

Alleyway Project Report

BIPOC Artist Residency

Artcite

Aug. 30, 20

Ostoro Petahtegoose

1.

This is an informal report intended to discuss the nature of the project, the information and research that had been accessed during this residency with Artcite, and finally some of the thoughts and feelings that I have experienced throughout this month long project.

As an informal report, it will not take on the aspects of a formal report; instead it will be allowed to organize itself in whatever manner best fits and fills the spaces and subjects that are being discussed.

The openness in which this is all received is entirely dependent on the class, racial and educational spectrums that people exist on. In that regard I want to acknowledge the barriers that exist even from within this informal report, to the people who could probably most use what I have to say in here to talk about the experiences of being dispossessed, of the ache felt deep down within that demands for us to acknowledge how untied we have become; how untied we have been because of colonial systems. The need to feel at peace and at home, connected to a community and space and how actively denied and policed we are away from those things.

I am trying to navigate how to break those barriers down, but maybe even in putting this down into a written medium looks to bypass bodily knowledge, the most accessible of all knowledges, for a quicker medium. We talk about accessibility but how accessible is the written word when we could instead actively go into communities and work there rather than engaging in purely academic mediums.

This is an academic medium.

In acknowledging that, I hope that maybe I can recognize my own privileges that I have accessed in this project I have created for this month long residency and how I can then work to utilize my experience and knowledge for the benefit of those around me. This is a catalogue of the experience of this project, but I am hoping to take the knowledge I've gained from this and move from here into the embodiment of experience. Essentially, I am hoping to bridge the inaccessibility of this particular form by making myself and my knowledge accessible in a community-oriented context. Meaning: I am hoping to take what I've learned and now know into community settings, and to make this accessible through on-the-ground engagement.

In saying all of this, I need to acknowledge the despondency I have felt periodically that exists in the new information and attention that has surfaced during the month of my residency towards alleyways in forms that is escalating the threat of harm towards populations who are the most dispossessed, who are in the most need for access to friendly spaces that are not utilized as much by the larger population.

This report will attach a page of sourced material that I drew from, and news articles that will shed light for anyone outside of Windsor on new developments within the city around sites like our alleyways.

2.

August 10, 2020

High fences, slim pickings.

3.

The aim of this residency and evolving art exhibit/project was to begin a dialogue around the question of *who belongs here? Or: who gets to belong here?*

I began my summer travelling up and down alleyways throughout Windsor, scouting out for logs that people had cut down and obviously had no use for. I wanted natural items to add to my garden at home. Not only was there this material reason for travelling these alleyways, but I had recently gotten over a bad bout of unexplained illness that was not Covid-19, that meant I had alarmingly lost too much weight in a very short span of time. I was combatting muscle wasting as a result of that sickness and needed to begin exercising regularly. Alleyways presented an opportunity and safety for me to travel as quickly or slowly as I needed to at any time. I could stop and walk my bicycle if I needed without the pressure of cars trying to get around me and potentially putting myself in harms way. Not only that, but alleyways became fascinating to me when I began to notice the ecosystems that sometimes came into existence throughout them.

As I bicycled through these places, I remembered sitting at a city council budgetary meeting that was open to the public back in 2018, where delegates came forward to speak about alleyways as potential sources of thoroughfares and could even become activated as *community* spaces. This idea has since intrigued me, especially because since then I've become aware of my responsibility to community. I've been aware my whole life that I am someone living in and among community regardless of whether I make the choice to interact with it or not, but it's only been more recent that I've come to reckon with what that means and the responsibility placed upon me (upon us all, really,) to the communities I belong to.

As an Indigenous person I have a responsibility to my Indigenous community, and as a Trans* identifying, non-binary, 2SQ Indigenous person, I have a responsibility that those identifiers relay to my Indigenous community.

But as someone who has been denied my Indigenous community for so much of my life, displaced from the region my father grew up on because of colonialism and residential schools, displaced by my very existence as an Indigenous person among rural farming communities that have the biggest stakes in our dispossession from the land to grow the food that feeds the extractive systems of capitalism. Displaced from my Indigenous communities because of trauma around deviating from the gendered, heteronormative scripts that colonialism forced onto my grandparents throughout their childhoods. I am plagued by questions of how to create a sense of community, when capitalism has taught us, depended upon us to actively work against any sense of community.

Traversing throughout Windsor, it becomes very clear the urban blight that exists here. The neglected properties that exist within multiple communities by negligent landowners who refuse to do anything with those properties, forcing the surrounding neighborhoods to live with them. I live near one such blighted property two blocks from my own home. A small factory once stood on the land, burned down one night back around the early 2000's, rumours abound that it was burned for the insurance. Within 3-4 years multiple buildings throughout the city burned in the same way and rumours continued to roll around that they were all burning for the insurance. This land has since stood empty for over a decade. The same concrete flooring and scattered bricks, the same weedy overgrowth that continues to fight for life and survival on this barren landscape. Periodically it goes up for sale - the last time it did the asking price was for 1 million.

I have often thought about this space and it's unactivated potential. A beautiful green space and community garden for those of us living around it, with trails and trees to offset the industrialization of the area. Not only would it beautify the area, but it would also offer a space for the physical health of the surrounding community: better overall lung and mental health perks, among others.

I look at this space and see the potential for community health and investment, while the landowners see this as an opportunity for more money.

And in thinking about this space, in the context of my Indigenous nationhood, I have often marvelled at the entitlement of the people who "own" these spaces to police everyone off of it. The idea that the only person allowed to utilize this space in any capacity, are those who own the legal titles to it. I see the spilled blood of our ancestors on this land. Sometimes, I even think I can hear the moaning of the land under the façade of brick and concrete.

