Hunting Buffalo Under the Ground: Encounters in Heritage Management

by © Claire Charlotte Poirier

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Abstract

This dissertation problematizes the notion that 'heritage' is a singular, agreed-upon concept within the context of central Alberta, Canada. Given this region's particular history, geography, and policy-legal framework, the concept of heritage is embedded within networks of relations that take shape through archaeological, ceremonial, and bureaucratic practices, to name a few. By focusing on Plains Cree ceremonialism and the Government of Alberta's strategies for heritage management, this research asks how or in what ways the state's approach to the management of heritage infringes upon Plains Cree ancestral relations that are maintained through ceremony.

For those leading a Plains Cree ceremonial way of life, heritage refers to living relations with land-based entities, which require constant care and nurturance. For the state, heritage applies to tangible sites and materials associated with the land's past inhabitants, which are dispensable in the name of economic progress. As the state implements procedures for the management of heritage, the relations that form Plains Cree ancestral networks come up against the modernist intellectual lineage that informs the state's notions of what heritage is. Even as the state recognizes that local Indigenous people continue to retain a connection to sites and materials defined as heritage, the management of those sites and materials remains under state control. As a result, the state's tendency to commoditize land and resources often becomes prioritized over the ancestral relations maintained through Plains Cree ceremonialism.

This dissertation aims to parse out the master narratives embedded in the state's use of the concept of heritage from how it is used in reference to localized Plains Cree networks in which the landscape itself is an ancestor. Attending to the discord between divergent conceptions of what heritage is and what it does exposes the consequences that come as a result of assuming the concept has only one meaning and opens the way for the lively and active cultivation of Plains Cree ancestral landscapes.

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Chapter One

Introduction

A large meteorite once sat on the east-central plains of Alberta. Commonly known

as the Manitou Stone, for several decades this meteorite has been central to public

concern about the state's control over Indigenous heritage in the province of Alberta. The

Manitou Stone was removed from its resting place by missionaries in the mid-nineteenth

century, and, according to Indigenous prophecies associated with the stone, its removal

led to war, sickness, famine, and death. This meteorite has received consistent media

attention since it was brought to the Royal Alberta Museum in the 1970s, and it continues

to attract controversy for being housed in a government institution despite its centrality to

the health and wellness of Indigenous people.

At an unknown time in the past, the Manitou Stone landed near Iron Creek, close

to the town of Hardisty in east-central Alberta. Based on several historical accounts, the

meteorite is commonly credited with having protected the people of the plains as well as

the buffalo herds that sustained them (Southesk 1875:423; Woolsey 1989:94; Butler

1872:304-305). For generations, "it beckoned hunters, families and bands in a pilgrimage

before and after the buffalo hunt" (Goyette 2004:88). Since the Manitou Stone was

acknowledged as having the power to protect the buffalo herds, and because buffalo were

essential to survival, veneration of the stone was considered a necessity to ensure life on

the plains could continue.

Despite its central role in ceremonial life – or, perhaps, because of it – the

Manitou Stone was taken from its place on a hill overlooking Iron Creek in 1866.

Methodist missionary George McDougall was responsible for its removal (McLeod

1999:75; McDougall 1888:141–142). The stone was hauled 240 kilometres to Victoria

Mission, a settlement northeast of Edmonton House on the North Saskatchewan River.

After it sat outside at Victoria Mission for a number of years, the Manitou Stone was

brought to Victoria College, a Methodist institution in Cobourg, Ontario. When the

College federated with the University of Toronto in 1890, the meteorite was exhibited in

the main hall of the Toronto campus until the early 1950s, at which time it was moved to

the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). The Curator of Geology had initiated an agreement

with Victoria College to have the meteorite on loan at the ROM, where it would be on

display in its newly-revamped geology galleries (Plotkin 2014:157-160). The Manitou

Stone remained at the ROM until 1972, when it was brought back to Alberta. It has been

housed at the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) since that time.

Like many other materials and assemblages commonly identified as heritage in

Alberta, the Manitou Stone is situated at the intersection of overlapping realities, and it

takes shape as entirely different entities within each. That is, the meteorite is

simultaneously configured as a 'historical resource' according to the province's

Historical Resources Act (HRA 2000), and as 'grandfather' within Plains Cree kinship

networks. These distinct entities intersect as the Government of Alberta implements its

legislation for the protection of heritage, or what it defines as 'historical resources'. I

examine the points of intersection where sites and materials defined by the provincial

government as 'historical resources' are also ancestral relatives for local Plains Cree

people.

As 'grandfather', the Manitou Stone is integral to fostering and strengthening the

relations that are maintained through ceremony. Plains Cree ceremonial kinship is bound

by *wakohtowin*[1], the inherent relatedness among all beings. As a law that governs relations, *wakohtowin* obligates humans to treat ancestral beings and landscapes according to specific ceremonial protocols – patterned actions and behaviours that continuously work to renew relations with other-than-human entities. As a 'historical resource', the Manitou Stone, as well as other assemblages I address in later chapters, are embedded in what I refer to as Alberta's 'heritage management framework'. By this I mean the policies and procedures that are currently in place to implement the province's heritage legislation. Heritage legislation applies provincially in Canada, and was implemented throughout the provinces during the 1970s and 1980s to address concerns that archaeological materials and historic structures were not being adequately protected. Heritage legislation obligates government and industry to abide by certain standards when engaged in infrastructural, residential, or commercial development.

When the Manitou Stone is singularized as only one entity, this obscures radical difference. The problem here is one of equivocation, or "the referential alterity between homonymic concepts" (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 7). Equivocations occur as radically different concepts that go by the same name come into contact. As translations take place between divergent concepts, interlocutors may not realize that they are using the same word to talk about completely different things. Left uncontrolled, equivocations can cause the erasure of radical difference: as the differences between divergent concepts are played

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[1] A note on the use of Cree terms: although I frequently reference Cree ceremonial principles, particularly in Chapter Five, my use of Cree words throughout this text is quite minimal. This is simply due to the lack of time I had available to invest in making formal requests to use Cree terms in my written work. Cree terms that describe ceremonial principles carry the potency of ceremonial teachings, and therefore, obtaining those terms requires that formal protocols be carried out. I hope to delve deeper into learning Cree terms that describe ceremonial principles in future work.

down, the distinction between those concepts is invisibilized. Uncontrolled equivocations "can be said to occur whenever differences between discordant exteriorities are played down in order to allow them to be subsumed under the category of a universal concept" (Di Giminiani 2013:536). Controlled equivocations, on the other hand, emphasize radical difference by highlighting the discord, and by making clear the divergence between homonymic concepts.

I aim to problematize the notion that 'heritage' is a singular, agreed-upon concept, and instead, attend to the different sets of relations at play as specific assemblages are enacted as both ancestral kin and historical resources. Each of the following chapters focuses on a particular assemblage that is enacted as more than one entity, through Plains Cree ceremonial practices that maintain relations with ancestral beings, and through heritage management practices that implement the *Historical Resources Act*. In each chapter, I hone in on the outcomes that result from the interactions that occur between these different enactments. Similar to the Manitou Stone, the assemblage I focus on in each chapter is central to, and demonstrates the entanglements between, Plains Cree ceremonialism and the Government of Alberta's strategies for heritage management.

A Strange Multiplicity

I deliberately chose to open this dissertation with the example of the Manitou Stone to direct attention at the kind of "discordant exteriorities" Di Giminiani refers to. The Government of Alberta's heritage management framework has the potential to invisibilize the form of radical difference highlighted by the Manitou Stone. My research aims to minimize this risk by attending to the equivocations that permeate the concept of

heritage and its usage in central Alberta. My aim is to parse out the master narratives embedded in the state's use of the concept of heritage from how it is used in reference to localized Plains Cree networks in which the landscape itself is an ancestor. I draw attention to the discord between divergent conceptions of what heritage is and what it does, and expose the consequences that come as a result of the equivocations that permeate its usage. I examine what happens as the relations that form Plains Cree ancestral networks come up against the modernist intellectual lineage that informs the state's notions of what heritage is, and I ask how or in what ways the state's approach to heritage management infringes upon Plains Cree ancestral relations that are maintained through ceremony.

For those leading a Plains Cree ceremonial way of life, heritage refers to living relations with land-based entities. For the state, the concept of heritage applies to tangible sites and materials associated with the land's past inhabitants. However, these different approaches to understanding what heritage is are not given equal footing: the state recognizes that local Indigenous people continue to retain a connection to sites and materials defined as heritage, but the management of heritage is under state control. In categorizing archaeological sites, or materials such as the Manitou Stone, as components of heritage, these sites and materials become subsumed under a concept assumed to be universal. And in so doing, the state's approach to managing what it defines as heritage becomes prioritized over Plains Cree ancestral networks, in which sites and materials are considered living kin. In this dissertation, my aim is to problematize the concept of heritage in order to prevent Plains Cree ancestral networks from being invisibilized as a result of the state's presumed authority over, and approaches to, heritage management.

While heritage is a central theme to all of the chapters, I also explore the equivocations that permeate other related concepts that came up throughout my research: buffalo, treaty, and sacredness. These main themes came to the fore as I began to investigate how the notion of heritage has been shaped by Alberta's history, geography, and policy-legal framework. Here I describe the interconnections between these main themes – buffalo, treaty, and sacredness – in order to lay a foundation for later chapters.

My initial inquiry into the equivocations that permeate the concept of heritage in central Alberta lead me directly to the buffalo. Having lived on the plains in massive herds up until the 1850s, buffalo had been the primary means of survival for Indigenous people. Buffalo take shape in very different ways in Plains Cree territorial landscapes and in the state's approaches to the management of heritage. In Plains Cree ancestral networks, the buffalo spirit, *Paskwawimostos*, or *Mostos* for short, is approached as kin, and is never separated from the life-giving relations that are sustained through ceremony. For those who adhere to a Plains Cree ceremonial way of life, humans must uphold obligations to *Mostos* by ensuring relations among networks of human and non-human kin are maintained. This illustrates the necessity, from a ceremonial perspective, to treat sites and materials associated with *Mostos* as living ancestors, even as the state defines these sites and materials as heritage.

For the state, buffalo is a different entity altogether than *Mostos*. Buffalo remains and remnants of the buffalo hunt are replete in the landscape of central Alberta, and are regularly encountered as infrastructural and industrial development takes place. The material remnants of buffalo are viewed by the state via a modernist intellectual lineage

that separates those remains from the lively agential networks in which *Mostos* is a living entity. It is through this separation that the state comes to define sites and materials associated with buffalo/*Mostos* as components of heritage. Throughout the following chapters I use the double term buffalo/*Mostos* analytically to refer to instances where the relational networks in which both buffalo and *Mostos* are embedded intersect. In these instances, the relational networks are so deeply enmeshed it is impossible to separate them. Alternately, I use the terms separately when I intend to refer to the separate sets of relations in instances where the entities buffalo and *Mostos* are most distinct.

Once defined as heritage by the state, material remnants of the buffalo hunt become subject to regulated procedures for heritage management. These procedures are in place to deal with archaeological materials encountered during infrastructural and industrial development projects, which often operate to support extraction of what the state defines as natural resources, such as lumber or crude oil. In defining archaeological materials as cultural or historical resources, this naturalizes the assumption that these materials should also be removed from the ground. In this way, sites and materials associated with buffalo come to be defined as a kind of resource by the state. At this point, the distinction I am attending to should be clear: buffalo-as-resource is a radical divergence from *Mostos*-as-kin.

Although the terms buffalo and *Mostos* refer to fundamentally different entities, these entities are also deeply entangled and there is not always a clear distinction between them. In general, I use the term buffalo to refer to the biological organism or historical entity that once resided on the plains in vast herds, and *Mostos* to refer to the buffalo

spirit that is integral to Plains Cree ancestral networks. However, as my usages throughout the following chapters are much more nuanced than this, I more carefully delineate how I refer to the entangled entities of buffalo and *Mostos* within the context of each chapter. Making the divergences clear is to prevent *Mostos*, the buffalo spirit, from being invisibilized within the state's approaches to heritage management, in which buffalo is construed as a resource.

Treaty is another central theme to my investigation, and I trace the divergence between buffalo-as-resource and *Mostos*-as-kin back to the Treaty Six agreement. Treaty negotiations between representatives of the Queen and Plains Cree leaders took place in 1876. Equivocations permeate the intentions embedded in the Treaty even today, since at the time of the negotiations the different parties had very different understandings of the nature of the agreement. For Plains Cree leaders, the treaty was meant to bind newcomers into existing ancestral networks. These ancestral networks included *Mostos*, and *Mostos* continued to be central to ceremonial life even after the wild buffalo herds had dissipated. The Dominion of Canada (the Queen's successor) understood the treaty to indicate Plains Cree leaders' agreement that their title to the land would be replaced with legally-attainable rights to access the land's resources. The Dominion of Canada viewed buffalo as a form of subsistence that could be replaced by the transition to agriculture, and a century later the Province of Alberta came to define buffalo sites and materials as historical resources under the *Historical Resources Act*. As a result, as I argue in Chapter Three, the different interpretations of the treaty relationship, treaty-as-relations and treaty-as-rights, came to inform the transformation of *Mostos*-as-kin into buffalo-as-resource.

Sacredness is the final central theme of my investigation. Cree speakers commonly refer to sites and materials associated with buffalo/*Mostos* as sacred. Likewise, the state recognizes that sites and materials identified as sacred hold significance to Plains Cree people. However, as with the other main themes I have identified, equivocations often result from the use of the term sacredness, and the distinctions between the divergent concepts or entities commonly referred to as sacred can then be missed. When applied to sites and materials associated with buffalo/*Mostos* in instances where heritage management and ceremonialism intersect, the term sacredness can have the effect of misidentifying the attributes being referred to. While referring to *Mostos* as sacred implies that the entity is integral to Plains Cree kinship networks, if instead referred to as buffalo, the term sacredness may not hold the same intended meaning. As a result, the kinds of relations that are being referred to may be misidentified. In general, I take references to buffalo as primarily secular and historical, and references to *Mostos* as inherently embedded in Plains Cree ancestral networks.

Equivocations permeate the interconnected concepts of heritage, buffalo, treaty, and sacredness, as the land in central Alberta is approached as both commodified resource and ancestral kin. On a broader scale, the intersections between heritage management and ceremonialism are encounters between different realities that rest on competing ontological principles.

Governance of the Prior and Science of Dwelling

As the state implements its heritage management procedures, these procedures can interfere, or align with, the obligations of Indigenous peoples to tend to kin relations. When the state's heritage management procedures interfere with those obligations, controversy can ensue. To draw out the broader power dynamics at play in these sorts of interactions and controversies, I turn to the work of Elizabeth Povinelli. In attending to forms of radical difference that emerge in encounters between Indigenous people and state institutions, Povinelli identifies those qualities or practices that are situated beyond the limits of what the state can formally recognize as fundamental to Indigenous ancestral lifeways (1995; 2002). Specifically, I draw on Povinelli's framing of the *governance of the prior* and the *science of dwelling* (2011a; 2011b) as exemplifying the formation of power evident in the interactions between Alberta's heritage management framework and Plains Cree ceremonialism.

As Povinelli (2011a) argues, Indigenous peoples' challenges to settler states' assertions of territorial sovereignty are not merely confrontations between equal and opposing sovereignties. Rather, since the modern form of nation-state sovereignty depends on the figure of an Indigenous, or prior, person to make those very assertions, claims emerging from that figure's priorness are continually undermined. Povinelli refers to this formation of power, in which the state and the Indigenous do not engage in direct confrontation but are "caught in strategic manoeuvres of temporalization and territorialisation", as the *governance of the prior* (2011a:15-16). To become something otherwise than prior, the state's definitions of what it means to belong must be confronted

through the creation of a new spacing (2011a:22). Elsewhere (2011b), Povinelli refers to this potential new spacing as a *science of dwelling* – a form of relationality that recognizes life as always emerging co-substantially with place. A science of dwelling calls upon a sense of 'immanent obligation' that does not simply arise from an individual's decision to act responsibly within a given environment, but emerges from a deeply embedded political and ethical intuition to act in a way that has little to do with 'choice' (2011b:32-33).

With the influx of a resource economy, the immanent obligations inherent to a Plains Cree dwelling science were drastically disrupted. This directly impacted the ability of humans to uphold their obligations to *Mostos* and other ceremonial beings. With the expansion of the fur trade throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and the enormous popularity of buffalo robes, expansive herds that had once spanned the plains were quickly depleting, and as a result, could no longer be depended on for providing the means of survival. The Plains Cree tribes could no longer hunt buffalo, and, as settlers were encroaching on their land, the chiefs requested that a treaty be made with the Queen. Their requests were deferred until a group of men who worked with CN Rail were in Cree territory to install train rails. The rail workers were in the territory without the Crees' permission, and this violation of Cree territorial authority triggered an agreement to negotiate a treaty (Christensen 2000).

As treaty negotiations were carried out, the Crees were led to believe that the treaty would guarantee that they could continue to live their customary way of life. This, undoubtedly, would have included the ongoing use of ceremonial materials and access to

places where ceremonies took place. However, unlike modern day treaty agreements[2], in 1876 there were no specifications made concerning how the material components of Plains Cree ceremonialism would be dealt with in the treaty agreement. The sites and materials that would later be defined as historical resources were still governed by ceremonial laws, and the category of heritage did not yet exist.

The imposition of a heritage management framework arose from the form of power carried by the governance of the prior. Povinelli argues that the pattern through which the British established colonial rule was to proclaim that the British carried their own laws wherever they went, and thus those laws were immediately enforced in lands 'discovered' and assumed to be uninhabited. The presumption that priorness is the basis of having a 'legitimate claim' to place was maintained in settler states that emerged as a result of British colonialism. This presumption, therefore, "cannot be neutralized or evacuated because it is sewn into the preconditions of the settler state across various levels and domains of social life" (2011a:18). Encounters with Indigenous people, then, posed a major problem to the presumption that prior inhabitants held a rightful claim to a place. The colonial state struggles with the fact that Indigenous peoples were prior inhabitants – it does not want Indigenous people to have rights in place of the newcomers, so it has to create formulas through which that priorness is deactivated as a legitimate claim to sovereignty. Precisely because the colonial state operates on the basis that those

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[2] For example, the Nisga'a Final Agreement, and land claims and treaty process the Nisga'a signed with British Colombia and Canada, includes an entire chapter that deals specifically with "Cultural Artifacts and Heritage": Chapter 17 outlines a process for the expedient return of Nisga'a artifacts from major Canadian museums when requested; custodial arrangements with museums for the continued care of Nisga'a artifacts; protections of Nisga'a heritage sites; and the return of human remains to the Nisga'a Nation (Nisga'a Final Agreement 1999).

who come first have legitimate claims, and because the priorness of Indigenous people is uncontestable, it somehow has to draw that priorness into question. The problem of priorness is dealt with through forms of governing, and the claims of settlers are made valid.

As Povinelli argues, current challenges that Indigenous peoples pose to settler states' sovereignty is doing much more than simply challenging the state's presumed authority over Indigenous lives. They are also "challenging what kinds of entities and relations can be the basis of a sovereign claim; how these kinds of entities territorialize space and time; and subsequent to this, what obligations are incumbent on those who claim to belong to these spacings and temporal orderings" (2011a:15). These sorts of challenges, I argue, are the basis of ceremonial activities that occur at places designated as heritage sites in central Alberta. As an expression of what Povinelli calls a science of dwelling (2011b), Plains Cree ceremonialism enlivens a network of relations among human and non-human agents, and ignores the categorical divisions that define, for the state, what does and what does not count as heritage. Engaging in ceremony at heritage sites strengthens ancestral ties with non-human entities, thereby allowing humans to fulfill their obligations to territorial beings such as *Mostos*.

In a Plains Cree ceremonial way of life, exemplary of Povinelli's science of dwelling, the land is viewed as a living entity and treaty-making is a means of establishing and renewing kinship relations through ceremony. *Mostos* is recognized in terms of kinship relations, and therefore, sites and materials associated with *Mostos* are also approached in terms of kinship. Through the province's heritage management

framework, as one manifestation of Povinelli's governance of the prior, the land is

viewed as a commodity and treaty is a means of allocating rights to resources. Buffalo are

recognized as a resource that can be dealt with archaeologically, and, therefore, sites and

materials associated with buffalo are approached in terms of historical resources.

Interactions between these distinct groupings are not simply about two opposing realities

or sets of practices. Rather, they are complexly entangled and entail a politics that hinges

on competing notions about the kinds of entities that exist, and the forms of agency that

entities carry. Framing the interactions between Plains Cree ceremonialism and Alberta's

heritage management framework in this way allows me to ask fundamental questions

about who or what is being governed, and by what means, as the relations that comprise

Plains Cree ancestral networks actively refuse the parameters imposed by the state's

definitions of heritage.

Methodology

Ethnographic fieldwork for this research was carried out in the predominantly

Plains Cree community of Maskwacis, Alberta, and in other locations throughout the

central part of the province. Located about a hundred kilometers south of Edmonton,

Maskwacis has approximately 7600 residents and is made up of four separate reserves:

Louis Bull, Ermineskin, Samson, and Montana. I spent a total of twelve months living in

Maskwacis – May to November 2012, and May to September 2013 – in order to

accommodate the seasonal timeframe during which both ceremonial activity and

archaeological excavations occur. Ceremonial activity is most active from June until

August, from the onset of summer to the time when most of the medicine harvesting takes place. Likewise, the archaeological field season can only take place during summer and early fall, when the ground is not frozen. While the bulk of ethnographic material in the following chapters has come through these fieldwork seasons, some has also come through my position working at the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM). I was hired by RAM in June of 2015 as Community Engagement Advisor to address many issues related to the museum's holding of sacred ceremonial materials that originated from Plains Cree and closely related communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Because of this, the empirical content of my fieldwork in 2012 and 2013 has been supplemented by my experiences as a museum employee.

The individual whom I refer to as my teacher, a Plains Cree ceremonialist who lives in Maskwacis, plays a prominent role in the following chapters. I first met Mekwan Awâsis in 2005 when I began an internship at Glenbow Museum in Calgary. The curator of ethnology had invited him to develop ceremonial protocol with the institution's large collection of Plains Cree sacred and ceremonial materials. I had come to the museum to learn and assist with that process. It was Mekwan Awâsis' commitment to leading a ceremonial way of life that gave him the authority to carry out this work. He had similarly developed protocols at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now the Canadian Museum of History) in Ottawa with one of his mentors in the early 1990s, and so he came recommended to Glenbow's curators based on that experience. Having studied under a mentor for about twenty years, Mekwan Awâsis lives by the teachings that emerge from a distinctly Plains Cree lineage. He leads a ceremonial way of life that follows the

Sundance, a four-day ceremony held each year at the beginning of summer, and has been holding sweatlodge ceremonies at his residence in Maskwacis for at least thirty years. His work in the museum, as well as his work with youth in local school boards, is focused on creating and re-creating the networks of kin that are maintained through ceremony.

Much of my time on the reserve was spent visiting with my teacher as he told story after story. Sometimes his children or grandchildren would be close by, listening in. Our frequent road trips were also occasions for storytelling, and I heard many teachings on our way to one destination or another. One such destination was Dry Island Buffalo Jump, a buffalo jump site about 150 kilometers southeast of Maskwacis. Overlooking the Red Deer River, this site was designated as a Provincial Park in 1970. Other road trips included Rundle's Mission, a Methodist Mission established in 1847, located about 75 kilometers northwest of Maskwacis, and recognized as a National Historic Monument; the Viking Ribstones, 140 kilometers east of Maskwacis, defined as a Provincial Historic Resource and located just outside the town of Viking; and the Bodo Archaeological Site, a field school centred around a 5000-year-old buffalo pound located close to the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. We went on several medicine-hunting ventures, at times coupled with visits to small towns, including a few small museums located close to the Badlands. I also attended many ceremonies during my time living in Maskwacis, including numerous sweatlodge ceremonies, three Sundances, and a feast to feed the ancestors at an archaeological site. These ceremonies, as well as the road trips, provided empirical context to the teachings Mekwan Awâsis shared with me.

The question of what I would do with these teachings was often at the forefront of my mind. In my hope to contribute to an area of anthropology that engages diverse intellectual lineages symmetrically (Green & Green 2013:21), I attempt to be explicit about how the distinct intellectual lineages of myself and my teacher interact throughout my research inquiry. My working relationship with Mekwan Awâsis is akin to what Marisol de la Cadena refers to as "co-labouring" (de la Cadena 2015:12). In situating my own research inquiry within distinctly academic and ceremonial domains of knowing, my process of co-labouring with Mekwan Awâsis took shape across divergent fields of knowledge. In proposing to do my research with him, I was asking him to help me think through his teaching praxis in order to address a particular set of questions, with the eventual aim of producing a body of academic work. However, since his own praxis was situated well beyond the limits of what academic inquiry generally entails, we were not in symmetric relation to the written material I would produce. That is, his teaching praxis was integral to informing my research inquiry, but the written products of my research would not, in turn, come to inform his praxis. In other words, his willingness to invest time in my learning process showed that he saw my research as a worthwhile endeavor, but, at the same time, he saw the written component of my work as somewhat irrelevant.

By locating precisely where my practices and approaches were meeting his, I attempt to make clear the knowledge hierarchies in which our interchange was embedded. I don't expect to transcend the hierarchies that permeate knowledge interchanges such as the one in which we were engaged, but I can, at least, attempt to disrupt the assumption of onto-epistemic sameness (de la Cadena 2015:16) that would otherwise naturalize an

assumption that this kind of interchange took place in a purely academic domain. If my research inquiry and his teaching praxis were not meeting in the written word, then our co-labouring was taking place at a different register altogether.

To fulfill my desire to co-labour with him, Mekwan Awâsis required that my learning process take shape not within a disciplinary context, but that it be located in a space of active engagement with the living body of teachings passed on to him by his teachers. He and I both knew my research would result in a written dissertation, but he instructed me to leave my research questions behind and to undo the academic conditioning that lead me to formulate those questions to begin with. To aid in this undoing, I was given two tasks. One was to spend time each day walking through the woods just east of his house, listening to the wind, the birds, and the four-legged animals. The other task was to pick peppermint in the swampy meadows adjacent to a shed that housed the sweatlodge. The peppermint I picked would accumulate for a few days at a time, and then be tucked into the willow branches at the top of the sweatlodge structure just prior to a ceremony. I tended to these tasks every day, and gradually my perception started to shift. I became more aware of the wind's patterns, and of the permeations of peppermint scent that lingered for days after a sweatlodge ceremony. My attention gradually became less focused on written language and the spoken word, and more attuned to my immediate surroundings.

This is the domain in which our co-labouring took place. During my fieldwork, I put constant effort into relinquishing my ingrained habits of academic thinking, a relinquishment that was essential to allow for an occasional meeting of minds between

myself and Mekwan Awâsis. He regularly reminded me that as long as I was diligent and consistent with the tasks I had been assigned, I would reap the benefits. But things were not always so harmonious, and divergences between my academic inquiry and his teaching praxis were often apparent during the time I spent with him. At times, he would draw attention to these divergences by adeptly pointing to the epistemological disparity between his mode of teaching and my engrained mode of academic learning. As his student, he would give me a starting point and then leave me dangling, thereby forcing me to wrestle with ambiguous outcomes. I, on the other hand, habitually expected clear and straightforward responses to my inquiries (as much as I wanted to believe I had already undone this habit). In the most potent teaching moments throughout my fieldwork, he would point directly to this disparity to reveal the complete ineptitude of an academic framework to contain the teachings central to a ceremonial way of life. A regular refrain emerged in the moments just after he had shared a story with me. I would be sitting next to him, silently struggling to take in whatever I had just heard. Then he would look at me, one eyebrow slightly raised, and jokingly say, "Put *that* in your book." The point was always abundantly clear: my writing would never contain even a tiny portion of the teachings he would share with me, and, further to that, my dissertation would take shape in a different domain entirely than the one in which I was learning.

Post-fieldwork, my writing process then became a way of translating our co-labouring into the written word. Since the written products of my research must be positioned academically, there is an inherent disconnection between our work together and the piece of writing I have produced. As an attempt to make up for this disconnection,

and to balance out the asymmetry of having rendered our co-labouring into the written word, I adopt a distinct tone when recounting the teachings Mekwan Awâsis shared with me, particularly in Chapters Five, Seven, and Eight. Positioning of the self is always central to the ceremonial teachings that I have learned, and this tone reflects the cautious sense of awareness and the receptivity that I had to cultivate in order to receive those teachings. I elaborate on the particularities of this positioning in Chapter Five, where I draw on Lesley Green's "ethics of presence" (2013:355) to situate myself as one responsive being among many others within the living kinship networks that comprise Plains Cree ancestral landscapes. While I recognize this approach doesn't rectify the asymmetry of working across divergent fields of knowledge, my intention is to ensure that in my writing, as much as possible, my teacher and I meet in the same register in which our work together was embedded.

Writing this dissertation has been a process of grappling with the question of how to write to "create a space that… becomes hospitable to different ways of knowing the world" (Green & Green 2013: 5). My intention in writing about the teachings I learned from Mekwan Awâsis is not simply to report on what I witnessed, but to make visible the networks of relations in Plains Cree ancestral landscapes that are invisibilized by state-sanctioned resource management processes. Doing this work involves operating against the master narratives that permeate the heritage sector in Alberta and showing how Plains Cree ways of knowing transcend the limitations of archaeological, curatorial and bureaucratic approaches to the management of materials defined as heritage by the state. I work to problematize the assumption that disciplinary categories carry equivalents to

what Plains Cree ceremonialists are referring to when they speak of heritage, and instead attempt to rely on the Plains Cree categories of being and belonging that bind ancestral networks.

I couldn't do this in isolation, and so I was entirely reliant on what Mekwan Awâsis was willing to share with me to fulfill the academic requirements of my PhD program. But, I kept asking myself, in what ways was I giving back? Was he benefiting from our co-labouring in any way? Over the course of my fieldwork, it gradually came clear to me why he saw my research as an important endeavor, despite its academic underpinnings. As I carried out the off-reserve components of my research, I ventured into other domains, such as talking with heritage administrators in the provincial capital of Edmonton, and working with archaeological consultants in various locations in central Alberta. During these components of my fieldwork I carried my teacher's praxis with me. I was then able to make my own observations about the extent of the divergence between Plains Cree relational engagements with place-based entities, and the state's construal of material heritage (including sites and materials associated with buffalo / *Mostos*) as historical resources.

Throughout the parts of my fieldwork that focused on state-derived definitions of heritage, my aim was to gain familiarity with the ways heritage management processes played out on the ground in central Alberta. I interviewed and held informal discussions with museum curators and other heritage management professionals who work with the provincial government. These meetings took place in cafes and offices in Edmonton, mostly at the Royal Alberta Museum and the Historical Resources Management Branch, a

department of Alberta's Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Through a small archaeological consulting company, I engaged in fieldwork at archaeological dig sites and accompanied CRM archaeologists as they carried out impact assessments for small-scale development projects. I also examined heritage-related policy and legislation, including the *Historical Resources Act*, *Guidelines for Archaeological Permit Holders in Alberta*, *The Government of Alberta's Guidelines on Consultation with First Nations on Land and Resource Management*, and the *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act.*

My interests here were twofold. First, I was interested in learning about the disparities between written heritage management procedures and the ways those procedures unfold in practice. Second, I was seeking out the disjunctures between my teacher's modes of relating with ancestral beings such as *Mostos*, and the state's approaches to managing sites and materials defined as historical resources, particularly those associated with buffalo. I attended to the categories embedded in heritage management policy and legislation, and to how those categories carry modernist assumptions about reality that come to inform heritage-related decision-making processes. My main aim was to understand how these categories and assumptions infringe upon, ignore, or align with the aims of Plains Cree ceremonial practice to sustain relations among human and non-human kin.

Where possible, conversations with heritage professionals focused on the sites and materials associated with buffalo, and the impact these assemblages had on their work. My original aim had been to carry out fieldwork at archaeological sites where bison bones

were present, and to follow the interactions that took place between archaeologists and ceremonialists at these sites. However, these kinds of interactions were not easy to find during my fieldwork. In part, this was due to the provincial government's distinction between the regulated procedures that are in place to manage 'historical resources' such as archaeological sites, on the one hand, and the procedures that intend to facilitate the First Nations consultation process, on the other. It was a surprise to me that these were entirely separate processes, and this put a damper on my expectations for placing direct ethnographic attention at the intersection of archaeological and ceremonial practices. Instead, for the most part, my learning processes took place in entirely separate realms: I learned about ceremonial practices and protocols on the reserve and on fieldtrips with my Cree friends, and I learned about heritage management practices at archaeological sites and in government offices.

There were some exceptions to this. I visited two prominent archaeological sites involving buffalo pounds on daytrips with friends from Maskwacis, and one of those visits involved a ceremonial feast. I was present for a ceremony at the launching of some archaeological work at a construction site in Edmonton. I had discussions with ceremonialists about their interactions with archaeologists, and talked to archaeologists about their experience working with ceremonialists. Since, despite my best efforts, it was more challenging than I had expected to bear witness to the direct interactions between archaeologists and ceremonialists, this dissertation has taken some unexpected twists and turns. Whereas in the beginning I expected the chapters to focus entirely on archaeological approaches to the management of buffalo sites and materials, as my

research unfolded I ended up investigating a variety of sites and assemblages associated with buffalo and attended to the multiple ways buffalo / *Mostos* take shape as ceremonial practices and heritage management procedures intersect.

Buffalo Assemblages

During my fieldwork, when talking to ceremonialists, museum curators, and archaeologists, and in examining archaeological reports, historical texts, and archival documents, a network of buffalo sites started to emerge. These sites span across the prairies and call to mind a precolonial landscape in which innumerable buffalo pervaded every aspect of life. The following chapters chronicle the complexities that have emerged around sites and materials associated with buffalo/*Mostos* since the treaty era as the land and its resources have come increasingly under state control and, more recently, as ceremonies have been undergoing a recent revival in central Alberta.

In Chapter Two, I establish the theoretical framework for my investigation. I draw from three areas of academic literature: ontological anthropology, politics of recognition, and critical approaches to heritage. First, to unsettle normative assumptions about what heritage is, I turn to the work of scholars who draw into question the singularity of reality. In arguing that realities are multiple, these scholars draw attention to the contrasts between the modern ontology, which rests on a clear separation between culture and nature, and numerous relational or non-modern ontolologies, in which such distinctions do not exist. Second, I turn to the work of scholars who challenge the notion that

Canada's past colonial policies of assimilation have been rectified by policies that celebrate liberal pluralism and equality. I draw on the work of these scholars to ask about assumptions that are embedded in the province's heritage-related laws and policies, and what those assumptions imply for the role indigenous peoples can play in heritage-related decisions and processes. Third, I turn to the work of scholars who examine the consequences that come of defining a site or material assemblage as heritage within the context of state-sanctioned heritage management processes.

