

STORIES AS MAPS AND MAPS AS STORIES: A NAVIGATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing- Masters of Arts

2015

## ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I develop a navigational epistemological lens in order to understand the pathways of navigating knowledge construction. Specifically, I am working with Native American and Indigenous scholars in general, and three scholars specifically, to develop this lens around four main characteristics: history, land, story and relationships.

This thesis is broken down into three content chapters, and each chapter focuses on one primary author. Chapter 2 works with Lisa Brooks' *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* to build the structure and foundation of the four characteristics. Chapter 3 is a conversation with Andrew Blackbird's *History of the Ottawa and Chipewa Indians of Michigan* to better understand how history and land functions in Native epistemology. Chapter 4 is a journey with Louise Erdrich's *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, specifically considering the implications of story and relationships in Native epistemology. Together, these chapters offer a method of understanding the ways that knowledge is constructed in an Indigenous context and provides a way to theorize and contextualize history, land, story, and relationships with in scholarly discourse.

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## INTRODUCTION:

### PACKING OUR BAGS

*My Uncle Jim is an old Cree man who has called Michigan his home for his entire life. As a child, Uncle Jim was one of the primary father figures in my life. He took time to teach me ways of functioning in the world that made sense to me. He taught me how to be respectful to the land and to people, because for him they were the same thing.*

*I struggled a lot as a kid. I never felt at home anywhere and my relationship with my extended family was strained to say the least. I was working to overcome several learning disabilities that made it nearly impossible to read and write, while learning how to deal with PTSD as a 10 year old. My Uncle Jim could see the internal struggles I was dealing with, but never treated me as a damaged good. He sought to empower me through teaching me ways to know the world on my own terms, but also ways to shape these terms into values and beliefs that looked for the strengths in the world around me.*

*Often this took the shape of using the land as an example. Uncle Jim would take me camping just south of the Grand Traverse Bay, near the town of Manistee, Mi. During these camping trips, Uncle Jim would teach me lessons about life by asking me to watch how the land and animals dealt with their issues. At first it felt hokey, and I resisted. It felt stereotypical for the Native dude to find the answers from the land around him (though I will fully admit I didn't know the word stereotypical at the time). I also didn't know why I should trust him or why he would invest time in me.*

*He taught me to walk silently through the woods. He taught me how to fish. He taught me how to listen. He taught me different ways to remember where the rivers were and what they*

*mean in relation to where I was and how to get home. He taught me how to listen to others and the land because he believed that everyone and everything is speaking to us, if we know how to listen.*

*Uncle Jim used the land as his teaching tool because he reasoned that the land could take my missteps far better than the humans in my family. He used the land because it was something he knew. At the place where we camped, he had been walking the forest for 15 years before I was born and knew in enough detail a square 10 miles around our camping site to show me beautiful places and ugly spaces where the land had been over harvested. He taught me how to get back to these places, so I could visit them myself. He taught me how to find basic nutrients and how to harvest food if I needed to, and it was through this activity I began to understand how the land could teach me.*

*On our fourth trip Up North, at 12 years old, I knew my surroundings and felt comfortable with the area around our camp site. I knew how to push my known boundaries by finding a landmark to keep in eyesight while I went further than I had before. I knew how to find the cedar swamp, locate the marsh where the beautiful purple flowers lived, and how to find the porcupine tree. I knew that if I got lost I just had to find the Pine River to get home. Uncle Jim taught me ways of knowing the difference between the Pine River and the Manistee (If I came to a dam and kept going I was on the Pine or by throwing a stick out as far as I could into the current, the Manistee flowed much slower than the Pine in the area surrounding us). I had to remember if I went to the left or to the right from the reference point of Moss Pointe. I knew which way to go as long as I could see the water.*

*I have told this story many times, in many different ways, but this time, I will tell the part of the story that I have always left out. After following a familiar trail that led deeper into the woods, not to the water, I heard a deep consistent drumming that sounded like a snare drum roll. I left the path to find the source of the sound. I moved slowly and as quietly as possible because I knew from my previous trips in the woods that I rarely saw any animals and as soon as they saw me they were gone. But, I was focused on finding the source of the sound.*

*I looked up into the tops of the trees, getting closer. I began to hear a laughing type sound followed by the sharp Tat-Tat-Tat. When I was nearly on top of the sound, I stopped moving completely, having broken through to a clearing in the trees and knowing I was exposed. I slowed my breathing and looked around. Perched on a fallen tree about 5 feet from me I saw a woodpecker that was more than a foot tall. I had heard Uncle Jim talk about these birds and how rare they were to find in this branch of the Manistee National Forest and knew I was looking at something rare and beautiful.*

*At first the woodpecker kept pecking like I wasn't there, but as I tried to move closer it was clear he saw me (when I got home I pulled out Uncle Jim's copy of the Audubon Bird manual and figured out that it was a male Pileated Woodpecker who was at least 3 years old based on the size and the deepness of the color red on its head). He didn't immediately fly away, in fact he was looking right at me as if to say "follow me". Slowly, the bird flew a short distance away, waiting for me to follow. I moved closer, still trying to be as quite as I possibly could.*

*He looked at me again as I got within four feet, turned to the tree and issued a few sharp pecks and took off again, staying about eye level. This time the woodpecker flew further than before, into the surrounding trees, and looked at me. I was being examined closely, but not so*

*closely that the woodpecker couldn't fly away if it felt threatened. I moved within in four feet again, and the process started over.*

*After what felt like an hour or so, we got to a small valley where a stream cut through to meet the river. I felt certain that in the process of me crossing the valley and getting up the other side the beautiful bird would fly away. But as I crested the hill, I saw my friend 2 feet away this time, waiting for me. I looked around and the trees were getting older and larger than any area I had been with Uncle Jim or by myself, and I could see years of accumulated moss growth on the oak and beech trees. I could feel the air thick with more oxygen than I had ever breathed.*

*While my woodpecker friend kept pecking, I looked around and I didn't notice anything until he stopped. Again we made eye contact and he flew off. No matter how many times he flew away, he would only go 5-10 feet away before looking back to see if I was coming.*

*I had left the campsite around sunrise and could just make out the sun through the trees which showed me it was about mid day. I had been following my friend for at least 3 hours. I didn't really care about the time as I knew I had as much of it as I needed and followed on.*

*We passed a grove of cedars I didn't recognize, small stands of birch, through a CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) patch of forest, and over another stream valley; moving at 10 feet at a time. As the sun started to distinctly head west, I could tell my trip was coming to a close as my woodpecker friend was starting to stay longer at the trees. I looked around and could see at least 7 trees with woodpecker sized holes in them and knew that he had brought me to his home.*

*I had been getting progressively more and more tired the further we went and decided to sit down for awhile. I tried to take in as much of my surroundings as possible, soaking up the scene of this small clearing that I would have never found without my friend.*



*My thoughts started to wander towards home and I realized I truly didn't know where I was. I had remembered a fair amount of the journey but couldn't remember from which direction I had come to the clearing. I was beginning to worry that I wouldn't be able to make it home before dark. As my fear began to grow, my woodpecker friend flew down to a branch next to me. He was so close I could touch him if I wanted to. He looked at me and I looked at him and he let out his laughing cry, then he flew away, this time too far for me to see him.*

*All the while we were making our trip, I had been thinking about my life and what I had lived through up until this point. I reflected on my family and the ways I felt disconnected from them. I thought about my mother who had struggled to make her way in civilian life since the first Gulf War. I thought about my fears and who I wanted to be.*

*While I was terrified of being lost, I remember distinctly feeling more lost within myself than being lost in the woods. I stayed in that clearing thinking for an unknown amount of time, reflecting on who I was and how little it mattered when I looked at the scene around me. I believe I began to gain a scope into the bigger picture of life as I sat there. I also knew I had to find my way home.*

*I have always been a visual map maker in my brain. I started to think back to when I left the trail and where I had been. I knew that I was to the right of Moss Pointe, which meant I had headed in an Easterly direction for the majority of my trip with the woodpecker. I didn't know if I was Northeast or Southeast of where I started, but knew that the river had to be somewhere near.*

*I started in the direction I guessed I had come and walked for what I would find out later was 4 miles more away from where I needed to be. Further East and more North. I continued to walk,*

*looking for any streams or water of any kind, because I knew that if I could find water, I could follow it to the river.*

*I kept my ears open and stopped every ten minutes or so to see if I could hear the sound of water running. I was getting, what felt like, deeper into the forest and losing my confidence. As I was starting to panic, I looked around me to see if I could see anything that would help me find my way. In the distance I could see the sun breaking through the trees and started to head that direction. As I got closer I could hear running water, it was calling me home, telling me to find the safety of its glass like sheen. I knew that I would be ok.*

*I found a stream that looked promising; I just had to guess which way to follow it, to the right or to the left. At this point I had lost all of my orienting ability and chose to go right because the trail looked like it was going downhill, which was also away from the river and further away from home. I had found what I was looking for though and continued to follow the pathways created by deer next to the stream. The stream grew wider and narrower at sudden intervals. Sometimes I had many feet of ground to walk on, other times a pathway that was less than a foot wide.*

*I also started to realize that in my joy of finding a stream to follow, I hadn't paid any attention to the current, which was clearly heading the opposite way that I was going. I had looked at the land, not the water itself. I had been walking the wrong direction for nearly an hour, always following the lay of the land, not the flow of the water. I listened to the sound, but didn't hear the meaning. I decided to keep going the direction I was headed, though I still am not sure why.*

*Eventually, I came to a county road that ran parallel to the stream for a few hundred feet. I left my deer path and started walking on the two track road which eventually turned into a pebbled path. It was clearly getting darker at this point and I knew I was no closer to home than I was to knowing where I was, but I kept walking.*

*My feet were sore and my arms felt heavy. I was half considering giving up making it home that day. I was sure I could use some of the foraging skills Uncle Jim had taught me if I absolutely needed to, but I was extremely terrified of losing the road again. I decided to keep walking for at least one more hour and would stop if I didn't get to a point of knowing where I was.*

*At the end of the hour, I could hear cars in the distance. I knew that I was either to M-55 or M-37. If I was at M-55 I knew I could get home, if I was at M-37 I was going to have to guess which direction to head again and at this point, I wasn't exactly feeling confident in my ability to guess correctly.*

*I was walking very slowly at this point and saw the M-37 sign as I came to the road. I guessed that I should go left and walked that direction for about a half a mile, when I realized that I actually knew where I was and had to turn around to head South towards M-55 because I knew I hadn't crossed M-55 during my journey. I started walking South and made it to where I came out of the woods plus a half mile. I was getting extremely hungry and hating every moment of my life at this point, but I kept walking.*

*Eventually, I was picked up by a local sheriff who brought me the rest of the way home. He was nice and laughed at the situation, but made it clear that he wasn't laughing at me. As we pulled up to the property where our camp site was, I saw my Uncle Jim and his friend Kenny*

*coming out to meet us. After the sheriff made sure I was ok and this was for sure where I needed to be, he left.*

*I assumed I would be in trouble, but my Uncle Jim just laughed. Uncle Jim said he was starting to get worried because I hadn't made it back yet, and told me that dinner was just about ready as we headed back to his camper. He asked if I had left the path, to which I said yes and left it at that. The remaining days of our trip I stayed relatively close to the camp site and made Uncle Jim promise not to tell anyone how lost I had been.*

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I tell this story as an entry point to discussing the relationships I have developed with 3 specific Native scholars (Lisa Brooks, Andrew Blackbird, and Louise Erdrich) over the last 4 years. I have never shared the Woodpecker part of this story because for a long time I thought it was foolish. I was afraid of what this would say about me. I was afraid of what my uncle would think of me, what you, reader, would think of me. But, as I started to work through understanding this project I realized the ways in which this fear was representative of the larger fear I developed around this project. I was afraid of talking about my orientations to these texts. I was afraid of appropriating these ideas. I was afraid I wouldn't be respectful enough or be able to situate the path I am taking in this document. Much as I was afraid of being lost, I was afraid to begin this writing.

This project is my Woodpecker and I have to start where it all started for me: in the woods, with my uncle, willing to follow the woodpecker because I believed what I would learn would outweigh what I would lose. What I have learned has lead me to believe that understanding the history of habitation of the North American continent is at the heart of my

research. I am shaping this Navigational Epistemology in order to make sense of the positionality and land based ideologies of other scholars (Lisa Brooks, Andrew Blackbird, and Louise Erdrich). In order to put the Epistemology into practice, I am providing an example by analyzing my relationships with the land and people of Michigan.

I also have to create a map, with directions, in which my reader can follow my journey. In the process of writing this document and making revisions, I have realized that I have been using land marks that only have meaning to me. As with any map, if the key doesn't make sense, neither will the map. What I would like to ask my reader to do here is to consider what follows as a map from my Uncle Jim's house (one of my homes) to the campsite where my uncle and I started the hard work of orientating to the land, the place where I got lost and had to find my way home.

We are starting in Wyoming, Mi, at my Uncle Jim's house, packing everything we need for the following week. The introduction represents this preparation as it is where the story begins for me. It is the story where I gained the scope required to anticipate what I would need to bring with me to survive for a week in the woods. It is also the context for the larger journey because it shows how I orient towards the land and have come to learn the importance of listening to the stories that the land has to share with me. This story sets the stage for the trip, just as packing determines what comforts I will or won't have while in the woods. There is too much to remember to bring and I always forget something, but here, I know that as long as I bring the essentials (in this case the experience and knowledge to follow and read the land) I will be ok.

When everything is packed the first leg of the journey is U.S. 131 North. This highway is the longest leg of the journey, much as chapter 2 is where the most theoretical heavy lifting

happens. For 74 miles we will travel on 131, and it is on this leg of the journey where it is hard to believe we will ever get to the forest. The sides of the road are covered with farm lands and shopping centers with sparse patches of tree, while on this leg of the journey we have time to reflect on the multiple ways that knowledge is constructed and known. Lisa Brooks, author of *The Common Pot*, is the hardest author for me to work with and chapter 2 represents the process of finding my understanding of knowledge construction. Much as 131 North represents one of the major thoroughfares of Michigan, bringing the Northern part of the Lower Peninsula together and the foundational leg of our journey, *The Common Pot* shows me how to understand knowledge making by looking at history, land, story, and relationships as the necessary connecting threads to understand how I have constructed this epistemology.

