is the role of story itself as a function of relationship. That is, where reader-response theorists look at the reader's relationship to the text as an enactment of the reader's own active power, I look at story as a product of the relationship between teller and receiver, with the receiver playing a vital yet still interdependent role. Furthermore, my focus is not on how reader-responses shift according to the meaning-making enacted by particular interpretive communities (as in the work of Fish and Radway), but rather how the story itself changes according to the influence of receivers as it is repetitively received and re-created.

In order to discuss the receiver's relational influence on stories, I must first define how I am using the term "story" itself, particularly as a form of knowledge that is able to creatively participate and change in relationship. This framing of story is deeply influenced by LeAnne Howe's explanation of the Choctaw prefix "nuk," which "has to do with the power of breath, speech, and mind" (30) and signifies the power to create. For this definition, I turn to several

Indigenous theorists whose work with varied definitions and defining features of story shares certain common threads that I find helpful and resonant. One is that stories are never divorced from relationship or removed from lived experience. Instead, they sit at the nexus of multiple strands of cultural, familial, material, and personal influence. I draw upon LeAnne Howe's definition of "tribalography" in my conception of the groundedness of story in relationship to people, places, and experience: "Native stories … seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieus" (42). Settler scholar Jane Bennett's sense of the term "assemblage" provides background in further defineing my figuration of this element of story. In my treatment, it is when these strands of influence work in unanticipated relationship that story functions with creative power, that it begins to "shimmer and spark" (Bennett 5). Necessarily, then, story is not isolated only to designated storytelling practices or singular tellings (such as reading a book or watching a play), but instead functions continuously within all the registers of lived experience that comprise it and in as many forms as the listeners and tellers enact. Story, here, is a process rather than a product. It is a means of communication rather than a result of expression. As such, stories are not finite or contained, but instead are continuously recreated in generative relationship. A story, once created, is not static; a story, once told, is not finished. Speaking about Puebloan language and expression, Silko describes modes in which stories function with this kind of continuous generativity:

> when one is telling a story and one is using words to tell the story, each word that one is speaking has a story of its own, too. Often the speakers, or tellers, will go into these word stories, creating an elaborate structure of stories within stories …. This perspective on narrative– of story within story, the idea that one story is only the beginning of many stories and the sense that stories never truly end– represents an important contribution of Native American cultures to the English language. (237)

That every story is composed of many stories, as well as all the assembled threads of presence that have brought them into being, suggests a branching structure of relationship both within and surrounding a given story. As these relationships are enacted and engaged, stories grow in continual re-creation.

These defining features of story necessitate a model of influence and relationship between stories vaster and more complex than those typically used in academic literary theory such as reader-response criticism, wherein texts are placed in hierarchical or linear chains of influence. For a more useful model I turn to Silko for the visual structure of a web of stories, as well as to Karyn Recollet for "kinstellatory" methodologies, and Maria Campbell and Matthew Wildcat for principles of wâhkôtowin. Campbell defines wâhkôtowin as "kinship, relationship, and family," but clarifies that "at one time, from our place it meant the whole of creation. And our teachings taught us that all of creation is related and inter-connected to all things within it …. Wahkotowin meant honoring and respecting those relationships" (5). Recollet provides another relational model in her discussion of kinstellatory methodologies:

> We have our own stories in Cree about the celestial and the star maps as part of critical Indigenous land pedagogies that are overflowing their own boundaries of being rooted rhizomatically downwards. Thinking about traditional territories as including the celestial really opens up how I think about kinstellatory relationships that are based upon our reciprocity and radical relationalities with multiple Indigenous scales. (214)

It is also worth quoting Daniel Heath Justice at length here in his discussion of kinship as distinct from lineage:

> In those Indigenous cultural understandings that have withstood such colonial intrusions, the status of 'human' is intimately embedded in kinship relations. It's why some version of the question "Who's your family?" or "Who are your people?" continues to be so important in Indigenous conversations: such questions don't just connect you to a lineage, however that may be understood – they place you in a meaningful context with your diverse relatives and the associated relationships of obligation, where you have people who claim you and who have, hopefully, trained you well in the ways of being a good human being. In other words, kinship isn't just a thing, it's an active network of connections, a process of continual acknowledgement and enactment. (41-42)

Justice adds, "It's not enough to claim relations with other peoples – we must consider what those relationships ask of us, and how we may learn to be kin in ways that make one another's lives better" (82). For a meaningful study of story as a function of relationship, particularly one

that focuses on the responsibility of the receiver to take care with the changes they make to the stories they interact with, such principles of kinship must guide the structure and engagements of a model of storied influence. For this reason, much of my discussion of the un-text is grounded in a shift from textual engagement on the basis of empathy or identification to engagement on the basis of relationship.

Silko offers a useful and embodied model of storied relationships in her essay "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective." She explains that "Pueblo expression resembles something like a spider's web– with many little threads radiating from the center, crisscrossing one another. As with the web, the structure emerges as it is made, and you must simply listen and trust, as the Pueblo people do, that meaning will be made" (236). In this model, each story is at a nexus, connected not only to a preceding story but directly or indirectly to the entire web. This model works especially well because it has the potential to shift and change, and to be deeply situated in a larger, more expansive landscape. A web structure allows us to see the reciprocity of storied relationships, where any act of creation or influence at one point on the web affects all other points of the web. To follow this image to its embodied conclusions, the spider web itself is also connected to and situated in a larger landscape, dependent upon this landscape to exist, and also functioning as a crucial component of this landscape. The groundedness of this model is imperative to an understanding of stories and story-practices that are themselves enacted in lived experience. The web model also resists the need to work from a definitive or "official" variant of a particular story and instead functions according to cycles of repetition and change. If stories are connected in a web of relationship, they must respond to changes elsewhere on the web and cannot remain static. Fish frames literature as a "kinetic art" (43), which seems to be true about any form of story when viewed beyond its definitive material variants. But the web of relationships between stories also resists completeness. It is itself kinetic, with the outer edges always expanding and the inner connections constantly shifting and becoming increasingly complex. With these models of storied relationships in mind, it is clear that stories are not created or received into a void, but into an active and present network of relationship.

The textual relationships preceding the creation of a given story can be traced on such a web model – the other stories, theories, relationships that led to the creation of this story, the relationships that meet and create story. The mutable stages of story-creation and exchange can

also be traced on this web. These stages include the story as embodied or conceived by the teller (the story as relationally enacted, the story as it lives in the body and the mind), the oral or written variant that is shared with a specific audience or series of audiences, and the material mechanisms of telling or performance (the pages of a specific written variant, the room in which a play is performed). What is less visually apparent is the network of influence of the story-receiver. There is a creative and an interruptive potential to the seemingly negative space surrounding story, a network of influence functioning silently in between the other points of the web. This network of influence takes the form of creative and participatory story-reception, such as readings, theorisations, repetitions, audience participation and interruption.

I conceive of this influence by story-receivers as a kind of un-text, operating not as a negation of text but rather as a continuous act of co-creation working outside of the oral or written variant. Not unlike reader-response theorists, I view the story-receiver's part in story-exchange as a generative one. Unlike these theorists, I think this influence acts upon the story itself and the entire web of storied influence. The story-receiver, here, acts as a co-creator of story. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes this mutual relationship of influence and the creative potential of the story-receiver: "The relationship between those present becomes dynamic, with the storyteller adjusting their 'performance' based on the reactions and presence of the audience. The lines between storyteller and audience become blurred as individuals make non-verbal (and sometimes verbal) contributions to the collective event" ("Theorizing Resurgence" 282). Silko's configuration of the teller/audience dynamic compliments Simpson's observation, as Silko the receiver themself as the source of story-creation: "the storytelling always includes the audience, the listeners. In fact, a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener; the storyteller's role is to draw the story out of the listeners" (237). Heid E. Erdrich speaks to a larger network of story-receivers acting always upon any engagement with or creation of stories:

> As a poet and playwright, I believe we are not alone in our reading, and so not alone in our writing. We write into and out of a great telling that brings us stories and songs, that teaches us to look and listen. This is not some mystic tradition; it is simply how it is to be aware of where you are, who you are, and who your people are when they create with words. (14)

If we are not alone in our reading, then, perhaps in the same way that we "write into and out of a great telling", we also read into and out of a great reading, and listen into and out of a great listening.

The culture of academic literary studies makes the operation of the un-text particularly difficult to see because there is often some material and temporal distance between the teller and receiver. The "official" written variant may also remain unchanged even when influenced creatively by the receiver, which isn't reflective of the level of engagement surrounding it that changes the way the story itself functions in the world and on the web of relationships in which it is situated. Simpson speaks to this degree of removal:

> When mediated through print or recording devices, these relationships [between storyteller and receiver] become either reduced (technology that limits interactivity) or unilateral (as in print, film, or video, when the creator cannot respond to the reaction of the audience). Then the process, to me, loses some of its transformative power because it is no longer emergent. ("Theorizing Resurgence" 282)

Whether the process "loses some of its transformative power" or whether this transformation simply loses its immediacy and shifts to a slower scale, becoming invisible when materially mediated where it would be visible in active performance, it is clear that some forms of material mediation make it difficult to see the un-text's influence on stories.

I propose that although the un-text continually functions in any set of storied relationships, certain story-practices make visible its often invisible creative influence. Any practice that functions with a low degree of spatial and temporal separation between the teller and receiver, and therefore allows the interventions of the receiver to be made in real time, makes this influence visually apparent, which is why my focus is on performance-based texts. However, there are several other storytelling principles that must also be present in these performance-based forms for the un-text to be at its most visually and immediately apparent – that make its invisible influence visible.

The main principles that allow for the un-text to be visibly present are performance, repetition, collaboration/participation/interruption, and enactment/embodiment. I use performance to mean any act of story-exchange where the teller is physically present with the receiver – they share a physical space and are able to respond to each other in real time. In

whatever ways the story is mediated materially (physical movement or lighting cues in place of words, captions appearing projected on a stage, etc.), this materiality does not create a separation between the teller and receiver but rather fosters further interaction. In the section on *Whereas* I will be exploring the text-based relationship between writer and reader and not just between performer and audience. Performance in this context is related to Long Soldier's recasting of the page as a kind of stage, the relationship between writer and reader being enacted through the spatial and textual effects of her poetry. My conceptualization of performance in a textual space is informed primarily by methodologies of "visiting" as well as Michelle Olson's (Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in) use of performance theory to spatially deconstruct theatrical hierarchies. These theorisations allow for a treatment of the page in *Whereas* as a visual space that can act as a field of interaction between the writer and the reader much like a room does for a performer and an audience.

Repetition is a significant element of story-exchange in that it allows us to see the gradual influence of the un-text on a particular story. Repetition is also a function of many performed story-forms. As a play is performed repeatedly, the way it is changed by shifting audiences becomes apparent over time. Repetition also functions in ways other than "official" or "definitive" variants, such as a scripted play. A story re-told or re-embodied functions, too, as a repetition, suggesting that many variations branch away from any single story. This is not repetition as sameness, but rather repetition as change (perhaps the phrase "dynamic repetition" is appropriate) like the same word spoken by different voices, or consecutive steps taken on a journey. It is through repetitive story-practices that the un-text participates in continual re-creation. Simpson explains, "[Anishinaabeg] hear variations of the same creation story for our entire lives, and we are expected to find meaning in it at every stage of life" (*As We Have Always Done* 200). It is the "find[ing] meaning" by the receiver that makes storied repetition continuously generative.

For these changes to be abundantly visible over multiple repetitions of story, the audience must participate and in some way interrupt; there must be visible collaboration between audience and teller. Although I suggest that the story-receiver inherently influences any story they engage with, this influence is made visible in an engagement more active and interruptive than the passive reception typical to forms like reading or silently viewing a play. This kind of influence by the receiver must in some way intervene or redirect the way a story proceeds. A

particularly palpable example of an interruptive, participatory engagement by story-receivers is Augusto Boal's Forum Theater, which he discusses in his book *Theater of the Oppressed* as one of multiple performance theories intended to function as a tool of class liberation. In Forum Theater, the audience is encouraged to interrupt and redirect the action of the play. Boal explains:

> The procedure [of Forum Theater] is as follows: First, the participants are asked to tell a story containing a political or social problem of difficult solution. Then a ten- or fifteen minute skit portraying that problem and the solution intended for discussion is improvised or rehearsed, and subsequently presented. When the skit is over, the participants are asked if they agree with the solution presented. At least some will say no. At this point it is explained that the scene will be performed once more, exactly as it was the first time. But now any participant in the audience has the right to replace any actor and lead the action in the direction that seems to him most appropriate. The displaced actor steps aside, but remains ready to resume action the moment the participant considers his own intervention to be terminated. The other actors have to face the newly created situation, responding instantly to all possibilities that it may present. (139)

Boal also explains that the main objective of Forum Theater is "to change the people – 'spectators,' passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action" (122). I would suggest that a visibly active un-text does not transform spectators into participants; rather, it enables spectators to become more aware of their role as participants and encourages them to participate intentionally.

Crucial to a participatory mode of story-exchange is thus an embodiment grounded in personal and cultural context. Erdrich writes that "when we read, we read from where we are and from who we are" (13), and this *where* and *who* are necessary elements to the engagement of the un-text in a network of storied relationships. Simpson further clarifies the significance of embodied engagement when she writes that "[e]mbodiment compels us to untie our canoes – to not just think about our canoes or write about our canoes but to actually untie them, get in, and begin the voyage" (*As We Have Always* Done 193). The influence from the un-text is not only a writing or a thinking (although both are also

embodied forms of engagement), but a presence and an enactment – it is a form of relationship that actively creates. Justice expounds upon stories as the enactment of embodied relationship for Indigenous peoples, which I would emphasize applies not only to the act of storytelling but also to the act of story reception:

> Our literatures are the storied archives – embodied, inscribed, digitized, vocalized – that articulate our sense of belonging and wonder, the ways of meaning-making in the world and in our time. Sometimes those literatures are the stories we tell around the kitchen table or the songs shared at the ceremonial ground; sometimes they're spoken at a microphone at the back of a crowded coffee house or read in solitary silence at the end of a long day; sometimes they're discussed with vigour in a classroom or whispered softly over a lover's damp skin. (186-187)

Embodiment, and specifically embodiment grounded in personal and cultural context, is a principle of storytelling that makes the influence of the un-text particularly clear to perceive as the receiver actively participates through their own body and the specificities of their own lived experience.