I see squatters there often, people who have been displaced from any sense of belonging to a place or space and I often actively ignore them because for squatters

and the homeless, there is a danger in being seen on these spaces. I'd even argue, that latently there is just an inherent danger in being seen for them when they are not actively engaging in the act of trying to be seen. Because to be seen by those of us with homes, with shelter, with stable situations, is to be *seen* as a threat; a danger; as a pest to be rid of. So I purposely *unsee* them when they are living on the land, in an act intended to give them back their privacy in a space that offers no privacy whatsoever. But even in that act of *unseeing* I have still *seen*, and in that *seeing*, I also recognize that they too constitute my community. That they too deserve access to land, to consideration of a space in which they too, belong.

I see them, and in that seeing I also see the ways in which my ancestors were also told that we *did not belong*. We were violently uprooted and forced onto small plots of land that colonists deemed undesirable, told to make a home there. The members of our communities who continued to travel upon the land, eat upon the land and act upon the land that refused to recognize any colonial authority also labelled as troublemakers, homeless, destitute, unfit for the serious consideration of settlers. The layers of dispossession increases when the demographics among the houseless count Indigenous people.

As an Indigenous person, sometimes there is power in being unhoused, but that is only if you can even recognize the land that you are existing upon as your home. Only if you are able to fulfill your needs, if you can go long enough periods without the threat of violence to interrupt the trajectory that your life has taken. More often than not being unhoused is not a choice. The older people who continued to live off the land, travelling where they wished, eating what they found are so few and far between. The last person I knew of passed on, back in the early 2000's.

So who belongs.

In contemplating these issues and subjects, I began to recognize the ways that people who are housed often see those traversing the spaces of alleyways as threats to their security. To be policed from accessing these public spaces, despite the fact that these are public lands rather than privately owned lands. The question of *who belongs* and *who gets to belong* became the focal point of this evolving exhibition/project, and in voicing that question, I then answered and issued the challenge of *I belong*.

In that challenge, this proposal was born. In challenging that notion that people like me do not belong, especially during a period of racial unrest that has finally mobilized large quantities of Canadians from their apathy and slumber on the issues of Black and Indigenous deaths and violence aimed at us, I began to assert my existence in these public spaces as a way to resist the narrative that people like me do not belong on the land. I resist the narratives that people like me do not get to exist on the land in peace. To ultimately, push past the social codes that say that I should not exist in these spaces unless I specifically live in the neighborhood - when in a larger social framework, we are all existing not just within the communities of our

neighborhoods, but also the larger community of our wards, our city, our township and region.

In existing in these spaces I am resisting the narratives that other people have written, in which I don't belong because they actively refuse the notion of a broader framework that relationships of community can exist within.

Furthermore, in resisting these narratives I am also reclaiming these spaces as places that I belong within and to; that not only am I allowed here, but that Indigenous peoples ancestors have always belonged here long before settler colonists actively and violently displaced and erased us from this land. In these small acts of resistance, I feel that any individual who finds themselves dispossessed and displaced because of the varying circumstances that can result in such a state, has the potential to find value in small acts of reclamation that people like myself are engaging in.

4.

August 11, 2020

Lights gone out, follow the markers. Maybe we can meet, do you come here often?

I hope to see you around.

5.

I would like to describe the methodology involved in my alleyway travels, because I think it's important to discuss the *how* of what I was doing. In my brief interviews with CBC Windsor and London, neither interviewer sought to ask me how I was choosing the items that were being brought in. I believe this is integral to the discussion, because alleyways aren't just forgotten and neglected spaces, people show whatever care they can for their alleyways when they have the resources available to them. I have come to appreciate the way that trees hang over the alleyways, protecting them from the heat of the sun and day, or the flowers that someone has decided to grow along the back of their fence. I have seen, raspberry bushes and mulberry trees that can be harvested for edible fruit, not including the varying edible plants labelled as weeds that manage to grow in the cracks of the broken, derelict concrete. Dandelions, Purslane, Burdock, Plantain Broadleaf Weed and Lambsquarters being a few weeds that are prolific within the region and that I have actively noted growing within alleyways.

In these spaces people have been more willing to let these spaces grow a little more "wild," allowing flora to become more haphazard, allowing the alleyways to become a little more rugged. While on the surface this may sound or appear to be

detrimental rather than beneficial, I'd like to point out that in being neglected, these spaces become corridors friendlier to indigenous fauna - including pollinator friendly species such as birds, bees and butterflies.

Alleyways are less neglected and forgotten than the media has hyped - and even when they are, it's not because the desire to care for them isn't there. It's because people merely lack the resources to show care. Even in what are considered poorer neighborhoods, I have seen tree logs utilized to fence off parking spaces, and bricks used to create a decorative lining along fences.

In these small, deliberate acts, intention can be witnessed by anyone who takes the time to discern and acknowledge them as acts of care.

In saying these things, it brings me back around to my methodology. There are several questions that I think are important to answer here:

How did I choose the alleyways that I traversed?

Why did I choose the alleyways that I did, in this fashion?

Why did I begin to collect discarded items from these alleyways?

Did I discern the difference between what was being discarded, and what had a utilitarian or decorative purpose?

How often did I make these trips?