What my reader should know is: once we are 30 miles into our 131 leg (past Rockford and Cedar Springs), we could take any exit and still get to our destination. The allure of taking these exits and adding miles to the journey is always there for me because of what I may see on the added distance. I mention all of this to inform my reader that there are other ways to get to the camping site, but I am focusing on one route, *The Common Pot* and Lisa Brooks, to travel this leg of the journey because as a text, there has been no other book that has provided me with such a wealth of possibilities. By acknowledging the multiple possible routes, I hope to imply to my reader the weight of importance this text has in my idea formation. There is an intended meaning behind the possibilities of other routes with this chapter, which reflects the multiple meanings that I have made from this text.

Chapter 2 is building on Brooks' work in understanding the importance of meaning from land based practice by considering the characteristics of knowing how knowledge is constructed and recognized. This chapter considers the meanings of defining Native space to understand

larger implications of colonization and the ways that Native people know the land. It also considers oral histories in the form of analyzing origin stories and the purpose of such stories in Native culture. It builds on ways of understanding the land by considering what it means for a Native author to create their own maps for use and analysis. This chapter looks at the ways in which historical and contemporary Native folks build relationships between each other and the land, and it considers the roles of the stories they tell to each other as a form of understanding land based knowledge. These conversations build towards the development of four characteristics of what I am calling a Navigational Epistemology that I will use to analyze Andrew Blackbird and Louise Erdrich. These characteristics are: history, land, story, and relationships.

As the anticipation grows as we see the first sign for West M10, Chapter 2 requires the reader to have faith that we will get beyond the farm land and shopping centers because once we get to W M10 we are halfway to the camping site, but the hardest part of journey is ahead. The roads will all look the same and it is easy to get lost, which requires me to provide the best instructions possible to navigate from W M10 to N M37, or in this case, from Chapter 3 to Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 specifically considers how knowledge is navigated through history and the land by considering and analyzing Andrew Blackbird's *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan*. This chapter is represented by W M10 in my directions to the campsite because of the flow of the land and the number of times I have personally made preemptive turns, taking a different or all together wrong *route*, to get to where I needed to go. This situation also reflects the care with which I need to present the information and analysis from Blackbird's text, in order for my reader to follow my path.

W M10 serves as a major causeway between N131 and Baldwin, and has been under constant development since my first trip up North. The lands that Blackbird writes about are in a state of flux and development. He is witnessing the destruction of Native spaces, and guards the specifics of his knowledge to prevent further exploitation by white settlers. There is a distinct sense that Blackbird trusts his readers to either know the spaces he is talking about, and thus can follow his narrative as a map, or if they do not specifically know the places, provide enough context to understand the larger picture of his narrative and the impact of colonization on the lands of his people. The text as a larger whole is a conversation of understanding knowledge through the land with a historical perspective, which relates directly back to two of the characteristics of the lens developed with Brooks.

What compounds this relationship is the additional histories added to the conversation when considering the hundred years since the book's publication. This is reflected in the businesses that have thrived and failed along W M10 since I have been making this thesis journey. In a sense, since I do not travel these roads often enough, I cannot provide many specific landmarks by which to orient a traveler down this road, because I cannot know what is new and what is no longer there. There is a distinct lack of specific land markers throughout this chapter because Blackbird doesn't provide any beyond the names of settlements and sites of colonial interaction. As such, this is reflected by my conversations of knowledge being known by the land itself and the histories told and shared about these spaces.

The story is different depending on the audience. If Blackbird was only speaking to Native people from this area, this issue would be compounded because he wouldn't need to provide specific locations for where the wild strawberries grow during summer due to his audience most likely already knowing where that is and would know how to respect and treat the



land. My navigation of this is in process and will most likely remain so for quite some time, what I am hoping to do in this chapter is discuss the ways in which Blackbird considers knowledge formation and recognition of how knowledge is known in his *History*. I am using the reference points of tens of signs that say W M10 as a means of navigation and claiming these signs represent meaning. After this chapter, we are more than 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the way to the campsite and ready to travel on my favorite leg of the drive, N M37.

N M37 is my favorite part of this journey because it shows the types of environmental diversity Michigan can have. There are huge hills, which dispute Michigan as a flat state. There are swampy low lands where Red Winged Blackbird fly. There are thick hardwood forests that are new growth trees, representing the recovery and survivance of the types of trees that covered the Lower Peninsula. There are stands of Civilian Conservation Corps forests, with their perfectly aligned pine trees that show how the land remembers human presence. There are rivers with clear waters, polluted waters, and dammed waters. There are lakes. There are homes. There are paths that lead to Lake Michigan, 30 miles away. To say the least, there is an abundance of what Michigan has to offer.

In my map of directions to my campsite, Louise Erdrich's text *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* represents N M37 because of the multiple ways in which relationships are formed and how these relationships demonstrate how Erdrich knows what she knows. Chapter 4 considers the major characteristics outlined in Chapter 2 by looking specifically at story and relationships as a way of navigating knowledge.

Erdrich asks her readers to take a journey with her. Much like what I am doing in framing the rest of this project, Erdrich provides names for specific roads and builds paths for the reader

to build relationships with her existing relationships. This is one of my favorite texts because of the ways that knowing knowledge is expressed through the story that Erdrich weaves for her reader. Erdrich pushes on what Native space means in a contemporary context by drawing maps of relationships across space and time. She remembers her ancestors, but acknowledges this is an ongoing relationship that strengthens as she learns more of the Ojibwe language. She builds relationships with the land by relating stories of the people and places she visits along her journey. There are similar stories as to those related by Blackbird in regards to Anishinaabe history of the Great Lakes, and through reflecting on these stories and histories, Erdrich maps the land she travels on. Each story, each relationship represents a hill, a swamp, a hardwood forest, of the 37 miles of N M37. All of these features when put together represent what is seen and experienced on this road. There is such a wealth of knowledge that is shared in this text that on a first read it is hard to take in.

Because Erdrich focuses so much of *Books and Islands* on building relationships and sharing stories, there is a sense that she is mapping herself in relation to the land in a way that is similar to that of Brooks and Blackbird, but distinctly its own. Erdrich relies on relationships to be the driving features of her map and the stories serve as the literal path she takes to get from point A and point B. These stories are the impetus for the concept I am working on in this chapter: stories as maps and maps as stories. This idea grounds itself by looking at ways that history and story combine to shape maps of meaning making and a method of understanding the knowledge contained in Native maps. To this end, each chapter contains a short narrative from my own experience in order to provide an example of how Navigational Epistemologies can work. All of these narratives are connected in that they are maps to my learning and serve as an example of the epistemology and stories as maps and maps as stories. Considerations of the

implications of this model are where I end Chapter 4, looking towards the future and practice of an embodied approach to understanding knowledge; it is also where we turn west to the last leg of our journey.

W M55 is the shortest leg of the trip, but is the leg that holds the most potential. It is winding and full of steep hills that climb former river valleys. Much like the conclusion of this document, W M55 reflects on the roads we have been traveling for the last two hours, but holds the potential to take us to other sites of inquiry. While I am asking that we take a right down Moss Road, W M55 could take us to Lake Michigan, or Manistee, Mi, or N M31. Metaphorically speaking W M55 represents where we have been and where this research could potentially go. The possibilities are shaped in the conclusion as are the reflections of the larger document. There are sites of known knowledge construction along the way, and this chapter is designed to reflect this. I ask the reader to first take the right turn to Moss Rd. and the campsite, but to also reflect on where W M55 could take us.

As we set up camp and unpack what we have brought with us, I would like to leave the reader with a consideration of word choice that serves as an example of where I am approaching this research from.

### **A Note About “Traditional”:**

One of the phrases I use with consternation is traditional. After much thought and deliberation I have chosen to use *traditional*, not as a move to situate all Native people in the past, but rather to imply the ongoing practice from historical spaces to contemporary spaces. Additionally, using the word *traditional* allows me to specify which sets of Native knowledge I

am looking at and to this end, I use *traditional* to differentiate between sacred knowledge and “common practice/knowledge” which I am labeling traditional. When considering land and Native space, this differentiation is extremely important as a non-Native scholar looking at Native work because there are things I am not meant to know and I want to respect that, but by looking at traditional ways of traveling the land and building relationships with the land, I am setting up a framework that has the potential to be used in multiple ways, one of which is mapping Native space in contemporary society. Here, specifically, the word traditional allows me to make the relationship to the past come to the present, by looking at how the methods of Native map making have had to adjust and change with contemporary pressures such as roads and farm land, but I am also able to draw connections with how the historic principles of Native map making still exist in a contemporary context. This situating of the past into the present is of extreme importance, to my scholarship, as it demonstrates the survival of traditional knowledge and establishes a well situated theoretical base to understand Native navigation of knowledge in relation to mapping practices. With that in mind, let’s move on to the next story where I begin to transition the experience in the woods to the class room.

## CHAPTER 2:

### FINDING THE PATHWAYS TO KNOWLEDG: A CONVERSATION WITH LISA BROOKS

*In the Spring of 2011 I was an undergraduate student at Michigan State University, in first year of a new major Professional Writing and after successfully navigating the Introduction to Rhetoric course taught by Dr. Malea Powell, I still had questions and a need to spend more time with Indigenous/Native authors. I asked if I could take the graduate seminar that specifically focused on Native and Indigenous Rhetorics in the Spring. While initially a little surprised, Dr. Powell was extremely encouraging that I pushed myself and my ideas by enrolling in the seminar. I wasn't sure what it actually meant to take a graduate seminar, but I was sure that the relationships I had begun to develop with Native Rhetoric were something I wanted to explore deeper.*

*I wanted to learn to listen, I wanted to learn to ask the right questions, I wanted to move beyond critique of other scholars and find a way to make meanings from what was in the text rather than find holes. All of these ideas were the same insofar as they all lead to a process of synthesis that encouraged the ways that I learn best, but more importantly encouraged the idea of learning to understand what I have known and have seen.*

*I sought to engage on a different level than I had before. I wanted to shape and learn how I made sense of the world around me. Admittedly, part of me believed that I could save myself by engaging in this work with everything I had, the marrow of my spirit. I believed I could find a space where I would be encouraged to engage in a way that held myself and others accountable for what we put in the world. Shawn Wilson's concept of relational accountability really struck home for me. While this narrative is not the place to dig deeper, which I will do later in this*

*chapter, the idea that everything is related and it is my job to honor and respect these relationships was the framework that I had known to be right, but had received very little support in developing this idea in my life previously to this course.*

*I threw myself amongst the wolves to see if I could hold my own. While a huge part of me expected cataclysms daily, I was too busy being in it to let my doubts hold me back. I engaged my classmates, I engaged the authors, I engaged my instructors; learning to ask the right questions, learning the difference between hearing and listening, learning to synthesize rather than destroy. I had been lost in the process of internal colonization, and had begun to find a path that made sense through this course work.*

*Lisa Brooks' 'The Common Pot' was integral an part of this transition and path making. I had never seen an author weave story with map construction in such an effective manner, save in fantasy and science fiction writing. More importantly, Brooks' text confirmed the beliefs that I had begun to learn from my Uncle Jim in the forest; that we are stewards of this land, that the relationship is reciprocal; whether we want it to be or not. For me this translates well to the relationships that I build with other people. Building reciprocating relationships with people involves taking risks and putting myself out there and being aware that everyone else is doing the same thing. I see my experience of taking this graduate seminar as one of the first steps of putting myself in relation to the field.*

*This class was particularly important because it is where I learned that I have to read certain books three or four times to see the potential that can be built from the words within. It is where I learned that I was a builder of things: relationships, ideas, theories, houses. I learned to embrace this characteristic; while learning to listen to the words of scholars and peers to see*

*what needs to be built. Seeking to build for something more than building's sake. It is because of this that I am consistently drawn back to Lisa Brooks and The Common Pot. In Brooks' analysis of history and the land of the North Eastern United States I saw the metaphor of the Pot<sup>1</sup> becoming a way of building and shaping knowledge. To this end, I began to engage with Brooks' work and ask questions about what this text is doing and how it is doing it. I wanted to see what I could build with text and the ideas within it.*

*I noticed the ways in which Brooks grounded herself to her work and explained why she approached certain aspects of the writing. I began to see the framework for what this project is building. From Lisa Brooks, I am working with the Pot metaphor and questioning the characteristics of what this metaphor are and the ways that it can transcend metaphor to become the grounding for an epistemology. I saw the ways that Brooks talked about knowledge as being grounded to history, to the land, to story, and the relationships people build. I wanted to build from this, an epistemological lens that would help guide my future research in understand land base and Indigenous cartographic methods.*

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So what is the common pot and how does it shape meaning? More importantly, how does the common pot relate back to maps and mapping practices of Native Americans in northeastern United States? According to Brooks the common pot is the metaphor used by Native authors, to invoke the larger sense of communal relationships between Earth as a living being and the humans that interact, take from, are nourished by, and retell its story. Brooks states "The common pot is that which feeds and nourishes... The pot is made from the flesh of birch trees or

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to the text specifically will be italicized, where references to the noun/metaphor/lens of the pot will not.

the clay of the land... It can carry or hold...The pot is Sky Woman's body, the network of relations that must nourish and reproduce itself' (4). From this definition, Brooks attempts to demonstrate and explain the multilayered meaning the pot holds.

The pot is the land and its people, it is the vessel that nourishes and here I argue that it is also the means through which meaning is made across the ever changing dynamics between relationships. More importantly, I am focusing on the day to day impact these shifting dynamics play in navigating tribal relations, native/settler relations, land and human relations, etc... which is an ongoing process of learning and knowing.

