Relations in the Alluvial Zone: Place and Indigenous Knowledges in Michael Marker's Scholarship

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Abstract

Through more than 20 years of scholarship, Michael Marker brings our attention, again and again, and more deeply, to the sentient, relational, spiritual, and political dimensions of *place.* This analytic review of his body of work illuminates Marker's teachings on place, specifically, in education, history, and Indigenous knowledges. It is an effort to both crystalize and mobilize his conceptualization to inform future work by others. Place, Marker teaches us, functions as an agent in the transmission of knowledge and in the course of events over time (sometimes referred to as history). Place is also centered in Marker's research as an analytic tool. He incisively points out the consequences of neglecting the aforementioned dimensions of place from Indigenous perspectives and for Indigenous communities, as well as their relations in teaching, learning, and research contexts. In his later work, Marker (2019a) introduces the metaphor of alluvial zones to characterize the co-presence of Indigenous and Western epistemologies and ontologies in the university setting. Marker (2019a) traces the metaphor, which will be further detailed below, by referring to university spaces as a "transforming river delta," a place that has the potential to yield the "most fertile soils in the world," wherein sediments (knowledges) unite in one sense, but remain distinct in another (pp. 502-503). We work with Marker's metaphor of the university as an alluvial zone to consider conceptualization and enactment of place as emblematic of Western and Indigenous knowledges coming together to both combine and not combine in ways that matter. In our resulting review of his work we found six themes on which we elaborate: recognizing local ancestors; placing knowledges; sustaining land relationships; engaging responsibilities; nurturing spirits; and confronting place refusals.

Relational Scholarship

Heather: My mentorship journey with Dr. Marker began in 2011 when I registered for his course as an incoming doctoral student at The University of British Columbia (UBC). I was coming from Nunavut, as a white settler scholar with life experience in the Arctic and a short track record of research in the history of Inuit education, but much less exposure to broader Indigenous education literature and discourse. I wrote Dr. M an email asking what I should read before his course to support my readiness for the conversations to come. He responded by sending me the citations for several of his own articles and suggested I make my way through the list. By my interpretation, this was not a move saturated with academic ego but a relational learning invitation. *If you are coming to study with me, why not do your homework about where I'm*

coming from? As this article will demonstrate, the depth of that expectation is something I continue to explore and hope to fulfill. I went on to take another course with Dr. Marker the following semester and he agreed to serve on my doctoral committee. We were in constant discussion about Indigenous education during the years I was at UBC, attended conferences together, exchanged drafts of manuscripts, and co-published on reciprocity in decolonizing research (McGregor & Marker, 2018). Now, I work at Queen's University, located on land and near waters traditionally cared for by Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Huron-Wendat peoples who were pushed off this place when it was "purchased" by the British in 1783. This land was traditionally called Ka'tarohkwi in Huron, located at the confluence of what we now call the Catarqui River, the St. Lawrence River, and Lake Ontario. Ka'tarohkwi is said to mean "a place where there is clay", or "there is muddy land (because it is in a wet place)" (Murray, 2017); either translation points directly towards being a place of alluvial mixing, as will be described further below.

Marc: Similar to Heather, my relationship with Dr. Michael Marker began during my time at UBC as a doctoral student. As a white settler, my trajectory towards Indigenous education spaces at that juncture was primarily informed by a decade of delivering informal STEM programming across Indigenous communities throughout Canada (urban, rural, southern, as well as northern), as well a profound recognition that there was still much learning to be done. After seeing each other without knowing each other in shared spaces such as at the First Nations House of Learning, I reached out in the summer of 2012 with what felt like a belated introduction. I was graced by the generosity of his spirit early on as well, as I was an instructor for the very first cohort of students who would be taking the mandatory Indigenous education course in the teacher education program that fall. Even though there was "a limited amount of Markerness to go around" (Michael Marker, personal communication, September 6th, 2012), he visited my class. This generosity extended into guidance for my doctoral research, as he became a "fireside support" for the inquiry I envisioned at the time, largely centered on visually storying relationships to place (see Higgins, 2016). Dr. Marker always had a way of posing problems (or Marker-isms): he often generously[1], playfully, and incisively asked questions about attending to and being responsible for Indigenous dimensions of place. Dr. M boldly lived and embodied what he frequently referred to as the radical possibility offered by Indigenous knowledges in the academy: criticality in relation.