Chapter Three examines the equivocations that unfold around the concept of treaty, which is essential for understanding later arguments about the problematic framing of heritage as a resource. While treaty, as a means of formal relation-making, continues to enliven territorial kinship through Cree ceremonial practice, for the Alberta government, treaty rights are implemented through regulated procedures for consultation. Treaty-as-rights and treaty-as-relations 'do' buffalo/*Mostos* in very different ways by relying on very different modes of recognizing and designating authority. Treaty-as-relations relies on the mode of customary authority carried through ceremonial law. In this understanding of treaty, *Mostos* is integral to kinship networks which ensure the continuation of life. In contrast, treaty-as-rights relies on a mode of recognition carried through a long lineage of Canadian Aboriginal policy. In this mode of treaty, buffalo is a historical resource that acts as an obstacle to development of the land.

Chapter Four focuses on the concept of sacredness and the equivocations that unfold as a result of the use of this term in dialogues between Indigenous groups and government or industry. I establish the specificity of the network of relations this term

points to when used by Indigenous people, particularly in the context of human-*Mostos* relations. I do this by focusing on the Buffalo Child Stone, a large boulder that had been on the landscape in southern Saskatchewan until it was destroyed by a developer in 1966. I argue that claims about this stone's sacredness are not based on an ostensibly universal understanding of the term, but on a very particular network of relations in which humans, buffalo/*Mostos*, and stone/*asiniy* are made of the same substance and are therefore part of territorial kinship systems.

In Chapter Five I look to a pair of buffalo ribstones that sit outside the town of Viking, Alberta. Buffalo ribstones are an assemblage of quartzite boulders that are carved to appear like the ribcage of a buffalo. There are eight known ribstone sites concentrated around the Sullivan Lake area of Alberta, but only one pair remains in its original location, close to the town of Viking (Fedirchuk 1992:16). Several authors argue that evidence of ceremonial activity at ribstone sites suggests that the boulders played a significant role in protecting *Mostos* (buffalo spirit) and perpetuating buffalo herds for at least several hundred years (Bryan 2005:65; Dempsey 1984:37; Fedirchuk & McCullough 1991:12-13; Ronaghan 1973:10). I look to Plains Cree ceremonial teachings to demonstrate how human-buffalo relations take shape through ceremonial practice, and I show that in this dwelling science, humans are obligated to engage in ceremony so that they can be recognized by ceremonial beings such as *Mostos*. I argue that since the provincial government has protected the Viking ribstone site as a Provincial Historical Resource, it has become a place where ceremonial activity can thrive. In this instance, an

ethic of non-interference is prioritized as the state implements its heritage management framework.

In contrast, Chapter Six focuses on a situation where the heritage management process carries an ethic of total interference. In this chapter I discuss the heritage management process at the Hardisty buffalo pound to show that the concept of 'priorness' gives the province jurisdictional control over archaeological materials. The process for constructing a buffalo pound was taught to humans by ancestral spirits, but in the heritage management rubric buffalo pounds are defined as historical resources. As I discuss further in Chapter Six, the resource paradigm naturalizes the assumption that archaeological materials, defined as historical resources in the province of Alberta, should be removed from the ground to make way for development of natural resources, such as oil and lumber. Once defined as such, archaeological sites and materials are subject to a set of regulated procedures under the province's *Historical Resources Act*. I outline the archaeological process that unfolded at Hardisty buffalo pound in order to show that tensions come as a result of defining buffalo sites as historical resources. Buffalo pounds are simultaneously enacted as archaeological sites and as ancestral knowledge. Because of this tension, the interactions that play out around buffalo pounds have the potential to reveal the extent to which, or whether, indigenous territorial claims hold any weight in the face of the state's presumed sovereignty.

In Chapter Seven I inquire how the Cree law of *wakohtowin*, the governance of good relations, might inform Alberta's approach to repatriation policy. Museum collections contain sacred ceremonial items that pertain to human-buffalo relations.

Alberta has legislation for the repatriation of ceremonial material, the *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act*. However, given that this legislation was developed in a Blackfoot context, I ask whether it can be adapted to suit the circumstance of Plains Cree and related communities. To investigate this question, I turn to the example of a buffalo-hunting bundle that belonged to Chief Poundmaker, a prominent Plains Cree leader at the time of Treaty Six negotiations. I argue that in order to foster good relations within Plains Cree ancestral networks, it is necessary to situate ceremonial materials within the webs of relatedness from which they emerged. The province of Alberta's *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Repatriation Act* provides an opening for *wakohtowin* to be strengthened.

In Chapter Eight I conclude by focusing on the intersection of archaeological and ceremonial domains as heritage management procedures play out. I ask how four-directions teachings can disrupt state-sanctioned notions of what heritage is, and instead promote the kind of relational ethic cultivated in ceremony. I look to specific examples from my fieldwork to show that despite the divergent categories and world-making practices that comprise archaeological and ceremonial domains respectively, finding a useful sameness allows for the possibility of effective collaboration across these domains. I finish with a story from my fieldwork that shows *Mostos* is not a passive remnant of a historical past, but is an active, lively entity that continues to participate in the recurrent relations that make up Plains Cree kinship networks.

Rather than building cumulatively, these chapters are constructed in such a way that each one independently illustrates my main argument – that equivocations

permeating the heritage management process have varying impacts on the relational

networks that enliven Plains Cree ancestral landscapes. Each chapter stands on its own to

demonstrate one iteration of the equivocations that culminate around the concepts of

heritage, buffalo/*Mostos*, treaty, and sacredness so that by the final chapter, the reader can

look back to see a rich tapestry of entangled relations.

"There is, really, no such thing as heritage."

Laura Jane Smith 2006:11

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

The concept of heritage is subject to scrutiny by Indigenous peoples and academics alike. Laura Jane Smith argues that heritage is accompanied by a hegemonic discourse that undermines alternative conceptualizations of what the term might mean. Heritage, Smith suggests, is a set of practices "involved in the construction and regulation of a range of values and understandings." This set of practices, coupled with assumptions about the superiority of expert-based knowledge held by heritage professionals, obscures the arbitrary boundaries that tend to get drawn around the concept and what it entails. The result, Smith argues, is a naturalization of an 'authorized heritage discourse' which comes to discount alternative understandings of the concept (Smith 2006:11). Smith continues:

> The practice of heritage may be defined as the management and conservation
> protocols, techniques and procedures that heritage managers, archaeologists,
> architects, museum curators and other experts undertake. . . These practices, as
> well as the meaning of the material 'things' of heritage, are constituted by the
> discourses that simultaneously reflect these practices while also constructing
> them.

Throughout this dissertation, I attend to the ways heritage-in-practice interacts with Plains Cree ceremonialism, and track the ways, or the extent to which, Alberta's heritage management framework governs human/non-human relations in Plains Cree traditional territory. Since sites and materials associated with buffalo/*Mostos* are commonly defined as components of 'heritage', particular material assemblages that pertain to buffalo/*Mostos* provide a strong empirical basis for this investigation. My examination focuses on how human-*Mostos* relations play out as Plains Cree ancestral landscapes – in which relations with *Mostos* are active and ongoing – interact with the state's modes of managing sites and materials associated with buffalo – deemed components of 'heritage' according to the state's definitions. Plains Cree ceremonialism and Alberta's heritage management process hold fundamentally different assumptions about the kinds of beings that exist, and I explore what happens as these different realities interact. In this chapter, I provide a theoretical foundation for this exploration, and in the remaining chapters I follow the interrelationship between heritage management and ceremonial practices as they interact around particular buffalo/*Mostos* sites and materials in central Alberta.

There are many assumptions inherent to the notion that there is a material, tangible category known as 'heritage' that can be managed, mitigated or salvaged through state-sanctioned regulated procedures. The process whereby places and objects become defined as heritage inserts those material assemblages into particular state structures that operationalize assumptions about the kinds of relations that can exist between human and

other-than-human entities. While humans are assumed to have agency, the places, structures and objects defined as heritage are assumed by the state to be passive, inert and in need of a 'management strategy' when they are encountered as the landscape is developed.

In framing material heritage within the expert-based paradigm of an authorized heritage discourse, heritage becomes defined in modernist terms that don't correspond to the mode of apprehending reality that gave rise to Indigenous ancestral places to begin with. Indigenous ancestral landscapes are constituted by webs of kinship that encompass numerous kinds of entities. The state frames these entities as components of heritage and labels them as 'historical resources' or 'archaeological resources'. As a result, ancestral landscapes come to be situated within fields of practice that are inherently linked to extraction and profit. The implications of the state's tendency to define aspects of Indigenous kinship networks as heritage are far from inane – rather, the effects can be far-reaching as they invisiblize those networks and discount the active and ongoing relations that take place within them.

I draw from three areas of literature in order to situate my investigation in current academic debates: ontological anthropology, Indigenous-state relations and the politics of recognition, and critical approaches to heritage studies. My aim is to provide a foundation from which to approach questions such as: What results from the state's recognition of Indigenous heritage? How do Indigenous-state relations play out as the state makes overtures for respect and inclusion around heritage issues? In what ways are these overtures effective, and in what ways are they damaging?

The 'Ontological Turn'

In anthropology, the turn to ontology is commonly associated with leaving the 'culture' concept behind in order to recognize the existence of multiple worlds in which relations among humans and non-humans can take shape in unexpected ways (Carrithers et al 2010). A parallel turn to ontology has been playing out in Science and Technology Studies or STS (Gad et al 2015). There are many contrasts between the two versions of the ontological turn. As Mario Blaser (2014) explains, the ontological turn in anthropology places an emphasis on alterity and brings a politics concerned with making the otherwise visible. Meanwhile, the ontological turn in STS places an emphasis on enactment and brings a politics concerned with how realities are shaped into one form or another. In my own work, I draw from both strands of the ontological turn in order to focus on the ways different realities are enacted through practices, and to illuminate unexpected relations that might go unnoticed by state actors.

The turn towards 'the ontological' in the social sciences marks a shift in the way 'difference' is conceived, which has immense implications for taking anthropology's 'others' and their difference seriously (see Alberti & Marshall 2009:344; Latour 2005:23; Poirier 2008:83; Povinelli 2002:253; Zedeño 2009:408). This shift has been occurring, according to Candea (in Carrithers et al 2010), due to the suspicion that cultural difference is not enough:

. . . the notion of cultural difference has been brought into general circulation,

reduced to a mere representational game, shown to be subservient to the needs of

identity politics. As a result it has suffered severe deflation as a term to point to

actual difference.

<div align="right">Carrithers et al 2010:175</div>

Underlying the 'culture' model for understanding difference, which relies on the
assumption that there is one universal 'nature' and many 'cultures', is the understanding
that 'cultures' are merely different representations of the same unifying reality. Inherent to
this line of reasoning is the notion that 'cultural beliefs' are nothing more than imaginary
projections set against a backdrop of a singular 'nature'. The move to ontology in both
anthropology and STS shifts the types of arguments that can be made: instead of attributing
'belief' to cultural difference, arguments about ontological difference acknowledge there to
be multiple realities or many worlds.

This line of argumentation in the multiple worlds approach to ontology builds on
the work of STS scholar Bruno Latour (1993; 2005), which shows that the two strands of
the ontological turn have been in dialogue for quite some time, even as they developed
along separate trajectories. Latour (1993) identifies "Two Great Divides" that have come
as a result of post-Enlightenment scientific reason. The first Great Divide shows how 'we',
the moderns, separate nature from culture. The second Great Divide separates 'us' from
'them' - the non-moderns - who don't have the capability of separating culture from nature
and therefore live in what 'we' identify as a state of nature. Following Latour's argument
one step further, the modernist mindset enforces a stance of bipurification in which the

purity of 'culture', the domain of humans, is entirely separate and distinct from the purity of 'nature', the domain of non-humans (1993:29-32). Here, in what can be referred to as a 'modern ontology', the constructed polarities are seemingly endless: us / them; culture / nature; human / thing; subject / object; mind / matter; belief / reason, and so on.

A number of social anthropologists argue that disputes between Indigenous people and modern states or institutions are profoundly impacted by unrecognized ontological differences. Conflicts resulting from these differences are particularly evident in instances of resource co-management, where that which is being managed, such as parklands, hunting territories, or particular landforms, sit at the centre of multiple overlapping realities (Clammer et al. 2004; de la Cadena 2010; Blaser 2009; Cruikshank 2005). Of particular interest to me is the work of scholars who examine how assumptions about reality that rest on a nature / culture distinction take shape in the management strategies of what the state refers to as 'material heritage' or 'cultural resources'. This includes scholars who work in fields such as archaeology (Olsen 2007; Whitmoor 2007; Alberti & Marshall 2009), museum curatorship and repatriation (Zedeño 2009; Noble 2002; Kakaliouras 2012), and critical approaches to heritage (Harrison 2015; Waterton & Watson 2013).

Despite the strengths of the many worlds approach, critics argue that it has its weaknesses. As Gad et al (2015) argue, although ontology can be an ethnographic tool that will "enable ethnographers to find 'otherness' and 'alterity' in their fields" (70), critics of the ontological turn in anthropology suggest it relies on a radical form of relativism that presumes worlds to be multiple, singular, and incommensurable (2015:70-71). Gad et al argue further that "anthropological interpretation of ontology becomes problematic when,

in spite of its stated ambitions, it remains predominantly epistemological and culturalist, and thus disinclined to deal seriously with practice and materiality" (Gad et al 2015:74). The risk of relativism is close at hand in the many worlds approach to the ontological turn, where ontologies are primarily accessed via concepts and ideas and are therefore difficult to distinguish from culture and meaning-making. As Gad et al argue, this risk, which comes as a result of a reliance on *a priori* concepts that are taken to classify the world, can be curtailed through the STS approach to ontology in which action is primary and actors are directly engaged in constituting worlds (Gad et al 2015:75-76).

The emphasis on enactment is made apparent in applying the common tool of analysis used by STS scholars. Known as Actor Network Theory or ANT, STS scholars (Latour 2005; Law 2004; Mol 2002) put forward that the tools of ANT can be an effective way to trace relational webs by approaching them as 'networks'. In this sense, networks are made of "the trace left behind by some moving agent" (Latour 2005:132). For Latour, using the word 'actor' brings an intentional ambiguity so that it's never clear who or what is acting. Latour explains "if an actor is said to be an *actor*-network, it is first of all to underline that it represents the major source of uncertainty about the origin of action" (2005:46). In employing the tools of ANT, the analyst makes no a priori assumptions about what qualifies as an actor; instead, the aim of the analyst is only to "retrace the many different worlds actors are elaborating for one another" (2005:49). ANT offers analysts the possibility of following actors themselves, thereby allowing analysts to render worlds that do not rely on the modernist separation between nature and culture.

One of the main tenants of ANT is that reality is not given in the order of things but is always performed or enacted. In putting forward that reality is "historically, culturally and materially located" Annemarie Mol argues, the work of ANT scholars robs reality "of its alleged stable, given, universal character" (1999:75). STS scholars suggest that the conditions of reality are not given, but are enacted through everyday socio-material practices (Mol 2002; Law 2004). In this way, practices are permitted to foreground objects, so, as Mol argues, "objects come into being - and disappear - with the practices in which they are manipulated." And, Mol continues, "since the object of manipulation tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiplies" (2002:5).

Through fieldwork in medical fields, Mol explains, STS scholars have found that a lot of work is done in day-to-day practice to coordinate between versions of reality. With this comes a certain kind of politics:

> The politics, here, is not one of otherness. In a first instance, it is about fights; not between people (a politics of who) but between versions of reality (a politics of what). However, in a second instance, versions of reality that clash at one point turn out to be interdependent a little further along. Ontologies are not exclusive. They allow for interferences, partial connections. Sharing practices.
>
> Mol 2014

I follow Mol's lead by tracing how versions of reality interact not as separate and distinct units, but as always emerging through partial connections. For Marilyn Strathern (2005), there is no such thing as parts and wholes, or "multiplications and divisions of ones" (Strathern 2005:53). Partial connections, as a tool for thinking about relations, cancels the assumption that the alternative to one is many. In disrupting the notion of there being multiple, singular units, the concept of partial connections offers a way of thinking about entities with relations integrally implied (de la Cedena 2015:32). In moving away from the analytical-political dualisms of modernity, the concept of partial connections enables the analysis of how different versions of reality "appear within each other and at the same time remain distinct" (de la Cadena 2015:33).

By "following the actors" (Latour 2005) that swarm around buffalo/*Mostos* sites and materials in the Treaty Six region, I show how these sites and materials take shape through partial connections, that is, how they are always simultaneously enacted as both buffalo and *Mostos*, as both resource and ancestor. In drawing from both strands of the ontological turn, I utilize the tool of ANT to make visible the webs of relations that include *Mostos*. This focus on enactment is a means of making the otherwise visible, and it requires a relinquishing of *a priori* assumptions about how the entities of buffalo and *Mostos* behave. As STS scholars suggest, it can't be assumed that these entities already exist in a certain and definite form, waiting to be noticed. As John Law (2004) argues, methods don't merely *discover* realities, but actually participate in the *making of* those realities (Law 2004:45). In the following chapters, I examine how multiple realities are

enacted through sites and materials associated with buffalo/*Mostos*, and track the interactions that go on between them.

The assumptions about reality that are inherent to the heritage management process are built upon the notion that material culture is significant only because of the meaning humans attribute to it. As Olsen argues, due to the philosophical foundations of the discipline, which has been built on the ideas of philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Rene DesCartes, archaeological thought continues to rely on a "seemingly irretrievable wedge" (Olsen 2007:580) between the human mind and the external world. In this sense, the material components of archaeological or cultural heritage acquire no significance of their own, but can only reflect the meaning that is projected onto it by social actors. While the human mind is active and creative, this line of thinking posits, matter is passive and inert (Olsen 2007; Whitmoor 2007; Shanks 2007). As a result of this imposed wedge between mind and world, other ways of relating to archaeological or cultural heritage, from an archaeological perspective, are often assumed to be nothing more than representational 'beliefs'.

Known as 'historical resources' in the idiom of Alberta's heritage management framework, material heritage is assumed to pertain to the category of 'culture', separate and distinct from the domain of 'nature'. An instance from my fieldwork is illustrative of the point. I was participating in an archaeological dig in Edmonton. After filtering a wheelbarrow-full of excavated dirt through a large mesh screen on a wooden frame, I was left with about a dozen tiny stones – a mixture of smooth, round pebbles and flat, jagged bits of rock. The differences seemed indiscernible at a glance, as all of them were similar

in size – just small enough that they couldn't fit through the mesh screen. But through the lens of 'heritage management', the contrast was stark. The pieces identifiable as debitage, or leftover flakes from stone tool-making, had to be put in clear plastic bags and labelled with the site's borden number[3] and pit quadrant. The small pebbles that were buried amidst those flakes, on the other hand, I could tuck into my pocket and take home. The flakes were categorized as the stuff of 'culture', as revealing evidence of human activity and therefore subject to the state's heritage management process. The pebbles were categorized as the stuff of 'nature', un-manipulated by human hands, and therefore not relevant to the findings of an archaeological dig.

Amongst my Cree friends, I witnessed countless instances where this kind of categorical distinction was entirely absent, when humans treated many kinds of stones, large and small, as living ancestors. One friend had been hearing calls for four years before he learned where it was coming from - a round rock, made slightly oblong by a ridge that went all the way around its centre. When he finally found it, its curved surface was barely poking through the surface of the earth, right between his feet. Another friend told me how he caught a perfectly round stone as it rolled directly towards him, seemingly out of nowhere. Rocks have often been described to me as the "spokesperson" or "messenger" in the relationships that are nurtured through Plains Cree ceremonialism. Stories that circulate through Plains Cree territory reveal the ways stones act as an intermediary between realms, carrying messages from the spirit world, and revealing ancestral teachings to humans

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[3] The Borden System is an archaeological numbering system, used to track archaeological sites and artifacts. Each site in Canada is given a unique identifier made up of numbers and letters, and each artifact is also identified by the site its came from.

through dreams and visions. As I show in the following chapters, stones often reveal how

to activate reciprocal relationships between humans and the buffalo spirit.

The stories I heard from my Cree friends about active relations with rocks stayed

with me as I witnessed how the rigidity of archaeological assumptions informed the

management decisions that take shape around 'heritage' in the province of Alberta. The

nature / culture division is so clear in the heritage management sphere that assumptions

about the categories they engender are taken as matter-of-fact, and are rarely interrogated

on the ground in day-to-day practice. When it comes to pebbles vs. stone flakes, the

categories are air-tight. Nothing can get between these opposed concepts, as one is

understood to exclude the other. Using the tools of STS, archaeological sites are not

confined by units and categories, and the state's notion of 'heritage' as pertaining strictly

to the past is interwoven with active, living relations that comprise Plains Cree

territoriality. When ceremonies take place at archaeological sites, the dualisms that emerge

from the nature / culture distinction are not given any weight. By focusing in at the level of

interacting ontologies I emphasise enactment in the intersection of heritage management

and ceremonialism. Despite the restrictions that come with defining a place or artifact as a

component heritage, relations among entities persist.

The Politics of Recognition

In asking how the notion of heritage takes shape as it is managed by the state, I also

ask about the assumptions that are embedded in the province's heritage-related laws and

policies, and what those assumptions imply for the role Indigenous peoples can play in heritage-related decisions and processes. Heritage management in Alberta relies on – and has emerged from – a long lineage of Aboriginal policy in Canada concerned with the governance of ceremony, land, resources, and Indigenous identities. After a century of explicitly colonial policies aimed at assimilation and cultural erasure, in the 1970s Canada shifted to policies of accommodation and self-determination. These policies entail a politics of recognition which, as I show below, simultaneously claims to satisfy Indigenous peoples' demands for their inherent rights to be acknowledged, and undermines those demands by setting very narrow parameters on what the state will recognize those inherent rights to be. This is what Povinelli terms the "brackets of recognition" (Povinelli 2002). Here, I provide a foundation for later arguments about the ongoing impact of Canada's policies affecting Indigenous peoples, and how those policies impact the kinds of relations Indigenous peoples can have with ancestral landscapes.

Theorists who take a critical approach to the politics of recognition in Canada, the US and Australia challenge the notion that colonial policies of assimilation have been rectified by policies that celebrate liberal pluralism and equality among all citizens. Rather, these authors argue that modes of recognition that claim to live up to liberal ideals of inclusion and accommodation drastically undermine the lived realities of Indigenous populations, and, in so doing, reinforce existing injustices or create new ones (Coulthard 2007, 2014; Alfred 2005; Dennison 2014; Taylor 1997; Tully 1995; Povinelli 2002, 2011).

Scholars who write about the politics of recognition in Canada argue that the form of mutual recognition promulgated by policies of self-determination reproduce the

assimilative processes that Indigenous demands for recognition have sought to eliminate. According to James Tully (1995), this is due, in part, to the form of expression these demands take:

> When, for example, Aboriginal peoples strive for recognition, they are constrained to present their demands in the normative vocabulary available to them. That is, they seek recognition as 'peoples' and 'nations', with 'sovereignty' or a 'right to self determination', even though these terms may distort or misdescribe the claim they would wish to make if it were expressed in their own languages.
>
> Tully 1995:38-39

These very terms, Tully continues, come to define the grounds on which claims for recognition are adjudicated. Claims for recognition, expressed in the language of the state, become normalized as inherently state-derived concepts. As a result, although policies of inclusion are ostensibly implemented to satisfy the demands that Indigenous people have a voice in decision-making processes that affect their traditional territories, the reality is that these policies perpetuate the aims of assimilation under the guise of liberal good intentions (see Povinelli 2002). These modes of recognition, as Indigenous scholars Glen Coulthard (2007:439) and Taiaiake Alfred (2005:104) argue, demonstrate the manner in which

Canada recognizes the collective rights of Indigenous people only insofar as these rights don't draw into question Canada's legal, political and economic sovereignty.

Coulthard refers to the politics of recognition in Canada as "the now expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to reconcile Indigenous claims to nationhood with Crown sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identities in some form of renewed relationship with the Canadian state" (Coulthard 2007: 438-9). In later work, he elaborates:

> . . . in situations where colonial rule does not depend solely on the exercise of state violence, its reproduction instead rests on the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to *identify*, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *nonreciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler state and society.
>
> Coulthard 2014:25

Coulthard echoes Povinelli's position that this mode of recognition requires that, paradoxically, to be granted rights, Indigenous peoples need to demonstrate continuity of ancestral practices and an unbroken temporal connection to their lands, even though this continuity was the very targets of brutal policies of assimilation (Povinelli 2002). Further to that, recognition always has its limits: we will respect and tolerate your traditions and ways of life, as long as your traditions and ways of life don't diverge too far from our own,

or from the parameters of settlers' social norms. The brackets of recognition, Povinelli argues, demand that the forms of difference demonstrated by Indigenous peoples sit comfortably beyond the parameters of settler society, but not so far outside those parameters that they induce a sense of repugnance within settler populations (Povinelli 2002:7-13). For Coulthard, as long as Indigenous peoples *identify with* models of indigeneity and forms of difference that sit inside the brackets of recognition, the state continues to do the work of colonialism.

Alberta's *First Nations Consultation Policy* exemplifies the standards of recognition the above-mentioned theorists point to in their arguments about the failings of liberal policies of inclusion. The consultation policy claims to satisfy the "duty to consult" set out in the 1982 *Constitution Act*, which formally entrenched Aboriginal and treaty rights in Constitutional law. As laid out in the policy, the consultation process is triggered when previously established Aboriginal and treaty rights have the potential to be violated by the province's decisions concerning land and resource management.

Alberta's consultation policy intersects with the province's *Historical Resources Act.* The *HRA* regulates archaeological procedures for dealing with archaeological sites that are encountered during the development process. This set of regulatory procedures is known as Cultural Resource Management or CRM. Where a site is deemed significant enough to warrant protection, or where destruction of a site would be determined to violate previously established Aboriginal or treaty rights, a consultation process may be triggered. This was the case, for example, when the Hardisty buffalo pound was encountered during the preliminary impact assessment for an oil pipeline. But the implementation of a

consultation process does not necessarily indicate that Indigenous people play an equitable role in decision-making. As I show in Chapter Six, the desire for profitable industrial development can sway the regulated procedures affecting heritage sites to prioritize resource extraction over caring for ancestral landscapes.

The manner in which Alberta's consultation policy and the *HRA* intersect may, at first glance, appear to appease Indigenous demands for control over ancestral landscapes. However, as those demands are expressed in the language of the state, modes of recognition become implemented as state-derived concepts that then work to prioritize modernist categories. This can be said of the state's notion of 'heritage', which reinforces the divide between nature and culture by a promoting a human-centric view of the past that values antiquities in the present. As Indigenous territorial relations are redefined as heritage by the state, the policy and legislation framework in place to deal with heritage issues comes to delimit the kinds of relations that can take shape in Indigenous ancestral landscapes. However, despite the constraints imposed by Alberta's heritage management framework, Indigenous people in the province continue to interact with land-based entities and ancestral beings through forms of ceremonial, customary, and natural law (see Borrows 2010). Indigenous peoples across Canada enact a politics of refusal that produces counter-hegemonic outcomes by prioritizing forms of rights understood to flow directly from the land, instead of those that flow from Canada's position as a sovereign authority (Simpson 2014; Feit 2005; Blackburn 2007).

These are the kinds of relations I attend to for the ways that they disallow the state's categories and presumption of sovereignty. I show that in Plains Cree

ceremonialism, human-*Mostos* relations are maintained even as they become bracketed by the state's forms of recognition that are implemented through policy and legislation affecting the heritage management process.

Critical Approaches to Heritage Studies

Authors working in this area of scholarship examine the consequences that come from defining something as heritage within the context of state-sanctioned heritage management processes. An aim of this body of work is to unsettle the presumed authority of disciplinary knowledges – namely archaeological – that inform these processes, and to draw attention to alternative modes of understanding what heritage is. Heritage policy in Alberta tends to reflect a particular definition of reality (see Brattli 2009), reflective of a modern ontology, in which buffalo sites and materials (for instance) are conceived as part of the 'archaeological record', defined as a 'historical resource', and positioned on a scale of 'assessed significance' (see Hamilakis 1999:68; Yellowhorn 2002:49-53; Fowler 1995:85; Smith 2004:105-107). My own interest is in situating these categories, as well as the material aspects of 'heritage' that these categories are assumed to contain, within the areas of scholarship discussed above.

Alberta's heritage management process entails a mode of recognition that aims to accommodate the particular needs of Indigenous people by implementing standards for protection and care of special or sacred places that were created, or inhabited, by their ancestors. However, in defining what counts as heritage, and in compartmentalizing so-

called 'sacred' places into pre-determined categories, the state comes to prescribe the kinds

of relations Indigenous peoples can have with ancestral landscapes. Indigenous heritage

becomes bound by the forms of recognition described above. I turn to scholars working

with critical approaches to heritage studies to understand how heritage takes shape within

those boundaries, and ultimately, how or whether the politics of recognition impinge on the

kinds of relations that can take place among entities in Indigenous kinship networks.

Heritage management processes determine how decisions around heritage-related

issues are made. The most intrusive of these is Cultural Resource Management or CRM.

Having developed as an applied offshoot of processual theory in archaeology, CRM

adheres to the scientific principles of logical positivism, and thus approaches 'heritage' as

quantifiable, fact-based information about the past (Atalay 2006:285; Watkins 2003:277;

Palus et al. 2006:93). As a result of the staunchly positivist stance underlying the

procedures and principles of the archaeological process, CRM most ardently delimits the

kinds of relations that the state can take seriously in a given landscape. Whereas some

approaches to heritage protection entail a strategy of non-interference, CRM is very

invasive. Regulated CRM procedures are implemented in order to mitigate destruction

through all forms of development, such as the construction of roads and infrastructure,

resource extraction, expansion of agricultural operations and urban sprawl. All these

activities involve alteration of the landscape, and, as mandated by the *Historical Resources*

Act, any materials defined in the *Act* as historical resources that are encountered during

these forms of development must be put through the regulated process of Cultural

Resource Management.

CRM emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s out of concern among Indigenous peoples as well as archaeologists that unless salvaged and protected, materials located underground would be destroyed as lands were further developed. As a result, as the remnants of Indigenous ancestral landscapes came to be defined as 'archaeological resources' or 'heritage materials', they also became the responsibility of the state. The process of managing those materials became mandated by law, regulated in policy, and governmentalized through a set of standardized practices (Smith 2001:99-100). Critical scholarship concerned with regulated archaeological practices such as CRM emerged in the 1980s out of reactions against historical and processual archaeological theories, which uncritically prioritize modern belief systems and fail to consider the political implications of disciplinary practice (Palus et al. 2006:85-86). More recent scholarship in critical archaeology points to the increasingly large gap between academic and professional areas of archaeological practice, which has developed due to a lack of analytical engagement with heritage management strategies (Allen 2010:164). According to authors working in this area, the expert-oriented discourse of processual archaeology, when implemented as a tool of government in CRM, naturalizes the management of 'heritage objects' through bureaucratic frameworks. Due to the gap between academic and applied areas of archaeological practice, the values underlying heritage legislation remain largely under-theorized, even as such legislation plays a prominent role in governmentalizing Indigenous identities, and in determining the type of relationship Indigenous peoples can have with the lands they occupy (Yellowhorn 2002:52-54; Smith 2004:36-37; Ross 2010:120-123; Palus et al. 2006:93).

Community and Indigenous archaeologies, as part of academic archaeology's postprocessual movement, reject positivism, encourage multivocality, and allow for collaborative interpretations of the past (Trigger 2006:444-448; Hart 2011:28-29). By undermining the presumed authority of archaeological knowledge, challenging the discipline's methodological and theoretical foundations, and making archaeology responsive to Indigenous needs and perspectives, critically-engaged, collaborative forms of archaeological research have made strides to address many Indigenous criticisms aimed at the discipline (Silliman 2008; Smith 2004; Atalay 2006). The ethics of collaboration have, to some extent, seeped into CRM through advancements in the professional training of archaeologists and through the participation of Indigenous peoples in the CRM process (Hunter 2005; Klassen et al 2009). However, due to the strong theory / practice divide that still permeates the state's approaches to heritage management, CRM remains drastically under-theorized and critical insights into the hegemonic structures inherent in heritage management processes remain almost exclusively external to their implementation (Winter 2013; Witcomb & Buckley 2013; Smith & Campbell 2012; Hutchings & La Salle 2013; 2016).

Due to the increasing prevalence of commercial archaeology – that is, the implementation of archaeological excavations in response to industrial, residential, or other forms of development – CRM has come to play a prominent role in the translation of localized landscapes and ways of life into a global discourse of cultural resources and 'heritage', thereby enabling and fostering archaeological interventions based on the demands and interests of capitalist development. As Shepherd and Haber argue, "to be

archaeologized is to be captured, disciplined, [and] interpolated to a set of global

disciplinary discourses" (2011:108). Although archaeologists are more and more often

called upon to facilitate the interrelationship between the interests of transnational

corporations as well as local territorial and community interests, Shephard and Haber stress

that these facets of CRM remain drastically under-theorized (Shephard & Haber 2011:101,

108). They elaborate:

> We might say that from the point of view of theory in archaeology the effects of
>
> CRM have been decisive, but these express themselves as a kind of anti-theory
>
> which bypasses discussion and articulation and passes directly into practice.
>
> Archaeological practice is now dominated by notions of 'cultural resources',
>
> 'heritage values', 'stakeholders', and by particular (and delimited) notions of
>
> 'community', 'consultation', and 'participation'. The effects of CRM are multiple,
>
> ambiguous, and contested, but it seems likely that the net effect of CRM discourse
>
> has been to domesticate locally situated sites, material cultures, and bodies of
>
> memory and practice to the interests of global capital, and to global and local
>
> elites.
>
> Shepherd & Haber 2011:109

As the formalized discourse on heritage becomes mobilized through the

intermediary role played by commercial archaeologists, modes of determining who has the

authority to speak about heritage-related issues comes to reflect corporate and state interests, which may be at odds with the relations of "bodies of memory and practice" (ibid) that tend to inform Indigenous peoples' relations with the land. Further to that, involvement of Indigenous people in CRM, when taking place under the auspice of collaboration and inclusion (for example, Connaughton et al 2014), arguably reflects liberal modes of recognition that homogenize alterity through a populist vision of nationalist heritage, in the interest of fortifying the public image of multinational corporations and extractive industries with narratives of 'intercultural respect and understanding'.