In relation to epistemology, the pot is, but not limited to, the known network of relations between peoples. The pot concept allows for theorist and map makers to acknowledge that lands exist beyond the scope of what they are able to map and know. It is the land masses that can be mapped and known, but further, the pot allows for changes in the landscape and the ways through which relations are made or unmade with the land. The pot serves as a reference point which allows mapping to happen by situating how and why relationships develop.

Moreover, the common pot becomes an integral part in shaping this specific Navigational Epistemology. As Brooks states, "inherent in the concept of the common pot is the idea that whatever was given from the larger network of inhabitants had to be shared within the human community" (5). This quote points towards a particular orientation in understanding the ways that land functions and can be represented, an orientation that considers changes and reciprocity between the people on the land and the land itself. I suggest that this orientation is also the site of meaning making where these seemingly vague ideas of relationships become tangible ideas and practices.



Quite importantly, in Brooks' analysis of the common pot metaphor from a historical perspective, Brooks demonstrates that relationships are the starting point to further meaning making and practice. Through understanding these relationships in a historical sense Brooks is also making the move towards contemporary importance. I am considering here the ways that historical meaning shape understanding in today's pressures where Native lands are currently being taken and the forced colonization of Indigenous people and ideas continue.

In contemporary society the capitalist need for land and control has become structurally engrained, and Indigenous sovereignty and ways of thought challenge these settler colonial values. As Indigenous Scholar and Decolonial theorist Linda Smith writes in her introduction to *Decolonizing Methodologies*, "*Decolonizing Methodologies* is not a method for revolution in a political sense but provokes some revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in decolonization and social transformation" (xii).

In questioning settler colonial values by defining Native space, both Brooks and Smith are reclaiming the knowledge of the land by making space for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty by reminding readers that this land is Native and the spaces therein are defined by their relationships to Indigenaity. To paraphrase Miami scholar Dr. Malea Powell in her CCCC's Chair Address, too many Native spaces have been lost to colonization and there is not a major city or development that is not on what was once Native lands (387). This points toward the need for what Brooks calls the recovery of Native space throughout *The Common Pot*. The continuing pressures of colonization can be seen today in the shape of Congress selling sacred Apache lands in Arizona or the destruction of *Mahnoomin* (wild rice) beds by way of contamination or housing developments in Michigan.

In relation to what the future of Native space looks like it is important to ask what aspects of historical knowing of the pot carry over to contemporary Native space and knowledge construction? I believe that it is the transition from historical context to contemporary context where the shift from metaphor to epistemology happens. The ways that relationships were constructed with the land historically have had to shift because of land loss and environmental degradation, but, still, at the heart of these relationships are the ways of interaction with the land. Despite roads serving as the highways of navigation, in contrast to waterways, the tribal relationships survive and are continually practiced. Native people continue to find ways of passing on the beliefs of the pot that account for the changes in landscape and tribal/settler relationships. If these beliefs were not still viable and accessible, Brooks would not have known how to craft her maps for these spaces, nor would she have been able to have the conversation of relationships and implications with an eye towards the impact of the relationships on today.

The network of relationships established in *The Common Pot* shows readers how the land becomes a living breathing entity in the reciprocating relationships between Native people and the land, further by shifting from the metaphor of the common pot, towards a set of beliefs, Brooks establishes a base for an epistemological stance that can evaluate and understand the larger network of relationships. This is a move that Brooks makes herself by considering historical documents and maps and analyzing their importance in terms of the survivance of knowledge and how these practices are still relevant today.

In the first chapter of *The Common Pot*, Brooks begins to define Native space as spaces where Native people live/have lived and where there is a well tested and functioning relationship between the people and the land. Whether this relationship is centered around resources, or medicines, or related groups of people; the notion of Native space centers the understanding of

relational accountability to the land (Brooks 6-11). With Brooks' definition I am able to understand Native land through the lens of historical meaning and contemporary practice. What this understanding looks like is an ongoing negotiation of settler colonial ideas/practices in regards to how the land is being treated today and what that means for Native folks who continue to have their lands taken by the federal government or settler colonialism. I understand Brooks' work as shedding light on how meanings are made with and through relationships with the land.

Brooks builds on the Abenaki and Haudenosaunee stories of birth and relational webs of connections: "These places were connected not only by relationships but by a network of waterways, which people traveled by canoe and footpath from the southeast coast to the northwest lakes" (17). Brooks is developing notions of Native space that go beyond human relationships to the land, and that these relationships are dependent on each other. The waterways would not have such significant meaning if it weren't for the Abenaki ability to remember and utilize these pathways. Similarly, the network of relationships between tribe members would not be able to sustain their pathways of communication without the waterways to connect villages and communities. This network of relationships is in part where I begin to develop the ways through which the pot becomes more than a metaphor.

These relationships are very real and there is a tactile sense of the implications of this reciprocal relationship in that humans are not the only actors in this relationship. This is a departure, at least to me, from the majority of Western scholarship on colonization and land settlement, where the land is a resource, not a political actor with its own sense of relationships that can be acted on, or not. More importantly, understanding the relationship between water and communication or water as what brings communities together drives further understanding of what is happening today. Questions that I am specifically considering while working with this

research are: What roles does water play in how people negotiate their relationships with the land, what can be learned by understanding the multiplicities of potential meaning water can have/represent?

Similarly, within *The Common Pot*, I see these questions as particularly relevant as Brooks begins the relationships she is constructing by first considering what allows these relationships to happen. The connection to the land and its geographical features inform the ways the Abenaki craft knowledge. Through the process of knowledge making, Brooks' suggests that the connections between tribal members are shaped as well. (15) This process of intertwining the Abenaki way of life with the land is evidence to me that land base can inform and shape the ways we know what we know and what we will know in the future. Within the frame work of this Navigational Epistemology, humans cannot be separated from the land just as land cannot be separated from humans. As humans have blood bringing nutrients to different parts of the body, so the land has waterways that nourish the crops and fruits of the land. Waterways are orientation points to understand the position of self and of a Peoples in relation to the greater land masses around them.

In *The Common Pot*, Native space gradually becomes synonymous with the common pot as a metaphor, but here it is imperative that I push on this definition and consider the ways that the pot functions in describing the relationships between Native folks, colonial settlers and the land itself.

The pot is the way through which the tribes that Brooks writes about understand their relationships with all of the factors that go into the pot. The pot also represents, in my research, the set of beliefs that govern interactions with other tribes, people, animals, and the land. In this

way, the factors that make up the contents of the pot have defined ways of interaction that determine what is or is not respectful to the land and the network of relations. It is in this specific interaction, determining what is respectful or not, that I see the pot representing a way of thought and understanding where knowledge is actively made and interrogated, thus I claim, an epistemological stance. In the following Haudenosaunee creation story, I am particularly interested in the relationships between the Native folks and the water as a feature of land base.

Waterways are central to my understanding of how the pot becomes more than a metaphor. Because of the importance water plays in Native communities, it is an actor in developing relationships, both between people and the land. When considering traditional meanings in relation to contemporary context, I understand that water is central to developing ways of knowing and understanding my surroundings. For Brooks water is a means of orientation. When I consider origin stories in a pan-cultural way, water is at the core of ontological meanings across cultures and societies. More specifically, when working towards understanding Native space there are direct ontological implications, that inform a land based epistemology, when it comes to water.

Brooks relates the larger importance of water to the people by telling the Haudenosaunee creation story of the Sky Woman:

“ A woman is seen falling from the sky and the water animals ‘council together... to devise a way to provide for her’. Each animal dives to the bottom of the sea, grasping for mud. Each returns, gasping for air, empty-handed. Finally, muskrat, it is said, dives deep down into the water until he can go no farther, grasps a handful of earth in his paw, and rises to the surface. He gives up his life, but in his last breath, he releases the mud onto turtle’s back. Geese fly up to catch Sky Woman in their wings and as they lay her on turtle’s back, the woman releases a seed she had carried from the Sky World and the earth is born.

The story of Sky Woman emphasizes the primacy of water in the northeastern landscape. Sky woman enters a world of water and water beings from within

which the land emerges. The story suggests that the earth is neither solid nor constant, but exists only through the interrelated activity of its inhabitants”  
(Brooks 2)

This story and Brooks’ analysis demonstrates notions of perception of relationships to the land base and to those who dwell there. It becomes extremely important to note when considering the function of a Navigational epistemology, that the Haudenosaunee maps are determined by the relationship of the people with the land. Brooks shows that understanding the relationship a people have with the land is the primary and most important relationship to understand when considering Native spaces. It is important to note that the relationships between Native people and the land are the first relationships that are addressed in this text. Brooks relies on the establishment of this interrelated framework to develop understandings of the relationships between native peoples and colonial settlers in this region. How do people move around their space? What relationships are at play in this navigation?

When considering, as Brooks supports, that the first relationship one must consider when understanding Haudenosaunee and Abenaki mapping practices, as a means of knowledge making, is how these people interacted and were related to the land around them. It is necessary to note that within every 20 mile stretch of land there is a waterway to potentially travel by. It is reasonable to conclude that because of the extent of available waterways, native folks in this land were oriented towards the water as an extremely important relationship to be maintained.

The multiple possibilities for travel along these waterways becomes even more important later in this document when considering how information was shared between native communities and for understanding the evolving relationships with Native folks and European settlers.

In my building on Brooks' image of the common pot, the waterways are what soak in the juices of the native and settler cultures. The waterways become the broth of the stew that is being created within this text. The Native people and colonial settlers are the meat, the animals and natural resources are the vegetables, but the land and its waterways are the literal broth that combines and puts these other elements into relationships with each other. Without the land and waterways, the flavors would not blend together; they would not be put in relation to each other.

### **Creating an Epistemological Lens:**

What this analysis of Brooks has lead me to are considerations of what ideas from *The Common Pot* are testable and relatable for my audience. To this end, I have determined that there are four characteristics that I can take away from this text and utilize as a means of understanding the ways in which Blackbird and Erdrich construct and know knowledge.

Conversely, these characteristics are discussed and developed after the analysis of *The Common Pot* as a text as a means to understand the wealth of knowledge contained in this book and as a means to recreate my process of understanding and coming to know the knowledge Brooks has shared with her readers. As I move on to looking at Andrew Blackbird and Louise Erdrich and the ways through which they construct ways of knowing knowledge the following characteristics will help the reader see how these authors, as well as Brooks, construct pathways of knowing.

The four characteristics are:

- Knowledge is understood through history
- Knowledge is practiced through the land
- Knowledge is experienced through story
- Knowledge is built through relationships

Knowledge being understood through history is a thread that I am weaving through each of these texts, and evidence can be seen of the importance of this idea in Lisa Brooks' introduction to *The Common Pot*: "This book, then, is at once an activity in which we participate, an Instrument and a map. It is a map of a network of writers and texts, as well as a process of mapping the historical space they inhabit" (Brooks xxii). The medium for Brooks' construction and method of conveying her ideas are rooted in the writing of histories, which she synthesizes into larger frameworks that draw connections across the Northeast. This synthesis is contingent on text that both discusses history as well as those texts which are historic. I make this distinction because Brooks discusses the types of documents that she found during research. Some documents were focused, much like *Blackbirds*, on relating the histories of the people/land (people sharing and crafting their own histories in written form), while other documents were contemporary when they were written but have since become historical given the 200 plus years ago they were written. Brooks reflects on the nature of the latter specifically later in the introduction by stating "I realized the power of writing early on, so when I started the research for this project I was not surprised to find that the bulk of early Native writings was focused on the politics of the land" (Brooks xxxiv-xxxv). This last quote demonstrates one specific way that knowledge is understood through history in that Brooks' expectations were confirmed, insofar that what she found in regards to historical texts supports and extends the information available to craft her own maps. Dr. Powell adds to this conversation in her article *Rhetorics of Survivance* by stating "Like the slave testimonies of the abolition movement, authentic Indian voices lend credence and urgency to reformist arguments and put a human face, one that could thus made be the object of pity and censure... No longer was simply imagined" (403). Both Brooks and Powell



demonstrate that when talking about Native history, it is extremely important to find and work with historic Native voices.

The politics of the land during the early settler colonial period in the Northeast were highly contested with both Native people and colonial settlers exchanging information, but in uneven ways. Evidence for what these contestations looked like can be found from Museum Curator and Author Mark Warhus describes European policies towards Native Americans during the colonial era in his *book Another America: Native American Maps and the History of Our Land*: “The official policies towards Native Americans seldom recognized their rights or dealt with them as sovereign peoples, and the colonial traders, administrators, and farmers usually looked upon Naïve Americans as a resource to be exploited or as competitors for colonial land.” (58). In relation to both Brooks and Powell, Warhus’ text further supports the need for Native voices in any conversation dealing with history and land when developing an epistemology framed around Indigenous methods of moving with and on the land.

To summarize, Brooks relates the expectations of the Native people to be of land use being equal and shared, working within the larger context of the Pot itself; whereas the settler colonial governments sought power over the land and exploited the relationships built with the previous inhabitants of the land (Brooks 33). As this text speaks specifically to the reclamation of Native space, Brooks writes with history on her side, being able to look at past transgressions and provide ways to reclaim Native space that are directly in conversation with what has happened in the past.

Similarly, knowledge being practiced through the land is evident throughout *The Common Pot*. In Brooks’ telling of the Great Beaver story, relationships are being constructed in

the personification of land, which leads to ways of knowing knowledge. “Ktsi Amiskw’s children, the beavers, abounded in the environment and played a similarly critical role in its maintenance. Their dams created many of the marshes that provided people and animals alike with a diversity of plant foods... in this way beavers participated productively, along with humans” (20). The role of the land and its inhabitants demonstrated the knowledge that Native folks needed to survive hard winters and build sustainable communities. By providing an example in everyday life, the lessons learned from listening and watching the land gradually became a way of life and knowing. As land became a commodity through colonial interaction, an additional formation of knowledge was developed and known. This relates back to the previous ideal that early Native writing was highly concerned with the politics of the land. “Traditionally, Algonquian land transactions were essentially diplomatic agreements concerning land use. Negotiation involved delineating territorial boundaries or common hunting areas with the goal of balanced accommodation of the needs of both groups” (Brooks 35). Even when considering land as a theoretical object that can be owned or exchanged as colonial settlers saw the land, it is clear from treaty negotiations that Native people saw the land as having its own need for respect and stewardship that involved human interaction, but not human ownership<sup>2</sup>. In this way, practicing the knowledge of the land extends to understanding the ways colonial settlers interacted with the land and Native people as a whole. What this means is that land helped Native folks practice knowledge in multiple ways: how to survive winter, but also what was at stake in colonial interactions.