It is this spirit of criticality in relation that continues to inform my more recent work, now in Treaty 6 territory at the University of Alberta: always being on the look-out for (post-)critical possibilities that lay in attending to the (traces of) alluvial mixing of Indigenous and Western

[1] It is worth stating here that this generosity extended primarily to folks who reciprocated this spirit of learning. However, when it was clear that lines of questioning were meant to diminish or dismiss Indigenous place-thought, Dr. Marker could also be playfully willful, enact dignified obstinance, as its own form of counter-protest. In one of his last pieces of writing, he points towards such exchanges:

> Just as one can use the wrong net for catching fish, one can use the wrong question for catching... truth. We often wish that Settler colleagues and Settler students would ask different questions… And ultimately, when Indigenous educators are presented with normative interrogations that are just simply the wrong questions for capturing our truth about reality, don't be surprised if we simply say, 'go fish.' (Marker in Marker & Hardman, 2020, p. 295)

knowledges systems in educational spaces. For example, heeding Marker's (2006) attentiveness to not only the ways in which Indigenous spirituality is framed as Western rationality's Other, but how the mutual exclusion of spirituality within "what counts" as knowledge is murky, ever shifting as a function of settler colonial power, I've been on the lookout for similar stories which might unsettle science education's sedimented exclusion of Indigenous ways-of-living-with-nature around questions of spirituality (see Higgins, 2021, 2022).

Reviewing Marker's Contributions

> "From an Indigenous perspective, the "truth" not only needs to be placed within larger dimensions of history and power, it must be experienced in actual places on the landscape." (Marker, 2003, p. 370)

Given the primacy of place in Marker's work, this is where we began making meaning with the expansive body of his scholarly work. As we began our review, we returned to manuscripts that made their own alluvial processes felt in our own scholarly work (for example, Marker, 2006; Marker, 2011a), moving towards a more expansive scan that would allow us to articulate our multifaceted relational obligations towards Indigenous place. However, it became quickly evident that no simple definition of place would do Marker's scholarship justice as his work never provided easy solutions, and he was often weary of solutions that could and would become new sites of settler colonial violence. To this end, there is a litany of cautionary notes as well as numerous invitations to critically and reflexively occupy academic spaces as Marker's articulations of place are always at once operationalized and troubled.

In honoring the ways that Marker, in his career, sustained the difficult, loving, and labored practice of turning the hydrological turbulence that usually marks the Indigenous-settler epistemic encounter into a site of possibility, we wanted to attend to the characteristics of place that he articulated in his work and the trajectory of how these characteristics take shape amid an ever-shifting educational landscape. It is evident to us in our revisitations of his scholarship that "this *thinking into places* is not merely an equity move to include Indigenous minds in university spaces,... the academic centering of local Indigenous place based knowledge [is] a paradigm shifting consideration" (Marker, 2019c, p. 203, emphasis in original). Marker's work always skillfully, provocatively, and productively pushed at the edge of academic frames available at the time: depicting relational obligations not only as responsibilities for the academy, but directly outlining what the academy might be able to respond to, should it shift paradigms.[2] He rendered the frames themselves as well as their limitations legible, while deeply attending to the ways that particular Indigenous realities of place remained unintelligible or unbearable by the academy. In selecting pieces to highlight within this review, we drew from across almost three decades of scholarship to attend to these trajectories. As we revisited Marker's scholarship, we read not only to summarize his scholarship, but also considering what it might mean to think Marker's scholarship through the placed metaphor of the alluvial zone (Marker, 2019a). This meant: a) attending to the place-ness of each manuscript, with its plural qualities; b) attuning to the

[2] For example, questions of Indigenous spirituality move from the sacredness of knowledge (i.e., as quality) in 2006, to spiritual practices such as ceremony and ritual in 2011, to the spirits themselves in 2018.

turbulence between Indigenous and Western ways-of-knowing and -being, as well as new possibilities that form from sediment settling anew;[3] and, c) looking out for exemplary stories that provide alluvial illumination, as Marker was a gifted storyworker.