In critical approaches to heritage studies, authors question the authoritative position of scientific, state-sanctioned heritage management frameworks (Hutchings & La Salle 2013:1) in order to unsettle commonly-held assumptions about what heritage is. Like Waterton and Watson (2013:547), I bring a 'critical imagination' approach to heritage studies, which urges scholars to broaden the scope of approaches that can be used to investigate the concept of heritage and its impacts in both theory and practice. For Waterton and Watson, ANT offers possibilities for this critical imagination. In a relational approach to heritage, they explain "new relationalities that emerge from the uncoupling of action from preexisting cultural contexts shifts the focus of attention onto performativity as a description of the emerging dynamics of subjective engagements with things, space and time" (Waterton & Watson 2013:552).

In following scholars who contribute to critical heritage studies, I intend to unsettle the presumed authority of state-derived definitions of heritage, and instead take up a relational approach to understanding what the concept of heritage is and what it does. This

is in keeping with my methodological aims of remaining open to diverse intellectual lineages. I follow the critical imagination of my teacher, Mekwan Awâsis, to show that human relations with *Mostos* sit beyond the purview of what the state takes heritage to be.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

I will draw on the three areas of scholarship discussed above to examine the main themes I pursue in this dissertation: buffalo/*Mostos*, treaty, and sacredness. In the next chapter I turn to how relations with buffalo and *Mostos* are at play in the different interpretations of treaty. Equivocations come as a result of the divergent understandings of the treaty relationship, and these divergent understandings demonstrate the tensions between governance of the prior and science of dwelling. I will argue that these tensions also reflect the translation of *Mostos*-as-kin into buffalo-as-resource, a translation that ultimately reveals the equivocation that treaty generates.

"We thought that maybe, if you watched how we lived, you might

learn how to live in balance in this territory. The treaties that

gave your family the right to occupy this territory were also an

opportunity for you to learn how to live in this territory."

Johnson quoted in Simpson (2008), in reference to Treaty Six

Chapter 3

Treaty and Territoriality: The Divergence of Buffalo and *Mostos*

The post-confederation treaties, known as the 'numbered treaties', were negotiated between 1871 and 1921 and cover much of what is now Canada, spanning west from Ontario into parts of BC, and extending into the Northwest Territories. Since their signing, the relationship agreed to in these treaties has been a cause of contestation. There continues to be widespread disagreement about the intentions of the different parties that were present at treaty negotiations, and about the fundamental basis of the relationships that were agreed to.

The Treaty Six region extends from the Western border of Alberta to the Eastern border of Saskatchewan, and from the Athabasca River in the North to the Red Deer River in the South. For the Cree leaders present at negotiations for Treaty Six, the treaty relationship was intended as a covenant consecrated through smoking the ceremonial pipe, thereby binding all participants into a network of kinship. Indigenous descendants of those leaders maintain that if their ancestors' intentions in the treaties had been honoured,

they would have continued to lead a customary way of life without interference from Canada's Federal and provincial governments. However, once treaty negotiations were complete, the Queens' representatives – who acted as intermediary negotiators while the Dominion of Canada was in its early stages – interpreted the treaty agreement to imply that indigenous people gave up their title to traditional territories. In this understanding of the treaty relationship, signing the treaty document with an 'X' was taken as a surrender of land and sovereignty.

I approach treaty as a site of equivocation in which these two interpretations of the treaty relationship are deeply entangled. I take this equivocation of Treaty as a manifestation of the tensions between what Povinelli describes as the science of dwelling and the governance of the prior, where each has its own prescription for what it means to live in proper relation with the land and with the kinds of entities inhabiting it. As a result of this equivocation, for Canadian governments treaty is understood to apply to 'rights' to resources, and for Cree descendants it is intended as a means of extending networks of kinship to newcomers.

In this chapter, I explore this tension for what it reveals about how divergent understandings of the treaty relationship came to inform the translation of *Mostos* into heritage. I show that through this logical background, in which the state views treaty as providing Indigenous people with rights to resources, *Mostos* becomes configured as a resource to which certain rights might apply. If treaty-as-rights applies to buffalo-as-heritage, I chart how this diverges from the way that treaty-as-relations applies to *Mostos*-as-kin. After describing the historical period leading up to the Treaty Six agreement in

1876, I discuss Indigenous approaches to treaties as living agreements that are intended to bind relations among many kinds of entities, including the land itself. Then I turn to the Treaty Six era and show that the centrality of Plains Cree relations with buffalo/*Mostos* informed Cree leaders' intentions in treaty-making. Next, I discuss the manner in which Canada (as the Queen's successor) came to define treaty in terms of legal rights to access resources, and how these rights apply to the category of heritage. Finally, I follow the equivocation of buffalo and *Mostos* to show that even as *Mostos* continued to be acknowledged in ceremony, buffalo came to be defined as a historical resource, and as a component of heritage.

Plains Cree and the Buffalo Hunt

The bands of Aboriginal people known today as the Plains Cree or *Nehiyawak*, having only been on the plains since the late 18th century, developed from a branch of Woodland Cree who moved west both in advance of and in association with the fur trade (Mandelbaum 1979:15; St. Germain 2009:23). Prior to moving westward, Cree territory was located in the areas known today as eastern Manitoba and northern Ontario (Mandelbaum 1979:20; Milloy 1990:5). The Cree were the main consumers and merchandisers in the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) fur trade, which was established in 1670 (Christensen 2000:47). Between 1690 and 1740 bands of Cree had easy and direct access to HBC trading posts, so they were situated in an optimal position for establishing trade relationships. As a result of this, these bands played a prominent role in the fur trade as middlemen between the European traders and other Aboriginal bands. Cree would

trade furs with HBC traders for tobacco, guns, ammunition, knives, and other goods, then

they would trade the European goods with Aboriginal people further inland. Trade

relationships made the Cree a very powerful nation. In this highly favourable position, it

was the Cree who decided who would receive European trade goods and who would not.

In pursuit of maintaining this in the fur trade, which also afforded them military control,

bands of Cree gradually moved westward onto the plains (Christiansen 2000:47; Milloy

1990: 16).

A distinctly Plains Cree culture emerged gradually and was clearly identifiable by

the end of the 18th century. According to some historians, bands of Cree first made their

way onto the plains in the 1690s to take advantage of resources in the area, and the

transition to a plains lifestyle didn't happen all at once. Around the year 1730 the Cree

were likely on the plains for only part of the year, spending the rest of their time further

east. By the 1770s they had adapted to the plains well enough to make a buffalo pound,

but they hadn't yet entirely given up the canoe. Having been introduced to horses by the

1750s, these bands had clearly taken on horse ownership, also by the 1770s. With the

westward expansion of the HBC, which was building trading posts along the

Saskatchewan River by the time the Cree had acquired horses, came new opportunities

for Aboriginal people living on the plains. Rather than focusing on fulfilling the European

demand for rare and valuable furs, such as beaver, they were encouraged to hunt buffalo

in order to provide sustenance for the European traders. With this came a new economic

relationship (Mandelbaum 1979:31-33; Milloy 1990:23-27).

The transition from forest to plains was complete by the 1790s, by which time the Plains Cree were completely devoted to hunting buffalo. The reasons for this transition are likely complex and numerous, so it can't be assumed that they were simply pushed west by the influx of Europeans, or that they were merely attempting to satisfy European demands for a new food source. This transition is not easily captured by historical literature, as indigenous voices from the 18th century are largely absent from documented history. Although a definitive argument can't be made about just how Plains Cree kinship networks came to include buffalo through this transition period, it is clear that buffalo did provide for just about their every need to live comfortably on the plains: hides for clothing, bedding, robes, and tipi coverings; spoons and ladles made from horns; sinew for making thread; and a water jug made from the buffalo's stomach just to name a few. Dried buffalo dung, known as "buffalo chips", were used as fire fuel (Jenish 2000:102).

The newly-formed Plains Cree bands of the early 19th century – whose territory at that time spread from southeast Saskatchewan and along the North Saskatchewan River, almost to the Rocky Mountains (St. Germain 2009:23) – came to lead a distinct way of life that differed from that of their Woods Cree relatives. Though their beadwork designs and tipi decorations bear similarities (Milloy 1991:57; Mandelbaum 1979:328), the Woodland Cree and Plains Cree lived in separate social, economic, spiritual and political worlds. In the 19th century there were at least eight major band divisions; each band contained family networks, and several bands were grouped together to form multi-band units. Together these units formed the Plains Cree Nation, and within any one of these units an individual always had many relations and a well-defined place of belonging

(Mandelbaum 1979:9-11; Milloy 1991:57-58). This system was fluid and supple with complete transferability of band membership, allowing for ease of accommodating the population changes derived from war, disease, disaffected band members, and the creation of new bands (Milloy 1990:75). Each band had a war chief to serve in times of emergency, and a civil chief to serve in times of peace (McLeod 1999:83).

For bands of Cree that moved westward onto the plains, the most distinct change was the shift to a buffalo-centred way of life. Existing in bands that were typically much larger than those of their Woodland counterparts, the extended kinship network of the Plains bands became integrated with the presence of vast buffalo herds. As a result, the devotion to buffalo had a profound impact on shaping Plains Cree identity and territoriality. The focus on buffalo meant that daily life was focused on hunting these animals, and Plains Cree bands were creating buffalo pounds – rounded structures used for corralling buffalo for slaughter – until the 1850s (Brink 2008:158).

Increasing encroachment of European settlers brought many changes to the Prairies. The spread of disease, Christian Missionization, and residential schools had severely impacted Indigenous populations, and the influx of a resource economy had an irreversible affect on Indigenous peoples' relationship with the buffalo. A new relationship developed with buffalo herds through the first half of the 19th century, as commercialization of the resource lead to extreme over-production of buffalo robes. This profitable commodity was used, along with theft and acquisition through trade, to purchase wealth in horses. In turn, horse-wealth was needed to hunt and kill more buffalo for the production of even more buffalo robes. Through this frenzy of production, which

Milloy calls the "family factory", the wealth differentials between families in Plains Cree bands became so extreme that the traditional system of economic redistribution couldn't even out the status hierarchy that had developed (Milloy 1991:65).

Between the 1850s and the 1870s it became increasingly apparent that the buffalo herds were disappearing, but the animals were still roaming on patches of the plains. As a result, tribes were drawn into fierce competition as they encroached on one another's land in pursuit of buffalo, which greatly increased tensions between tribes (Milloy 1990:65; St. Germain 2009:23). Even long-time allies such as the Cree and Assiniboine were pitted against one another (Hämäläinen 2003:852). All sides had become so weakened they could no longer survive without entering into a treaty agreement with the Queen's representatives. The Treaty Six agreement was negotiated in 1876. With the passing of the Indian Act also in that year, the Plains Cree became wards of the state and subject to policies intended to assimilate them into mainstream society. The changes brought on by colonization, including the shift to a resource economy and the outlawing of ceremonies (Pettipas 1994), had a devastating impact on the relations of reciprocity that sustained Plains Cree bands since they had moved onto the plains.

Treaty as Territorial Kinship

Many Indigenous scholars argue that for the Indigenous signatories, the numbered treaties were negotiated with Creator as well as the Crown in order to ensure that newcomers would learn how to appropriately relate to that territory and its inhabitants

(Borrows 2010:25; McLeod 2007:27-28; Venne 1997:175). Prior to the treaty era, ceremonial protocols, such as a gift of tobacco, had long been a means of establishing and maintaining peace between tribes (for example, Craft 2013:20). Ritualized interactions such as this were a means of establishing kinship, intended to bind strangers into networks of human and non-human kin. These relations are enacted through "pre-colonial legal orders that govern the way Indigenous nations have and continue to relate with their ancestral lands" (Daigle 2016:259). According to Daigle, these laws emerge directly from the land and are grounded in the understanding that territories are comprised of numerous other-than-human persons with whom reciprocal relations must be maintained (Daigle 2016:261). Below, I further elaborate on what it means to describe these laws as emerging from the land, and what this implies for the Indigenous intentions in treaty-making.

As Simpson (2008) argues, inter-tribal treaties were approached as sacred agreements about how to live respectfully within overlapping territorial boundaries. As a way of establishing peace, reciprocity, and accountability, treaties were solemnized in ceremony and put into practice through the day-to-day sharing of resources. Treaties also initiated trade relationships and solidified inter-tribal alliances (Simpson 2008:29-30). These sacred alliances were not only established between humans. As Simpson suggests, relations with the animal nations are treaty relationships like any other and require careful work through nurturance and the maintenance of mutual obligations. As Simpson explains, "[t]he treaty outlines a relationship that when practiced continually and in perpetuity, maintains peaceful coexistence, respect, and mutual benefit" (Simpson 2008:33-35). The laws and protocols enacted through the treaty relationship establish reciprocal relations not only with human and animal nations, but also with other kinds of

beings that Sheridan and Longboat describe as forms of intelligence that belong to a territory. These entities "interact with each other in ways that continually re-establish and maintain those entities and their recurrent relations" (Sheridan & Longboat 2006:368), so dwelling in a particular territory enlivens a living connection with a sentient landscape (Sheridan & Longboat 2006:367-369). These recurrent relations comprise the immanent obligations inherent to the dwelling science, as described by Povinelli (2011a; 2011b).

Anishinabek legal scholar Borrows (2010) describes three forms of Indigenous law that inform reciprocal relations among humans and ancestral landscapes. Sacred, natural, and customary forms of law are understood to emerge directly from the land, and therefore provide the basis for ethical living within a given territory. Stories are often considered a source of sacred law, since they "contain rules and norms that give guidance about how to live with the world and overcome conflict" (Borrows 2010:25). The implications of these kinds of stories can be far-reaching because they contain instructions on how all beings should relate to a particular territory; that is, how they must conduct themselves without unsettling the balanced relationships among all kinds of beings. For example, Plains Cree creation stories involve Wisahkecahk, a trickster who brought laws that inform relationships among humans, animals, spirits, ancestors, and land formations (Ahenakew 1999).

Other legal principles can be drawn from what Borrows calls natural law. Natural laws flow directly from the consequences of the world's patterns of behaviour. In the Plains Cree ceremonial way of life such laws flow, for example, through the regular cycles of seasons, or from the causal effects of the wind when it blows in a certain

direction. Because territory *is* kinship, natural laws derive from obligations which all beings must uphold.

Finally, Borrows describes customary law as binding participants through patterns of interaction which, through repetition, oblige individuals to act in a particular manner (Borrows 2010:25-29; 51). In Plains Cree ceremonial contexts, customary laws bind humans into particular patterns of interaction with other-than-human entities. These laws form a complex system of ceremonial protocols that inform the process for requesting and sharing information and for engaging in healing practices. These laws also inform how those leading a ceremonial way of life interact with buffalo or *Mostos* at heritage sites.

Taken together, sacred, natural and customary forms of Indigenous law enact the territorial relations that inform Indigenous intentions in treaty-making. A means of establishing connections among peoples who were formally strangers or enemies, treaties became formalized through the smoking of a ceremonial pipe. Pipe smoking and gift giving were common modes of establishing or creating kin within many tribes across North America, and such protocols would be repeated yearly or seasonally to ensure that peaceful relations still existed between parties. According to ceremonial law, in the presence of the pipe everyone has to speak the truth (Luby 2010:214; Venne 1999:188), so ceremony acted as a guarantee that the laws of the territory would not be violated.

The pipe ceremony binds participants into what Plains Cree scholar Walter Lightning (1992) refers to as a process of "mutual thinking". This meeting of minds, Lightning argues, must occur in a ceremony, since it ensures that the conditions for truth are being cultivated. The establishment or renewal of a relationship required that ceremonies be carried out, in order to ensure participants shared a common frame of

mind. Only if the minds meet in the proper way can participants be sure that the parties truly understand each other (Lightning 1992). As an example of Lightning's framework of mutual thinking, I turn to Lakota elder George Sword's explanation of the connections enacted by the pipe, recorded in 1896:

> The spirit that is in the smoke goes with it into the mouth and body and then it comes out and goes upward. When this spirit is in the body, it soothes the spirit of the smoker. When it goes upward, it soothes the God. So the God and the spirit are as friends. When a man smokes a pipe at a ceremony, he should think of that for which he is smoking and then the God will think of the same thing.

Sword continues, in reference to when many men gathered together are passing the pipe in a circle, each taking a puff or two:

> It should be thus passed until all the contents are consumed and then emptied in a fire. The spirit in the smoke will soothe the spirits of all who thus smoke and all will be as friends and think alike.

> Lincoln 1994:2

In a treaty agreement that is consecrated by smoking a pipe, a process of mutual thinking takes shape within the confines of a specific way of approaching 'truth' so that each party ensures the other they will not fail to follow through on their promises. This reciprocity forms the basis of *wakohtowin,* the law of relatedness that binds all beings. Lightning states that those engaged in a ceremonial way of life are obligated to act truthfully, and to uphold the natural and customary laws that ceremonies work to sustain. Ceremonies fulfill the "thick duties" (Sheridan & Longboat 2006) that emerge through continuous engagement with webs of territorial kinship. To uphold these duties is to ensure life can continue. To do otherwise is to violate those laws and fail to uphold one's obligations. This kind of breach can have effects in other spheres of life, meaning that harm can come to individuals who use deception (Lightning 1992:230). He elaborates:

> One cannot reach truth through the vehicle of deception. That is like taking a short cut. Deception in that sense is going against the authority to use something without protocols… When the path itself is part of the ceremony or ritual, you are forced to function within the confines, within the domain, of truth.
>
> Lightning 1992:242

Although Lightning isn't speaking directly to treaty, I draw on the principles he outlines to show that for the intentions of Plains Cree leaders in establishing a treaty relationship, there simply are no shortcuts. Obligations must be upheld by both parties, because the agreement had taken place under the watchful eye of the pipe. Cree intentions in treaty-making encompassed the domain of truth that Lightning points to. He depicts a path that must be closely adhered to, by both parties, in order for a mutually beneficial relationship to emerge. Because the agreement had been consecrated by the pipe, as long as the protocols were strictly upheld, the relationship would continuously satisfy both parties.

Reciprocal relations with buffalo had long been central to survival for Plains Cree bands, and despite the decimation of the wild herds, the duty of humans to uphold their obligations to the buffalo spirit were not relinquished. The centrality of buffalo to laws emerging from the land (see Milloy 1991) indicates that, with the pipe being smoked at treaty negotiations, the buffalo spirit was an active participant in that agreement. And upholding one's obligations in Treaty, understood here as an always-unfolding path that is confined by the parameters of truth-making, is to maintain binding relationships among human and other-than-human entities. Given the centrality of human-buffalo relations in Plains Cree forms of natural law and governance, my intention is to track the divergent forms these relations take as buffalo come to be defined as a 'historical resource'.

In the webs of kinship that are sustained by the law of *wakohtowin*, severing a relationship always comes with repercussions. I ask, do heritage management practices foster good relations? Where do these relations break down, and why? I locate the roots of these questions in the translations that took place during and after the treaty

negotiations, as these were the moments when Cree-*Mostos* relations broke down and the buffalo, the biological organism, hid underground.

The Treaty Six Era

Milloy (1991) suggests that Cree references to "our land" and "our buffalo" (Milloy 1991:62) in speeches throughout and following the treaty era must be understood in reference to Cree cosmology. Drawing on Mandelbaum, an anthropologist who worked with the Plains Cree in the 1930s, Milloy argues that, for the Cree, the buffalo were not only respected as a gift from Creator but were also revered for their centrality to ceremonial life. Buffalo were integral to the Cree sense of territoriality that informed the Cree intentions in treaty, since the ceremonial laws that bind humans and buffalo/*Mostos* in mutually reciprocal relations of life-giving provided the foundation of the intended treaty relationship. To trace the life-giving flows of these recurrent or reciprocal relations is to illuminate the manner in which kinship networks are made and sustained through ceremony. As long as humans fulfilled their duty to buffalo by faithfully and consistently performing ceremonies, the buffalo were likewise obliged to fulfill their "contractual obligations" to humans by providing meat, fur, and skins, and nourishing the ground to grow plant medicines. As Milloy suggests, this indicated "the supposition by the Plains Cree of a guaranteed reciprocity with the Creator that constituted a Cree right to Cree

land and the buffalo..., a reciprocity that might be most appropriately termed. . . a sacred right"[4] (Milloy 1991:62).

Ceremonial protocols had been vital to maintaining peaceful and mutually respectful relations between tribal peoples and Hudson's Bay traders during the fur trade era. These protocols were understood not only to consecrate relations among humans, but also to ensure that Indigenous and newcomer alike were acknowledging their obligations to non-human entities. For the Cree, the expectation was likely that Canada, in some ways perceived as the successor of the Hudson's Bay Company, would adhere to these protocols in acknowledgement of Cree territorial sovereignty (Christiansen 2000:121; Miller 2009:15; St. Germain 2009:45).

The Treaty negotiations began on August 18, 1876, at Fort Carlton and Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, and lasted four days. The treaty signings took place on August 23 at Fort Carlton and on September 9 at Fort Pitt. Alexander Morris, a lawyer who had worked with two of Canada's Prime Ministers, was brought in as the new chief negotiator in 1873. Well experienced in the treaty process, Morris had played a negotiation role in Treaties Three, Four and Five, and was appointed as the primary negotiator for Treaty Six (Miller 2009:165, 167; St. Germain 2009:102). Ceremonies carried out by the Cree with the commencement of treaty talks were reminiscent of the protocols that had been standard practice with HBC fur traders. Upon Morris' arrival to the camps at Fort Carlton,

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[4] Milloy's use of the term 'right' in the context of a 'sacred right' points to the set of relations maintained through the ceremonial pipe, and does not point to the legally-defined 'treaty rights' established by the provincial government.

he was greeted with singing, dancing, and drumming, twenty painted warriors performing

on horseback, and a pipe ceremony, or "dance of the stem", in which a large and

elaborately decorated pipe was raised to the heavens and each of the four cardinal

directions, passed between young Cree men as they danced and chanted, then presented to

Morris, who smoked from the pipe after stroking the pipe's stem several times

(Christiansen 2000:232-235; Miller 2009:177-179).

The participation of Indian Commissioners in these elaborate ceremonies indicates

that for the Indigenous leaders, the spirit and intent of the treaty agreement meant that all

present were speaking the truth about what the treaty relationship would entail, and that

Creator bore witness to the consecration of the agreement. Venne elaborates:

> Smoking the pipe would signify to the Creator the intention of
> the parties to keep the terms of the agreement in a strong and
> binding manner. The Indigenous peoples wanted this treaty to
> last as long as the earth would exist; this is the reason they
> smoked the pipe with the commissioner... It was more than a
> pipe ceremony: it was a solemn undertaking by both sides
> before the Creator that this agreement would last into the
> future... In the face of the Creator, it is not possible for the
> Indigenous peoples to break the agreement undertaken with the
> Crown's representative.

The ceremonies that took place at treaty negotiations enacted the laws of that territory to bind those present into a sacred covenant (Miller 2009). The Plains Cree approach to the treaty relationship was firmly rooted in the assertion of their indigeneity, that is, as having inherent relations with the land and its resources, and the obligation to maintain of their traditional way of life.

As St. Germain explains:

> The Creator had an explicit role in this conviction, investing the Cree perspective with a formidable spiritual component, reflected also in the belief that social, economic, and spiritual conduct must unfold in accordance with Creator-inspired guidelines. Reciprocity and mutual respect were implicit aspects of any relationship conceived within this philosophical framework.
>
> St. Germain 2009:24

According to Cree ceremonial laws, the promises made in the presence of the pipe had to be maintained. Morris was entering a "highly honoured agreement" in putting the pipe to his lips, and by smoking the pipe he was, in effect, sealing the treaty relationship

(McLeod 1999:72-74; Taylor 1985:9). Failure to live up to the truth that was spoken

when the pipe was smoked would result in *pastahowin,* meaning that a breach of sacred

and natural laws would take place (Borrows 2010:85). The laws sustained through the

pipe would be broken, the natural order of the world thrown off balance, and there would

be repercussions.

Plains Cree scholar Neal McLeod (2007) recounts stories his great-grandfather

heard from people who directly witnessed buffalo retreating into the ground in the 1870s

and 1880s, in response to the changes brought on by the treaties. He says his great-

grandfather:

> . . . spoke of how, during those times of upheaval, the buffalo
>
> used to move in their thousands to Redberry Lake… when the ice
>
> was thin. They would inevitable fall through the ice and drown…
>
> This happened because the order of the land had been
>
> transformed: instead of being able to roam freely, the buffalo, like
>
> the Indigenous people, were increasingly confined to smaller and
>
> smaller areas.

McLeod 2007:57

Though the treaties were intended to ensure the Cree could continue their way of life through the transition to agriculture, the Cree intentions in treaty-making were made subservient to the interests of the Canadian government, and the kin relations established through lengthy and elaborate ceremonies at Treaty Six negotiations were not upheld by the Queen's negotiators or by the newcomers who settled on the land. Government officials and missionaries contended that ceremonies were immoral and seriously undermined the aims of assimilation. Introduced in 1895, Section 114 of the Indian Act made some ceremonial practices illegal, and it became the jurisdiction of Indian Agents to monitor ceremonial activity, interrogate participants, and arrest those who were in violation of Section 114 (Pettipas 1994:3, 110-111). As a result, ceremonies were weakened and it was no longer possible for proper relations with buffalo – and therefore with the territory – to be fully maintained. The urgent need for food had overshadowed the need for humans to uphold their obligations to buffalo / *Mostos*, and as a result, those obligation were not upheld. Since the promises made as the pipe was smoked at treaty negotiations were broken, buffalo / *Mostos* became severed from the life-giving flows of reciprocal relations and chose to retreat into the ground.

For those who adhere to the ceremonial way of life in central Alberta, the act of encountering buffalo remains embedded in the earth can't be separated from the causal effect – the failure of humans to uphold their obligations – that is understood to have led the buffalo underground. Although the material remnants of the buffalo hunt commonly become defined in archaeological terms as pertaining to the past, through the dwelling science the obligation to maintain reciprocal relations with entities such as *Mostos* are as

relevant today as they were when buffalo still populated the plains. Since buffalo retreated into the ground as a result of the failure to uphold the relationship agreed to in the treaties, the archaeological process intercepts the active relations between Plains Cree and buffalo-as-kin today. Territory is kinship, and archaeological materials embedded in the earth continue to be inextricably bound with treaty relations.

Treaty as Rights

Across the country, there has been ongoing disagreement concerning the nature of the relationship agreed to in the numbered treaties. As Asch (2014) explains, a common point of contention in these disagreements is that, while Indigenous leaders intended to agree to share the land with newcomers through an ongoing process of establishing relations on principles of mutual benefit and reciprocity, the Crown assumed that the treaties meant Indigenous leaders had ceded the land to European settlers. The government's Indian Commissioners present at negotiations may have intended to honour the mutually beneficial aspects of treaty agreements, but those responsible for their implementation transformed treaty obligations into the parceling of access to different types of resources through Federal policies (Asch 2014:156-157; Goulet 2010). This approach to the 'rights' emanating from treaty relies on the European assumption that land and its resources can be owned and exploited by humans, which altogether missed the Indigenous enactment of treaty as pertaining to a web of kin relations.

If the numbered treaties were intended by the Queens' negotiators to ensure a relationship that would be mutually beneficial, this intention was countered by the passing of the *Indian Act* in 1876. By unilaterally imposing Federal administrative regulations on Canada's Indigenous populations, this colonial piece of legislation and its various amendments came to govern every aspect of Indigenous life and forced Indigenous people into a relationship of dependency with the Canadian state. The *Indian Act* aimed to extinguish traditional modes of governance and demanded that, in order to be recognized, the structure of Indigenous leadership had to mirror that of the Canadian government. This was done through the imposition of the band council system, the only structure of leadership that the Canadian government would agree to formally recognize. Though many Indigenous communities have resisted adoption of colonial forms of governance, the imposition of democratic procedures for determining leadership meant that elected officials gradually replaced the role of the traditional chief and were positioned to represent the interests of the community in negotiations with Federal and Provincial Governments in Canada (Borrows 2010:42-43; Tully 1995:90; Long, Little Bear and Boldt 1984:70).

In 1969, almost a hundred years after passing the *Indian Act*, the Canadian government proposed a policy of assimilation commonly known as *The White Paper*. The policy proposed that the *Indian Act* be abolished, and that Indigenous people be given the same rights and opportunities as everyone else in Canada. The Canadian government would do this by eliminating the centralized bureaucracy of Indian Affairs, removing the delivery of social and other services, and officially ending the legal relationship between

the government and Indigenous people (Long, Little Bear and Boldt 1984:70). The 1969 policy was rejected by Indigenous leadership across the country (see Cardinal 1969) and Canadian Aboriginal policy became recapitulated in terms of mutual recognition, which emphasised a nation-to-nation relationship between First Nations and the Crown (Coulthard 2007:438). At this time, Indigenous leaders began demanding that Canada honour the treaties that had been negotiated a century before.

Treaty rights became enshrined in Section 35(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. This was a major victory for First Nations people in some respects, but also points to the failings of the legal system to account for the kind of relationship Indigenous people have with their territory – a problem that results from the reliance on a policy lineage derived through the categorical separation between nature and culture. Once entrenched in the legal system, Canada came to implement treaties through the legal partitioning of the separate and distinct 'rights' that are taken to apply to different types of resources and to First Nations engagement in subsistence-based activities with those resources. In this understanding of treaty, traditional lands are ceded and replaced by treaty rights, which for the provinces are understood to apply to hunting, fishing, and other subsistence-based activities that are proven ancestral practices. Although there have been many cases across the country where treaty rights are successfully negotiated through, for example, co-management agreements (Feit 2005; Nadasdy 2005), and modern-day treaties (Robinson & Hoffman 2010; Blackburn 2007), the breadth of what exactly constitutes treaty rights continues to be a wide source of contestation.

The scope and content of the numbered treaties has never been clearly defined in Canada, and the definition and implementation of those rights remains erroneous in many parts of the country. For example, Goulet argues that in Dene Tha territory in the Treaty 8 region of Alberta, despite the provincial government's claim to recognize and honour First Nations' treaty rights, the province has consistently allocated the right to the land's sub-surface resources to industry (Goulet 2010:21). Since there are no unilateral principles through which treaty rights may be assumed to apply, they are established on a case-by-case basis through lengthy and arduous court proceedings, and are variously implemented across the country.

The question of what it means for treaty rights to apply in heritage-related contexts can be traced by attending to the legislative decisions that have provided operational mandates with which bodies of government must comply. Significantly, after the 1982 ratification, treaty rights were further defined following landmark decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada in the early- to mid-1990s, through which:

> the Court reaffirmed that it remains the fiduciary obligation of government to establish a process of consultation that provides Aboriginal communities a thorough understanding of the potential impact a policy or project may have on local land use as well as for providing a forum in which Aboriginal communities can respond to government initiatives. Further, the consultation process is to be a 'two-way street' that provides Aboriginal communities a meaningful role in the decision making process.

Since the Court failed to clarify what constitutes 'adequate' consultation – and evaluates consultation requirements on a case-by-case basis – application of the process has been inherently inconsistent and interpreted in various ways by those who carry a legal obligation to consult.

The Canadian provinces hold the duty to consult with Indigenous communities whose treaty rights are potentially affected by development projects. The onus is on provincial governments to uphold *Section 35* treaty rights through a consultation process. In Alberta, this requirement was implemented inconsistently throughout the 1990s (Natcher 2001). Then, in response to a court case that reinforced the province's so-called 'duty to consult' when Indigenous treaty rights were at risk of being violated (Schwartz & Rettie 2006), Alberta implemented a consultation policy in 2005. It was then revamped as The Government of Alberta's Policy on Consultation Policy with First Nations on Land and Resource Management in 2013. In its aim to mediate dialogue between First Nations, government, and industry, the Consultation Policy intends to prevent the violation of Section 35 treaty rights.

Procedures for consultation apply across a number of governmental departments, including the Historical Resources Management Branch, which administers the *Historical Resources Act*. This means that a consultation process might be triggered if Section 35 treaty rights have the potential to be violated by a proposed development project. Embedded in this process is the assumption that buffalo sites are components of heritage, and that they require the state's intervention.

Translating Buffalo into 'Heritage'

The question of whether, or in what way, Section 35 rights apply to historical resources continues to be a difficult one to answer, because of the frequently unnoticed equivocations that continue to beguile both parties. Approaching the treaty relationship in terms of rights discounts the relations that are central to Plains Cree intentions in the treaty, and instead construes land-based entities as resources to which particular bundles of rights might apply. The mistranslations that resulted in defining buffalo/*Mostos* as heritage can, at least in part, be traced back to the equivocations of buffalo and *Mostos* at the time of negotiations.

At the time of treaty negotiations, it was presumed by the Queen's negotiators that the reliance on rapidly depleting buffalo herds would adequately be rectified by the transition to agriculture. This was a tall order to fulfill, since buffalo had provided for every aspect of survival on the plains for millennia, and had been integral to Plains Cree identity, territory, and ceremonial life (Milloy 1991; Mandelbaum 1979). Negotiations in 1876 included assurances that the Cree would be provided with fertile land, agricultural tools, seeds, and instruction necessary to grow enough food to feed each band, who would be provided with reserved lands based on a ratio of one square mile per family of five. They were also promised livestock, a horse and wagon, and provisions of rice and flour during times of famine. Though they were guaranteed the continued right to hunt, trap and fish, support for the transition to agriculture was intended to replace the reliance on buffalo (Miller 2009; Jenish 1999).

Along with this support came the assumption that buffalo had been nothing more than a means of subsistence that could easily be replaced by other food sources. This was a drastic misinterpretation of the role held by buffalo/*Mostos* in Plains Cree cosmology, as it misidentified the kinds of relations that were at stake for Plains Cree leaders at the time of treaty negotiations. As a result of the unnoticed distinction, the divergence between *Mostos*, an entity embedded in a network of ceremonial relations, and buffalo, an entity situated in historical narratives about pre-colonial life on the plains, only continued to grow throughout the 20th century. Even though *Mostos* continued to be central to Plains Cree kinship networks, buffalo gradually came to be redefined in terms of heritage, particularly with the passing of the *Historical Resources Act* in 1973.

In Chapter Six, I examine what comes as a result of defining archaeological materials as 'historical resources' in Alberta. The 'resource paradigm', which I discuss in further detail in Chapter Six (Smith 2004; Yellowhorn 2002), naturalizes the assumption that archaeological materials should be extracted from the ground to make way for industrial development. Archaeological materials connected to *Mostos*-Cree relations came to be translated into 'historical resources' under the *Historical Resources Act*. The *HRA* was passed at a time when Indigenous demands for the recognition of treaty rights were first being articulated. However, it was 1982 before constitutional recognition of treaty rights were firmly established.[5] As a result, there is no direct mention of Indigenous

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[5] Later attempts to develop Federal heritage legislation in the 1990s failed because Indigenous leaders refused to pass off the legal ownership of archaeological materials to the Federal government. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

heritage in the *HRA*, and there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that materials

defined as historical resources are protected in a way that reflects Indigenous interests.

