LEARNING, LAND AND LIFE: AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF LAND USE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN A NORTHERN ONTARIO FIRST NATION

By

Sheila Gruner

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Sheila Gruner (2012)
LEARNING, LAND AND LIFE: AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF LAND USE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN A NORTHERN ONTARIO FIRST NATION

Doctor of Philosophy (2012)
Sheila Gruner
Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology
University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

This study examines intricately related questions of consciousness and learning, textually-mediated social coordination, and human relationships within nature, anchored in the everyday life practices and concerns of a remote First Nation community in the Treaty 9 region. Through the use of Institutional Ethnography, community-based research and narrative methods, the research traces how the ruling relations of land use planning unfold within the contemporary period of neoliberal development in Northern Ontario. People’s everyday experiences and access to land in the Mushkego Inninowuk (Swampy Cree) community of Fort Albany for example, are shaped in ways that become oriented to provincial ruling relations, while people also reorient these relations on their own terms through the activities of a community research project and through historically advanced Indigenous ways of being. The study examines the coordinating effects of provincially-driven land use planning on communities and territories in Treaty 9, as people in local sites are coordinated to others elsewhere in a complex process that serves to produce the legislative process called Bill 191 or the Far North Act. Examining texts, ideology and dialectical historical materialist relations, the study is an involved inquiry into the text process itself and how it comes to be put together. The textually mediated and institutional forms of organizing social relations—effectively land relations—unfold with the involvement of people from specific sites and social locations whose work is coordinated, as it centres on environmental
protection and development in the region north of the 51st parallel. A critique of the textually mediated institutional process provides a rich site for exploring learning within the context of neoliberal capitalist relations and serves to illuminate ways in which people can better act to change the problematic relations that haunt settler-Indigenous history in the contemporary period. The work asks all people involved in the North how we can work to address historic injustices rooted in the relations and practices of accumulation and dispossession. The voices and modes of governance of Aboriginal people, obfuscated within the processes and relations of provincial planning, must be afforded the space and recognition to flourish on their own terms.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was written with a spirit of solidarity and commitment to a better possible world, a spirit I have witnessed in so many people during the years it took me to complete its writing. I am deeply grateful for their inspiration, example and accompaniment along the way. And while I have counted on many for their guidance and support, all errors and omissions contained in this dissertation are solely my own.

A huge migwetch to the people of Fort Albany First Nation, who welcomed me in 2005, have endured my comings and goings ever since and have taught me more than I can recount. Friendships found here are of the life-long kind. I especially want to thank Ed Metatawabin for reading through and offering suggestions on the final dissertation draft, as well as Joan Metatawabin, Christiana Nackogee, Jessie Sutherland, who welcomed me into their homes; to Chris Metatawabin, for encouraging me to centre my PhD efforts in Fort Albany; the Paquataskamik Advisory and Project Team, Jackie Kataquapit, Meshan Sutherland, Chris, Jessie and Ed whose vision and commitment to their community have made so many good things happen. To the many that have been involved with project activities in important ways and who also extended their friendship, Mike and Eva Metatawabin, Danny Metatawabin, Jassen and Karen, Brent and Skye, Mike Knapaysweet and Rex Knapaysweet, Tessa Baxter, and Cedar Metatawabin, Fort Albany Chief Andrew Solomon and Council members over the past seven years, Grand Chief Stan Louttit and the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council, as well as the many other adults, Elders and countless young people from the coastal communities who participated in project activities and continue to inspire with their creative determination to be out and within their vast traditional territories.
Thanks also to the scholar-activists, writers and artists, First Nation leaders, environmentalists and others who have committed their intellectual lives to critical, Indigenous, ecological, and community-centred research, especially those whose work and conversations I have depended on over the course of this writing. I especially want to thank Dorothy Smith, S.E. Turner, Louis Bird, Jean-Paul Restoule, Wendy Russell, John Cutfeet, Anna Baggio, Joseph Boyden, Lee-Ann Simpson, and my own thesis group at OISE/UT, all of whom enriched my understandings through their own writing or discussions of problems, methodologies and challenges of research, and particularly Sara Carpenter, and Soheila Pashang who opened their homes to me during visits to Toronto. I continue to hold Colombian and other Latin American colleagues, friends and teachers close to my heart and to them I maintain my eternal gratitude for shaping my understanding of the meaning of struggle, resistance and perseverance. A special recognition to the people of the Pueblos En Camino and La Chiva collectives, who continue to carry out important solidarity work across the Americas.

Thank you to Gayle Broad, colleague, friend and Director of NORDIK Institute, who has supported and encouraged me in my academic and activist research life in Northern Ontario, since it began. Thanks also to Linda Savoury-Gordon, Jose Reyes and the Broad family who helped me settle in to life in the Sault as I transitioned from PhD student in Toronto to professor at Algoma University facing the intense pace that ensued. I also want to thank other colleagues in the Community Development and Social Work Department, Anita Vaillancourt and Rose Cameron, and the students of Community Economic and Social Development (CESD) who have kept it real for me as I delved into writing. Other faculty colleagues and friends at Algoma are too numerous to name, but a special recognition to Noni, David and Michael who energized me in ways for which I am so grateful.
The research support and creative genius of Joanne Robertson, Jaime McKee, Cynthia Morriseau and Shannon Moan who worked on the Paquataskamik Project at NORDIK made it all the more possible and worthwhile, your help has been immensely appreciated. Thanks especially to Misko Anungo Kwe for continuing to dream, inspire and work for the people. A special recognition to Shannon Moan for her creativity and technical expertise related to the electronic representation of the “Map of Textually Mediated Social Relations” (p. 262).

To the many I have counted on, so as to not lose my sense of self as the tasks piled up: for your friendship, for making the trek to the Sault, following trails through the Hiawatha Highlands, for sharing good food and always-lively conversations that kept life moving in the right direction over these past 5 years. Especially, Margaret Neveau, Lisa Pauloff and Paul Larsen, who also saw me through the more intense last leg of thesis writing and kept spirits high throughout, along with Michele Doncaster, Jane Oliver, Tanyss Horsely, Mike O’Connell and Karri North, Nick Craine and Sandy Atanasoff, Rebecca Stuebing, Katie and Marshall Meyer-Beck, Jenn and Shannon Lawr and others who I haven’t seen but who saw me through these years.

Thank you to my committee members, Jean Paul Restoule and Jennifer Sumner who made the thesis committee experience an immensely positive one.

Shahrzad, I am so grateful that you encouraged me to take up the doctoral challenge, which turned out to be so much more than a scholarly affair. You are a wonderful teacher, friend and co-conspirator. I am much indebted to you and Amir for your always warm welcome, your confidence and belief in my abilities, and for your continued drive to do critical, engaged and meaningful work.
And finally, to my family Ruth Gruner, Tim Gruner, Doug Gruner and Holly Holtman, Quinn, Skyler and Nicolas Gruner, whose unwavering encouragement and energy has gotten me this far. It’s been facing new life as well as loss that we’ve gained insight into beauty of this shared road. Thank you for being so very there for me.

To all, thank you does not say enough.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS ........................................................................................................... viii

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................................ x

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. xi

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS ............................................................................................ xii

CHAPTER ONE ....................................................................................................................... 1

Displacement, Dispossession and Nature: From Colombia to Innino Aski ................. 4

Limitations of the Research ................................................................................................. 16

CHAPTER TWO ....................................................................................................................... 18

Territory, Treaty and Organizational Relations in Innino Aski ................................... 19

A Daunting Policy Landscape and the *Far North Act* ................................................. 22

Research Choices, Methods, Questions and Dissertation Chapters ......................... 31

CHAPTER THREE ................................................................................................................... 39

Inninowuk Learning and the Everyday ........................................................................... 39

Learning and Contemporary Development Politics ..................................................... 43

CHAPTER FOUR ..................................................................................................................... 52

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY, COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH AND CRITICAL

LEARNING ................................................................................................................................. 52

On the Question of Research and Learning with Indigenous Communities ............... 52

An Ontology of the Social: Dialectics of People-in-Ecology ........................................ 64

Institutional Ethnography as a Critical Approach to Inquiry ....................................... 78

A Standpoint for Research as Activist/Ally and Learner-Educator ............................ 83

An Entry Point ...................................................................................................................... 87

CHAPTER FIVE ......................................................................................................................... 96

RULING RELATIONS AND LAND IN MUSHKEGOWUK TERRITORY: A

PROBLEMATIC EXPLORED .................................................................................................. 96

Historical Materialism, Dialectical Relations and the Text in Treaty Making ............ 96

*Etymology and the Power of Naming* ........................................................................... 101
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Formulating a Problematic through Learning of Life on the Coast</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The “Paquataskamik Project”</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Narratives and Land Relations</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CHAPTER SIX</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IDEOLOGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIGENOUS LANDS</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary Ideology and Accumulation as Extension of the Colonial “Past”</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous Encounters of Western Institutional Relations: Knowledge as Relations</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accumulation, Abstraction and the “Ecological Crisis”</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Standardized Environment and Emergence of an Environmental Ideological Code</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Production of “Protection”</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNCOVERING THE INSTITUTIONAL: FROM CONCRETE TO ABSTRACT SPACE</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accounts of Land Use Planning in Indigenous Communities</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mapping and Power in Indigenous Lands</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Features of Planning in Indigenous Lands in Canada and Ontario</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Ruling Relations of Land Politics in Treaty 9</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Public Texts and Institutional Workings of Planning</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking up Texts Locally and the Bifurcation of Consciousness</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>CHAPTER NINE</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TEXTUAL MEDIATION, WORK AND SOCIAL RELATIONS ACROSS SITES</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Local Community Research Project and its Organizational Relations</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Activities Prior to 2009</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advancing Institutional Relations in 2009</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Land Use Planning Information and Coordinator Meetings in Timmins</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Planning Together”: A Site for Translocal Coordination with the Relations of Ruling</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discursive Enclosures on the Coast or Protection for a Way of Life?</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CHAPTER TEN</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LEARNING, LAND, AND THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE: REORIENTING RELATIONS FOR REGENERATION</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reorienting the Institutional through Dialectical Historical Materialist Critique</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>FOOTNOTES</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Christopher James Joseph Gruner (1935-2010), who encouraged and inspired me since I could first raise my head.

Nōkōséh: Show yourself; or, he/she/it appeared.
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Map of Treaty 9 Communities ................................................................. 21
FIGURE 2: Far North Land Use Planning Northern Training Partnership Fund ........... 50
FIGURE 3: MNR Land Use Planning Process (8 Stages) .......................................... 241
FIGURE 4: Textually Coordinated Relations .......................................................... 262
ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

Abbreviations:

BCR – Band Council Resolution
CBR/CBAR – Community Based Research/Community Based Action Research
EDO – Economic Development Officer
ENGO – Environmental Non-Governmental Organization
FAFN – Fort Albany First Nation
INAC – Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (changed in May 2011 to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada - AANDC)
IE – Institutional Ethnography
MTO – Mushkegowuk Tribal Council
MoE – Ministry of the Environment
INAC – Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (changed in May 2011 to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada - AANDC)
IE – Institutional Ethnography
MTO – Mushkegowuk Tribal Council
MoE – Ministry of the Environment
MNR or OMNR – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
MNMDMF or OMNDMF – Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry
NAN – Nishnawbe Aski Nation
PAR – Participatory Action Research

Terms:

Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous, First Nation: these terms (with varying debates on relevance and appropriateness) are generally used interchangeably to refer to the people who resided in the territories of North America before the arrival of Europeans, and their descendants

Bill 191 – An Act With Respect to Land Use Planning and Protection in the Far North (or The Far North Act)
Innino Aski – Mushkego Inninowuk/ Cree word for land

Mushkego/wuk Innino/wuk – Swampy Cree People from the James and Hudson Bay lowlands

Omushkego/wuk – Mushkego/wuk (Swampy Cree)

Paquataskamik Project – Name of community based research project underway in Fort Albany

Peetabeck/Peetabego – Fort Albany First Nation

Treaty 9 - Treaty between provincial/federal governments and Nishnawbe and Mushkegowuk (Ojibwa and Cree) people signed in 1905, 1906 with adhesions in 1929
CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCHER STATEMENT

The writing of this dissertation reflects a spirit of solidarity, reciprocity and dialogue, inspired by the people, land and rivers of the Kistachowan Sipi (Albany River) watershed and the activities of the Paquataskamik Project, a community-based research initiative that has grown in scope and depth since 2006. The doctoral project is a snapshot of a specific moment of history located within a broad and complex set of social relations, situated critically, dialogically within prevailing relations of ruling, rooted in ongoing material transformations of nature and people. The dissertation is aimed at “doing justice” to the new possibilities that erupt though the tension and conflict between the relations of domination and resistance, as people continue to assert cultural ways of being through consciousness and learning, drawing and acting upon critical knowledge in face of “institutional” relations.

It is through the writing-up of the dissertation that has allowed me to recognize the complex and awe-inspiring juncture expressed at this moment, in Treaty 9 territory, as an “outsider” working with people in a place called Peetabeck (Fort Albany First Nation), a place that links to others in neighbouring communities, nearby urban areas, and further-away centres of decision-making. Dialogic relations shaped by capitalist social relations are established via institutional processes. It is at a historical juncture that bears witness to rapidly advancing large scale industrial development, taking place at the same time as a revitalization and expressions of Indigenous ways of being-in-place reappear, and struggles for political and territorial self-determination in the region are reinvigorated. These however are voices still largely inaudible by mainstream Canada.
It is a moment in history that I will locate and analyze through explicating the textually coordinated relations of institutions (Smith 2005, 2006) with regards to the narratives of everyday life and land of the Mushkego Inninowuk of Peetabeck and others who face similar struggles to protect land and a way of life as these are drawn into land use planning and development relations. I use the Inninowuk (Cree) names for site names in many cases, rather than their English equivalents, recognizing local efforts to make visible some of the hidden history and challenging the assumption that colonial naming is complete and unchangeable. It reflects a position on the power of language and naming that I take seriously. This said, I will use English equivalents interchangeably at times, given they are in much greater use currently, especially in the English speaking world, and will allow the reader to access policy references and interviews that use this specific terminology.