Like stories themselves, generative responses *to* stories by the story-receiver function according to particular principles and take many forms, some more visible to perceive and trace on a web of storied relationships than others. For instance, as Silko observes, anthropologists and ethnologists "tended to elevate the old, sacred, and traditional stories and to bush aside family stories, the family's account of itself (238). Once again following the storytelling principles Silko outlines, I do not consider one form of story-reception or its influence as more important than another. I do not, for example, elevate a published work of literary criticism above a shout from an audience member, nor do I elevate a concrete, material act of influence above an ephemeral, imaginative one. For the purposes of my research, the kinds of story-reception I focus on will be those engaged in performance-based story forms that follow the principles outlined above.

As a guiding methodology in this study of the influence of the un-text, I look to Erdrich's use of the Anishinaabe word *name'* as a mode of tracing Ojibwe literary presences. Erdrich defines *name'* in relation to this work:

> I choose to be guided by a metaphor that involves a play between the notion of landmark literary works and the pictographic marks/signs/ presence that Anishinaabe people left/leave/find on rock and elsewhere. This metaphor arises from an Anishinaabe-centered epistemology that relates writing with landmark, and marking with ongoing presence in place. The Anishinaabe word name' is a verb transitive animate and means to "find/ leave signs of somebody's presence." While engaging in research in order to recover an Ojibwe tradition of writing in English, I find landmarks of literature, signs of presence, and draw them toward my understanding of the Anishinaabe word name'. It seems apt: What helps us know a place? Landmarks. What helps us know a people? the marks/signs they leave, that we find. These marks and landmarks help us follow their path across a landscape of time. (14)

As a landscape is changed by one's presence in it, so too is a text changed by one's interaction with it. I aim to approach texts as Erdrich suggests and enacts: by tracing landmarks of audience co-creation, revealing the active presence of the un-text. This approach as outlined by Erdrich suggests a treatment of story as landscape, as a place where any presence is felt and can be mapped. Justice discusses "the myth of *terra nullius* – or *'no one's land'*" (10), emphasizing that there is no such thing as an empty landscape. There is also no such thing as an uninhabited story. The stories I have chosen to study in the following chapters not only operate according to storytelling principles that reveal the presence of the un-text, they also maintain a treatment of physical and textual space that engages the audience or reader as a co-inhabitant of a shared space.

I conceive of the story-structures that emphasize potential traces of the un-text, by the receivers of story, to be signs of presence in storied landscapes, which can be gradually perceived through the repetitions (variations, enactments) of performed story. Because I do not have access to every repeated performance of the texts I work from, I cannot comprehensively trace every audience interruption or every consecutive change made in repetitions of a given story. My aim is less to create a comprehensive map than it is to identify the signs of presence that hold particularly noticeable influence, to look at the story practices that are already engaging actively with these presences, and specifically to visit only the parts of these storied landscapes that are available to me and that I will not damage by being present there myself.

Ultimately, my aim is to glean a sense of how these signs of presence can be perceived not only in performance-based story forms, but also in written literary landscapes. I am interested in the ways the un-text functions in non-performance textual relationships, engaging the co-creative presence of the reader in a context not determined by staging or spatial dynamics, and how this influence acts even with the material and temporal divide between the teller and the receiver that characterizes much literary work.

Chapter 3: Cyclical Collaboration in Cliff Cardinal's *huff*

3.1 Introduction

While the co-creativity of the un-text surrounds and acts upon any story, certain story-exchange structures (particularly in performance) make conscious the collaborative participation of the story-receiver. Cliff Cardinal's *huff* (2017) suggests the possibility of an actively aware relationship between audience and performer in the gestures towards participation that are written into the text. The enacted reality of such participation in actual performances of *huff* is its own discussion, and one that would require a lengthy study of repeated live viewings of the play, a process which is both materially unavailable to me and in some ways incidental to the questions guiding my research. I am more concerned with the acknowledgement of the presence of the un-text than with its effects, which would depend on the contexts of its staging and on its audiences. *huff* was first performed at the Gordon Best Theatre (2012) as part of the Ode'min Giizis Festival in Peterborough, and then later staged by Native Earth Performing Arts in Toronto in 2015 and toured throughout Canada in 2016 (Cardinal 11). Both temporally and pedagogically, then, *huff* can be situated within the fourth wave of Lindsey Lachance's (Algonquin Anishinaabe) "Four Waves of Indigenous Theatrical Representations," which witnessed "a shift from Indigenous artists playing roles written by non-Indigenous artists to a self-recognition where they begin to create a diverse body of theatrical training, pedagogy, processes and works" (18).

huff is a one-actor show in which Cardinal plays all twenty characters, though the central voice of the story is a character named Wind. Structured within a frame narrative, the play is bookended by two scenes that take place in Wind's present, which is the viewpoint from which he retrospectively narrates the story of his childhood. In the first and last scenes, which frame the stories Wind tells in the body of the play, Wind contemplates and attempts suicide, explaining to the audience the "story that began a long time ago" (15), which brought him to this point. The retrospective narrative of Wind's childhood follows Wind and his younger brother Huff as they struggle with grieving the death of their mother, as well as with solvent abuse, physical and sexual assault within their family, and suicide. As recalled and reenacted by Wind, the audience is brought into his experiences with his brother, and especially into their games, such as in scenes where they play Sega Genesis with their father, where they play the "pass out game" where one boy chokes the other until they pass out and escape into a hallucination, where they use beer cans to put on a puppet show about their school, and when they huff gas:

WIND picks up the bag of gas.

(to audience) You wanna go first?

Beat.

Okay.

Gas tastes like metal but also like being scared.

Like someone's screaming in your face.

WIND screams in silence.

He takes a big breath from the bag.

Another. (22)

After several rambunctious and chaotic scenes that establish the boys' caring relationship with their Kohkum as well as the abuse and neglect they receive from their father and his girlfriend, the violence within their family escalates. It reaches a breaking point when their older brother Charles, who suffers from a developmental disorder, rapes Huff and is later beaten by their father. After an argument with Huff, Wind runs away and Huff plays the pass out game alone, committing suicide by hanging himself with a belt. It is, however, left deliberately ambiguous whether or not Huff's suicide was intentional. The narrative is then brought back from stories of the past to Wind's present moment, where he once again attempts suicide and is ultimately interrupted by the presence of Huff's spirit.

Both the stage directions and the play's dialogue constantly involve and negotiate the presence of the audience. For example, the stage directions for the first scene describe Wind entering with a plastic bag over his head; it is "*duct-taped around his throat to create an airtight seal*" (13). Wind then demands audience participation as he asks an audience member to remove the plastic bag from his head before he suffocates. He then requests that this audience member keep the plastic bag and not give it back to him no matter what occurs, only to return at the end of the play to ask for it back. The stage directions indicate that regardless of the audience member's response, Wind is to return to the stage empty-handed and produce the second bag from his pocket:

I need that bag back.

I'm almost finished.

Can I please have my bag back?

If the audience member offers the bag, WIND refuses it. If the audi-

ence member keeps the bag:

Thank you.

He returns to the stage. He turns back.

He takes another plastic bag out of his pocket. He puts it on his head. He duct-tapes a seal around his throat. (61)

Between the two fraught interactions that frame the play, the audience in general as well as specific audience members are involved to varying degrees as presences that have the potential to influence the story. In a continuum of participatory action, they are high-fived, splashed with tomato juice, and addressed by the various characters that Wind voices. The structured audience interactions initially show the audience that they have the potential not only to participate in the story but also to alter or intervene in its outcome – but it is a power which this same structure ultimately denies to them.

To some degree within the text of the script itself, and to a concerning degree in the actual performance of the play, Cardinal's own participation in the relationality he creates with the audience has the potential to cause harm, particularly for Indigenous audience members who are made to witness horrific violence being done to an Indigenous body with no frameworks of relational care in place. Although the text of *huff* uniquely engages relationship, it is not necessarily always *good* relationship, particularly when put into actual practice rather than existing in theory as it does in the text. Rather, *huff* functions as an example of theatrical practices that operate towards relationality – including unwanted or undesirable relations. The extreme spectacle of these relational practices also has the effect of making audience members consciously aware of their engagement in story-reception processes that they may normally engage in unconsciously.

While taking into account the significant limitations of the play's relationality, my focus is on the interpersonal structure suggested in the text as a conscious method of collaborative meaning-making, demonstrating the possibility of performative acknowledgement of the constant functioning of the un-text. The text makes apparent and exaggerates several principles of story-exchange, gesturing towards both interactive and alienating elements of story/storied collaboration. In order to analyze this structure, I first distinguish the permeable framework of Cardinal's text from the self-contained structures of Greek Tragedy. I look to Stanley Fish's work as a starting point to challenge the idea of the story as a self-contained, stable entity before

moving to Warren Cariou's work to consider story as multiply embodied in a dynamic network of receivers. I then move to a repositioning of relationship (in contrast with empathy or intellectual response) as the means through which storied meaning is made, relying on theorisations of relationality by Lee Maracle (Stó:lō), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Natalie Diaz. From this basis of understanding, I analyze the relational structure suggested by Cardinal's text, placing Cardinal's collaborative gestures somewhere between the traditions of Forum Theatre, as theorized by Augusto Boal, and the impulses of In-Yer-Face Theatre, arising in 1990s Britain. Finally, I consider Cardinal's subversion of catharsis in favour of a cyclical engagement with story and its reception through the lens of *huff*'s central metaphor of repeated breath, an image which also lends clarity to the relational limitations of Cardinal's text.

3.2 The Physical and Conceptual Instability of the Story

Neither Cardinal nor his play is a container of meaning; rather, they are both participants in and instigators of a meaning-making process that is carried out in the bodies and minds of the audience in relationship with each other and with Cardinal as playwright and as actor. This lack of stable self-containment inverts conventions of Greek tragedy that are foundational to much of Western theatrical tradition. Within the structure of Greek tragedy, a play exists on two conceptually separate physical planes, that of the stage and that of the audience. The role of the actor on stage is to perform, and the role of the audience is to watch, and the implicit rule is that the border between these two spaces will not be physically or conceptually traversed by either party. As it would follow Aristotle's description of tragedy, a successful play is one that convincingly imitates real action within a structure of internal rules that differ from those governing the external world of the audience. For Aristotle, this internal "structural union of parts" is specific and self-contained such that "if any one [part] is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed." It is the stability of this structure that creates meaning within the Aristotelian theatrical tradition: "the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all". The performed characters would exist in this self-contained world of the plot, unaware of the audience and bearing the responsibility and knowledge of the story. The audience is aware of both the story and the world external to the story, sitting at a distance from both the actors and the Chorus, thus occupying a position both powerful and, in terms of the action on stage, disempowered.

Of course, violations of these rules of self-containment appear even within the Western theatrical canon; breaks in the fourth wall are common, including, for example, Shakespearean drama and British pantomime. Notably, Bertolt Brecht speaks to a shift in the performer/audience relationship within the tradition of "epic theatre" wherein attention is consciously drawn to the performance *as* a performance: in his note on *The Threepenny Opera*, for example, he indicates that "[t]he actor must not only sing but show a man singing" (96). As in *huff*, the focus becomes the *process* of story-exchange as well as or rather than the *product*. Cardinal, however, reaches an extreme of theatrical instability and explodes the border between these two theatrical spaces to make them continuously permeable and traversable to varying degrees, both conceptually and physically. The characters in the story are aware of the audience (once again to varying degrees) and ask for their participation in such a way that the spectator has an individual and material impact on the development of the story. Although the fourth wall is always open in *huff*, neither the audience's role nor Cardinal's relationship to the audience is constant, but rather continuously shifts and adjusts. Even Cardinal's own person as the solo actor and thus the sole embodiment of the story is permeable and changeable as he switches rapidly among all twenty characters in the play and even in and out of character altogether. It is not the narrative structure itself, but rather the engagement *with* the dynamic structure by both Cardinal and his audience that primarily creates meaning in *huff*.

Fish speaks to a different but related physical and conceptual literary divide: that between the work as it is physically represented, which functions as an ostensible container of meaning, and the work as the receiver reads or views it. He writes,

> The objectivity of the text is an illusion and, moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The illusion is one of self-sufficiency and completeness. A line of print or a page is so obviously *there* – it can be handled, photographed, or put away – that it seems to be the sole repository of whatever value and meaning we associate with it. (43)

huff is intentionally unconvincing in terms of consistency and separateness. Fish speaks to this kind of fractal nature of meaning-making. Although I would argue that it applies to *any* unit of language or any method of story-exchange, he suggests that when a unit of language (such as a sentence) becomes abstract to the point of incomprehensibility, it becomes "no longer an object, a thing-in-itself, but an *event*, something that *happens* to, and with the participation of, the reader"

(25). Furthermore, "it is this event, this happening – all of it and not anything that could be said about it or any information one might take away from it – that is, I would argue, the meaning of the sentence" (25). For Fish, the mechanism by which meaning is made and the meaning itself are one and the same. Meaning is not something to be derived; rather, it is an action – a story *means*.

The meaning-making event that is *huff* happens in collaboration with the body and mind of the viewer not only during the performance itself, but afterwards too as the viewer's remembering of the play (which will, after their initial viewing, be the way they experience the story) includes their own embodied participation in its telling. This is the dynamic Cariou discusses in his response to Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?* In "Who is the Text in This Class?" Cariou writes about his own experience receiving stories told by Louis Bird in a class Cariou was teaching. He theorizes his own reception and remembering of these stories as events that continue to be generative of meaning in his memory because they include his own embodiment:

> When I think back on those unwritten, oral stories now, they refuse to be settled, to be reified. In some ways that's because I don't remember them properly. I only have an imperfect recollection of how they went, and what order the events in the stories happened. But I think there is more to this than simply the weakness of memory. The stories persist in my mind as a memory of an event, a community, a particular set of circumstances – including the fact that it was incredibly hot that week, and we were sweltering in the room. And there was the sound of the fan that was facing Louis as he led the discussions. And the faces of the students as they listened to him. All of that is part of my recollection of them. (471)

Cariou adds that although he has recordings of the stories, he has not listened to them because it would settle his ongoing and ever-changing relationship to them: "I would know what the story was, and where it was: i.e., outside of myself, in a location that could be identified and shared with others" (472). Since Cariou interacts with the story internally (in his own memory and body rather than externally on a recording or a page), he is still co-creating it, just as he was when he first received it. Since he was a participant in receiving the story, his own specific self, positionality, and embodiedness are embedded in his knowing of the story. If he were to replay the recorded story, it would no longer conceptually include him to the same degree; it would

absolve him of the responsibility of retelling and recreating the story in his attempts to remember and continually engage with it (as he does, laboriously, in his essay). The definite and self-contained meaning of the story is not something Cariou acquired, but rather a relationship in which he continues to participate. The story exists in the way it does for Cariou and the readers of his essay because of who Cariou is, who he is in relationship to Bird, and who he is in relationship to his students. It could, of course, be argued that in this mode of engagement wherein the meaning made *is* the continued internal process of meaning-making, the receiver is able to make the story too much about themselves for the exchange to be truly relational. I would suggest that this is one of many possibilities of an inherent engagement with story, the productivity and relationality of which depend in large part on the receiver's awareness of their own implication in the collaborative network surrounding the story and their resulting responsibilities to it. Furthermore, Cariou's engagement with the self in relationship to story perhaps allows for an embodied visualization of models such as Silko's web, wherein one's own engagement with a story is but a point on a larger network that comprises the co-creative process of a story. Within this model the story is not self-contained, nor is the individual conceptualization of it all-encompassing. As a story repeats, the un-text surrounding it dynamically shifts and changes as it co-creates meaning.

