

Response to Embodying Power and Place

Nanaki Virdee

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

CTL 1818: Arts in Education

Dr. Ann Wessels

May 21, 2021

The three theatrical videos that we watched on the Embodying Power and Place website emotively commemorated the lives of the missing and murdered Indigenous women, reflected upon the significant tragedy and consequences of their loss, and expressed the ongoing fears and struggles faced by Indigenous women in present times. Complemented by the commentary of the Artist visitors involved in their production, the videos engaged me with the unique ways they juxtaposed traditional Indigenous culture with experiences associated with contemporary urban Canadian society, and the unique mediums and storytelling conventions that were selected to communicate their intended messages.

To begin, in *Dreamgirl*, upon my first viewing, I was captivated by the selection of visuals employed to convey the story, most particularly the object that appeared most often, the fireflies in the mason jar. I feel that the choice to tell the story mostly with this image in lieu of a typical animated story with characters and environments was an effective way to convey the importance of the fireflies within the story to the viewer, and reflect what Darla Contois, the playwright, had intended for them to represent: the lives of the lost Indigenous women. As she explained during her visit, the flickering of fireflies resembles the flash of light that appears when a sperm meets an egg to conceive life. This parallel is most apparent when one is made to focus specifically on the attributes of light flashes themselves, as was done in this video. In essence, this intentional choice helped the viewer understand what was most essential to the story's intention, and effectively empathize with the complex sensation they imagine the protagonist to feel when the fireflies are released at the end : one of heart-break at the horrific loss of the women who have helped develop her as a person, and one of awe at the beauty of the irreplaceable souls flickering all together one last time.

In the *The Price of Us Waiting*, the way in which the two performers alternate their movements from being almost symmetrical with one another when words associated with

hope and positive change are stated to disharmonious when words that describe their fears as marginalized people are uttered effectively conveys the confusion and terror they are used to experiencing to the audience in a way that feels very personal. In *Becoming*, the story is told from the first person, with a single animated image, encouraging the viewer to appeal to their imagination as they empathize with the experience of its protagonists in their own minds.

Lastly, in all three videos, I was intrigued by the ways the directors chose to represent their experiences as Indigenous people experiencing Canadian society in the present day. In *Dreamgirl*, it was through a passage in which a young Indigenous woman sings the song “Jolene” by American singer Dolly Parton while beading. In *Becoming*, it’s when the protagonist feels pressured to continue breathing deeply when facing bigotry. And in *The Price of Us Waiting*, it’s through every tense word that contrasts every positive word. Each method effectively asserts to the viewer that, as mentioned by the visiting Artists, Indigenous people and culture exist and thrive in the present, and do not solely exist in the past.

All in all, the importance and power of these works are evident to me. The legacy archive, as described in Chapter 10 of the National Inquiry, is an important contemporary collection of works that emphasizes the right for these works to be easily accessible and continue to educate and move viewers like myself, something that must continue if we are seeking to move forward with efforts of reconciliation and reparation.

References

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- Evans, A. (Playwright). (2021). *The price of us waiting* [Video]. Nightwood theatre & Native earth performing arts.
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