My task here is to represent what appears on the surface to be a short period of time with a small group of people, in what many call a remote community of Northern Ontario, but what is in fact a specific, present and actual place, with its rhythms, challenges and developments of the everyday, rather than far/remote, in internal relation, from within its site of meaning-making and extended beyond. I call to attention the challenges facing policy makers in the centres of power, indeed “remote” from people in the Mushkegowuk region, many of whom know little of these lands and lives based on direct experience and relation building. This indeed is a life-shaping, transformative period of time, complex and multi-dimensional and could be represented in a plethora of ways as it articulates with broader political and economic forces at play. I will attempt to do justice to its complexity, as I present a version of events here necessarily limited by
time and the subjective choices of the researcher, which are explicitly rooted in concerns of the community of Peetaback and people of the Treaty 9 region.

My aim, explicitly, is not to represent the voices of Inninowuk. I have taken on the role of learner and colleague, sometimes offering skills as educator, facilitator or research support, primarily paying attention to what people convey that they are currently experiencing or have historically survived in relation to colonialism, marginalization and dispossession, in defense of an Inninowuk way of life. My intention is to act in consequence as an ally, based on critical engagement in a broader context of capitalist social relations, commitment to praxis and the emancipatory goals of community-based research. The standpoint I take in relation to this dialectical historical materialist and institutional ethnography study is perhaps best described in the narrative presented in the “Entry point” as I enter into a moment, that could be one of many moments over the past few years, that hooks myself up, alongside community members and other First Nation people, to broader textually mediated institutional relations involved in land use planning, protection and development. It is this entry point that has allowed me to grapple with the various points of tension and elucidation that come from working as a non-Indigenous person in an Inninowuk context that brings with her a longer trajectory of working in solidarity with social movements, activism shaping in part the theoretical underpinnings and methodological choices of the research overall.

The assertions in this study arise in relation to the work I do currently and relationships developed within the community over the past 5-6 years that run parallel to my own learning about dialectical historical materialism and critical education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education with my thesis supervisor and thesis group, to whom I am greatly indebted. I will attempt to identify both my own conscious efforts to “start from actuality” (Smith 2005, 2006) in
order to elaborate a theory of social change, embracing the ephemerality of life while critiquing the discursive apparently durable and static representations of organizational forms and space within capitalist and institutional relations. I centre my critique of capitalist social and spatial relations drawing inspiration from the work of Dorothy Smith, Shahrzad Mojab, Paula Allman, David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, Silvia Federici, Himani Bannerji as well as that of Indigenous scholars and activists whose struggles in defense of territory and culture also orient my solidarity and scholarly efforts, including the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Winona LaDuke, Ward Churchill, Leroy Little Bear, Marie Battiste, Leanne Simpson, to name but a few who speak to broader theoretical concerns and global issues affecting Indigenous people, movements, and territories, as well as Mushkego Inninowuk academics, historians and authors especially Louis Bird, Edmund Metatawabin, Jackie Hookimaw-Witt and George Kataquapit, whose written work I was privileged to come across in the writing of this dissertation. I also draw on the work of other critical theorists, historians and educators who seek to foster a revolutionary, praxis-oriented approach to learning and research, challenging conventional assumptions about race, gender and class, and imagine new “possible worlds” through the transformation of dominant social relations.

**Displacement, Dispossession and Nature: From Colombia to Innino Aski**

I began to develop an understanding of displacement and dispossession after I left southern Ontario as a teenager, and long before I would put words to what I was learning. I knew the world of suburbia was not representative of the world “out there”, as hidden as it is in middle class Euro descendent privilege. At the same time, my own familial experiences of loss, having a father who suffered a terrible accident while we were all still young, awakened me to the deeply personal character of struggle, which served as a life-long point of reference. I came to realize
that there were losses far greater than mine however, and many that went beyond personal loss, and spoke of historically rooted violence and oppression, endemic and inherited throughout generations within established social relations that allowed it to be so. I followed a trail that lead me to people and places where I encountered stories of everyday life in face of displacement, conflict and the effects of unwanted development. A crucial piece of my own learning came through the development of strong personal relationships with friends and colleagues in coastal, mountainous and urban communities that maintained a strong sense of history, justice and relationality within their homelands. Their dedication to the celebration of life in face of constant struggle is in many ways what moved me to commit to this doctoral endeavour.

I learned that there are different ways of expressing meaning, of expressing ‘being’ in the world, and that these ways of meaning-making are constantly in tension in face of the subsuming effects of a dominating global economy, read as wide-spread capitalist social relations, that uproot, that re-territorialize, arrange and re-arrange how people live, or couldn’t live, in their homes, on their lands. Exposed to displacement as a violent, systematic expression of development and capitalism in Colombia, South America, I began to see the historical, ecological, cultural, class and gender-based dimensions of the problem. Working alongside Indigenous, African-descendant and Mestizo women, men, workers, farmers and activists in the rural countryside and urban centres, I spent years going to and coming from Colombia. This represented a real awakening for me to the brutal realities of capitalism and resistance, a visceral understanding of Marx’s so-called primitive accumulation of capital, which as others have demonstrated as a continuous, rather than an early stage of capitalism (Harvey, 2003, 2006; Di Angelis, 2001).
No clearer was this continuous character than in Colombia, where violent displacement was a generalized experience of so many, embodied by the Mestizo or Indigenous peasant thrown off their lands to the settlements around the urban centres, forced to work or beg for money and food as their territories are taken over by large landowners for purposes of land speculation; the urban gang member whose Afro-Colombian parents and grandparents were once fisher people from the coast, a historical identity disembodied via the cocaine trade, guns and war; the displaced woman with no husband, he having been forced into the war or disappeared, she having to sell lotto tickets on the side of the road to feed her fatherless children.

The stories were almost always terrible and violent, but also spoke of survival, determination, resistance to the on-going systematic practices, deeply gendered experiences of accumulation, and of constant celebration of life, family, and of the magnificent lands and waters that displaced people remembered in their hearts as if they spoke of yet one more family member.

I also learned about an ongoing complex organized resistance to the ruptures of these deeply rooted relationships to land and community. Resistance manifested in a plethora of forms from messy and contradictory armed struggle to the often overlapping movements based on race, gender and class vindications. What drew me closer were the very diverse experiences and proposals for change in face of the ongoing violence of capitalist accumulation that demanded both a search for commonalities while respecting deeply felt difference, and that this was being achieved in various ways. The call was to overcome contradictions between armed and unarmed resistance, between North and South, between those movements that collectively organized around race, or gender or labour/class, and recognize the truly dialectical character of change.
These movements actively worked to engage each other in fomenting a different kind of social relationality for Colombia amidst the most brutal of repression. Hundreds of thousands of people came together inside and outside the country in on-going mobilizations against globalization and free trade, corruption and impunity, the violence and terror imposed on the civilian population to force them to choose sides in the war and in the economy; they came together in unending acts of solidarity with the landless, poor, and marginalized workers; in face of the cruel and systematic misogyny of war. They came together to support courageous and so-called illegal acts of land re-appropriation in face of brutal repression. Indigenous people have been able to take back land in significant amounts, lost through displacements in the colonial and contemporary periods, such as demonstrated by the Nasa (Paez), located in the south-west of the country, who have regained 70% of their original land-base (CECIDIC, 2001).

Yet the power to suppress was ever present, carried out through direct violence, pervasive acts of development and violence-induced displacement, accompanied by policies geared towards military-driven response to all forms of social dissent, policies that promoted foreign investment that undermined the legally recognized rights of Indigenous and African descendent people to ancestral lands. I began to explore more seriously the connection within formulations of resistance centred on both nature and labour and to question how “policies” of development could be on the one hand, so utterly oppressive, serving for example to violently de-territorialize Indigenous and Afro-descendent people through militaristic development plans such as Plan Colombia (Castro Caycedo, 2001); while also serving to critique and propose on behalf of those left out of development, including policies recognizing the rights and jurisdiction of Indigenous and Afro-descendants eventually entrenched in the Colombian constitution of 1991.
Many of the most visible groups intimately tied their identity and class-based struggles to a contestation of the on-going destruction of nature and rights to a collective form of land tenure. The pervasive attacks on people, their subsistence livelihoods and the destruction of the environment went hand-in-hand. My understanding of this was born during my first visit to Colombia in 1990, but was taken to much deeper places over the ensuing years. And the understanding that accumulation continued to drive the exploitation of people and nature set the stage for the next nearly twenty years of questioning and activisms that went beyond the cordilleras and coasts of Colombia. As we continued to witness the rampant destruction of nature around the world, the parallels to the massive displacements of people became clear. However, and despite working with displacement organizations in Colombia over a number of years and producing a chapter as part of a multi-disciplinary research team investigating Development Induced Displacement out of the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University, I felt that there was a long way to go for the actual transformation of dominant relations leading to displacement, to see governments and institutions be taken to task in ways that could actually name and overcome the contradictions leading humanity down a path of perpetual violence and dispossession.

The sense of bewilderment at the huge and insidious power of globalization and development leading to displacement, the complexity of the grey areas, and the internal struggles to self-reflect and analyze my own role as researcher and activist attempting to understand and approach these multiple issues, could at the best of times be humbling and at the worst, crippling. The promised emancipatory potential of the activist side of this work seemed often stunted by hidden political agendas, personal grievances, miscommunication and sometimes intentional misinterpretation based on political or personal interest. Indeed a renewal in the worth of writing
about such efforts came from a sense of loss in face of stunted activist projects, and the grief that remained given the on-going systematic nature of violence and displacement which I had begun to understand - yet had few places left to express meaningfully. The realization that liberation is a messy, on-going struggle, necessarily a personal and collective fight, brought my own humility to a new level, always having a reference to the deep sacrifices people make in their daily lives in face of the interwoven calamities of globalization, neo-colonization, abuse, conflict and displacement.

I understood that we were all implicated in the relations that gave rise to the brutal realities I had witnessed in Colombia and elsewhere. They were relations spread the world over, whether one gained or lost in the outcome. The brutal reality was that as we entered further into advanced capitalism our actions were increasingly mediated via policies that centred on relations based on accumulation. That in fact, accumulation relations were all around us, and we use them and participate in them, in our everyday exchanges and activities. In Canada, as much as any other developed nation, the visible or mainstream history is written from within these relations. We live as part of the national project that is Canada, based on a history where Indigenous peoples have been displaced, miners have been exploited, and forests intensely overharvested. We live the outcome of these relations daily where the struggles of Indigenous people, of labourers, of all those who have been historically left out of the great wealth they were pivotal in creating, are overshadowed in an overall sense, histories subverted to the story that is Canada, written by those who have gained most from these unequal relations. In the “great land of lakes and rivers” people now talk about how even the power of nature, embodied by once rambunctious waterfalls and rapidly moving rivers, has been subdued.
My own sense of history began to be shaped in very new ways and drove me to learn about the country within whose borders I was born, and indeed, to eventually question those very borders. During the 1990s and first decade of the 21st Century, I found myself working in some of what are considered the more remote areas of Canada – North West Territories, rural New Brunswick, and the James Bay region in Northern Ontario, and learned more directly about a similar history of displacement and dispossession in rural and First Nation/Métis communities. The evidence of Canada as shaped by a racist, colonialist history of capitalist displacement-producing relations was everywhere, persisting in a plethora of ways and leaving deep wounds inherited by new generations. I became determined to understand how these relations continue to threaten lives and ways of being of people in this country, what it meant for my own life and kind of world within which I desired to live. I learned about my own history from the time the Irish were displaced from their homelands under English colonial rule, to the eventual establishment of a colonialist country called Canada. I discovered that, hidden and outside of mainstream consciousness, the dominant relations of capital were ever pervasive.

My aim became to foster a more nuanced understanding of displacement-producing relations and ways in which people resist and sometimes overcome what has been thrown at them over the course of decades, centuries. At the heart of displacement and dispossession is a rupture in a direct relationship with nature, although we can never separate ourselves, as much as our tendency to abstract this relation makes it appear as such. As critical Marxist-feminist and ecology scholars remind us, we are material beings, and live from what our labour produces from nature, a deeply gendered and “raced” process within capitalist social relations (Marx, 1977; Engels, 1960; Mies and Shiva, 1993; O’Connor, 1998; Clark, 2005; Harvey, 2003).
I wanted to explore and be able to better articulate how ruptures in our relationship with and within nature are related to the exploitation and displacement of people, and look for ways of transforming the relations and conceptual practices that give rise to this reality. So I took on a broad project that was to envelop my intellectual and activist life: to research and act in face of the displacing and dispossessing web of hegemonic relations that disrupt our more intimate and reciprocal relationships within nature and among people.

The exploitation of nature in Canada has systematically gone hand-in-hand with the exploitation and expropriation of Indigenous people. While we are all involved in the complex displacing social relations of capital, it has been working alongside First Nation communities, the Mushkego Ininowuk of James Bay in particular, that has painted a clear picture of just how our relationship with nature is being transformed. Amid the murky federal and provincial politics and policies affecting life, land and development in the North, when one listens, there is much insight to be gained by people who maintain a way of life and ability to celebrate despite the havoc wreaked via colonialism and capitalism.