3.3 Relationship as the Basis for Theatrical Meaning-Making

Within Cariou's theorizations, embodied relationship is the mechanism through which storied meaning is made. Also working from an understanding that meaning is a process rather than a product, Ric Knowles explains that theatrical meaning-making is both productive and relational:

> Meaning is not something inherent in a play script or theatrical production, nor is it something that is simply expressed by autonomous (independent) individuals – playwrights, directors, designers, and actors – and understood by autonomous audience members. The meaning of a particular work is neither constant nor universal. Like those who produce and interpret it, a work of theatre is subject to different historical and cultural forces. It is produced by cultures, and it is productive of culture. As meanings come into being, they change cultures, however subtly, and they change the ways in which future meanings can be produced and read …. One of the implications of this is that meaning is less a product for consumption than

something that is always in production through processes of negotiation across many different codes. (2-3)

I would emphasize that the meaning of a particular work is not understood by autonomous audience members because the meaning-making engaged in an exchange of a story is inherently relational. One cannot create storied meaning independently because a story must be received from a second party, and is likely received in relationship with other receivers, even if this relationship is not immediately physically present (watching a movie, reading a book, etc.). Meaning, in the context of story exchange, is enacted *through* relationship. Simpson and Maracle further clarify the necessity of relationship to meaning making, with Maracle's claim that "No thought is understood outside of humanity's interaction" ("Oratory Coming to Theory" 3) and Simpson's that "The only thing that doesn't produce knowledge is thinking in and of itself, because it is data created in dislocation and isolation and without movement" (*As We Have Always Done* 20). Their approaches suggest both the necessity of relationship for meaning-making and the stuntedness of meaning-making processes in Western theatrical contexts that intentionally sever this relationality and encourage isolated intellectual and emotional response.

Relational response to stories not only lacks prioritization within the Western canon, but is specifically targeted by colonial knowledge systems, as Daniel Heath Justice points out: "kinship was specifically targeted by colonial authorities in their efforts to destroy Indigenous communities; indeed, kinship was the primary target" (58). This targeting applies also to story-exchange processes. To return to Aristotle, Western theatrical traditions pertaining to tragedy prioritize audience response grounded in the pleasure of recognition and appreciation of well-constructed art, as well as in an empathetic response whereby the audience vicariously feels the emotions that the performer depicts. Brecht's focus on an awareness of the performance itself as distinct from the plotline signals a desired shift from empathetic response to intellectual response, wherein the audience analyzes the structure of the performance rather than being guided into certain feelings by structural and social conventions. Since empathy and relationship can concerningly resemble one another as ways of attempting to relate to a performer, my focus is on the dichotomy between the two, and I will set intellectual engagement aside for the most part. The dichotomy between empathetic and relational engagement is, in essence, that empathy stops at an emotional response within the self, while relationship carries forward into action, or at least has the greater potential to carry forward into action. The empathetic viewer is concerned

with the self in abstraction while the relational viewer is concerned with the self in relation to the other. Natalie Diaz theorizes empathy as having very little to do with the object upon which it is projected: “For me, when I think about what is empathy … it is me seeing or hearing about something that’s happened to someone, and being able to imagine how I would feel if it happened to me. It has nothing to do with them” (Diaz 47.16-47.35). Of course, being in relationship does not necessarily equate to being in *good* relationship, and a teller or receiver may always cause relational harm. However, in the context of the distinction between empathy and relationality, it seems that an awareness of relationship at the very least allows for the receiver to be intentional about the ways in which they engage rather than mistaking self-focused imagination for true connection.

Although any story is exchanged through relationship, the interaction written into the text of *huff* makes it unavoidably apparent to the audience that they are relationally implicated and disallows inactive empathetic response as the primary mode of engagement. It is perhaps the material urgency of Cardinal’s opening scene that most immediately demands and achieves relational rather than empathetic response from his audience. The play opens with the lines, “This is an interruption of your regularly scheduled program. Don’t worry though. Your normal show will be on again soon. This isn’t life and death. Not for you” (13). It is, however, “life and death” not only for Wind, but also for Cardinal, who appears on stage with a plastic bag taped over his head and his hands cuffed behind his back. Several reviewers describe the realization that this is not a staging trick as they watch Cardinal take a breath and empty the bag of air as it crumples around his face: “I began to realise the possibility that the actor in front of me didn’t have invisible holes poked into this bag so that he can breathe, rather, he simply hadn’t reached the six-minute mark yet” (Johnson). Cardinal establishes through such staging that his own stakes differ from those of his audience. While an audience member can imagine the claustrophobic feeling of a bag over their own head, it is only an imagining; they are not, in this moment, themselves about to run out of oxygen. As Diaz notes further in her theorisation of empathy, “the only thing that feels at stake in empathy is that it not happen to me” (Diaz 48.10-48.16). In *huff*’s opening scene, the stakes for an audience member are not limited to an imaginative fear of their own suffocation. Instead, the stakes for a viewer become that it not happen to *Cardinal*.

This relational engagement is further enforced when Cardinal asks an audience member for help, necessitating an action-based engagement rather than an inactive emotional one.

Cardinal chooses an audience member and asks them to take the bag off his head since his own hands are bound: “Hey, can you get this off me? Seriously. Seriously, get this off me. If you don’t help me I’ll suffocate right here” (14). Both audience member and performer are then engaged in the same activity – removing the bag from Cardinal’s head – but this shared action (like that of exchanging a story) holds different embodied and emotional stakes for both participants since one is not the emotional mirror of the other; they are in relationship. The stage directions here note that “*If the audience member says anything aside from ‘yes,’ WIND goes to someone else* ” (14-15), indicating Cardinal’s own material urgency in the need to *quickly* find someone who will do what he needs. This direction also suggests that Cardinal needs his participant’s consent in the act, a consideration that is not elsewhere extended in his interactions with the audience. While an audience member’s inclination may be to respond to the painful scene playing before them with empathy, the action they take cannot be a passive, mirroring one. They must act from their own specific positionality as it relates to Cardinal’s. The audience member fulfills a different role than Cardinal firstly because of their physical circumstances (their hands are not bound), but also because of their collaborative role in relationship to the story as the receptive audience member rather than the actor-teller. Although this role still places the audience member within the creation of the story, their external position to the internal world of the story allows them to disrupt the action in a specific way that a character in the play cannot, not only because it would defy the internal logic and themes of the story, but also because all the characters are embodied *by* Cardinal, and so all are functionally suffocating and all functionally have their hands bound. The audience is able to participate and co-create the story in this specific way because of who *they* are in relationship to who *Cardinal* is. That relationship is emphasized again physically as well as conceptually: once the audience member has taken the bag off Cardinal’s head, he thrusts it back into their hands and tells them, “And this. Hold onto this for me. And don’t give it back no matter what I say. Okay? I need you. Thanks” (15). Here, Cardinal reinforces that the audience cannot passively rely on their own empathy and must instead be, and remain through the course of the play, actively engaged. However, while Cardinal’s and the audience’s intentions are aligned in this moment according to the immediate necessity of saving Cardinal/Wind’s life, they retain the potential to be disconnected later because they have separate, unique positionalities and roles in the story.

The audience's conceptualization of their role moves from one that is symbolic, abstract, or unconscious, to one that is urgently and physically present and demands immediate action. Justice emphasizes the necessity for such enacted rather than abstract relational conduct, writing, "It's not enough to claim relations with other peoples – we must consider what those relationships ask of us, and how we may learn to be kin in ways that make one another's lives better" (82). Cardinal's audience cannot just emotionally imagine a connection with Cardinal; they must respond to what is asked of them by the actual, concrete relationship of which they are a part, and they must consider from their specific positionality what their responsibilities are and what they are willing to do. It is worth noting that, although the audience's response to Cardinal moves (or has the potential to move) beyond the symbolic, the same actualizing of responsibility is not necessarily carried out by Cardinal.

3.4 Relational Structure

With relationship as the means through which theatrical meaning-making is carried out in *huff*, Cardinal also creates a specific structure through which this relationship is executed. Although the play can at times be read as an enactment of boundless chaos, the stage directions as well as the overall structure of the text demonstrate that the way with which the audience is to be engaged is highly specific and deliberate. Particularly when dealing with a painful and potentially harmful story, it is not just the presence of relationship but the mode and structure of relationship that is crucial for constructive collaboration. In the introduction to *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Justice suggests that "sometimes [stories] are noxious, bad medicine, and even when told with the best of motivations, they can't help but poison both the speaker and the listener" (2). While it is neither my place nor my purpose to judge whether the story of *huff* itself goes so far as to poison the speaker and the listener, Cardinal's rejection of Aristotelian catharsis nevertheless demands an intense level of emotional involvement from the audience, for which the text offers no safeguards for supporting the wellbeing of all its collaborators. Cardinal himself states that he does not care what his audiences think about the play, and writes, "*huff* is a punk show. It's a fuck you to a society that would put our little brothers and sisters' backs against the wall. I wanted to throw a brick" (8). In this context, Justice's distinction between "noxious" stories and "difficult" stories suggests the line that Cardinal treads:

> What is clear is that the stories that will make a difference aren't the easy ones. If they don't challenge us, confound us, make us uncomfortable or uncertain or humble, then I'm not sure what they offer us in the long run, because to my mind it's the difficult stories that offer hope of something better. (201)

I do not suggest that the value in *huff* lies in its potential to cause harm, but rather that whatever constructive meaning may be made from it is possible only through the difficult work of constructing and reconstructing relationship. The mode of engagement theorized in Cardinal's text seems to suggest that difficult stories offer hope of something better *because* of the intentional and active relationships between teller and receiver that they necessitate, and that the relational exchange of story itself allows for the disruption of destructive patterns and the emergence of new ones. As the performance of *huff* shows, there is also great risk for harm in the necessity of this kind of relationship, as well as significant limitations in the structure Cardinal constructs in order to enact this relationship.

As well as a revisioning of Aristotelian theatrical traditions, Cardinal's relational structure echoes but also reconfigures elements of several other modes of audience interaction, namely the political strategies of Forum Theatre and the shock associated with In-Yer-Face Theatre. Forum Theatre, although participatory, is largely without relational structure. As enunciated in 1974, Augusto Boal developed and used Forum Theatre essentially as a way to rehearse strategies of resistance. In the staging of oppressive scenarios, the audience was invited to repeatedly interrupt, participate, and redirect the action of the play towards justice and resistance. When this resistance failed, Boal and the participants would talk about why, and then try something else: "Anyone may propose any solution, but it must be done on the stage, working, acting, doing things, and not from the comfort of his seat" (Boal 139). Within Forum Theatre, there is an implicit assumption of homogeneity in which anyone can and should interrupt at any time, which is perhaps useful within the context of rehearsing methods of class resistance. However, in the context of a story-exchange – particularly one enacted in a public setting where anyone may be in the audience – a standard that lies on either extreme of homogeneity (in which no one should interrupt or in which everyone is equally welcome to interrupt at any time) is harmful to a respectful, constructive, collaborative story-creation relationship.

Relationality is also pushed to the extreme in In-Yer-Face Theatre. Popularized in early 1990s London, such plays rely on an aesthetic of shock and spectacle to communicate meaning,

not unlike *huff*. As exemplified by the works of Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, it disrupted its audiences even while using a proscenium theatrical setting. Aleks Sierz identifies three main characteristics of In-Yer-Face: it "uses explicit scenes of sex and violence to explore the extremes of human emotion"; "It usually involves the breaking of taboos, insistently using the most vulgar language, sometimes blasphemy, sometimes pornography, and it shows deeply private acts in public"; and "At its cruel best, it can be so intense that audiences feel – emotionally if not literally – that they have lived through the events shown on stage" (19). Sierz adds, "What characterized cutting-edge theatre in the 'nineties was its intensity, its deliberate relentlessness, and its ruthless commitment to extremes. To be so uncompromising, dangerous, and confrontational became praiseworthy" (20). The ethos of In-Yer-Face's relationship to audiences, however, is to display salacious experiences to discomfited spectators rather than to involve audiences in them. Where In-Yer-Face creates "the feeling that your personal space is threatened" (Sierz 18), Cardinal materially enters the audience's personal space, almost shattering the fourth wall to the extent that there seems to be no division between the audience's space and his own. Cardinal makes use of these same tactics of shock and spectacle, then, but involves the audience in the enactment, discomfiting them not just ideologically but also interpersonally. In this sense, Cardinal's theatrical structure could perhaps be understood as falling somewhere between the audience-interaction methods of Forum Theatre and In-Yer-Face Theatre, not limitlessly collaborative like Forum nor one-sidedly confrontational like In-Yer-Face. Rather, he enacts a dynamically shifting combination of both wherein the structure of his spectacle draws attention to the relatedness of his audience to himself and the action of the play, and allows for limited and specific but material participation from the audience.