. *How did I choose the alleyways that I traversed?*

. *Why did I choose the alleyways that I did, in this fashion?*

To start I want to talk about how I chose the alleyways to traverse for this project. At the beginning of the summer I began bicycling as a way to combat some muscle wasting issues brought on by an unlabelled, chronic illness that began a year prior and that continually resulted in periods of large, sporadic weight losses. In the period that became the most worrisome and that led to my bicycle rides, I lost 15lbs in two weeks. My bicycle rides became a source of comfort, a way for me to maintain some semblance of control over my health in a period where I was experiencing a loss of control. As I biked through the streets of Windsor I began reflecting on a time in my early 20's when I would walk through alleyways at 3, or 4am and how peaceful these treks were, but also, how interesting the landscape was in these spaces.

I decided to start these treks again, except on my bicycle during the day and found that my rides became quieter. I worried less about vehicles being a hazard to me and the ways that drivers disrespected my space as a bicyclist. I found it was easier to set the pace that I wanted or needed at any point during my ride. On these rides, I began to contemplate on the urban blight that plagues this city and the ways that as citizens, we're actively prevented by these blighted, neglected spaces to do anything that would be beneficial to the communities that have to live around these areas of blight. I began to contemplate on how these spaces act as a detriment, a drain on the mental, physically and environmental health and well-being of the

surrounding communities but those who legally hold the deeds to the lands are allowed to continue neglecting them.

I began contemplating on how alleyways are also often neglected spaces but in a different way. I noticed the ways that people interacted with alleyways, and began to contemplate on them as public spaces that certain demographics of our population are policed from accessing, despite having very few spaces to exist in, to sleep in, to operate in. I began to think of the unactivated potential for all of these spaces to become communally minded spaces that anyone can access. I began to question who is doing this policing, and to reflect on what this policing ultimately says about those determining who gets to exist on this land and who doesn't.

I began to reflect on the agenda of colonization, and that in urban areas this agenda is reflected within even the smallest of spheres. I began to reflect on what it means for me, an Indigenous person, to purposely position myself within these spaces and the latent challenge that is posed in just existing on the land in any capacity. I reflected on the issue of homelessness within the city and the lack of resources, or investment in infrastructure to adequately address the housing crisis and needs of the Windsor community. I reflected on the seemingly misaligned values of a community that appeared apathetic at best and malicious at worst to the very real crisis that our homeless population is experiencing. To clarify: being homeless is to find oneself within a crisis; an ongoing crisis that infects every other aspect of life for those who are stuck within that crisis.

Under these reflections, I decided to choose the alleyways that most reflected the disparity between the most vulnerable within our community and those who held the most expensive legal titles to the land here in Windsor; I chose affluent neighborhoods with houses backed onto alleyways. I chose these specific alleyways as a resistance to the narratives that public land isn't really public land, as a resistance to the hold that colonizers continue to exert on a land that was never really theirs to begin with. I chose these alleyways as a statement of resistance to narratives that I, or anyone else could be threatened; coerced; policed or forcibly removed from these lands. These alleyways were the most threatening to the most vulnerable populations and in choosing them to exist in, I was actively resisting that implied threat as someone belonging to a demographic that has been targeted by those with affluence and power.

By traversing these spaces, I resist colonial interventions or narratives that try to tell me I don't belong here.

Having said all of that, I want to just briefly touch on some of the alleyways that I very briefly traversed through. In Windsor there are three different types of alleyways that exist: paved alleyways, unpaved alleyways and closed alleyways. Closed alleyways are spaces that have been paid to be closed by someone (or *someones* plural) and that those legally holding the deeds to the abutting properties have the opportunity to "purchase" to incorporate as part of their property. Property

owners have the opportunity to do so but are not required to. This has meant that there are "closed" alleyways that have some spots along the alleyway that are not really owned by anyone, while the city holds onto it until someone living with the abutting residence decides to purchase it. It's why sometimes you will see an alleyway begin, but then abruptly end at a fence.

Paved alleyways are ones that we are all more familiar with because of the prolific nature of them. They once served the function as routes for garbage and recycling trucks, but over the years have ceased being used for those purposes. Now most garbage and recycling pick-ups occur on the front of the property.

Which brings us to unpaved alleyways. Finding areas with mostly unpaved alleyways was interesting because in place of concrete, the alleyways were merely lined with grass. While this may seem of little note to anyone else, this one small difference changed the feel of these alleyways in significant ways. For one, it made these alleyways feel more private: as if I was entering into the backyard of a home rather than entering a public space. In fact, in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods, I traversed down such an alleyway and was met with the owners of the property deeds treating the alleyways as if they were an *extension* of their backyard. There was no signage, postage or warning that the alleyway was closed, there was nothing to indicate that there was no traffic at all through the alleyway - in fact tire tracks that had worn down the earth indicating it was used as an area of travel. There were properties abutting this alley that even had fences delineating between the alleyway and the private property.

Which brings me back to the mythology of *ownership* and how strongly this mythology persists, but also how strongly those with affluence and power are willing to force that mythology even against their own colonial systems.

In the face of how insidiously persistent and invasive this mythology is, I've begun to realize how imperative and immediate the need is to push back against these narratives.

.*Why* did I begin to collect discarded items from these alleyways?

The collection of discarded items within alleyways was part of the intentional act of resistance against colonial narratives. Part of the more complex puzzle of why people are being policed off these public lands, is the idea that anyone could access the detritus of the people living backed onto these spaces. Oftentimes, in neighborhoods with less resources, you will find that people put items that they no longer want or desire on the curb out front as an offering to anyone walking by who could use those items. Or alternatively, people are often glad to be rid of the detritus that is left in the back alleyways because of the cost or effort to have them removed rather than perceiving this act of taking as a direct threat to the people inhabiting the space backed on the alley. This line of thinking is reflective of more communally

minded ways of understanding and acting in our neighborhoods, one that echoes: if it can still be used and I don't need it, but you can use it or need it, take it freely. *We both benefit from this transaction.*

However, I find that in populations who have never needed or wanted for anything that they could not provide through the resources they have been allowed access to, they do not perceive such gestures as being a mutual transaction. Rather, they perceive anyone taking anything that comes in close proximity to the lands they legally hold deeds to as a threat to the space they believe they have complete and total ownership of. Oftentimes in this line of thinking, an extension of that property they believe to have complete ownership of, subsumes the public property around that space; including the alleyways their property is backed onto.

