Be Changed and Then Don't Stop: What 2894 Can Do
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Truth Telling

On March 8, 2017, on the occasion of International Women's Day, 338 young women, including 70 Indigenous women, filled the seats of the Canadian Parliamentary House of Assembly and shared their views about Canada's future. Though the purpose of the event, as stated by its initiators, Equal Voice, was to encourage young women to become political leaders, listening to the delegates brief speeches indicates that the women present needed very little encouragement to become political or to lead. Their words were often rousing and wise, commanding and tearful, and indicated clear paths for an ethical future.

Teanna Aygadim Majagalee of Skeena Bulkley Valley described acts of violence against the land and against Indigenous women and insisted that unless Canada's citizens and governments take steps to protect and stand up for both, we are doomed to continue to harm the lands and waters that support us and the women who create life. She also asked us to imagine the next hundred years as years of revolution lead by women. She then said, emphatically, that Canadians must listen to Indigenous voices: "We are not reconciliation yet. We're at truth-telling."

On the same day, Trina Qaqqa, from Baker Lake, Nunavut, speaking about suicide in her community, asked, "Where our non-Indigenous allies?" She called on Canadian citizens to work with her community members and, "Most importantly, to listen to us."

According to these two young women, who turned a "mock" parliamentary performance into a public call to listen, listening is a political act and an urgent responsibility in a time of crisis. Chippewa of the Thames is in Supreme Court against Enbridge, a corporation that is currently pumping high volumes of heavy oil through a pipeline that experts say should have been replaced five years ago and is destined to burst. Just short of 100 reserves are without clean water with 134 drinking water advisories ongoing, despite Trudeau's promise to provide clean drinking water to all reserve communities by 2021. Just over a year ago, youth from Attiwapiskat asked Canada for help as many of their friends committed suicide on their reservation, which lacks employment, medical and mental health services, education and infrastructure, all integral to young peoples' sense of worth and horizon. In Teanna Majagalee's home, suicide is too prevalent for her to bear. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Report announced that Canada had been responsible for the deaths up to 6000 Indigenous children in the residential school systems and was guilty of cultural genocide. The same report called for a national inquiry, in consultation with Aboriginal organizations, into "the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls," including an "investigation into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls" (TRC *Calls to Action* 41)*.

*Now more commonly referred to as the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, *and* LGBTQ2S folks.

The moment is fraught. The stakes are high. And young women are asking us to listen.

Whether we identify as settlers or Indigenous, our relationships to one another are historied. While *2894* is not primarily an education project, reading through the report gives the reader the opportunity to reckon with past events that we missed out on in school. I am caught off guard continually by family members, friends and colleagues who are deeply steeped in colonial forgetting, who are not versed in Indigenous histories, the stories of settlement and cultural genocide, residential schools, the violence and racism of the Indian Act, pieces of the past that continue to play out in our collective present. When I teach Indigenous history in my classes at Trent University, my students continually express how astonished they are that what they learned in school relegated Indigenous peoples to the past or to stereotypes. Many of them also express wanting to learn more.

At the moment, in my home territory of the Kiji Sibi Watershed, Canada's capital plans to name a waterfront nature area bordering the Ottawa River after John A. Macdonald. A few decades ago, there were plans to turn sacred site

Oiseau Rock, along the Ottawa, into a Canadian Mount Rushmore, John A.'s head carved over pictographs and into sacred land. Knowing even a little about John A., these moves seem unconscionable, but how many people know that Macdonald's legacy is one of attempted Indigenous extinguishment? And while national icons like Gord Downie have drawn attention to residential schools and survivors, the truth-telling is far from over, and settler attention to Indigenous truth-telling is often far from keen. How do settlers begin to undo colonial amnesia?

The TRC Report, while widely and rightly criticized from many avenues, offers a pretty good primer on Canada's historic relations with the many Indigenous nations of this land. *2894* offers a chance for people to read through the work together, over time, pointing to the ongoing process of listening to truth-telling, and the fact that we are, urgently, in this together.

Who am I in all of this? Who am I, In Relation?

When I think of what it means to read through the TRC Report, with others, in *2894*, I think of a question Jill Carter asks: "Who am I in all of this?" ("Interventions into the Maw of Old World Hunger," 221)

In a paper called, "Storying the Possible: Speech Acts, Smudge Bowls and Strawberries," Jill expressed:

"As non-Indigenous treaty-partners invest time and energy in re-educating themselves, in listening to and learning about the lands upon which they live and the Indigenous peoples who continue to steward these lands, they must also invest equal portions of time and energy in remembering themselves."

Who am I when I read the words of the TRC report? Who am I in relation? In relation to the lands and waters I read from, as I understand them in a moment when I am trying to heal my own forgetting, to learn where and who I am in these spaces occupied by resilient Indigenous peoples for millennia? Who am I in relation to these histories? To these stories?