The aim of the province's consultation policy is to mediate dialogue among First

Nations, government, and industry in land and resource development. The Provincial

Government has no requirement for consultation directly associated with the *HRA*, but the

consultation policy follows a triggering process so that a consultation process will be

initiated under specified heritage-related circumstances. If, for example, a substantial

ceremonial site was within the buffer zone of a proposed development project, a

consultation process would be initiated. This involves sending a letter to the consultation

offices of any First Nation whose Section 35 rights have the potential to be violated, with

a short window of time for those First Nations Band Offices to respond with details

regarding the potentially violated rights. What about the obligations of tending to

relations with *Mostos* that is embedded in the ceremonial approach to treaty?

The radical divergence between treaty-as-relations and treaty-as-rights continues

to be a site of tension between First Nations and Canadian bodies of government. The

interrelationship between the depletion of buffalo herds and the need for a treaty

agreement was a common narrative at Treaty Six gatherings I attended in 2015 and 2016[6].

Throughout these gatherings, during which the main topics of conversations were related

to contemporary issues faced by Treaty Six communities, I heard frequent reference to the

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[6] I had the privilege of attending two Treaty Six gatherings, having been invited as an employee of the Royal Alberta Museum in order to meet elders and tell them about my work with the Royal Alberta Museum (described in more detail in Chapter Seven). The first of these gatherings, hosted by the Onion Lake Cree Nation, took place at Fort Pitt, Saskatchewan, in September of 2015. This was an annual commemoration of treaty signing that takes place each year. The second gathering took place at the River Cree Resort and Casino on the Enoch First Nation reserve in January of 2016.

rapid depletion of buffalo herds that had taken place just before the treaties were negotiated. The sentiment underlying these statements was that the Crown, in order to placate Indigenous people and manipulate them into a position of dependency on the state, targeted total annihilation of their sole means of independence and survival. Without the buffalo to depend on, Plains Cree bands had no choice but to enter into a treaty agreement, which led the way to European settlement and the confinement of Indigenous people to reserves.

The material components of 'heritage' are situated within commodified landscapes, and therefore subject to the province's *Historical Resources Act*, and the regulated procedures that implement is. Regardless, as I will show, *Mostos* continues to be central to ceremonial networks for the Cree.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The divergence of buffalo-as-resource from *Mostos*-as-kin can be traced back to the equivocations that permeated the treaty agreement in 1876. *Mostos* was understood by Plains Cree leaders to have participated directly in the treaty agreement, but for the Queen's negotiators, buffalo were viewed merely as a replaceable food source.

Plains Cree intentions in treaty-making were informed by the active participation of the territory in the treaty agreement. The treaty was consecrated through the ceremonial pipe, thereby binding relations not only among humans, but also with non-human beings and the land itself. *Mostos* was central to Cree intentions in treaty, due to the mutual obligations of life-giving and nurturance between humans and *Mostos*. For Plains Cree leaders, smoking the pipe meant the agreement would not be broken and that

the Queen's representatives would become part of an active kinship network. But the Crown failed to fulfill its promises, and those Cree leading a ceremonial way of life could no longer uphold their obligations to *Mostos*. As a result of this failure, *Mostos* hid underground.

Canada's interpretation of the treaty relationship is informed by the assumption that Indigenous signatories agreed to cede the land to European settlers, and reflects a rights-based approach to the land and its resources. Treaty rights became enshrined in the Canadian Constitution in 1982, but since these rights are implemented through the legal partitioning of subsistence-based activities, they are unevenly and inconsistently applied across the country. Due to the ongoing disagreement concerning the nature of the relationship agreed to in the treaties, the question remains as to whether treaty rights can be taken to apply in heritage-related contexts. Although Section 35 rights are constitutionally protected, there continue to be glaring discrepancies between the way First Nations and Provincial bodies of government perceive the application of treaty rights.

The equivocation that equates *Mostos* and buffalo is bound up with the equivocations that permeate the concept of treaty. This equivocation even permeates the notion of 'sacredness' as it applies to sites associated with buffalo/*Mostos*. This is what I turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

This is Not Unstoried Land: Buffalo Child and the Category of Sacredness

In recent years, the political relationship between Canada and First Nations peoples has become increasingly fraught due to the encroachment of state-sanctioned industrial development. Indigenous opposition to industrial development is often expressed as defending the land's 'sacredness'. But claims about the land as sacred can have the unintended effect of drawing the legitimacy of those claims into question. The state doesn't always take at face value that places referred to as 'sacred' are central to the survival of a group of people – not merely as a component of their identity, but as a living relative, integral to the mutual life-giving bonds of kinship. The concept of sacredness is often deployed in an attempt to create common ground for discussion about land-use among Indigenous peoples, levels of Canadian government, and industry. However, the concept is rife with the potential to cause conflict since the term singularizes a multiplicity of concepts, practices, relations, and entities.

This has occurred in instances where buffalo-related sites are encountered in process of development within Plains Cree territory. When reference is made to the sacredness of buffalo sites, what are the implications? Is this a useful category for Plains Cree people to use to communicate the importance of buffalo sites to the province and to industry?

Mistasini means 'Big Rock' in Cree. An enormous boulder located in southeast Saskatchewan[7], which was about 30 feet long and 18 feet high, went by this name. It had long been a place for Cree and Assiniboine people to visit for ceremony, to leave offerings and to fast. It is unsurprising, then, that the destruction of this boulder had a devastating impact on those for whom it had been a living relative. *Mistasini* has certainly not been forgotten, and continues to be called by another name as well. As photos of the Big Rock make clear, it closely resembled a large buffalo, sleeping on prairie grass. And as the story of Buffalo Child goes, this stone was once a man who, after becoming separated from his family as a baby, was raised by buffalo (Waugh & Prithipaul 2006; McLeod 2007). Despite its integrality to Plains Cree kinship networks, *paskwiwiMostos awasis asiniy* or Buffalo Child Stone was reduced to rubble in 1966.

The destruction of Buffalo Child Stone has not obscured its centrality to Plains Cree territoriality. As I demonstrate below, claims about its sacredness emerge from the Cree principle of inherent relatedness, *wakohtowin*, and testify that kinship is not confined to human bloodlines. The story about Buffalo Child evokes as law the inherent relatedness among humans, buffalo/*Mostos*, and rocks. I aim to show that, rather than reflecting a commonly agreed-upon category of what constitutes 'sacredness', Plains Cree

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[7] The content of this chapter is a slight divergence from the rest of the dissertation, since the Buffalo Child Stone was located in the Treaty Four region of Saskatchewan and the other chapters focus on the Treaty Six region of Alberta. Despite the implications of the provincial boundary, I continue to focus on heritage policy in Alberta. Pre-treaty tribal boundaries were always moving and shifting, and as Cree people regularly remind me, these boundaries continue to be set along linguistic lines. Although the imposed borders separate tribes and families through a vast bureaucracy that severely restricts the lives of Indigenous people through legal and administrative means, kinship with buffalo continues to span a system of relations that is irresponsive to those limitations.

claims about the sacredness of sites associated with buffalo/*Mostos* are grounded through relations in an active kinship network.

In this chapter, I inquire into the implications of referring to buffalo sites as 'sacred'. Within Plains Cree territoriality, sacredness refers to lively agential networks that bind entities into kinship relations. In framing the content of this chapter around the Buffalo Child Stone, I make a broader argument concerning the active role other buffalo sites play in maintaining kinship networks. After describing the circumstances surrounding the destruction of this boulder, I give an example from my fieldwork that situates questions about the category of 'sacredness' within the context of its use as a universal concept. I then relay a version of the story about how the Buffalo Child Stone came to sit on the plains of southern Saskatchewan. Lastly, I argue that approaching ancestry as a rhizome of relations provides a model for understanding Indigenous territorial networks. This model adequately demonstrates the particular relations that claims about a site's sacredness refer to.

By questioning the universality of the concept of sacredness and then revealing the specificity of human-*Mostos* relation-making in Plains Cree cosmology, my aim is to situate buffalo sites, and particularly the Buffalo Child Stone, within an active, intelligent landscape.

Problematizing Sacredness

Controversy unfolded around the Buffalo Child Stone when the South

Saskatchewan River Dam Project, which intended to channel waters into a reservoir that

became known as Lake Deifenbaker, declared the enormous boulder was in its flood path.

Rather than simply allowing the rock to become submerged under floodwater, plans for

its destruction began to unfold. Many Indigenous leaders, archaeologists, teachers and

students protested the flooding of the rock, and ceremonies were held at the site. A long

campaign, including plans for a benefit concert that never occurred, was carried out by a

professor at the University of Saskatchewan. The aim was to raise funds so the boulder

could be relocated to higher ground. But in an expected move, on the morning of

December 1, 1966, a crew from the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration arrived

with up to 60 sticks of dynamite. The team drilled several holes in the boulder, detonated

the dynamite, and turned the Buffalo Child Stone to dust and chunks of stone. While

some claim adequate funds weren't raised to cover the costs of having it moved safely,

others maintain that the decision to blow up the boulder was a deliberate move to end the

protests that were taking place, an affront to the bourgeoning rights-based movements of

the 1960s (Dawson 2014; Ahenakew 2007; Spray 2014; McLennan 2008). At that time,

calling upon the concept of 'sacredness' did not hold enough weight to prevent

destruction. This leads me to ask, is the concept an effective one for making these kinds

of claims?

The issue of how the concept of sacredness is used in decision-making processes

related to land and resource use has drawn the attention of several scholars. These

scholars problematize use of the category of 'the sacred' in intercultural dialogue. In some cases, where the concept is used in territorial claims made by Indigenous people, the state draws the legitimacy of those claims into question by framing them as an opportunistic strategy to justify opposition to development (Dawson 2014). In other cases, the concept successfully provides a sense of mutual understanding that results in collaborative decision-making about special places. In either case, misunderstandings often ensue from invocations of 'the sacred' because the concept is subject to divergent interpretations. As a result, its strategic use in claims to territory can end up working against those who use it (Tiedje 2007:329, 332).

The term 'sacred' frequently goes unnoticed as a marker of difference where sites or objects commonly recognized as sacred are situated at the centre of overlapping worlds (Keller 2014; Benson 2012; Dunstan 2012). To reiterate a point from Chapter One, this occurs as a result of what Viveiros de Castro terms an "uncontrolled equivocation," a kind of misunderstanding in which interlocutors are not talking about the same thing, but do not realize that this is the case (2004). Blaser (2009) argues that instances of uncontrolled equivocation can work to subordinate other ways of being to our own (2009:18). Tiedje (2007) suggests that although "sacredness is presented as common ground that shall foster hopeful dialogue and collective action among Indigenous peoples, scientists, economists, and theologians," this should not obscure the "persisting ontological asymmetry" (2007:329, 332) at play in such dialogues. Where equivocations around the concept do occur and go unnoticed – that is, remain uncontrolled – forms of

radical difference are drastically undermined and become subsumed by a concept

presumed to be universal (Di Giminiani 2013:528).

During my fieldwork in the summer 2013, I witnessed an event that demonstrates

the problematic logics involved in casting sacredness in the role of creating common

ground. The event took place at a location in central Alberta where the regulated CRM

process was being initiated for a phase of a large construction project. An old man from

Maskwacis had been invited to do a pipe ceremony on the first day of work at the site.

About two dozen people were present – professional archaeologists, students hired for the

job, construction workers, safety officers, and a few monitors from nearby First Nations

communities. An Anglican priest was also in the crowd.

The old man and his son were walking from one spot to the next, apparently trying

to decide where the old man should sit with the pipe. They decided on a spot and he sat

down on a cushion, then quiet voices spread word that the men should sit in a circle with

the old man, and smoke the pipe in turn. Some non-Native men refrained, looking

uncertain and keeping their distance, their backsides clinging to a nearby fence. The

women stood scattered around the perimeter of the men's circle, also keeping their

distance, some whispering their confusion to one another and shrugging then falling

silent. A First Nations woman from a nearby reserve explained some protocols to the

other women.

The old man prepared the pipe then spoke at length about why they had come and

why everyone was gathered there together in a circle to smoke the tobacco. He spoke

about the laws of the territory, about the importance of honouring the land and honouring

his people's ancestors. Several times as he spoke he thumped the ground with the palm of his hand, indicating why the pipe ceremony was about to take place. "We use this land, and we need to respect it" he stated. "This is where our medicines come from." His hand thumped the ground again. "We use this land every day. It is sacred to us."

He finished speaking to the group in English and bowed his head as he began to speak in Cree, praying in words familiar to me from the ceremonies and funeral feasts I had been to, words that plead with ancestral beings to take pity on humans, and to answer their prayers. Some of these ancestors speak their own language, I've been told – they don't all speak in Cree – and only certain humans are gifted with the ability to hear them. The old man lit the pipe, smoked, and passed it to the left. The pipe gradually made its way around the circle, and when the tobacco had all been burned, the son retrieved the old man's pipe. He spoke in Cree briefly, then fell silent and gazed around at the men in the circle. They shook hands with their neighbors and stood up.

Then the Anglican priest also stood and encouraged everyone to gather in to listen. We stood close together in a cluster. He thanked the elder for guiding the pipe ceremony and proceeded to speak for a few minutes about his own perspective on the land's sacredness. As the priest explained, he recognized that the land was sacred to the First Nations people whose ancestors lived on the land since time immemorial. He acknowledged that those connections go back a long, long time. But, he said, the land is not only sacred to First Nations people. He told us about his own ancestral ties to the land we were standing on, that his own descendants had been in Alberta for generations. "The

land is sacred to all of us," he said. "We all have a special connection to the land, and it is sacred to us all."

I felt an uncomfortable twinge of 'epistemic disconcertment' (Verran 2011), the 'common ground' that the priest had claimed was at play in our collective connections to the landscape invisibilized the entities that had been called upon during the ceremony. The priest's words seemed to diminish the intent of the pipe ceremony to a mere performance, a form of belief that is similar to his own. His words seemed to imply that there was only one way of relating to the land, in all its sacredness, and that we all knew what that was.

Did the priest mean to imply that the land was sacred to everyone in the same way? Did the pipe carrier mean something different when he spoke about the land and his ancestors? The interactions that occurred on this day had a lasting impact on my own understanding of the potential for the concept of sacredness to be misconstrued in instances of intercultural exchange. Although the priest likely called upon the concept with the best of intentions – to create a sense of mutual understanding, for those present to be able to think about the land in the same way – this 'ethnographic moment' (Strathern 1999:6) provides an example of how the concept of sacredness can become misconstrued in Plains Cree territory. In this instance, the complex relations maintained through ceremonial laws were glossed over by a concept assumed to be universal.

The ceremony ended abruptly and the old man waited in his car. The lead archaeologist gave four folded cloths, in black, red, yellow, and white, to the old man's

son, who then spent a few minutes deciding where he should leave two of the 'prints'[8] on-site. He examined the prints as he made his decision.

"These are Blackfoot colours, you know," he uttered.

The archaeologist was a bit embarrassed by his blunder and apologized. Black cloth should never be given to acknowledge Plains Cree ancestors because it signifies a bad omen. Ceremonial protocols have come to be common practice among archaeologists and local people, but they didn't always get the protocols right.

The old man's son acquiesced to the prints' colours and decided to leave two of them under a small poplar tree, a relatively quiet spot where they wouldn't be disturbed. Leaving the prints in this spot was a way of ensuring that the ancestor's spirits in the area would know they had been acknowledged, and that they were being asked to cooperate in allowing the archaeological work to take place.

I rely on this instance of calling upon sacredness as common ground to illustrate the potential effect of an equivocation that is left uncontrolled; of how the 'unreflective use of analogies' can lead to misunderstanding (Di Giminiani 2013:536). I'm not suggesting that the priest's use of the concept was intended to cause any harm. But, writ large across a landscape carrying centuries of dispossession and struggle, putting the concept forward as universal inadvertently undermines the reality that the settler-colonial

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[8] A common ceremonial protocol is to offer coloured cloth and tobacco to an elder. In this instance, the old man's son accepted the cloth and tobacco on behalf of his father. The coloured cloths are commonly referred to as 'prints'.

mentality has not taken Indigenous-territorial relations – and the kinds of entities at play in those relations – seriously.

In the case of the Buffalo Child Stone, claims about its sacredness, the protests that took place at the site, and the efforts to raise money to safely move it to another location, were not enough to save it from being destroyed. Whether its destruction was the result of poor planning, of mistaken calculations, or of a blatant intent to reduce it to rubble isn't clear, and any attempts to explain or justify the cause fifty years after it occurred is more conjecture than anything else.

That said, while some suggest that the decision to blow it up would never occur today given the measures for heritage protection that are now commonplace (Dawson 2014; Spray 2014), the fact remains that claims about its sacredness were not taken seriously enough for it to have been saved from destruction in 1966. At that time, many people recognized the Buffalo Child Stone as sacred, but it was ultimately deemed expendable by those who had decision-making power.

Had proponents of the Gardner River Dam project had the same sentiments as the priest, that sacredness is a universal concept which applies equally to everyone with a qualifying connection to a landscape, would they have seen the Buffalo Child Stone as expendable? Where does the divergence lie in the distinction between relating to this boulder as an ancestor, and as a material substance in the way of the dam's floodpath? What does it really mean when people call this boulder 'sacred'? As an attempt to answer these questions, I ask in what forms the concept of 'sacredness' appears in the heritage management process. My aim is to understand another layer of complexity involved in

these worlds, and the interactions that go on between them, as ceremonies take place at buffalo sites and as heritage-related decisions are made.

Even where the state recognizes that places considered sacred by Indigenous people are essential to their relations with the land and makes efforts to protect those areas, the state's use of the concept continues to rely on a set of categories emerging from a modern ontology. In a modern ontology, sacredness is assumed to be a projection of the human imagination onto passive materials, which imbues objects or places with special meaning (Bird-David 1999). This modernist mindset is rooted in post-enlightenment philosophy which divorced matter from meaning, mind from world, subject from object. As a result, sacred places are assumed to be bounded units with clear non-sacred counterparts that don't warrant the same kinds of care or protection.

The concept of sacredness at play in Cree cosmology refuses the categories and boundaries of the modern ontology. For many First Nations contesting industrial development in their traditional territories, the landscape is comprised of lively, agentive spirit beings (Keller 2014), and to inhabit a landscape is to fulfill obligations that bind all beings, human and non-human, through relations of reciprocity. These relations swarm through a living and storied landscape (Chambers & Blood 2009:260-261; Sheridan & Longboat 2006:368-369). In Plains Cree territoriality the buffalo spirit continues to enliven relations with humans, and stories about buffalo reveal the kinship relations that inform claims about the sacredness of buffalo/*Mostos* sites. Resistance to the destruction of this stone and the ongoing narratives about how the spirit of the stone lives on aren't merely proclamations about the importance of *Mostos* to Plains Cree identity. Much more

than this, these narratives speak to the active intelligence that moves through buffalo/*Mostos* sites, and to the trauma brought on by the intentional destruction of a living ancestor.

The Story of Buffalo Child

To understand what makes the Buffalo Child Stone sacred, it is necessary to delve into the role of stone and of buffalo in Plains Cree cosmology. Sacredness is not a universal concept but a particularized quality that emerges through complex sets of relations. Here I relay a version of the story of Buffalo Child as told by Barry Ahenekew, a Cree traditionalist from Ahtahkekoop Cree Nation in Saskatchewan[9].

> *. . . It was a sacred stone. You wouldn't find a boulder that large on the prairies except for there. And the shape of this huge stone was like a buffalo, like a buffalo sitting down. And the history goes from my old people was almost lost I believe, and I've been reviving it.*
>
> *A long time ago as the people traveled with their travoises, they'd have these camp movers, camp leader that they'd pick, and when they decided to move, they'd all move. Everyone would pack up their lodges and tipi poles and they'd all travel wherever he decided. If things went well they would keep them for a while as camp leaders. They revolved them; they'd get a new*

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[9] This version of the story was recorded by the University of Regina and is available here: http://www.thesas.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/buffalo-child-stone.pdf

person to lead them. So that's how they worked cooperatively. And most of the time they did a pretty good job of moving them towards where there was lots to eat, lots of herbs to pick to add to their meals, to add to their medicines and totally just to enjoy life.

But this one time there was a baby in the hustle and bustle of the traveling, that wasn't secured right. Wāspison is a moss bag. It wasn't secured right even with the moss bag, everybody was such in a rush to get going, and somehow one way or another this baby was dropped and as the people traveled in the evening, being well-fed, the baby was quiet, didn't make no noise. Nobody trampled the baby.

They just kept moving on. Well, I guess after a long period of time as they traveled they still didn't notice. Some buffalo came, came along, and these buffalo heard a strange sound, the sound they heard was a baby crying. So they checked it out, inquisitive, being inquisitive and the way they said it was the buffalo people. Long ago they identified them as like a type of people, the buffalo race, the buffalo people. So the inquisitive buffalo searched for the sound, where the sound was coming from and they came upon this little baby who was now hungry. The younger buffalo recognized him as a little human being and they wanted to stomp him, to crush him but it so happened that there was a buffalo bull chief and that buffalo bull chief put a stop to what they were intending to do, and he held them at bay and he told them that the child was innocent, the child had never hurt them, this human being child,

and that he was going to take him as his own. But he couldn't feed him. But he had his females, the cows, some of them had calves, and they had milk so he got those cows to come over. They had their own system of runners, etc., so it was those cows that came over. He explained to them that these young bulls had found this child and that they were wanting to kill him and that he had put a stop to it because the child was innocent and he was taking him as his own and adopted him and he wanted one of his cows to bend down over atop the little one so that he could suckle. And that's what happened, and that's how the child survived - he suckled the buffalo cows.

And being buffalo milk that's how he grew strong and he grew fast and before long he was running around like the buffalo calves, for all intents and purposes he was a buffalo. Playing with the calves, growing up, running with the buffalo as they ran, as they walked, as they ate. He ate what they ate. They accepted him as one of them. As he got bigger, one time, after being chased at times by First Nations people for buffalo meat, there used to be people that would see him, a human being that would run with the buffalo. Maybe it was the spirit of the buffalo, they'd say. They'd catch glimpses of this young man running with the buffalo but they could never catch him, they could never catch him. And they could never catch that group of buffalo that he was running with. They were hard to corner; they were hard to catch; they were always on the lookout. But they would catch glimpses of seeing him and they would talk about it and they'd say it was probably the spirit of the buffalo

that's running with the herd. As he grew taller, stronger because of the buffalo milk that he had had when he was a youth, he was running naked. His hair was long, shaggy and unkempt, just like the buffalo bulls, their shaggy heads, long. But one time, and he had seen glimpses of these people that were chasing him too and he knew that they were shooting them with arrows and killing them too.

One time they went to drink water in a lake, it was a beautiful mirror lake, calm day, the water was just like a mirror and they all ran into the edge of this lake, all to fill up with water, and as he drank water himself he noticed that the ones drinking water beside him had big heads, horns, which he had seen before, but when he looked at himself in the ripple that they created he could see that he didn't look like them, and that shocked him. That was the first time he realized he was different, and yet he could communicate and he could talk with them, the buffalo language, and they had accepted him so much into their way of being buffalo, of being a buffalo, so that he never thought he was anything else but a buffalo until then when he looked in the water. He felt sad after that. He talked to his adopted father, the old bull, one of the bull chiefs, and the bull chief told him, "I won't hide anything from you. When you were small, we found you and we raised you. I adopted you. I brought you up as one of us. True, now you know you're not one of us. You're really a human being. You're free to go, you're free to go. If you want to go,

go. Find your people. You have a mother and you have a father out there somewhere that's a human being."

Being inquisitive to a great degree he left. He bid adios to his buffalo family and he left. He wandered away. Finally he came upon some people and those people took him to their Indian town, tipis. He couldn't talk human talk; all he could do was grunt this way and that way, just buffalo talk, but slowly, slowly he communicated. Slowly he began to communicate by imitating their sign language and he used sign language to communicate with them, but it took him a while to catch on. It was all totally new to him. He lived with the human beings for a long time and he did eventually, through the travels of that group and the criss-cross travels of the other tribes like I mentioned earlier, he eventually found his mother, his real mother, and his real father.

Being a handsome young man, clothed now, with clothes, he eventually lived with not just one woman, they used to have women, sisters or relatives or whatever that would join together and work together under one husband. And that's how he ended up with about five wives, five women through time, meaning that he was a provider, but the one thing he would never do was eat buffalo, he'd never chase buffalo, he'd never eat buffalo. He knew how to use bow and arrow, but he'd go after elk, the occasional moose, anything else but buffalo. He would never touch buffalo. None of his family would touch buffalo out of respect for the people, the buffalo people that brought him up.

I don't know what caused him, the old people never said, what caused him to leave except for the fact that he became lonely for his buffalo father and his buffalo mother, a loneliness that crept into his mind and body and ate away at him, that caused him to leave. So he bid adios to his human people, his human family now with his wives and his children that he had with these wives. He bid adios to them and he said he'd be back and he left. He found buffalo. The buffalo would be leery of him, because he was a human, but he knew how to communicate with them. He could talk buffalo talk, so they'd loosen up right away, they'd ease up right away because he could talk their talk, and that's what took place. Eventually he did find his buffalo father again on the prairies, his buffalo mother, his buffalo family.

And as he was with them that time, there was a group of people, human beings that came upon them, that started chasing them, whooping and yelling; thundering herd of buffalo, thundering hooves. He was running along with these buffalo and he now knew what was going on. All these buffalo people could be getting skinned and gutted and made into drying meat hanging on racks in these human beings' village, and it made him feel, it sickened him, never made him feel good.

So him and, in a hidden area, him and his bull father buffalo ran into a hidden area which turns out to be by the elbow and the turning river, where the river turns, katitipī chiwak, and there his father told him, "If you do not want to be a human being anymore I'll tell you and show you a way that you

will turn into one of us all the time. But if you don't want to be one of us all the time, you can roll over four more times and you'll be one of us all the time. But you will also turn into stone. It's your choice."

And he thought about it and he did as his bull father buffalo told him. He rolled over four times and he stood up. He was on four legs - he was a bull buffalo. He could hear whooping and yelling and buffalo being chased and he thought I love being a buffalo, and I love being a human being. I've got family with the buffalo and I've got family with the people human beings. I can't take it. I'm going to roll over four more times. And when he rolled over four more times, as he sat, that's how that stone grew and he turned into a buffalo. And that's the sacred story of the Buffalo Child Stone. I've been trying to keep it alive.

Ahenekew 2007

Ancestry as Rhizome

Claims about the sacredness of Buffalo Child Stone are not based on a universal concept, but are grounded in very specific ancestral ties to the land that extend through cultural-linguistic webs of kinship. The story of Buffalo Child doesn't point to a mythical time of the past, but informs how kin relations continue to be embedded in the present. Neal McLeod elaborates:

The narrative embodies the notion of wahkotowin as the stone embodies the

relationship that people have with the buffalo. In addition, the narrative also

marks the importance of adoption and the way in which we can raise children,

who may not be ours biologically.

McLeod 2014:100

McLeod's comments about the story foregrounds the kin-making practices that are

part of everyday life in Plains Cree communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In one

way, as McLeod suggests, the story of Buffalo Child can inform the ways youth

experience new familial relations that are implemented through the foster care system.

Praying for the stone as an ancestor strengthens the familial connections for youth who

don't have a connection to their biological parents. The story of Buffalo Child Stone gets

told and retold to reinforce the strength of kinship ties that are made through adoption.

The story reinforces the notion that these connections are as strong as blood. Among my

Cree friends in Maskwacis, kinship ties that are made through adoption are virtually

indiscernible from the connection to relatives that are defined through blood. Adoptions

criss-cross through family lineages, generations, and bloodlines, and are often

consecrated through the giving of very special or powerful gifts. One man told me about

his own kin-making practices – he has given a horse to his adopted mother, and gifted a

beautiful 19th century rifle to his adopted brother. One great-grandmother I know gave a

horse and blankets when she adopted her brother's adopted son's daughter as her sister.

The great-grandmother is in her seventies, and her adopted sister is six years old.

Gift-giving practices that establish relationships among humans do the same for relations among human and non-human entities. Numerous historical accounts contain references to the practice of leaving beads, trinkets, and other offerings for the *Mostos* at the centre of buffalo pounds (Mandelbaum 1979; Brink 2008), or at the base of stones such as ribstones (Fedirchuk & McCullough 1991), the Manitou Stone (Plotkin 2015), and also at the Buffalo Child Stone (Hind 1858). Offerings made at buffalo sites are kin-making practices which parallel adoption among humans, and the adoption of buffalo through ceremony still regularly takes place today. In Chapter Five I elaborate on ceremonial protocols involved in establishing kinship with the buffalo spirit. Cree individuals continue to refer to Buffalo as Grandfather, and the centrality of kinship continues to inform how Cree people relate to buffalo sites. The act of giving gifts to buffalo enables the essence of one entity to be carried to another and conjoins the spirits of giver and receiver – this is the work that goes into making and maintaining one's kinship ties. Relations are consecrated through gift-giving, as spirit binds one entity to another. The essence of *wakohtowin* lives through these exchanges.

Wakohtowin is inherent to the relational networks through which 'Creeness' extends. This notion reflects TallBear's (2013) conception of indigeneity as referring to peoples who understand themselves as being "in intimate relationship with particular places, especially living and sacred landscapes" (2013:510). TallBear continues:

> In short, indigenous peoples' 'ancestry' is not simply genetic ancestry
> evidenced in 'populations' but biological, cultural, and political groupings

constituted in dynamic, long-standing relationships with each other and with

living landscapes that define their people-specific identities and, more

broadly, their indigeneity.

TallBear 2013:510

The immanent nature of relations among humans and non-humans, both material

and immaterial, frequently gets passed off as 'unbelievable' in negotiations between

Indigenous people and the state (ie. Poirier 2010; Povinelli 2002). Claims that are rooted

in TallBear's notion of indigeneity challenge colonial, modernist assumptions that there is

a clear distinction between humans (culture) and the environments in which they live

(nature). The notion that humans merely walk upon the surface of the earth, and remain

separate and distinct from it, is based on a genealogical model of ancestry (Ingold 2000).

The genealogical approach to ancestry reflects a modernist understanding of the world, in

which the earth is passive and inert, unable to engage in its own forms of expressivity.

When Indigenous peoples make claims that call upon active connections to a place, this

undermines the state's tendency to bind indigeneity with cultural stasis and reinforces

living relationships that blur boundaries between nature and culture, land and humans

(TallBear 2013). Claims about the sacredness of buffalo sites emerge from articulations

about Cree relations with place that are nested inside particular webs of kinship relations.

The concerns of TallBear parallel those of authors cited above who argue a similar

process occurs when Indigenous peoples' connections to a place are expressed in terms of

that place's sacredness. If Indigenous peoples express the traits of sacred places in the idiom of the state, the very forms of difference from which those claims emerge become weakened and the nature / culture division becomes prioritized. As an alternative to linear conceptions of descent, Ingold offers the relational model of ancestry: that inhabiting the land is to constitute a place (Ingold 2000:149). In a relational approach to ancestry, the land is understood to be an "immense tangle of interlaced trails – an all-encompassing rhizome – which is continually ravelling here, and unravelling there, as the beings of which it is composed grow... along the lines of their relationships" (Ingold 2000:149-150). Ingold's alternative to the genealogical model is useful for the way it substantiates Indigenous peoples' claims about inhabiting a living landscape, and for its potential to inform a mode of articulating sacredness not as a universal concept, but as a quality that emerges from a particularized set of relations that flows through a specific environment.

The principles of relatedness depicted in the story recounted by Ahenekew are derived from the law of *wakohtowin*. The set of relations at play in articulations of sacredness in Plains Cree territory demonstrate that Creeness is grounded in ceremonial practices that work to illuminate the inherent relatedness among all beings. Claims about sacredness of the Buffalo Child Stone – and that of other buffalo sites, for that matter – are often expressed in terms of this inherent relatedness. These claims situate the stone within webs of relations that deny the genealogical model of ancestry, and which are informed by the assumption that humans, buffalo, and rocks are composed of the same matter. In Plains Cree cosmology, all beings emerged directly from the landscape, and, therefore, are made of the same 'stuff'. The Buffalo Child Stone's situatedness within

webs of kinship derives from particular relations among a collective of human and non-human entities that are based on principles of shared bodily substance.

Protocols surrounding the ritualized sharing of food bind participants through the reinforcement of shared bodily substance. I've attended several funeral feasts, which occur four days after a death. During the four-day-long wake leading up to the feast, a deceased relative is always surrounded by loved ones. A constant rotation of cousins, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandparents and grandchildren are present to guide their deceased relative to the 'happy hunting grounds', as people often jokingly refer to the afterlife. Usually taking place in the home of the recently deceased, the walls are lined with chairs that become occupied by dozens of relatives, and women take turns making soup and sandwiches for everybody present. At least one person remains awake through the night so the deceased is never left alone. On the fourth day, the funeral feast takes place and everyone participates in the ritualized sharing of food. Soup, bannock, berries, and other foods are distributed to all the guests who sit in a large circle, outside on the grass if the weather allows, or inside the house if its winter. I learned the hard way that it's not appropriate to refuse the food at a ceremonial feast. As a vegetarian, I would politely say 'no, thank you' to the beef soup as a young man walked around the circle to put soup in everyone's bowl. Eventually I was told it's against the law to refuse – to deny the food at a feast is to refuse to feed the ancestors.

This is the case not only at funeral feasts, but also at feasts which take place at special places on the land. In these situations, it is not a deceased relative but other spirits and ancestors that are being honoured through the ritualized sharing of food. One woman

told me that the first time she visited a well-known archaeological site in east-central Alberta, where ten thousand-year-old buffalo had been unearthed, she unexpectedly discovered that the spirits there were very hungry. Shortly after placing tobacco on the ground to acknowledge the other-than-human presence at the site, she took a piece of beef jerky out of her bag to eat. Suddenly, the jerky flew out of her hand and landed on the ground. She instantly knew that the ancestors were hungry – of course they were, she understood in that moment, since no one had properly fed them. She organized for a feast to take place at the site a few months later.

Kinship relations are established and strengthened through the ritualized practices of food-sharing, and the immanence of *Mostos* is regularly acknowledged at ceremonial feasts. When feasts take place, there are many protocols around preparing, distributing, and consuming food. Lessons about the relations made through the consumption of shared food emanate through the story of Buffalo Child. He comes into being as buffalo by suckling the females as a baby, and by eating the same as them. "*He ate what they ate. They accepted him as one of them,"* as Ahenekew says. When he goes to live with the humans as a grown man Buffalo Child can't bear to eat buffalo meat, since he sees himself as one of them. After repeatedly faced with the need to choose to be one or the other, human or buffalo, he can't take it anymore and chooses to be a rock, deeply rooted in the ground and integral to both his human and buffalo families. In this way, Buffalo Child refuses to make the familial distinctions that divide humans and buffalo into different categories of being, or that prioritize either genealogy or adoption, and instead offers the law of inherent relatedness to all beings residing in and on the territory.