It is in part the specificity of his audience interactions that places Cardinal between these two theatrical traditions. Cardinal enacts non-universalizing relational principles by making apparent the ways in which the viewership and participation of the audience (the specific audience members rather than the audience as a cohesive whole) affect *him* and the many characters he embodies, modeling the kind of engagement he asks of the audience in which he asks them to consider the ways *their* own positionality impacts their viewership. Several of the characters he embodies are continuously aware of the audience, though to varying degrees and in various ways depending on their positionality and role within the story. For example, Wind initially decides that the audience is imaginary, telling himself, "You're hallucinating because

your brain is screaming out for oxygen. I'm ninety per cent sure that's what you are. 'Hi, imaginary friends!'" (14). However, acting from some transitory space between playing Wind and breaking character entirely, he also engages with the audience from the understanding that they have the ability to materially alter his circumstances and impact the story when he asks someone to remove the bag from his head. Throughout the play, the figure of Wind engages with the audience more consistently than any other character, explaining what is happening in the story, asking them to participate, and seemingly wavering on his conviction that they are imaginary. The character of Huff also seems to be consistently aware of the audience, and to believe that they are real and have influential power, though he engages with them less often and less overtly than his brother Wind. Rather than using directives or physical engagement, Huff communicates with the audience through silent looks or subtle extensions of trust in such a way that the audience must determine for themselves how they can or want to respond, allowing the audience more agency and self-determination in the relationship than any other character. Huff and Wind's Kohkum is also aware of the audience without any indication that she sees them as imaginary, stating that it is the audience's responsibility to protect her grandsons: "That's right. I see you. You're here to take me to spirit world. No. You're here to help my nosums! Good thing. Cuz I'm no good" (33). Huff and Wind's father, Mike, does not seem to be aware of the audience and, in fact, is the one character the audience is directed *not* to interact with. In scenes involving Mike, the audience is treated the way another child might be, with the implicit understanding that they have no power in this situation. Wind tells the audience, "You can come over but you better not bother him while he's watching TV" (34), and later, "My dad is pretty mad. You should probably go" (53). As a result of these moments, the audience is not given one universal and definite role throughout the whole play. Similarly, necessary action is not demanded of them outside of the bookended interaction with the plastic bag. Instead, they receive various messages about what their role can or may be (although it is never in question that they do have a role to play), how their presence impacts the characters, and what degree of access they may have in various storied spaces.

In this sense, Cardinal does not allow equal access and control over every part of the stories being shared, nor does he physically or completely disallow certain audience members from viewing or participating. Instead, he refuses certain kinds of response from certain receivers and implicitly asks again and again, What is your responsibility to me in this moment and how

are you going to carry it out? Sometimes this responsibility is an intervention into the action of the play, and sometimes it is to participate and co-create *by* sitting silently and letting go of a control one is used to possessing as an audience member or as a citizen. Cardinal co-creates storied meaning in part by whom he chooses from the audience to be his closest and most active collaborators. In Jill Carter's viewing of the play in 2015, Cardinal selects a "sweet-faced Caucasian woman" (426) to remove the plastic bag from his head in the first moments of the action. According to Carter, this choice shapes the meaning made by Cardinal and his audience for the rest of the show. Carter describes the way this choice carries through thematically to the end of the play, when Cardinal asks the audience member for the bag back and she fulfills his earlier request by refusing:

> Stepping momentarily out of character, Cardinal makes her a courtly bow and thanks her for her considerable willingness to help. It is a gentle moment, a tender moment. And the audience exhales with relief as he slowly turns to walk upstage. But the relief is momentary. He turns, as he reaches center stage, pulling a second plastic bag from beneath his clothing. It is a mad, mad moment. But it is madness choked with method. In this metatheatrical instant, Cardinal/Wind closes the liminal breach (that he had earlier engineered) between performer and witness to clearly demonstrate his sovereignty within his own story and to withhold from his observers entry into or agency within his world. It is not for this (or any) audience-member to decide how his story will end, just as it is not for Canada to 'save' the original stewards of this land. Cardinal/Wind is the storyteller, and he will finish the story; he will find a light to shine in the darkness, or he will perish in the madness. (427-428)

Carter concludes, "To the well-meaning allies who look on, Cardinal has nothing to say; they are merely witnesses – the battle is ours to fight" (428). However, the meaning Carter identifies is possible in large part because of who Cardinal is and who the white audience member is: the decisions they both make take on meaning according to their positional relationship to one another and to the rest of the audience within a larger political context.

In another scene, Cardinal makes the conditional access to storied spaces explicit and asks the audience to participate in a specific, scripted way in order for their presence to be welcome in this space. Wind and Huff are about to go to their favourite place, an abandoned motel, but before

they share it with the audience Wind "swears the audience in" by having them all shout curse words together:

> Think of your favourite swear word and on the count of three we're all
> gonna swear em.
> Ready?
> One . . . two . . . I'm serious, you guys . . . three: COCKSUCKING
> MOTHERFUCKER!
> Now that everyone's sworn in I can show you the rest. (21)

The audience here is asked to engage not in the way they have likely been taught to behave as audience members, but within the context of Wind and Huff's own system of meaning, knowledge, and relationship. In their participation in Wind and Huff's dynamic, however, the audience is still asked to participate as themselves by choosing their own personal *favourite* swear word, bringing a piece of their own linguistic individuality to the story. The audience must establish that they are willing to engage on Wind's terms but from their own specific context in order to gain access to a certain space in the story. Of course, at least within the confines of the text, there is nothing to ensure that every audience member will participate here and no indication that they will be barred from viewing the remainder of the scene if they do not. In a way, this conditional relationality is performative rather than concrete. However, there is constructive possibility in the act of reminding the audience that they are actively inhabiting a shared space and that their presence has inherent influence, thus allowing them the choice to participate in a way that respects the terms of the relationship set out by the performer.

Mutual suspension of interpersonal control is another element of the relational dynamic written into the text of *huff*. Cardinal invokes the shift from audience detachment to audience involvement metaphorically when Wind describes how it feels to alter his state of mind through huffing gas: "The first thing that happens is you feel like you're watching everything on TV. Only you've already seen the show. So you feel nice and safe cuz you know everything that's gonna happen … Then after a while you're not watching the show anymore. You're part of it" (22-23). Wind undertakes this transformation of his own engagement as a means of escape, and in fact seems to talk to the audience largely as a means of distancing himself from his own story by describing it to his "imaginary friends." Cardinal, perhaps in a gesture towards healing the traumatized detachment of his main character, asks the audience to make the same transformation

in their engagement but for opposite reasons, letting go of surety and safety and becoming a part of Wind's story instead of watching it from a detached (maybe empathetic) distance. Rather than vicariously feeling Wind's suffering, the audience must do the more difficult, painful work of considering their role *in* Wind's story. The audience must decide for themselves how and when they will respond during the telling of the story itself, and therefore how the story of which they are a co-creative part will exist in their own bodies and memories as well as those of the other participants.

There is a great deal of responsibility and risk undertaken by both the audience and Cardinal in such moments and in the play as a whole. Asking for response in relationship is inherently risky, whether this response is as extreme as begging someone to save your life, or as playful as asking someone to join you in a release of inhibition to yell your favourite swear word aloud. What if the other person does not respond? What if they respond in a way that is harmful? What if they do not respect the boundaries of this invitation and instead silence you and center themselves? What if you save someone's life but they have another plastic bag in their pocket? The structure of *huff* requires and foregrounds the dynamism of any relationship, which necessitates that while the participants must take responsibility for influence, they must also suspend control. No participant can fully control how another participant acts, or how the story will ultimately end. And, indeed, many of the limitations of Cardinal's relational structure demonstrate the limitations of relationship itself, particularly relationship enacted across such disparate and conflicting power dynamics.

3.5 "Rebreathing the Same Breath"

Much of the relationship Cardinal negotiates with his audience may be expressed by the metaphor he introduces in the first scene: "When you've got a plastic bag on your head, what you're doing is rebreathing the same breath until you choke. This breath is a story that began a long time ago" (15). This relational metaphor of repeated breath is brought to a head at the end of the play when Cardinal returns to the same position in which he began the story: embodying the character of Wind and about to commit suicide with a plastic bag. This time, it is a different plastic bag, the first one remaining with the audience member to whom he initially gave it, since either they have honored his request and kept it, or they have not and Cardinal has refused it when they tried to give it back. Cardinal has also refused the help and the participation he

initially asked for, and the actor is left on stage again alone, having set a renewed boundary with the audience where they are no longer welcome to intervene materially. The action is the same, but the breath is different. Wind has ended up in the same place and, within the world of the play, not much time has passed for the character. However, in between the first action and its repetition, a story was exchanged and a relationship was enacted. Through that relationship, the repetitious act of breathing the same air was interrupted, and in the participation of the audience, the un-text prompts the key question of the play's interactive structure: whose turn is it to inhale and whose turn is it to exhale? That is, whose turn is it to participate additively and whose turn is it to participate receptively? Of course, there is a limit to this process in that Cardinal is the only member of the relationship who speaks and *tells* the story. The inhale and exhale of the relationship functions not in the recounting of the story, then, but in the collaborative response surrounding it. That is, every response or lack thereof from the audience is embodied and affective, and all participants in this relationship must avoid the thoughtless repetition of the same action or the same air lest it become toxic. They must determine within the relational codes that have been set up whether it is their role in any given moment to collaborate in a way that is additive or whether it is their role to inhale and allow the story and the rest of the storied network to impact and enter *them*. Either action comes with complex power dynamics between audience and performer (both of which hold and lack relational power in different ways), and within a healthy relationship this will be negotiated like healthy breath – where there are times to inhale and times to exhale in constant dynamic repetition – in which the action is the same but new breath is taken in and expelled.

This dynamic of inhaling and exhaling permeates the structure of the text itself. It is invoked in the title, language, and internal logic of the play in such a way that many names and events prompt the receiver to consider how breath is moving in any given moment or scene. Following this metaphor of repeating stories as rebreathing toxic or limited air, a central story in *huff* that repeats cyclically is that of death by suffocation, an image that brings the metaphor and its representation together in a single image. Within the timeline (rather than the action) of the play, the first of these deaths is the suicide of Wind and Huff's mother: "She took herself away from us. Went into the woods. Tied a rope around her neck. Stopped breathing" (18). Another instance is when Wind and Huff's older brother attempts to strangle Wind, but is stopped by Huff's intervention: "Let him go. He can't breathe. *HUFF wrestles CHARLES'S hand off*

WIND'S throat" (26). Huff suffocates by playing the pass-out game alone, with no one there (except the audience) to take the belt off his neck after he passes out. Finally, bookending the action of the play is Wind's attempted suicide, which is interrupted in the final scene by the presence and breath of Huff:

> That's when it happens.
> Tennis shoes.
> Tiny and soggy-wet tennis shoes squeak across the kitchen floor.
> A chair slides against the counter.
> And as the tiny shoes disappear onto the chair out of sight—and as the cupboard door creaks open—and as the key to my handcuffs falls from the sky onto the floor in front of me I swear: I can smell tomatoes.
>
> *WIND unlocks the handcuffs and tears the mask off his face. He breathes. Whoosh.*
>
> Breathe.
>
> *The lights fade out.* (62)

The pattern of breath and the ways it is or could be disrupted becomes familiar to the audience, repeatedly bringing to their awareness what does and does not allow for inhaling and exhaling.

The language of the play surrounding these central patterns subtextually communicates the dynamics of breath as well, with the names of the two main characters (Wind and Huff) and even a character that is a personification of a bad smell. This naming allows for the characters themselves to embody the breathing pattern of the story, and the dynamics between them to take on an additional level of meaning in the larger relational structure of the story. The character of Smell appears after the family dog, Angelina, scares a skunk into spraying. Wind explains to the audience, "The skunk is gone, but the Smell remains" (31). Left to inhale this now poisoned air and humbled by the consequences of her actions, Angelina exclaims, "Oh the smell! It's huge! I'm useless" (31). Because of Angelina's desire to protect the boys – a relational response – the air has been poisoned not only for herself but also for the boys she was trying to protect, their Kohkum, and the audience, all of whom are then berated by Smell's abusive monologues: "You know what the worst part about smelling bad is? You never feel like you deserve to be anywhere. And you don't, you piece of shit" (31). Because of their Kohkum's care, as she gives them tomato juice, Wind and Huff are able to banish Smell from the scene. The dynamics of inflicting

and disrupting harmful breath (or harmful additive responses to story) are thus expressed through the enacted dynamics of the characters, and Wind's name allows for similar resonances. After Huff's death, Trickster reports on the radio, "In the weather it's the first calm day for as long as I can remember" (60), suggesting that the wind (the movement of air) has stopped. Wind then tells the audience that he no longer believes in the internal logic of the story he created and recounted from the events of his life: "Angelina can't talk. She's just a stupid dog. Our mom never loved us. She couldn't even love herself. And no one gets a sacred gift from Creator. After my brother dies I don't believe anymore" (60). The wind stops, and Wind chooses to stop influencing the story with his own specific perspective. He refuses to additively exhale, and the movement of wind – of circulating air – in the world of the story ceases.

Huff linguistically embodies and enacts what is perhaps the central relational dynamic of the play, with his name evoked in the title of the text itself and repeatedly in the act of huffing gas. The title of the play and the early introduction of the boys' solvent abuse communicates the feeling and action of repeatedly inhaling something toxic. However, although he participates in this harmful act of inhaling, Huff as an embodied character represents primarily an additive and healing act of exhaling. While siphoning gas from their teacher's car, Huff explains to Wind his sacred gift from Creator:

> You know that feeling you get when you laugh?
> You know how inside it feels real good and everything?
> I can give that to someone.
> Just by blowing.
> Like this.
>
> *HUFF blows; WIND feels laughter but doesn't laugh.* (20)

It is Huff's specific positionality and his relationship to Creator and to his loved ones that allows this act of exhaling to function positively. Huff's gift is functionally the second step of the action first evoked by the word "huff" – the exhale following the inhale – but the *way* Huff enacts it allows for an alternative and a disruption to the harmful inhalation initially introduced. Huff's exhalation (his additive response) also allows Wind's inhalation (his reception) to be one of healing and happiness rather than one that poisons and suffocates him. It is significant that Huff gives Wind the feeling of laughter, but does not cause him to actually laugh. He does not control

Wind's actions (or does not change the contents of the story), but rather influences the engagement surrounding these actions. Once again, the dynamics of limited or poisoned breath as well as methods of disrupting them and responding constructively are embodied and enacted by the characters.

The dynamics of inhaling and exhaling embodied by the characters are textually extended to all members of the process of story-exchange, including the audience. It is perhaps in their relationship with Huff that the audience is invited most often to exhale, or to respond additively, even if this invitation is often only symbolic in nature or is revoked as soon as it is extended, without giving the audience much of a chance to attempt a disruptive action like they do in their initial interaction with Wind. In a moment of extreme hopelessness and despair, Wind and Huff have an argument about the influential potential and possible motivations of the audience:

WIND: Because no one cares about us.