I first found myself in Fort Albany First Nation in 2005, as director of a summer literacy program for Mushkegowuk youth. It was full of challenges, not the least being the English-only curriculum in an Aboriginal community context where Ininowuk (Cree) is the primary language. As with so many aspects of life in James Bay, the fact that Ininowuk is a language rooted in land is evidenced in visceral, lived ways, is a fact undervalued by governments as funding for Aboriginal language programming has been sporadic and insufficient at best. The importance of language for the cultural well-being of people in the community was voiced as a real and urgent concern by a number of adults I had conversations with at that time. It was evident that literacy should be so much more than reading and writing English, but about a way
of living and expressing Inninowuk life, of facing the threats of displacement to a collective way of being.

In the end the experience created a connection to people in the community that would remain close to my heart and to which I would soon return to continue conversations about literacy, critical learning and traditional territory. I went back to the First Nation in 2006 for about a week, invited to facilitate a workshop with mostly non-Aboriginal and a few Aboriginal teachers and students at the local school about school-community relations. I was invited as someone involved more in community development than curriculum to help bridge what was perceived as a wide social divide between the school teachers and the wider community. The main topic that emerged was related to the importance of respecting Aboriginal cultural concepts for learning that should inform school curriculum. The community had expressed concerns about their children’s learning of Cree culture – or lack of learning – while at school. The mostly Euro-descendent teachers expressed their legitimate hesitancy about discussing Cree culture, and many felt locked into the provincial guidelines that they had been hired to teach by. There was an evident, historically-rooted and systematic problem that laid intense pressure on both community members and teachers in ways that set them up in different, often contradictory ways. As long as the Mushkegowuk did not have the ability, which had been entrenched in principle within the Treaty, to protect their way of life through appropriate education, these contradictions would necessarily persist. But it was much more than a question of funding. This had to do with a growing institutionality in Ontario and Canada that promoted standardization and “measurable outcomes” based largely on realities outside Aboriginal communities. And in an era where education is increasingly geared towards training for the needs of neoliberal capitalist markets, particularly extractive industries in the region given its long and expanding history of resource
based economies, the pressures and mixed messages about the best approach to education continue to be overwhelming.

Responses to the problem were not easy to navigate but had to do with questioning the displacing effects of provincial policies and ways of opening new spaces for supporting an already existing, historically rooted Mushkegowuk relationality with land and among people. It had to do with questioning the relations that gave rise to the current disjuncture, and opening spaces for understanding these relations as something deeper than surface tensions between individuals.

My own previous work on displacement in Colombia served as a reference point for what was being expressed in the community-school dialogue. The importance of cultural learning to generate a sense of meaning within a specific territory was at the heart of this community’s struggle to remain on their land and continue being who they are. The obstacles and tensions facing the Mushkegowuk to be and express who they are in their own land were all around them. This reminded me of others I had worked with. It spoke of the histories that had been under recognized but that were refusing to be concealed. It spoke of historical struggles that arose in face of displacement and exploitation that had developed new expressions in an age of development policy and institutional relations.

Throughout the 20th Century, the Mushkegowuk of James Bay were being driven from a migratory way of life based on hunting and trapping on vast, immeasurable reaches of traditional land, to sedentary reserve life, after Residential School policies were implemented to extract children from traditional livelihood practice (Long, 2006, 2010), which set out to “alienate the people from the land” (Bird, 2005, p.53). Subsequently, provincially-funded schools were brought onto reserves, partly in compensation for the cultural repression, physical violence and
emotional abuses wrought on the community during the missionary and residential school period. Today, large-scale development looms all around, with one of the biggest diamond producers in the world, having set up a large diamond mining operation in the territory, and with an alarmingly large number of new mining claims staked throughout Treaty 9 peatlands, including the most recent public announcement of a massive chromite deposit twice the size of Prince Edward Island, named the “Ring of Fire”, located in the heart of Inninowuk traditional territory (“The Ring of Fire”, 2011). ¹

What became clear was that the inherent links between identity, land and learning had not died with the forced uprooting from the migratory way of life to life in the reserve settlement, nor had the processes of dispossession and marginalization ended. Indeed the Mushkegowuk, continue to maintain and foster cultural and material relationships within the territory through inter-generational learning on land, and in face of the effects of policy processes born of and made more complex since, the early colonial days. Current problems are clearly linked to colonial policies and legislation such as the Indian Act.

As evidenced in the following interview:

[There are] no resources to go out on land and maintain trap lines…you have to use lands for government to recognize that people are living on traditional lands, right now everyone is squeezed onto the reserve, and that’s it, we’re just “kids” and we’re “wards of the government”. People don’t understand these put-down words, like “wards of the state” if they understood they’d put a stop to it, ask for re-dress, no one understands these politically correct terms…There is no power in the Indian Act…only power under the IA is to pull out weeds and get rid of them. We are told to stay put inside the reserve, stay in the reserve and don’t do anything…(Interview with adult male from Fort Albany)
Driving the community forward based on the maintenance of strong familial and community relations, are the historical experiences, knowledge and continued land practice in relation to what it means to be Mushkegowuk, tied to the swampy lands in which people live, contained within the Inninowuk language, still spoken in the communities. The hunting and trapping trips to camps throughout the summer, or during the school year’s goose break or cultural break ensured that many young people were still either witnessing the older generation engage in meaningful land-based activities or engaging directly in them themselves.

At the same time, adults in the community sometimes expressed a sense of loss for their children’s generation, decrying the deterioration of Inninowuk (Cree) language skills; the dramatic increase in the use of computerized games in contrast with land-based activities; the social problems and out-migration of adolescents for education or jobs. Yet these were also recognized as “realities” of the new generation and were not necessarily seen as contradictory to a Mushkego Inninowuk way of life. The deep pull to maintain and foster a Mushkegowuk identity as tied to land was clear.

I first answered a call, before I began my PhD work, from the Economic Development Officer in Fort Albany, who sought my involvement on the development of a research project related to climate change and traditional knowledge. Following the collaborative proposal writing experience, which went unfunded, this colleague was to unexpectedly show up for a course I was teaching at Algoma University on social movements and globalization in 2006, just before I began my PhD.

The course served as a platform for developing a common understanding that was to become the basis for our continued efforts in proposing studies for collaborative community research in Fort Albany First Nation. As I began my doctoral studies a few months later, I was
encouraged to return to the community of Fort Albany to carry out research. It left me with the significant task of carrying out my own deepened reflections on what it means to engage in research, the kind of research I wanted to do, decolonizing, critical research, that could challenge and perhaps transform the relations that give rise to displacement and dispossession I had been exposed to throughout the years. I thus set out to develop a program of research that was to become the centre of my attention, activities and scholarly efforts over the ensuing five years.

**Limitations of the Research**

The constraints of time and distance in the development of this study were strangely less than originally anticipated. I was able to travel to the community and meet with community members on an average of about three times a year since 2006, at times for extended periods of up to two weeks, and longer in a couple of cases. I also met with people outside the community on many occasions, such that I felt very much a part of ongoing conversations and “in-dialogue” with actualities of community life. As outlined in my introduction, I was also able to participate in a number of meetings, conferences, workshops, conversations, interviews and other activities related to my work outside of the community, which gave me insight into a broad realm of social relations that gave meaning to the Institutional Ethnography undertaken. Indeed it is not until an Institutional Ethnography project is “written up” that one actually encounters the vast web of texts and relations involved and does the detailed work of explicating the textually mediated “institutional workings” that needed to be covered, which can never be done in its entirety.

As such a number of potentially important political spaces of dialogue were not possible to explore in depth, including the texts, sites of work and coordination produced by Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) in relation to their “Northern Table” governance discussions (later known as Oski-Machiitawin, or New Beginning) with the province on jurisdictional issues related to land
use planning in Treaty 9 territory; as well as important sites of resistance and “alternative
development proposals” springing up across Treaty 9, including that of Kitchenumaykoosib
Inninowug (Big Trout Lake First Nation) as well as the communities of the Mushkegowuk area
who are working on collaborative proposals to develop an approach to watershed protection and
have surfaced the concept of a “cultural corridor” that binds communities, rivers, and ecological
systems in a conception of space and territory that moves beyond the provincial formulations and
mapping in the area. In my attempts to gain insight from a broad cross section of people involved
in the text processes of the ”Far North Land Use Planning Strategy” while privileging the
narratives and perspectives of people from Fort Albany First Nation, I found myself limiting the
number of “ministry officials” and “developers” I could converse with in formal interviews, and
as such relied on informal phone and in-person conversations, textual information available in
meetings and on websites (which shifted and changed over the period of study and may now be
dated), as well as public announcements and news material. Perhaps the greatest limitation is in
the area of “possible worlds” that I have only been able to point to in brief moments through the
course of writing, and which could be the focus of an entirely new dissertation, where the life
worlds of the Mushkegowuk would be adequately represented, on the terms of people who live
in the region, in its complexity, richness, one that proposes a new type of relationality with
settler society that shifts the displacing tendencies so prevalent in the contemporary period.

The Mushkegowuk lifeworld and “possible other worlds” in contemporary social
arrangements, act as an undercurrent that moves the river of this story forward, perhaps only
perceived and made apparent during brief moments, but what in essence is the source of its
strength and movement forward. Thus begins the narrative of this research study.
CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

The stories of the northern terrain where this research derives its inspiration belong to the Mushkego Inninowuk (Swampy Cree) people who have been immersed in these landscapes for thousands of years, historically deriving their sustenance, cultural and spiritual well-being from the land and waters upon which they continue to live. The territory, land or “aski” is considered by people as deeply shaping their identity as Mushkego Inninowuk, offering them a language, a way of life that has taught them that there are six seasons, how to survive them, and how to organize and govern their communities. Language speakers especially continue to express a consciousness of land not as separate from them, but as integral to a broader set of familial and productive relations, of which they, animals, the water, rocks, plants are all related, a highly complex history that has been passed on orally and more recently, through written text (Bird, 2005, 2007).

This way of expressing life, learning and land relations has been largely hidden to, by and within the capitalist relations and institutional processes taking hold, as large-scale extractive industry increases in pace and scale, exploring, extracting, and largely excluding through the politics of neoliberal development. These politics drive new policies that in effect lead to new discourses and arrangements with local people coming into tension with their external goals and perspectives not consistent with their own. For the people who live here, the territory is vast, still traveled and known, still resisting the boundaries and divisions produced through the relations of accumulation and private property, which are rapidly descending under an objectifying gaze that
produces both “absolute” and “abstract” space (Lefebvre, 1974/2009) while obfuscating the everyday lived experience of people and the place they call home.

**Territory, Treaty and Organizational Relations in Innino Aski**

Mushkego Inninowuk territory, along with that of other Indigenous groups lies within the political boundaries of Treaty 9. Nearly two thirds of the surface of Ontario is under treaty, (including Treaties 3 and 5). Treaty 9, signed in 1905, represented an agreement (both oral and written) between the provincial and federal governments on behalf of King Edward VII on the one hand, and Anishnaabe (Ojibwa) and Mushkego Inninowuk (Cree) people on the other. The treaty was signed in communities over the course of the year (1905), when the signing at Fort Albany took place) and in 1906, with adhesions added later on in 1929 and 1930 in other First Nation communities (Long, 2010). The treaty has meant many things to many people who live in or are involved in the region, and has deeply shaped Indigenous-settler relations. The century following the treaty signing represented a critical juncture for Mushkegowuk, as they began to be pressured and forcibly removed from a sustenance mode of production and practice of Shabatowan (a traditional Innino way of life) with the accompanying loss of culture, language and governing control over land.

In the face of deeply traumatic experiences of forced assimilation, displacement and dispossession, the Cree people of the Northwestern region of Ontario resisted and organized over the course of the 20th Century in overt and subtle ways. The Indian Brotherhood and the Grand Council Treaty No. 9 were two early manifestations of the struggle for cultural survival and self-determination where, as one of the founding members Chief Andy Rickard summarized, “there was a very elaborate and functional system of government before the arrival of the white man” and the task at hand included “dealing with the problem of regaining resources which will allow
the people to move toward self-determination…[and] recognise the need for local economic development” (“Voices of the North”, 2010). A spirit of resistance to the impositions and maneuverings of colonialist and exploitative extractive practice, such as the toxic pollution produced by the Reed Paper Company (“Voices of the North”, 2010), was carried forth through the years, and lead to the formation of current Indigenous organizations in the Treaty 9 area, including Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN). Women are less visible in the historical written accounts of resistance, but have played a central role in the persistence of the Inninowuk way of life and contestations to dominant institutional impositions. Today women’s organizations and initiatives abound, including those arising in Fort Albany First Nation

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (known as Grand Council Treaty 9 until 1983) was established in 1973 as the regional organization representing the political, social and economic interests of the people of the Treaty 9 area (as well as a portion of Treaty 5) in Northern Ontario (NAN, 2009). Within the Treaty 9 area, Mushkego Inninowuk live mostly along the coasts of James and Hudson Bay, with some having moved further inland. The Mushkegowuk Tribal Council (MTC) is the regional organization set up in 1984 by Chiefs and Councils of 7 First Nations within Mushkegowuk territory to have “effective political representation on their united interests and concerns” (Mushkegowuk Tribal Council, 2009). Fort Albany First Nation is both a member of the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council and constituent community of Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Mushkegowuk territory is located within the overall NAN, or Treaty 9 territory. (See Figure 1).

Both NAN and the Mushkegowuk Council, in dialogue with local chiefs, councilors, band office workers and community members, play a significant role as broker in the institutional relations developed between the provincial and federal governments on the one hand and Mushkegowuk communities on the other. NAN has taken strong political positions on recent
legislations including the *Mining Act* (Bill 173) and the *Far North Act* (Bill 191), among others, and has been involved in negotiating development projects, assessing treaty issues for potential re-negotiation, tracks and evaluates any government legislation that have, or could have an effect on their constituent communities.