Alluvial Zone

Drawing inspiration from the Fraser River's delta where the xwməθkwəyə̓ m (Musqueam) people have always lived and moved to follow the mouth of the river (Musqueam First Nation & Museum of Anthropology, 2018), Marker offers the metaphor of the alluvial zone to consider his, and by extension our, work*place*. In this ecological sense, it is important to consider deeply that an alluvial zone is both a metaphor *and a real place* in Marker's work, as it is (albeit perhaps differently) in our respective university settings, and perhaps in yours. He asks us first to widen our gaze beyond the university in order to bring the surrounding landforms and larger depositional environment into view. He suggests the landforms represent local Indigenous places that are "the beginning of all aspects of…knowledge production" (Marker, 2019a, p. 511) and that all geomorphic surfaces are shaped by Indigenous knowledge systems. Through fluvial processes "Indigenous knowledge, expressed through languages, ceremonies, and cultural enactments of all kinds, [continuously transform the university and stand to] return…the sacredness of the peoples' territories" (Marker, 2019a, p. 501). We begin to view the university – a seemingly stable and constant feature at first glance – as an "Indigenous interstitial alluvial zone of knowing". Here,

> an alluvium of mixing…swirls both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems around each other…The materials composed of minerals and organic particles are the substances that both combine – and do not combine – to shape the lines of emerging landforms and waters. [Here] the most fertile soils in the world are formed. But, while the sediments unite in one sense, many elements and pieces remain in a suspended colloidal flux, sharing liquid time and space; not fused, but distinct and separate particles. Alluvial processes combine sediments at one level but the essences remain discrete at another level. (Marker, 2019a, pp. 502-503)

This metaphor holds the distinct, and sometimes opposing, features, approaches, and purposes of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems while calling our attention to the fruitful potential of combination without fusion. This metaphor is particularly apt for our synthesis and translation of Marker's teachings on place because, he suggests, framing the university as an alluvial zone has "the potential to nurture a paradigm shift [that] recogniz[es] the sacredness of places [and] counter[s] a pervasive view of land as strictly a soulless commodity" (2019a, p. 501).

Six Themes Emerging from Fluvial Processes

Recognizing Local Ancestors

Referring specifically to the universities with which he interfaced around the Salish Sea (UBC,

[3] Also known as *the Marker provocation*: in naming problems and possibilities, there continues to be an implicit call to action.

University of Victoria, Western Washington University), but relevant to most institutions in North America, Marker points out: the university is sitting on land that once belonged to the ancestors of Indigenous peoples. Underneath and around university structures is land that hosted important people and events in times past. These are places significant to communities and families for reasons *other* than for being a university. Indigenous members of university communities do not recite their ancestry only out of habit or tradition, it is often intended to thread the reality of past into the present:

> In explaining current social conditions and challenges, or even in personal introductions, tribal people usually offer extended historical and genealogical descriptions as a way of locating themselves and their discourse meaningfully in the present. These narratives are always founded on a moral cast, which is embedded in their belonging to the land. (Marker, 2000a, p. 83)

Marker (2000b) continues on to point out a deep injustice: that Indigenous students from communities local to the university – those who have ties to real people living in proximity to these lands longer than the university's history – are often treated by the university as foreign or exotic. Non-Indigenous members of the university know and privilege the knowledges of their international colleagues over the knowledges tied to the people who took care of the land around and underneath them (Marker, 2004a). As universities ask questions about how to "recruit", "engage", or "support" Indigenous students, Marker argues, it may be important to consider how those students–if they are local to the place–are viewing the university in relation to the other (Indigenous) histories located there.[4] For example, one might ask, is the university a source of the Eurocentric or racist knowledges that justified violent forms of schooling imposed on local Indigenous communities in the past and present? Likely yes, as in the case of the Lummi Nation and their experiences with the fishing rights controversy in Washington State in the 1970s (Marker, 2000b). By forgetting the ancestors, the university displaces that which Indigenous peoples would like to teach: "For Indigenous people, the local history that frames the community's relationship to the traditional territory is the most important knowledge to be passed on to the youth" (Marker, 2011a, p. 105). Marker (2009) reminds us, then, to reorient university learning goals in relation to the ancestors and their descendants who have a presence, an imperative, and a sovereignty that is preeminent. Returning to the alluvial zone metaphor helps signal that this history is formative; the fertile potential of fluvial processes is defined in part by the length of time during which waters have deposited sediment. As settler academics working in universities, we are accountable to these real histories, memories, and processes unfolding over time – time that far exceeds the colonial and the institutional frames.

Placing Knowledges

Across Marker's scholarship, there is an irreducible connection between knowledge and place: "from an Indigenous perspective, the 'truth' not only needs to be placed within larger dimensions of history and power, it must be experienced in actual places on the landscape" (Marker, 2003, p.