     *   *   *

Claims about the sacredness of Buffalo Child Stone are contextualized within a storied landscape in which relations with *Mostos* are active and ongoing. Assuming the concept of sacredness to be a universal concept can cause these relations to be overlooked. When other sites associated with buffalo/*Mostos* are referred to as sacred, pointing to the specificity of the relational network in which these claims are situated works to prevent those claims from being delegitimized, and, instead, works to identify the active intelligence of Plains Cree ancestral landscapes.

Plains Cree kin-making practices challenge the genealogical model of ancestry in which the landscape is perceived as passive and inert, and in which human bloodlines are portrayed as a linear tree. As the principle of shared bodily substance demonstrates, in networks of Plains Cree kinship, ancestry more closely resembles a rhizome of relations. These relations, which are not confined to bloodlines but can be made through adoption, are consecrated through gift-giving and food-sharing practices that occur in ceremonial contexts. This mode of establishing kinship works to bind heterogeneous entities. The story of buffalo child continues to enact these laws by reinforcing the principles of relationality and reciprocity, which are central to Plains Cree ceremonial life.

Attending to the kinds of relations at play in claims about the sacredness of Buffalo Child Stone, or of the other sites associated with buffalo/*Mostos*, is to acknowledge that those relations are immanent, enduring, and are accompanied by a set of obligations which require an individual to act with the utmost integrity in relation to the territory.

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In Chapter Five, I turn to an instance where the protection of a pair of stones has worked to strengthen Plains Cree kin relations. A pair of boulders known as buffalo ribstones have been designated a Provincial Historic Resource by the Alberta Government. I show that in protecting this site, the Alberta Government is also protecting the relations that comprise Plains Cree ancestral landscapes.

Chapter Five

The Ones Who Speak the Loudest: A Plains Cree Ceremonial Way of Life

The day that my teacher, his son, and I set off towards the town of Viking was hot and sunny, the sky bright blue with layers of wafting clouds. The region's landscape is flat enough that the entire circumference of the horizon is often visible, but the low slopes of the Rocky Mountain Foothills allow for occasional elevated sightlines. The sun was hot, the air dry, and driving on the dirt roads stirred up enough dust to warrant closing the car's windows. As with many of our road trips around central Alberta this one required a careful measure of planning and spontaneity, and until the moment we set off I couldn't say with any degree of certainty that the trip would even take place. As my friends got ready and packed their things in my car, I literally held my breath so I wouldn't somehow throw off the balance and make the trip impossible.

Our decision to visit Viking emerged gradually, the proposition having come in and out of focus over the previous few weeks. My Cree teacher and his extended network of kin, both human and non-human, inhabit a space of complex reciprocal obligations; a space made ripe with unpredictable possibility by a constant, deliberate swaying among multiple courses of action, as certain obligations become prioritized over others. A scheduled plan may always be subsumed by, or align with, the demands of tending to kin relations.

Our destination was just a few kilometres outside of Viking, where on top of a sloped incline sit a pair of boulders known as buffalo ribstones. The surface of these

rounded, oblong rocks are carved with long grooves that make them resemble the ribcage of a buffalo. The pair of ribstones that sit outside of Viking are part of a much larger assemblage. There are about 15 of these stones in total, which were once distributed across central Alberta and Saskatchewan (Fedirchuk & McCullough 1991). Several are now housed in museums or private collections, but the ones at Viking are the only pair that remains exposed to the elements close to their original location.

After a two-hour drive, we approached our destination and got out of the vehicle. The stones were cordoned off by a simple metal railing that was square in shape, each side of the square painted a different colour. I later found out that employees of the province's Ministry of Culture and Tourism had worked with Cree ceremonialists to determine an appropriate way to install the protective railing. This site has been managed by the province since the Government of Alberta purchased the land surrounding the ribstones in 1959, and although all other historic sites in the province had been designated as Provincial Historic Resources in 1976, the Viking ribstones did not receive this designation until 1994.

As we approached the ribstones I recognized the railings' colours as corresponding to the four directions, as I had seen many times in ceremonial contexts. Looking more closely, I saw that there was a buffalo skull strapped to the northward, white-painted portion of the railing. The other sides of the square were yellow, blue, and red, corresponding with east, south and west. Small mounds of tobacco as well as other offerings – coins, jewellery, marbles and other trinkets – were scattered across the surface and base of the ribstones. A quick glance at the surrounding area revealed a mass of

multicoloured cloths hanging in nearby trees. This was clearly a stopping place for many people who came to give offerings, and our visit was woven within a dense network of active relations with these stones.

In this chapter, I start with the question of how to appropriately engage in an inquiry about ribstones. I show that this is not as straightforward a question as it might seem, since it must start with an inquiry into who has the authority to speak on ribstones' behalf. Next, I show that ceremony functions as a disciplined process of establishing relations among the entities comprising Plains Cree relational networks. Then I show that, since the process of establishing relations must always start with one's own personhood, an inquiry into buffalo ribstones must also start with the self. I recount the methodology my teacher proposed for engaging ethically in such an inquiry, which involves socializing with ceremonial entities that reside in each of the four directions. I then look at the implications of a teaching my teacher shared with me in reference to making an inquiry into the relevance of ribstones and, more broadly, the centrality of human-*Mostos* relations, in Plains Cree ceremonial life.

My line of questioning in this chapter is twofold. First, I ask about the place of ribstones within the kinship networks that comprise Plains Cree territorial relations. I start by discussing how to appropriately engage in an inquiry about ribstones. This is not as straightforward a question as it might seem, since it must start with an inquiry into who has the authority to speak on ribstones' behalf. Second, I inquire whether human-*Mostos* relations, as they are configured within the broader scope of Plains Cree ceremonialism, are disrupted or strengthened through the ribstone site's designation as a Provincial

Historic Resource. I argue that, since the Alberta Government's protection of the ribstone

site demonstrates non-interference in Plains Cree territorial relations, this is an instance

where the province's heritage management practices actually work to strengthen human-

Mostos relations.

A Question of Authority

My entry point into learning about ribstones had come only a few weeks before

our trip to Viking, when I met with a curator at the provincial museum in Edmonton. He

informed me that the museum was working to acquire a separate pair of ribstones that had

originally resided close to the town of Endiang. This pair had been collected from a

farmer's field in the 1960s, and since that time they sat in the museum of a private

collector in Wetaskiwin, a town that neighbors the four reserves that make up Maskwacis.

Knowing that I was carrying out my fieldwork in Maskwacis, the museum curator had

asked whether I knew of any ceremonialists who might be interested in advising the

museum on how to appropriately transport and store the ribstones they were working to

acquire. I was essentially being asked whether I knew of anyone who could speak on the

ribstone's behalf, since he did not know whom to approach.

While the museum curator expected that humans with the proper form of authority

to speak about ribstones could be easily identified and located to give advice on their

treatment in the museum's setting, my inkling was that it would not be so straightforward.

This situation brings up an interesting set of questions that emerge from the disjuncture

between different modes of recognizing and designating authority. The form of authority that moves through the dwelling science, to use Povinelli's term (2011) doesn't rely on an established system of authentication that is based on bits of information stored in a human mind. Rather, this form of customary authority emerges as a result of a life-long process of relating with other-than-human persons through ceremony.

The individuals who hold authority in ceremonial matters are not always easy to identify. For those who adhere to a strong lineage of ceremonial teachings, the act of proclaiming one's own authority is frowned upon, and may actually serve to demonstrate the opposite. Prioritizing ego over humility is indicative that one isn't truly in a position of safeguarding the living body of ceremonial teachings. Plains Cree scholar Lightning (1992) refers to this body of teachings as the ethos, and argues that elders and ceremonialists who live humbly acknowledge that any authority rests not with themselves as individuals, but with the ethos itself (Lightning 1992:242). This is fundamental to the ceremonial way of life in Maskwacis, and this refusal to claim authority was making it difficult for the museum curator to know whom to approach. "I'm just a human subject. No more, no less," my teacher would say to me on occasion, indicating that the ethos chooses to do its work *through* him, rather than the other way around.

Acknowledging that the ethos sustains itself is essential to understanding how authority is recognized and allocated in the dwelling science of Plains Cree territory. The obligations humans uphold through ceremony are a means to activate the ethos' potential for efficacy – to strengthen kin relations, to ensure good health, and to promote healing. But there are never any guarantees. "Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't," my

teacher has explained. The most essential way to ensure that the ethos maintains its strength is to refrain from abusing its potential power, which is why ceremony must not be practiced from a place of ego. Authority on ceremonial matters is developed only through the practice of devout humility, to the point where those with the greatest insight into the ethos' responsiveness, and into the web of relations it works to sustain, may claim that they don't know anything at all. Lightning describes his learning process when he developed an interest in understanding more about the ceremonial practices passed down by his ancestors. He tells of an experience going to a well-respected elder to ask for his guidance. When he approached the elder with cloth and tobacco to make his request, he was overcome:

> I thought of how poorly I knew how to complete my task, and thought, "What am I doing, trying to prepare the protocol? I don't know how to do this properly, and in the presence of a person who has seen this countless times and knows all its significance!"
>
> I said to him in Cree, "Grandfather, I don't know how to do these things. I am trying to prepare the protocol but I realize that basically I don't know anything. Please, I implore you, have compassion for what I am doing."
>
> Elder Art Raining Bird, for all his stature and knowledge, was a living example of humility. He looked at me and answered with deep kindness and understanding, saying, "It's nothing, my grandson. We don't know anything."

The state of knowing nothing is intrinsic to the form of authority one acquires through leading a ceremonial way of life. It is inappropriate to make explicit claims of one's own superiority in activating the power of the ethos, or for someone to ask direct questions about an individual's level of expertise in doing so. Several years ago, while doing some work at an institution in Alberta, one of the institution's directors asked my teacher if he was a "ceremonial leader" in his community. He still speaks about this as indicative that this person had no understanding of the necessity to remain humble.

Occupying a state of knowing nothing is to allow the ethos, as a living body of teachings, to sustain itself by working through human and non-human subjects. To claim individual authority is to weaken the ethos' power, so the question of who has the authority to speak on the ribstones' behalf is not an appropriate one to ask. Questions directed at a human subject are out of line with the process of socialization that binds humans and *Mostos* into obligations of mutual life-giving. An inquiry into ribstones needs to take place in a different register altogether – one that recognizes knowledge *about* ribstones doesn't precede the process of relating *with* them. To engage in an appropriate inquiry on the relevance of these stones to Cree territorial relations, the question must not be about who has the authority to speak on ribstones' behalf, but what proper relations among humans and *Mostos* look like.

Understanding the basis of this form of authority – which is based on humility –
and how it moves through the ethos is a fundamental starting point for asking whether the
province's protection of the ribstone site has any impact on the strengthening of Plains
Cree kinship relations. The provincial government's designation of this site as a
Provincial Historic Resource prevents destruction of the area immediately surrounding
the site. But the site's physical properties are not all that is being protected. Plains Cree
ceremonial practices, and the kinship relations they sustain, are likely not obvious or
outwardly apparent to those who make heritage-related decisions for Alberta's provincial
government. Despite this likely invisibility, protection of the ribtone site also serves to
protect the relational networks that are established, and sustained, through ceremony.

Establishing Relations

The ethos, as a living body of teachings, moves through the landscape. Sites
associated with buffalo/*Mostos* are known to be particularly potent places, where the laws
that emerge from the land flow strongly, and carrying out ceremony in these locations is a
means of accessing that potency. Numerous people visit the ribstone site to give
ceremonial offerings, as the mounds of tobacco and trinkets can attest. The site is a
popular stopping place for people traveling east of Maskwacis, towards the city of
Camrose or into Saskatchewan. The designation of the ribstone site as a Provincial
Historic Resource has the effect of providing a place for ceremonial activity to occur. As I
argued in Chapter One, ceremonial activity at buffalo sites is a means of refusing the
state's forms of governance through which a heritage management framework is imposed.

But how exactly does ceremony function to strengthen kin relations? And what does this have to do with these boulders known as buffalo ribstones?

Ceremony is a means of creating and sustaining networks of kinship among human and non-human entities, and the ribstones are acknowledged as having the capacity to strengthen those networks. As I argued in Chapter Four, a relational approach to ancestry can be depicted as a rhizome of relations in which beings are interrelated through a tangle of interlaced trails (Ingold 2000). However, entities that reside in different domains may not, at first, be able to discern one another. It takes work to make bodies mutually apparent, and as socialization among different kinds of entities unfolds, bodies may not become demarcated until the proper protocols have taken place. If human and non-human entities are not immediately apparent to one another, ceremony acts as a process of making human and non-human persons mutually distinguishable. Mutual recognition that takes place through ceremony actively includes *Mostos* in the act of kin-making. As a result, any inquiry into the importance of ribstones in kinship networks must include *Mostos* in the conversation.

The ceremonial way of life requires that individuals engage in a socialization process that is oriented along what I refer to as two axes of experience. These axes, which my teacher Mekwan Awâsis calls the 'horizontal' and the 'vertical', are interdependent modes of relating that inform Plains Cree ceremonial practice. The 'doing' of ceremony, as prescribed actions and behaviours which humans are obligated to uphold, constitute the horizontal axis of experience. Only through strict adherence to these protocols, by demonstrating one's commitment to the socialization process, does the vertical axis of

experience become accessible. This is where the behaviour of ceremonial entities such as *Mostos* can become recognizable. But there are never any guarantees. It requires a lot of work to develop the skills of responsiveness, the ability to perceive distinct patterns of behaviour of ancestral beings, and the capacity to respond.

When a ceremonial event occurs, it is not because a linear sequence of actions has cemented its emergence in a particular time and place. Ceremonialism doesn't depend on a unidirectional or singular orientation to time; it is always conditional, constantly teetering on many variables that may or may not allow the ceremony to unfold. Within this set of variables, an individual's participation is also always conditional; a ceremony may take place with or without the individuals who initiated its emergence, since once it has been set into action it must not be truncated. The temporality of Cree ceremonialism, as I have come to understand during my time living at Maskwacis, is enfolded into a dense system of causal relations which move in a non-linear, and often unpredictable, manner. So, a ceremony – whether it takes place in a sweatlodge or at an archaeological site – only unfolds when the conditions for its emergence are properly and diligently cultivated; when humans foster its eventuation through a particular set of protocols. As my teacher has often stressed, "it's all about protocol. Protocol, protocol, protocol."

The term 'protocol' refers to prescribed actions or behaviours which, when carried out in a particular sequence, enact the horizontal axis of socialization. Lightning (1992) elaborates:

That term, protocol, refers to any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by ancient tradition, that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request. The protocols differ according to the nature of the request and the nature of the individuals involved. The actions may be outwardly simple and straightforward, or they may be complex, involving preparation lasting a year or more. It would be a mistake to say what is presented is symbolic of whatever may be requested, or the relationship that it is hoped will be established, because it is much more than symbolic.

Lightning 1992:216

These protocols don't merely represent the intended request being made or the relationship being established. They are, quite literally, what moves the request or relationship into an actualized state. If the request is for an individual with the proper form of authority to host a particular ceremony, the protocols literally enact the ceremony into being: they provide the potential for its inception and then nurture the conditions for its emergence. When a request for a ceremony is made, tobacco is the most basic and essential offering. Cotton broadcloth is often offered along with the tobacco, one or two metres of up to four different colours, each folded neatly into a layered rectangle. This act may be carried out by someone who has done it countless times before, or by someone who is giving an offering for the first time.

This was the case when a group of about ten people, most of whom identify as non-Indigenous, were present for a sweatlodge ceremony held on my teacher's property. The discussion that took place just before the ceremony provides an example of the way ceremonial teachings are relayed not through a direct and straightforward explanation, but through a long, drawn-out process of learning by developing one's awareness. The individuals were members of an organization from a neighboring town and many of them had never been in ceremony before. They had requested that Mekwan Awâsis become a part of this organization in his ongoing work with Native and non-Native youth. Making this request in an appropriate way meant that they were to carry out the proper protocols, and this is why they were present for the sweatlodge ceremony that day.

A few individuals stood to present their cloth and tobacco to Mekwan Awâsis as they stated their requests, which pertained to specific aspects of the organization's work. Once they were finished, Mekwan Awâsis said, as a way of summing up the requests, "establishing relations is the primary reason for the sweat."

One man was confused, trying to make sense of what this means. He asked, "Does that mean people in the community will know we were here?"

"No, not at all. This is a private affair," says Mekwan Awâsis. After a pause he added, with mild sarcasm, "I'm not gonna be calling people up to tell them who was here to sweat, and why."

His comment is met with silence and downward gazes.

A local Cree man, who often visits the property to do ceremony, interjected that there's a strong spiritual dimension to the relations they're talking about. For a while the explanation doesn't go any further than that, and confusion continues to hang thick in the air.

The confusion took time to begin to yield, and eventually more conversation unfolded along with a subtle probing about what "establishing relations" means. Mekwan Awâsis told the group about a man who came and spent an entire afternoon there, just helping and sitting and listening. Still there was no direct or explicit step-by-step description of how to do relation-making, and he simply summed it up as "doing things in the Cree way."

Verbal descriptions of ceremony leave a lot of work up to the listener. For those who are new to the learning process, instructions for doing ceremonial protocol might come in short, scattered segments. Bring cloth in four bright colours. Bring tobacco. Clearly state your intentions, and be as specific as possible. But it takes time to understand what these offerings do, and to see for oneself the kind of work that ceremony does when the protocols are diligently followed. Participation in ceremony is crucial for an individual's potential foray into perceiving the vertical axis, where human and other-than-human entities undergo a mutually reciprocal process of making bodies and behaviours apparent. Since they are not often spoken about directly, it might take years to learn the names of ceremonial beings. It might take years more to recognize their behaviour and tendencies. This is the long, slow process of establishing relations "in the Cree way," and it takes consistency, patience, and a deep sense of commitment. Above all

else, it requires a careful and constant attunement to one's immediate surroundings, since relations always start with the self and flow outward into the world.

If establishing relations is the primary reason for ceremony, then doing things in the "Cree way" means always putting relations first. Plains Cree ceremonial law, the particularized obligations that bind entities into reciprocal relations, holds that *wahkohtowin* must be maintained. Relations with ribstones are established as humans satisfy the obligation to uphold reciprocal relations with other-than-human entities through ceremonial protocols. Establishing relations at the ribstone site means engaging with ribstones as lively, agentive beings, as *Mostos* is always participating in the process of relation-making. Protection of the site, therefore, allows humans to engage in direct relations with *Mostos* without interference.

Relations Start with the Self

The process of establishing relations always starts with the establishment of one's own personhood. To learn about *Mostos* I had to engage an "ethics of presence" (Green & Green 2013:55), a relational ethics in which a person recognizes they are one responsive being among many other responsive beings. During my fieldwork, I had to bring constant awareness to my own positioning as a researcher inquiring into the relevance of *Mostos* in the Cree ceremonial way of life. I received constant reminders that my every action would affect my own learning process, and to conduct myself as if I were operating in isolation would come with drastic repercussions. To be inescapably in relation is to carry

deep and immovable obligations, and these obligations must be fulfilled in order to prevent the severing of relations.

Every ceremonial act, whether offering tobacco or smoking the pipe, enlivens the territorial laws that are at their most robust in the Sundance lodge, a round structure made of willow branches with a pole of poplar at the centre. The lodge is constructed according to strict protocols. Establishing relations "in the Cree way" is to follow the lineage of ceremonial teachings that emanate from the Sundance, the Grandfather of ceremonies, which takes place at the beginning of each summer and in which participants go for three days without food or drink. Any individual following a ceremonial way of life must continually demonstrate to other-than-human entities that the laws of the Sundance are being followed. "This here is our parliament," a friend told me as we sat next to a lodge talking about those laws. Like the central Sundance pole, the self is always situated at the centre of the cosmos. As the self is articulated and rearticulated through ceremony, the spirits and ancestors are called upon to take notice.

Early on in my first summer of fieldwork, Mekwan Awâsis proposed a process for engaging an inquiry into *Mostos* in a way that encompasses a relational ethics. "We'll work in the four directions," he said, "starting with the east, moving clockwise." This was familiar enough, having already been trained in how to move appropriately during ceremony. But what came next took a lot of time to sink in. "We'll build layers of cloth in each of the four directions, moving in an upward spiral. Eventually, we'll make a tipi." This was the methodology he proposed for me to use, or, in other words, the tools he provided me with to make my own inquiry.

Engaging in relations with *Mostos* must begin with establishing one's own personhood, that is, how and where one is situated in relation to the consortium of entities that move through Cree cosmology. According to my teacher's praxis, one must be diligent in carrying out their duties on the horizontal axis – consistently articulating the self through ceremonial protocols – in order to learn anything about the way ceremonial beings behave. He was insistent that all he could do for me was provide some tools, the basic fundamentals of learning through ceremonial practice, and the rest of the work was up to me. I had to figure out for myself what to do with the four-directions teachings he shared with me.

My inquiry into *Mostos* required a careful balancing act, however – he gave me repeated warnings not to ask for too much, not to be too curious, or I would get more than I needed and become overwhelmed. His mode of instruction was always pointed very specifically at the relational aspects of our work together: he as a teacher passing on what he had learned from his own teachers; I as a student and friend, as someone eager (at times too eager) to learn from him, and as someone working to satisfy the demands and rigors of academic research. His instruction sharply curtailed the modernist assumptions about a researcher's distanced and objective positioning inherent in much academic inquiry, and he made it abundantly clear that if I were to revert to the engrained habits of asking pointed questions and working towards clearly defined and expected outcomes, he would no longer be willing to invest time in my learning process.

It is through this strictly directed learning process that I engage an ethics of presence. This is not an instance of "going native" nor of exoticizing "the other" to satisfy

anthropological curiosity. This is an engaged mode of relational ethics that unravels the assumption that there is a pre-existing, 'knowable' nature that can be discovered, translated and recorded as data for the purpose of scientific study. This engaged ethics nurtures the inherent relationality of research in the territory of Maskwacis, recognizing that the self does not come into being in isolation but always along with other worldly entities. Engaging an ethics of presence through the research process is a means of remaining open to unexpected ways of assembling the world. Because I had to allow *Mostos* to come into view through the teachings of the ethos, my own selfhood was inescapably implicated.

My understanding of the process my teacher proposed for learning about *Mostos*, to work in the four directions, grew deeper as the teachings were iterated in day-to-day practice. One of these teachings was relayed to me when we were sitting in the shade of a pine tree on a hot summer day in 2012. We sat in two collapsible canvas chairs, their metal legs reaching for the earth between tall blades of very green grass. There was a lot of rain that year, accompanied by intense hail storms that pummelled Maskwacis three weekends in a row, so the grass needed frequent cutting. A certain calm attunement accompanied our talk that day, a palpable coming-together of minds that would happen on occasion. It was impossible to predict when that sense of attunement would happen, but, when it did, I had to stay focused and hide my excitement so I didn't seem too eager. If I gasped or barely smiled at hearing the teachings and stories and dreams he would share with me, if my eyes darted around too much or if my brow furrowed as I formulated questions in my head, chances are our session would end immediately. All these

behaviours are indicators that one isn't ready to receive the teachings. So, I sat and listened: calm, silent, unreactive.

Several times over the previous few weeks, my teacher had been talking about the teachings of the East. The sun. *Pisim*. He had stressed again and again the importance of getting up with the sun, of greeting the sun each and every morning, and of adhering to ceremonial laws on a daily basis. These daily actions were the only way to learn how to perceive "the ones who speak the loudest," those ancestral entities who resided in the four directions. He had stressed the importance of getting up with the sun over and over, and I knew he got up at four or five each morning during summer to see the light of the day emerge. Yet, until we sat in the shade of the pine tree that day, I only thought I had understood the implications of getting up with the sun.

At some point in our conversation, he reached towards the ground to grasp my water bottle and his, then into the chair's pocket for his cigarette pack (for he was a smoker at the time). He dug around in his pocket for a lighter. Looking around for one more object, he suggested I grab one of the empty pop bottles that had been discarded under the tree. When we had five objects altogether, he set them up on the ground in a familiar pattern. He put the blue lighter in the middle, saying "that's you", then arranged the other four objects around the lighter, marking the four main directives. This is the patterning of self in ceremony that I had been shown before, such as when leaving a tobacco offering at a sacred rock. Self is always indicated at the centre, surrounded by four.

He looked straight at me, intently. "Ok, now watch."

All five objects were lying on the ground, the bottles and lighter on their sides, the cigarette pack lying flat. "Now, they're horizontal. They're sleeping," he said.

He reached for the lighter at the centre and for the bottle marking East. The self and the sun. He lifted them slightly, turning them upright, and stood them up in the tall grass. They became vertical. "See, you get up with the sun."

The enactment hit me with such clarity that I could see for the first time the deliberate necessity of getting up with the sun. I hung on to calm astonishment, and as the blue lighter rotated a quarter-turn clockwise, the bottle marking South stood upright. Thunderbird. *Pihesiw*. Another quarter turn and the cigarette pack at the West stood up. The wind. *Yotin*. Finally, when the lighter faced North, the pop bottle stood upright. Buffalo. *Mostos*.

"You're always the centre of the universe. Wherever you are, you're always the centre of the universe."

This is not a claim of human exceptionalism, but a declaration of the self as constantly, inescapably in relation. In a Cree ceremonial way of life, the self is always situated at the centre and is never removed from a particular, situated positioning in the cosmos and in relation to other beings. That positioning is highly individualized, so one knows best how to comprehend their own direct engagements with the world and the other-than-humans that populate it. "Are you seeing any results yet?" my teacher would ask on occasion, prompting me to carefully consider my surroundings, my encounters, the flow of events that unfolded on a day-to-day basis.

Just as in my teacher's enactment that day, the self, indicated by the lighter at the centre, must always move in a clockwise direction during activities related to ceremony. Greeting the sun in the morning is only a first step in the daily articulation of self. The sun always moves in the same direction, rising in the east and setting in the west, establishing the cycles of days and seasons and years, of growth and death and decay. In ceremony, moving against the direction of the sun is to violate the laws that ensure life will continue. Countless times during the beginning of my fieldwork, in the midst of fetching wood or sweeping the floor in preparation for a sweatlodge ceremony, I would mindlessly turn the wrong way. "No, to the right, to the right!" my teacher would shout from a distance, always aware of my every move.

This teaching, that one is "always the centre of the universe", is a prescription for how to live in right relation with the territory. An inquiry into the role of *Mostos* in Cree territoriality is never separate from an articulation of a self that is situated at the centre of the cosmos. A friend described this as "braiding the home fire", indicating that relations necessarily start with the weaving of one's own personhood to create a strong sense of certainty about who is acting. Self-as-centre is constantly reinforced through appropriate bodily enactments. My teacher's performance in the grass with the pop bottles, cigarette pack and lighter depicted how to perform one's daily actions in a way that lives up to the obligations of being human. To be recognizable by *Mostos* is essential to establishing one's own personhood. In this dwelling science, humans hold the obligation of caring for *Mostos. Mostos*, in turn, is obligated to care for the earth and everything that grows.

The self-as-centre teaching is apparent in numerous forms and on many scales in the teachings that permeate Plains Cree ceremonialism. Gradually I came to see how one's own position in the cosmos is implicated in the offering of cloth in four colours, in placing tobacco in the prescribed manner, and in always moving clockwise when preparing for or participating in ceremony. Knowing how to engage in patterns of call and response with worldy entities involves establishing one's personhood in recognizable form. In engaging with ribstones as lively, agentive beings, the process of relation-building takes shape in the context of four-directions teachings. The self is always situated at the centre, and relations extend in the four directions. Through a reciprocal process of socialization, humans may come to recognize, and be recognized by, *Mostos*, *pisim*, *yotin*, and *pihesiw*. Establishing relations with *Mostos*, therefore, is inseparable from the process of relating with these other entities.

Embodied Obligations

Many people who visit the Viking ribstones site do not realize that the boulders have been cemented directly into the ground. This was done when the site was designated as a Provincial Historic Resource, as part of the provincial government's efforts to prevent them from being stolen. At one time, there were altogether three ribstones at this site. But the little one, which I've heard many people refer to as the "baby" ribstone, went missing. There is always a risk of theft or vandalism when it comes to public knowledge about such sites and materials. The solution in this case – to cement the ribstones into the ground – serves to ensure the ribstones will remain in situ, so that people can visit them

for ceremonial purposes. By way of the protection that comes with designating this site as a Provincial Historic Resource, the provincial government allows for the obligations inherent to a Plains Cree dwelling science to be carried out with minimal interference. As I explained in Chapter One, those obligations have little to do with an individual's choice, and, rather, are based on mutually reciprocal obligations that are deeply rooted in and with the territory itself.

To make an inquiry into the relevance of buffalo ribstones to Cree territorial relations, I was guided to situate myself in relation to the cosmos by working in the four directions. My teacher's model for situating self-as-centre, as demonstrated by the blue lighter surrounded by four other objects, took hold more deeply the day he shared another teaching with me. I had recently helped him erect a set of tipi poles, twelve long, straight spruce trees that had been cut and prepared at least a decade before. To set them up, we started with a tripod then worked around in spiral, each of the three foundation poles eventually supporting three more. We then secured them together with a rope. When he shared the tipi teaching with me I could still feel the weight of those poles, I could sense my body's exertion required to stand them upright, and I could see the end result, twelve poles intersecting above me, brilliant blue sky beyond. We sat outside that summer day, and he said he wanted to tell me something he had learned from one of his teachers.

"When you stand inside a tipi," he started, "each of those poles points to a star."

I sat silently and listened.

"Once each of those poles reaches up and hits a star, then the lines start going the other way," his hands enacted his words, each of the poles' lines diffracting at right angles once they hit the stars, intersecting once again before extending further into the cosmos, "making a giant, upside-down tipi in the sky."

A teaching such as this, derived from a Plains Cree lineage, isn't meant to reveal its implications as immediate and obvious; rather, it is meant to continually unfold, gradually impacting the listener over a long period of time (Lightning 1992:217). Over the following weeks, this teaching gave me deeper insight into the methodology my teacher had proposed, and into understanding why an inquiry into human-*Mostos* relations required that the self be articulated into the four directions. The image of a tipi reflected in the sky expanded my awareness of what it meant to engage an ethics of presence. I started to ask myself, if the self is always at the centre, then what would it mean for the self to be situated inside a tipi that is reflected in the cosmos?

The tipi in the sky and the tipi on the earth are self-scaling, one invariantly superimposed on the other: a tipi containing the cosmos and the cosmos containing a tipi. Since constructing the tipi on the earth is process-oriented, always starting with a tripod and building in a spiral, then the same must be true for the tipi in the sky. And because they are not fragments of one another but are mutually contained reflections, then in building a tipi, one must also be building the cosmos. The implications of this teaching strengthened my intention to engage ethically through my research in Maskwacis. Asking questions about ancestral beings requires a particularized ethical positioning in relation to the ethos of

teachings. Situating oneself in a self-scaling tipi came to inform the challenge I had been given: engaging an ethics of presence to make an inquiry into human-*Mostos* relations.

Asking about the relevance of ribstones to Cree territorial relations situates these boulders within a rendering of Plains Cree cosmology in which the self is always deeply in relation. It is the obligation of humans to engage kin-making practices on a day-to-day basis, and as kin relations unfold with the powerful entities residing in the four directions, every action within the tipi on the ground also occurs within the tipi in the sky. To renew relations with *Mostos* is essential to the composition of the cosmos, and is essential to fulfilling the obligations of being human.

Reciprocal obligations among human and non-human entities are inherent to the Plains Cree ceremonial way of life. Given that territory *is* kinship, persons and landforms come into being co-substantially through patterns of mutual life-giving. *Mostos* is integral to territorial relations. So, ceremonies at buffalo sites are essential to maintaining reciprocal relations with these agentive entities. Giving ceremonial offerings, and many other prescribed actions and behaviours – such as smudging with the smoke of various plants, sharing food, singing song, giving tobacco – are practices which make bodies apparent and carve out the place from which persons are acting. Relations are always in flux, always in motion, and require constant renewal through ceremony.

Self is always in the making, articulated and rearticulated through the cyclical hardening and collapsing of bodily boundaries. One comes to be recognized through a gradual accumulation of discreet layers, the surfaces of skin, hair and clothes bringing body into being when engulfed in steam, when hands and face are covered with the

smoke of sweetgrass, or when the pipe is smoked. The self takes shape, or, as my teacher once put it, is "carved out" through these daily practices. In the home of Mekwan Awâsis, one of the household rituals is to smudge the entire house before bed every night. A member of the family, often one of the younger grandchildren, will be asked to carry a small pan holding a smouldering blend of dried plants around the house, allowing the smoke of sweetgrass, juniper, cedar, and sage to reach into the corners of every room. They'll pause with the pan outstretched in front of each person they pass, giving a few moments for the recipient to fan smoke over themselves, inhaling deeply. I often hear people breathing a satisfied sigh after covering their head with smoke. Every night all household entities take shape, as layers of sweet-musty scent lingers on the surface of couches and chairs, delineating walls and ceilings. Piles of clothing and other belongings, worn or outgrown, are regularly burned in a fire just east of the house. Here, common sense suggests that it's unsafe to pass one's belongings on to other people since this could result in mistaken identity. Clothed bodies are continuously articulated through discreet layers of smoke, steam, the substance of shared food, so of course one's clothing and belongings become recognizable as a component of self. To be living in this house is to be recognized by those entities encountered in ceremony, so certain precautions are crucial.

In order to uphold obligations to this powerful being, humans must continuously renew relations with *Mostos*. Carried out in the four directions, the day-to-day actions that make up the horizontal axis of experience are integral to enlivening an ethics of presence in Maskwacis. Much work goes on in the iterative process of socializing through the

interdependent modes of establishing relations that unfold along the horizontal and vertical axes of experience. One's personhood is iterated again and again through the performative 'carving out' of self through ceremony. The proper lines of authority must be followed. Inquiries must be made through the appropriate protocols and by establishing relations through the appropriate means.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Relations with *Mostos* are fundamental to the webs of kinship that compose Plains Cree ancestral landscapes. Since buffalo ribstones are intimately bound with relations among humans and *Mostos*, these boulders hold a central place in Plains Cree ceremonial life. The Alberta Government's designation of the Viking ribstone site as a Provincial Historic Resource goes far to strengthen human-*Mostos* relations by instantiating a principle of non-interference as the site is being protected. This means that, in the immediate vicinity surrounding the ribstones, humans can satisfy the demands of tending to kin relations by fulfilling their obligations to *Mostos*. Integral to those obligations is that humans acknowledge *Mostos* through ceremony.