Figure 1 Map of Treaty 9 Communities
A Daunting Policy Landscape and the *Far North Act*

Over the past few years, the policy arena has become particularly daunting as development interests have greatly intensified in the region, and multiple interests have emerged, often conflicting with First Nation interpretations of protocols, consultation processes and the “rules” for development and environmental protection. Many policies are an attempt to appease growing unease with the “status quo” development practices that have allowed for largely unrestricted and externally defined and controlled extractive practices. Whether they do what they set out to do is a question for debate and careful research.

Current policy processes focus on land-use planning, environmental protection, green energy, mining, and forestry. Moreover, a great deal of official literature has been produced relating to “Aboriginal Economic Development” while the “New Relationship Fund” has been established parallel to that, in order to “...help Aboriginal communities and organizations across Ontario participate in meaningful consultations with government and the private sector” (Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs [MAA], 2011). The New Relationship Fund has established a “Core Consultation Capacity” component to “better engage with government and the private sector on lands and resources issues” (MAA, 2011).

Despite the misgivings of many First Nation people, organizations and allies, significant legislations, are being moved forward at a furious pace, largely out of sync with the rhythms of community members who are expected to actively participate in decision-making about what takes place within their ancestral territories. The terms are often confusing and overwhelming and serve to stunt active participation, highlighting a growing divide between the everyday experience of people and the bureaucratic “speak” and workings of institutions. An early interview with a community member in Fort Albany highlighted this situation:
The governments are creating confusion in Indian country by using these technical words to hid behind: governance, land use, environment, economic development…they are all chopping things up, people get confused, what’s everybody hiding under? (Interview with male adult, Fort Albany First Nation)

Quick workshops, consultations and information sessions mostly in urban centres such as Timmins, Thunder Bay or Sudbury, take place regarding new developments in the Treaty 9 region, with the occasional 1-2 day visit from officials to the communities themselves. The Ministries of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM), Natural Resources (MNR), the Environment (MoE) and Aboriginal Affairs (MAA) are all actively engaged in policy development in Innino Aski and Treaty 9, now referred to regularly as the “Far North” by the provincial ministries. New policies or “text processes” run alongside private sector developments in the area of alternative energies, natural resource extraction, roads and transmission lines among others.

These textual, or policy, developments however accompany a dearth of information available at the level of affected communities and the general public about the environmental, social and learning implications of what is currently underway. As policy processes unfold at an intense rate, legislations concerning land-use planning, protection, and development including mining, energy and forestry, are often in place within a short period of the public consultation process. And despite ongoing tensions about the validity of consultations with First Nation communities in Ontario on legislations set to have a vast reach, there is precious little material available about how these policy processes are actually “put together”, and what the effects of the process are on life and land. As people are offered training in the technical aspects of planning and industry, education and learning become “capacity building” for development jobs,
rather than for critically engaging with policies and addressing issues that stand to affect land, people and the generations to come. People are offered small amounts of funding for planning and development, rather than meaningful spaces for dialogue and engagement towards fostering self-determination. Communities are left to their own devices to further this kind of learning and these kinds of discussions. Indeed there is far less research from a critical historical materialist perspective that contemplates implications of legislative developments for people in the region north of the 51st parallel, in relation to learning, consciousness and the spatial and territorial dynamics at play.

This study takes place at a time when the provincial (Ontario) “Bill 191: An Act with Respect to Land Use Planning and Protection”, otherwise known as the Far North Act, was in process of being produced. The legislation is a material and complex representation of how space and jurisdiction are constituted in Indigenous territory drawing on the contested discourses and dialectics of provincial planning, development and environmental protection. The process draws on the coordinated work and involvement of many, willing, unwilling, as well as unsuspecting people, over the course of what appeared to be a short two years between the Premier’s first announcement in July 2008 (“Protecting Ontario’s Northern”, 2008) and the bill’s royal assent in late 2010 (Ontario Legislative Assembly, 2010) but has a longer history rooted in already-established organizational work that is not immediately visible. Indeed the bill draws on a broader set of institutional discourses, relations and processes underway, and relies on what Dorothy Smith (1999, 2005, 2006) has called the “relations of ruling” that permeate and hook people up through a kind of unexpected learning that takes place as these relations expand. Indeed the collisions and collaborations between industry and environmentalists, reflected in the dialogic disciplinary discourses of development and protection, coordinate their protagonists
within the legislative process, and represent a rich dialectical background for exploring the implications of consciousness and learning for all involved in the production of the legislation, ultimately standing to affect people and land in the Treaty 9 region. As large scale development moves forward, so produced is the management of the environmental problems it generates. And few other places on Earth represent an area with such vast ecological importance and “development potential” than this one, home by official accounts to more than 24,000 Indigenous people (Ontario Newsroom, 2010) whose ancestral territory has come squarely under a global development gaze. Ontario, and Northern Ontario more specifically, holds the “promise of significant jobs, energy and material sources” to generate wealth in an ever exclusive neoliberal marketplace, in a region increasingly “open for business”, reflected in provincial policies across ministries. (“Ontario Open for Business,” 2011; “Bill 68: open,” 2010; "Places to grow," 2011).

In face of this vast economic pressure, ecological systems stand to be greatly impacted. The ecological importance of the James and Hudson Bay lowlands cannot be understated as it provides a vital ecological function for the health of region and indeed the planet itself (Riley, 2011), deemed extremely important in relation to off-setting carbon emissions (MNR, 2010b). Yet conventional large-scale development saw a steady increase over the past decade with an unprecedented number of mining claims alone in and around the Ring of Fire (Gorrie, 2010), which increased over the period of time that the Far North Act was in process of development between 2007-2010, from 35,385 to 90,579 claim units (MNR, 2010b). By 2007, the rally cry from scientists around the world was circulated in the form of an open letter:

In a letter released today and addressing all Canadian governments - provincial, territorial and federal - 1,500 highly respected scientists from more than 50
countries around the world call for protection of Canada's Boreal Forest. The
scientists identify the 1.4 billion acre Canadian Boreal Forest as one of the largest
intact forest and wetland ecosystems remaining on earth. (Canadian Boreal
Initiative, 2007)

Despite this, development interests have surged and continue to increase, providing a strong
impetus for environmentalists to urge community-based land use planning in the area as a
strategy of environmental protection. Drawing on experiences with another provincial (MNR)
planning process in the south of the province called, Ontario Living Legacy (OLL), part of the
“Lands for Life” process that began in 1999 (OntORA, n.d.) to manage intense forestry
activities, a new planning process was proposed for the “unorganized territories” of the region
north of the 51st parallel, initially known as the Northern Boreal Initiative (NBI) (“Northern
Boreal Initiative”, 2001). As it built upon an already established framework of planning, the
development and consolidation of a new “planning area” and set of jurisdictional relations would
thus begin to be constituted through a complex textually mediated and official process authorized
and legitimated by the province, coordinating the work and relations of a plethora of organized
groups and people.

Regional and local First Nation organizations, including Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN),
the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council and local First Nation band offices, while either vocally
opposed to or tacitly supportive of the bill, participated in the spaces opened by the province, and
were coordinated into the institutional workings that presented both possibilities and risks in
terms of enhancing the jurisdictional realm of their constituents and band members.

Developers, civil servants, scientists, academics, consultants, public officials, media,
lawyers and other experts were brought into the public debate on planning north of the 51st
parallel, touted in some instances as a panacea for both the under-development of First Nation communities and to address ecological threat due to development; and in others as a form of continued exclusion of First Nation people from the real benefits of development while not doing enough to mitigate development’s far reaching effects on the environment. This contradictory landscape added to parliamentary discussions and divisive debate between political parties about the oppositional stance taken by representative groups like NAN whose resistance to the legislative process was clearly articulated in statements such as, “[t]he Far North Act is viewed by First Nations in NAN as an invalid law and a new form of colonialism” (NAN, 2011). Indeed, the overt rejection of the Act was also utilized to further a discursive terrain that served to produce the legislative process, even in its contestation. The text process depended upon moments of public dialogue, “consultation” and engagement, seemingly no matter what they were.

Indigenous people were effectively placed in a tenuous position of uncertainty about what the effects of such far-reaching legislation would be, speaking to the broader concerns of governance and jurisdiction over “lands and resources” and the desire to have more control over the process unfolding in their territories as they understood they should have, under treaty. The legislation, which sets out the rules for development, protection of land as well as “approves” the areas that people identify to use for other local/cultural purposes, began to frame how people would think and talk about development and the environment before the legislation would even come into being. The textual process underway would pose important questions about consciousness and learning as people’s lived experiences were fragmented into the language of planning, and oriented to a provincial jurisdictional regime that seemed to erode the centrality of the treaty in the settler-Indigenous relationship.
As it took up such significant discursive space in the realm of decision-making about land and the activities that could take place therein, the question of the treaty, already replete with tension and divergent interpretation, is yet to be resolved, predicted to be, instead, opened to deeper debate through direct contestation, perhaps battled out in the courts if not through direct actions of resistance, if the history of Indigenous land struggle and occupation in Ontario and Canada is any indication (Hall, 1991; Borrows, 2005). Indeed, resistance to imposed, externally driven development, has been visible in the Treaty 9 region in more than a few recent cases, perhaps most highly publicized in the dispute between Kitchenamaykoosib Inninowug (KI) and Platinex Inc., that saw the courts sentence the Chief and Council of KI to six months in jail after peaceful protests against the company took place on their lands (Mining Watch Canada, 2008). The courts eventually released the leaders and the province was required to pay reparations to the company. A recent Watershed Declaration and Consultation Protocol, developed by KI (Kitchnuhmaykoosib Inninuwug, 2011), attests to continued efforts for the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and continuing clamour for clarity and action unfolding in the region concerning environmental problems instigated by the large scale exploitation of the environment.

Looking at the relations that are historically produced within the actual text processes of planning, protection and development, we begin to see that there is much more at play. Conflicts and differences over the “power to decide” about development, about the land, about life in the territory, are ever present. Yet the texts themselves serve to orient relations, opening possibilities for development, triggering cooperation or dismay, bringing people together to discuss and negotiate, coordinating people into roles, those with power to develop, the authority to “protect” and regulate, and those who resist these impositions.
As public policy and legal frameworks set out the sequences for how development can take place (and how it cannot), and people respond through resistance or acquiescence demonstrated through their own alternative declarations or development agreements, it begins to become apparent that the text itself plays a “coordinating” role in these relations, one that shapes activities that unfold in diverse locations across the North. As local responses to development trigger established texts rooted in broader scientific, economic, environmental ways of seeing and naming the world around us, a type of dialectical learning takes place. While people continue to root their concerns in their everyday experience and fight for its continued practice, they face the fight to do so in face of the objectifying power of texts. Abstraction that leads to disengagement between ideas about nature and lived experience rooted in a productive relationship with the land and waters comes to define debate. A new way of engaging in environmental politics is born of the abstracting, reified debates that further us from lived experience. Indeed this ironically begins to constitute a new “green” politics in Ontario and Canada more generally.

How does this process of abstraction, of the reification of nature unfold historically in the northern regions of Ontario, where multiple categories of nature have been elaborated in texts and policies, since the first arrival of European settlers, while the abstraction of ways of knowing is continually resisted by First Nation people? Posing this question acknowledges a vast and powerful set of discourses that has materially and historically affected the lives of people in the region and beyond, as well as the resilience of people in face of such objectification, and raises other questions that merit exploration, as the new period of Northern development takes hold. This period is characterized by the appearance of discourses around green development, Aboriginal economic development, environmental protection and land use planning, as
development politics in Northern Ontario grows to new heights and complexities, and adequate approaches to problems generated remains out of sight. Are policies aimed at promoting land use planning, development and protection, emphasizing economic opportunities for First Nation people really advancing what they purport? If they are not, what is actually at play?

This investigation thus stumbles upon some of the “higher level” jurisdictional questions as they became evident over the course of working in the community of Fort Albany, and being exposed to institutional processes that were unfolding at that time in places like Timmins, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Ottawa and Toronto. Important questions arose such as how, despite assurances to the contrary, is it that the provincial land use planning process could appear to have more material weight and presence than the federally governed Treaty, an agreement, as problematic as it is at times, that represents the foundational relationship and agreement between First Nation people in the region and settler governments? What are the mechanics and relations of the process that has made this possible? Every official response seems to be that the Treaty will not be compromised in the process of applying the legislative rules of Bill 191, yet it seems to be a gamble that the entrenched rights and responsibilities for First Nation people to maintain their ways of life and access to lands is not compromised by the authority of the province to ultimately decide what this means, especially in a context of economic aperture in the region. Through the legislation it appears the provincial government is afforded the ability to effectively and broadly regulate what happens on land, and subsequently what people do on that land, throughout the Treaty 9 region, in ways they did not previously do or actively pursue in earlier historical periods.

Through this investigation I have thus set out to trace, through the use of Institutional Ethnography as method, just how the ruling relations of provincial land use planning unfold
within the context of development, through textually mediated processes, paying attention to its effects on people and their territories, as it coordinates myself as researcher-activist and people in local sites, to others elsewhere. I will explicate the ideological problems and dialectical relations involved in the production of the text process, with the intention of critiquing not the work of policy-makers, civil servants and the like, but the text process itself, the textually mediated and institutional forms of organizing social relations, and effectively land relations, which are unfolding with the involvement of these and other people whose work is centred on the region north of the 51st parallel. These standardizing forms of land management are dependent on the work of people in organizations, institutions and that of people in their everyday worlds, who take up established forms of viewing “nature”, managing the “environment”, and planning for development, providing a rich site for exploring learning within the context of neoliberal capitalist relations. Moreover, if done well, a critique of the textually mediated institutional process can serve to illuminate the ways in which we, whether, activists, researchers, community members, policy makers, civil servants, members of parliament, environmentalists and so forth, can better act to change the problematic relations that haunt settler-Indigenous history in the contemporary period.