[4] Further, Marker (e.g., 2019c) invites strong consideration of the stories we tell about Indigenous students in the academy: institutions desire success stories which work to individualize Indigenous students' struggle to survive and thrive, erase narratives of those who do not complete programs, as well mask the academy's structural colonial complicities.

370). However, in the alluvial zone, attending to "an Indigenous sense of theory [that] is concerned with the interconnected relationships in a specific place" (Marker, 2004b, p. 108) is not without its own colonial turbulence. This includes, as Marker identifies, the ways in which educational institutions "seem to arrive on the landscape out of nowhere. They are institutions plopped down in a place without regard to the local history or ecology of the land" (Marker, 2006, p. 492). What Marker refers to as a curriculum of placeless-ness (e.g., 2004b, 2006) comes to bear on the encounter between Indigenous and Western thought as "conventional academic discourse trends towards the generalizable and universal" (Marker, 2004a, p. 105). The consequence of this does not necessarily mean that place is not addressed (although it often is not), but rather that when it is, knowledge of and from place is generalized so that it might be extracted and transposed. More often than not, the places addressed and valued are *elsewheres* instead of "the history and ecology of the land that the university is sitting on" (Marker, 2004b, p. 107).[5] Marker (2000b) reminds us that this can and should be thought of as its own form of Indigenous erasure:

> For tribal people, experience and interpretation are local. Consequently, abstract theoretical discussions of power, culture, and history are not entirely sound because they neglect the distinctiveness of the local stories that contain the deep and concrete aspects of reality. For aboriginal people, ''location'' is always a real place. (p. 401)

In addition, the academic valuing of placeless-ness is but one colonial imposition that shapes this encounter; a longer list might also include the imposition of colonial nation-state geographies which render many Indigenous peoples, such as communities from the Coast Salish region, transnational (Marker, 2004a, 2009, 2015), amidst other place(d) dis-engagements discussed in the *Confronting Place Refusals* section below.

Marker offers a simple, yet critically incisive question is offered: "what if scholars took the narratives of Elders and traditional Indigenous knowledge holders seriously about an intimate vastness of wisdom that percolates through the layers of physical and metaphysical time and space in sentient landscapes?" (2018, p. 454). This invitation to attend to Indigenous knowledge of place is potent. Specifically, place goes beyond being more than the backdrop against which knowledge is constructed, be it treated as any combination of cultural, historical, spatial, material, architectural, and/or environmental context.[6] Rather, place agentially and relationally acts as teacher. Sacred geographies and sentient landscapes hold knowledge in ways that defy many differing Western understandings of place (be they positivist, humanist, or even posthuman). The place-based relational interdependence of humans, other-than-humans, and more-than-humans is location from which Indigenous inquiry begins. Further, place and its relations are no longer the "ends" of knowledge-production, but rather its "means": Indigenous place as in a process-based methodology and practice with its own localized Indigenous ethics,

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[5] As Marker (2006) suspects, this valuing of *elsewheres* and *nowheres* cannot be separated from settler insecurities and futurities: "there is a deep insecurity within the consciousness and conscience of settler societies that, when confronted by the indigenous Other, is awakened to challenges about authenticity in relation to land and identity" (Marker, 2006, pp. 485-486).

[6] In thinking with Marker (2003) we might ask how this emerges as a function of academics' "interests" what "interests" the academic. Taking Indigenous place seriously then would require that academics engage in an "intellectual de-laminating colonial categories of truth and reality – embossed onto the landscape." (Marker, 2018, p. 462)

ways-of-knowing, and -of-being. It is for this reason that Marker (2019c) states that "when universities invite not just Indigenous students—on the university's terms– but Indigenous *knowledges* on the terms of place-ness and respect, a fuller transformation will be enacted" (p. 204, emphasis in original).

Sustaining Land Relationships

As knowledge and relationships are embedded in place, oral traditions, protocol, ceremony, and other forms of ritualized action establish and affirm multiplicitous connections to Indigenous land: relations that are human, other-than-human, and more-than-human. Significantly, these connections "are the centerpiece of Indigenous approaches of identity and learning" (Marker, 2004b, p. 109). In turn, sustaining Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous place are projects that are irreducibly connected. However, as Marker (2004a) notes, the place(d) relations that Indigenous students and academics are asked to center, and uphold, or even work within and against are often those of the institution:

> Indigenous students have to critique, account for, and/or translate traditional forms of knowledge. [Attending university] is a space of alienation that lures Aboriginal students away from community and a sense of place to a kind of nowhere metropolis where they wander as strangers through a maze of careers and "choices." (Marker, 2004a, p. 105)