HUFF points to the audience.

HUFF: What about them?

WIND: Them?

They're not even real.

HUFF: Yes they are.

WIND: No they're not.

HUFF: Yes they are.

WIND: No they're not.

And neither is your sacred gift from Creator.

HUFF: Whoosh.

WIND feels warm inside.

WIND: Fuck off!

WIND pushes HUFF. (57-58)

The audience is suddenly included in a questioning of their ability and desire to protect Wind and Huff. The audience has been told both implicitly and explicitly that it is their role to protect the boys, but in this moment the role is not prescribed and the argument is not resolved. Instead, the audience is invited to consider this question themselves. Do they care about Wind and Huff? Do they have the ability to act on this care? However, the action of the play then moves swiftly along as the audience is left to contemplate their own relational response. Only a few lines later, Wind

has run away and Huff is left alone with the audience for the first time. Huff begins his interaction with them by once again inviting response and presence:

> **HUFF**: *(to audience)* Hi?
> Hi?
> Hi. (58)

He then delivers a monologue about his own experiences of loneliness, grief, and hopelessness. As he ties one end of his belt to the doorknob and the other end around his neck in preparation to play the pass-out game, Huff makes a request of the audience to save his life, though one that is less direct and insistent than the same request Wind makes at the beginning of the play:

> Don't let me pass out for too long, okay?
> Promise?
> Blast-off!
> *HUFF hangs himself.* (60)

Rather than an insistent demand like Wind makes when he urges an audience member to remove the bag from his head, Huff's interaction with the audience is a quiet extension of trust. Huff believes the audience cares about him and has the ability to help. However, the action of the play once again moves along before the audience has a chance to additively respond to this request for intervention. In the same line of stage direction that describes Huff hanging himself, Trickster "*grabs the microphone*" and explains that Huff has died: "The school is closed for the death of another one of our youth, the victim of apparent suicide" (60). The audience is left with the knowledge that they are involved, and also that they lack control; they are asked to exhale, only to be forced into another gasping breath.

This central metaphor of restricted breath is indicative of the central limitations of Cardinal's relational structure. The dynamic of response and reception directed by Cardinal wherein the audience is repeatedly asked to exhale only to be left gasping again suggests a restriction of the cyclicality of breath, as if the theatre space itself were the huffing bag, or the bag Cardinal wears when he first appears on stage. The audience exhales only to inhale that very same breath; they consider their ability and desire to protect a child only to be left alone with this additive intention for response and unable to enact it outside of their own embodied perception. If considering the theatre space as a huffing bag, and keeping in mind Justice's assertion that some stories "poison both the speaker and the listener" (2), an exhalation of poisonous breath (or

harmful additive response) is inhaled by all participants in the story-exchange. Like after inhaling a toxin, some viewers may feel the need to purge themselves of the story rather than having the breath to constructively respond to it.

Not unlike Huff taking on risk with the hope that the audience will respond, the audience suspends their own breath with the understanding that they are in relationship and will have the chance to exhale. The fatal danger of the pass out game, for Huff, is that he was left alone. In relationship with Wind, Huff uses his sacred gift from Creator and exhales, "Whoosh" (58). However, and similar to what the structure of the text does to the audience, Wind refuses this response and leaves Huff alone, telling him to "Fuck off" and pushing him away (58). Huff does not have his brother there to watch over him and be aware of his limitations, and the structure of the play does not allow the audience to respond to Huff's request to fill the role that Wind has refused. Although there is a great deal of inherent risk in the pass out game, the logic of the text allows for an interruption of Huff's death if support were maintained between himself and Wind or if response had been allowed from the audience. It seems that the greatest risk of harm in the relational structure of *huff* is that the story-receiver is ultimately left alone with their breath – their capacity to receive and respond – in some way restricted or poisoned. To return to Cariou's description of a continued, embodied response to stories within the memory, the implications of this denial of relationship are long-lasting for both the individual receiver and the larger network of the un-text. Cardinal asks the audience to restrict their breath, to undertake risk, but refuses the response he has asked for in a play that ultimately lacks a structure for relational care and protection once the audience members leave.

A result of the relational rather than empathetic performer/audience relationship written into the text of *huff* is a refusal of the catharsis central to the structure of Greek tragedy, meaning that the audience is denied the relief of a deliberate purging of the negative emotions they feel during what Aristotle calls the tragedy's "scene of suffering". Within Aristotle's definition of tragedy, catharsis is enabled by empathetic viewership as well as the self-contained structure of the play. That is, the viewer is engaged in a perceived act of vicarious feeling that does not extend beyond the performance of the play. Raymond Williams interprets tragedy not as a performative aesthetic, but as a "precise structure of feeling" (39), and the resulting cathartic response as a product of the conceptual distance between the spectator and the character with whom they are asked to emotionally identify. He writes that within the way catharsis is

culturally conceptualized and enacted, the spectator acts as "a detached and generalised consumer of feelings" and for both spectator and performer, "their actions are limited to occasions for displaying their modes of consumption" (49). Here, Williams describes a structure of feeling and engagement predicated on an inhale and an exhale. The spectator consumes (or inhales) feeling during the play, and when the dramatic action has finished, they purge (or exhale) it. However, this cathartic process is neither cyclical nor relational. The spectator, in isolation, enjoys the "'mixed feelings' of pleasure and grief" (Williams 49) and leaves the theatre without a conscious ongoing relational tether to the dramatic action or to their fellow spectators. In a cathartic dynamic, if the spectator's breath is constricted during the action of the play, then it is released at the play's conclusion.

Cardinal not only refuses the purgation of a cathartic structure, but deliberately uses a structure in which the tragic action cannot be left behind and is instead recycled like the breath in the play's central image. This denial of catharsis does not so much result in the audience being left to hold their breath rather than exhale it; instead, their breath is returned to them again and again in a cycle that continues beyond the bounds of the play. Within this structure, it is the responsibility of every participant to ensure that this repetition is not a "rebreathing" of the same breath, but that each repetition is in some way a renewal that allows the cyclicality to be dynamic. A framework of repetition rather than catharsis disallows the more passive and empathetic audience engagement typical of Greek tragedy, and insists instead upon continued involvement and responsibility on the part of the audience. However, even while Cardinal's relational structure denies the emotional conclusion allowed by catharsis, it also precludes the kind of relational conclusion or continuation that may facilitate a healthy, dynamic recycling of breath. The audience is left without the relief of either purgation or continued relational support. This denial of catharsis or conclusion is achieved in part by the structure of the story. Rather than the grand catastrophe typical of Greek tragedy that would allow for closure and thus for social and emotional purgation, *huff* returns to the same moment and repeats the same action with which the story began: Wind's suicide attempt. While in a Greek tragedy there may be a gradual building of emotional tension that is then released in the final moment of catastrophe, in *huff* the audience is involved in the catastrophe in the very first moments of the play, contends with this involvement throughout the story, and returns to the catastrophe with a deeper level of involvement than that with which they started. After Wind's final refusal of engagement from the audience, he does not

acknowledge its presence again, focusing instead on his own suicidal conviction and then on the intervention of Huff. Within the bounds of the text, the audience does not (and cannot) fulfill the primary role they were given: to protect Wind and Huff. Since the audience is relationally involved, they are unable to leave behind the tragedy. Instead, they are left to inhale the same breath yet again and, since Cardinal has dis-involved himself, the only chance to exhale is outside of the relational framework of the play without a sense of how to enact this continuation.

In the right context, a conscious continuation of the cyclical breath of participation and reception outside the telling of the story itself could be powerfully constructive, which suggests the question of what staging practices *would* allow for an ongoing, relational cycle of breath between audience and performer. Layli Long Soldier's poetry collection *Whereas* (2017) provides, if not an answer to this question, then at least some sense of an alternative to Cardinal's mode of engagement. While both Long Soldier and Cardinal reject catharsis in favour of cyclical repetition, with Long Soldier working from a central metaphor of grasses returned to the mouth rather than rebreathing the same breath, she reciprocally participates in what she asks of the reader, allowing for mutual inhalation and exhalation within and beyond the boundaries of her text. Long Soldier's reader is not given a defined mandate, but is instead asked for participation within a flexible and reciprocated relational structure, and is allowed ample room to enact that participation on multiple levels of textual engagement.

Chapter 4: Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* as a Habitable Space of Collaborative Transformation

When the Dakota people were starving, as you may remember, government traders would not extend store credit to "Indians."
One trader named Andrew Myrick is famous for his refusal to provide credit to Dakota people by saying, "If they are hungry, let them eat grass."
There are variations of Myrick's words, but they are all something to that effect.
When settlers and traders were killed during the Sioux Uprising, one of the first to be executed by the Dakota was Andrew Myrick.
When Myrick's body was found,
his mouth was stuffed with grass.
I am inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors a poem.
— Layli Long Soldier, "38," *Whereas*

4.1 Introduction

The presence of the un-text is most evident in performance-based contexts; however, certain visibly participatory modes of engagement can also function in the text-based relationship between writer and reader and not just between performer and audience. Layli Long Soldier demonstrates the active process of fostering this kind of participatory and co-creative textual relationship in her poetry collection *Whereas* (2017) largely through formal choices that defamiliarize standard reading practices. Although, as a published volume of poetry, *Whereas* is received via text rather than performance, performance and participation inform much of Long Soldier's multidisciplinary, collaborative body of work, which includes multiple registers of co-creation in community-based art installations. For example, Long Soldier's collaborative installation *A Line Through Grief* (2017) asks viewers to participate by placing a piece of paper in each of three boxes, writing on one something the viewer is grieving, on the next a question they have about grief, and on the third a way they deal with grief. Long Soldier later compiled these answers and turned them into a series of found poetry (Long Soldier "WHEREAS WE RESPOND"). *Whereas* itself is divided into two sections: "Part I: These Being the Concerns" introduces the reader to Long Soldier's personal, cultural, linguistic, and historical context, and

defamiliarizes the prescriptive reading practices through which the reader is likely accustomed to accessing texts; "Part II: Whereas" is a section in which Long Soldier responds to the U.S. Congress's 2010 "Apology to Native Peoples of the United States" in a series of "whereas statements" followed by a series of resolutions. Long Soldier's response to these statements addresses in particular their preemptive foreclosure of response or collaboration, using her own series of poems to invite and foster co-creation.

My focus in this chapter is on Long Soldier's use of poetic form to make visible participatory acts of reading that are often overlooked by the reader even as they perform them, and particularly the way she draws attention to the operations of the un-text in her reconstitutions of a congressional language that is divorced from concrete action. She transforms the bureaucratic discourse of the US government's non-apology through acts of repetition and through spatial arrangements of text that interrupt habitual modes of reading and reception. Her staging of the text and un-text emphasizes positionality, relationality, and collaboration, such that the acts of co-creation she facilitates continue to function well beyond a single act of reading.

First, I consider the way Long Soldier's formal choices create a consciously participatory relationship among author, text, intertexts, and the reader. In Part I, Long Soldier uses defamiliarizing page layouts to set a standard of engagement through which the reader becomes aware of the active choices they make in how they read a particular text, and therefore the way in which they gather and create meaning in collaboration with this text. Long Soldier makes use of non-standard layouts, such as destabilizing enjambment, text aligned to the right side of the page, and words and lines scattered in various arrangements across the page in such a way that it is not apparent in which order they should be read. She also makes use of various degrees of omission, from words enclosed in brackets or parentheses, to words that are crossed out but still legible, to words that are cut off by the edge of the page. White space contributes to this defamiliarization, appearing in abundance not only in the space surrounding poems, but also within them, breaking up lines and even single words (e.g., "s p l i t" [12]). She also conspicuously removes white space, making its presence elsewhere particularly noticeable, such as in the line "*why*thisimpulse" (13), in contrast with the rest of the poem, which has extra spaces between nearly every word and line. I also return to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's work on repetition within Anishinaabeg ways of knowing to inform my understanding of the many

repetitive gestures that are central to Long Soldier's collection, as well as the many invitations to repetitive engagement that are extended from Long Soldier to her readers.

Following a reading of Long Soldier's page layouts, I use several schools of performance theory as well as methodologies of "visiting" as lines of approach towards understanding Long Soldier's treatment of the page as a visual space that can be co-inhabited by herself and the reader, much like a room is co-inhabited by a performer and an audience. My application of performance theory is informed by Ric Knowles's *How Theatre Means*, a book grounded in the claim that "To mean is not the only thing that theatre does … but it is one of the most important things" (2), and which deconstructs the multiple modes of communication used in a theatrical context as a way for meaning to pass between performer and audience, such as "the complex languages of sound, music, gesture, design, and visual communication … working in consort or in tension with one another" (2). Michelle Olson's approach to performance theory more specifically applies to Long Soldier's relationship with her readers, reconfiguring western understandings of theatrical space from physical dynamics of division to ones of collaboration, which I apply to Long Soldier's use of spatial dynamics on the page as a way to encourage collaboration with her readers. To inform this approach to performance theory, I look also to methodologies of visiting in order to clarify the modes of engagement being suggested in the spatial reconfigurations of Olson and Long Soldier. Janice Cindy Gaudet and Dylan Miner (Métis) suggest (and enact) a research methodology based on the act of visiting, which, Gaudet explains, "may seem on the surface to be a passive and apolitical activity, but it is, in fact, political, re-centring authority in a way of relating that is itself rooted in a cultural, spiritual, and social context" (53). From this starting point, I consider the other inhabitants of a given storied space and the multiply coded roles that each participant plays, with a particular focus on the kind of engagement that Long Soldier theorizes and demonstrates among the members of this assemblage. These modes of cohabitation and interaction suggest the merits of engaging relationally rather than empathetically in the context of story reception and creation.

Finally, with a focus on the "Resolutions" section of *Whereas*, I apply Long Soldier's theorization of relational rather than empathetic responses to her treatment of reappropriated language, which transforms this language through placing it in a new story-reception context. Natalie Diaz and Jill Carter's theorizations of empathy inform my reading of Long Soldier's criticism of empathetic reader-responses, Diaz suggesting the limits that a desire for empathy

places on the potential for relationship and questioning the existence of empathy itself, and Carter criticizing forms of response that are not predicated upon or followed by action. As in participatory performance contexts, Long Soldier makes visible registers of story-reception that are always functioning, though often without being consciously perceived. Through her formal choices, she makes the reader aware of their own role as an active co-creator in a larger assemblage of co-creators, as well as the responsibilities that come with this role. In her transformation of actionless congressional language, Long Soldier demonstrates that an active relational dynamic among members of this co-creative assemblage allows story itself to function as a concrete and creative action.