**Research Choices, Methods, Questions and Dissertation Chapters**

As a Euro-descendent not from Fort Albany First Nation or the Treaty 9 region, invited to carry out research as an ally/colleague/researcher/educator, I have found myself grappling with the many problems associated with research in and with Aboriginal communities in a general sense, confronted with the normative assumptions established through conventional research relationships that seem to inevitably come to bear on written research efforts. There has been an important problem of representation and authorship that has followed me throughout this
endeavour as I seek to privilege the voice and story of the Mushkegowuk while being precisely aware of my own positionality as from “outside the community” and responsibility as researcher and writer of the content of this study.

My choice is thus not haphazard to utilize Institutional Ethnography (IE), drawing on Participatory Action /Community Based Research (PAR/CBR) and narrative, woven into my overall approach to this inquiry. These represent long-sought alternatives to conventional research joined with efforts to maintain an empirical line of inquiry that fosters a depth of integrity to the research that may otherwise be unachievable in relation to the topic at hand. IE has allowed for a shifting of focus from the study of people, to the study of text/policy processes and the institutional relations of land use planning, protection and development that play a role in shaping the consciousness and lived experience of people who work and reside in the region. CBR on the other hand has allowed for an active, lived, and meaningful engagement alongside people who stand to be most affected by these text processes and who offer compelling historically informed accounts of being-in-place that run counter to dominant notions of what it means to live meaningful, fulfilled lives. I have come across poignant arguments for the use of mixed methods alongside IE, including the use of autoethnography and narrative, allowing for the voice and standpoint of researchers and the people they work with to be actively present (Taber, 2010; Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson and Sookraj, 2009). It has been the conjoining of IE and CBR along with limited use of narrative that has allowed for the specific findings of research to both critique and propose, to trace both how powerful, dispossessing relations of property and accumulation play out, while identifying the more important substance of alternative relations and ways of being on land that need to be made more explicit, not as fragments captured within the institutional frames and processes that attempt to represent and
rule over them, but as they actually are lived, in place and time. There is not enough time to do justice to the latter, nor is it my place to singularly represent them, but rather acknowledge, through a critique of the dominant relationality, that there are other modes and ways of being in nature that must be made visible for the sake of them as well as the rest of humanity concerned with how to repair our distraught and exploitative relationship within nature.

I have been motivated, not paradoxically, to move both further within and beyond a critique of capital, by continued strength of a nation of people who are able to speak through the pain of the colonial experience in ways that continue to illuminate and contradict conventional Marxist theoretical assumptions about class, race, gender and the land-based condition. I am grateful for the exposure to new and nuanced readings of Marx that critical educators and scholars have continued to encourage, grounding and bringing to life a theory of the social that speaks to the primacy of lived experience.

The overall study is founded in the day-to-day interactions, the kitchen-table conversations, phone conversations and email exchanges, planned and unplanned research activities and excursions of a community project that I continue to be involved in, local and regional meetings, workshops and conferences, that bring to light a history of exclusion and resistance in ways that will not adequately be represented in the pages of this dissertation. In Institutional Ethnography, once a “problematic” is formed that identifies the complex issues and relations involved in a given textual landscape affecting people, there are diverse approaches to applying its method. The main elements that the researcher must take into account include that the standpoint be rooted in the everyday lived experience of people as they encounter the institutional complex and that it is centred in a critique of ideology and an explication of the textually mediated coordination of work across sites. I accordingly developed my research
approach based on this method that centred on my participation as activist, researcher and ally/friend/colleague in a community project unfolding in Fort Albany which has afforded me insight into the problematic for study. Over the course of 2007-2011, I have also participated in numerous local, regional and provincial meetings and information sessions about policy developments related to the Mushkego Inninowuk and Treaty 9 territory generally and read extensively on topics related to the problematic.

Overall the findings of this research are derived from three main research sites/processes: interviews and conversations; participation in events and project activities where copious notes were made (and sometimes not made but remembered); and primary and secondary literature sources. Specifically, I carried out 23 semi-structured interviews and had numerous (well over 150) conversations with a broad spectrum of people including community members, other First Nation people from the Treaty 9 region, environmentalists, civil servants, ministers, Mushkegowuk Tribal Council and Nishnawbe Aski Nation representatives, scientists, historians, developers, academics and others working in the region. Between the years of 2007-2011, I participated in community project activities that had me accompany community members into the historied landscapes of the Mushkegowuk ancestral territories as well as gave me insight into the institutional workings of project funding processes; I participated in information meetings and legislative public consultation sessions on Bill 191 and the “Far North Strategy”, regional land use planning workshops, public policy events on “Aboriginal Economic Development”, Treaty 9 and the “Far North” taking place in Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, Toronto and Thunder Bay; and public meetings with ministers, planners, and others; conferences on land-related issues including Treaty conferences. I attended public events along with members of Fort Albany, civil servants, environmentalists, academics, consultants, industry representatives and many others
who participated, in often long working sessions, in these “sites of coordination”. During this period, I also examined the rich academic and public domain primary and secondary literature related to this study including First Nation people, land, planning, policy and development in the Treaty 9 region, including the scripts of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario parliamentary discussions related to the Far North Act and policy materials made available by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) on the Far North Strategy, found on the MNR website.

The questions that oriented this study that I set out to address in 2007 were: What are the driving concerns, stories and perspectives of the Mushkegowuk Cree in face of their changing relationships with(in) traditional territory? What are the key policies and policy processes targeting the region that come to bear on the landscapes, territory and people of Fort Albany First Nation? How do these institutional (policy) processes shape consciousness and learning? What role does consciousness and learning play in shaping these policy processes? What takes place among diverse actors in local, provincial, regional and national institutional spaces as these texts are applied, interpreted, resisted and/or re-shaped, with what consequences for people, land and consciousness in the Far North? What are the implications for collaborative and emancipatory learning among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?

It is the writing up of the work that poses the largest problem: what to include and what to exclude, how to do justice to the complexities and nuances of such an important story, in ways that will not distract from the important matters at hand, will not overwhelm the reader, or overwhelm the writer for that matter. This endeavour reflects a conscious effort to engage in a de-colonizing approach to research, in face of the many complex interactions that have arisen, including those with funders, civil servants, ministry officials, other First Nation communities, academic and research institutions, regional Indigenous governing bodies, environmentalists,
developers and legal experts, to name but a few. As activist-researcher an overarching goal is to contribute to Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal collaborations for emancipatory theory and practice in the region and beyond, based on a mutual concern over the ecological integrity of the peatlands/muskeg of Innino Aski and the social and economic well-being of its people.

The chapters of this dissertation are organized so that the narratives and historically relevant material of the community, region and people intersperse with critical analysis giving the reader a sense of the dialectical and historical relations as well as personal perspectives and stories involved. Chapter One has provided an overview to the overall study, offering background to the people, Indigenous organizations, development context and the land use planning and development “text process” under the research gaze. In Chapter Two I examine some orienting background of everyday Inninowuk life and learning and move to a critique of learning within the context of contemporary development and land politics and the dominant emphasis on “learning for employment” arising in relation to “Far North Land Use Planning”. Chapter Three allows for my own self-reflection as a non-Indigenous researcher working in a First Nation context, which has fostered a complex reading of reality that is explained as an ontology of dialectical social relations. As I attempt to privilege Indigenous perspectives while being true to a dialectical historical materialist reading, I draw on both theoretical bodies of work that mutually reinforce the goals of the overall project in critical learning and transformation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. I then describe Institutional Ethnography as a critical method for inquiry that relies on a dialectical historical and materialist understanding of ideology and consciousness, which constitutes a critical approach to learning based on an examination of the objectification of nature and life practice inherent in contemporary institutional relations in the region north of the 51st parallel. In Chapter Four the study delves
further into the “problematic” for study that roots the overall Institutional Ethnography in an understanding of the issues of dispossession and marginalization, related to historical, colonially rooted problems restricting land access and self-determination among Mushkego Inninowuk. I examine how these issues are currently at play in the dialectical relations that unfold in the community project underway in Fort Albany and in relation to the broader Bill 191 (*Far North Act*) legislative process. Chapter Five deals with accumulation-centred development in relation to its ideological trends and practices, and examines the core discursive areas implicated in the *Far North Act*, including standardized notions of the “environment”, the institutional and power-laden history of “protection” and the underlying relations of development that bind both. My intention is to problematize assumptions inherent in neutral representations of protection and development as binary opposites, and discuss these in dialectical relation as they become productive of provincial “land use planning” in the region north of the 51st parallel. Chapter Six sets out to examine and critique standard accounts of land use planning and mapping in Indigenous communities, seeking insight into how land use planning is “put together” as a discourse, and serves to hook people up to specific formulations of development and protection, shaping concepts of land and land practice in ways that affect consciousness, learning and the land itself. Chapter Seven moves into a deeper examination of the planning, development and land politics in the Treaty 9 region, drawing on the discursive practices present in public speech and texts of provincial land use planning. Chapter Eight centres on explicating the dialectical process at play, the specific ways in which people’s work is coordinated across diverse sites through the mediating power of the texts of land use planning. I centre on key moments of textual coordination of work and social relations across locations that hook up local, regional and provincial sites of action and text production. I conclude the dissertation in Chapter Nine with an
examination of the implications of the Far North Land Use Planning text process for learning, consciousness and land development in Innino Aski, reviewing possible routes forward towards a more critical approach to learning among all people involved and interested in addressing the problems produced within colonialist and capitalist relations among settler and Indigenous people that persist today.
CHAPTER THREE

Inninowuk Learning and the Everyday

The Mushkego Inninowuk, including those from Fort Albany First Nation, draw on a rich cultural identity and history in the Treaty 9 region, brought together with other James and Hudson Bay and some inland communities. The people here have a long established collective identity, produced through consciousness of shared territory and shaped historically within an Inninowuk mode of production. People continue to be immersed in land practice, express meaning in the Inninowuk language, and carry forth the words, symbols and norms that permeate “local” institutions that draw on a long history of organizing socially, economically and politically in the region. People continue to develop their cultural and social meaning in face of the alienating, dispossessing, racialized and gendered processes of capitalism brought to the territory during the colonialist period.

First Nation communities continue to maintain a significant presence as the legitimate “collective owners” in the region, a problematic term, but nonetheless relevant in face of the lack of official recognition of their status as people with a legitimate governing authority in the region. First Nation groups are given more weight than others in the planning process as outlined in the Far North Act, but are simultaneously considered “on par” with other groups in the North and subverted to the “social and economic interests of all Ontario” (MNR, 2010). For the Mushkegowuk, the “Creator place them here to live on and protect the land” (Hookimaw-Witt 2006, Bird, 2005, 2007) where they have lived “since time immemorial” and along with other Indigenous people rally for their internationally recognized right to govern as professed in such global treaties as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples passed in 2007,
initially and noticeably without the support of Canada as a signing nation under Harper (“Canada Votes No”, 2007) who eventually signed on three years later in 2010.

Fort Albany First Nation, along with other communities, continue to engage their youth in learning about their territory, and way of life, integrating cultural activities into school curricula and developing Mushkegowuk approaches to formal and non-formal education practices that are specific to them, and in everyday ways that are not represented in text. There is a strong oral tradition, a process in itself which has shaped consciousness differently than that of learning mediated through textual forms. The Mushkegowuk must grapple with both, with two, not necessarily opposing but distinct, complex forms of relating to the world. These are forms passed on through parents, Elders, adults and other knowledge holders in the community as well as those brought in via policies of forced assimilation, institutional education, dominant development, and a plethora of texts that shape the everyday lives of people, how they learn informally, formally and what they must contend with to ensure life continues in a meaningful way despite continued social and economic pressure and the contradictory demands of capitalist accumulation. What Leroy Little Bear expressed as a “collision of ways of relating to the world” in his work “Jagged Worldviews Colliding” (2001) connotes the clash felt and expressed in the everyday world of people as they deal with their marginal status in face of privileged western capitalist “modernity” seeking to incorporate an estranged “Other” that persists and resists its obliteration.

The “collision” described by Little Bear forms the basis of a dialectical relationship between European descendent settlers and Indigenous people, shaped within a dialogue of clashing modes of production, with deleterious effects on people. In the words of a Mushkego Inninowuk former chief and author from Fort Albany, represented here in a public presentation
given at 2009 conference, speak to the struggle to maintain a way of life in face of the dispossessing and displacing effects of accumulation:

We all know that most First Nation people have difficulty adjusting to life in the twenty-first century. For them the [notion that] “economy needs to accelerate” has no relevance and goes against the teachings of the elders that say, in all things we do, it is “for those that are not yet born”. Our people were forced off the land by governments, by Churches, by fur trading companies and now resource companies. When a mining conglomerate offers the Indigenous sector .03% share in the diamond venture, a form of theft is being committed. That kind of mentality determines the future and even as our governments observe the “negotiations”, .03% sets up our young generations to continue fighting over resources. We do however understand our responsibility to represent the position of our young brothers and sisters, the animal kingdom, to keep their environment safe and unpolluted for their own young. (Metatawabin, 2009)

Cultural learning in Fort Albany is rooted on the one hand in “productive” practices that are highly social events, from hunting and preparing moose and geese gifted to families or for special events (Metatawabin, 2008); passing on stories through a strong oral tradition (Bird, 2005, 2007); teaching youth how to work in sustainable logging, gathering fallen trees and turning them into lumber, furniture or buildings (Russell, 2007); spending vast amounts of time discussing and developing programs for cultural camps, activities, celebrations as well as locally driven and university-supported research and educational activities that involve a revitalization of Mushkegowuk history and lived experience out in the broader territory. These are some of the kinds of learning that I have witnessed or have been invited to participate in, to which I come as
a learner, and of which the Mushkegowuk territory has continued to be a central focus, its role and importance to people impossible to understate.