This particular sedimentation in the alluvial zone cannot be separated from the ways in which the academy is structurally invested in sustaining settler colonial lifeways and land relations:

> As the Indigenous understanding of place is a layered formation of physical and metaphysical interpenetrations between multiple realities, one may think of the history of settler colonialism – partly – as a system and series of unnatural laminations covering and re-placing ancient ecological/metaphysical understandings with a modernist regime of divisions. (Marker, 2018, p. 462)

Nonetheless, in this alluvial zone, Marker reminds us that there are many practices that can generate possible possibilities for the academy that have existed since time immemorial.[7] Most frequently, in Marker's scholarship, this work has taken the shape of a deep listening to Indigenous Elders and other Knowledge Holders storied accounts of experience:

> For Indigenous people, the conduit for both learning and healing is the narrated past and the ways that their ancestors' relations with animals and plants merge into the present reality. Everything has a story connected to it that explains what it was before it arrived at the present moment. Creation stories affirm both the deeds of ancestors and the points of reference on the landscape. The land is alive and meaningful by reference to a past that affirms relations between humans and the natural world. (Marker, 2006, p. 492)

[7] This includes small statements such as "all my relations," when they move beyond performative salve to a way-of-knowing -and-being in relation:

> In a general way, their [First Nations'] epistemological framework is developed from this sense of an animated landscape. Plants and animals are spoken of as teachers and healers. The familiar pan-Indian benediction, 'all my relations', is meant to affirm the personhood of animals, plants and even stones. It is a profound acknowledgment of an interdependency that is both physical and spiritual. Human beings, in this context, have a relationship to particular animals and to specific places. (Marker, 2000a, p. 82)

In "There is no Place of Nature; Only the Nature of Place," Marker (2018) critically[8] and attentively listens to Elders from the Coast Salish region who were recorded in the 1960s and 1970s for the ways in which they articulate "the structure of a vibrant conscious geography in the efforts to transport the listener to an actual experience of *being* on the land" (p. 456, emphasis in original). For example, Marker highlights Nooksack Elder Joe Louie's 1973 interview in which he stories what it means to live as a hunter, and particularly what it means to hunt for a ceremonial event such as a funeral. Marker highlights the multidimensional ways "spirit, or metaphysics, appears in conjunction with land and animals" (p. 456) by highlighting that hunting is a way for Louie to contribute to his community in time of need, and to uphold a deeper relational metaphysics extending towards the power of *being in places*: "the ways that animals, as part of a spiritual relationship with humans, will decide to give themselves for human purposes that respect the zone between life and death" (p. 457).

Following Marker's lead: what alluvial possibilities might be rendered possible if we divert our care and attention away from the institution's "proper" objects, which continue to perpetuate relations of extraction and erasure, towards those that sustain Indigenous land?

Engaging Responsibilities

Marker's place is not merely the setting for human events, as in modernist conceptions, but rather anchors the imperatives on humans to enact responsibility and reciprocity towards landscapes and animate others. In the difficult work of illuminating the *realness* of metaphysical understandings of place within academic scholarship, Marker (2011a) asserts, "There is a fundamental difference between a story that places people as coming *to* the land and a story that has people coming *from* the land" (p. 99, emphasis in original). To substantiate these points and examples, Marker frequently draws on scholars who also document Indigenous knowledge systems in relation to place, such as Vine Deloria, Keith Basso, Julie Cruikshank, Keith Carlson, Paul Nadasdy, and the Elders with whom Marker worked at Lummi Nation and elsewhere on Salish territory. Especially in his later work, Marker traces the contours and implications of teaching humans to engage their responsibilities to beings and species with whom they share place. One example he offers is the potlatch ceremony, deeply misunderstood by the European missionaries and colonists who encountered the practices in the 19th century. Marker (2011b) explains, "it was an environmental management system that holistically responded directly to the ecological conditions of the multi-village cosmos to redistribute wealth and avoid both economic and ecological collapse in times of environmental fluctuations" (p. 202). Prohibiting the potlatch in law from 1885 until 1951, the Canadian government could not understand how "vital the ceremonies were for sustaining fisheries, hunting, harvests of crops, and agreements between powerful families who preserved the necessary resources of an entire region" (Marker, 2011b, p. 202). Living well with place then, was, and is, a matter of interrelatedness with the whole, as

[8] Worth noting, Marker (2018) brought "keen interest in … discerning the differentials between the voices and language of the interviewers and the informants" (p. 456) in how he worked with Elders' storied accounts: Marker's work is emblematic of a research stance that is critical and complicit, that recognizes the danger in seeking out spaces of "purity." Rather than evacuating spaces in search of something not yet problematized (which is often how and where problematics become re-entrenched, differently), Marker critically worked within and against structures that have their difficulties already and readily at hand.

called for by Indigenous knowledge systems.