4.2 Non-Standard Page Layouts as Invitations to Intentional Reading

Concrete and creative action is visibly prompted by a defamiliarization of standard poetic page layouts as Long Soldier makes the reader actively aware of their individual choices about how they will read each poem they receive. For example, in the third section of her poem "Ȟe Sápa," Long Soldier arranges four lines into the shape of a square, with each line forming one side of the shape. The middle and surrounding spaces remain empty, along with blank spaces left partway through two of the lines. Each line is a rearrangement of essentially the same words:

This is how you see me the space in which to place me

The space in me you see   is this place

To see this space   see how you place me in you

This is how to place you in the space in which to see

(8)

However, beginning the reading process at the top left of the text and moving clockwise is only one possible choice as to how to approach the poem, though it is the first, intuitive option in my mind because of my own set of personal, educational, linguistic, and cultural contexts. A reader could choose to begin the poem with any of the four lines, and depending upon where they start, the poem would be different. There is no obvious standard option, making the reader aware of the choice they make as well as of the existence of choices other than their own.

Consistently placing the onus on the reader to make active choices is a mode of engagement that Long Soldier employs across her works and in multiple forms, so that a network not only of her own choices but also those of her receivers informs the breadth of Long Soldier's work. In one of her collaborative art installations for instance, Long Soldier created a star quilt made of paper stitched together with copper wire, which was laser printed with the words of Pine Ridge community members discussing "mitakuye oyasin," a Lakota phrase meaning "we are all related," or "all my relatives" (Long Soldier 40:40). As in her textual poetry, the reader of the star quilt is asked to choose where the poem will begin, where it will end, and the path they will take as a reader to get there. In an interview with David Naimon, Long Soldier explains, "The way it works is, going from the top diamond, the top point, as you move downward, the reader can go in any direction downward and connect the phrases in any pattern that they would like. And hopefully as they reach the bottom point, they've created a poem of their own" (48:31-48:53). In this mode of active story-reception, the reader is dislocated from traditional author-reader lines of contact and becomes aware of their inherent role as not only a receiver of the work, but also as a co-creator.

In her defamiliarized page layouts, Long Soldier does not ask the reader to partake in any action that is not already present in a given act of reading. Any text asks its reader to make choices; a text does not need to have crossed out words, a line down the middle of the page, or words scattered across the page for the reader to make an individual choice as to where to begin reading, what to include and omit, or what path to take across the page. What Long Soldier does, however, is make this choice apparent and therefore make the reader aware of the process and that they *are* making a choice. Reading this page of this thesis chapter, a reader will likely choose to begin at the top left and read everything until the bottom right, an action so standard that it is not conceptualized as a choice. Long Soldier makes this choice conspicuously visible,

asking the reader to be aware of the *ways* in which they receive the story and act in relationship to the teller.

Another way that Long Soldier makes visible the often invisible, co-creative actions of the story-receiver is in creating page layouts that invite, and perhaps insist upon, rereading. Since many of Long Soldier's poems are not structured in a way that suggests an obvious way to read them, they can be read (and re-created) in multiple different approaches. For example, even with the constraint of following the shape clockwise and sequentially, the reader could reread the square poem at least four different ways, each beginning with a different line. Although the reader receives the same page of poetry each time, they create a different story through each repeated reception. The same is true for the third section of "Diction," which includes partial lines that are crossed out (although still readable). The reader is left with the choice of whether to read the crossed-out lines or skip over them. The poem can be read once with the lines omitted, and once with them included, as well as any varied combination of omission and inclusion, with each rereading of the poem being unique despite repetition.

I return to the phrase "dynamic repetition" – that is, when the content of a repetition remains the same while its structural engagement continuously changes – to discuss this kind of rereading (or re-receiving) that is both unique and repetitious, and which allows for the receiver to continuously co-create with the teller, a process inherent to most story-reception practices but which Long Soldier makes visible through page layout. In terms of the growth and change of a story through this kind of repetitious reception, I like to imagine the kind of embodied and directional repetition used in the act of walking. As someone walks, each step taken is a repetitive motion performed habitually by the body. However, each repeated step also moves the walker forward and progresses their journey. Each step is different (even as the physical act itself is repetitive) because it has landed in a different place, because the walker has seen and experienced different things since the previous step, because no repeated embodied action is perfectly identical to the last. The dynamic repetition of a story can function similarly. Although it is the same story being repetitively exchanged, the network of relationships, choices, embodiments, the space in which the story is told, and many other contextual factors, differ each time. With the reader's active awareness of this dynamic repetition in their story-reception practices, their repetitive reading – like steps taken in a journey – moves their own reception as well as the story itself forward. Through the visible variations of possible readings that Long Soldier creates in her

collection, the reader is able to be actively aware of this potential for dynamic repetition in their reception of her poems, coming to understand that with each reading, they can access another element and variation of a given poem.

Repetition as a method of meaningful communication informs multiple registers of Long Soldier's work in her role as both teller and receiver, allowing both herself and her readers to continually deepen and develop their relationship (with the story being the function and method of this relationship) even across the spatial and temporal distance involved in a text-based relationship. Not only do Long Soldier's page layouts demand re-reading, she also re-uses the same sequences of words again and again throughout the collection. Consistently aware of her dual role as both teller and receiver, Long Soldier repetitively (and dynamically) returns to language reappropriated from congressional documents, developing and complicating her own relationship to them in this act of repetition. In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson describes this kind of repetition as a crucial aspect of continuous learning within systems of Nishnaabeg knowledge:

> rhythmic repetition is at the base of Nishnaabeg intelligence. We hear variations of the same creation story for our entire lives, and we are expected to find meaning in it at every stage of life, whether that meaning is literal (when we are kids), metaphorical, conceptual, or within the constellation of our collective oral traditions or that meaning comes from lived experience. Our way of life is repetitive. Every fall we collect wild rice. We don't take a year off because we are bored, because aside from that being ridiculous, if we are not continually and collectively engaged in creating and re-creating our way of life, our reality, our distinct unique cultural reality doesn't exist. If you're bored, frankly you're not paying attention. (200-201)

While Long Soldier comes from a different cultural context than Simpson (Lakota rather than Anishinaabeg), she nonetheless appears similarly to suggest that if a reader occupies a static role, they are not aware of their own tacit participation. As is suggested by the larger context surrounding Simpson's claim, this boredom or this lack of attention to participation has ethical implications and does not simply describe a missed opportunity on the part of the reader or receiver. Long Soldier models this ethical import through her own visibly active engagement with borrowed language throughout the collection. She does not allow her reception of this

language to be singular, but returns to it again and again in variations, implicitly asking the reader to do the same.

4.3 The Page as a Coinhabited Space

Long Soldier also practices this kind of reciprocity (wherein she does not ask the reader to engage in ways she is not visibly engaging herself) in her mutual negotiation of visual poetic space with the reader, and with the larger storied network of which Long Soldier is a part as a member of Oglala Lakota Nation. The collection begins with Long Soldier's request for the reader to "make room in the mouth / for grassesgrassesgrasses" (5). Grasses are multiply coded in Long Soldier's collection, but if we are to understand them on one register to mean embodied poetry, poetry as action, then Long Soldier begins her relationship with her readers by asking them to make physical space in themselves for the story they will receive, a mutually honoured request that allows for an equitable form of relationship between teller and receiver. This mutuality is deepened by the fact that Long Soldier asks readers to make room specifically "in the mouth" rather than the ears or the eyes, which (from my own context) seem to hold a more intuitive association with the embodied act of receiving a story. The mouth suggests an act of telling, yet this is the place in the body that Long Soldier invokes in her request for the reader to make physical space in themselves for the act of receiving a story. This specific request of space-making suggests a mode of storied relationship whereby even as the reader receives the story, they simultaneously become participants in its telling. In a mutual dynamic of telling and receiving, one action is never free from the responsibilities of the other.

In her use of form to defamiliarize the reading experience, Long Soldier makes visible her own acts of making physical space for the reader to inhabit on the page just as she asks the reader to do in their own body. Abundant white space appears on the pages throughout the collection and, like the choices as to where to begin and end reading the text itself, these spaces must be continuously and individually negotiated. In the fourth section of "Diction," for example, the left side of the page is blank and the right side of the page is partially filled with a dynamically shifting block of text, many lines of which are cut off mid-sentence or mid-word by the right edge of the page (17). Just as the reader is confronted by the choices involved in their own reading practice, the reader here must reflect on a lack of access to the entirety of the text of the poem, and must choose how to interact with the vast space on the left side of the page to which

they *do* have access. In the same way that Long Soldier makes visually conspicuous the elements of a text that readers often engage with unconsciously, Long Soldier makes the inherent engagement with the space surrounding text (a feature of books that typically exists cognitively as a non-feature) conspicuous as well. Visually, Long Soldier's white spaces are as weighty as the text itself. This visual weight makes apparent the fact that the empty spaces *must* be contended with, and that they carry as much meaning-making potential as the text they surround.

In "Steady Summer," Long Soldier uses this white space to demonstrate her own continuous act of making room in a particularly audible echo of the request she makes of the reader in her opening poem to "make room in the mouth for grasses." In the poem, Long Soldier makes a dynamic return to the image of grasses, whose repeated requests for the speaker to "*shhhhh*" are surrounded by abundant white space. When Long Soldier's speaker opens her mouth (like she asks the reader to do), it is language that appears there: "in those / heady grasses the mouth / loosens confesses: / *I don't trust nobody / but the land*" (31-32). In this mutual act of space-making that Long Soldier models, the grasses listen and ask the same of Long Soldier's speaker: "you understand the grasses / hear me too always / present the grasses / confident grasses polite / command to *shhhhh* / *shhh* listen" (32). Because of her specific positionality, and because of that of the reader, Long Soldier's reception of the "grassesgrassesgrasses" cannot be the same as that of the reader. The reader cannot simply replicate or mirror Long Soldier's receptive responses. Instead, the relationship between the reader and the text must be individually negotiated, a process for which Long Soldier makes room both conceptually and visually, and which is replicated aurally when she reads her poems aloud, leaving pauses between lines and phrases so lengthy that they become conspicuous, demanding notice and response in the same way as her visual white space. One example of this performative space is in Long Soldier's 2018 reading of "38" on the Griffin Poetry Prize YouTube Channel. Long Soldier takes nearly fifteen minutes to read the five page poem, the text of which has an extra line of space between each line of poetry.

Standard Western reading and staging practices create a false sense of separation between teller and receiver, and Long Soldier's use of visual space removes this separation in a way that relies on spatial dynamics much like a collaboration-based revisioning of staging practices relies on spatial dynamics. Olson explains the separation created between audience and performer according to the spatial positioning typical of Western staging practices:

> Our society sees most of its theatre and dance through the frame of the proscenium. The rules of power are deeply embedded in its structure and informed by the historical context it was birthed from. It is a space constructed on unspoken assumptions and unseen but imposing power structures …. The physical architecture of the proscenium stage sets up this dynamic between performer and audience. The audience sits in opposition to the performer, in a place of power and in a place of judgement. (273)

The audience is expected to see themselves as separate and removed, participating in the illusion that they inhabit a space distinct from the performers in front of them rather than being aware of the reality (and resultant responsibilities) that they inhabit the *same* space as the performers but must negotiate it *differently*.

Like Long Soldier does with her spatial relationality on the page, Olson attempts to create spatial alternatives to this kind of cognitive separation between teller and receiver. Olson describes an attempt to revise staging practices by placing "the performers in a formation that created part of a circle, the audience creating the other part" (281). In this formation, the audience and performers act collectively and relationally to create a single shape, with each person participating differently depending on where and how they have inhabited the shared space. Olson provides another example of staging, one intended to ease the burden for performer Margaret Grenier (Gitxan/Cree) when standing onstage alone and carrying her story by herself with no help from the audience:

> We collectively proposed that she perform her mask dance with the audience encircling the space. We staggered the chairs so Grenier could move through the audience like a river moves in and around rocks and islands. With this adjustment of gaze, we became her landscape. Our instincts heightened and our perception refocused; we were given the privilege of being on her territory. Rather than having to stake her claim on the territory of the palace and the colonizer, Grenier could welcome us to hers. (282-283)

This negotiation of space by both teller and receiver disallows the flat mirroring dynamic of a typical Western text/reader relationship or a proscenium stage with closed theatrical borders. The receiver cannot conceptualize their own act of reception as a passive reflection of the story, but instead must become aware of their act of negotiating storied relationships from different and

shifting spatial positionalities. It is particularly significant that for the audience, their "instinct heightened and [their] perception refocused." By making visible the dynamic of negotiating the same space as the teller, the receivers may come into an increased awareness of their own spatial presence, as is demonstrated in *huff*. In the first moments of the play, Cardinal enters the audience's space and demands their interaction, drawing the audience's attention to their own enacted presence and making evident the necessity for all inhabitants of the theatrical space to engage in relationship.

Olson characterizes this negotiation of shared spatial presence between teller and receiver as functioning like a landscape, and the same characterization could be applied to Long Soldier's use of spatial dynamics on the page, which, like Olson's staging practices, invites the receiver to inhabit rather than simply to view. When Long Soldier asks the reader to "make room in the mouth / for grassesgrassesgrasses" (5), she is asking the reader to meaningfully inhabit the landscape of her collection, to change this landscape and be changed by it. Once again, Long Soldier is not introducing a new feature to the act of reading, but revealing a continually functioning (but often invisible) feature. One cannot exist in a landscape without changing it, without leaving signs of their presence, nor can one avoid being changed by that landscape themself. Long Soldier's use of spatial dynamics reveals that the same is true when one inhabits the landscape of a story.