Capitalism has a lot of us convinced that even the things that we've decided is "garbage" is still owned by us. That for others to participate in taking things that have been *actively discarded*, we've overstepped some unnamed boundaries dictated by social codes.

I think that in order to continue this discussion, we have to define what the notion of *discarded* encapsulates. What does it mean to "discard" something? If we discard something, can we truly claim ownership of it anymore? According to Canadian law, if refuse or garbage is left on public property, it is legally considered to be *abandoned*. In 2009, in a court case between a man named Patrick and the seizure of his garbage by police, the court found "that individuals do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their garbage," so long as it is not on private property.

Ultimately, it begs the question that if social codes believe that *we still retain the rights to our refuse even when it is on public land*, and it conflicts with the legal codes that rules that we do *not*, what agenda does it serve to continue investing in the belief that our garbage, despite being discarded by us, is still our property?

I need to ask: when does garbage stop being owned by us?

When is it acceptable to take garbage?

At what point, do we recognize this as an unsustainable model of behaviour, especially under the impending threat of global warming, climate change and the environmental damages that we are being forced into reckoning with?

What liminal status does garbage take on in being both abandoned yet under this constructed idea that it is still owned?

Under these questions, I began to realize that a part of the reclamation process needed to include a pushback against the belief that affluence excuses us from the responsibility of working in and being mindful of our place within community - because even those living within affluence are still operating within communities. Community is inescapable and in recognizing the humanity of those around us we are in a sense recognizing those we are living in relation with.

It was not enough to just merely exist on the land, part of the process of reclamation and challenging colonial conceptions had to involve gathering items that had been discarded by those who are in a position to give the most. In reality, these people engage in consumerist and extractive methods at much higher rates than those in lower financial strata's, while continually seeking to push the boundaries of what they are entitled to, ultimately to the detriment and sometimes destruction (gentrification) of the communities surrounding them.

In taking items that had been actively discarded and abandoned, I was pushing back against the narrative that even in the abandonment of property it is still somehow owned by those who actively discarded it in the first place. This act was part of the challenge to the mythology of *ownership* that has been invested in by settler colonists and colonial powers.

. *Did I discern the difference between what was being discarded, and what had a utilitarian or decorative purpose?*

The short answer is yes, yes I did.

The longer answer is that during this process, I had to very seriously consider the spaces that I travelled through and engage within them in a mindful and considerate fashion. My goal was to merely claim items that were legally considered abandoned, rather than to just take any old item that happened to exist within alleyways.

Under a communally minded mode of thought, I was trying to ensure that I considered the intentions of the people inhabiting that area and proceed in as respectful and considerate fashion as possible. While I wanted to resist and challenge notions of ownership around land - most especially public lands and how we interact with them and the mythologies of ownership that affluent people have formed around them, I wanted to do it in a fashion that did not stray from that communally minded way of thinking. These people are still within my regional community, and in that I wanted to ensure that I modelled behaviour reflecting that reality.

I had to take extra time, care and consideration when I came across potential items for me to reclaim and repurpose. I feel that in these acts of care, there is the recognition of the humanity of other people - that they deserve my time and consideration even in this small way.

I am still responsible for modelling behaviours that shows how we should regularly interact with and exist within communities and the individuals living with them. The entirety of this project relied upon me modelling this behaviour.

. *How often did I make these trips?*

I made these trips as often during the week throughout the month as I could handle. I am still combatting whatever chronic health issue I may have, and even during this residency I had flare ups that actively prevented me from the work of my project. I sometimes pushed myself so I could meet an unspoken quota of at minimum, 4 times a week.

While these trips had a practical and functional goal, I also want to point out that the reason for this project was to assert my belonging onto this land. I would sometimes be out for two hours, bicycling, sitting in the grass along the waterfront eating a peach and watching the river. These deliberate acts of taking my time, slowing down, noticing and allowing myself to just exist on the land is an act that speaks to the survivance and resilience of my people, my ancestors and my family in the face of genocidal acts that could have meant that I never existed here in the first place. I purposely chose to take my time during these trips because my ancestors lived in these ways, and because my ancestors were deliberately and violently denied the right to continue living this way -even to access this land in the way that I am able to presently.

This act of being present and embodied on the land, is something that I owe to myself as someone who continues to experience dispossession and displacement, as a member of community that continues to experience the denial of our sovereignty on a land that we should have always been allowed to live on as we saw fit. I exist, in the face of colonial processes and forces that still continue to work against my existence, and I owed it to myself to find that connection to the land, to let myself be present and be giving of my time, energy and presence in cultivating a relationship with it again. In this practice is how I become grounded again on this land against the wishes and desires of a colonial state.

6.

August 15, 2020

A welcome, a space carved out
for you
for us

we were never meant to be here
never meant to be
but
we can reach in and
pull these spaces
Into
being

who are you to

tell us
no

7.

So where do I go from here.