With reference to research, Marker (2018) suggests, "All inquiry, in this cosmology, must begin with an awareness of the interconnectedness of plants, animals, and humans, geologic forms along with the stories that tune and shape cognition of a landscape that is also conscious of human beings" (p. 454). And, conversely, research neglects these relationships and conditions to its own detriment:

> Often, when researchers have gotten it wrong in reporting on an Indigenous community, it was largely because they did not understand the complex social reality entangled with colonialism, the ecological history, and the cosmologies of Indigenous relationships to other-than-human and more-than-human ancestors; in short, they did not understand the deep structure of place-ness. (Marker, 2018, p. 458)

Education in Indigenous frameworks does not segment animals, places, and humans away from each other. Animals are teachers, gifters, and healers (Marker, 2011a, pp. 102-103), and they must be visited in the real places where they live. In the Coast Salish First Salmon Ceremony, Marker (2011a) explains, Salmon People (sic) are honored while stories of the long relationship between salmon and people are told, and thus "salmon are not just a resource… they are integrated into all aspects of the past, present, and future for the Coast Salish people" (p. 103). Contemporary treaty negotiations, land claims, and animal, land, and marine conservation agreements centered on culturally important species demonstrate that Indigenous knowledges are oriented to conveying the responsibilities of humans to other species that have sustained them over time. If education, particularly history education, can acknowledge these distinctions and shift in its epistemological rigidness, then,

> …we can begin to see the land and the flow of stories from the land as part of a past that carries us on a common journey, the way Indigenous people view history may help schools reconfigure our relationships to the ecologies of our communities and revise our thinking about how to live sustainably in the future. (Marker, 2011a, p. 111)

Flood plains, alluvial fans, or alluvium deposits may offer generative places for human food production and other high-yield needs, but for too long this anthropocentrism has overshadowed human responsibilities towards the rivers, landforms, and other species. Education, therefore, must engage human responsibilities using an approach that "swirls both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems around each other" (Marker, 2019a, p. 503).

Nurturing Spirits

Marker's framing of place extends beyond human and other-than-humans: Indigenous ways-of-living-in-place are inherently spiritual in character as well. While his scholarship has always pointed towards the "sacredness of place" (Marker, 2019a), making space for Indigenous spirituality in spaces simultaneously marked by anti-Indigenous racism and secularism provokes its own series of challenges. It is perhaps for this reason that across his scholarship, Marker was always pushing at the edges of what could be said and done in terms of spirit(s), to respond to and produce particular alluvial mixtures at the intersection of Indigenous place-thought and colonial institutions. Notably, we read this across Marker's scholarship as moving from discussing the sacredness of Indigenous knowledge (e.g., 2004a, 2006), to spiritual practices and

ritual (e.g., 2011b), to speaking to the more-than-human spirits themselves (e.g., 2018).

Particularly, Marker's (2006) "After the Makah Whale Hunt" highlights the challenges of transforming this alluvial encounter into a site of possibility. Following the hunt of a gray whale off the Washington coast by the Makah tribe on May 17th 1999, the white settler community's racism towards Indigenous peoples of the area crested, exacerbating already present tensions (e.g., "special" fishing rights of the Puget Sound tribes), all-the-while intensifying the masking of settler colonial complicities: "teachers, administrators, and other members of the White community argued vociferously that they were not being racist against Indians but were merely disputing the 'special' rights of tribal people" (Marker, 2006, p. 485). This had real and immediate consequences for Indigenous students in schools in the area (e.g., bullying and mistreatment). When a Makah parent and knowledge holder offered to speak to school children about the traditional practice which surrounded whale hunting, numerous white settler parents protested. Marker explains, this conflict exceeds environmental conservation debates, as well as the failure to forcefully translate Indigenous ecologies of relations into settler lifeways, turning them into "fraudulent models for ecologically sustainable lifeways" (p. 484) – white parents were up-in-arms on the basis that this presentation was "religious" in character rather than "scientific." Marker makes explicitly clear here that "because the schools privilege a form of knowledge that presumes the cultural neutrality of science and technology, [I]ndigenous ecological understandings are dismissed as exotic, but irrelevant, distraction" (p. 483) – "spirituality" operates as a colonial-state-sanctioned criteria under which Indigeneity can be refused at the door even amidst educational policy reform pointing towards diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism. Taking the Indigenous sacredness of place seriously, on its own terms continues to pose a particular challenge for Western institutions as "spiritual substance is infused in all [traditional Indigenous] processes of knowledge acquisition and application" (2011b, p. 199).