The ribstone site is a nexus of territorial kin-making, and its protection is essential for the strengthening of kin relations across Plains Cree territory. That the site is protected allows relations with *Mostos* to flourish. In this way, the province's designation of this site as a Provincial Historic Resource grounds an equivocation that does not interrupt the territorial obligations of those leading a ceremonial way of life in Maskwacis. Not only that, but given that the ability to continue to live a customary way of life was one of the treaty principles intended by Plains Cree in 1876, the designation of the Viking ribstone

site as a Provincial Historic Resource is one step in the right direction for the Alberta Government to honour treaty relations.

However, this protection also comes with a problematic spatial imagination, since the protected site comes with boundaries that don't apply from within networks of territorial relations. Taken to an extreme, the spatial imagination of heritage management in Alberta pits territorial relations against industrial development. These kinds of tensions are not apparent in the example of the Viking ribstones, but are quite visible at other sites in the province. This is what I turn to next.

Chapter Six

Sites of Tension: The Resource Paradigm at Hardisty Buffalo Pound

When Andrew Reed excavated a fully-intact wooden post in the ground, he knew right away he had come across something special. Andrew, a professional archaeologist working with a private consulting firm, had been contracted by a commercial oil company to carry out the preliminary impact assessment for a new oil pipeline. The proposed pipeline, if approved, would be located just outside of Hardisty, about 100 km west of the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The post Andrew uncovered in 2008 was part of a buffalo pound, a round structure made out of wooden posts and woven branches accompanied by a lead-up ramp, commonly used by peoples of the Plains to corral buffalo so they could easily be slaughtered. The wide posts that marked the entrance, and the large buffalo skulls sitting adjacent to the posts, are characteristic features of buffalo pounds.

The site has garnered a lot of attention due to its size and evidence of active occupation from around 700 AD until 1200 AD, and it would turn out to be one of the most substantive archaeological sites in the province. The site has much to reveal about the buffalo-hunting way of life in this time period. But that is not all. The knowledge and practice associated with constructing and utilizing a buffalo pound are considered 'sacred' (Samson Cree Nation 2015), and, therefore, for local Indigenous people, the pound at Hardisty has become a central place for maintaining relations with the buffalo spirit. But there is another side to the story as well, one in which buffalo are approached not as ancestral kin, but as a resource to be removed from the ground.

The Hardisty region has become a thoroughfare for multiple oil companies, and several pipelines cut through the area. The buffalo pound has been subject to the regulated procedures that implement Alberta's heritage protection law. As the landscape is transformed through resource development infrastructure, archaeological materials are regularly encountered during impact assessments for development projects. The *Historical Resources Act* defines archaeological materials as 'historical resources'. Once uncovered, these materials become legally owned by the provincial government and are then dealt with according to a set of pre-determined procedures that guide operational decision-making. These procedures are administered by the Historical Resources Management Branch (HRM Branch), part of the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The mandate of this branch of the government is to balance the needs of heritage preservation with the demands of development. While in some cases this mandate reflects genuine concern for the preservation of sites considered significant to the people of Alberta, in the case of the Hardisty buffalo pound it ultimately pits Indigenous interests against the interests of industry.

There are fundamental tensions between caring for ancestral landscapes and engaging in resource extraction. In recent years, the Hardisty buffalo pound has become one of the most contentious archaeological sites in central Alberta. In large part, the tensions around this site emerge from its position at the juncture between Cree relational networks, and the province's *Historical Resources Act*. This legislation was put into place to protect archaeological sites from destruction, but the basis of its mandate to protect archaeological sites presumes that altering landscapes to make way for resource

development is inevitable. In other words, defining these sites as 'historical resources' pits them on the other side of the 'natural resources' coin. In this way, the framing of sites associated with buffalo/*Mostos* primarily as resources naturalizes the assumption that they should be removed from the ground. As a result, obligations of territorial kinship become overshadowed by the benefits of resource commodification, and Indigenous people are allowed only cursory involvement in heritage-related issues.

In this chapter, I start by tracing how the lineage of heritage policy and practice in Alberta has come to inform the way the heritage management process has played out at the Hardisty pound. I then discuss the particular heritage management process that has unfolded at the Hardisty buffalo pound, and look to the failings of that process to effectively engage strategies for heritage protection. Following this, I discuss the problematics of defining archaeological materials as 'resources', and ask how regulations for heritage management intersect with other areas of policy that relate to treaty rights. Finally, I look to the implications of having ceremony at the Hardisty buffalo pound site, and show that despite the constraints of heritage legislation, human/*Mostos* relations continue to unfold. I argue that despite the failings of Alberta's heritage law to adequately reflect Indigenous concerns and interests, First Nations continue to find avenues to maintain relations with territorial beings.

The slippery slope of heritage protection

Hardisty is well-known in Alberta as a breeding ground for "tank farms", the idiomatic term for the cluster of giant cylindrical containers where oil companies store oil for shipping and piping. Enbridge Inc., an oil and gas distributor based out of Calgary, is one of several companies including TransCanada, Husky, and Gibson with tanks in the area immediately adjacent to the archaeological site. On a hill next to the buffalo pound sit about 70 tanks filled with oil (Barnes, 2014).[10] The presence of several oil companies in the site's immediate vicinity make the impact of Alberta's resource economy strongly apparent, and draws into question the feasibility of implementing a strategy for protection of a massive archaeological site alongside development of the oil industry.

This is not an unusual set of circumstances – there are contradictions inherent in laws that mandate heritage protection, as these laws claim to protect archaeological sites as a reflection of public interest. However, where public interest in strongly in support of the expansion of industrial development, archaeological sites are readily sacrificed for this perceived 'common good'. The question of whose interests this sacrifice supports is ultimately left dangling, and efforts to uphold the so-called 'common good' requires that Indigenous ancestral sites are destroyed in the name of economic gain.

Archaeological studies and historical accounts demonstrate that buffalo pounds were in active use up until the 1850s, at which time the herds had been depleted to such

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[10]http://www.edmontonjournal.com/news/Energy+Hardisty+enjoying+boom+even+awaits+decision+controversial+Keystone+pipeline/9340761/story.html

an extent that they could no longer be depended on for survival (Brink 2008; Verbicky-

Todd 1984). For those who lead a ceremonial way of life in central Alberta, it is through

sites such as the Hardisty buffalo pound that reciprocal relations with buffalo continue to

be enacted. Because of this, proper care of the pound is crucial for maintaining the

"contractual obligations" (Milloy 1991) that are sustained through the Cree law of

wakohtowin. In the buffalo-hunting days, technologies used for the slaughter of buffalo

were inseparable from the all-pervasive laws that governed ceremonial life. These laws

held that mutual care was crucial to survival – humans cared for buffalo through

ceremony, and buffalo, in turn, cared for humans by offering themselves as food,

clothing, and shelter. Buffalo pounds were built under the direction of a shaman who had

been bestowed that power by way of a spirit being. Offerings to Creator, such as feathers,

bones, cloth, beads and tobacco, would often be hung in a tree at the centre of the pound,

or placed near the entrance (Jenish 2000:97-98; Mandelbaum 1979:52-53; Brink

2008:110-111). Acknowledging networks of relations through which sites such as the

Hardisty pound came into being is essential for ceremonial laws to be upheld, and failure

to acknowledge those relations is to fail to follow the land's laws.

However, as I have argued in previous chapters, buffalo sites are also subject to

the province's heritage legislation and the processes that implement it. The province of

Alberta has robust legislation for the protection of heritage, meaning that there are strict

procedures with which developers must comply before breaking ground to ensure that

archaeological materials aren't needlessly destroyed. The *Historical Resources Act* of

1973 is typical of legislation passed during this era. At the time, there was growing

concern about the damage being done to archaeological materials through processes of development, and both Indigenous people and archaeologists were pressuring governmental bodies to implement laws for heritage protection. Since the vast majority of archaeological sites in the province derive from the ancestors of Indigenous peoples who live in the area today, heritage legislation impacts Indigenous heritage most substantially. The procedures that implement the province's *Historical Resources Act* – such as impact assessments and strategies for archaeological mitigation – aim to prevent the destruction of Indigenous heritage. However, in certain circumstances, this aim can stand in direct tension with the claim that any and all archaeological materials in provincial lands, defined as 'historical resources' under the *Historical Resources Act*, are legally owned by the Government of Alberta.

This is a tension that Ziff and Hope draw attention to:

> Generally speaking, heritage preservation legislation provides a framework for the designation, protection, and management of historical and archaeological sites, including aboriginal and cultural sites and places. Conventionally, heritage legislation grants the state authority not only to take measures to ensure that the sites are properly maintained but also to permit their alteration, even their destruction, in appropriate circumstances.

> Ziff and Hope 2009:184

It is in the regulated procedures for identifying these 'appropriate circumstances' that the state designated itself the authority to decide which interests to prioritize. Despite the centrality of the Hardisty buffalo pound to Indigenous territorial and relational networks that are sustained through ceremony, in this case the province's jurisdictional control over heritage issues has ultimately resulted in the prioritization of industrial development. A look into the development of heritage legislation, and the processes which implement it, is helpful in order to understand how this slippery slope in heritage law – that is, how the legal mandate can prioritize one set of interests over another – came to be.

The development of heritage laws and policies coincided with a drastic shift in archaeological theory, which was moving away from cultural-historic approaches developed in the late nineteenth century and towards the 'new archaeology' of the 1960s, known as processualism. Processual archaeology was a divergence from the explicitly political motivations of cultural-historic archaeology, which had characteristically been used to bolster European nationalist regimes that were strengthened by archaeological proof of so-called pure ethnic identity (Trigger 2006; Thomas 2004). Instead, processualism moved towards the positivist approaches of the natural sciences, which claim to be scientifically objective and ethically neutral. This so-called 'new archaeology' used systematic methodologies that avoided the political leanings of cultural-historic approaches. Processualism gave archaeology a 'clean slate', ostensibly wiping away the tainted intentions of archaeology's other incarnations. In valuing empirical verification, processual archaeology was taken up by governments as a means of objectively reporting

on historical facts. As a result, archaeology came to be recognized as a standardized form of expertise that produces scientific generalizations about the past.

As heritage laws were being implemented, the management of cultural and heritage resources came to be increasingly under state control. As a result of this, trained heritage professionals were needed to implement and administer the archaeological and bureaucratic procedures that were being created to uphold the newly-formed laws. The archaeological procedures that implement heritage laws, based on the processual methodologies developed in the 1960s, are known as Cultural Resource Management or CRM. The professionalization of archaeology, which occurred just as archaeology was being celebrated as a scientific form of expertise, landed archaeologists in a new-found position of authority (Allen 2010; Smith 2001, 2004).

CRM procedures are carried out by trained, professional archaeologists on behalf of their clients – industrial developers who need to satisfy the demands of heritage laws. The CRM process identifies archaeologists as 'experts' on heritage issues, and along with this reliance on archaeological expertise is an assumption that Indigenous people are not available to give input on how to manage their own heritage.

Alberta's *Historical Resources Act* defines historical resources as "any work of nature or of humans that is primarily of value for its palaeontological, archaeological, prehistoric, historic, cultural, natural, scientific or aesthetic interest including, but not limited to, a palaeontological, archaeological, prehistoric, historic or natural site, structure or object" (*HRA* 2000:3). Buffalo sites become defined as 'historical resources' through the heritage management process. All components of the Hardisty buffalo pound are

defined as historical resources, including the pound's wooden posts, the buffalo remains and skulls that marked its entrance, and the spear points and pottery shards in the surrounding areas that were used for processing buffalo. As a result, decision-making processes that have unfolded around this site have prioritized an approach to buffalo that defines them as 'resources' and not as 'kin'. The assumption that archaeological sites should be managed according to the regulated procedures outlined in the *Historical Resources Act* are left unquestioned.

Federal heritage laws in Canada have never been developed – legislation for the protection of heritage, and the processes which implement it, applies provincially (Bell 2009; Burley 1994). Although there was legislation incorporated as part of the Indian Act in 1927 to prevent destruction or acquisition of grave goods, carvings, and rock art, this only applied to lands set aside as First Nations reserves. Burley (1994) explains that from the 1930s to the 1950s, a few Federal laws had some indirect implications for the conservation of archaeological materials. However, they were generally weak and rarely enforced. In the 1960s there were still no active resource management programs in either Provincial or Federal jurisdictions. Despite efforts on the part of the National Archaeological Survey in the mid-1970s to implement Federal funding programs for archaeological resource management programs, this funding was cut in 1976 (Burley 1994:79-81).

As Burley (1994) points out, there were efforts to implement federal heritage legislation in the early 1990s. A symposium was held in 1991 to gain input from First Nations people from across Canada on a proposed Bill, entitled an "Act Respecting the

Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Canada". First Nations participants in this symposium pointed out problematic definitions in the proposed Act, and expressed concern that elders and spiritual leaders should be included "in the process of impact assessment and regulatory control" of archaeological sites (Burley 1994:90). However, the greatest conflict at this symposium arose concerning the presumption of Crown ownership over archaeological materials. Burley explains:

> Technically identified as "Her Majesty in right of Canada" in legislative text, claims of Crown ownership equate with public as opposed to private rights to archaeological remains. Though there exists an overall assumption of "we-ness" in reference to the Crown as public, it is a perception not shared by aboriginal cultures. It was the Crown with whom many of these groups were forced into Treaty relationships, and it is the Crown who continues to represent the colonial agency of the Indian Act. In essence, the Crown is viewed as a foreign colonizing power and the proposed legislation, intentionally or not, becomes a means by which it will appropriate from aboriginal groups the title to their archaeological and cultural past. This situation was unconditionally rejected, and to gain support of Canada's First Nations the proposed legislation must recognize an "inherent right to ownership" by aboriginal peoples of their ancestral legacy.

> Burley 1994:90-91

For Burley, the fundamental lack of agreement about ownership in the proposed

federal heritage legislation is the primary reason it could never get off the ground. The

lack of federal legislation, even as heritage issues are left in the hands of the provinces,

points not only to the unwillingness of the federal government to recognize any kind of

inherent right of Indigenous people to control ancestral sites that are located on Crown

lands, but also to the unwillingness of Indigenous people to agree to the Crown's

ownership of ancestral places. However, there is much more at stake than heritage sites in

these sorts of tensions, as the lack of control Indigenous people have over ancestral

landscapes is rooted in the Crown's claims to sovereignty.

As in the case of the Hardisty buffalo pound, there is a close link in Alberta, and

indeed across the country, between heritage protection mandates and oil and gas

development. This link was first established in the late 1970s when the Archaeological

Survey of Canada was asked by Cabinet to provide recommendations for a national

strategy on heritage management legislation in order to deal with an impending, large-

scale oil and gas development project in the north. However, with concerns that an

archaeological program developed specifically for the north would not adequately address

the nation as a whole, it was never implemented at the federal level (Burley 1994:85).

Without clear definitions and mandates for heritage protection that apply across the entire

country – a characteristic that remains unique to Canada in relation to other industrialized

nations (Natcher 2001:119) – it is left to each province to determine how to define,

implement, and regulate how, to what ends, and to what extent heritage sites require

protection in the face of various forms of development. The result is an inconsistent

patchwork of provincial heritage laws, which may bend and sway depending on the

resource development priorities of each province's government.

With heritage issues confined in the realm of provincial jurisdiction, the *Historical*

Resources Act perpetuates the same issue that prevented agreement regarding federal

heritage legislation, since historical resources are considered to be owned by the province,

and the province therefore has ultimate decision-making authority.

'Expert' Knowledge and CRM at the Hardisty Buffalo Pound

Smith uses the term "authorized heritage discourse" to refer to the reliance on

expert knowledge in state approaches to heritage management, and argues that hegemonic

underpinnings of this discourse undermine alternative ways of knowing (Smith 2006).

Since expert knowledge based on formal qualifications and scientific training is

prioritized in the implementation of heritage laws, professional archaeologists are in a

position to produce recommendations for heritage-related decisions. As the mandate to

protect heritage is implemented through regulated heritage management procedures, only

certain voices are legitimized as having the authority to speak on heritage issues. As

heritage legislation was developed at a time when it was believed Indigenous people were

on their way to disappearing entirely, and despite efforts of Indigenous people to play an

active role in heritage management processes (Burley 1994), the state largely continues to

rely on the logics of scientific expertise to provide solutions for dealing with

archaeological sites and materials. As a result of this, Indigenous interests in archaeological sites often get ignored, because there is no defined role for direct input within the regulated heritage management process.

Following how the CRM process has played out at the Hardisty buffalo pound provides an empirical basis from which to asses whether, or to what extent, the intention of the *HRA* to balance the protection of heritage with the facilitation of development is achieved. Where is heritage protection prioritized? Under what circumstances are the scales tipped in favour of industrial development? Where industry is prioritized over heritage protection, what impacts does this have for those who lead a ceremonial way of life?

I visited Hardisty towards the end of my fieldwork in the fall of 2013 after receiving an invitation through the Archaeological Society of Alberta, which organized a group visit for its members and other interested individuals. My previous attempts to visit the site had fallen through, and since a visit required coordination with site staff – to help us navigate the rough terrain between a nearby resident's driveway and the site's distributed features – it wasn't something I could easily do on my own. So, along with a companion from Maskwacis, I made the journey to join a group of about twenty individuals on a site tour, lead by Andrew Reed, the project's head archaeologist, who had uncovered that first post back in 2008. The Hardisty buffalo pound has been subjected to several phases of development between 2008 and 2015.

On the day of my visit to the site, while congregated by the fence at the end of the neighbor's driveway, Andrew gave us a briefing on what we were going to see and the precautions we, as visitors, had to take. The consulting firm didn't want anyone to fall into an archaeological pit and take legal recourse. We made our way across a pathless hill of long, uncut grass then approached the site. We were guided through the various components of the dig, consisting of several excavation areas which corresponded to the areas where test-shovel pits had proven positive for archaeological materials during the impact assessment for this phase of the project. Our visit was towards the end of the field season, so excavated pits were mostly void of earth, sitting as empty rectangular pits with precisely straight walls and rigid right angles. There were a few pits being actively excavated, archaeologists crouched low with trowel in hand, carefully scraping away layers of dirt. One woman was working her way around a bison bone protruding out of the surface of the earth, cautiously removing earth to reveal its contours. These archaeologists were carrying out the regulated procedures of CRM for their client, Enbridge Inc., in order for the company to receive *Historical Resource Act Clearance* from Alberta's HRM Branch. Only once they received *HRA Clearance* could pipeline construction begin.

At the Hardisty buffalo pound, each time an oil company submitted a proposal to construct a new pipeline, the regulated CRM procedures were triggered. Each of these development phases began with a *Historical Resource Impact Assessment*, as outlined in the *HRA*. The impact assessment carried out by Andrew in 2008 began with a database search for any known sites in the area. At the time, there were no sites in the region that

had been recorded in the province's archaeological database, known as the *Listing of Historical Resources*. So, the next phase of the assessment was to carry out ground-surface inspections in the proposed pipeline route. This involved physically traversing the area, carrying out test-pits at controlled intervals according to the "judgemental survey techniques" archaeologists develop as they gain familiarity with a particular kind of landscape. Some of my archaeologist comrades told me how their predictions came to be measurable by common sense, developed through repeatedly testing hypotheses such as how dwellings might be situated in reference to elevation and sightlines, shelter from wind, and proximity to bodies of water. It was on this initial impact assessment that Andrew came across the intact wooden post that would become the subject of a tale now told countless times. In addition to the pole, a substantial number of test-pits tested positive for archaeological materials.

The initial assessment was carried out for a joint project between two major oil companies, Enbridge and TransCanada. The ideal scenario for a company proposing a development project is for an impact assessment to turn up nothing – no archaeological materials in the proposed project route. This way, they do not have to deal with the cost and timeline attached to the regulated requirements for archaeological mitigation. But the process did not unfold this way for Enbridge and TransCanada, who had contracted the company Andrew worked for to do the job associated with gaining *HRA Clearance*. A major archaeological site was obstructing their pipeline route, and they had to deal with the costly and time-consuming realities of appeasing demands of the *HRA*.

The initial impact assessment in 2008 resulted in a report that outlined

recommendations to Alberta's Historical Resources Management Branch, a component of

the Ministry of Culture and Tourism that administers all aspects of the regulated heritage

management process. This report produced by Andrew was a fundamental aspect of the

process, since the oil companies could not proceed with constructing the pipeline until

recommendations made in the report, once approved by Ministry administrators, were

properly implemented. And because the ground-surface inspections had indicated it was

likely that a voluminous amount of archaeological materials lay beneath the surface of the

earth, substantial excavations were going to be necessary before the Ministry would grant

HRA Clearance and allow construction to begin.

The first round of excavations took place through three phases in the field seasons

of 2008 and 2009. A total of 160 square metres were excavated, and this covered the

pound itself, as well as two nearby campsites where buffalo were processed for food, furs,

and other uses. During the 2009 excavations, TransCanada Aboriginal Affairs initiated a

First Nations participation program, during which members of Maskwacis visited the site,

participated in the dig, and held a sweatlodge ceremony with the archaeological team. I

return to the impact of a sweatlodge ceremony involving CRM archaeologists working on

the Hardisty site later on. While reference to it may remain buried in a field report, for the

Plains Cree ceremonialists involved, this is the appropriate way to establish relations, and

a minimal requirement for the archaeologists doing the excavation work.

Once this first round of excavations were complete, the resulting report submitted

to Alberta's archaeological survey recommended that the pipeline be rerouted to avoid the

buffalo pound site, since countless undisturbed artifacts were likely still embedded in the ground. This recommendation was implemented and the project route redesigned, so the pipeline was not constructed directly through the pound itself, which includes remnants of its circular structure as well as the still-undisturbed remains of buffalo that had accumulated over centuries of active use. Instead, the pipeline was constructed to circumvent it.

This 'avoidance strategy', to use the parlance of CRM archaeology, reflects an aspect of the regulated heritage management process that accommodates recommendations of professional archaeologists based on a site's assessed significance. As the excavations, inventories and analyses of CRM are carried out in Alberta, each management decision hinges on the possibility of there being the right kind of evidence to justify continuation, or not, of the regulated archaeological process. Justification for archaeological mitigation rests on demonstration that affected sites are 'significant' enough to warrant delaying project construction. However, since the significance of a historical resource is not only assessed according to its unique or exemplary status, but also measured against the profit margin of other resources, protection of a site that is assigned a high rating on the scale of significance can be undermined when the potential economic benefits of industrial expansion are prioritized.

The next phase of excavations proceeded without any major disruptions, following an impact assessment for a pipeline project initiated by Enbridge. Similar to elements of the project that had been carried out in 2008-2009, the process for acquiring *HRA Clearance* was initiated with an impact assessment. Following approval, the field

season started in 2013. Excavations totalled 616 square meters, which included more campsites and processing grounds in the area immediately surrounding the pound (Reed personal communication). In total, upwards of 45 000 artifacts have been excavated, catalogued and stored at the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton.

Up to this point in the heritage management process, it could be argued that the mandate of the HRM Branch, to balance the protection of heritage with the facilitation of development, was maintained. First Nations from Maskwacis were kept informed about the site and participated in the archaeological process. Shortly after this, however, the integrity of this balance was lost.

Since the excavations that took place in 2013, several projects have been initiated in the Hardisty area. One of these projects, proposed by Enbridge, was for an Edmonton to Hardisty pipeline. The same regulated process was initiated for this project, starting with an impact assessment. The resulting report made recommendations to re-route the newly proposed pipeline, since the route in the first proposal intercepted highly sensitive areas of the buffalo pound. As a result, a second proposal was submitted to Alberta's Historical Resources Management Branch, and was subsequently approved. However, upon making a request to Enbridge for information about the newly-routed pipeline, a band from Maskwacis was denied that information, as Enbridge claimed the information was confidential.

Following Enbridge's refusal to release the documents outlining *HRA Clearance*, the Maskwacis band filed a complaint with the National Energy Board, requesting that the certificate granting clearance with *HRA* requirements – and therefore the official approval

to start construction – be suspended. This request was denied, and the National Energy

Board's review of the issue resulted in confirmation that Enbridge had been operating in

compliance with all recommendations the province had put forward in its approval for

HRA Clearance, and was therefore not in a position to have the certificate suspended.

Still, this did not satisfy the Samson Cree Nation, one of four bands at Maskwacis.

An article in the Samson Cree Nation newsletter, dated July 2015, announced their

decision to take the case to the Federal Court of Appeal. An excerpt from that article,

which quotes Councillor Holly Johnson/Rattlesnake, demonstrates the position Samson

takes on the failure of the province to implement a fair and transparent process for

managing the buffalo pound amidst industrial interests in the area:

> This continued trampling of our sacred sites without talking to us or
>
> considering our concerns can't continue. They [the Government of Alberta]
>
> believe that our resources and historic sites are not real or not that important.
>
> How is it possible to meaningfully consult with us about the pipeline and
>
> related avoidance and mitigation measures to the Bison Pound if government
>
> and industry decide that it is their burden to decide what is best for us and our
>
> sites without providing us any information or including us in its discussions?
>
> The Maskwacis Cree people are a strong people and will no longer allow
>
> colonial attitudes to prevail unopposed," said Councillor Holly
>
> Johnson/Rattlesnake.

Further activity in the Bison Pound area without meaningful consultation is unacceptable. As stewards of the lands, waters, and resources, it is our obligation and right to be meaningfully engaged about impacts to our rights, cultural resources and heritage property. Samson will not stand for Alberta delegating to third parties its substantive consultation obligations in respect of the Bison Pound to companies continuing to advance projects in the Bison Pound area. We are not opposed to carefully planned development that avoids impacts to the Bison Pound, but Alberta needs to consult with us directly and not try to pass-the-buck to the companies.

Samson Cree Nation 2015: 2-3

Councillor Johnson / Rattlesnake's words point directly to the effects of an authorized discourse through which heritage issues are addressed – the province delegates to third party archaeological consultants, who are considered 'experts' on heritage issues, and First Nations have little to no say in regards to sites located on ancestral lands. Her words also expose the deep roots of Canada's failure to come to an agreement on Federal heritage policy – the unresolved dispute concerning ownership of material heritage residing with the Crown – here reflected on a provincial scale but nonetheless revealing the unwillingness of Canadian bodies of government to relinquish control over heritage sites. At the time of writing, this case continues to be before the courts.

The resource paradigm

Haber (2012) argues that commercial archaeology, which defines archaeological materials as 'resources', recapitulates coloniality. By normalizing an ontological split between the material and immaterial, archaeology has disciplined the way colonial governments tend to deal with remnants of the past:

> Simply written, archaeology is about knowing the past through the study of its material remains. There is a time called 'past' that has gone before we came. Something material has remained from it, and even if it has not remained as it then was, something has remained from that original material... As time has passed, the past is gone; a common representation of the passage of time from past to present to future is the timeline, whose natural manifestation is stratigraphy. We are in the present separated from the past by a measurable distance on the timeline.
>
> Haber 2012:58

The archaeological past reproduces coloniality through "the modern disciplinary representations of (pre-colonial) history and of the correct ways of dealing with its remains" (Haber 2012:59). The material remains of the past are there to be sacrificed for a prosperous future, while the immaterial – such as memory and kinship – are excluded as non-disciplinary (Haber 2012:60-61) and therefore are assumed to have no role in CRM practices. That materials embedded in the ground are encountered as part of the

development process has left unquestioned the view that these materials are 'resources' to be removed from the ground like any other resource.

The resource paradigm (Smith 2000:98; Yellowhorn 2002:73) has naturalized the assumption that these materials, often referred to as 'cultural' or 'archaeological' resources, are there to be extracted through the scientific methodologies of CRM, in order to make way for impending construction or harvesting of 'natural' resources such as oil. As Yellowhorn puts it, "CRM is about preserving archaeological material as though they are non-renewable resources deserving protection, but built into the model is the rationale for harvesting cultural resources under the guise of salvage" (Yellowhorn 2002:65). The resource paradigm posits the material remains of the past as being worthy of protection, but only insofar as they don't compromise the potential for wealth that comes as a result of resource extraction generally. In Alberta, the inherent value of heritage sites is recognized by the *Historical Resources Act*, but how the protection of such sites and materials plays out is always contingent on the perceived value of new development projects and their capacity to bring more wealth to the province.

Even as the Historical Resources Management Branch intends to ensure a balance is maintained between industrial development and heritage protection, the interests of industry often become prioritized. Due to the reliance on the "authorized heritage discourse" (Smith 2006), CRM only legitimizes scientific knowledge. In a similar vein, Nadasdy argues that resource co-management processes rely on scientific forms of capturing, recording, and analyzing data. Co-management processes, in legitimizing expert-oriented discourse, simultaneously work to delegitimize non-expert ways of

knowing (Nadasy 2003). As expert archaeological knowledge is carried through the heritage management process, the relations that are integral to ancestral landscapes become discounted.

Under the *Historical Resources Act*, material remnants of buffalo-hunting days became construed as a historical resource in need of protection through the development process. Standards for protection came to be based on expert-oriented archaeological practices and processes that left First Nations out of the conversation concerning appropriate means of caring for these sites as integral to ancestral landscapes. As a result of the implementation of a consultation policy, the *HRA* started to converge with a general tendency towards rectifying the lack of consistency in applying a process for meaningful consultation. As I argued in Chapter Three, although treaty does not intersect directly with the *Historical Resources Act*, the HRM Branch works with a system of 'triggering mechanisms' that initiate the consultation process when the province's decisions concerning land and resources have the potential to impact previously established treaty rights. The circumstances under which the consultation process is 'triggered' in heritage-related contexts is determined by two interrelated factors: whether a proposed development comes within specified proximity to sites already protected under the *HRA*, and whether a newly-encountered site is deemed significant enough to warrant it being in the state's best interest to avoid the potential risk of failing to fulfill the duty to consult.

As noted by Laidlaw & Passelac-Ross (2014), treaty rights in Alberta are interpreted in the narrowest possible terms, meaning that First Nations use of and access

to natural resources only seldomly becomes a legally established right. The narrow definition of treaty rights is also evident in instances where heritage-related matters are being addressed. For example, the province makes a distinction between treaty rights and what it defines as 'traditional uses'. The ability to engage in specific ancestral practices is a recognized treaty right. However, the government defines which practices are guaranteed rights. When it comes to ancestral places that may be defined as 'historical resources' by the province, the right to have access depends on how the province defines which practices are guaranteed in the treaty. This means that access to sites used for particular ceremonies, or for vision quests, are considered legal rights, so sites used for ongoing ceremonial use must be protected from development. However, access to land for other types of ancestral practices, such as gathering plant medicines, is not considered a treaty right (Laidlaw & Passelac-Ross 2014).

Although many employees of the Historical Resources Management Branch make every effort to expand the scope of their work to protect Indigenous ancestral places, they are often bound by the restrictive definitions laid out in the *Historical Resources Act*, and by the limited mandate of the Consultation Policy. First Nations make claims to exercise a treaty right through continued access to a particular place. However, these claims often don't hold up against the province's interpretation of treaty rights. For example, without clear examples of ongoing ceremonial use, a place may not be deemed significant enough by the province to warrant protection. As made evident by the Hardisty buffalo pound, treaty rights don't necessarily apply to give First Nations people access to the most substantial archaeological sites in the province.

Clearing Obstacles

It wasn't until a few years after my visit to the Hardisty site, when speaking to Georgia Bull, a Cree woman from Maskwacis, that I learned about the impact a sweatlodge ceremony had had on the CRM workers at Hardisty[11]. Georgia told me all the archaeologists had been camped out there, but that they were having trouble carrying out their work. Things kept going wrong, the weather wasn't cooperating, and they were feeling frustrated. A few months after starting their field season, they had a small ceremony at the site, and then a sweatlodge ceremony offsite, with Georgia and a few others from Maskwacis. Things improved after that, she explained. The weather stopped impeding them, the other obstacles cleared, and they could finally do their work.

This is a common mode of explanation concerning cause and effect within the dense folds of relations that are at play in heritage work. If things are not going well, the spirits must be appeased. The relational webs that extend through the landscape in central Alberta continue to be strengthened through ceremonial activity. Despite the events surrounding the Hardisty pound, the province's jurisdictional and procedural control through the *Historical Resources Act*, these networks of relations continue to operate. In the instance referred to by Georgina, other-than-human entities were uncooperative in allowing the work of archaeologists to unfold until a ceremony took place. Even if the

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[11] Note, I am uncertain as to whether this is the same sweatlodge ceremony referenced in the report that outlines the CRM process at the Hardisty pound in the 2008-2009 field season. More than one sweatlodge ceremony may have occurred, and I did not discuss the specific timeframe of the ceremony Georgina spoke about.

CRM process continues to prioritize the interests of industrial expansion, ancestral beings continue to have an impact on the day-to-day operations, and continue to demand acknowledgement through ceremony.

As I showed in Chapter Three, the divergence between buffalo-as-kin within the reciprocal relations established through ceremonial networks, and buffalo-as-resource within the resource paradigm established through the province's heritage law, can be traced back to the treaty agreement. It was due to the translation of treaty from kin-making practice into a rights-based approach that living entities, active within Cree relational networks, came to be defined as 'resources' to which particular, legally-established rights could apply. However, even though this translation has come to constrain the kinds of relations the state recognizes as taking place between First Nations and entities that have become defined as natural and cultural resources, this does not prevent the continuation of lively reciprocal relations from occurring within Plains Cree territorial networks.

Councillor Johnson / Rattlesnake's words cited above describe the Hardisty buffalo pound as a sacred place that warrants the same kind of reverence held for other assemblages discussed within the chapters of this dissertation. Despite the failings of the *HRA* to protect Indigenous interests in this case, the buffalo pound is honoured as a 'sacred' place through an annual pipe ceremony held by Samson elders to "*honor the kinship and Traditional Lands within the Hardisty Industrial Corridor"* (Samson Cree Nation 2015:2). As I argued in Chapter Four, approaching a site such as this as 'sacred' situates it within particular kinship networks that are not confined to human bloodlines.

The basis of claims about a place's sacredness, as I argued in Chapter Four, are grounded

in principles of shared bodily substance that are reinforced through ceremony and the

ritualized sharing of food. For those who adhere to a ceremonial way of life, these are the

obligations that work to uphold the law of *wakohtowin*. As Councillor Johnson /

Rattlesnake said in her statement, the Samson Cree Nation is not opposed to carefully

planned development in the buffalo pound area. However, if First Nations people are not

informed about which areas of the pound are subject to disturbance, then they are not able

to fulfill their commitments to their territory.

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The tensions between buffalo-as-resource and *Mostos*-as-kin are arguably the

most robust at Hardisty buffalo pound. The implementation of the *Historical Resources*

Act, in this instance, demonstrates total interference with Plains Cree territorial relations.

This is in contrast with the Viking ribstone site discussed in Chapter Five, where the site's

designation as a Provincial Historic Resource protect it by way of non-interference in

Plains Cree territorial relations.

Framing archaeological sites as resources is deeply problematic as it naturalizes

the assumption that archaeological materials are meant to be removed from the ground.