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars Dennis Woods, Benedict Anderson, and J.M. Blaut discuss the ways that through mapping and perceived borders, land is theorized in a method that allows it to be abstracted into an object that can be sold, owned or manipulated. These scholars help to understand colonial mentalities and the process through which settlers colonized and stole lands from Indigenous people.

Central to many Native arguments for decolonization, the land and the rights to access resources on traditional Native spaces are at the heart of the matter and the main reason why I am considering land one of the major characteristics of a Navigational Epistemology. Anishinaabe activist and scholar Winnona LaDuke explains in a TedTalk *Seeds Of Our Ancestors, Seeds of Life* that “We have fought hard and long to keep our wild rice and to keep it good” (LaDuke). LaDuke goes on to explain that due to increasing urban development and pollution, access to these spaces of traditional foods and medicines is diminishing to critical levels. The sites where the wild rice grows are sites of inquiry and knowledge making. To reinforce this idea, Powell writes “By ‘space’, I mean a place that has been practiced into being through acts of storied making, where the past is brought into conscious conversations with the present...Spaces then, are recursively made through specific, material practices rooted in specific land bases...” (388). In order to understand how knowledge is practiced through the land, it is necessary to understand the importance of the practice and know how knowledge is made through material practice itself.

Knowledge being experienced through story is one of the more complicated characteristics of the Navigational Epistemology that I am creating with Brooks. I am framing story here in multiple ways, literal stories that tell of lessons to be learned which may or may not be literal translations (such as Sky Woman or the Great Beaver) and oral history as a form of storytelling to relate real events that have happened in a culture’s history. As Cherokee scholar Thomas King writes, “The truth about stories is that’s all we are” (2).

First Nations author and story teller Lee Maracle points toward the extreme importance of storytelling as a form of theory building (thus knowledge making) in Native culture in *Oratory: Coming to Theory*, “Among European scholars there is an alienated notion which maintains that theory is separate from story, and thus a different set of words are required to

‘prove’ an idea than to show one. Yet if you take the story out any school textbook the student is left without proof for positioning any information” (3). Maracle is putting into juxtaposition a western understanding of story with a Native understanding of story. These ideas relate back to the King quote about stories being all we are in that stories are theory. Stories are the way that past experience is processed into knowledge. They are a method of sharing one’s experience or the experience of a culture in terms that children and adults alike can see and know cultural markers of importance.

The Native people who interacted with early European settlers had previously used oral history methods to remember their history. It is because of this that much of the justification for considering Native people uncivilized was developed by European settlers. Even after Native people had learned the settler’s method of writing down history Brooks relates that “Even as the European customs of land alienation and written deeds entered Native space, words on paper held less weight for Native people than oral communication and material exchange in council” (35). This quote points towards the importance of oral customs within Native communities<sup>3</sup> and the methods of deal making amongst Native peoples. Treaties would become stories that would be passed down and honored by Native peoples, as would the wars that lead to the need for treaties. Additionally, the use and function of origin stories to relate the history of a community becomes intertwined with the history that is constantly developing.

Origin stories provide a starting point, and as new stories are created they speak and point towards the origin stories, weaving a complex historical model that is continuously growing. The new stories are reliant on the origin stories for derived importance and meaning, much like the

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<sup>3</sup> This also points towards the importance of items such as wampum belts which were used to tell the stories of treaties and war. While I would love to discuss this at length, I do not have the space here to do so. if interested please read *Wampum as Hypertext* by Angela Haas.

origin stories maintain their relevance by conversing with contemporary events. To use some of the imagery from *The Common Pot*, the origin stories are the springs from which the people come from, but as the springs turn to lakes, rivers, and streams, the story continues. What I am not saying here is that stories only exist in an oral fashion or that the only stories that matter are oral, but that at the time of early contact with colonial settlers, written text was not trusted, which speaks to the larger network of relationships developed between settlers and Native people. As this text is centered on the writing of native people as a means to re-write the history and re-tell the story, of course written texts are important in the formation of storytelling.

Much of the initial thought and planning around relationships began with Shawn Wilson. In *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Wilson (Scottish and Cree) lays the foundation for understanding how relationships function in indigenous research. Wilson states in the forward to *Research Is Ceremony*, “The shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is that relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality)” (7). What this quote demonstrates is a linkage back to Maracle, and more importantly a vital point of connection between readers and the stories that build relationships with authors. Wilson is setting the framework to understand how stories build relationships and how these relationships are reality. Much like Brooks described the actors within the pot as those who were aware of the relationship and those who are not, Wilson states “It is my intention to build a relationship between the readers of this story, myself as the storyteller and the ideas I present” (6). Theorizing relationships is difficult at first because there are distinct intentions that relationships involve and as scholars we are often told what the author intends is/may not be the most important part of a text. But, much as most people have experienced, there are one sided relationships, reciprocated relationships, failed relationships, successful relationships, etc. that serve as everyday evidence

of the interconnectedness of relationships. Knowledge is built through relationships and in many ways this is the most important characteristic of this Navigational epistemology. The varied application of the word relationships, as demonstrated by the authors cited here and many more, serve as the compass or orientation for the navigation of knowledge and Indigenous rhetorics. Story in the form of history about and with the land is what this entire chapter is about. It is why I have shared my narratives throughout this document and has been one of the most critical features of development as I have moved forward with this project.

To reinforce the importance of relationships, Brooks states, “This Mohican ceremony enacted distribution of resources, equality between community members and the interdependency inherent in the network of relations, but it also emphasized the role of human action in rebalancing a loss in the network” (6). To re-emphasize, the network of relations involves all actors within the larger framework of the Pot. It is the people and how they steward the land, it is the medicines and where they grow, it is the food and how they nourish, it is the water and the life it brings, it is the animals and knowledge they bring, it is the land and what it holds. The idea shared in this ceremony is what Wilson discusses as relational accountability, “in essence this means that the methodology needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and as to demonstrate respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into practice)” (99). The Mohican ceremony demonstrates the position of the Mohican people, but also explains to whom and what they are accountable towards. The network of relationships, whether between Native groups or Native groups and colonial settlers, followed steps of relational accountability as described by Wilson. Thus the conflict that Brooks is writing about is the contrast between the actions of the Mohican people (deemed savage and uncivilized) and the European colonizer (deemed pure and civilized). This conflict is further put into

juxtaposition when considering the process and effects of industrialization in contemporary Native space. The possibility of building knowledge and the practice of traditional relationships with the land and the beings there are shifting as there are less lands and less relations to be had.

Brooks relates, “Europeans were in the common pot, whether they knew it or not, and they brought with them ideas, behaviors, and materials that could potentially disrupt or even destroy it” (7). The concept of building knowledge through relationships is a choice, but being a part of relationships in this world is not. What this means in regards to the construction of Native space and the process of knowledge making is that it takes conscious effort to understand the ways in which relationships are formed and maintained. Equality may or may not come into play, or may be considered in a macro sense in that everything balances out in the end. The reason why I am pointing toward this characteristic so heavily is that it is through reflection and interaction that knowledge is built through relationships. It is an active practice. The relationships happen and develop either way, but it is up to the community or individual to take time to see knowledge in these interactions and know what the knowledge means. It is also an active work to understand how that knowledge is known and what it means to be aware of it.

### **Why a Navigational Epistemology:**

I am calling this Epistemological lens Navigational because it sets and describes possible methods of traversing knowledge. Knowledge is not a stagnate thing and as new information is acquired, new pathways have to be made to relate old information to the new. By utilizing the four characteristics, I am providing a potential starting point. More specifically I am providing a way to question, understand, and investigate what is “real” and a method of making sense of that realness. As Wilson states, “Epistemology is tied in to ontology in that what I believe to be

‘real’ is going to impact on the way that I think about that ‘reality’. Choices made about what is ‘real’ will depend upon how your thinking works and how you know the world around you.

Epistemology is thus asking, ‘how do I know what is real?’” (33)

At the heart of this epistemology are relationships and the ways that they inform and build knowledge. As stated previously, relationships serve as the compass or orientation, and with a compass or directional orientation it becomes easier to navigate and know the world around you. I ask my readers to remember the story I opened this document with.

Had I had a sense of which cardinal direction I was heading or a compass, I would not have gotten quite as lost and once I found markers to orient to, the path got easier. This Navigational epistemology provides specific markers to orient towards. Each characteristic is asking the reader to position themselves towards a specific concept to understand knowledge while in an Indigenous rhetorics framework. Much as I described the pathways to get pretty close to my Uncle Jim’s camping site in the introduction, this epistemology can provide a route to understand knowledge by navigating experiences (both lived and historical), spaces, and relationships.

Additionally, I am using footnotes through the body of this text to draw and build on these relationships. Each discussion of a characteristic will have a footnote that specifically names scholars and authors whose work has impacted this project. In Chapter 3, *Walking In Michigan: A Conversation with Andrew Blackbird*, I want the focus to be on Blackbird’s text. In Chapter 4, *The Stories We Tell are Related to the Ground We Walk on: A Conversation with Louise Erdrich*, I tap into Wilsons concepts of Relationality and Relational Accountability by including both footnotes, but also citations of folks I either know personally and have worked



through this project with or folks whose writing has been extremely impactful. Both of these moves are to build the network of relationships across the ideas contained in this document and as such, I encourage my readers to engage with the scholars that I do not have space to elaborate here.

### **What Happens Next:**

In the following two chapters I will use the Navigational Epistemology to discuss knowledge and the relationships that exist between history, land, story and relationships. I consider knowledge construction through history and land in relation to Andrew Blackbird and story and relationships in relation to Louise Erdrich. All four characteristics do indeed exist in both Blackbird's text and Erdrich's texts, and I will briefly talk about all of them for each author.

## CHAPTER 3:

### WALKING IN MICHIGAN: A CONVERSATION WITH ANDREW BLACKBIRD

*As we crested the last hill that lead into Harbor Springs, Mi, I began to realize the depth of history in these lands. I realized that despite 13 years of living in this state, I still had much to find and learn from this land. I reflected on my travel companions, Michael W. and Dr. Malea Powell, both of whom have been my main support network while living in East Lansing, and the ways of knowing that I have learned from them. Malea has helped me continue the teachings my Uncle Jim began when I was a kid, a steady belief in the process of learning that has to be tied to places we are. These places are both physical and mental, and through Malea's mentorship and willingness to engage with me I have learned how to look for teachings that come from the land. This process is imperfect, but feels natural to me. It is ongoing and something that I continuously have to check because I know my pathways into this knowledge, however real to me, possess the potential for appropriation. What I have learned from Michael is to approach everything with an interest that is open and willing for engagement. In a way, let my actions be the testament of my engagement and willingness to learn.*

*I am not writing this as a testimony of my authenticity, but more as a way to engage and reflect on the epistemological lens that I am building for this project. Given the history of Harbor Springs, reflection is critical in trying to understand orientations in this space. Much of the land, it could be argued all of it, in Harbor Springs is contested Odawa land that due to multiple loop holes in the federal governments litigations and treaties with Native folks is no longer held by the Odawa people.*

*Malea related a story to me that an Odawa tribe member outright bought the land of Harbor Springs as a way to maintain an Odawa presence on the land, but because he was a Native person he was unable to hold the deed to the land. In essence, the federal government accepted the tribe member's money, but created too many barriers of entry for the sale to be recognized in a court of law.*

*Walking the land and seeing what exists now is extremely important to the development to this project. Lisa Brooks describes in her introduction a brief overview of the miles she traveled to create the maps in The Common Pot, but more importantly is the ways in which she related the miles walked as tactile way of connecting with the land she was writing about, the land of her ancestors. While Harbor Springs is not the land of my ancestors, it is in the place that I call home, Michigan. It is the land that Andrew Blackbird called home.*

*Going and doing on the land of one of the authors I am trying to understand and work with is one of the ways in which I can engage in an ongoing relationship to the history of the lands I call home. More importantly, however, is the ability to see, feel, and breathe the colonial history of these lands as a way of understanding the pure weight of history. In many ways, this project is about survivance and continued recovery, but Harbor Springs and Andrew Blackbird help me to understand why these concepts are important in the first place. In developing an epistemological lens with which I engage these scholars, I am bringing focus to the spaces they are writing about. For me, the North Eastern United States is not a land I can travel to at this point and while I would love to retrace Louise Erdrich's journey through Minnesota and Canada, I am unable to.*

*That is not to mean that Harbor Springs is a consolation destination. What it means is that I am testing my lens on the lands that I call home, in the place where I have invested myself. I can engage with Blackbird on a level that feels tangible to me because I have spent many hours on the same land that he is writing about. My future focus will be the Great Lakes region and this trip is where I am beginning to develop my relationship to my work. I am specifically drawing attention to the works in Brooks' acknowledgement chapter in The Common Pot, where she describes the miles she walked, the historic sites of meaning making, and how physically visiting these places confirmed and expanded the information she had come to know through text and historical accounts. By visiting Blackbird's homeland, I am placing myself in conversation with the author, developing a relationship with the land he saw and lived on, to better understand the impact of colonization on the Odawa people. My focus is primarily on the present and future of these lands and by engaging Blackbird's story as one piece of an ongoing history I am able to navigate what I know and how I know it.*

*Blackbird is difficult person to understand. He was the last chief of the Odawa people, he was highly educated in both the traditions of the Odawa and western educational systems, he married a woman of English decent, he fought for U.S. citizenship for the Odawa and Ojibwe, and was the Postmaster of Harbor Springs. He was an author of multiple texts that address colonial and Native relations and served as an intermediary between Native folks and U.S. military forces in Michigan. He sought to further his education through western educational forms, while at times bemoaning the Odawa influence on his ability to speak. He walked from Harbor Springs to Ypsilanti, a distance of over 200 miles, multiple times for varied reasons. Blackbird embraces aspects of assimilation but this embrace is only on the surface. He*