The conceptualization of the story or the page as a landscape suggests the need for a mode of engagement that ensures a respectful inhabitation of this landscape, which Long Soldier actively theorizes in the ways she engages as both a teller and a receiver in her collection, and which can perhaps best be understood through methodologies of visiting as applied to storied landscapes. Gaudet discusses this mode of engagement in her essay, "Keeoukaywin: The Visiting Way - Fostering an Indigenous Research Methodology," which recounts her study of visiting as a way of approaching research – a study that she herself approached through visiting with Maria Campbell as well as the Omushkego people of the Moose Cree First Nation. She writes that "Indigenous research methodologies disrupt rigid and individualistic approaches to research whereby researchers attempt to predefine questions, processes, and the contributions of participants, without consideration of relevance, responsibility, or relational accountability" (58). She suggests further that an approach not predicated on an ethics of visiting "assumes an external position of acquiring knowledge from the other, and does not consider or address what happens

in the relationship, the feelings brought up during visits, or the well-being of self, family, community, and the land" (59). As discussed, Long Soldier sets this standard of engagement in part by disallowing "rigid," "predefined" ways of reading, and therefore also discourages this "external position of acquiring knowledge from the other." By asking the reader to inhabit each poem differently and to make active choices about how they will navigate their own presence in each shifting poetic space, Long Soldier identifies relationship as the standard by which reading practices are established and the means through which information is exchanged. A dynamic echoed also by Nishnaabeg systems of intelligence, Simpson defines visiting in part as "lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy and in the presence of compassion" (*As We Have Always Done* 173). As exemplified by Olson's staging practices, which spatially dismantle a hierarchical separation between audience and performer, it is the lateral or horizontal nature of a visiting practice that allows for mutual and reciprocal participation within a shared poetic landscape.

Another way that Long Soldier insists upon a methodology of visiting within her poetic spaces is to restrict access to certain parts of these landscapes, or at least to have the reader make conscious, careful decisions about which parts they should or should not enter. One of her "whereas statements" forms a thin, shifting column of text down the middle of the page:

WHEREAS *re-*
solution's an act
of analyzing and re-
structuring complex
ideas into simpler
ones so I place
a black bracket
on either side of
an [idea] I cordon it
to safety away
from national re-
solution the threat
of re-
ductive

[thinking]: (82)

Acutely aware of the risk and vulnerability of mutual creation in story-exchange, Long Soldier shows the reader the process of omission (placing a word in brackets), telling us that there are parts she is not willing to have changed and influenced by the reception of readers in this particular story-exchange process of mass publication. When considering this storied relationship with Long Soldier as one of visiting, the reader must be aware and respectful that not every part of the landscape is available to them, instead understanding that in order to visit a particular storied place, the reader must be invited.

4.4 Relational Reception as an Alternative to Empathetic Reception

Long Soldier carries the "lateral" nature of storied relationships beyond the mutual relationship between herself and the reader, and applies it also to the entire network of relationships surrounding the text, treating each as an active member of a story-creation assemblage[2]. This conceptualization of her own participation suggests that Long Soldier also treats all other members of the assemblage as actants with creative subjecthood, including the story itself and its composite visual and conceptual elements. In her interview with David Naimon, Long Soldier describes her process of writing the square poem, explaining that this square shape was initially the only thing she knew about what the poem would be:

> I think it's because shape, you know, shape also communicates, just like sound … shape says something, before the reader and maybe even before the writer comes to the page, a shape is telling you. It's saying something. So it's almost like I had to wait for that square to tell me what it wanted to say, you know? So I waited and I tapped out each little word, patiently waiting, word by word. (Long Soldier 38.00-38.35)

Long Soldier respects the creative subjecthood of the story itself, meeting this shape from her position as a receiver and honoring its role as an equally active member of the assemblage that comprises story-creation in relationship.

Through these relational standards, Long Soldier theorizes an ethics of response to received texts that demonstrates the value of relational response while demonstrating the harms

[2] Jane Bennett uses the term "assemblage" to refer to the dynamic through which assembled materialities create meaning by the nature of their relationship to each other and to the cultural, political, interpersonal contexts surrounding them.

of empathetic reaction. Each member of an assemblage of story creation is unique and performs a unique role, and it is this individual context that creates additive response. One cannot participate in a network of storied relationships without the influence of their own personal context even as much as Western story-reception processes ask us to try or to pretend, in part through the valorization of empathetic response, which asks receivers to act as mirrors, to feel what the teller is feeling rather than being aware of their *own* distinct feelings. Ric Knowles, in discussing audience response, compares empathetic audience response to the functioning of mirror neurons: "What [Vittorio] Gallese and his partners demonstrated was that the observation of others engaged in a purposeful activity triggers the same response in the brain of observers as it would if they were themselves engaged in that activity" (88). The key here is the "they … themselves": the spectator does not respond emotionally *as the performer* engaged in that activity, but as if "*they were themselves* engaged in that activity." The mirroring that the spectator experiences is not passive, but imaginative and creative, and yet directed back to spectator themself. The spectator imagines experiencing the activity themself, from within their own body, their own experiences, and their own emotional context. Thus, the ethical problem with empathetic identification is not the failure to completely place oneself in the emotional context of another, but rather the lack of awareness of the inevitable inability to do so authentically, and therefore a lack of awareness of one's own specific emotional context and the way it functions in relationship with that of another.

Diaz and Carter address these problems in their own criticisms of empathy, noting that empathy, as it is culturally constructed, disengages from unique personal context, lacks active response, and is perhaps not fundamentally possible. Diaz provides a generative and relational perspective on the mirroring response that Knowles describes, suggesting that the limitation disallowing an audience member from imagining themselves *as* the performer (rather than as themselves performing the actions of the performer) is in fact a fundamental doorway to relationship:

> I don't believe that empathy is possible …. You might have lost your mother and I might have lost my mother but I have no idea what you feel like. I know what I feel like, and that might inspire me to have certain ways of caring or even avoiding, but it's not the same feeling, and it doesn't need to be. For me, the fact that I can be next

> to someone and not need to pretend I can be in their shoes …. That, to me, is the ecstatic. (Diaz 44.08-44.58)

Rather than a symmetrical meeting of same-feeling, Diaz construes misunderstanding and mistranslation as the means by which one unique set of personal contexts can communicate and collaborate with another. She further explains, "I really believe in misunderstanding or not understanding. I think it's one of the most natural states of our being" (23.04-23.16) and suggests that "[w]hat makes us who we are, are the knowledges that we can't translate to somebody" (22.15-22.23). For Diaz, relationship is built not upon perfect understanding, but upon actions taken collaboratively from two separate and distinct understandings. Carter, too, values action above sympathetic emotional response. Although Carter defines empathy differently than the definitions I am using (the crux of her argument being the distinction between sympathy and empathy, with the former being inactive and the latter being active), her disavowal of inactive emotional response to art aligns with the theoretical work of Diaz and Long Soldier. Carter suggests that "where sympathetic feeling bubbles up and dissipates in a cathartic rush into the gaping maw between 'us' and 'them,' empathy offers no such relief until action is performed to relieve the shared suffering experienced by 'us'" (414). Working within my own definitions of empathy, I would understand this distinction according to, perceived empathy being a feeling that dissipates and relationship being a mode of engagement that demands sustained action in response to a suffering shared from multiple positionalities. To return to *huff*, the suffering experienced in Cardinal's interaction with the audience member is shared, but not equally so, and both participants must on some level acknowledge that fact and undertake different actions to end this suffering based on their distinct positionalities.

As well as demonstrating the necessity of individual context in relational (rather than a purely empathetic) story-exchange process through her formal choices, Long Soldier explores this storied dynamic in the relationships depicted in her poems. In one of her "whereas statements," Long Soldier describes her and her daughter's relationship to each other and to their language:

> I hold my daughter in comfort saying *iyotanchilah michuwintku*. True, I'm never sure how to write our language on the page correctly, the written takes many forms

yet I know she understands through our motion. Rocking, in this country of so many languages where national surveys assert that Native languages are dying. (75)[3]

The story-exchange is significant, and Long Soldier's daughter understands it, specifically because of who Long Soldier's daughter is, who Long Soldier is, and what the context of their relationship is. Furthermore, this understanding is created through embodied and relational movement informed by the familial, loving dynamic between them. Long Soldier is able to tell her daughter a certain story in a certain way because of how *her daughter specifically* is receiving the words.

Throughout the "Whereas" section, Long Soldier theorizes empathy as a mode of receiving story or information, and highlights the harmful potentialities of empathetic modes of engagement as they are distinct from relational or action-based ones. In one poem, Long Soldier describes being in a van with a group of non-Indigenous nurses who are expressing outrage and sadness about the state of reservations and the resources they supposedly lack: "Well what we want to know one lady asks is why they don't have schools *there*? Her outrage empathy her furrowed brow" (77). The woman's emotional reaction forces Long Soldier's speaker to make the choice as to whether to perform the emotional labour of correcting their misconceptions. In another poem, Long Soldier recounts a conversation with a non-Indigenous woman who describes her own perceived empathetic response to an Indigenous woman's pain, which she has witnessed on TV, as the figure shares that "she never knew until then they could feel" (78). The woman only decides to receive this information (that Indigenous people can feel) when it is presented to her in such a way that she can imagine experiencing this same pain *herself*. In these poems that interact with others in the collection, Long Soldier theorizes a specific problem associated with empathy as a primary mode of engagement: the lack of awareness of one's inability to understand. Rather than feeling and reflecting back a now mutual feeling that leads to action, the empathetic receiver creates a feeling from their own emotional (cultural, familial, racial, classed, etc.) context and assumes it to be shared with the storyteller, thereby creating a widening gulf of unproductive misunderstanding. The woman in the second poem cannot feel or understand the Indigenous woman's pain. By pretending she can, she refuses to perceive her own

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[3] This statement takes the form of a prose poem. I have replicated its appearance as best I can within the confines of MLA formatting conventions.

emotional response in relation to the woman's pain. The emotional response the receiver may consider empathy is really a contribution to the story they are receiving. Believing this creative emotional response to be an empathetic one is to lack understanding and awareness of one's own influence on a story and its teller.

In the context of interpersonal relationships, although the same could be applied to storied relationships, Simpson discusses a form of mirroring in Nishnaabeg thought that seems initially similar, but is subtly distinct from the kind of empathetic response that Long Soldier criticizes. Simpson writes, "Part of being in a meaningful relationship with another being is recognizing who they are, it is reflecting back to them their essence and worth as a being, it is a mirroring" (*As We Have Always Done* 180). I understand this form of response not as an attempt to feel what another being is feeling, but rather to receive something about the person one is in relationship with and to return it to them in relationship. This is not an act of a misperceived mutual feeling, but an action-based response to the "essence and worth" of who someone is. Empathy offers temporary and actionless vicarious feeling, whereas Simpson describes a personal, continual, and action-based practice grounded in mutually aware relationship.

4.5 Words without Action Become Words *as* Action

This action-based, relational mode of engagement is one that Long Soldier theorizes and demonstrates not only in the interpersonal relationships she depicts, but also in the relationality and embodiedness of the language she exchanges and creates, as well as the way she receives and has received it. A central dichotomy in *Whereas* is that of language *as* action versus language that *prevents* action, which functions not unlike the dichotomy she theorizes between relational and empathetic reception. The former is based on an awareness of an active and mutual influence, while the latter disallows both action and relationship. This dichotomy may also be characterized as words received relationally (other-focused, aware, action-based) as distinct from empathetically (self-focused, unaware, actionless).

The actionless language that Long Soldier addresses comes from the 2010 "Apology to the Native Peoples of the United States," a congressional resolution "[t]o acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States" (US Conc. Sen. Comm. Indian Affairs. 1). The document "urges the President to acknowledge the

wrongs of the United States against Indian tribes in the history of the United States in order to bring healing to this land" (5-6), and is signed by then-President Barack Obama. The apology is composed of a series of "whereas statements" that name atrocities committed by the US government against Indigenous peoples. Many of the statements are meaningless in their neutrality or damagingly oversimplified, such as "Whereas the arrival of Europeans in North America opened a new chapter in the history of Native Peoples" or "Whereas while establishment of permanent European settlements in North America did stir conflict with nearby Indian tribes, peaceful and mutually beneficial interactions also took place" (2). The naming of the wrongdoings are also vast in scale and correspondingly vague, such as "Whereas the Federal Government violated many of the treaties ratified by Congress and other diplomatic agreements with Indian tribes" (2), a generalization made necessary by the intention to apologize for an entire history (or series of complex and overlapping histories) of colonial violence in a six-page document. The apology was written to function as a government document (intentionally devoid of emotion and relationship) and includes legal protections against any obligation by the US government to provide reparations. Long Soldier explains that "[n]o tribal leaders or official representatives were invited to witness and receive the Apology on behalf of tribal nations. President Obama never read the Apology aloud, publicly" (*Whereas* 57).

One of Long Soldier's main criticisms of the congressional apology is that it is composed of words without action, and she clarifies in her "Introduction" to the "Whereas" section that her "response is directed to the Apology's delivery, as well as the language, crafting, and arrangement of the written document" (57). Throughout the "Whereas" section of the book *Whereas*, Long Soldier repeatedly considers what makes a valuable apology, presenting as an example an apology from her father where she catalogues his movements, his tears, her hand on his shoulder (65). In her first "whereas statement" she emphasizes the necessity of embodiment as a means of making language tangible and relational:

> WHEREAS when offered an apology I watch each movement the shoulders
> high or folding, tilt of the head both eyes down or straight through
> me, I listen for cracks in knuckles or in word choice, what is it
> that I want? To *feel* and mind you I feel from the senses – I read
> each muscle, I ask the strength of the gesture to move like a poem. (61)

The congressional document is the functional antithesis of the kind of apology that Long Soldier describes as having tangible, relational value. All of Long Soldier's "Whereas" poems begin with the word "whereas" and end with a semicolon. In one of these poems, Long Soldier explains that "whatever comes after the word 'Whereas' and before the semicolon in a Congressional document falls short of legal grounds, is never cause to sue the Government" (70), meaning that the government's lack of both action and relationship are legally protected through language. The apology is not only composed of words without action, but of words that *disallow* action.