Heritage protection is a slippery matter, particularly in resource-rich Alberta, where the

interests of industry often come first. Defining buffalo sites as historical resources, in

cases such as the Hardisty buffalo pound, situates them within the configuration of power

that relies on colonial structures of governance. Without acknowledging the priority of

prior persons, these governance structures depend on management strategies that ensure

the sovereignty of the state is never shaken. The *Historical Resources Act* is integral to state control over ancestral landscapes, and events surrounding the Hardisty buffalo pound point to an instance when implementation of the *HRA* resulted in the failure of adequate protection.

The reliance on expert knowledge in heritage-related discourse undermines sets of relations maintained through ceremony, in which ancestral entities are recognized as having agency and the ability to affect outcomes. The question of who has the authority to make heritage-related decisions is not only an issue of sovereignty, it is also a question of what kinds of entities are acknowledges as being able to speak. In the case of the Hardisty buffalo pound, the *Historical Resources Act*, in effect, disallowed the possibility that *Mostos* could participate directly in the heritage management process. This shows that despite the Alberta government's mandate to balance the protection of heritage with the facilitation of development, at times the economic benefits of industrial development prevail over heritage protection. However, despite the imposition of colonial structures of governance, human-*Mostos* relations maintain strength as long as humans continue to uphold their obligations to acknowledge *Mostos* through ceremony.

In Chapter Five I described an instance of non-interference, in reference to the Viking ribstone site, as Alberta's *Historical Resources Act* is implemented. In contrast, in Chapter Six I described an instance of total interference, in reference to the Hardisty buffalo pound, as the *Historical Resources Act* regulates the archaeological process. In the next chapter, I describe the current circumstances around another piece of provincial

legislation that has the potential to strengthen Plains Cree ancestral relations that are

maintained through ceremony.

Chapter Seven

Chief Poundmaker and "Buffalo that Walks Like a Man" Spirit: Museums, Repatriation, and the Governance of Good Relations

I was in Victoria, British Columbia, on a rainy evening when my Cree teacher called my cell phone. I had left Maskwacis about a week before, after six months of fieldwork, and was spending a few days on the island before heading south to study at a University of California campus. He and a friend who lived in Saskatchewan had just had a phone conversation about something, and he wanted to tell me about it. He referred to the work we had done at Glenbow Museum several years before, which had since become a regular topic of conversation between us. Then he told me about the revelation he and his friend had just shared.

"Those bundles at the museum," he said, "some of those, they go back to the time of the buffalo-hide tipis. When those laws still ruled the land."

He was referencing the ceremonial laws that had been severely weakened with the influx of European settlers in the 1800s. I took in his words as I huddled in a cement doorway, shielding myself from the west coast mist.

"Isn't that amazing?" he asked.

I agreed, it was.

He said that's all he wanted to tell me, then he wished me a safe journey and we hung up. He never says "goodbye" at the end of a conversation, since there's no word for that in the Cree language. Instead, just, "we'll talk again."

The old bundles he was talking about are being housed in storage cabinets in the collections areas of two museums – the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) in Edmonton. The bundles made their way into the museums between the 1950s and the 1970s, and that's where they remain today, mostly undisturbed for the last few decades. I was hired at RAM in the summer of 2015 to work on a number of tasks related to the sacred ceremonial items in the collections at these two museums, which are considered to be government-owned in the Canadian legal sense. One of these tasks is to work towards developing a process for the repatriation of sacred ceremonial items to the province's Cree communities. This would be done through a regulation associated with the province's *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Object Repatriation Act* (*FNSCORA* 2000). However, after one year on the job, it is clear that solutions for how to deal with the sacred bundles are not easily forthcoming.

Alberta is the only province in Canada that has this kind of legislation. The Act was developed through close collaboration between museum employees and members of the three Blackfoot communities in southern Alberta in the late 1990s, and came into effect in 2000. Although *FNSCORA* is intended to apply to all First Nations in the province through individual regulations that can address the different circumstances faced by those communities, to date there are only Blackfoot regulations, which were finalized in 2004. The development of Cree regulations has been a long time coming, but until now it has not been a top priority for the government of Alberta to address.

Although *FNSCORA* was developed to apply to all First Nations in the province of Alberta, this *Act* does not adequately address the specificities of Plains Cree cosmology, communities, and collections in Albertan museums.

In this chapter, I inquire how the Cree law of *wakohtowin*, the governance of good relations, might inform Alberta's approach to repatriation policy. To start, I describe the circumstances surrounding the ceremonial items from Plains Cree and related communities that are in the collections of RAM and Glenbow, and situate these circumstances within the Canadian context and within academic debates about museums, ownership, and repatriation. I then turn to an example of a ceremonial bundle that belonged to Chief Poundmaker, a prominent Plains Cree leader at the time of treaty-signing, as a starting point from which to inquire about the role of 'sacred' materials in Cree cosmology. Next, I outline the impact that the Alberta government's urging for more inclusive policies around Indigenous issues has had on the issue of repatriation, and show why rushing to find all-encompassing solutions is problematic.

I argue that in order to foster good relations in Plains Cree ancestral networks, it is necessary to situate ceremonial materials within the webs of relatedness from which they emerged. As conveyed by my teacher's words, buffalo are integral to those ancestral networks, and therefore play a pivotal role in efforts to facilitate the repatriation of ceremonial materials or, alternatively, the continued stewardship of the sacred items in the museum.

Museum Collections and Ownership

There are hundreds of sacred items in the ethnology storage rooms of the Glenbow and Royal Alberta museums. In both institutions, ceremonial material is contained in specific cabinets in a designated area so that certain protocols can be upheld. Menstruating women should not go near them. The cabinets must be accessible for viewing and smudging by community members. Noise and disturbance should be kept to a minimum, and the sacred items shouldn't be handled or moved unless absolutely necessary. Despite the decades-old museum facilities, cramped collections areas, and challenges of meeting both institutional and ceremonial protocols, the museums' employees do the best we can to provide necessary provisions.

The material that is considered to be Plains Cree in origin is stored in the same cabinets, and on the same shelves, as material that is associated with Assiniboine and Saulteaux. Since at the time of treaty negotiations Plains Cree bands had long been allies of the Saulteaux, and, due to intermarriage between tribes, many reserves in Saskatchewan and Alberta have members of mixed Cree and Saulteaux ancestry. Other bands are a mixture of Cree and Assiniboine peoples. While many bands in Saskatchewan celebrate a purely "Plains Cree" identity, some critics call this claim into question and argue that they are more likely Saulteaux (McLeod 2000). Museum records show that ceremonial materials from this mix of tribal affiliations come from about thirty-five communities, and were collected mostly in the 1960s and 1970s. The vast majority of these communities are in Saskatchewan, along with several in Alberta, and a couple in Manitoba. The fluidity of pre-treaty intertribal relationships continues to be reflected in

the socio-linguistic boundaries that span this wide geographic range. That ceremonial

practices have long been shared among closely related tribes makes it difficult to discern,

if repatriation were to take place, how to define what materials could be returned to

whom. The fluidity of Indigenous identities doesn't conform to the state's demand for

clearly defined units.

The collections of sacred ceremonial items from Plains Cree, Cree-Assiniboine,

and Saulteaux communities at RAM and Glenbow were created in three general ways.

First, curators went on collecting trips to reserves to buy ceremonial items directly from

people at their homes. Second, individuals from those communities came to the cities

with items to sell directly to the museums. And third, there were a few key individuals

who took the role as middlemen. They would gather material on their own reserves or in

neighboring communities, and would bring multiple items at once to the museum to

sell.[12]

Collecting in what is now Canada was common practice for military men,

missionaries, and HBC traders since the seventeenth century. However, systematic

collecting by institutions didn't commence until the mid-nineteenth century. Collecting

on a national scale became the mandate of the Geological Survey of Canada as the route

for the transcontinental railroad was charted in the 1870s, and a central repository –

which eventually became the Canadian Museum of Civilization – opened in Ottawa in

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[12] At a meeting with numerous elders in Kawacatoose First Nation, the Saskatchewan community most heavily represented in both museums' collections of sacred materials, the elders confirmed that many sacred items had been stolen from their relatives and disappeared from their communities in the 1960s and 1970.

1911. The general collecting policy was one of ethnographic salvage – to compile as much information as possible about Canada's First Peoples before they disappeared entirely (Brown 2014:70-76). Developing a deeper understanding of the collecting practices and motivations of the curators at RAM and Glenbow during the 1960s and 1970s would take a great deal more research, but it is fair to say, since institutional collecting in Canada had been common for over a hundred years, that their aims were a combination of ethnographic salvage and a desire to fill gaps in the collections.

In the late 1980s, the role of museums in housing sacred items was being drawn into question by First Nations people in the Prairie provinces. The rightful ownership of a sacred bundle that had belonged to Big Bear, a prominent Plains Cree leader at the time of Treaty Six negotiations, became a matter of debate. In 1989, a Cree man name Jimmy Thunder, along with a few followers, ran from Edmonton to New York to reclaim Big Bear's bundle. Known as a very powerful leader, Big Bear had led a rebellion against the Canadian government in protest of its failure to honour treaties signed by his people's relatives to the east. He refused to sign Treaty Six and was committed to maintaining a buffalo-hunting way of life until 1882, when he was essentially starved into submission and forced to sign the treaty. His bundle wound up in the museum decades later in 1934, after a son of Big Bear gave it to anthropologist David Mandelbaum for safekeeping.

After learning about the bundle's whereabouts, Jimmy Thunder decided to take action. As it states in a *New York Times* article that was published at the time:

Ten years ago, Jim Thunder, a Cree Indian, had a powerful dream. In it, a revered ancestor and Cree warrior, Big Bear, commanded him to retrieve a sacred Cree symbol - Big Bear's bundle, a two-foot-long grizzly bear paw sewn to a sacred red cloth, with a plug of tobacco and a batch of sweet grass encased in layers of fabric.

That command is why Mr. Thunder found himself running along Central Park West yesterday, completing a 2,700 mile journey to the American Museum of Natural History.

It had been a long journey, spiritually and physically. Mr. Thunder, a 38-year-old resident of Edmonton, Alberta, began his trek on Sept. 1, running from Canada to New York City to ask museum officials to return the sacred bundle to the Cree in North Battleford. The bundle has been in the museum's possession for 55 years.

The museum did not return the bundle to Jimmy Thunder, and his declaration that he was a rightful recipient became a matter of contention within the Cree community. Some people argued that the bundle was not his to claim (Brozan 1989). Almost thirty years after he went on his journey to New York, the story of Jimmy Thunder and Big Bear's bundle continues to circulate. The few times that I have heard it the story it was either told as one of resistance and reclamation, or as a drastic miscomprehension of Cree ceremonial protocols. Since the bundle was enmeshed with Big Bear's connection to the

spirit world, it could be of no use to anyone else. That was Big Bear's bundle, I was told. The bundle didn't hold power for anyone other than him, so what would anyone else want with it?

As this example shows, Plains Cree sacred items are associated with the personal power of one person and their own individual connection to the spirit world. Bundles were passed down through one clear familial line, so successive males, one generation after the next, would care for a bundle. But with post-treaty policy that repressed ceremonies and promoted assimilation, younger generations were no longer prepared to care for them, since they were not familiar with laws and protocols in which ceremonial items were embedded. The issue of repatriation cuts to the centre of a complex intersection among potentially divergent conceptions of ownership, and this divergence must be taken into account in any attempt to find solutions.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been much scholarship focused on issues of repatriation and Indigenous opposition to state or museum ownership of sacred and ceremonial materials (Asch 2008; Conaty and Janes 1997; Daes 2000). In Canada, these dialogues emerged largely in response to a joint task force between the Canadian Museums Association and the Assembly of First Nations that was launched in 1992. Known as the *Task Force on Museums and First Peoples*, this national inquiry into the state of relations between museums and Indigenous people was the result of controversy which unfolded around an exhibit at Calgary's Glenbow museum in 1988. *Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* coincided with the city's hosting of the winter Olympics that same year. The exhibit became the focus of a boycott by the

Lubicon Lake Cree from Northern Alberta, who argued that Shell Oil, the exhibit's

sponsor, was drilling for oil on land that was subject to an outstanding land claim (Bell

2009: 45; Brown 2014: 6-7). Shortly after the US decision to implement federal

repatriation legislation (NAGPRA 1990), [13] and through dialogues initiated by the *Task

Force on Museums and First Peoples*, Canada decided that the issue of ownership of

items in museum originating from First Nations communities would be resolved on a

case-by-case basis, rather than being legislated. To date, there is no federal legislation of

heritage issues in Canada.

Today there is common agreement that the return of materials to source

communities – the communities that museum collections originated from (Peers and

Brown 2003) – is integral to the healing, reconciliation, and self-determination of

Indigenous people (Graham and Murphy 2010:116; Bell 2009:23). This sentiment is

heightened in the current climate in Alberta, with both provincial and federal levels of

government pushing for policies to encompass the broad goal of reconciliation. However,

the discourse of ownership isn't necessarily adequate to address the networks of relations

that hold Indigenous peoples, their ancestral lands, and sacred items together.

Anthropologists concerned with museum collections originating from Indigenous

communities in the US and Canada often focus on the colonial power dynamics at play in

legal and policy regimes that intend to resolve issues of ownership, access, and

repatriation (Mauzé 2003; Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2013). Over the past twenty years or

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[13] NAGPRA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, was passed in the US in 1990. Fundamentally, this legislation requires federal agencies and federally funded museums to inform Native American tribes and lineal descendants with information about their collections (Graham and Murphy 2010:106).

more there have been many cases where ceremonial objects were successfully returned to source communities, or where suitable alternatives were agreed-upon through careful dialogue between museums and Indigenous peoples. However, several scholars suggest that legal and policy frameworks, by continuing to impose colonial categories on Indigenous ways of life, fail to do the work of redressing colonization. These laws and processes that address the return of sacred material, Alberta's repatriation legislation being one example, tend to enforce lengthy bureaucratic procedures, selectively determine who may make claims to which materials, and place the burden of proof on Indigenous people to demonstrate their affinity with materials being claimed. Since ownership is defined according to non-Indigenous values and categories, many argue that the state's efforts to return sacred objects has the potential to reinforce the unequal power relations that gave rise to the existence of such collections to begin with (Doxtator 1993; Kramer 2004; Laforet 2004; Glass 2004; Noble 2008).

Due to the presumed authority of legal and policy frameworks that govern relations between humans and things, claims for the repatriation and control of materials must be articulated through categories that can be recognized by the state (Bell 2009:16, 53). These categories are carried through the day-to-day operations of the institutions that house and care for sacred items, and as a result, legal ownership is assumed by the state to be strictly in the hands of humans and applied to the unified category of things. Indigenous claims directed at sacred and ceremonial materials in museum collections don't accommodate the separation between humans and things as premised by modernity. Sacred objects are often considered relatives or living ancestors (Bernstein 2013:110;

Chambers and Blood 2009:266-7). As some argue, the ancestors associated with sacred objects play an active role in creating and maintaining the networks of kin which are necessary for the continuation of life (Zedeño 2009; Santos-Grenero 2010). Acknowledging that non-human entities are embedded in the same kinship networks as humans, and that these entities participate directly in any process that facilitates the return of sacred items, helps to situate claims directed at museum collections outside of the categories informing the state's definition of ownership.

As the example of Big Bear's bundle attests, the assumption that sacred materials housed in museums are better off in the hands of people in originating communities doesn't always hold true. In my current position at RAM I've been collaborating with a number of Cree ceremonialists to work on issues related to appropriate care for the sacred items. This includes general protocols around storage, handling, and the eventual transport of these items to a new facility. This also includes conversations about the legal transfer of ownership so sacred materials can be returned to ceremony. However, many people have told me that the materials are best left in the museum, where they are safe and cannot cause any harm.

The ceremonialists I have spoken to make abundantly clear that it is not simply a matter of returning materials to where they came from. In a lot of cases where a material assemblage is associated with a particular ceremony, that ceremony is no longer being practiced. As a result, there are no people in originating communities who have the ceremonial experience or expertise necessary to properly take care of sacred items in the museum, or to know how to bring them back into ceremonial use. The ceremonialists I

work with have expressed a great deal of concern about what might happen if materials end up in the wrong hands. These concerns cover a range of potential mishaps, such as sacred items being repatriated to people who are in the right family lineage but know nothing about ceremonial protocols, or to people who would sell the items again to private collectors or pawn shops. The underlying fear is that materials being returned to the wrong people could unleash powerful forces that are beyond human control, which would put families and entire communities at risk. I've heard many stories recounted of instances where protocols weren't followed – where medicines weren't dealt with in the appropriate way or where the proper ceremony didn't take place – that in each case, resulted in illness, accidents, injury and death. These warnings are not to be taken lightly, and point to the very real dangers embedded in the possibility of sacred items going back to where they came from.

Next, I turn to an example in order to situate the complexities surrounding repatriation and ownership in the particular relations that take shape through Plains Cree ancestral networks.

Poundmaker's Stone

Just as human-buffalo relations are central to Plains Cree conceptions of territoriality, these relations are also integral to sacred materials held in museums. As I argued in Chapter Four, when the concept of sacredness is invoked by Indigenous peoples it refers not to a universal quality, but to a very particular set of relations that is grounded

in territorial kinship. I draw on one particular example to link the current circumstances around the issue of repatriation to the overall themes of this dissertation.

Many items stored in the museum cabinets pertain directly to the pre-treaty relationship to buffalo, as demonstrated through the words of my Cree teacher at the beginning of this chapter. As these items go back to the times of the buffalo-hide tipis, they are still embedded in ceremonial laws. Here I turn to one stone – part of a bundle – that Chief Poundmaker received from a spirit in the Cypress Hills region of Saskatchewan. Historical accounts hold that Chief Poundmaker could communicate with buffalo / *Mostos* (Jennish 2000), and that he had received the gift of building buffalo pounds. It is unsurprising, then, that this stone was given to him by "Buffalo that Walks Like a Man" spirit (Light 1988). This and about two hundred other items came into the Royal Alberta Museum through the personal collection of a man named Doug Light, who was a life-long collector and curator employed at Glenbow Museum from 1966 until 1976. Much of his collecting had taken place in the Battlefords region of Saskatchewan.

Battleford and North Battleford are towns situated about 120 kms east of the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The area is most famous for the events that took place during the north-west rebellion of 1885, when bands of Plains Cree demonstrated their resistance to the disenfranchisement brought on by the newly-formed Dominion of Canada. Doug Light was born in Battleford in 1933. His father, Fred Light, was another long-time collector who was born in the barracks of Fort Battleford, and who went on to run a garage in the town for many years. The Fred Light Museum, established in 1980 to house the Light family's collections, still stands in Battleford today, where it overlooks

the very valleys where the 1885 revolt took place. Needless to say, the region's history flowed through the junior Light's blood until his death in 2008, and within his personal collections from the Battleford region are many items with direct links to prominent Plains Cree leaders during the pre- and post-treaty eras. In a move that caused some controversy – since they had been collected from reserves in Saskatchewan – all two hundred items were sold to the Royal Alberta Museum in 1988, shortly after Light's retirement.

Due to Mr. Light's thorough and consistent record-keeping, there is clear provenance associated with Poundmaker's stone. The stone was given to Mr. Light by a man named Solomon Bluehorn, whose father had received it from Poundmaker's son, and the accompanying narrative – that the stone was a gift from the buffalo-man spirit – was passed along with it. In Light's records, it says:

> With a proper ceremony, the stone would tell the owner where buffalo could be located. The owner would wear this charm to show others he had received special powers from the Buffalo Spirit.
>
> Light 1988

Many items in the collection, which Light procured during the 1950s and 60s, lead back to leaders such as Big Bear and Poundmaker. Despite these clear lineages, there are no obvious answers concerning who they would be returned to if repatriation should take

place. Determining who would have the rights to repatriate sacred items originating from such prominent leaders would not be straightforward. Traditionally, sacred materials such as this stone would have been passed down a singular family line, one generation after the next. With that line of transfer broken, any efforts to repair it would likely cause a great deal of controversy within and among Plains Cree communities. Poundmaker has many living direct descendants today, and since many individuals across Alberta and Saskatchewan could conceivably claim the rights to a Poundmaker's stone based on lineal descent, the process has the potential to set people against each other and cause inter-familial conflict.

These two Albertan museums, separate and distinct from the government branch that deals with implementing the *Historical Resources Act* in relation to archaeological sites, are nonetheless integral to the broad framework of heritage management in the province. Fortunately for the museum, the issue of ownership isn't as contentious as it is with the province's archaeological sites, as openness to repatriation of sacred items applies to sacred ceremonial materials but not to archaeological materials. Despite the risks, there is potential in the province's openness to repatriation, so long as the issue is approached in a manner that allows for relations to be fostered according to ceremonial laws.

Plains Cree sacred materials in museum collections are integral to ancestral networks of human and non-human kin. The kinds of relations at play in these networks exceed conventional conceptions of ownership, taken to apply to the material property of humans. In Plains Cree cosmology, sacred materials, when socialized in the appropriate

way, enliven the living relations governed by *wakohtowin*. As a result, ownership looks a lot more like what English speakers would call 'belonging' or 'relatedness' than like the concept of 'property'. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the sacred items in RAM and Glenbow are not just materials that can be unilaterally subjected to Alberta's repatriation legislation. Rather, they are powerful actors that themselves operationalize complex sets of laws that work to establish and maintain relationships among various other human and non-human actors. Therefore, any process that intends to facilitate the return of sacred materials into ceremony must acknowledge the direct participation of those actors in the process.

In Plains Cree cosmology, relations between humans, buffalo / *Mostos*, and rocks are constituted through networks that bind human and non-human entities into relations of reciprocity. Entities residing in and on the landscape – as well as the landscape itself – hold specific duties that function to maintain connections of territorial kinship. Plains Cree sacred items that are housed in museums have been separated from this network due to the broad colonial process. What implications does the prospect of re-introducing this stone into ceremony have for relations among humans, buffalo, and rock? Does the repatriation act foster the 'good relations' maintained through *wakohtowin*?

These questions about Poundmaker's stone parallel the relations at play in the story of Buffalo Child, relayed in Chapter Four. This story reveals the role of stone in governing relations among humans and *Mostos*. By the time Buffalo Child had grown into a man, he had lived as both human and buffalo. This caused him a lot of inner turmoil – he had been raised by buffalo and considered them to be his brothers and

sisters, but when he was a human he was very disturbed by his fellow humans' reliance on buffalo meat and skins for survival. In the end, when given the choice, Buffalo Child chose to become a stone so that he wouldn't have to be either human or buffalo, one extreme or the other. In this story, stone is a manifestation of good relations; it is the embodiment of a solidified state of being that is kin to both human and buffalo. In occupying this state of being, Buffalo Child came to comprise the very substance of the earth. Both *asiniy* and *Mostos* are commonly referred to as 'grandfather' within Plains Cree relational networks.

As I argued in reference to the Buffalo Child Stone, humans, buffalo/*Mostos*, and rocks are made up of the same substance – this is the essence of territorial kinship in Plains Cree cosmology. This principle is no different in the case of Poundmaker's Stone; relations between Chief Poundmaker and buffalo are governed through the law of *wakohtowin*, manifested as stone. This law enacts forms of relational governance through many other material assemblages that are stored within the museums' cabinets. For example, ceremonial pipes enact their own laws, and are central to the governance of good relations among humans, buffalo, and many other non-human actors. It is not appropriate to assume that ready-made solutions to bring sacred materials back into ceremony are going to correspond to those laws. For repatriation to facilitate good relations, the process must be guided by Plains Cree ceremonial laws, protocols, and philosophies. For the repatriation of Poundmaker's stone, for example, the spirit of Poundmaker and the buffalo spirit that gifted him with the stone must play an active role. The same can be said for many other assemblages in the museum – immense

responsibility comes with engaging in ceremonial activity and for ceremonialists, the risks of doing things wrong outweighs the benefits of returning sacred materials to the communities they came from.

Alberta's Push for Repatriation

I started working at the Royal Alberta Museum just at the time of a drastic political change – in early summer of 2015, the NDP took office after half of a century of Conservatism in the province. A noticeable shift occurred when Rachel Notley became Premiere of Alberta, which arose from her urging the provincial government's ministries to immediately take action to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights on Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP 2007). Canada hadn't signed on in 2007 when the UNDRIP was first introduced, and although the Federal Government officially endorsed it in 2010, it had not been officially adopted, nor had it made its way into policy. Notley made clear that it was top priority for her government to implement UNDRIP. Shortly after starting my job at the Royal Alberta Museum, government employees from each Ministry were asked to give input on how government initiatives were addressing, or needed to address, the forty-six recommendations that UNDRIP put forward. Since some of these recommendations specifically point to repatriation and sacred materials, this shift in policy priorities had direct implications for my job.

The recommendations in UNDRIP that concern repatriation are as follows:

Article 11

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.

Article 12

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practice, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.

2. States shall seek to enable the access and / or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and

effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.

<div align="right">UNDRIP 2007: 6</div>

These articles deal with highly sensitive subject matter that requires that a close, mutually respectful and trusting relationship between state bodies and Indigenous peoples be developed. Despite all good intentions, Alberta's push to implement UNDRIP in an expedient manner has the potential to open many logistical sinkholes, due to the failure to account for on-the-ground realities. In reference to the issue of repatriation, the reality is that Plains Cree ceremonialists are not as keen as the Provincial government to get ceremonial materials back into the hands of people in the communities those materials came from. Given that I am working directly with Cree ceremonialists on issues related to sacred items and repatriation, I am uniquely positioned to account for the disparities between Plains Cree ceremonial laws and protocols and the Albertan government's push to develop Cree regulations under *FNSCORA*.

In the eyes of the Alberta government, actualizing Articles 11 and 12 as they apply to government-owned collections in the Royal Alberta Museum and the Glenbow Museum involves implementing a set of regulated procedures for the return of ceremonial materials to source communities. For the three Blackfoot communities, the applicant submits an application form that is then reviewed by the museum and by a panel of Blackfoot ceremonialists. Next, details about the repatriation request are published in community newspapers, and a deadline of 30 days is set for any other claims to be made

on the same materials. At times, there has been more than one active claim on a particular bundle, and in these cases it was up to the government to determine which applicant would receive it. This decision was usually based on the amount of detail the applicant provided concerning how the bundle would be put into active ceremonial use. Now that the province is eager to develop a process to repatriate to Cree communities, which are represented second only to the Blackfoot in terms of sacred items that have been housed in the province's two museums, the plan is to implement a similar procedure. However, this is not as straightforward as it may seem.

FNSCORA was developed in response to the needs and circumstances of Blackfoot ceremonialists, who had begun repatriation efforts in the 1970s. During the 1990s and 2000s, employees of the two museums worked closely with Blackfoot ceremonialists from Kainai, Siksika, and Piikani to introduce ceremonial bundles back into ceremony. Frank Weasel Head (2015), a member of the Blackfoot Advisory Panel on Museum Relations, explains that Alberta's then-Premier Ralph Klein had a close relationship with Blackfoot people, and had been inducted to the Kainai chieftainship. Premier Klein wanted to give Blackfoot ceremonial bundles back to the people but was told that would be breaking the law, since the *Historical Resources Act* stipulated that all such material belonged to the province. As such, he introduced the *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act* in order to override the *Historical Resources Act* (Weasel Head 2015:169). As a result of the long-standing relationship between Alberta museums and the Blackfoot peoples, the Act, though intended to apply to all First Nations in the province, nonetheless tends to reflect Blackfoot cosmology.

In Blackfoot ceremonial practice, bundles are held collectively and are passed from one individual to the next through a ceremonial transfer that binds sacred relationships between generations of bundle holders (Conaty 2015:24). Blackfoot ceremonialism involves a number of societies, Conaty explains, few of which were active by the middle of the twentieth century, due to Canada's colonial Indian policies that started with the Indian Act of 1876. Conaty continues, "traditionally, a Blackfoot person would belong to a number of sacred societies, most of them age-graded, and each of these societies had its own ceremonial observances, in which specific sacred bundles played an essential role" (Conaty 2015: 24). To accommodate these particular traits of Blackfoot ceremonialism – the centrality of bundles to the continuation of a ceremony, and the practice of transferring bundles – *FNSCORA* anticipates that sacred items will go back into "active ceremonial use" and that the legal transfer of ownership only applies to "items essential to the continuation of ceremonies". To differentiate between which items were subject to the repatriation law and which were not, collectively-held items are distinguished from those that are personal or familial. As a result, the distinction between personal and collective is implied in the *Act*, as only collectively-held bundles are assumed to be subject to the repatriation law.

Plains Cree bands no longer have clearly defined societies like Blackfoot peoples do, the major difference being that ceremonial items are held personally, not collectively. Like Poundmaker's stone and Big Bear's bundle, materials are considered sacred for their centrality to an individual's living connection to the spirit world. Plains Cree materials that were present or worn during ceremony were either passed down within a single

familial line, or were buried with their owners. In the mid-twentieth century, at the same time when Blackfoot societies were not active, Plains Cree ceremonial practices had also been severely weakened by assimilative Indian policy. Sacred items were no longer being passed down along direct lines of descent, nor were they being buried as the older generation passed away. This shift in the treatment of sacred materials coincided with the rise in demand for materials to populate museum collections. As a result, ceremonial items that had belonged to the recently deceased became quite valuable. A regular Plains Cree visitor to the Royal Alberta Museum told me that during the 1960s and 1970s, when most of these items were collected or brought to the museum, it had become common practice for people to 'help themselves' to bundles and pipes from the homes of their deceased relatives. Much research still needs to be done, but this shift in treatment of sacred items in communities, coupled with museum collecting practices, could be how many of the Plains Cree ceremonial items came to be in both the Royal Alberta Museum's and Glenbow Museum's collections.

Due to the personal nature of Plains Cree bundles, it remains questionable whether it is appropriate for items to be returned to ceremonial use. Other museums within the territories of Treaties Four and Six have also experienced this kind of ambiguity around repatriation to Plains Cree, Cree-Assiniboine, and Saulteaux communities. For example, a curator at a Saskatchewan museum told me about her own experience working with individuals from communities in that province to develop a policy for the stewardship and repatriation of sacred items in the Saskatchewan museum's collection. The policy came into effect in 2010 and, although there is an itemized list of sacred items available, and

despite efforts made by the province to further disseminate information to people in First Nations communities though a detailed brochure, the museum has not received a single request for repatriation of a sacred item.

Provincial legislation carries with it categories and assumptions that don't conform to these on-the-ground complications, and, as a result, attempts to develop Cree regulations for the existing legislation could impede the province's general aim to satisfy the recommendations of the UN Declaration. An overarching assumption is that, since *FNSCORA* is considered to be enabling legislation, a procedure for the return of ceremonial materials can be developed prior to and independent of the ceremonial laws that might allow for their return to ceremony. This is problematic for ceremonial law, which requires that a socialization process unfold gradually, allowing for the participation of both human and non-human entities in influencing the intended outcome – the reintroduction of sacred materials into ceremony.

<center>*   *   *</center>

Underlying the government of Alberta's aim to develop regulations for Cree communities under *FNSCORA* is the intention to renew relations among First Nations people and ceremonial items. Part of the current motivation for this work is the push for Alberta's Ministries to implement the recommendations of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, many complications could stand in the way of the broader aim of reconciliation, particularly if the circumstances surrounding collections of sacred items from Plains Cree, Cree-Assiniboine, and Saulteaux communities are not carefully taken into account. Sweeping solutions have a tendency to brush aside on-the-

ground realities that are integral to implement processes of decolonization, so the procedure must follow close and cautious dialogue between the provincial government and affected communities.

It is essential that the province bring a distinct awareness of assumptions and categories informing state conceptions of ownership, because even where repatriation is actively encouraged, there can still be blatant misconceptions about the place held by ceremonial materials within networks of territorial kinship. The province's willingness to address the issue of repatriation in a fair and transparent manner opens the possibility of allowing Cree laws to guide the process. This is in stark contrast to the *Historical Resources Act*, discussed in Chapter Six in reference to the Hardisty Buffalo Pound. While the *HRA* places control over what it defines as 'historical resources' strictly in the hands of the province of Alberta, the *First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act* acknowledges that sensitive materials may be better off outside of the museum, and thereby overrides the power of the *HRA*.

As I demonstrated trough the example of Poundmaker's stone, the law of *wakohtowin* governs relations among entities within webs of territorial kinship, and therefore powerful ceremonial beings, such as the buffalo spirit, play a central role in any process that facilitates the return of ceremonial materials to ceremonial use. The implications of relying on Plains Cree praxis to inform heritage management processes is what I turn to in the final chapter.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Defining *Mostos* as heritage sets severe limitations on the extent to which networks of ancestral relations can be activated throughout heritage management processes. However, those limitations are not absolute. Where ceremonial protocols are followed, ancestral relations remain robust and defy the limitations that are set by the categories informing the heritage management rubric.

Previous chapters have demonstrated this by revealing the multiple dimensions of heritage and the potential for this concept to disrupt relations that flow through Plains Cree ancestral landscapes. Chapters One and Two showed that the concept of heritage requires much unpacking for its divergent meanings to become clear. Chapter Three focused on how the newly-formed laws for heritage protection, in the 1960s and 1970s, came to be shaped through the equivocated understandings of treaty-as-rights and treaty-as-relations. Chapter Four grappled with the problematic dialogues that can ensue when Indigenous people deploy the concept of sacredness in reference to sites and materials also defined as heritage by the state. Chapter Five focused on an instance where heritage protection successfully facilitated the relations maintained through ceremony. Chapter Six dealt with a situation in which relations broke down and the interests of industry were prioritized over caring for ancestral landscapes. Finally, Chapter Seven focused on an instance where there is the potential to foster good relations, so long as the right balance is maintained between ceremony and policy.

Although the concept of heritage may be fixed and static in the state's definitions, this is not the case for alternative ways of defining the term. In the praxis of Mekwan

Awâsis, adhering strictly to ceremonial protocols is a necessary and integral part of the socialization process when approaching anything the state defines as heritage. Significant places on the land, recognized as such by the state, have come to be defined as components of heritage, but the relations that made these sites significant to begin with continue to be maintained through ceremonial protocols. This is particularly true for sites and materials defined as heritage that are associated with buffalo/*Mostos*, since this entity is central to all Plains Cree ceremonial activity.

My own inquiry into the consequences of defining buffalo as heritage also had to be made by way of ceremonial protocols. At the beginning of my fieldwork, when Mekwan Awâsis was sharing teachings with me, he instructed me not to interject with questions about how *Mostos* communicates with humans or why *Mostos* resides to the North. His point was that asking direct questions was counter-productive, and this came through loud and clear in a teaching he shared with me.

"If a daisy is growing," he explained, "every time you ask a question, you cut that daisy's head off."

And, after a pause, "You want the daisy to grow, don't you?"