*demonstrates that he is willing to do anything and everything to maintain the lands of his people by advocating for citizenship for Native peoples in Michigan.*

*It is hard for me to understand fully the history of this land that Blackbird called home as it is equally hard to fully understand the man and author. In the beginning stages of developing this project, Blackbird greatly influenced what I was interested in because he is the only scholar I was directly working with to understand the impact of the Dawes Act. In short the Dawes Act served as assimilationist bill to mainstream Native Americans into U.S. culture and citizenship. While extremely problematic, the most important piece of understanding in relation to my research in regards to the Dawes Act is the ways in which traditional Native Spaces (lands specifically here) were parceled out and quantified. What this actually means in terms of understanding the land base in Harbor Springs is that through the Dawes Act the majority of Native people were moved from one space to another and because of Native American status these people were not allowed to hold the deeds to lands that had been traditional summer homes for centuries before contact (Blackbird.)*

*Blackbird's allotment land is now a golf course, a golf course with restricted access for members only. The irony of this colonization is hard to miss and further brings home the reason why I had to visit Harbor Springs. Traditional lands that once were home (and probably still are in some cases) to traditional medicines are no longer accessible to the Native folks who still live in Harbor Springs. What potential knowledge this land holds is owned and restricted by people who don't how to build a reciprocating relationship to the land.*

*My relationship with Harbor springs is developing.*

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In the *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan*<sup>4</sup>, Andrew Blackbird describes the methods in which Native peoples traversed and built relationships with Northern Michigan. He also describes the ways in which Native people oriented themselves to the land before and after contact and colonization. I am particularly interested in the period in which Blackbird wrote (late 1890's) because he is writing in a transitional period in which the Odawa people were actively losing their lands and pathways of assimilation seemed to be one of the only options that would allow the Odawa people to remain in their homes. Blackbird is consciously aware of the outcomes of forced migration, acknowledging the potential death of 50% of the Odawa during the period of acclimation (Blackbird).

Blackbird's narrative is one of the most important documents in my understanding of Native map making practices because of the navigations of information and space/place actively happening. Blackbird is crafting his history into a dynamic map with different features that are reliant on what time of year the reader is attempting to read the map. This is not a clear map and throughout this chapter the quotes have been selected for a dual purpose. First, they are quotes that support and build on the importance of history and land as features of knowledge construction. Second, they demonstrate the ways that Blackbird is building his map. What I have provided here is an attempt to mirror this style, to layer the meaning in multiple ways as Blackbird does.

Blackbird is his own cipher, which is to say, he is his own key to understanding the map he weaves. He describes all of the pieces one would need to create the map (times and names)

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<sup>4</sup> The names Ottawa and Chippewa are used by Andrew Blackbird in his text. I use the names Odawa and Ojibwe as the traditional names for these two groups specifically. The Ottawa are referenced as Odawa and the Chippewa are referenced as Ojibwe in my words. I make this move as a means to acknowledge the history of these people and to call them by the names they self identify.

but it is through his orientation to these things that he crafts his map. I may tread the same land, visit the exact same places, but my understanding of the map/land will be different because I cannot see the places where the strawberries grew wild or where whitefish ran so thick you could simply reach your hand into the water and grab one. In 2015, it is possible to find wild strawberries and I bet there are still whitefish to be caught, but after 100 plus years of colonization the strawberries will most certainly be by someone's private summer home marked with a no trespassing sign.

The ways in which Blackbird has coded his map preserve the memory of what was once abundant in Michigan. To think that Blackbird was not aware of how this map was coded would be a disservice to the memories and meaning contained here. With time I could recreate Blackbird's map, and the *History* contains all of the pieces necessary to do so, but here I want to focus on the relationship Blackbird creates with space and time. Blackbird is building a map that is actively weaving Native Space and time together in order to preserve the memories of this land, but to also provide a way for contemporary Native folks to build a relationship to lands surrounding Harbor Springs.

As stated in the *History*, Harbor Springs and L'Arbre Croche were the summer homes of Blackbird's people. By the time Blackbird wrote his history, the only lands left for his people were the summer places. This history<sup>5</sup> is Blackbird's way of building relationships with future generations and as a direct conversation with colonization as a structure.

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<sup>5</sup> History here is a complex idea. It is both colonial history and Native history. When considering the larger impact how history has been told and what is there and what isn't there, it becomes necessary to consider both sides. I have made a few biased assumptions as to what the dominant/colonial model of history has taught, and as such I am focusing on Native history and the words of Andrew Blackbird. Here I am building on the work of Roy Harvey Pearce (*Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*), Jodi A. Byrd (*The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*), The Vine Deloria Jr. (*Custard Died For Your Sins*), Malea Powell

He is lamenting the loss of the land his people have lived on for generations, but equally importantly, he is describing the process in which these lands made meaning and how that meaning has to shift now that they have been colonized. He is building a map of resistance and survivance for his people, while crafting a map of broken alliances with colonial powers by describing the process of restriction the Odawa faced during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Blackbird is also building a map of future resistance by describing and demonstrating the importance of education in the face of land loss and the ever increasing difficulty his people will face in the future.

Blackbird is situating this history in what was a contemporary context for him. This history is a reflection of what happened and what will happen in the future. When I originally started working through the ideas of this project and meanings made from Blackbird, I thought I would focus on the few references to birch bark writings and signal tree markers as a means of geographical navigation, but after going to Harbor Springs I realized that I had missed some of the point of my research. I am developing an epistemological lens in order to develop other projects in the future, but one of the most important goals of this lens is to understand the context in which knowledge is made and navigated.

Blackbird has strategically kept important parts of his story hidden. It is unclear if he wants his map followed. Given the time in which Blackbird's narrative was written, one possible reason for this would be a misuse of the information or potential disrespect to his homeland. But, it is clear that Blackbird needed to share this information for future generations by providing evidence of resistance. This can be seen when Blackbird states, "When the white man took every

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(*The Rhetorics of Survivance*), and Deborah Miranda (*Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*), and many others including Qwo-li Driskill, Robert Warrior, and Andrea Smith.



foot of my inheritance, he thought to him I should be the slave. Ah, never, never! I would sooner plunge the dagger into my beating heart, and follow the footsteps of my forefathers than be a slave to the white man” (102). It is important to the colonizers of this land because it describes the ways in which they gained their homes. It is important for the Odawa as a way to remember and continue to practice their ways of being, though so much of the lands and situations have changed.

The fears of appropriation and disrespect are real for Blackbird. At the time of his writing, Native people were considered second class citizens of the United States who needed to be assimilated and civilized. Blackbird addresses these ideas with irony and sarcasm as he describes the Odawa society before colonization. Additionally, Blackbird left behind a map of his people. Where they lived, how they practiced their beliefs, and what they would (according to Blackbird) need to do to survive.

What Blackbird’s text provides readers is a rich history that is aware of the cultural practices of Blackbirds people. Blackbird writes, “I have seen a number of writings by different men who attempted to give an account of the Indians who formerly occupied the Straits of Mackinac and Mackinac Island, (that historic little island which stands at the entrance of the strait)” (7). From this framing, it is clear that Blackbird is setting up this chapter to frame history from a Native perspective. Similar to Brooks and Erdrich, Blackbird grounds his writing in the customs of his people, refuting in subtle ways the accounts of the colonizer in relation to the lands he has known and the history of the Odawa (Ottawa) and Ojibwe (Chippewa). He goes on, “But I see no very correct account of the Ottawa and Chippewa tribes of Indians, according to our knowledge of ourselves past and present. Many points are far from being credible” (Blackbird 7). What Blackbird is saying here is that despite the many ‘historical’ accounts of his

people shaped by colonial settlers, there has been no account from the Native perspective. He is not re-writing history here, he is contesting that the histories that do exist are wrong. That the knowledge being shaped and shared about the Odawa and Ojibwe and the lands they call home are misleading in regards to the societal structures and means of life. As a Native person writing about Native people and Native space, Blackbird is drawing a comparison between the colonial history of these people and lands. It is with subtlety that he refutes the histories shaped by colonial governments; it is with irony and sarcasm that Blackbird contrasts the ways in which the Odawa and Ojibwe have lived and the history that is told by colonial governments.

This can be seen more thoroughly in the ways Blackbird uses the word ‘civilized’ or ‘uncivilized’. In relating the guiding principles of Odawa life, Blackbird contrasts these ideas with the Ten Commandments, stating “Very few of these divine precepts are not found among the precepts of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians...almost every other commandment can be found, only there are more as there were about twenty of these ‘uncivilized’ precepts” (13). This level of discursive analysis is found throughout Blackbird’s *History* as a means to provide credence to why this text is being written in the first place. It is a move to demonstrate what aspects of life and land that European settlers are missing in regards to Native people and Native spaces.

Much as Brooks discussed European settlers being in the pot, whether they recognized it or not, Blackbird is contrasting the treatment of Native people/space by European settlers to what they claim to believe, suggesting a subversive read of Christianity and ‘civilization’. This also lends credence to why Blackbird is writing this history, to tell Native history from a Native perspective. Throughout the first chapter, Blackbird contrasts the ways of life of the Odawa, before and after permanent settlement of Europeans.

What this initial foregrounding does for Blackbird is provide a method of discussing history that considers relationships between humans and land. Blackbird grounds his telling of histories directly to the land as a means of connecting the people with their spaces. Blackbird relates his first memories of Arbre Croche, “there was nothing but small shrubbery here and there in small patches, such as wild cherry trees...and such an abundance of wild strawberries, raspberries and blackberries that they fairly perfumed the air of the whole coast with fragrant sent of ripe fruit” (12). In the context of this first chapter, Blackbird is putting into juxtaposition the abundance of food and land as metaphor for how the Odawa and Ojibwe people lived before Europeans settled his home lands. The word ‘wild’ here can be understood to have similar meaning as ‘uncivilized’ did in relation to the precepts of Native life in Waw-gaw-naw-ke-zee (L’Arbre Croche). This also relates back to the ways Blackbird understands the knowledge of his people after colonization with the ideas shared later in the same paragraph “Then I never knew my people to want for anything to eat or wear” and “I thought (and yet I may be mistaken) that my people were very happy in those days, at least I was as happy myself” (12). Through the knowledge of the land, Blackbird’s people were self sustainable. More importantly, here, Blackbird is expressing a sense of loss of knowledge and connection to the land through European settlement.

Blackbird is constructing a map of time and colonial interaction, based on the transitions of colonization in relation to traditional Odawa knowledge. By putting himself in relation to the land<sup>6</sup> and the experiences he has had to those experiences of the Odawa as a whole, Blackbird is

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<sup>6</sup> While Blackbird and Brooks have been the most influential authors to discuss land in the process of this project, Anishinaabe scholar and activist Winona LaDuke (TedTalk: Seeds of Our Ancestors, Seeds of Life <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHNlel72eQc>), Cherokee Scholar Kimberli Lee (Cultural Rhetorics Conference Panel 2014), Mvkoke Poet Joy Harjo (*Crazy Brave*), Potawatomi Scholar Robin Kimmerer (*Braiding Sweetgrass*), and Malea Powell (specifically the 2012 CCCC’s Chair Speech) have all greatly influenced in developing understandings of land and how it applies to Indigenous studies.

providing a view of both what has been lost and maintained. He contrasts the method of interactions between Native people and settlers in chapter 2. In describing the settlement after the murder of a Chippewa (Ojibwe) man by an Ottawa (Odawa) man over fishing nets, Blackbird discusses the means through which these two closely related groups settled their dispute. After council, the Odawa ceded part of their country “A strip of land which I believe to have extended from a point near Sleeping Bear, down to the eastern shore of the Grand Traverse Bay, some thirty or forty miles wide...they were also allowed access to all the rivers and streams in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan” (Blackbird 15). What this demonstrates in terms of land and knowledge is the value placed on hunting grounds, but also that through settling the dispute in this way, both the Odawa and Ojibwe avoid war and death. This further contrasts with the approach of war taken by European settlers, and works to affirm Native knowledge as, at the very least, relevant as the “civilized” settlers.

Blackbird’s history cannot be separated from the land. As the *History* progresses, this becomes more and more apparent. In regards to the history of Mackinac Island Blackbird writes “Again, most every historian or annalist so-called, who writes about the Island of Mackinac and the Straits and vicinity tells us that the definition or meaning of the word Michilimackinac in the Ottawa and Chippewa language, is ‘large turtle’... but we consider this to be a clear error” (19). Blackbird is relying on his knowledge of the Odawa language to show how he knows the history of his people. He later states that “our traditions says that when the Island was first discovered by the Ottawas, which was some time before America was known as an existing country by the white man” (Blackbird 19). This is a move to demonstrate the length of history of the Odawa people in Michigan. Initially, I read this idea as Blackbird conferring his knowledge in relation to that of the European settlers, but what this really means is that Odawa knowledge is not

contingent on European knowledge and is known through the traditional practices of the Odawa people. This is extremely important when considering the time frame in which this piece was written and the contrast of civilized and uncivilized. The history of the land, through Blackbird, has multiple ways of telling. It is through the stories of the Odawa and Ojibwe that Blackbird makes meaning and understands the knowledge of this place.

This is evident when Blackbird states, “I will here give it just as related in *our* traditions, although this may be considered, at this age, as a fictitious story; but every Ottawa and Chippewa to this day believes it to be positively so” (21). While the emphasis of *our* is mine, the meaning here is clear that Blackbird is navigating multiple versions of the history of the land. This is exceedingly important when considering how Blackbird is using history and land to know knowledge, because it situates this knowledge in a specific culture and time. This relates back to how Brooks uses the origin stories of Sky Woman and the Great Beaver, in that the Native people stand their ground in what they believe to be true, despite colonial understandings of history. Further, when considering the method of relating this story, it is taken as history to the Odawa and Ojibwe people. In the chapter that follows, I will discuss the ways Erdrich utilizes similar stories to weave a network of relations that incorporates history as a way to tie these authors together and draw connections between how knowledge is navigated through history.

