Returning to the trouble

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We met via Zoom to discuss a return to the Raising Spirit project, a multi-year, multimodal project in Blackfoot Territory. The three of us, Jan, Amy, and Erin, represented the settler scholars on a research team that included collaborators and researchers from the Blackfoot community, as well as settler scholars from anthropology, history, and education. The team also included young people from both Indigenous and settler backgrounds. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the three of us found ourselves drawn back into this work and into communication with our old team members, despite our temporal and spatial distance from Raising Spirit and southern Alberta.

The project began as an attempt to facilitate the articulation of childrearing values among primarily Blackfoot families in a small southern Alberta city, and it ended with a digital storytelling library and public exhibition. Across the arc of the project, the politics of knowledge production shaped methodological innovations, researcher relationships, and the final transfer of the library and its materials to our community partner, Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society. What began as a consideration of how children are raised, in the context of the continuing violence of residential schooling and state-led adoption and foster care practices in Canada[1], became a consideration of how young Indigenous people can take part in such research projects (Alexander, et al., 2018). This now leads us to a more deliberate entanglement with the possibilities of multimodality as a way to linger creatively and productively in the trouble.

Raising Spirit did not begin as a multimodal project, but it certainly became one. We planned some of these multimodal approaches, such as digital storytelling and blogging, but others were improvisations designed to meet the challenges and needs that emerged as we worked with Indigenous young people and a partner NGO devoted to early childhood education for Indigenous children and their families. Our troubles with the multimodal nature of the project have left traces of possibility as well as moments of refusal (Mack and Newberry, 2020).

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[1] In 2015, the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was released, capping a six-year examination of the effects of years of child-removal and assimilatory education projects through government-funded and church-run residential schools that separated approximately 150,000 Indigenous children from their families and communities between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Practices of separation continued in the mid-20th century with the "Sixties Scoop" and even now through foster care practices.

We returned to these tangles in the early days of the pandemic when people across the globe were making use of multimodal technologies to connect with, and care for, our kin. Our desire to collaborate again is part of the reason for this return, not just as feminist practice (El Kotni, Dixon and Miranda, 2020), but also as a recognition of the always changing and intertwined matrix of our own relationships with one another: from supervisor and student to colleague, mentor, friend, and supporter. Yet, we write here as three settler academics, not as the full research team (see Alexander, et al., 2018). Academic papers are not necessarily the goal of Indigenous youth, and social service organizations dealing with children need to communicate with their communities quickly. Yet, it was the young people we worked with who taught us the most about the constraints and possibilities of identity defined through local assumptions of who counts as an expert and as authentically Indigenous (Mack and Newberry, 2020). Across the project, the boundaries between us and them collapsed and were redrawn through encounters in the spaces of the university, our partner organization, and on Blackfoot land. As the Executive Director, Tanya Pace-Crosschild said so succinctly: this project is about relationships. We feel the pull of these ties as a kind of kinship, and we draw not only on Haraway (2016) but on what we learned about Blackfoot ideas of kinship as built on the mutuality of exchange to nourish and sustain connection.

We find entanglement a useful way to imagine these continuing obligations and responsibilities that still require our care, despite the fact that the places and people have continued to shift and become tangled up in other spaces, projects, and relations. Ingold (2015) reminds us of the multiplicity of lines that connect and make the human and their relationship to these memories of people and place. Haraway (2016) notes that the lines of kinship, which extend to the more than human, may be cut or tied, connected and disconnected. Here we each return to a particular knot, line or trace of entanglement to take up the trouble we met in the project and to recognize what connects us to this territory and its people. We write in the spirit of Haraway's admonition to stay with the trouble in the making of kin.

This return also marks an explicit turn towards multimodality for future phases of the project. Earlier phases of the project included adaptive shifts from extractive methods (Smith, 2013) such as photo-elicitation towards research-creation and experimental methods in design spaces based on co-conceptualization (Rappaport, 2008). The resulting transmedia work was iterative and emergent. Multimodality offers a way to continue the unsettling of ethnographic methods and relationships that have been colonizing for too long. It also offers the promise of knowledge production and dissemination that serve the networks of relations within which we now work: kin who are young and old, rural and urban, interested and disinterested.

To return to the troubles emerging from the project, we have each chosen a photograph from the project to illustrate continuing entanglements that bundle place, people, and meaning. In doing so, we reflect on multimodality as a driving force in our conceptualizations of relations, memory, place, identity, and the senses.

Jan is a professor of anthropology who was there at the start of this knot of relationship making. In her section, she describes how an initial focus on photo-elicitation as a participatory process led to thinking through photographs, not as objects, but as bundles of meaning, connection, and translation that realize relations through transfers.

In her section on the sensorial power of social media and images, Amy explores how these can prompt a return to the best trouble: fieldwork memories. As a millennial and white settler scholar, Amy found social media a space for building and maintaining field relationships with interlocutors and research team members alike. Moreover, during the global Covid-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, they provide an opportunity to return to a space and time that has changed dramatically. Indeed, she is no longer an MA student in southern Alberta; rather, she is now a doctoral candidate many hours to the north studying the violent resurgence in right-wing groups. These multimodal engagements provide relief in uncertain times as well as an opportunity to reconnect with old relations.

Erin is a non-Indigenous educator of British descent. When working on the Raising Spirit project, she was a postdoctoral fellow with the Institute for Child and Youth Studies at the University of Lethbridge. She is currently an Assistant Professor in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. In her section, Erin reflects on the ways in which the project troubled her identity, particularly through a reconceptualization of land, belonging, relations, and academic knowledge.

Thus, in our recits we ask, how might a multimodal approach allow us to draw in new as well as old collaborators and kin, from around the globe to help think through our troubles? How does multimodality allow us to stay with the good trouble?

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Amy Mack is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta. As a cultural anthropologist, she specializes in digital anthropology/ethnography, as well as digital storytelling and literacy. Her current work explores the Canadian right-wing social media landscape and attends to both its white and male supremacist aspects.
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 Jan Newberry is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Lethbridge, Canada. Her book *Back Door Java: State Formation and the Domestic in Working Class Java* considered urban space, gender, community and state in social reproduction theory. More recently, she has worked on the governmentality of global early childhood education programs. Her work has appeared in *Economy & Society*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, *Indonesia*, *Anthropologica*, *Ethics and Social Welfare*, and *Collaborative Anthropologies* among other peer-reviewed journals. Her current research concerns collaborative and multimodal ethnographic methods in Blackfoot Territory. She is co-founder of the University of Lethbridge's Institute for Child and Youth.
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Dr. Erin Spring is an Assistant Professor in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Erin's research seeks to understand the ways in which young people make sense of their identities through reading, writing, and art. Her research projects are united thematically by a shared investment in stories and storytelling as a way of articulating identity development, with a particular focus on the influence of place. Her ongoing objective as a settler scholar is to collaborate with communities, including schools, to ask and answer questions that matter to them, facilitating social change, building capacity, and promoting student wellbeing.
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