Again and again, this teaching has showed me that asking questions was not an appropriate means of gaining access to ceremonial teachings. My engrained assumption had been that since Mekwan Awâsis had the kind of knowledge about human-*Mostos* relations that I was seeking, I could ask him questions about the patterns of communication that are characteristic of those relations. With the daisy teaching, he made

it clear that was not how it worked. It was only by socializing with ceremonial entities

directly that an individual could learn about *Mostos*, and I was no exception.

In Chapter Five, I described this positioning as an "ethics of presence," (Green &

Green 2013:55), a form of relational ethics in which a person recognizes they are one

responsive being among many. In that chapter, I went on to explain that engaging an

ethics of presence as a researcher in Maskwacis required I had to follow a methodology

that was in line with my teacher's praxis in order to make an inquiry into human-*Mostos*

relations. His proposition was that our work together be an act of protocol in itself, our

collaboration mimicking the movements of the sun, and thereby aligning with natural law.

His proposal – that we work in the four directions to build layers of cloth in an upward

spiral, eventually creating a tipi – was anything but trivial. I took this to be a model for

engaging a distinctly *Nehiyaw* relational ethics.

In this process of "co-labouring" (de la Cadena 2015) with Mekwan Awâsis, I

made it my responsibility to closely attend to the ethics implied by his tipi methodology

and to carry those ethics with me as I did my research in other domains. Then, at times, I

was able to discern where *Nehiyaw* relational ethics would be cut off or ignored by the

logics informing heritage management. Throughout my fieldwork, some of the most

impactful ethnographic moments occurred when I encountered epistemic ruptures

between my teacher's praxis and that of professionals working in the so-called heritage

sector. Despite the sense of unease they left me with, I came to recognize these moments

as profoundly generative for what they revealed about the complex sets of encounters that

occur as the state implements practices for the management of heritage across *Nehiyaw* ancestral landscapes.

This sense of unease is akin to what Helen Verran calls "epistemic disconcertment," or "the feeling that assaults individuals – including their bodies – when the categories that pertain to their world-making practices and institutions are disrupted" (de la Cadena 2015:276). This sense of disconcertment is what one experiences when the assumptions, categories and institutions underpinning their day-to-day reality no longer hold as fundamentally true. In my own research, I follow Verran's lead by responding to these moments of existential panic by seeking to expand them, and to exaggerate the condition (Verran 2011:6-7). Going deeply into these moments, as Verran explains, is a means of actively refusing the kind of translation "which requires a colonising reduction to a shared category" (Verran 2011:7). Lingering in moments of epistemic disconcertment is a means of ensuring that radical forms of difference are maintained, since it is a necessary first step towards accepting "that we may not be metaphysically committed to a common world" (ibid).

In this vein, I wonder, how can cultivating epistemic disconcertment promote a disruption of state-sanctioned conceptions of heritage and allow for the nurturance of ancestral landscapes to infuse Alberta's heritage management processes? I start by looking to an example of a rupture I encountered during my fieldwork that caused my own experience of epistemic disconcertment. This rupture revealed a glaring disparity in the ways ceremonial and archaeological practices engage with the landscape. Following this, I inquire about the broader implications of this disparity in light of the state's

imposition of a heritage management framework on Plains Cree relational networks. And finally, I show that despite this imposition, Plains Cree ancestral networks continue to remain strong and can have an impact on the way that heritage management processes unfold in resource-rich Alberta.

Cultivating Disconcertment

I follow Verran's (2011) suggestion to cultivate epistemic disconcertment, which, as discussed above, I take to be the sense of unease that comes as a result of the disruption of categories pertaining to one's day-to-day reality. As Verran argues, epistemic disconcertment is not only bodily and personal, but also analytical and methodological, and therefore provides a useful tool for ethnographic inquiry. I took this as a useful lead during my fieldwork, and as I went from ceremonial domains to archaeological ones and vice versa, I deliberately sought out those points of disjuncture for what they revealed about incommensurable claims to truth. Instead of attempting to reconcile them, I sought to make their distinctions apparent and the tensions between them clear.

As previous chapters have made clear, the material components of what the state defines as heritage are simultaneously enacted into divergent yet overlapping worlds. The tipi teachings that were informing my research situate *Mostos* within a cosmic order that includes entities residing in the other three directions. In contrast, a standard rule in archaeology that a team of archaeologists shared with me shows how a principle of linear

time sequencing informs archaeological interpretations of material found in sedimentary layers of earth. Although the archaeologists did not include buffalo in their rendering of this principle, the implications of the principle would apply to all materials considered to be 'archeological'.[14] Here I allow the sets of relations to stand side-by-side, and ask how one set of categories disrupts the other.

For those who lead a ceremonial way of life, the skulls of buffalo /*Mostos* are central to the living body of teachings that are activated through ceremony. As I spent time with my Cree friends in Maskwacis, I heard many stories about the potency of these skulls and the role they play in relational networks in central Alberta. Amongst my Cree friends, buffalo skulls are known to rise out of the ground in response to the call of a pipe. In ceremonial teachings, encountering a buffalo skull is never a mere coincidence. Agentive beings meet each other willingly, so these encounters are not attributed solely to human agency. As my teacher has explained to me, to respond to the call of a pipe – that is, to be apprehended by ceremonial means – a skull must have belonged to a buffalo that fulfilled its own obligations to the land and its inhabitants.

One evening, while sitting on his porch, Mekwan Awâsis told me about the ways buffalo skulls move. A woman nearby, he explained, taught him the pipe directives to make a buffalo skull rise out of the earth on its own. Then he told me about his own experience encountering a skull. He found a buffalo skull resting on the surface of a freshly-mowed field. The scent of grass was still hanging in the air, he said, and clumps

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[14] Note, this may or may not include isolated buffalo skulls depending on the circumstances, since non-human remains are only deemed archaeological if they display evidence of interactions with humans.

of wet grass were all over the ground. The industrial-strength mower had just cut the grass and foliage within an inch of the ground, but the buffalo skull was just sitting on the surface, undamaged and undisturbed. The strange thing was, he said, there were no footprints in the grass leading up to the skull, and no one in sight who could have put it there. I've heard many other stories about encounters with buffalo skulls, and many of these stories have been about the protocols people follow in order to find them. The skulls would not be encountered by humans if it wasn't *Mostos*' will, since *Mostos* is always actively participating in these encounters.

Relations with *Mostos*, as I argued in Chapter Five, are established by way of ceremonial protocols that orient participants along two interrelated axes of experience. As humans perform the horizontal axis into being by carrying out particular actions and movements, such as smudging with sage and always moving in a clockwise direction during ceremony, they are carrying out the actions of socializing on the vertical axis as well. This is where relations among entities open up, unrestricted by the disconnections between past, present, and future. Relations are immanent and immediate, without temporal separation.

In an inherently relational system, I came to learn, it is not only up to humans to ensure relations among entities remain strong. The obligations humans hold to entities such as *Mostos* is only half of the equation. *Mostos*, likewise, must fulfill their obligations to humans. In ceremonial world-making practices, therefore, interacting with the components of what the state defines as heritage is necessarily relational. Construing *Mostos* into a historical resource, in instances such as the Hardisty buffalo pound, severs

the relations ceremonial practices seek to maintain. Before elaborating on this point, I describe the four-directions teaching Mekwan shared with me which situated a buffalo skull within the interrelated processes of horizontal and vertical socialization.

I was preparing to travel with a friend to a major archaeological site in the region, which was known to be a several-thousand-year-old buffalo pound. As I sat with Mekwan Awâsis the evening before my trip, he asked, "you know what I do, when I see a buffalo skull?"

I shook my head to indicate I did not know, and he situated a single imaginary skull within the lineage of teachings that had been passed on to him.

"A buffalo is always in motion," he said, "always moving horizontally and vertically."

The hand emerges, slowly reaching forward with palm facing sideways, fingers outstretched and fanning wide. It starts to jolt, tilting and kicking along as if galloping across flat prairie land. "The buffalo is always moving, going this way," he said. Tilt and kick, tilt and kick, then the hand releases from its run.

"So what I do," he continued, "is look at that buffalo this way," fingers tight together, palm facing the earth, hand tracing the smooth horizontal terrain that stretches to the north, the directive that brings Night. Winter. Slumber.

"Then I look at it this way," gesturing east, where the sun's rays first emerge each morning.

"Then this way," to the south.

"... and this way," to the west.

"Then... *then*, I look at it this way." This time the hand moves up, fingers reaching in a half-spiral towards the stars, following the lines which designate that single imaginary buffalo's place in the cosmic order.

"Vertically," he said.

This teaching gives an indication of the intricacies involved in relating with *Mostos* for Mekwan Awâsis. His gestural rendering of his mode of interpretation for situating a buffalo skull within the cosmic order is an iteration of the tipi methodology and demonstrates, as other four-directions teachings recounted within the pages of this dissertation have done, the centrality of those teachings for the process of relating with *Mostos*. The temporal ordering of past, present, and future had no relevance to this teaching. The age of the skull had no bearing on the relational engagement Mekwan Awâsis relayed, and the question of whether the skull remained buried or became exposed to air was not relevant to the teaching. It was the way he situated the skull within the cosmic order that was most salient, and which showed me again that an ethical inquiry into *Mostos* could only be addressed through four-directions teachings.

The disconcertment that I experienced during my fieldwork occurred most strongly as I shifted between the different registers of ceremonial and archaeological practice. During these transitions, I would often encounter conflicting perspectives on what it meant to appropriately deal with the material components of heritage. The most striking points of conflict occurred when an archaeologist or heritage administrator would

refer to historical resources, as defined in the *Historical Resources Act*, as entirely closed off from having newfound relationships in the present. The encounters I had with people working in the heritage sector showed me that the practices and institutions collectively referred to as 'heritage management' were put in place to protect and preserve materials that pertain to the past. And indeed, sites and materials associated with buffalo/*Mostos* are certainly important in a historical sense. But this is not what is of primary importance in a ceremonial domain. Relations maintained through ceremonial practices don't rely on a clear distinction between past and present, so when this distinction is imposed by archaeological practices and modes of interpretation, relations maintained through ceremony can become cut off or ignored.

This is not an uncommon sentiment among scholars who take a critical approach to archaeological practice. Green & Green (2013) explain that in tracking materials as they become defined as 'archaeological', those materials are cast into rigidly linear notions of time and space, and therefore become incapable of establishing new connections:

> . . . in the activity of excavation, every item (or collection) is bagged and tagged with a provenience number. In the moment it is put into the plastic bag's bubble, it has become something new because it has entered the conscious world of another. Via its provenience number, it has become an object that has been gridded in the x, y and z axes of Cartesian space; archived in a precise layer of the earth. In due course. . . laboratory

technicians will add the fourth dimension of time to its coordinates, in order

to try to locate it precisely in chronological time. The plastic bag[s]. . . seal

them off from other kinds of relationships. [T]hey become zombie objects,

stripped of all relationships; ghosts of a past that will travel in the hope of

reconnection with bodies from times past, in the future.

Green & Green 2013:242

Attending to the process whereby materials become defined as archaeological

shows how those materials become "stripped of all relationships" (Green & Green

2013:242). This kind of sentiment characterizes heritage management practices generally,

and stands in stark contrast to the inherent relationality of ceremonial approaches to

engaging with the landscape. Assumptions about reality that delimit the kinds of

relationships that can form around archaeological materials are embedded in the

archaeological process, and therefore, have a profound impact on how heritage-related

decisions are made.

The extent to which the archaeological process sets constraints on relations

became apparent during my fieldwork, when I was doing some archaeological work at a

site in central Alberta. During the initial orientation at the work site, I found myself

conversing with several archaeologists who work for a small consulting company. We

stood around a test pit that had recently been dug in the ground, looking at the lines of

strata that were visible on the sides of the pit. Layers of sediment had settled in such a way that you could see monochromatic layers of brown earth, and our discussion turned to the principle of superposition. This principle, they explained to me, maintains that layers of sediment are necessarily deposited in a linear time sequence, with the oldest at the bottom and the most recent on top.

Standing around the test pit, I learned that, from an archaeological perspective, the earth's strata are assumed to relate to the present only through history, promoting a reverse-chronological, unidirectional gaze wherein the present is marked by soles of feet touching earth. Time, extending straight down into the past, can be read in the linear progression of sedimentary layers that correspond to well-defined temporal units. As we talked, I noticed the logic of the superposition principle implied that, below the surface, the land was un-living, inert, once alive but now dead. And this meant that any present-day, newly formed connections between what occupies the surface and what lies beneath could only occur within the confines of separate temporal units – as present-day observations and analyses of historical moments frozen in time.

To illustrate how this principle impacted his own experience of implementing this principle in day-to-day, one of the archaeologists later told me a story. He explained that an Indigenous man had found some rocks on the surface of the earth, and insisted the rocks were put there as a grave marker. The archaeologist was asked to investigate and dug a test-pit into the ground. He immediately saw layers of sediment in the cross-section of undisturbed earth that the test-pit revealed which, according to the principle of superposition, proved the ground had never been disturbed.

According to this archaeologist, that the earth contained layers of undisturbed sediment was proof beyond any reasonable doubt that there was no relationship between the rocks on the surface of the earth and whatever might be under the ground. There could be no possible relationship, the archaeologist told me, because the ground had clearly never been disturbed. According to this logic, even if the supposed grave were hundreds of years old, one would simply have to dig deep enough to discover the level at which there were no clear sedimentary layers. But no, the archaeologist assured me, he had dug down deep enough and the link was absolutely impossible – these rocks, he concluded, were definitely not a grave marker.

The notion that relations can only be among living, contemporaneous entities stands in stark contrast with the active relations that enliven the landscape of central Alberta. Plains Cree ceremonialism and Alberta's framework for heritage management carry very different modes of apprehending time, and, therefore, entail very different possibilities when it comes to establishing relations. What might the archaeologist have made of my teacher's stories about buffalo skulls rising out of the earth on their own? Would he have accepted those stories as true only if he saw with his own eyes the disturbed layers of sediment that lay in the skull's wake? These seem implausible questions to ask, since the archaeologists' truth claims arise from a very different set of categories and assumptions than those of Mekwan Awâsis. Trying to justify the outcomes of one through the logics of the other would entirely miss the point of cultivating disconcertment, which is to actively refuse the translation of difference into sameness.

Staying with the unease caused by maintaining distinctions across divergent fields of knowledge undoes the potential harm of seeking out shared categories. Refusing to find sameness between my teacher's stories about skulls emerging from the earth and the archaeologists' stories about the superposition principle allows for radical differences to be maintained.

Plains Cree ways of knowing come solely through experience, and the world (including ancestral places) is knowable only insofar as an individual's relations are made and sustained with the entities that compose it. As demonstrated by four direction teachings, ancestral landscapes contain the bodies and trails of countless entities, whose shapes and movements can be discerned only by those who have been trained to perceive them. For those who lead a ceremonial way of life, relations are not confined by linear time, because ancestral entities are always co-becoming within an active and ever-changing rhizome of relations. In contrast, in archaeological approaches to apprehending time, relations can only occur between contemporaneous entities that exist in a single temporal unit. Archaeological ways of knowing assume the world (including the 'things' of archaeology) to be knowable as material evidence corroborating historical narratives about how humans lived in the past. As demonstrated by the superposition principle, the 'things' of archaeology are perceived as components of a dead world, connected to the present only by way of a retrospective gaze into the past.

Life and Non-life

I take the disjuncture between four-directions teachings and the superposition principle as a productive one for the kind of "generative tensions" that can induce innovative possibilities for "going on together doing difference" (Verran 2011:9-10). The epistemic disconcertment I experienced when shifting between ceremonial and archaeological domains provided an opening for the kind of analytical engagement that does not eschew either set of practices or the categories and assumptions underlying them, but rather seeks to go deeper into the space between them. In so doing, I pry into the categories informing each set of practices and ask: what comes as a result of the disjuncture between ceremonial and archaeological practices and categories, as the state implements the heritage management rubric?

Throughout my fieldwork, the answer was abundantly clear. The parameters that prescribe what counts as life are defined very differently in the categories pertaining to ceremonial and archaeological practices. And as the heritage management rubric is implemented by the state, since archaeological categories and practices tend to be prioritized, the parameters by which the state defines what counts as life tend to be prioritized as well. Examining interactions between archaeological and ceremonial ways of knowing has much to reveal about how the distinction between life and non-life impacts decisions concerning what the state defines as land and resources.

As I argued in Chapter Six, archaeological categories are informed by the manner in which the state construes substances embedded in the landscape as natural and cultural resources. The commodification of these substances, such as bitumen, minerals, and

remnants of the historical buffalo hunt, leaves them devoid of the qualities by which the state defines life. This standard of characterizing natural and cultural resources as non-life, which I discuss in further detail below, is in contrast with the way life is configured in ceremonial contexts. During my time in ceremonial contexts and in talking with people in Maskwacis and other communities, I heard countless stories about the active and lively interactions that individuals have with many varieties of ancestral beings who reside above or below the ground or in the sky. These stories depict a cosmos where life flows through everything, from the rocks to the stars. These networks of relations continue to enliven the land of central Alberta, even as the resource paradigm translates ancestral landscapes into commodified resources.

In ceremonial contexts, what qualifies as life has no bounds. But in the heritage management rubric, what qualifies as life is tightly restricted. This is the disjuncture that became most readily apparent throughout my fieldwork, and which clearly warranted the kind of analytical attention that consistent disconcertment calls for. As I argued above, the aims of enduring this sense of unease is to disallow the translation of difference into sameness, and to remain with the tensions between divergent sets of categories and practices despite the discomfort these tensions induce.

My own engagement with each set of practices was in part first-hand, but also came through the stories that were shared with me about the worlds that both ceremonial and archaeological practices enact. For this reason, I must be clear that my portrayal of the incidents described above is characterized by my own distinct positioning as a researcher investigating these overlapping domains. As I explained in Chapter One,

because my fieldwork involved very few direct interactions between ceremonialists and heritage workers, I went about investigating ceremonial and archaeological practices in almost entirely separate domains. Granted, I did hear stories recounted by archaeologists about their colleagues' level of unease and puzzlement when they attended ceremonies with local First Nations elders at archaeological sites. I also witnessed the same kind of disorientation at the ceremonies I attended in Maskwacis amongst those individuals who had never been in a ceremonial environment before. However, for the most part, as I went from one domain to the other and silently observed the categories informing one set of practices contradict those of the other, the disconcertment I experienced was entirely my own.

In taking an analytical approach to this disconcertment, I have attended to the tensions between ceremonial and archaeological modes of apprehending reality, while recognizing that each set of world-making practices reflects the particular categories pertaining to those practices. That is, for my teacher, a buffalo skull can rise out of the ground on its own, and, for the archaeologists, the superposition principle can disprove that a relationship exists between what lies above and what lies below the surface of the ground. One is no more or less true than the other, and digging deeper into the implications of this disjuncture has much to reveal about how each set of categories and practices makes its own distinction between life and non-life.

The question of what counts as life has been underlying the content of all previous chapters, and each chapter has provided the grounds to conclude that the state's governance of heritage is profoundly impacted by the state's distinction between what

does and what does not qualify as life. To look deeper into the basis of this distinction I turn to recent work of Povinelli, who focuses in on the implications of the distinction between life and non-life as the state implements forms of governance.

The state's governance of what qualifies as life hinges on what Povinelli refers to as the carbon imaginary. In the carbon imaginary, life is attributed only to those carbon-based life forms that go through specific metabolic processes, and experience the key events of birth, growth, and death. These key events are normalized as justification for the proposition that only carbon-based entities can have life. It follows that, since only carbon-based life forms can die, then that which can not die (as in the failing of an entity's metabolic functions) is assumed never to have been alive to begin with (Povinelli 2013). In contrast, in the ceremonial way of life lived by my Cree friends, life is not defined by an entity's metabolic tendencies, and relations are not confined to a singular temporal period. Within a rhizome of ancestral connections, temporality is not perceived as singular and linear, since ancestral beings are always immanent. Spatial coordinates are not perceived as determinant of what kinds of relations can occur, since the rhizome is not confined by geographic location. The ancestors will travel anywhere that they are called upon.

The distinction between life and non-life that is inherent to the carbon imaginary provides a foundation from which the state can undermine claims of sovereignty that are based on the principle of prior occupation. As I have argued throughout previous chapters, those claims of sovereignty emerge from the immanent obligations that bind human and non-human persons to Indigenous ancestral landscapes. The state's

recognition of Indigenous peoples' connections to ancestral landscapes is limited by the question of which forms of life the state can accept as real, and as pertaining to those territorial connections. The notion that a hill, a river, or an archaeological site is a living ancestor can impede justification for the myriad forms of construction and development – infrastructural, industrial, residential – that function to support capitalism. And so, to justify continued capitalist development, it is crucial for the state that the notion of a living landscape be absolutely untrue (Povinelli 2013). The distinction between life and non-life carried by the carbon imaginary takes priority as ancestral landscapes are construed into extractable resources, and the boundless configuration of life in Plains Cree relational networks is cast off as untrue for the barriers it poses to the expansion of development.

Given that Alberta's heritage management framework is bound up with the land's development, it is clear that the carbon imaginary informs heritage management processes. The presumed separation of life from non-life plays a major part in how the state interferes with the maintenance of Plains Cree ancestral landscapes. The principle of superposition, embedded in the logics through which the state governs the category of heritage, clearly demonstrates Povinelli's carbon imaginary. This principle promotes the notion of an un-living world that is impervious to the destructive forces of resource extraction. Perpetuating the view of a world that is unable to engage in forms of expressivity (see Rose 2004) justifies those destructive forces in the name of capitalism. If the land is assumed to be innately inert, then by the same logic the land does not need to be treated as if it were alive. And if the land is deemed not to be alive, then it requires only minimal protection from the destructive forces of resource extraction.

This is the logic underlying Alberta's heritage management process, which goes to show that heritage protection is always intimately bound with capitalist forms of development. Haber (2012) describes the connection between linear time and the justifications for expansion of extractive industries:

> … the archaeological idea of time and history as lineal is reproduced: by its inclusion within an administrative procedure oriented towards the implementation of a capitalist development project, it implicitly assumes the inevitability of capitalist development, as governed by the progression of time.

<div align="right">Haber 2012:61</div>

The link between a linear perception of time, the construal of the land's substances as commodifiable resources, and defining life solely by metabolic function should now be clear. When dealing with land and resources, the state tends to approach archaeological materials as dispensable, and capitalist development is favoured for its potential promise of a prosperous future. Commercial archaeology reproduces coloniality through regulated procedures that prioritize the resource paradigm and translate Indigenous ancestral landscapes into lifeless, commodified resources. Informed by the carbon imaginary and linear approaches to time, this paradigm severely delimits the kinds of entities that are understood to participate in the heritage management process.

State governance over heritage carries the divisions between life and non-life imposed by the carbon imaginary. As a result, since archaeological materials do not pertain directly to living, breathing organisms, they are not considered to be viable forms of life as the state implements its heritage management framework. The archaeological process carries a linear temporality that separates the past from the present. The forms of life central to Cree relational networks are not defined by metabolic function, but rather, participate directly in the process of establishing relations in the here-and-now, and must uphold their own obligations to the land and its inhabitants.

Those obligations bind humans and non-humans into patterns of ritualized behaviour that iterate four-directions teachings and follow the interrelated processes of horizontal and vertical socialization. As I argued in previous chapters, in Plains Cree relational networks, humans, buffalo/*Mostos*, and the land are composed of the same substance, and this quality is reinforced by engaging in ceremonial activity. Including ceremony as integral to heritage-related processes opens the possibility of entities such as *Mostos* participating directly in decisions concerning land and resources. Engaging directly with *Mostos* ignores the carbon-based division of life from non-life, and the temporal disjunction between past and present. In the final section, I aim to show that despite the limitations imposed by the heritage management framework, Plains Cree ancestral landscapes remain strong.

Unexpected Relations

In resource-rich Alberta, where archaeology is largely a capitalist enterprise, ancestral landscapes are at constant risk of destruction. Heritage protection is slippery slope in light of the push for development and industrial expansion, and the principles underlying the carbon imaginary impose severe limitations on the values and ethics carried by the heritage management framework. However, despite the tendency of the state to favour industry over the protection of heritage when there is money to be made by way of extractive development, Plains Cree relational networks continue to be enlivened by ancestral connections.

Places and materials that are simultaneously referred to as 'sacred' by local Indigenous people, and identified as 'historical resources' under the *Historical Resources Act*, continue to be integral to those relational networks. The intersection of ceremonial and archaeological practices is a disconcerting place to be, where the categories of each awkwardly bump up against one another, at times one violently cancelling the other out. It is in these deep pockets of incommensurability, Verran argues that "we might grasp generative possibilities for going on together doing difference" (Verran 2011:9). In other words, rather than easing the discomfort of epistemic disconcertment by attempting to dissolve difference, disconcertment should be maintained along with a useful sameness that will, instead, "strengthen separations" (Verran 2002:750) and highlight distinctions.

As the world-making practices of ceremony and archaeology intersect, a useful sameness does not close down the possibility for generative tensions, but opens the potential for innovation and reciprocal transformation. This research has aimed to

cultivate the generative tensions that form at the intersection of divergent worlds, and to do so in a way that aligns with the ethical praxis of Plains Cree ceremonialism. As I explained in the introduction to this chapter, in the co-labouring process I undertook with Mekwan Awâsis, I aimed to attend to the ethics implied by the tipi methodology he had proposed. As I made my inquiry into human relations with buffalo/*Mostos*, the disjuncture between *Mostos*-as-kin and buffalo-as-resource was very disconcerting indeed. The disconcertment I experienced provided a place from which to examine the disjuncture between archaeological and ceremonial domains, and from which to interrogate the interactions between them.

In Chapter Two, I suggested my work aimed to reflect a 'critical imagination' approach to heritage studies, as Waterton and Watson (2013:552) urge for. A critical imagination, they argue, intends not only to question the authoritative position of state-sanctioned heritage management frameworks, but also to broaden the scope of approaches that are used for investigating the concept of heritage as a modern construct laden with particular categories and values. My own contribution to academic dialogues concerning the concept of heritage has been made possible by the co-labouring process I undertook with Mekwan Awâsis, and it is his ingenuity and creativity that infuses the pages of this dissertation with the kind of critical imagination that has the capacity to effect change.

The proposition that we work together to construct an upward-spiral tipi was a resolutely political move, not only for its refusal to settle for the status quo in academic research, but also for its demand that Cree praxis be the sovereign force that guided my research. Adhering to his tipi methodology is to work towards maintaining the kind of relational ethics that were intended by the Cree signatories at the time of the Treaty Six

agreement. Engaging this same relational ethics in heritage management processes, by adhering to ceremonial protocols and acknowledging the immanence of ancestral beings, is a step towards fulfilling the treaty obligations that were instantiated with the smoking of the pipe in 1876.

The equivocations that occur around the concepts of heritage, treaty, sacredness, and buffalo/*Mostos* have garnered my attention as a result of the disconcertment I experienced in shifting back and forth between ceremonial and archaeological domains. All of these concepts are not only of concern in reference to the state's presumed authority over land and resources, but are also embedded in the iterative patterning of Plains Cree four-directions protocols and teachings[15]. The tipi methodology, as one articulation of those protocols and teachings, is essential for understanding the place of *Mostos* in Plains Cree cosmology. Given the centrality of buffalo/*Mostos* to heritage sites and institutions in Alberta, the tipi methodology should also inform standard heritage management processes in the province.

My co-labouring with Mekwan Awâsis has been aimed at forging a path of inquiry into human-*Mostos* relations. This path has been devised by way of a critical imagination that calls on Cree praxis to inform and influence heritage management processes and practices. I take my cues from the tipi methodology to show how life is configured by way of four-directions teachings, and to demonstrate what the implications

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[15] The greatest downfall of this research, I must concede, is the lack of Cree linguistic terminology for the concepts I describe in English. In future research I intend to map out some of the Cree concepts at play in this research.

are for engaging with *Mostos* as a viable form of life, even as the network of relations in which *Mostos* is embedded becomes invisibilized.

De la Cadena argues that relations don't only connect through similarities – that differences also connect. In approaching difference as divergence rather than as contradiction, "divergence refers to the coming together of heterogeneous practices that will become other than what they were, while continuing to be the same – they become self-different" (de la Cadena 2015:280). My intention is not to entirely disengage from Alberta's heritage management framework, but to attend to the divergences between heritage management practices and the care of ancestral landscapes in a way that shows how differences can connect. In producing a useful sameness between ceremonial and archaeological worlds, differences are maintained and therefore divergent categories that might otherwise disrupt one another can go on together without interruption. Producing a useful sameness means that these worlds can carry on together, even correspond, so that the categories pertaining to each can remain strong.

It is with this deliberate paralleling in mind that I share a final story. This story is intended to demonstrate possibilities for calling upon a critical imagination to apprehend *Mostos* as a viable form of life at the intersection of archaeological and ceremonial worlds. What follows invites a mode of apprehending *Mostos* that arises from the four-directions teachings recounted earlier in this chapter. In particular, the following story is intended to show how a useful sameness opens up possibilities for going on together without reducing one set of categories to the terms of the other.

Recall from Chapter Four the ceremony that had been organized to take place at an archaeological site. A ceremonialist from Maskwacis was present to do a pipe ceremony before the archaeological work commenced, and about a dozen men, including archaeologists, construction site managers, and First Nations monitors, were gathered in a circle to participate. The old man had explained at length that the ceremony was done to protect those who were doing the work, and to respect the land. His words stressed an active engagement with the earth.

I had been present at the site periodically throughout the summer as archaeological work was carried out, and I returned one day about two months after the pipe ceremony had taken place. Excavations had just ended for the season, so only one archaeologist, as well as members of local First Nations who had been hired to monitor construction activities, were on-site. I met with the archaeologist, who told me they had found something the previous day that would interest me. It was a buffalo skull.

The day before, construction workers had been digging with an auger[16] to make the holes necessary for installing towering pieces of rebar. The industrial-sized auger was inserted into the ground, loosening the dirt and boring a deep hole as it descended into the earth. The hole, at first, seemed to be like any other, with dirt and rocks packed into the auger's frame. Except on this occasion, as it emerged from the ground, a completely intact buffalo skull was situated on the spiraled, metal edge of the auger.

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[16] An auger is a spiral-shaped piece of construction equipment, designed to loosen earth and leave an empty hole in the ground.

The archaeologist I spoke with emphasized that the odds of unearthing a buffalo skull in this way were very slim. The skull happened to be situated underground directly in the auger's path. It was at a depth that happened to be reached by the auger's coiling motion, and somehow the skull wasn't crushed by the giant metal corkscrew as it gouged through the earth in a downward motion. Once the auger reached the desired depth, the equipment operator reversed the direction of the machine and it began coiling the other way, drawing fresh earth to the surface and leaving behind a hollowed-out hole in the ground. The buffalo skull went along for the ride.

Is it merely a coincidence that this skull followed a spiralled vertical path as it emerged from the earth, in line with Mekwan Awâsis' gestural performance when he shared his mode of interpreting a skull's place in the cosmos? In what ways might this skull's trail be an iteration of the ancestral pathways that are opened by ceremony?

Asking these questions is intended to prompt a rethinking of engrained, taken-for-granted assumptions about what heritage is, and encourages the cultivation of a critical imagination that seeks to broaden the scope of what counts as life as heritage management practices are implemented. Making Plains Cree ancestral landscapes visible reveals the extent to which state-sanctioned resource management processes deny the possibility that non-carbon-based life forms require protection and nurturance as the land is developed. If the notion of heritage is taken to include those beings who play an active role in Plains Cree ceremonial life, then four-directions teachings are central to the entire heritage management framework.

The intersecting categories pertaining to the distinct world-making practices surrounding buffalo/*Mostos* marks an intersection that has much broader reach concerning land and resource management. This intersection is resolutely place-based, in that it is enlivened by localized entities and informed by particular policy lineages. All chapters in this dissertation have shown that examining the interplay of buffalo and *Mostos* as they are performed simultaneously has much to reveal about the distinction between life and non-life as ancestral landscapes become construed into commodified resources. These overlapping entities are enacted into entirely different worlds, but worlds that can correspond by way of a constructive sameness that makes effective collaboration possible.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The concept of heritage is not given in the order of things, but points to entangled sets of relations that participate in both the doing and un-doing of active kinship networks enlivening a given landscape. The complex equivocations and translations that go into rendering ancestral entities as a resource allows the state to (mistakenly) assume that relations among humans and non-humans can be managed by way of state-derived legislation and regulated procedures. There are instances where heritage protection laws can reinforce the relational ethic enacted in ceremony. However, due to the state's favouring of the resource paradigm, the concept of heritage is inextricably bound with economic value and capital accumulation.

This research is intended to promote a rethinking of the composition of heritage, as it is broadly conceived within state-derived heritage management practices in Canada,

to include the non-human, land-based entities whom many Indigenous people commonly refer to as kin. This requires a sustained interrogation of how principles derived from a modern ontology inform the practices and processes that implement heritage policy and legislation in Canada. The category of heritage largely takes shape under the weight of the resource paradigm, and, as such, the materials deemed heritage by the state are always susceptible to the forces of industrial expansion. So-called 'cultural' resources are pitted against the value of so-called 'natural' resources, and 'heritage management' mediates the relationship between protection and destruction in the name of capitalist development. Left unquestioned, the categories informing the state-derived framework for heritage management can have devastating effects on the ability of ceremonial people to fulfill their obligations to ancestral entities.

The ceremonial intentions in treaty agreements across Canada laid the groundwork for a just and mutually beneficial relationship to unfold among settlers and Indigenous people in a manner that would includ non-human entities in the process of relation-building. With the current Canadian Government's endorsement of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* there has been a recent push to increase the involvement of Indigenous people in decision-making processes affecting their traditional lands, and including ceremony in heritage management processes is a move in the right direction to honour treaty relationships. But there remains much work to be done to rectify Canada's policy-legal framework as it affects Indigenous peoples' ability to live as the treaties intended, and heritage-related policy and legislation is no exception.

What would heritage management frameworks in Canada look like if these

frameworks were re-created to reflect the relational ethic embedded in the treaties? In keeping with an ethic of presence as put forward by Green (2014), a treaty-informed framework for heritage management would necessarily start with the ceremonial protocols instantiated through the collective smoking of a pipe at treaty proceedings. Participation in ceremonial protocols situates an individual within an active rhizome of relations, so an individual's position in the cosmic order would be deeply implicated in heritage-related processes and procedures. This, in turn, would prompt a careful consideration among those involved in heritage-related decisions of how each action relays a particular series of consequences within the rhizome.

In the current configuration of heritage management, the parameters of what counts as life are limited by archaeological principles that carry a clear disconnection between past and present. Rethinking the composition of heritage is to question the categories that pertain to heritage-related practices and institutions, and to undo the assumptions that rely on the modernist separation between nature and culture, human and non-human. It is by way of this undoing that other worlds become possible.

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