Much like Brooks, Blackbird’s connection to the history of his people is directly tied to the land, both where the Odawa have been and where they are at the time of this writing. Further, Blackbird demonstrates the process of navigating the knowledge of his people as connected through land and history in Chapter 10, “Very many centuries ago, before the discovery of the American continent by the white people, the traditions of the Ottawas say they lived along the banks of one of the largest tributaries of the St. Lawrence, now known as the Ottawa river” (79).

Through the oral traditions of the Odawa, Blackbird knows that the Odawa did not originate in Michigan. This scope of time works to discursively dismantle notions of colonial history, but speaks more to the importance of traditional Odawa knowledge. Through this history, Blackbird is able to describe and build connections with the Ojibwe people through the network of language relations. Blackbird is utilizing the similar language structure and home lands between the Odawa and Ojibwe to demonstrate one of the ways that history and relationships are tied to the land to experience knowledge. What this means is that through relational networks knowledge was shared and known across cultures. This becomes additionally important when considering this is a history of the Odawa and Ojibwe people. Blackbird demonstrates this connection as a means of knowing knowledge through relational networks, and it is through this relational network that I understand why this text serves as history for two separate, but related groups.

One of the most complex relationships that Blackbird addresses is between the Native people in the Lower Peninsula and the colonial settlers. Blackbird states, “There are now but comparatively few living in the State of Michigan, trying to become civilized and to imitate their white neighbors in agricultural industries and other civilized labels” (97). Blackbird here is drawing a contrast to the small number of Native people at the time of his writing and the number of people he historically knew lived on these lands. Additionally, this quote highlights the types of changes the relationship with colonial settlers has brought to the Odawa. The colonial language of civilized is used again to reflect the process of colonization and the changes it has brought. But what draws me to this quote is the way Blackbird uses language to demonstrate how he navigates knowledge in relation to colonization. The relationship with colonial settlers is not a choice for Blackbird, but he is using this relationship to confirm the

process of knowing the history of the land and his people as the same process as navigating the knowledge of the land and his people. This will have greater implications when I discuss Louise Erdrich in the next chapter, but directly relates back to how Brooks uses history and land to ‘recover’ Native space as a means of knowing knowledge.

Where I will end this chapter is with a discussion of Blackbird’s call to his people as a means to survive colonization and keep their fires burning. Blackbird states, “I thought, this is what ought to be, for the same god who created the white man created the red man of the forest, and therefore they are equally entitled to the benefits of civilization, education and Christianity” (98). When I first read these words what I believed Blackbird was calling for was assimilation. Through this project however, I realize what Blackbird is asking his people to do is to put traditional Odawa knowledge in relation to colonial knowledge as a means to better know the knowledge of their people. Through his text, Blackbird is crafting an argument that demonstrates how traditional Odawa knowledge is as robust as Western knowledge. He draws his readers (and his people) back to the land and the ways Odawa tell their history as a way to combat notions of Native people being uncivilized. More importantly, Blackbird is providing a map for the Odawa people to know the traditional knowledge of their culture. Yes he is arguing for colonial forms of education, civilization, and Christianity, but these devices are suggested as a means of survivance, rather than assimilation. Blackbird is calling for the Odawa and Ojibwe people of Michigan to understand their traditional knowledge in relation to colonial knowledge through means that will additionally allow Native people to function in a colonized world. This is a map that can be read in this text. This is map that in some ways, Louise Erdrich follows in the next chapter. Not all of Blackbirds delineation of space and history can be followed as a map, but in this chapter (chapter 12) Blackbird provides a map of survival. That this map comes near the end

of this text is telling because in order to get to these ideas, the reader must travel with Blackbird through the Lower Peninsula and navigate colonization through time and place.



## CHAPTER 4:

### THE STORIES WE TELL ARE RELATED TO THE GROUND WE WALK ON: A CONVERSATION WITH LOUISE ERDRICH

*When I first read Books and Islands I was on my way to my first C's in St. Louis. I had gotten a root canal 3 hours before we left. I was riding with my close friends Ben and Lena, who were my biggest "peer" support network as I tried to navigate my first graduate class. As I sat in the back seat, face numb, I began to fall deeper and deeper into the story that Erdrich was weaving. I saw the Perkins where she and her family met up for a meal. I started to draw connections between the ways my class practiced their conversations and food practice and how Erdrich described the meanings food had in her family. I had my friends there to help me talk through connections I was making between Erdrich and other Native authors. I started and finished the book on the drive from Lansing to St. Louis. This text was fresh in my mind as I sat bleary eyed listening to Malea Powell's 4C's chair address and I made connections between the decolonial practice of being where I think and do.<sup>7</sup> I was just a baby in the field of Rhet/Comp at this time, but I felt my Rhet/Comp story begin in earnest on that car ride down to St. Louis with Erdrich as my traveling companion. Erdrich had helped me know knowledge through the relationship she had built with me through her text.*

*As a child, I would escape into the worlds built by authors, spending hours in space or Middle Earth. I was a trouble maker and my mother was a recovering army vet with PTSD. We struggled to survive those early years, but I made it through by reading. It became hard at times*

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<sup>7</sup> See Walter Mignolo's *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* under the Decolonial options section for a further explanation of this concept.

*to separate what I was reading from real life and to help me understand the world better, I began reading about “real” life.*

*As I made the transition from fiction only to frequent works of non-fiction I found that I was still entering different worlds and views with the non-fiction, but that there was a greater sense of empowerment and ability to change myself. I brought this method of reading with me to whatever I read, though I didn’t understand how important this ability would become until I started that first graduate seminar.*

*I could hear the words of my uncle reflected in Erdrich’s text; a way of moving through the world. Not a path of least resistance, but a path that takes into account what obstacles I want to move over, through, or around. Every time I read Books and Islands I feel that Erdrich is talking directly to me, asking me to be a part of her history, to travel the lands she has. And while this works for awhile, I always come back to the idea that there are some things that I won’t be able to know or understand explicitly. I won’t know what it is like to experience cultural genocide or have those memories tied by blood. I can’t know what it is like to have traces of a language buried deep within me, trying to come to the surface to be remembered; to be spoken. As a son of a war survivor and a person with PTSD, I know what it’s like to survive, but my experience is confined to a one generation, maybe two.*

*I sometimes struggle with conversations of survivance because I worry that as a non-Native person looking at Native work I will frame my discussions in a way that shows Native people as the “noble savage” trope from elementary school history classes. But, while I am engaging in trying to understand this as an idea/concept, I see the ways that Erdrich speaks to this and provides a method of understand Native space in a contemporary context. I think back*

*to the hours I have spent with my Uncle in the Manistee National Forest, consciously learning the ways we are related to the earth. I think of the views of relational accountability I have learned in these spaces that my friends laugh at and don't try to understand.*

*I have been developing this project for 3 ½ years, but so many of these ideas I have been working with my entire life. There have been moments where I have tried to describe to my friends and family not in the academe what I am studying/building and they typically ask: "so you are looking at maps right? Did Native Americans make maps? Are you looking at old maps? Are all of these maps in English?"*

*Books and Islands is always the example text I suggest if these people want to know what I am doing. I have had 8 copies of this book, 6 I have given away, 1 I lost, and 1 that I keep safe because it was given to me by a friend and mentor. Books and Islands sticks with me, but more importantly, I want it to stick with those close to me. I want to know if my family sees reflections of themselves and the family dinners we used to have at my grandparents house before my grandmother passed away. I want know if my family feels tied to this land the way I do.*

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This chapter explores Louise Erdrich's *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* as method of understanding how Erdrich understands and builds her own relationships with traditional Ojibwe knowledge through story and relationships. I will focus on the ways Erdrich uses story and relationships as a means of Native cartography in order to investigate implications for a Navigational epistemology.

What Erdrich offers in informing the Navigational Epistemology that I am shaping here is a look at the complex negotiation of contemporary and historical colonization. Erdrich builds on the context of *Blackbird* and shows how the weight of history informs contemporary practice while sharing narratives that are directly tied to the land and the people who have and do live there. She also, like Brooks, is aware of her relationships to the land and demonstrates a way of accountability to the places she tells about and the people she interacts with.

Louise Erdrich's *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country* is a fascinating narrative that first brought home the importance of story in Native tradition to me. This text, as a story, creates a map of the land and a map that creates a way of understanding the story. The concept of stories as maps and maps as stories is extremely important in understanding the Navigational Epistemology because this it works directly towards de-stabilizing western notions of cartography. In western cartography, maps are crafted as objects and understood as only in the abstract, representing features of the land.<sup>8</sup> In this text, Erdrich prompts readers to begin to consider what knowledge is stored in the land. This can be seen with phrases like, "you could think of the lakes as libraries" and "And in truth, since the writing or drawings that those ancient people left still makes sense to people living in Lake of the Woods today, one must conclude that they weren't the ancestors of the modern Ojibwe. They were and are the modern Ojibwe" (Erdrich 5-6). The stories of the land become locations on a map, just as the histories of the

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<sup>8</sup> While I will not be discussing Western mapping practices specifically in this document, I briefly use this example to draw importance to Erdrich and the ways I understand her narrative in relation to Native mapping practices. J.W. Blaut's *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* and Walter Mignolo's *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* both provide particularly useful critiques of Western mapping practices as cartography refers to power.

Ojibwe people are stored in this land, waiting for someone who knows how to read the land to know the story<sup>9</sup> and the knowledge.

As Erdrich's story evolves, so evolves the methods of weaving space with story. Erdrich is defining Native space as any space in which she moves. Erdrich brings the Pot with her. The previous quote regarding modern Ojibwe supports Erdrich's demonstrations of experiencing knowledge through the stories of the Ojibwe and the lands of her ancestors. Erdrich interacts with contemporary colonial pressures in a way that actively acknowledges the past and navigates these spaces with her stories and the traditional stories of the Ojibwe. To demonstrate this navigation of traditional Ojibwe and contemporary colonization, Erdrich writes "as we travel along a highway that was expanded from a road that was once a trail, an old Ojibwe trade route, heading North" (14).

Brooks described pre-colonial Native mapping practices as a series of stories and anecdotes that not only described the land itself, but also what could be found on the land and the types of relationships the people had with the land. Erdrich balances both story as a form of map making as well as giving specific directions in order for the reader to follow her map. I could visit the places that Erdrich does in *Books and Islands* by following her story, and/or the road map she provides. I am not saying that these maps don't speak to each other, or that for Erdrich they are two separate maps, but I am drawing attention to the fact that there are multiple ways of reading Erdrich's story and making meaning from it. This multiple layered meaning reflects how

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<sup>9</sup>I am using story as a sort of a catch all to refer to a prevalent theme of utilizing multiple storied form in the larger academic discourse in Native studies. They can be origin stories as shown with Brooks, or they can be personal narratives as shown with Erdrich. The upshot here is that authors such as Malea Powell, Thomas King, Joy Harjo, Leslie Marmon Silko, Lee Maracle, Andrea Riley Mukavets, Louise Erdrich, Lisa Brook, Andrew Blackbird and Shawn Wilson all use story to convey meaning. More specifically, these authors use story to convey knowledge as it relates to history, land, and relationships. There are many other folks (both Native and non) who utilize story in their scholarship but the previously mentioned authors are who I have built my relationships with and I am talking with in this document.

Blackbird tells his history. There is a history of the Odawa and Ojibwe, there is a history of Native people and colonial settlers interaction, there is the colonial settler's history contrasted with the Native people's, and there is Andrew Blackbird's personal history. All of these layers shape one text. For Erdrich, it is her history with the land, her relations, with contemporary colonization, and the story of the land. For both of these authors and Brooks, all of these stories are related, all of these layers form one cohesive structure. Erdrich makes sense of this through this quote "the teachings made sense of the beauties and hardships of Ojibwe existence" (33). What this quote also does is acknowledges what happened after we leave Blackbird in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and is Erdrich acknowledging the difficulties of maintaining a pathway for knowing Ojibwe knowledge. The beauty and hardships help readers understanding the relationship between the dual mapping system.

In fact, I propose that Erdrich's dual mapping system is the outcome of contemporary context as a Native person traveling on colonized land. This is a level of audience awareness that drives the purpose of this text as act of resistance as well as a means to leave something behind for her child that she is writing about. As Blackbird explained, removal of the language and the land were the first steps of 'civilizing' Native peoples in the early colonial period (Blackbird 56). *Books and Islands* is an act of resistance because all of the pieces are included to follow the map, but the reader has to sort through them themselves. It is also an act of resistance because the map contained within the narrative provides other Ojibwe a means to know and visit traditional sites of Native space and knowing. There is a distinct relationship between the ways Erdrich tells her story and Blackbird tells his. Both authors are seeking ways to pass on the information they carry in their body. Both authors are actively working to understand the ways they have been

colonized and what this colonization means for the future generations. Both authors refuse to not use their culture's language as a means of relating to their history and the land.

Erdrich understands that in a contemporary context, the need for Native space is as important as it has always been, if not more so because of what has been lost in terms of land and traditional Ojibwe practice. Given the historic removal of people and language from Native spaces, Erdrich provides the reader, in this case me, a way of knowing what were traditional Native spaces and a means for regaining/maintaining them. She uses road signs and towns as signifiers to her story and as a way to build relationships with her readers. I see this as a means of remembering the history but also being conscious of those who may not know or remember the traditional ways of navigation.

By using contemporary/colonial features to signify the route she is taking, Erdrich is contrasting her navigational system to that of Blackbird, but the systems are not mutually exclusive because Erdrich names the rivers and lakes, providing in many places both the colonial name and the Ojibwe name. As the previously mentioned quote stated, many of the roads that have been paved and expanded for colonial exploitation were once Native pathways of navigation (Erdrich 14). In this way, Erdrich is reclaiming these pathways and demonstrating the process through which she knows traditional Ojibwe knowledge through history and the land. For a long time I thought that Erdrich was doing this to describe the dual worlds she lives in, but slowly I began to realize that Erdrich doesn't view these worlds as separate. Erdrich provides multiple ways of naming her path as a way to make sure the reader isn't left behind. Additionally, it is through this method of naming that Erdrich is talking with her audience and showing us the way she is carrying the Pot with her, claiming that all spaces she travels are Native space because of the knowledge she is carrying with her. Erdrich is conversing with

Blackbird, asking what he saw education bringing to Native people and spaces, asking if this is what he meant. Blackbird is asking Erdrich how she was able to know the traditional lands of her people despite having so much of them taken away by the Federal government.