As I gathered these materials from the land and spent time *existing* upon it and *asserting* my existence into spaces that are public property, I was often conscious of the ways that other people's prejudices might inform that experience. I was acutely aware at all times that rather than ceding to my humanity, they could instead choose to strip me of it for the mythology of *ownership*. I was acutely aware of how much power others were capable of wielding that could be the difference between a very good day and a very bad day.

I was very, very aware of how vulnerable I felt.

And while I would like to claim that I was bold and brave and asserted myself with confidence, I would be lying. I am an Indigenous person who has experienced a multitude of violence within my life, all of those experiences at the hands of white people, and they almost left me bereft of both my life and my ability to even function. I still carry this embodied experience with me, including feeling *frissons* of danger that white people pose to my health and wellbeing. This embodied, visceral knowledge, regardless of how tightly I monitor my own behaviours and reactions to it, will forever impact me.

In being acutely aware of the danger that others posed to me, I had to strategize.

I deliberately chose and wore clothes that were neat and tidy that I knew would give off a trendy but also practical look intended to give off the vibes of *artist*. I invested in a refurbished bicycle and new bicycle trailer to help with bigger and heavier items. I chose times of day - either early morning or early to midafternoon - that would be considered "reasonable" for individuals to be traversing the alleyways and that meant less traffic overall.

And while it could be argued that this may undermine the intent of my project, I would argue that in the deliberate act of care and consideration that I was giving to myself in this project actually spoke back against colonial systems that undervalues, undermines and actively erodes the health and well-being of Indigenous people.

In showing deliberate acts of care for myself by decreasing unnecessary risks to my person, I was doing what the colonial state has actively worked against since its inception - I am fighting not just for my survival, but for my rights to health and wellbeing; to exist without the threat of violence, suffering, trauma or even death.

I am not just allowed to experience comfort as a 2spirit, queer, trans identifying Anishinaabe, but I am allowed to invest in my own health, wellbeing and joy.

The joys of existing on land, the joys of asserting my presence in these latently anti-Indigenous spaces. The joys of just existing without the pressures of doing anything more than just to exist.

8.

August 19, 2020

Sometimes
secrets
are in the open
if you just
looked

surprises
and

invitations

we are all
Welcome

even if...
despite the...

come and join me
we still belong

9.

Part of the aim of this residency was to get in contact with individuals working within community projects, organizations or spheres. My initial focus for this part of the residency was to get in contact with those working in BIPOC spaces and to discuss with them the scope of their work. I wanted to access their knowledge and experiences in community work so that I could figure out how I, as an artist, could situate myself and my work alongside the community work that these people are doing.

I believe very firmly that as an artist I have an obligation to situate myself and my work within the communities that I and my work, exists within. I believe that I have an obligation to speak to and include these local communities in my work, especially when that work is grounded upon the land that they exist within. I wanted this to be an opportunity to invite people from outside of my spheres to become personally invested in my work, and to in turn offer that investment back.

I sought to engage with these people in a process of reciprocity, because part of being in community is to ensure that the work we do is not extractive (to echo Leanne Betasamosake Simpson from *As We Have Always Done*,) but rather reciprocal and mutually beneficial. This too, is a direct challenge to the colonial agenda that sought to separate Indigenous children from their families, their communities, their home. This separation was designed to alienate our children from us, to assimilate them and to ultimately destroy those kinship ties. A strategy designed to "Kill the Indian, save the child."

We have all been saying: kill the colonial agenda, save the tribe.

Arctite began to reach out to various organizations and individuals I had listed on my behalf to see if they would be interested in this conversation with me. Coming into this residency, I had dreamed of a walking tour to derelict, abandoned and neglected spaces within Windsor, and that on this walk I would have a dialogue with these individuals on their work and ask in depth questions relating to that work. The parameters of this walking tour would be decided according to the comfort and ability of everyone involved.

Eventually however it came to light that a walking tour was not to be for several reasons and the idea was downgraded to a private one-on-one conversation around their work. Several responses came in from groups that had formed under a United Way program, but eventually the first and only person I was able to meet with was a person who had started Bloomfield House in Sandwich Towne. I had been following Teajai Travis for some time on social media and had become familiar with his drumming and poetry, watched as he created tirelessly in his artistic and communal work. I want to give a small mention to his adorable dog that always makes me smile whenever he crosses my social media feed.

While initially, I was nervous coming into this conversation because I was asking for something, I was hopeful that this discussion could pave the way for me to introduce myself and maybe, hopefully bring to him some of the skill sets that I have been tirelessly working on and use them to the benefit of him and Bloomfield House. I was hoping that we could walk away from this conversation invigorated and dreaming of the possibilities of the future.

This private conversation took place at Arctite over the course of 2 1/2 hours and encapsulated many interrelated topics. We talked about the inception of Bloomfield House and its foundational structure built upon and dependent upon the

entirety of the community it exists within, we talked about his work with Ojibway Park and the revelations that came from that work. We talked about United Way, and its four Neighbourhood Engagement Strategy partners: Downtown Windsor Community Collaborative, Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal, Our West End, and The Initiative: Glengarry to Marentette, Neighbour to Neighbour. We talked about the Bloomfield house and United Way approaching them. We talked about the creative and brilliant methods utilized to meet the needs of all those who came to Bloomfield House, and the varying problems that have been plaguing the surrounding community.

In this conversation I was gifted with an entire history and methodology that exists outside of academia, institutional structures and ways of understanding community. They will continue to exist outside of that because I will not be the one to turn it into an academic exercise. Instead, I will merely echo Teajai's words from my memory and understanding: Bloomfield house is entirely grounded within the community it exists within, and without that community Bloomfield House would not exist. From what Teajai has told me, they are inseparable. I believe that any and all conceptions of community and community grounded projects, centers or work should be inseparable from the communities they exist within.