Long Soldier participates in a larger tradition of reappropriating and defamiliarizing, subverting, or exploding harmful texts within her poetry, sharing similar methods with contemporary Indigenous poets Jordan Abel (Nisga'a) and Billy-Ray Belcourt (Cree) in particular. In their respective collections *Injun* (2019) and *NDN Coping mechanisms: Notes from the Field* (2019), Abel and Belcourt both, like Long Soldier, compose significant sections of their texts from some form of harmful, racist, colonial language and use their visual reception of the source text to subvert and revision it. In the process of writing *Injun*, Abel worked with a database of ninety-one public domain Western novels and used sections of text surrounding the word "injun" to create the text of his collection (Abel 83). Through a use of footnotes, white space, the visible omission of words, and defamiliarizing page layouts (including ones that must be turned upside down to be read), Abel collaborates with the actively engaged reader to give the words new meaning *because* they are being engaged with in a new way by both writer and reader. Abel transforms the reappropriated novels in a way that invites and even requires the reader to make choices, such as whether to read all of "Injun" first, and then "Notes," or whether to flip back and forth at each footnote. However, because of the specificity of the project, there is (at least compared to Long Soldier's collection) a limited sense in the text of either Abel's own personal context or the larger network of relationships through which the text is created. The reader is given the space to actively engage, but with less sense than in Long Soldier's poetry collection of the kind of relationship they are undertaking with the writer in that process. Belcourt's text, too, is full of intertexts. Most of these are invoked through conventional forms of literary allusion, being quoted in the poem and then discussed. However, in "Treaty 8" Belcourt blacks out the majority of the text of the Treaty 8 document. Engaging with governmental, colonial language like Long Soldier, he creates his poetry from the words he leaves visible. The poem ends with the powerful and poignant line "The Indians / of the / present / honour / the terms

/ of the un / written" (54), which speaks to his method of creatively and relationally "un-writing" a text made violent by lack of action, given the Canadian government's failure to uphold the agreements made in the treaty. While similar in intention to Long Soldier's revisioning of the congressional apology, Belcourt's "un-writing" of Treaty 8 does not invite or necessitate active engagement from the reader to quite the same degree, nor does it make visibly apparent the storied network within which he embeds the reappropriated text. What Long Soldier does, and what makes her work performative, is to take a text that prevents action in both its content and structure and, through the storied network in which she embeds this text, makes the very process of receiving and re-receiving reappropriated words a continuously generative act of revisioning through relationship.

To understand the extent of the transformation Long Soldier performs upon the actionless congressional language she receives, it is useful to look at perhaps the most potent example Long Soldier provides of language *as* action, and specifically of the transformation of language as action, which once again comes from the image of grasses. In the poem "38" Long Soldier tells the story of the Dakota 38, which refers to "thirty-eight Dakota men who were executed by hanging, under orders / from President Abraham Lincoln. / To date, this is the largest 'legal' mass execution in US history" (Long Soldier, *Whereas* 49). The context of "38" is the history and events surrounding the 1862 "U.S.–Dakota War between United States and Minnesota militia and Dakota warriors reluctantly led by the Mdewakaŋton chief, Little Crow (Ta Oyate Duta, or 'His Red Nation')" (Pexa 29-30). The war was preceded by land theft that barred access to hunting and fishing grounds (37) and that forced starvation when "government traders would not / extend store credit to 'Indians'" (Long Soldier *Whereas* 53). Christopher Pexa (Dakota) describes the war as a "campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide" (30) and explains that captive Dakota people were imprisoned in concentration camps, such as Fort Snelling (36). The mass execution that Long Soldier describes in her poem was the outcome of a military tribunal where 393 Dakota warriors were tried and 391 were sentenced to death. However, Pexa explains, "Lincoln, afraid that so many executions would be perceived as its own kind of massacre, reduced the total number of condemned to thirty-eight" (35). Long Soldier writes in "38":

> One trader named Andrew Myrick is famous for his refusal to provide credit to
> Dakota people by saying, "If they are hungry, let them eat grass."

There are variations of Myrick's words, but they are all something to that effect.
When settlers and traders were killed during the Sioux Uprising, one of the first to
be executed by the Dakota was Andrew Myrick.
When Myrick's body was found,

his mouth was stuffed with grass.

I am inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors a poem. (53)

Violent language is transformed into poetry as an action performed in relationship by and upon the body. This transformation is grounded in a changed relationality; that is, in a changed relational context that alters and layers the significance of reappropriated language. Through her request to "make room in the mouth for grasses," Long Soldier invites the reader to the very serious task of entering into an embodied relational network with the potential to transform a harmful text through the poetic and story-exchange actions performed surrounding it.

The final section of the collection, "Resolutions," demonstrates a similar form of contextual, networked influence on a received story since it is composed for the most part of words and phrases borrowed directly from the congressional apology, but reconfigured by the *way* these words are received and placed in spatial and conceptual relationship. In her seventh and final resolution, Long Soldier takes a sentence from the apology and multiplies it, visually representing her response. The full sentence is: "commends the State governments that have begun reconciliation efforts with recognized Indian tribes located in their boundaries" (97). At the top of the page, Long Soldier begins with just the word "boundaries" and adds another word to the sentence in each subsequent line. This slow addition of words expands the body of the text to the left, while to the right of the page there is a rectangular box that remains empty until there is no more room for the growing text of the poem to the left, at which point the line begins to spill into the box more and more with each subsequent line, beginning once again with "boundaries" and expanding backwards in the sentence. As the line grows longer, there is soon not enough room for the words in the box either, and so they begin to shrink and lose the spaces between words with each subsequent line, while the words outside of the box remain unchanged in size and spacing. In the final line, the words in the box are miniscule and read, "withrecognizedIndiantribeslocatedintheirboundaries," constituting perhaps Long Soldier's most pointed visual use of the page as landscape: it is the spatial rearrangement of the words and the reader's relationship to them that tells a story of land theft rather than stating it outright.

Without changing the actual content of the apology, Long Soldier uses her creative reception of the text to visually represent the hypocrisy and violence that she reads in it. In her interview with David Naimon, Long Soldier describes an art installation she created that invited the community of Pine Ridge Reservation to visually respond to and interact with the congressional apology, the text of which was projected on the walls. She tells a story of two young girls who, after consulting with one another, wrote over the apology, "If you're so sorry then give us back the Black Hills" (80.20), a clear criticism of the lack of action in the apology. Long Soldier visually represents this same sentiment in her own interaction with the words of the apology in her final resolution, showing spatially that reconciliation attempts are not being made as long as Indigenous peoples are legally restricted and their lands forcibly divided by government-enforced boundaries. This poem, then, shows not only Long Soldier's signs of presence in the text of the apology, but also the presence of the two girls from Pine Ridge, as well as the larger network of responses to this apology, expressing in different ways, from different perspectives, criticism of the attempt to apologize for violence and theft that are still being enacted.

This final section could in many ways be read as a visual representation of the function the un-text performs, a surrounding of a text with multiple, influential, disrupting, creative responses that change the story in its repetitions. In Long Soldier's collection, a main influence of the un-text is to use this co-creative network of relationship as a means through which to transform a static, actionless, relationship-denying text into a means and function of relationship and continual change. That is, it is the ever-changing relationship itself between teller and receiver (and other members of this assemblage) that performs action.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The central contribution of this thesis is an application of a methodological shift in how the role of the story-receiver is treated in literary scholarship. In my research, the most constructive starting point for this methodology is in the structure of the story and story-exchange practices, which determines the kinds of collaborative action and ethos possible in the surrounding un-text. I also find that the teller constructs and determines much of this structure, as in the case of both Cardinal and Long Soldier, since their audience/reader engagement is so intentional. However, the form and content are also – like any elements of story-creation – continuously re-created and negotiated collectively with other participants. An awareness of what kind and degree of active participation is enabled by the structure of a text allows for a deepened understanding of what creative influence the un-text performs in dynamic repetitions of the story and across the larger network of storied enactments. My hope is that this methodology is applicable both for scholars to take into account the creative influence of the receiver in literary analysis, as well as for receivers to deepen a skill set of determining what kind of collaborative participation the text allows and to engage accordingly from an awareness of their own relational positionality within the textual landscape.

A major takeaway of this project is the potential for an embodied recognition of and conscious engagement in reading or viewing practices, which one may generally enact unconsciously, as a way of accessing a deeper register of textual relationship. This accessing and negotiating of textual relationship seems to be a particularly generative form of storied collaboration in that it necessitates dynamism, reciprocity, and an expansion of engagement beyond the self. By engaging consciously on the basis of relationship, the receiver participates in a constant cycle of additive and receptive collaboration, allowing the story to grow and change. Within this dynamic, the story is constantly shared back and forth as it is created and exchanged, repeatedly returning to each participant changed, like shared breath in a room or grass returned to the mouth. Not only is the story *changed* each time it is cyclically received and re-received, it also *changes* as it in turn influences the un-text, creat*ive* as well as creat*ed* because of the relationships through which it moves. Both Cardinal and Long Soldier demonstrate (but negotiate differently) the generative cyclicality of the story/un-text relationship, and both also demonstrate the pitfalls and complications present in the construction of any relationship. In this sense, one of

the lessons I have received in participating from a scholarly vantage point with both storied webs is a recognition of the importance of developing the relational skills to be able to recognize and respond to the ways I am invited to participate as a receiver.

My aim in this thesis was to identify the presence of the un-text and the ways it is revealed, guided, and encouraged through participatory story-structure. However, there is a possibility for this methodology in analyzing story-structure as a starting point to studying the functioning of the un-text, using as a baseline the kind and degree of participation allowed by the story-exchange practices of a given text. This analysis could be based on a number of structural elements (well beyond those considered in this thesis) including how the textual or physical space is inhabited, and how boundaries are held, crossed, or deconstructed within this space. As demonstrated by both Cardinal and Long Soldier, a constructive point of analysis is also what precautions are in place to protect areas of this storied space, as well as how and to what degree these boundaries are enforced. Story-structure may also be analyzed on the basis of questioning where the receiver is invited to make conscious choices, how these choices affect the process of story-exchange and the story itself, where the choices are more or less evident, and to what degree the choices of the receiver are actively prioritized rather than symbolically considered. One may also consider how much of a story's relational structure is predetermined by the teller, and how much is itself co-created with the receiver through the process of exchange.

The methodology I've sketched out could also be used to trace the actual influences of the un-text (rather than simply identifying the presence of the un-text or the modes by which it is made visible) on a given story by analyzing its dynamic repetitions. Starting with an understanding of this story's framework and the collaborative actions permitted or restricted within it, the influences of the un-text could be studied as they change a story or the shifting contexts of collaborative networks surrounding a story over time. Similarly, this methodology could be used to study the revisioning of inherited texts through reconstructed story-exchange practices. As is suggested by Long Soldier's engagement with congressional language, there is potential for study of the process of embedding a more or less unchanged inherited text in a different un-text, functionally re-creating the text by engaging with it through different relationships and different relational structures.

To similar ends, a longer-term study of a single performed story would enable the tracing of multiple viewings and engagements with the texts surrounding those viewings to analyze the

continuous impact of the un-text as well as the continued negotiation of ongoing storied relationships. Following Cariou's continuous re-creation of a received story, I would be interested in a longer study that not only focuses on the shifting of the story's performed variants, but also the shifting of the story as it is repeatedly embodied and engaged by a single receiver or community of receivers. A larger scale study of this kind would also allow for a deeper questioning of the kinds of story-exchange practices that foster continued active, intentional relationship among participants beyond the initial story-exchange event. The question is thus one regarding the kinds of story-structures and considerations that could facilitate present, actionable, recognizable relationship beyond the moment of exchange as successfully as those I have identified within the moment of exchange. While in this project my focus was how the un-text can be made visible in the exchange of stories, it would be possible to look more deeply at what this visible presence does as well as how it can be made similarly present outside of performance or reception. Just as the elements of story-reception identified in this thesis are simply exaggerations of inherent, constantly functioning story-exchange practices, I want to better understand what structures of continued relationship beyond the moment of exchange are already functioning subtly and could be exaggerated through specific relational actions performed within and beyond initial story-creation.

I believe there is also exciting potential for the application of this methodology to other venues, forms, and settings. I am particularly interested in applying this framework to spoken word poetry and the particularly active un-text surrounding so much of the performative material within the form. Aside from my own personal interest in the form after nearly ten years of artistic and facilitatory involvement in spoken word communities, there are several reasons that I think a study of the un-text in the context of spoken word could be particularly generative. In terms of engaging through relationship, there is typically an existing interpersonal familiarity between audience and performer within spoken word communities, meaning that audiences are used to conceiving of their own receptions relationally rather than empathetically or intellectually, as well as engaging those relationships beyond the moment of performance. Spoken word is also a literary culture that encourages audience interaction as a baseline, whether or not there are additional structures of participation created and put in place by the performer. In many spoken word communities, it is standard for audiences to voice not only their support and encouragement, but also their disapproval during the performance itself as well as in conversation

following performance. Performative variation in repetitions of poems is also common to varying degrees within spoken word, allowing for a visibly direct link between audience participation and performative response.

I also feel there is great potential for further application of the theories I work with in the field of academic literary scholarship, particularly within the classroom, as that kind of academic space represents much of my experience within this discipline. The research for this thesis has clarified for me the potential benefits of a shift in focus for scholars and students towards how one's reception of a text relates to the receptive actions of others. That is, an engagement based on collective relationship rather than individual identification or intellect may allow for a deeper level of collective responsibility for the influence that these receivers have on the storied networks they are a part of within the context of scholarly engagement. This shift necessitates a questioning of not just what a text *does*, but what our collective receptions of a text do, and what meanings these receptions create in relationship. My research for this thesis has brought a seminar experience from the first year of my Master's degree into further clarity, and suggests to me the generative potential of this shift in academic language and engagement. In Dr. Jenna Hunnef's graduate seminar on Indigenous Literary History and the Politics of Form, I gave a presentation on the network of textual relationships surrounding two short stories by Simon Ortiz and Leslie Marmon Silko, which was based on Silko's web model and which initiated my interest in the un-text. At the end of the presentation, I asked each member of the class to draw a web representing their own understanding of the relational connections between each text involved in the network of literary influence surrounding those by Ortiz and Silko. The class's participation in this exercise far exceeded the nuance of my own presentation, surpassed the relational engagement that I had accounted for, and greatly deepened my own understanding of receptive participation. The variety of creative responses allowed for a discussion of the way each student's participatory conceptualization of textual relationship interacted with one another, what influence our collective and individual positionality had on these perceptions, and how our individual and collective perceptions of the textual relationships under study influenced our own participation in them. Several students charted their own or the class's response on their webs; one memorable web even included a drawing of the student's brain at the center, signaling her own perception as the point through which all other connections reach her. As I come to the end of this thesis, I have a greater appreciation for the active reception enacted by the vast network of creative

relationships surrounding every point of storied connection that has reached me. What I have received and what is, for me, the future of this project is a deepened sense of active exchange in my storied relationships, and a knowledge that *to* receive is an action that demands accountability in order for those relationships to be good ones.

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