One of the ideas that sticks out to me about Erdrich's text is the way that the Ojibwe language is used in telling this story. Erdrich acknowledges that she is an ongoing learner of the language, which is in contrast to Blackbird who was a fluent speaker. Both authors give the Native name of specific places every chance they get. Erdrich specifically provides the Ojibwe words for books and babies, among other things as well (Erdrich). In Erdrich's case, the Ojibwe used in this text as a means of resistance to colonial powers. Building on the concept of resistance as a means of knowledge, Maracle writes "By talking to my readers as though they were truly there in my heart, both the point of victimization and the point of resistance becomes clear. The value of resistance is the reclaiming of the sacred and significant self" (14). The relationship here is that through including the Ojibwe language Louise Erdrich is reclaiming part of her own identity and through relating this reclamation in story she is showing a method of experiencing the traditional knowledge of her ancestors.

By integrating Ojibwe into her story, Erdrich is further staking the claim that Native space is where she is. That is not to say that this is unique to Erdrich, but that, in a larger sense, Native space is where Native people are, where Native languages are spoken, and where Native practices are practiced. Erdrich asks her readers to address and understand what colonization has done to Native people and to remember that all of the lands of the Great Lakes were once Native lands and the land holds this memory. More importantly, Erdrich use of Ojibwe as a statement of existence, is a way to say that Native people never left these lands and are thriving in these spaces. Lisa Brooks reflects on *Books and Islands* in the acknowledgement section at the



beginning of *The Common Pot*, reflecting on what it means to use Native languages in contemporary scholarship as a means of reclamation of Native space and a method of survivance for Native culture (xxi). Additionally, Anishinaabe and Chaldean scholar Andrea Riley Mukavets writes “After hearing these stories, I begin to understand what healing feels like” (1). What Riley Mukavets is adding to this conversation is healing powers that stories hold, contrasting colonization with traditional ways of knowing the land. The difficulties occur when trying to navigate and make sense of what has happened as a means of going forward and remembering the genocide of Native peoples and what that history means today. Like Erdrich, Riley Mukavets understands stories as a process and a means to experience the knowledge of her ancestors, thus furthering the importance of story as a means of knowledge construction. By connecting her story to the Ojibwe language, Erdrich is offering her struggle as a means to heal.

Erdrich demonstrates that Native people have always and already navigated this land, that while there are Native people alive, they will be traveling the waterways, making meanings from the relationships they have built with each other, the land, and colonial powers. By framing her story as a Native person writing about Native people, Erdrich is describing and embodying what survivance means. By providing a way for other Ojibwe to retrace her steps, Erdrich is also providing ways for future meaning to be made. Erdrich knows what she knows through generations of practice and adaptation. Erdrich reflects on the history of the lands she travels, “All of this happened during the eighteenth century, when the fur trade began the first wave of alterations that would forever shift the economic, social, and spiritual balance of Ojibwe life in Lake of the Woods” (38). Through *Blackbird*, I saw this shift happen, but here through Erdrich, I see the ways that Native people have responded to these changes. They are still moving, they are still harvesting their medicines, they are still marking the land with their story and building their

histories. Erdrich is one example of this, but as she relates the stories of her daughter's father, she is one among many other Ojibwe navigating contemporary space as a Native person who remembers her history and the lands of her people. While I will reflect later in this chapter on the importance of the relationship between Erdrich and her daughter's father (as well as call him by name), here what I want my reader to understand is that Erdrich is showing us that knowledge needs to be continuously experienced to be known and understood. She has to maintain the relationships with the land and retell the stories in order to know the knowledge that is contained in them. With each journey and telling, Erdrich is strengthening her understanding of this knowledge and is opening up herself to know more.

Similar to both Brooks and Blackbird, Erdrich tells an origin story, but Erdrich's origin story focuses on her baby child. It is the origin of Rita, baby Nenaa'ikiizhikok, as an Ojibwe daughter and Erdrich has provided a way for Rita to know her traditional places. Erdrich is weaving her story so that Rita is an active actor with the land. Examples of this can be seen with the idea that "To either side, the rich young undergrowth is said to be inhabited by the spirits of babies who choose humans, as they pass, to come and live with" and "I've heard it said that until it does, the baby hears the spirits talking" (Erdrich 57). Here, Erdrich is tying Rita to the land and the spirits that the Ojibwe believe exist in the land, but this relationship is more complex because Erdrich is not only saying there is relationship between Rita and the spirits, but that Rita can hear the spirits. To reinforce this, Mvskoke poet Joy Harjo writes, "Each child has a spirit and its particular relationship to parents, ancestors and place" (27). This explanation of the spirits is one way that Erdrich is demonstrating a process of experiencing traditional Ojibwe knowledge additionally Erdrich is demonstrating one of the ways through which Ojibwe people can remember when they have forgotten or remember what can never be forgotten. This is a

story of dealing with colonization. This is a map of healing and survivance through the passage of knowledge from one generation to the next.

In *Books and Islands*, Erdrich begins building a web of relationships<sup>10</sup> similar to Brooks' in *The Common Pot*, but the primary difference is that Erdrich's relationships are personal. They are relationships between the land she lives on and the lands that are her people's homelands (in this case the Lake of the Woods in Minnesota and traditional Ojibwe lands in southern Canada); they are familial relationships between the author and her daughters; they are relationships that are developed through necessity and survivance. Most importantly, this story is a means of understanding the ways in which traditional knowledge is practiced today. Riley Mukavets writes, "I tell this story to heal--- to learn about my relationships with the women, my research, or myself. In this re-telling moment, I realize that at the center of this dissertation is a story about how relationships are tools for survival." (3). As Erdrich connects with her relationships to traditional knowledge and people, she imparts on the reader what Riley Mukavets explains in relation to her research.

Erdrich explains that she is a learner of traditional Ojibwe knowledge and one of the people who aid this learning process is Rita's father, Tobasonakwut. Tobasonakwut "who is a traditional healer, as well as a tribal politician, teacher, and negotiator... He has devoted his life to helping people. He is a one-man spiritual ER" (Erdrich 30). With her relationship with Tobasonakwut, Erdrich explains one of the methods she learns traditional Ojibwe knowledge.

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<sup>10</sup> The majority of the scholarly framework for understanding and building the section about relationships stems from the scholarly work of Shawn Wilson. Equally important though are the relationships I have built with my Uncle Jim (demonstrated through my stories) and Malea Powell (still scholarly, but of the mentor and instructor variety) because these people have helped me find my own path of understanding what it actually means when I say that all things are related. Other scholars who have since informed a theoretical understanding of relationships are Kathleen E. Absolon (Minogiizhigokwe) in her book *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know*, the poetry of Qwo-li Driskil, conference conversations with Kimberli Lee in regards to her work on Native Feminism, and the CCCC's Indigenous Caucus (specifically Lisa King, Andrea Riley Mukavets, and Gail McKay).

This character is one of the most important characters in terms of Erdrich building a set of traditional Ojibwe knowledge because she is actively engaging with the lessons he passes on, which both people pass the knowledge to Rita.

Erdrich states, in reference to Tobasonakwut, “I have just decided that he and the lake are one person. That is a relief. For if to describe one is also to describe the other, I am set free. Both are so vast and contradictory and full of secrets that I both despaired of and was delighted with the prospect of never getting an adequate handle on them.” (32). Here Erdrich is building the connective relationship between Tobasonakwut and the land. By stating Tobasonakwut is the lake and sharing the level of knowledge contained in both as full of secrets, the reader begins to understand the immenseness of traditional Ojibwe knowledge. This quote also shows one of the ways that traditional Ojibwe knowledge is shared and known: through human interaction and established relations between a teacher of knowledge and a learner of knowledge.

This process of building knowledge through relationships is tied to the land, again, with the idea Erdrich relates to her reader,

“His people were the lake, and the lake was them. At one time, everyone who lived near the lake was essentially made of the lake. As the people lived off fish, animals, the lake’s water and water plants for medicine, they were literally cell by cell composed of the lake and the lake’s islands. Tobasonakwut’s father once said to him, *the creator is the lake and we are the waves on the lake*. Tobasonakwut shows the place in the heavens from which the creator descended. Their origins are familiar. The cosmology is on the surrounding landscape, in the stars, in the shapes of the rocks and islands, and in the mazinapikiniganan, the paintings that his people made on the sides of the rocks” (34)

Here, Erdrich is building on the ways the relationships exist and relate traditional Ojibwe knowledge through human interaction and remembrance of story. This also relates to the process of remembering traditional Ojibwe histories by using paintings and reading the story from said paintings: “The lines drawn between things in Ojibwe pictographs are

extremely important, for they express relationships, usually between a human and a supernatural being. Wavy lines are the most impressive, for they signify direct visionary information, talk from spirit to spirit” (Erdrich 56).

Erdrich is reclaiming a traditional way of building her relationships by tapping into the stories of the past. Anishinaabe scholar Kathleen Absolon writes, “Knowledge quests and knowledge searchers are all around us. Indigenous peoples have always had means of seeking accessing knowledge. Yet, indigenous searchers are usually caught in the context of colonial theories and methodologies” (23). Erdrich is actively refusing a colonial method of building relational knowledge, and is in essence moving away from a singular context of colonial theory and methodologies. These paintings demonstrate an additional way that relationships are formed and understood. Knowledge, in traditional Ojibwe belief, is known through conversations between spirits. These relationships inform human interaction and ways of knowing the land through bonds that transcend the physical world around them.

While these are only a few of the relationships that Erdrich speaks to, in understanding the ways that Erdrich knows knowledge through the land, history, story and relationships they are the most important for me to understand and work with. Through understanding the function of these relationships to Erdrich in *Books and Islands*, I see and understand the ways they inform Erdrich’s map construction and better understand the idea of stories as maps and maps as stories. The stories of these relationships are one demonstration of how history is tied to the land and through these stories knowledge can be experienced and built.

Erdrich helps readers to understand the history of colonization and develop ways of knowing how traditional beliefs have lived on and adapted. The continuation of practice in both the past and present is evidence that the Navigational Epistemology, as developed with Brooks, is at work throughout *Books and Islands*. While not specifically mentioned, the common pot is at play within Erdrich's narrative. Examples of this are seen in Erdrich's relationships to land, people, and colonization.

What Erdrich adds specifically to this mix, and to understanding how the Navigational Epistemology can be used, is the engagement Erdrich creates with her readers. The conscious ways of navigating contemporary and historical colonization, while maintaining traditional practices of relationally navigating the land, demonstrates how the contexts for the characteristics can and will change, but that the characteristics of land, history, story and relationships remain vital to knowledge creation.

## CONCLUSION:

### LEAVING WHERE WE BEGAN, THE STORY GOES ON

Stories are maps and maps are stories, what this means is that maps are everywhere in Native discourse and each map looks different. Some maps show the tree line and mountains, others show the route between peoples; there are maps of relationships to the land and between Native folks and the creator. Each of these maps have different characteristics, but one common thread between them all is that they tell a story. Sometimes this story is about one person, other times the story is about a group of people.

The future of this journey can take many shapes. I would like continue this work and focus it by shaping a comprehensive methodological text of Native cartographic practices that looks specifically at relationships with the land and how to map said relationships. I want to create topographic maps of these relationships using global information systems and oral histories together. I see this future project as a way to provide a decolonial option for cartography.

I also think that there is a lot of potential to attempting to map out origin stories, finding the overlaps between Native cultures and working with communities to build maps of their origin stories. This project is slightly more problematic as many of the sites of origin are considered sacred sites, which I would not feel comfortable mapping without an established relationship and permission, and even then I would still potentially feel uncomfortable. One alternative would be to work with specific communities to learn what their cartographic practices look like and finding places of overlap so the community could make their own map. Ideally it would be great

to teach any community who wanted to learn how to map, but that would mean I would have to learn how to map, myself.

I would like to eventually work with Native communities and see if there is a need/want for this researched to be turned into a children's book. I see the potential for this being a way to preserve and pass down meanings of geographic sites as well as a family building tool.

All of these previous examples rely on one thing though, which is me learning how to create multiple kinds of maps. This project is a written map of my relationships and ways of knowing what I know, in addition to this however I would like to be able to learn how to create GIS maps, pictograph maps, story maps, and any other kind of maps that have the potential to show relationships.