From this conversation, I found myself educated and illuminated on varying aspects of Windsor and its workings that had before, been obfuscated from me. This was an unexpected and highly prized gift from Teajai that I was not expecting. This insight has allowed me to piece together some aspects of the working of City Council, Windsor and the properties here, in a way that clarifies the kind of work that I will be able to do and work that would be futile to pursue.

I am hopeful that Teajai will not be hesitant to contact me in the event there is something that my skills and experience can be of use for towards the work that he is doing. He has posited some problems that I've been mulling over since and that I am hopeful for a creative solution to. Ultimately, I have walked away from this conversation with far more than I was expecting, and for that I wish to repay Teajai through the offering of my services, skills and experiences.

Of the other candidates, there were four that I decided not to call because I realized that I wished to keep the focus of my meetings to the BIPOC within the area doing community work. I attempted to personally contact Joi Hurst through the Coalition of Unity, Equity and Justice, but have received no response back - more of an indication I believe of how busy she is rather than of being ignored. Then I called Can-Am Housing to try and schedule a phone meeting to discuss their community work. I reached someone by the name of Eric Hill who I was able to secure a time to talk with, however I caught them during a busy period for a program they run in supplying school supplies to Indigenous children in the area. We had to schedule our meeting for after the end of my residency. I also asked if I could speak to someone else within their programming but haven't heard from this person as of writing this informal "report."

10.

August 27, 2020

Sometimes
I forget that
these worlds are
forgotten
overlooked?
ignored
maybe just
unseen

unseen

we can play in the unseen
create new worlds in
the unseen

what new worlds
can we create

11.

One final, technical portion of the residency that I haven't touched on yet but that I want to speak on is the studio visit with an artist of my choice. I believe it's extremely important here to discuss this, because of the choices that I made and ultimately who I will be meeting with in September. My first choice was an artist named Ziibiwan who in 2017 was "nominated for two Indigenous Music Awards, Best Instrumental Album and Best New Artist, for their Time Limits EP" (AGO, 2018.) When I submitted my proposal to Artcote, I had initially dreamed of creating soundscapes to go with the evolving exhibition, intended to reflect the varying moods and ideas that would arise from the items coming into the space in this project. In the choosing of my artists, I wanted to keep my focus to other 2Spirit/Queer Indigenous artists who's practice mirrored some of my own in some capacity because of how important it is to me to get connected to and potential create kinship ties with them, especially when they are so close by.

Eventually however we had to begin moving down the list I provided and while Ziibiwan was unavailable, my second on the list responded back with availability. This artist, Demian DinéYazhi is an artist that I have been following on social media for a number of years. To try and encapsulate the prolific work of Demian's, I will simply quote from their wikipedia page:

"Demian Dinéyazhi' (born 1983) is a Native American artist and activist known for their transdisciplinary work and advocacy for indigenous and LGBTQ+ people. Their work "consists of photography, sculpture, text, sound, video, land art performance, installation, street art and fabrics art."

With their art as a platform, Dinéyazhi' uses their work to advocate the themes of decolonization, as well as queer advocacy, survivance, and feminism. Their works include Make Native America Great Again, KA-HA-TENI KAY-YAH, [Native (Native) Land (Land)], KAY-YAH CAH-DA-KHI TA-GAID AH-CHANH, [Land (Land) Wound (Wound) Without (Without) Self Defense (Protect)], POZ Since 1492, and A Nation is a Massacre.

Dinéyazhi' is also known for founding and directing the artist-activist organization called R.I.S.E.: Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment. Additionally, they are known to be the co-director of an LGBTQ+ and Indigenous Two-Spirit zine entitled Locusts: A Post-Queer Nation Zine. Along their career as an artist-activist, they have also published poetry books promoting Indigenous and queer advocacy. These books include Ancestral Memory and An Infected Sunset.

As of 2020, Dinéyazhi' has received critical acclaim, recognition, and awards for their work such as the Brink Award from the Henry Art Gallery in 2017. They are currently based in Portland, Oregon.[1] Dinéyazhi' identifies as gender non-binary and uses gender neutral pronouns." (Wikipedia)

Not only am I thrilled to have a studio visit with someone whose life and work embodies the same ethics, morals, values and beliefs that I have been working to embody within my own life and practice, but I am excited to have this opportunity to speak one-on-one with someone who's career I've watched and who, I hope to create a connection with in some capacity, even if it is from afar.

I am looking forward to my studio visit with Demian, and to the potentials of our discussions.

12.

August 30, 2020

There were names here

Before the concrete

And

bricks stacked

neatly

of

genocide
assimilation
erasure

you
piling
brick
atop
brick

decided

to

unwitness

and

obfuscate

in the name of

“Love”

13.

So if I were to imagine these public spaces beyond the colonial mythology of *ownership*, bought and sold by those in possession of colonial wealth and power. How would I imagine them?

What can I dream for these spaces, beyond "revitalization" projects aimed at repaving them, beyond the new "naming" project introduced by city councillors as a project of interest rather than investing in the infrastructure to address the ongoing crisis of homelessness and houselessness?

What can I dream for these spaces, in seeing such unactivated potential as I cycle down these decrepit, but beautiful and liminal spaces?

I can dream of the potential for the closures of these thoroughfares to cars so that we can focus on inner city trails intended for walkers and bicyclists. I can dream of the potential of community gardens springing up, lining the fences so that anyone walking by could take what they needed so that they can nourish themselves, rather than wasting away in want and need.