The territory has been the protection and refuge of people against the encroachment of unrelenting extractive development since the arrival of European settlers just a few centuries ago, which has intensified over time, bringing deeply mixed results for people who are offered limited jobs, impact benefit agreements and often less-than-standard services, while being excluded from the “higher level” decision-making as self-determining people in their own land. Despite the 1905 Treaty agreement that promised the ability to maintain a way of life on their land as they always had, in exchange for shared use of the land (Long, 2010), the “sharing” relationship has consistently been undermined, indeed flawed from the outset through the magic of legal interpretation, driving force of capitalist relations, and selective, partial expression of the social relationship manifested in textual format by federal and provincial governments in 1905. The dispossessing effects born of the colonial project have been unceasing, and are not forgotten by the Mushkegowuk or their Oji-Cree and Ojibwa relations throughout Ontario, effects made more subtle and complicated over the past century through the technical and inclusive-seeming development and governance language that textually-mediated institutional processes depend upon, yet people continually resist.

In Fort Albany, I became interested in accompanying what I perceived as a spirit of defense of territory and culture, offering energy to support these efforts, and engaging in a dialectic of mutual learning and teaching. I was certainly a learner in this context, while also invited in to play specific teaching roles in the delivery of courses and workshops and through accompanying a community research initiative and the lines between the learner and educator were constantly blurred as the collaborative and dialogic character of what we were involved in
took over. As the project activities advanced and a critical program of study took shape, it became clear that the community I was working with had been learning ways of surviving the institutional relations of land and development politics for a long time indeed.

**Learning and Contemporary Development Politics**

This project became a critique of dominant conventional thought in adult education where learning is “organized, experienced and conceptualized as a thing or a compilation of things, bodies of knowledge, that some possess (teachers and experts) and others need to acquire (students or learners)” (Allman, 2001, p. 54). Education, as with other disciplines, has fallen prey to the problems of reification so prevalent within capitalist society, particularly evident in Northern places in Ontario, peripheral to urban and political centres that now seek to incorporate them, as the drivers of accumulation seek new resources to tap and new markets to dominate. The focus of adult education takes on new clientele in Northern Ontario in the area of “skills development” and “job training” as education is conceptualized in relation to wage employment, and conditions of marginalization, chronic unemployment and poverty separate those who “need education” from those who control, or are privileged within, the processes of accumulation, possessing “knowledge” to be coveted by those without.

Indeed a critical project of learning centring in a small First Nation community, in the region of Innino Aski, Treaty 9 territory, demands a great deal of delving under the surface expressions of the problems of poverty, marginalization as rooted primarily in unemployment and lack of education, despite these being two very real symptoms of the problem and ones that cannot be ignored. A critical educational project should take us much further however, making explicit the underlying relations and allowing us to see the “problem” under a much wider scope, one that does not lose sight of settler-Indigenous relations, of productive mode, and of the
contested projects of territory, culture, governance and ecology. This study is intended to contribute to such an approach to learning, beyond the reifying tendencies in adult education and conceptualizations of learning that centre our attention on the “results or symptoms of fundamental relations, rather than the relations themselves” (Allman, 2001, p. 55).

In Northern Ontario, and particularly in First Nation communities, we are encouraged by government ministries and funding agencies to see education and learning in the context of capitalist development, as a commodity to be bought and sold. There is a great emphasis on education as “training”, on learning as “knowledge to be obtained”, valued primarily within exchange relations, rather than as “use value” as Rikowski’s (2000) study called Education for Industry explores (as cited in Mojab, 2011, p. 227); rather than in relation to the everyday lives, concerns and ways of producing and reproducing both material and meaningful life in an Indigenous context; and rather than the learning called for by Indigenous scholars throughout Canada to “revitalize Indigenous intellectual traditions” (Simpson, 2008, 2011), to engage people in Indigenous education to “heal and transcend the effects of colonization” (Cajete, 2000), to help people escape the “cognitive prison” imposed by ideological Eurocentric education that draws on artificial constructs of nature to “form the basis for the artificial context of the modern state” (Henderson, 2000, p.11); to re-learn Indigenous teaching through actual experience, storytelling, renewal ceremonies, Aboriginal languages, in order “to maintain relationships that hold Creation together” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 81) and as de-colonizing practice “in and beyond institutions directed by a new politics of difference and an indigenized understanding of sustainability” (Battiste, 2000, p. xiii).

Primary emphasis, rather, is on learning as “training” for employment. Learning about the problems of “development” or “the ecology” broadly speaking, let alone of “cultural forms”
that offer clues to less resource-depleting practices, are vastly subverted to the simple yet forceful drive to provide jobs for specific industries requiring them. This type of learning is severed from the devastating effects of previous colonial educational, environmental and development policies and practices, which are best “left in the past” or to the elected leadership to deal with in negotiations over reparations as is the case with the Residential School Policy, the Radar Clean-Up Sites, and the impacts of large scale mining such as De Beers Victor Mine and the most recent “Ring of Fire” chromite deposit.

Surface learning for “skills training” and “capacity building” is based on a conceptualization that envisions “accessing opportunities” without explaining why only certain opportunities exist and not others, and offers the promise of participation in an expanding capitalist economy that is normalized, a goal to reach in an increasingly competitive marketplace that continues to marginalize and dispossess. A 2010 report of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, “Respecting the Seventh Generation: Voluntary Relocation of Non-Viable Reserves” goes so far as to call for “Indigenous leaders to focus on allowing their communities access to employment and educational opportunities that may mean relocation [of the community]” both interpreting a certain coercive power by leaders over people and the economy, and explicitly linking deterritorialization, education and employment, justified in terms of the “unviability” of settlements rather than the relations that give rise to their difficult conditions.

While First Nations people, their allies, colleagues, ministry contacts, advocates, and the general public, generally know that it is a history of oppression, of colonization rooted in the same accumulation-based relations, that served to displace, dispossess and marginalize Indigenous people from their ancestral territories and ways of life, the efforts to train and educate for employment continue to take precedence. It is within this contradictory landscape that people
from across cultures, disciplines, sectors and professions learn about and are oriented to the texts and policies of land use planning, protection and development.

Specialized knowledges replace critical capacity and run the risk of “dehumanization through specialization” becoming the norm, as the processes of mass extraction and production, characteristic of resource-based industries in the north, take hold. The troubling contradiction expands as experts concentrate their expertise around the financing made available through the government purse, large scale extraction and the specialized productive enterprises linked to it. The contradiction lies in that, as it amplifies spheres of participation, it “simultaneously distorts this amplification by reducing critical capacity through exaggerated specialization” (Freire, 1969/1996, p.34).

Opportunities to be accessed in the region north of the 51st parallel are largely accumulation-centred and demand specialized knowledge, from the “entry level” knowledge required of mining operations, to the expert planner who applies advanced, technical frameworks to organize local and regional ecologies and cultural sites, in face of potential forestry, mining, and hydro developments. Environmental activists straddle the worlds of advocacy on behalf of protecting nature (a nature which sometimes includes and sometimes does not include people), and that of specialized knowledge of the environment, increasingly portrayed in terms of “ecological services”, orienting the imagery of nature and programs for protection to the terms of the neoliberal marketplace (Singh and van Houtum, 2002). Academics, officials, CEOs, professionals, experts of all kinds become entrenched in their own particular disciplines, ministries, and industries, within institutional relations that deeply limit dialogue beyond their own “trenches of interest” yet are profoundly related within the dialectical and materialist relations of capital.
Indeed, the “successes” in the Far North land use planning process, of officially recognized “cross-sectoral” dialogue, are generally limited to discussions of amounts of land to be protected versus land to be developed and how the “cultural values” of First Nation people can be incorporated into the process. Lived knowledge of the Mushkego Inninowuk, the Nishnawbe and Anishnaabe people, runs the risk of becoming fragmented, relevant within a specific section or category of planning and development, dematerialized, taken out of historical and productive context. Attempts to bridge the vast divide between First Nation leaders and federal and provincial governments on jurisdictional problems inherent in the provincial land use planning strategy are stunted and dissolved, with no resolution to the ongoing disputes. While environmentalists, scientists, planners, and other experts may align themselves and are motivated to work with First Nation groups, the specialized disciplines and institutional regulatory regimes they are immersed in discourage and in some cases legally prevent them from taking up critical questions of jurisdiction and stunt their own learning of “ways of being” on land that represent alternatives to the destructive accumulation modes.

It seems impossible today for example, that an environmentalist, scientist, or developer could take a public stand on the issue of land title on behalf of Indigenous people even if they were convinced that it could be a better route for protecting lands in the long run or an important step in righting history and “leveling the playing field”. Funding could be compromised, disciplinary and professional protocols breached, and political havoc unleashed. In the meantime, the projects of territory, cultural rights, ecology, governance and jurisdiction, are left to the realm of elected leaders, government officials, negotiators, and lawyers, with these other “experts” learning the ways in which they can insert their disciplinary knowledge into the process of planning to shape it in ways they view best justified. Some “experts” then are specifically
discouraged to critically engage with the underlying relations of planning and development, while others are authorized as the sole officiators of such negotiation. The broader, “grassroots” First Nation membership are left to “be consulted”, most often in a vacuum, without access to necessary information or the means of critical learning that would allow them to engage more fully in their lives, lands and territorial politics. Learning, with the sole aim of training for the marketplace, sets us all up, from local First Nation leaders, to academics, civil servants, planners, environmentalists and so forth, within a narrow set of differentially regulated rules and protocols, according to our specialized and institutional spheres of work, severely limiting our capacity to critically understand let alone address the processes of dispossession and environmental deterioration facing people in the region, and ultimately the planet.

The texts of “Far North Land Use Planning” are deeply implicated in the surface approach to learning in the area north of the 51st parallel, as they centre on new collaborations with the Ministry of Colleges, Training and Universities that tie learning as “training” to land use planning, in an extension of the new politics of “growth” in Ontario:

Under the ‘Jobs and Growth in Northern Ontario’ initiative in Ontario’s 2010 Budget, a $45M commitment was announced to support a project-based skills training program to help Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Northern Ontarians participate in and benefit from emerging economic development opportunities.

(MNR, 2010)

This $45 million commitment is explained as part of the “Open Ontario” strategy, aimed at the further liberalization of the economy, generating increased competition and attraction of foreign investment. The provincial budget of 2010 directly links the training funds to the biggest mineral discovery in the region, with the training aiming “to help Aboriginal Peoples and northern
Ontarians benefit from developing economic opportunities such as the Ring of Fire. This *Budget (sic)* also announces a Ring of Fire Coordinator to work with all parties to advance the area’s economic promise” (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2010).

“Education as employment” approaches in Ontario reflect broader tendencies within conservative Canada. As examined by Metcalfe and Fenwick (2008, p. 209-225): “Through the unfolding of a multi-million dollar Workplace Skills Strategy (WSS) agency, and the launch of two research agencies, the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the Canadian Council for Learning (CCL), the federal government of Canada has expressed a clear interest in shaping knowledge mobilization and has established conditions for particular forms of knowledge production.” The authors contend that, “Higher education is increasingly placed at an artificial nexus between quality and purpose, with these terms often narrowly defined in relation to regional and national economic interests.” (Metcalfe and Fenwick, 2008, p. 209)

As the “Far North” comes under the widening purview of ministries, companies and others seeking opportunities for energy production, mineral extraction, forestry, environmental protection and land use planning, education and learning in the region is increasingly linked to these agendas following trends south of the border, as “aggressively fostering its attack on the welfare state, unions, non-commodified public spheres, and any critical vestige of critical education, neo-liberal politics makes it increasingly more difficult to address the necessity of a political education in which active and critical political agents have to be formed, educated, and socialized into the world of politics” (Giroux, 2004, p. 494).

The texts of land use planning, become enmeshed with learning for extractive development, within the context of provincial political economy and encourage a reading of land use planning as a source of learning for employment in an ahistorical mode, one that avoids overt
attention to unresolved questions of First Nation jurisdiction while simultaneously setting criteria to bind any recipients of funding to the provincial land use planning strategy within the provincial relations of jurisdiction already established. As evidenced in this text excerpt from a public announcement for the Northern Training Partnership Fund (NTPF) Guidelines - Far North Land Use Planning skills training programme:

**Figure 2 Far North Land Use Planning Northern Training Partnership Fund**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Far North Land Use Planning portion of the Northern Training Partnership Fund (NTPF) will:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Assist Far North First Nation communities in gaining skills required for the development of community based land use plans. These skills will be transferable to subsequent resource-related employment opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Lead to immediate employment within Far North First Nation communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Assist Far North First Nation communities/organizations and MNR to develop long-term relationships and partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Enable Far North First Nation communities/organizations to be better able to benefit from resource-related activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All proposals must involve a working relationship/agreement between the applicant and MNR on Far North land use planning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Far North Land Use Planning strategy has the potential to engage communities in meaningful kinds of learning that may involve, but must go beyond “capacity building” conventional forms of planning, technical learning of mapping tools (such as GIS etc.), and
training for resource industry jobs. The legislation opens a door for engaging in a wider definition of “protection” that includes First Nation conceptualizations yet actual promotion of learning about protection, its complex and problematic history with First Nation communities, legal and institutional framings, and potential routes for First Nation defined protection, is also absent from the “capacity building” emphases in the funding for training. For the Far North Land Use Planning strategy to be effective, a great deal of critical examination of planning, environmental protection and development alongside the history of the region, its people, and settler-First Nation relations, is required for a transformative and revolutionary educational process to actually take hold.