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*I would like to close this document in the same location we began; in the Manistee National Forest considering relationality and relational accountability. On my last trip to the woods with Uncle Jim, we tried to recreate the pathways I took fifteen years earlier when I got lost in the woods. Throughout my life Uncle Jim has been there whenever I felt lost and he has often helped me find my way again. This has been true throughout my educational journey as well as learning to deal with the complex relationships I have with the rest of my family.*

*I knew that end of our experiences up North were coming, and I wanted to share a part of my path that Uncle Jim had started me on. By going back to my origin, the place where I got lost, I wanted to express my thanks to Uncle Jim for always helping me find a path way home.*



*Over the years Uncle Jim's COPD and emphysema had progressed to the point where he could no longer trek the distance from our campsite to Moss Pointe, but on this day, he told me he wanted to see something he had never seen before. I knew that our path would be slow going, but earlier on this camping trip I had begun to retrace my trail with the Woodpecker. While I still kept this part of the story to myself, I wanted to walk the land where I began with my Uncle. I wanted to show him what I saw and how I saw it. I wanted to let him know how I had come to understand the knowledge he had shared with me over the years.*

*What was equally important about this specific trip in the woods was that this was the first time when walking together that I was in lead. I pointed out which trees I used as markers and shared what kinds of birds I had seen along the path over the years. This was the first time that we walked together where I did the majority of the talking, telling Uncle Jim stories from college, working through understanding the complexities of a thirty person family that had been slowly disintegrating since the passing away of my grandparents, and talking with Uncle Jim about his health.*

*He let me lead the way through the fiddlehead ferns. We walked slow and had to stop to let Uncle Jim rest every fifteen minutes or so. When we paused, we talked about the land we had seen together and the histories we shared. We talked about our relationship and stories we had built together. He told me of the first time he had come to this section of the Manistee National Forest and the time he caught a world record white sucker fish. I told him of the changes in life and the ways I had come to learn how to deal with my depression. I tried to tell him how important he was to me and how much I valued the lessons he had taught me.*

*I didn't know the words to express this, but there was a sense of knowing as we past a small stand of Cedar trees a quarter mile away from our campsite. We always stopped at Cedars when we found them during our walks. This stand of Cedars had trees that were five feet around, some of the largest I had found in my explorations, I asked Uncle Jim how old he thought they were, but he sat in silence, deep in thought.*

*He reached into his pocket and pulled out his inhaler, though we had been taking it easy it was clear to me that this walk was taking its toll on Uncle Jim. I asked if he wanted to go home, but he looked up at me and said "I am proud of you, Zeke. You have had ten million reasons to not be doing what you are, I am glad you have found at least a few reasons to keep going. I wanted to share with you the meanings I found in the woods when I was a boy, and I see that you know them. What's more important is that you made your own meanings and you have run with what I have tried to teach you."*

*I hadn't expected this and compliments are hard to come by with this old Indian man. I didn't know what to say, but I also didn't get much of a chance because after he said this, he stood up and asked "do you know what's over that next hill? I have never been this way before."*

*Earlier the previous day I had come this way and knew that the hill lead to a deep tributary ravine that lead to the Pine. I told Uncle Jim that I wasn't sure and that we should investigate. Though this was the first time I had taken the lead on our walk, part of me wasn't ready yet to lead the way. I knew that this would be the last time we were in this place together and I wanted to learn what I could with the time we had left on this land. Uncle Jim has a rough exterior, which has disconnected him from the majority of the family we shared, but I have always found ways to learn from what was there rather than looking at what wasn't. Through*

*listening to his stories, I had learned to listen to the land. By seeing the ways Uncle Jim acted, despite his words, I had learned to build respectful relationships.*

*Instead of leading the way up the hill, Uncle Jim said we should walk together. As always, he treated me as an equal, listening to my stories as I shared them and telling his own. When we reached the top of the hill we had to pause again so Uncle Jim could catch his breath. We sat there together on a fallen Cedar and listen to the sounds of the forest around us. We could hear the constant movement of the water below, calling to us to follow the stream. In the background I could hear the laughing call of the pileated woodpecker, reminding me of the journeys we had together.*

*After a few minutes of rest, Uncle Jim asked me where we should go next, do we go to the river or take a right and head east and follow the stream. I knew that if we went to the river we would have to go down the steep bank to get to the water, which would take Uncle Jim thirty minutes to climb back up and multiple hits on his inhaler. I also knew that the walk back up the hill would be the last thing we did before we headed back to the campsite. I wanted to keep going; I wanted this time together to last as long as possible and said we should follow the stream by way of a deer path that ran along the crest of the valley.*

*After ten minutes on our new path, we both heard the deep knocking of the woodpecker close to us and we stopped moving to see if we could see the bird. Streams of sunlight broke through the canopy as we stood surrounded by fallen and growing trees. There were dead Birches, with peeling white bark. There were young birches that hadn't developed their pliable skins. I thought back to Brooks and Blackbird and the histories that had been written on tree skin as Uncle Jim tore off a strip of bark and stuck it in his pocket, revealing the peach colored*

*underside. I started to say something and Uncle Jim held his finger up to his mouth and then pointed just to the left of a huge upturned tree.*

*There on the visible part of the giant root ball sat a fifteen inch talk pileated woodpecker, its crimson head in bright contrast to the surrounding green. For the first time we had seen this bird together. On our last time together in these woods we saw the bird that had lead me on my path. I can't say that it was the exact bird, but I couldn't help but remember where I was seventeen years ago, following a woodpecker in the forest. I thought about where I had been and what I had learned over the years; the ways that I have marked my history and how it is shared with this land and my uncle.*

*This time the wood pecker didn't stay long, seeming to leave when it became aware that we saw it. Uncle Jim smiled at me and said "I have only seen those a couple times. They are beautiful aren't they?"*

*Before I could reply, he started walking again, finding the path left by the deer again, heading east and following the sound of the stream. Down below, in the valley, the patches of marsh grass were deep green, looking like little islands amongst the clear flowing stream. Every fifteen minutes we had to stop and sit which provided many quite moments to listen to the wind through the trees and the constant sound of running water.*

*The forest around us was beginning to change, with the trees getting older and shifting from pine, cedar, and birch to oak and beech trees. We kept following the stream and the valley seemed to shrink, even though we hadn't climbed up or down any hills. While still twenty feet down, the stream also had grown deeper but narrower, running faster and the ripples of the current could be seen from where we were standing at the top of the valley. At our next stop for*

*rest I asked Uncle Jim if we were getting close to the source of the stream and if he thought we could find the spring from which the water started.*

*He told me that if we followed the stream until there was no valley we would get to a marsh where we could find the source if we looked hard enough. I wanted to find the spring, which I referred to only as The Source from then on. I could tell Uncle Jim was starting to get tired, tired to the point where a short rest wouldn't do it. I didn't want to suggest we head home because I knew this was the last time we would be together in the forest. So I waited until Uncle Jim was ready to move again and didn't say anything other than to ask how he was doing.*

*My mind had been relatively clear and in the moment up to this point, trying to soak in everything the forest had to show me. But now when we started to move this time I was thinking about time and memories Uncle Jim and I had built over the years and how much of them were centered on this land. I learned how to move in the woods because of him. I learned to listen to my surroundings, which taught me to listen to those around me. I learned to read the land with my Uncle Jim, and had grown into an adult with him. I knew I could never repay him for the lessons I had learned from him, but also that I didn't have to, I just had to pass on what I could and always to try to pass more.*

*After two more stops in silence, I asked Uncle Jim if he wanted to try to find The Source with me. His breathing heavy and coming in rasps, said he wanted to head home and get to his nebulizer. He told me that The Source was my journey and that I should come back to this place tomorrow and get him some spring water to use for our afternoon coffee.*

*I looked around to find some form of landmark to remember this place by and Uncle Jim closed his eyes. I thought I could use a leaning Beech that extended over the valley and almost touched*

*the other side, but decided to make my own mark in a fallen tree to be on the safe side. As I bent down to work my pocket knife into the fallen tree we had been sitting on I could hear Uncle Jim muttering directions under his breath “We started North, turned East and have been going for about an hour and half of walking time, I bet if we just....”*

*He opened his eyes and looked at me and said “I bet if we take a sharp right here and walk through the woods for about half a mile we will get to one of the DNR paths runs east from out campsite”*

*I responded, “how in the world can you know that? We have been walking for at least a couple miles and I thought you said you had never been to this part of the woods?”*

*“I haven’t but we can’t have gone more than three miles away from our campsite and we have been heading steady east for most of it. Since we started heading north and then turned east and haven’t changed course, we have to be running parallel to the DNR path because that path goes for at least ten miles, in direct line from our campsite.”*

*I closed my eyes and thought about it, recreating the map of our walk in my mind and comparing it to the trail I knew Uncle Jim was talking about. He was right, though I remained impressed.*

*We turned right to cut through the woods, not really worried if we kept a straight line as long as we kept moving forward. There was no path and the going was slow, but we gradually made our way forward. We didn’t talk much and as the trees began to thin there wasn’t much to see. Since we were moving at such a slow pace, Uncle Jim didn’t need to stop much on our way to DNR trail and we kept moving on. In the distance there was a clearing that Uncle Jim said*

*was the trail, but just as he said this he came to a complete stop and pointed straight ahead of us but up into the trees. There, standing, at the top of a dead tree was a Great Horned Owl.*

*We started to move closer, trying to be as silent as possible, and made it within ten feet of the tree. One of us stepped on a branch and the owl flew away. We were both smiling, appreciating the beauty of the bird and also the luck we had at seeing a Great Horned Owl in the middle of a bright sunny day. As we passed the Owl Tree, the trail came in to view and we headed home.*

*The next morning, after breakfast and a couple cups of coffee, I started to look for things to use as trail markers when I made my way back from The Source. I found a bag of zip ties and fifteen red Solo cups. I grabbed a handful of the ties and seven cups and packed them into my backpack. Uncle Jim asked what I was doing and as I explained, he thought it was a good idea. He reminded me to bring my pocket knife so on the way back I could cut the ties and bring home my trash. I chuckled at the reminder as my pocket knife was the first thing I packed.*

*I then grabbed an empty Poweraid bottle and headed out for the DNR trail. I tried to find the spot that we had come out the forest the day before and took a sharp left when I thought I had found it. I walked back through the pathless trees and after fifteen minutes or so of walking, I could hear the stream in the distance. I was surprised at how much quicker the journey went; now that I kind of knew where I was going and that it was just me by myself. I tied the Solo cups with the ties in 20 yard distances to mark my way back to the trail.*

*When I got to the stream valley, I saw that I had went too far down the DNR trail and that Uncle Jim and I's stopping point was twenty yards to my left. I had taken the DNR trail East, turned North into the woods and had to turn right to begin following the valley upstream.*

*Now the height of the valley was rapidly shrinking and it wasn't long before the path was barely a foot above the stream. In the distance I saw that the side of the valley I was on quickly turned to marsh land, but that the stream was separated from this. I hadn't found the marsh of The Source yet.*

*I decided to jump from one side of the valley to the other, a small distance of three feet, to remain on solid ground and continue my path following the stream. The trees quickly faded away and I was soon surrounded by tall grasses to my left and a straggling tree line to my right. The marsh I had avoided had quickly given way to a sparse stand of cedars and I was in shade as I followed the stream between the grass and trees. I could tell that I was getting closer to The Source, but I didn't know where or how I would start looking for the head waters.*

*After twenty minutes or so, the stream became lost in a sea of grass, blowing in the wind. There were little pathways of water here and the ground was getting soggy, the mud leaving a dark black line on my shoes as I kept moving. I saw a singular tree on a small mound of earth, tall and weathered, bright grey in the sunlight. I started to make my way toward the tree and the higher ground the tree would provide to see if I could find The Source.*

*At this point I had to jump from bits of ground to avoid the water and the path was slow going. Gradually I got closer to the tree and when I finally was able to jump to the mound of earth that held the tree into the ground I decided to take a little break. While I was sitting beneath the tree, I could hear water flowing from somewhere around me. When I had reached the marsh and the stream broke up in to smaller tributaries I remembered I had stopped hearing the movement of the water and its return caused me to look around.*



*At the base of the mound of earth I was sitting on I could see where the tree roots met the water. Between the roots and where the earth broke away, water was moving from the mound, bubbling up through the roots and into the pools of slowly moving water. The Source looked like the flow of water when you put a hose in a swimming pool and direct the nozzle at the surface. Constantly moving, providing the water for the stream I had followed.*

*I jumped down from the mound onto a small muddy island, my shoes sinking just past the sole. I took my backpack off and pulled out the empty Poweraid bottle. My jump had muddied the waters, but because of the steady flow of water coming out the ground I didn't have to wait long for the waters to be clear. Once clear, I dipped the water bottle into the pool, as close as I could get to the bubbling surface. Once my bottle was filled, I reached my hand into the pool and filled it with water. I brought the water to my mouth and felt the cold but sweet flavor of The Source. I stood there watching the water move for fifteen minutes before I started to move towards home, listening to the sounds of the marsh, noting the deeper sound of this moving water versus the stream that I had followed.*

*Since I no longer needed to follow the stream to find The Source, I crossed the bank to my right, away from the tall grey tree, and cut a straight path toward the cedars I could see in the distance. When I reached them, I turned right and began retracing my steps home. The jump across the stream was a little more difficult this time as I had to jump from the lower side to the higher side, but I made it.*

*On the way back I let my mind clear and focused on the sound of the water, letting the stream bring me back to my first Solo cup. The journey back felt too short and part of me wanted to stay by the side of the stream, but a larger nagging part of me wanted to go home and get*

*some lunch. As I cut down the ties holding the red cups to the branches I had secured them to, I thought about the beauty of The Source and how lucky I was to see such a sight. I wished Uncle Jim had been with me and we had gathered the water together, but knew that I was carrying a piece of that place with me to share with him. When I got back to the campsite I poured the water into our percolator coffee maker and ate a quick sandwich. Uncle Jim wasn't at the campsite but I knew he would be back soon.*

*Shortly after the water came to a boil Uncle Jim came back. I started to tell him of the trip I had taken as I prepared his coffee for him. We sat around the fire, drinking our coffee from The Source talking about how we would always carry part of this land with us now that we had drank the waters.*

*While I have returned to this part of the Manistee National Forest many times since our last trip, I haven't been back with Uncle Jim. The land that our campsite was on has been sold and there are tens of NO TRESPASSING signs along the border of the private land and the national forest land. When I look back at this journey I see the trip to The Source as when and where I began to understand that I know knowledge through history, land, story, and relationships. I have lived my own history here, finding myself in different ways over the course of my life. I have learned to listen to the land, respecting the beauties I have seen and walking the miles of trees. I have shared my stories of what I have learned here and have brought my stories of daily life to this place to be shared with my Uncle. I have built a lasting relationship with my Uncle Jim that helps me to understand and know the world around me.*

*My journey to The Source was the first steps in the journey of this project. It is was when I began to understand myself as a map and the mapping of my story. This narrative is a*

*recursive one. It is always beginning just as it is always ending. There are new meanings with each time I tell it. There are new locations on my map each time I remember the story. I have brought a part of this land with me. I didn't need to drink the water to have this land with, but it certainly didn't hurt. As Thomas King writes, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are."*  
(2).

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