I can imagine the revitalization of community health and wellbeing by creating inner-city wilderness spaces, intended to revitalize the Indigenous flora and fauna to the region for the health and wellbeing not just for our environment, but for ourselves; our bodies, spirits and minds.

I can dream under the lens of Indigenous knowledge, especially in the face of ongoing warnings by scientists of climate change and the absolute necessity to invest back into the environment in ways that work beyond being merely extractive. Under this lens I would argue that alleyways are unactivated spaces for environmental conservation. Rather than closing them in order to privatize these spaces and incorporating them into the backyards of those living backed onto the alleyways, rather than advocating that we “name” them, I would like to put forth a bold idea. The idea is that these spaces as not only communal spaces, but spaces that can benefit anyone within or moving through the neighborhoods and far beyond even our regional community - spaces that can recognize and honour our place within and be a benefit to our global community.

These are dreams beyond colonial interventions and mythologies intended to continue the agenda of displacement, of dispossession, of violent removal. I will continue to dream beyond this residency, into futures where we are all fed and where we are all, dreaming our way into community, safety and security and into a space where that future is possible.

14.

September 6, 2020

You may not find me

here anymore

but

to be out
on the land
sun on face
and
my body remembering

this connection

you can find this too

and in that

I will be there

we were

never really

separated

those were just stories
to make us believe
that we were

we will
find each other again

make worlds with each other
against

the designs
of
systems intended

to keep us isolated and
alone

a punchline:
we were never alone
our power lies there

15.

I know I've thrown around the word *community* a lot, the way we'd throw clover across the ground in an effort to root something - anything, in a barren spot.

But I mean it. I mean it in almost a desperate way, parched for the embodied knowledge of what it could mean to have space be held for me and for me to learn how to hold space for others. To understand the world in ways that are healing, rather than through the played-out clichés of *trauma* and *violence*.

To have an inkling of what my ancestors felt, what they held, how they knew within the fibres of their beings what it meant to coexist in care, kindness and consideration. To live less encumbered by the capitalist trappings of narcissism, isolation and alienation. To live in imperfect, mutual understandings that benefits us both. That benefits us all.

So I will dream within the word *community* that exists beyond the reach of narcissistic cages and ploys, I will dream within the word *community* that teaches me to reach for joy, for life, for the solidarity of Black, Indigenous and brown kin, for the joy of 2spirit, queer understandings of love and the depths of love that I am capable of experiencing outside of the stories that I have been told to expect.

I will say *community* like a mantra, a prayer, a ritual of cleansing and health. Because to dream of community means to dream of being held and of holding in return.

16.

If I were to talk about any of the things I've learned through this experience, I would like to say that the work of grounding myself within community is an ongoing act that requires a lot of personal investment. This work cannot be approached academically, because to do so would be to objectify communities and individuals within those communities and we have to work at envisioning beyond those colonial models. Ultimately, that has been the entire goal of reaching out to those working within community and grounding myself and my work by those communities I exist within: to find ways of working beyond the colonial models I've been taught my whole life. This is work that is intended to break the cycles of colonial violence that has displaced Indigenous people and the attempts to dispossess us of our own lands. This is work intended to break the cycle of colonial violence that still seeks to prevent at any cost my own connection back to the land, back to my community.

While initially, I thought that this project I had proposed for my time at Artcite would be straightforward, it turned out that everything was much more askance than I imagined. New developments occurred within the city that has shone a new spotlight on alleyways, demonstrating the ongoing colonial project of erecting more barriers and more threats to vulnerable populations. I find it unforgivable for a city councillor to prioritize the naming of alleyways while there are people who continue to eke out a living in this industrialized, barren and inhospitable city. I leave it for everyone else to come to their own conclusions about this act, but I will leave with this final word about it: we had names for these places before settler colonists removed us violently and forcibly from these lands. Where is the reckoning with Canada's history with Indigenous people I was promised over the last few years and through the Indigenous renaissance that took the Canadian landscape by storm?

Windsor continues to believe it is exempt from the same education that the rest of the country clumsily attempts to catch up on.

My travels through the alleyways with the goal of this project in mind, made me feel a lot of times a potential target for people. This experience reminds me of the precarity involved in living as a homeless person, the constant vigilance and paranoia that accompanies that state, the exhaustion and fatigue and ultimately the ongoing and ever-present trauma that living in that situation results in. Living homeless is traumatic. It is the trauma of being abandoned by everyone around you, being continuously failed and subjected to the project of dehumanization so that everyone else can live more comfortably with themselves. And rather than spend the money and resources into building the infrastructure that would actually prevent people from falling into homelessness and seek to provide shelter to every citizen within our city, Windsor's City Council would prefer to change the city bylaws so that people with wealth can build tiny homes on their property to rent out to others in a process they have coined as "gentlefication."

While one could be infuriated at the wording, it really ultimately speaks to the moral compass of affluent people with power who really do not perceive any issues with gentrification itself: just in the connotations attached to its current coinage. It attempts to obfuscate the realities involved in the benefits that are received in being a landlord, as opposed to any offered to those who are tenants; mainly that the landlord is the sole, financial beneficiary of such an arrangement.

In the process of building this evolving exhibition, I realized near the end that this process required me, as the artist to be ever present with and around the work. I believe that the barrier that exists between the artist and our audience should be demolished. A part of the project of grounding oneself within the communities we work within means making ourselves available to the individuals within that community. It means making ourselves present and available as opposed to being distant, aloof and unreachable. It was fortuitous that the way I envisioned this project being built and what it accomplished in this regard aligned organically.

And in the process of this practice I realized that this is a model to build my career upon.