Through learning about the underlying relations of textually mediated policy processes, of how “ideology dominates educational practice…and recognizing the dialectical relationship between thought and practice” (Mojab, 2011, 227) we can begin to imagine a pedagogy that involves critical capacity for making effective decisions about land and envision alternatives in the “context of the universality of capitalism” (Mojab, 2011) that are dependent on consciousness. Deciphering the process of the production, reproduction and taking-up of texts within the realm of land use planning, development and protection will allow for informed choices to be made that can more adequately shape the terrain within which people’s lives play out in ways that, rather than further displacing, may actually work towards their emancipation.
CHAPTER FOUR

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY, COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH AND CRITICAL LEARNING

On the Question of Research and Learning with Indigenous Communities

I first found myself working with people in Fort Albany in 2005, and then coming back in the ensuing years, to visit, to facilitate workshops in the community, for the teachers and others at the local school, to substitute teach at Northern College. I was invited back to work on a small research project working with community members, youth and others, encouraged by community members to gear my PhD work to benefit the community. It was then that I was directly confronted with the challenge of doing this in a way that would respect the people I had come to know, many of whom I considered close friends, as well as permit critical inquiry that was of some actual use to the community, and adequately speak to the complex relations of exclusion, displacement as well as political struggle and cultural revitalization underway.

Questions about the use of Indigenous and western methods and methodologies were immediately heightened. Could I carry out research in an Indigenous setting without somehow working with and drawing from Indigenous epistemology? As a white researcher in an Indigenous community, was this even something that I should consider given the problematic representational issues and confusions it might generate? Perhaps the most grounding question was: where did I want to put my efforts, as activist, ally, and critical educator in the current context of marginalization and dispossession facing people in the community and broader region of Treaty 9?

I took seriously Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s 1999 seminal work on research and Indigenous communities called, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Questions
of power and representation are crucial to all critical inquiry, but especially relevant for non-
Indigenous people, people of privilege and of white background, working in Indigenous contexts
where people must confront a “political economy of whiteness” rooted in “non-Indigenous
discursive practices” (Banerjee and Tedmanson, 2010).

Based on experiences in Colombia and elsewhere, I had taken up these questions before,
was familiar with their complexities, and had been exposed to both the beauty and sometimes
soul-destroying challenges of social movement solidarity work and research, convinced also of
its necessity. But in truth, this was the first time I was on my own to establish routes forward in
such an endeavour, charged with fostering space to collaboratively develop a research process
that contributed, even if in small ways, to the effective transformation of hegemonic modes of
power and production, while opening space for the articulation of voice and goals of people who
have been, and continue to be marginalized, excluded and often rendered invisible through
conventional research.

To engage in such efforts required a change in the conventional relations of research,
towards more collaborative, reciprocal approaches that recognize us all as people facing the
objectifying relations of capital in diverse forms that place especially racialized and gendered
groups in precarious positions. These concerns thus anchored my own methodological choices,
and reflected a long trajectory of learning and perhaps “un-learning” what it means to do
research with Indigenous people and others who have been marginalized, excluded, displaced yet
continue to inspire, organize, reimagine and reorient the hegemonic relations that undermine
their very way of being. I took seriously the work of Indigenous scholars and educators like
(2000), Vine Deloria (1969) and many others who spoke of the Indigenous alterity that was not
meant to be “other” but recognized on its own, in its multiple, diverse expressions rooted in specific Indigenous histories, that spoke for themselves, joined by a desire to repair and revitalize people and their places, that western research had historically set out to subvert.

Important contributions from other Indigenous academics, scholars and educators about the experiences of Aboriginal people articulate clearly what is at stake. The disruption of a non-capitalist, Indigenous ways of being via colonialism and capitalism produced Leroy Little Bear’s (2000) “jagged worldviews”. He refers to strong historical memory and experience of non-capitalist relations among Indigenous people, but one that is now also immersed with a capitalist mode that has produced ruptures in ways of knowing that are often confusing and distressing, creating situations of trauma. James Henderson (2000) also describes the imposition of modes of learning via colonialism that favour abstraction and universalizing principles over the specific and diverse experiences of Indigenous peoples across the Americas. Marie Battiste (2000) argues for an Aboriginal education that recognizes a distinct relationality to nature among Aboriginal people and states that, “To understand how education in Canada continues to suppress or exterminate Aboriginal consciousness one has to understand modern thought.” (Battiste, 2000: 195). These authors, forefront in Aboriginal scholar-educators, clearly allude to differences in modes of production rooted in distinct historical experiences which is crucial for the project of critical education that seeks to radically transform settler-Indigenous relations now immersed in the capitalist dialectic.

In the following pages of this study I do not set out to compare Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learning and education, but rather to delve into an exploration of consciousness as produced within contemporary capitalist relations, involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people involved in the institutional processes related to land, protection and development, in the
region of Treaty 9, called Innino Aski in the Inninowuk language. I became interested in exploring how a text process can generate ideological abstractions about nature, how this plays out in people’s lives and on land. I wondered whether gaining deeper insight into how changing perceptions unfold in relation to institutional policy textual processes could offer something further to understanding the effects or results of the colonialist encounter that has wreaked havoc throughout Indigenous territory. How do “subsistence” or mixed economic modes of producing life encounter increasingly dominant and institutional and textually mediated forms of accumulation and with what effects on people and land? An examination of how these activities take place, increasingly within a capitalist mode of production as a specific organizational form or set of ruling relations, will shed light on how a colonially-rooted policy environment continues to have significant effects on First Nation communities, land and water, and subsequently for Canadian society overall.

I found invigoration in the work of critical race and feminist scholars such as Himani Bannerji (1995, 2011), Shahrzad Mojab (2003, 2010, 2011a, 2011b) and Dorothy Smith (1999, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2006a) that the conventional categories of theorizing racism and sexism did not suffice in the explanations of what was happening for people in places like the north (and elsewhere) and required a politics of “social understanding which conceives social formations as complex, contradictory, and inclusive of phenomena of social interactions. It cannot be a simple arithmetical exercise of adding or intersecting “race” gender and class in a stratificatory mode” (Bannerji, 2011). The point, instead, is to locate the experiences of racism, sexism, poverty and exclusion within broader social, economic and political processes and relations, recognizing their “translocal” and “textually mediated character” (Smith 2001, 2005), as ideological processes that are “historical” as Marx has demonstrated in a critique of political economy as social relations,
that “rather than further undermining claims to knowledge, provides both the conditions under which knowledge is possible and its limitations.” (Smith, 2004, p. 445). We can thus recognize how contemporary racism is expressed not always as explicit or intentional “othering”, but as an extension of the institutions of Western European imperialism that subordinated people, “who could be distinguished from Europeans by physical traits. That subordination has translated historically into the racism of postcolonial society” (Smith 2001, p.62). Smith goes on to state that, “We participate in the ongoing historical commitments of the social relations organizing racism in our everyday lives, and how we know each other arises from and builds upon a past that is coming into being in the present and projects into the future” (2001, p.62). The relevance of learning in this context was ever linked to broader relations of capitalism and imperialism (Mojab, 2011) that must be kept in mind as the accumulation advancing in Indigenous territory furthers the goals, relations and practices of imperialism as the most advanced stage of capital.

The long history of exploitation and mis-representation by often well-meaning white researchers working with First Nation/Metis/Aboriginal communities is examined by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who question the assumptions of western epistemology and examine the deeper implications of knowledge production based on the representation of Indigenous people’s experiences (Smith, 1999; Haig-Brown, 2010; Evans et al., 2009). It should be obvious when research has gone wrong, but the powerful and often subtle process of objectification so characteristic of the western academy is often just left to local communities to feel the brunt of, while research produced moves forward careers and the goals and interests of ruling society.

Maori scholar, L.T. Smith (1999) so cogently describes the anger felt as an Indigenous person in face of conventional research carried out in Aboriginal communities: “It galls us that
Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own cultures and own nations.”

This reality is enough to deter any researcher who does not originate from a First Nation community, to even engage in research in the first place. There is always the challenge of representation. But research in effect, is produced within the relations developed in its process of elaboration and represents the actual relations between people. To opt not do research with or within an Indigenous community would effectively be completing a separation that born of the colonizing project through the creation of its objectifying subjectivities, and turning away from the very real historically potent question posed since the arrival of Europeans in the days of imperial expansion to North America: whether we indeed have the capacity to listen, to slow down the fervent expansion of commodity relations wreaking havoc on the Earth and its people, and actually work to transform the relations of ruling and exploitation through serious political and scholarly effort. I echo the works of scholar-activists who strive for an ever deepened critique of capitalist social relations through advancing the goals of social justice.ii

Linda Smith rightly posits the research problem as one of ideology, productive relations and representation that underpin so much of Western research, even when researchers see “benefits of their particular projects as serving a greater good.”(1999, p.2). Smith contends that “belief in the ideal that benefiting mankind (sic) is indeed a primary outcome of scientific research is as much a reflection of ideology as it is of academic training” (Smith, L., 1999, p. 2).
Many critical anti-racist researchers have begun to move research in new directions to actively attempt to address problems generated by conventional research through incorporating anti-racist, Indigenous, feminist, participatory, narrative and other multiple methods specific to the places and people with whom they work (Fischer, 1997; hooks, 1984; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000; Mihesuah, 1998; Salmon, 2007). Yet these mixed-method approaches are worthwhile only insofar as they are able to delve into the social, in critical and emancipatory ways. This requires commitment of any researcher regardless of race, gender or class, to navigate the social relations of research production. Necessary is the critical examination of the overt and subtle forms of objectification and alienation that take place within the research process, which are born of capitalism and colonization. Smith (1999) urges we take seriously that, “…the methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ…need to be “decolonized”…”

This “decolonization” that Linda Smith urges us to take seriously, is far from complete and for which postcolonial approaches to study have come up short, if anything else has not been clear, the words of Aboriginal activist, Bobbi Sykes, still resonate today, “What? Postcolonialism? Have they Left?” Decolonization can only take place alongside the transformation of capitalist social relations, and as such, this is my starting place, carried out through a careful analysis of ideology and the relations of ruling as they play out in people’s lives.

The problem of representation of the Mushkego Inninowuk story is not solved in this investigation, but approached through the use of narrative, drawing on a relationship of reciprocity evidenced through the years of community research undertaken, and the recognition that errors and omissions in its telling are my own. The necessary recounting of only parts of the
story reflects a dialectic of narrative that is shaped by both the critique of ruling relations and the limitations and confines of the writing of a dissertation.

I have centred this effort taking seriously the ethical assertion that, “At every stage, research with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher and people” (NAHO, 2004, p. 15). Every step of research must be guided by principles of mutuality, reciprocity and form a route towards deepening respectful human relationships. Research must be beneficial to the communities in ways that are meaningful to them (First Nations Centre, 2007).

This question of ethics ties to the research approach and methods used, and, knowing there is no perfect or precise research approach, I have attempted to bind myself to the relations of research in as much of a material sense as possible, where my involvements could serve to benefit community members in real ways, to facilitate productive activities that critique the objectifying relations of institutions and disciplines, recognizing my immersion in them. It was through collaboratively supporting the development of a programme of community based research (which took on a life of its own) in the community, that I was able to initiate my own way of “giving back” to the community as they put up with my comings and goings.

Both the community based research project which I was invited to participate in, as a mix of colleague, friend, advisor, researcher and learner-educator, as well as the Institutional Ethnography I carried out in relation to the legislative developments and textual processes underway in the region, both served to critique problems associated with abstraction and ideology while privileging local Mushkego Inninovuk narratives of land and life. To do such research has required a conscious and consistent contesting of conventional research relations, developing an approach to study that is specific to the place, material circumstances
and people with whom I was encouraged to carry out research, while avoiding the problem of objectification inherent in much conventional sociological research as Dorothy Smith so avidly critiques in her reflections on the problems of theoretical bias and disciplinary framing (Smith, 2001).

To reach these multiple ends the methods developed for the Institutional Ethnography relied heavily on involvement in a community-based or participatory action project (CBR, CBAR, PAR) that insisted on the self-representation of community members concerning their own local ways of knowing, as well as community control over the process of research activities, agendas and findings. Some of the written work produced has been authored collaboratively (Metatawabin and Gruner, 2010; Restoule, Gruner and Metatawabin, 2011) and the data collected by local researchers is considered the collective material of the project, community owned, overseen by the advisory, within the context of ethical protocols and principles developed collaboratively (Paquataakamik Website, 2011).

While community based and participatory research as methodologies are not without daunting challenges, most potent of which include the potential weakening of its emancipatory potential through co-optation within dominant ruling agendas (Fals Borda, 1999), the efforts undertaken in Fort Albany were based on the principles and convictions of its critical ontology, including a critique of “research as expert” and one that fosters “a two-way dialogue between scholars and communities, [that] recognizes the practice needed to create an awareness and capacity among subaltern groups” (Carroll, 2006). Indeed, despite the dilution of its transformative character through the widespread misuse of the language and discourse of community-based research it is its dialectical and historical materialist origins and continued practice of learning towards critical transformation, that has been a driving force of my own
participation in the community research project underway. Marx’s eleventh thesis from his famous *Theses on Feuerbach* was ever present, that “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (Marx, 1845/1978).

This critical version of CBAR (Community Based Action Research), used interchangeably here with CBR (Community Based Research) and PAR (Participatory Action Research), truer to its radical roots, is what Carroll (2006) considers “inspired by Marx’s method and is complementary to Institutional Ethnography” as “social inquiry becomes a form of radical pedagogy”. He explains that, “Marx’s dialectical approach to unmasking modernity’s contradictions and injustices yields insights particularly on issues of material inequality. As political activist ethnography, Institutional Ethnography is a powerful tool for explicating the reach of extra-local ruling relations into the everyday and for informing activist strategies and actions. Together with Institutional Ethnography, CBAR affects a tight link between theory and practice: it empowers and mobilizes while producing knowledge of practical value to participants that critiques the dominant power arrangements in society.