I gave my first land-acknowledgement in 2016 in the territory of the Haudenosaunee at Clarkson University. I was nervous to do so for a few reasons. Among them, Jill Carter was there and her work has been instrumental in encouraging people to treat land acknowledgements as opportunities for re-worlding, recreating the self in relation to Indigenous histories, peoples, treaties and territories, transforming Indigenous-settler relations one person at a time. The stakes are raised as the person speaking is asked to identify personally and publicly, sharing themselves openly and humbly at a site ripe for changing the self in relation. When the stakes go up, so does the possibility for transformation. For me, the stakes of expressing my relationship to my Indigenous identity already felt pretty high. For the Clarkson symposium, I had written a paper about the difficulties I had reconciling my settler and Indigenous heritages, the deep hunger I had to reconnect to my Indigenous heart, and about the gaps in knowledge I encountered as I tried to get to know my Algonquin relatives.

In this first land acknowledgement, I wanted to know what it meant for me to be saying the words of welcome and recognition I was saying in the space, and I wanted to express, at the same time, how little I knew about the territory and myself in it. Admitting how little we know, maybe especially for the scholar, maybe especially for the mixed-ancestry Anishinaabe-kwe coming home after a long time, is uncomfortable. I was a little anguished and quite terrified.

What transpired through my utterances was personal change. As I began to speak truthfully about my position in relation to Haudenosaunee territories and histories, I broke an ashamed silence that had been allowed to brew in me for too long. I said who I was, with all of the feelings of the fear of not belonging, a mixed-ancestry Anishinaabeg from the Kiji Sibi watershed territory of the Algonquians. I described my research process as I began to learn about Haudenosaunee peoples and territories: I had read the Iroquois Confederacy's *Call to Consciousness* and watched a youtube video about maple syrup harvesting and one about Mohawk language, narrated by a young woman filming trees and paths around her house – and her dog. I spent time reading the story of the foundation of the Iroquois Confederacy of Peace. I walked around the rivers and woods in Potsdam, and recognized trees and plants from Kiji Sibi territory with gratitude. I showed as much of myself as I could, and I made myself accountable for what knowledge and feelings I brought into the room. I shared my words with others, and saw them hearing me, and I

became constituted as I was in that moment. I was becoming aware of myself in relation, and was being asked to express the process. Through that, acknowledging the land got easier! And identifying myself did too. I was beginning to reconcile to myself, truthfully. And it was starting to feel pretty good.

Who am I when I read the TRC Report?

2894 allows readers and listeners to engage in small acts of listening that could transform us, if we are willing. In the words of the report, "By listening to your story, my story can change. By listening to your story, I can change" (TRC, "Legacy" 125).

My biggest question: Can reading the TRC Report aloud for internet streaming transform the reader? Can they re-imagine themselves in light of the reading?

While I read for the second time, for *2894*, I began to feel uncomfortable with not introducing myself, not saying who I was in relation to the words. I was feeling the responsibility to identify in relation to the voices and stories in the TRC Report, to identify the shifts that might be happening in myself. I found myself valuing more and more the notebook that accompanies the phone recorder in *2894*, where some readers write short reflections following their experience of reading.

I asked claude about the possibilities of introducing ourselves as a way of "honouring the truth." He began to have readers (including himself) identify who they were and where they were from as they began to read. In my next reading, I too will say who I am, as a beginning to entering into honest dialogue. If part of what *2894* can do is shift my understanding of myself, then I would like to say where it is that I begin, who I am, in relation.

Collective Reading: My Voice, My Heart

Sometimes I smudge with students. We form a circle and heal together in ceremony. When I smudge, I get a good fire going and then I pull sage smoke over my head to purify my mind, my eyes, so that I might see clearly, my ears, to hear the truth humbly, and my mouth, so that I might speak in a good way. In this practice of letting go and gathering in, I also smudge my heart, letting it open to those around me.

When I heard that claude was looking for someone Indigenous to write about *2894*, I volunteered. I had felt that it was my responsibility, as part of educating myself about Indigenous histories and calls to action, about colonialism and residential schools, and all of the many things the TRC Report entails, to read it. And I had begun. But 2894 pages is a lot to take in, a lot of time spent reading, and a lot of hard heart work, made more difficult by doing so alone.

In my notebook, as I approached reading for *2894* for the first time, I wrote:

> *"The last reader, Antonia, ended at page 110, just before 'Department of Indian Affairs.'"*
> Hi Antonia. I am about to meet you in reading. I choose to lean into you, because, even though I know my own loss is great but also small, I don't want to do this alone… To not cry, I am thinking of how beautiful and simple this project is, and how I am joining 50 people who have already thrown their voices into risky relationship with these words."

Part of the appeal of *2894* is its collaborative distribution of the work of reading. Especially, if the moment of reconciliation is a moment that calls all treaty people, all sovereign nations, all 'citizens' of what we call Canada to engage in the dialogue that takes place after a long period institutionalized forgetting, then we are already a collective, a community. Many of us are playing decolonial catch-up. Reading together only makes sense in this context.