Imogen, in a moment of insight for me, mentioned that the work being an evolving piece that was subject to change throughout its month long exhibition, challenged the ways we think of arts institutions and spaces. That works that come into gallery spaces become static, and that this work challenges that foundational concept of how gallery spaces should function. I owe you a debt of gratitude for that insight because admittedly, it was something I hadn't even thought of before. I've been imagining and challenging myself for so long on making works accessible outside of the gallery space, and spent a long time questioning whether I ever wanted to exhibit within a gallery space that I never thought of the implicit challenge an evolving art work made to the space it was existing within.

It means that I've been dreaming in the right direction.

In terms of whether my project was successful at being accessible, I began utilizing tools at my disposal to try and do so: mainly social media. With Covid-19 presenting us with even greater challenges at connecting us with each other, I am finding that our old, foundational ways of thinking are being challenged and I have to ask: are we all rising up and meeting that challenge?

I am excited for the future and simultaneously anxious.

I am excited, not because I believe the future is going to be "better," but merely because I believe in our capacity for growth and to meet the oncoming challenges that are presented to us. But only if we make the choice to do so, and in this you will find my anxieties. Will we continue to invest in acts of "gentlefication," continue to ignore the climate crisis we're finding ourselves in, and labour under a denial of Covid-19 by refusing to wear masks and social distance...or can there be a way to guide the trajectory we're on back towards a way of living in which we are all looking out for one another within our daily actions, thoughts and words? Can we guide this trajectory back towards that?

In this anxiety, I find myself reaching out to my fellow 2Spirit/Queer Indigenous kin, to my local queer/lgbt+ kin, and to those who have unabashedly come into my life because they have found something of value in my presence. In this anxiety I reach out to them, because of the love and comradery that continues to bolster me on my trajectory.

This project occurred during a time of exponential personal growth, and in that growth has been the recognition of my own power to try and steer those around me on a path of mindfulness, compassion and of finally working beyond consumerist extractive ways of thinking towards a path of reciprocity and mutually beneficial exchange.

In this personal growth I've finally forgiven myself for all of my own failures and am now dedicated to the project of building and rebuilding kinship and community ties. It is here that I will build myself a new foundation, a new way of thinking, a new way of living. It is here that I will ground myself, and it is here that offers me the space that I have always needed.

17.

To conclude this informal "report", I'd like to just thank Imogen Clendinning for her tireless work throughout this residency in trying to ensure that I was provided for as the artist in residence. I'd like to thank Lucas Cabrel for checking in to ensure I was comfortable, and to the both of you for giving me the space to be heard as an Indigenous person occupying the BIPOC Artist in Residence opportunity.

I would like to thank Derrick Biso for so many things. For their tireless enthusiasm for my work, our long bicycle ride and numerous talks that touched upon the topics encapsulated within my project and beyond. For their willingness to volunteer to document my work and for all the things they've given as gifts to me in reciprocity. If you only gifted me the sauerkraut that would have been enough, but you've been so present throughout the entirety of this project and in that presence I feel that I became much more fluent in the language of my project. I want to also thank you for your tireless advocacy, your endless enthusiasm for learning, for being accountable to those around you and for the ways that you have and continue to show up for me that I've needed. For telling me that "we would have been buds" and carving out a space of forgiveness for myself and learning to love myself in saying that, and for so many more things that I've left out of here.

I would like to extend my utmost appreciation to Tejai Travis for meeting with me over our lengthy discussion that seemed to just touch on so many things that it's hard to keep track of sometimes. You've illuminated so much for me and I look forward to working with you in the future, because I am committed to finding the opportunities that will allow me to give something back.

I'd like to extend my utmost appreciation to April Morris who voluntarily offered her vehicle to pick up some doors that became important staples to the evolving exhibition, I hope to work more with you in the future and to maybe have a chance for longer conversations.

I'd like to thank everyone who saw enough value in my work to choose my application and for giving me this opportunity.

I'd also like to extend my utmost appreciation to the people who I have yet to meet and talk with but who have agreed to meet and talk with me. To Eric Hill at Can Am Housing, I'm excited to hear about the work that you all are doing over there and to ground myself within this community more than I have been, and to Demian

Dinéyazhi' for doing this studio visit with me. I am excited to get to talk to you about the work that you do, I hope to one day be as tireless in the work of decolonization that you have been. I'm still finding my way.

I'd like to extend my thanks to every BIPOC 2spirit/queer/trans/lgb+ individual on social media. Your presence on social media has kept me alive when that should have never been your job in the first place. Your tireless advocacy work, your tireless assertion of your presence, value and right to exist gives me hope and has allowed me to find joy in my own 2Spirit/Queer/Trans existence. It shouldn't be your job to provide those things especially when it comes at the cost of your health, your well-being, your livelihoods. I am here as kin and as a witness to your resiliency and survival. I am here holding a space for you to be heard and when I can to offer support even if you will never meet me, never know me, never interact with me. I am trying because you deserve better than what's been given. Because love is a verb and it means it's my responsibility to act where I can.

But most especially, thank you to my Indigenous 2Spirit/Queer/Trans kin. In you I have found myself, without you I would have never had parts of myself illuminated, I would have never found the beginnings of my path. I hope to do you all proud and to one day meet you all.

And lastly, I'd like to extend my love and utmost gratitude to my love and partner, Adam Peltier. Without you, none of this would have been possible. You bring such light and joy to my life, and I cannot express in words the numerous and multitude of things you've done for me and with me. I wouldn't be who I am if I hadn't been with you and I wouldn't have gone from a scrappy, feisty mess to who I am today without you.

Thank you.

It is within these acts of reciprocity, that we will find our way.

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