In continuing to labor through this forceful and consequential failure of translation, Marker's later scholarship works within and against an anthropological tradition of documenting and describing Indigenous spirituality. For example, he identifies that Indigenous place-stories "contain messages that challenge modernity and ask Aboriginal youth to respond to the values of tradition, elder knowledge, and animal and spiritual beings as teachers" (2011b, p. 205) while later making explicit that "in Indigenous cultures, the landscape is more than simply a container for human history. It is the mind of reality shaping the stories of time and space" (2018, p. 453). Perhaps one of the greatest challenges that Marker offers in relation to Western modern understandings of spirituality is that spirits themselves are not transcendental beings, but rather co-exist, in and only in particular places: "place itself is saturated with energy forms that exist only in the dimension of that landscape" (2018, p. 456). Attending to the excessive flows of spirituality in the alluvial zone certainly brings about its own register of complexities and complications, but also its own possibilities; but it is always "spirited" in both senses of the word!

Confronting Place Refusals

Marker's conceptual choices constantly return his reader's attention to the difficulty of working

at the interface of Western and Indigenous knowledges. As such, we suggest the verb "confronting" to summarize this dimension of Marker's place-focused scholarship. Indeed, in the alluvial zone there is beauty – imagine the rushing in and out of the water on a particularly high tide – but there is also a *grind* between elements as landforms change. The flows of water against rock, and rock against rock, are uneven, and by design. Reviewing the titles of Marker's published works demonstrates this: uncertainty, clash, racism/racist, struggle, change, violence, invasions, and disquieting. Calling out the academy's refusal to acknowledge Indigenous place consciousness, and illuminating the consequent racist exclusions and colonizations experienced by Indigenous knowledges and community members, could be said to be Marker's purpose in teaching, research, and service.

A pivotal moment in Marker's career was the creation of the Oksale Teacher Education Program at Northwest Indian College on the Lummi Reservation in Washington State (Marker, 2000c, p. 38). During and following the completion of his doctorate at UBC, Marker worked to develop, fund, and direct this teacher education program as an alternative to the degree offered at Woodring College of Education, Western Washington University in nearby Bellingham (Marker, 2000c). In the initial stages of building the program Marker was encouraged to approach Western Washington University administrators in order to explore possibilities for collaboration and accreditation. He was deeply disappointed in the response. In this section we quote directly and extensively from Marker rather than paraphrasing in order to preserve fidelity to his perspective. He says:

> They proved an unfriendly audience. Aside from asserting an inventory of notions about maintaining "standards," they were most unwelcoming to the suggestion that local culture and history were vital aspects to a First Nations approach to teaching and the self-awareness that must accompany teacher training. (Marker, 2000c, p. 40)

Marker (2000c) goes on to argue that the reason for this cool response was that Western Washington University is implicated in "the local history of tensions between Indians [sic] and Whites in the region (Marker, 1999)" and furthermore the Indigenous perspective needed to be "contained and neutralized" because of its "disruptive power as a public narrative, exposing institutional hegemony" (p. 40). Marker (2000c) concludes, "To include this local narrative and analysis as part of a process for decolonizing First Nations teacher education students was seen as both unnatural and incomprehensible to the education department [at Western Washington University]" (p. 40). This demonstrates how his vision for authentic community teacher training was born from conflict, and resistance.