The burden of educating settlers about Indigenous histories and experiences has too often fallen to Indigenous people. One of the pragmatic features of *2894* is that mostly settlers partake in the responsibility of reading through

the TRC Report. I think also of Dylan Robinson's cautions that listening to testimony from the TRC process can elicit hungry and selective viewing, so that people listening to testimony on the National Research Centre website "can pause and fast-forward and stop and say, 'No, that's not the story I want to hear;· or, «This one doesn't seem relevant, I'm going to go to the next testimony:' So there's a change in witnessing, in a sense, where the listener has full control and I think to a certain extent may not even have to witness what's going on because they can be selective about time, with time (*Maw*, 227-8).

2894's process asks the participant to join the reading where the last reader left off. In this way, the TRC Report reads out in sequence, from beginning to end. As the reader picks up the text at the next sentence, selective witnessing moves over in favor of joining the voices and the text as they come to the reader. They may find themselves reading about any number of Indigenous nations, past or present events, or calls to action. The *2894* project's title and the collective reading experience it generates are reminders that, wherever I happen to enter the reading, there are pages before and pages afterwards, and that what I am attending to is a tiny piece of the whole (and this is only the TRC Report! To get a fuller decolonial education, there are many other texts one might read). While reading, because of the elements of this project – the tiny book with instructions for how to record and the scrawled thoughts of previous readers, the de-individualized/de-personalized phone, the single book in the series that makes up the report, plus the length of time it takes to read a few pages – I could really feel my position within a collective of readers tackling a lengthy text, and that text's complicated and detailed extension beyond my minor labour. I experienced an embodied sense of my small role in hearing the stories we know are much larger than the report.

John Ralston Saul says, "They need to hear others hearing them." Anyone can access a stream of people reading the TRC Report on 2894's website. If you listen carefully, you can hear the readers hearing themselves hearing. Reactions to the report's content, and vocal expressions of the emotional body's experience of listening to truth-telling are there, if you listen.

Some readers, in the book for written reflection, expressed how shameful or painful it was when they stumbled over the words of Indigenous people mentioned in the report. This acknowledgement of faltering and the shame it brought seemed very important to me. This was a recognition of loss experienced by settlers, who are so far from First Peoples' languages that their vocal apparatuses find it difficult to make the sounds that were once the rhythm of these lands, before families and their storytelling were broken apart, before children were punished if they spoke their grandmother-tongues. Language loss is pandemic in Indigenous communities, and so is language resilience and resurgence. A loss that we experience in vastly different proportions is still a shared loss, and the flourishment of Indigenous languages in local language nests, in the scholarship I now read, and its presence in the TRC report are shared experiences of Indigenous survivance, knowledges and stories continuing to be spoken and presenced.

Our voices stumble over the Indigenous words and names. These recorded readings are indexical traces of a cultural moment where settlers might forget the words but are learning to say them. As long as we are reading.

I was in agony as I slowly sounded out names like Mistahimaskwa and Pitikwahanapiwiyan, doing them no justice, while the names of colonists, whose language I speak, tripped off my tongue with a fluidity that conceals a turbulent history.

When I said the name Hayter Reed, I knew I was saying the word "hate" and I was glad to have a place to say it, grasped by this name connected to the Indian Commissioner, a person who made sure that Indigenous communities starved, who worked for the destruction of Indigenous cultures, who hated. I learned, recently, that Hayter Reed participated in a Fancy Dress Ball in Ottawa, wearing clothing he had collected in Western Canada, dressed as sixteenth-century Iroquois chief Donnacona, who met Jacques Cartier. At the party, Reed gave a speech in Cree. How he came by the clothing he wore, and that he was able to speak Cree, when so many today can't, are questions I wouldn't have been able to ask without having spoken his name aloud as I read through the 1880's history of Indian Affairs and its place in cultural genocide in the TRC Report.

How can we understand the current context of unsettling Canada's 150th Anniversary, young people asking settlers to listen to their cries to end youth suicide on reserves, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and LBGTQ2S, Idle No More, Resistances to Pipeline and deforestation projects, Algonquin Land

Claims, John A. park projects, movements of resurgence in Indigenous arts and activist processes, etc. if we do not begin to understand the past?

I have only read a couple of dozen pages so far, as part of *2894*, but I already understand more about myself in relation to the history and the present that the TRC Report lays out. I have already been given the opportunity to re-imagine myself as I learn about the systemic violences of colonization and the resistance of Indigenous peoples that mark my/our heritage, as I learn about my own voice.

In listening to truth-telling as I express these stories with my own voice, I begin to understand myself more honestly, in relation to the stories told in the TRC Report. This is no simple project, and it is obviously ongoing.

In December, when I passed the 2894 project materials to a student of mine, I tucked a little sage into the package. Decolonizing is healing work. And we are in it together.