Marker's interest in identifying, confronting, and excoriating such place refusals and their consequences for Indigenous self-determination and survivance within and beyond universities continues in his scholarship over 20+ years (Marker, 2004a; 2006; 2011b; 2019a). He models the confrontation through his methodology of cross-cultural comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous onto-epistemologies broadly speaking, and often specifically in the cross-border comparison of Indigenous experiences with schooling in what is colonially referred to as Canada and the United States. He outlines the consequences for Indigenous graduate students who are seeking greater access to the university (Marker, 2004b; 2019a). In "After the Makah Whale Hunt" Marker (2006) illuminates implications for public schooling. He argues that instead of treating the Eurocentric mainstream idea that *whales cannot be food* as the societal norm,

differing perspectives on and uses of whales could be the subject of respectful cultural comparison: examining different human worldviews over time and in relation to place as *constructed* (Marker, 2006, p. 499). Instead, Indigenous students experience a "daily barrage of epistemic violence," "[t]hey are silenced," "told that the past is dead," and finally, "[t]he local history is rendered irrelevant or useless by a curriculum that is eager to promote 'cyber-global cultural awareness' but not the culture and history of the land that the school is sitting on" (Marker, 2006, p. 496). In the alluvial zone, Marker (2019a) says, "while the sediments unite in one sense, many elements and pieces remain in a suspended colloidal flux, sharing liquid time and space; not fused, but distinct and separate particles" (p. 503). To share time and space and remain distinct, there are, and will be, confrontations and refusals. To insist on the primacy of place in knowledges is no less important in universities than in longhouses.

Conclusion

We are moved by the spiritedness of Michael's work: the care and carefulness to locate the edges of possibility, of intelligibility, within educational discourses, and the force with which he continued to pry open that which closes off Indigenous place-ness from the academy. Marker reminds us that responding adequately to the confrontation, and sometimes gentle mixing, of sediments (knowledges) in the alluvial zone is disorienting. For example, in history classrooms, this will "necessarily entail sacrificing some conventional ways of teaching Canadian history" (Marker, 2011a, p. 111). Much of Marker's work was research-as-advocacy (e.g., Marker, 1998; 2000c; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2006; 2019a), and he would frequently draw on his own, and his students', experiences in the academy to critique institutional, methodological, and onto-epistemological colonialist and racist exclusions and hypocrisies. And now we strive to hear this voice over our shoulders as we work; as we hold space for the complexities and complications of doing the seemingly geologic-in-size work of the alluvial zone. Heeding this call is not just a matter of reminding our colleagues and students of the relevance of Indigenous knowledge, or calling for it as a matter of upholding equity policies in a bid towards exceeding "good intentions." It is a matter of confrontation. It is a matter of power. It is a matter of curricular, epistemic, time and ideological *change*, and for some it will be experienced as *sacrifice*. It was difficult for Michael to do this work of dwelling in the alluvial zone amidst the swirl, trying to keep track of what is what as the water meets with sand, mud, and rock – "working to maneuver through an institutional landscape that is at once an alluvial floodplain and, at the same time, a kind of concrete maze" (2019a, p. 501). This maneuvering took its toll. But, as his students, colleagues and friends, we also could see that it was impossible for him not to do it.

We close this paper with solidarity in mind. We close with the intention to continue to circulate the gift of Michael Marker's scholarship by offering educational scholars a set of questions to engage with the agency of place, as they embark on decolonizing research and teaching in their particular alluvial zones, within their own historical and ideological conditions. They are: To what extent, and how, is the university:

- recognizing local ancestors, and that their Indigenous knowledges come *from* place?
- challenging the primacy of Western knowledges that are simultaneously displaced and rendered universal and place-less?

- practicing Indigenous theory and affirming Indigenous identity through oral traditions, protocol, ceremony, and rituals that confirm long-sustained relationships with sacred lands?
- engaging the relationships and covenants between species in a place over time, as a guide to the responsibilities of humans to each other, and to places and other species, now?
- nurturing the spirits that are located in and of place, and demonstrating an openness to whatever flows from taking metaphysical possibilities of place seriously?
- addressing refusals to acknowledge relationships in and to place as a form of colonial oppression and violence?

Marker (2019a) says, "universities are slow to renovate their ethos", and they "perpetuate an assimilationist supremacy" (p. 502). And yet, he persisted. What else was he to do? And likewise, we will persist. What else are we to do? We close with Marker's voice on this, in a spirit of gratitude, inspiration, and hopefulness:

> If these spaces of paradigm change continue to open and expand, they could catalyze new third spaces of consciousness combining Indigenous and Western knowledge systems as a form of reconciliation. Universities, willing to acknowledge and engage the history of settler state colonialism while supporting Indigenous intellectual priorities could become the sites for a new/old relationship to the natural world. This, as Ellen White offers, is a transformation that takes the 'drifting' university, not away from its purposes, but rather home to deeper purposes and deeper connections. (Marker, 2019a, p. 511)

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