Institutional Ethnography (IE), which will be explored forthcoming, lays a foundational approach to developing critical knowledge about, in this case, institutional discourses of land relations and jurisdictional processes underway, while the community project provides a site for informal analysis, discussion and critical learning.

IE also serves to re-orient conventional research relations, by shifting focus of the “object of study” in a way that rejects the “White study of Indigenous people’s lives”, but places the “gaze” on the institutional processes that affect them and the places they live, unmasking the hidden workings of ruling. Linda Smith (1999) emphasizes that “Research has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other. Objectification is a process of dehumanization. In its clear
links to Western knowledge research has generated a particular relationship to Indigenous peoples which continues to be problematic.”

To counter this problem is what IE has offered to this project, which indeed, became the project itself and furthered my commitment as researcher, activist and colleague, to challenge power relations involved in research. The IE method has allowed me to develop a standpoint alongside people affected by these specific textual workings as opposed to studying people as in conventional sociological research (Smith, 2006), in an attempt to address a long-standing power differential between researcher and participants inherent in much conventional sociological research. People involved in the research, especially those who take up texts in particular ways as part of their work, also become involved in reflecting on their own role in the process of text creation via the IE method. In this sense IE serves a practical and critical pedagogical purpose with the participants involved. The act of grappling with the workings of environmental and development text processes as reflective of relations of ruling became a part of critical learning activities elaborated with the community throughout the duration of research. While we may have not been able to always draw tidy conclusions about the problems inherent in the institutionalization of land relations, we were able to gain insight into their functioning and the effects on people’s ways of viewing what was at play. Mostly the project served as a way of accompanying a community intent on ensuring their members had a way of coming to know the sites and stories of ancestral territory through inter-generational dialogue, and through its activities, the research processes helped set out spaces for exchange and analysis among Mushkegowuk, other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

As has been clearly demonstrated through the literature on the subject, land and people’s relationship to land is considered fundamental to the health, autonomy and cultural identity of
Aboriginal people (LaDuke, 2002; Battiste, 2000; and Simpson, 2008). Scholars such as Fast and Berkes (2007), Russell (1998) and Long (2006) discuss how this is relevant specifically for the communities of James Bay, Ontario. Aboriginal institutional bodies such as NAHO (National Aboriginal Health Organization), the Chiefs of Ontario, National Aboriginal Women’s Organization, NAN and the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council, among many others, hold this as a widespread conviction. Any research taking place in or related to these territories needs to include First Nation members from the region in defining aspects related to the conception and design of such studies. The spirit and questions moving this doctoral study are thus rooted in such a commitment: to alliance-building, rooted in critical, emancipatory pedagogy based on a meaningful, collaborative and community-oriented programme of research that addresses specific concerns, needs and perspectives of people.

Specifically, I have worked with a community advisory established within the community of Fort Albany to develop a community oriented programme of research involving an integration of informal and formal critical learning activities with people who have voiced concern about the rapid rate of policy developments aimed at their traditional lands and waters and lack of access for young people to take up traditional land based activities. Project efforts have centred on access to both formal and non-formal learning by Mushkegowuk who are concerned with overcoming obstacles they face in their on-going attempts to foster stronger inter-generational relationships, rooted in collective territorial and cultural well-being. The years of community project activities have allowed for a simultaneous and committed exploration of key concerns that both inform the IE ‘problematic’ (Smith, 2005; Campbell and Gregor, 2002) and shape meaningful spaces for continued critical learning and transformation as “change is itself
conceptualized dialectically, as a conjoint transformation of circumstances and of selves” (Carroll, 2006).

An Ontology of the Social: Dialectics of People-in-Ecology

Through the practice of Institutional Ethnography (IE), critical community based research and explorations of Indigenous epistemologies, I have attempted to articulate an ontology of the social that is critically informed, non-dogmatic, committed to social justice, solidarity and the reclaiming of “lived” space in face of its continued abstraction. I draw on a “dialectical, historical and materialist” reading of reality that recognizes that “textually mediated institutional relations” are pivotal to theorizing contemporary social life, contemplating also the aspects of space and place as shaping and shaped by consciousness. This has become clearer to me as I became involved with the institutional relations shaping land and consciousness in territories of the Mushkegowuk in James Bay. I also draw on Indigenous formulations of reality, in dialogue with “western” conceptualizations and not subverted to them, significant to the understanding and theorizing of reality, important to the project of solidarity, resistance and resurgence of Indigenous people, and progressive intellectual pursuit. A thorough exploration of Indigenous ontologies however, is a task beyond the scope of this project, and advanced by a growing body of Indigenous scholars, activists, writers and others elsewhere. This said I will draw on some of my own learning in a limited way in this area throughout the pages of this dissertation.

It is through my lived experience in relation to what I have set out to explore and do with and within the community over the past few years that I can make any legitimate claims to a dialectical theory of reality. The dialectical tradition is a broad and in-depth one impossible to review comprehensively here. But I will contend however that grappling with the method of dialectical historical materialism as developed by Marx (1845/1970) in the German Ideology and
advanced by numerous others including Smith (2004), Bannerji (2005), Mojab (2011), Harvey (1996, 2001, 2006) and others, has provided me with new tools to describe what happens in the world I encounter in richer, more nuanced ways, including the problems with abstraction of life practice and the reification of concepts that are fragmentations, actually tied through dialogue to other relations within broader social and political conditions that shape how they are articulated. The dialectical method is deeply implicated in learning, not excluding that of my own, tied to that of others I engage with, learning that takes place in the contemporary period of neoliberal capitalist accumulation in the Treaty 9 area, in Ontario, Canada and globally.

Dialectical historical materialism recognizes consciousness – and learning – as shaped within history, erupting from the lived relations between people, within modes of organization and production, mediated and moulded within the objectifying power of ideology, and represented contemporarily in ruling text processes, with embodied, real, material effects on people and nature. Marx explains the material relations of the global market as historical:

In history up to the present it is certainly an empirical fact that separate individuals have, with the broadening of their activity into world-historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them…a power which has become more and more enormous and, in the last instance, turns out to be the world market. (Marx, 1845/1970, p. 27)

He goes on to state that:

Our conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the simple material production of life, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this…as the basis of all history; further to show it in its action as State; and so, from this
starting point to explain the whole mass of different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics etc., and trace their origins and growth by which means of course the whole thing can be shown in its totality (and therefore too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another).

(1845/1970, p.28)

This formulation expounds the complex, displacing and dispossessing effects of capitalist social relations on people, critiquing the turn from embodied, lived, actual, life practices of people. Contemporary capitalist relations between humans and nature are deeply rooted in an historical accumulation-driven process based on an abstraction of the conception of nature itself. The powerful process of abstraction is explained, again within history, pointing to how both history and nature are produced in the consciousness of people:

In the whole conception of history up to the present [the] real basis of history has either been totally neglected or else considered as a minor matter quite irrelevant to the course of history. History must, therefore, always be written according to an extraneous standard; the real production of life seems to be primeval history, while the truly historical appears to be separated from ordinary life…With this the relation of man (sic) to nature is excluded from history and hence the antithesis of nature and history is created. (1970, p.59)

Engels’ less publicized but important work called “Dialectics of Nature” expanded on Marx’s dialectical method putting forth the since accepted view that, “All nature, from the smallest thing to the biggest, from a grain of sand to the sun, from the protista to man, is in a constant state of coming into being and going out of being, in a constant flux, in a ceaseless state of movement and change.” (Engels, 1960). He is one of the early theorists that contemplates accumulation in
the context of the relationship of exploitation of nature linked to that of the exploitation of labour with detrimental effects on both nature and people:

In the most advanced industrial countries we have subdued the forces of nature and pressed them into the service of mankind’ we have thereby infinitely multiplied production, so that a child now produces more than a hundred adults previously did. And what is the result? Increasing overwork and increasing misery of the masses, and every ten years a great collapse. (1960, p. 19)

It is through the tracing of accumulation relations within history, through its abstracted institutional processes and discourses about nature, that we can gain insight into how this “separateness” is maintained, made more complex over time as the material benefits of such separateness are concentrated in these disciplines that define the ruling politics of environmental management. (Harvey, 2006).

This separateness relies on a specific form of consciousness that is rooted in ideological readings of reality that depend on the productive activities that shape consciousness. This point is important for understanding how people learn in contemporary politics. Paula Allman (1999) summarizes the work of Marx and Engels in her assertion that:

…if you wanted to understand the prevailing form of consciousness in any social formation the place to start was with real people and their activity, but especially the activities that took place within the way they were organized to produce and reproduce their material existence. This activity takes place with historically specific relations, and these relations are the key not only to people’s consciousness but to what they are like as human beings. (Allman, 1999, p.38)
Marx and Engels demonstrate the difference between an abstract notion of history and a materialist conception, which is based fundamentally on the human struggle to survive. Simply put, “the first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life…” (Marx and Engels, 1970, p.16). It of course does not end with feeding mouths and finding shelter, but develops to involve inter-actions between people, the search for meaning. This is fundamental to how consciousness is produced.

Abstract notions about history, in contrast, hide the relations involved in producing and sustaining life. They might, for example, focus on general notions, happenings or images that characterize an era: religion, political issues, or most recently, the “environmental crisis” (O’Connor, 1998). The abstraction, turning happenings into “ideas” about history and then presented as “things” or fixed “truths”, actually de-historicizes the lived experience of people, de-materializes experience in general and specific ways, and renders abstract both labour and the relationships people have with their natural surroundings. This explains for example, how people can eat food without knowing where it came from, who produced it, or what kinds of relations to the earth, animals and people was involved in its production. Once history is conceptualized in an ideological or abstract way, moving away from people’s labour to the realm of ideas, the appearance (the discourse or what is said) serves to hide what is taking place, the actual productive relations at play. This is manifested in racist and genocidal colonialist abstractions about people which saw Indigenous societies among other land-based people as part of a “wilderness” to be tamed, exploited, controlled, destroyed or coerced via violent and other means to become subsumed within the social relations of capital. Women, as Silvia Federici (2004) so
eloquently demonstrates, were deeply affected through this process, in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which has led to the continued impoverishment, marginalization and victimization and the deeply gendered social relations of contemporary capitalism (Federici, 2004). That notions of “woman as nature” are still invoked today to wage wars and justify questionable development and military interventions (Mojab, 2006) is demonstrative of just how powerful these abstractions continue to be, having real consequences on the lives of women, men and land-oriented people the world over.

The contemporary period is a complex mix of forces that present new ontological challenges as we open up and shut down debates on what “knowledge” is relevant for survival and what is not. In the neoliberal period of advanced capitalism in Ontario, useful “knowledge” is often reduced to the training and skills required to become adequately employed in the job market, subverting other forms of knowing to lesser realms, afforded a “sub” reality of neoliberalism, if at all. Geographical or spatial knowledge becomes the domain of experts in disciplines that tend to understate its social and political dimensions (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2001). This knowledge subsequently taken up by policy makers and ministers who then articulate legislations and plans that must attempt to represent the interests of the “majority”, rendering complex, locally-lived experience, as simple or uni-dimensional, reflected in such assertions in the Far North Act that it will work for the “social and economic benefit of all Ontarians”, as defined within advanced capitalist development.

In the current neoliberal period, reality is seen through highly bureaucratic, managerial and economistic discourses, privileging “cost-effectiveness” and “efficiency” in development as an orienting language that sets out how we read what we should do, how we should plan, and the kind of spatial and social organization that will result. “Traditional knowledge” is reduced to
fragments of its actual experience, objectified through institutional processing, translated from complex Indigenous languages, developed over centuries and that articulate and encounter the world in ways not fully unknowable in English, the dominant language of commerce and governing institutions.

In face of these daunting challenges, a dialectical theory of reality that speaks to its social relational process is crucial, one that is able to interrogate the reifying, de-historicizing tendencies in the current global era of globalization and its resulting violence, marginalization and exclusion. Ollman (1993) asserts that:

Dialectics restructures our thinking about reality by replacing the common sense notion of “thing” as something that has a history and has external connection with other things, with notions of “process”, which contains its history and possible futures, and “relation”, which contains as part of what is its ties with other relations” (original emphasis).

Ollman provides important insights into Marx’s method of reading reality that critiques abstraction as internally constituting the relations of capitalism. He states that, “What is most distinctive about Marx’s abstractions, taken as a group, is that they focus on and incorporate both change and interaction (or system) in the particular forms in which these occur in the capitalist era” (1993, p. 62-63). Using a metaphor that speaks to my own experience with river communities, Ollman retrieves for us the following insight:

Beginning with historical movement, Marx’s preoccupation with change and development is undisputed. What is less known is…how he integrated these abstractions into his study of a changing world…The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus provides us with its classic statement when he asserts that a person
cannot step into the same river twice. Enough water has flowed between the two occasions so that the river we step into the second time is not the same river we walked into earlier. Yet our common sense tells us that it is, and our naming practice reflects this view. The river is still called the “Hudson” or the “Rhine” or the “Ganges”…his point was that change goes on everywhere and all the time. (Ollman, 1993, p.64)

Important to this reading in the contemporary period dialectics helps to recognize and privilege “process” above “things”. David Harvey (1996) contends that “dialectics forces us always to ask the question of every “thing” or “event” that we encounter: by what process was it constituted and how is it sustained?” (Harvey, 1996, p. 50). As Harvey further states, dialectical thinking depends on the exploration of “possible worlds”, and therefore the “building of ethical, moral and political choices into its own process…”

Ontology as such is a theory of social process, attempting to describe the ephemerality of life, its constantly changing character, which is in fact dependent on dialogue, consciousness of power as it plays out within modes of production and reproduction of material existence. In the contemporary technologically advanced period, the ability to replicate texts, to mass produce them across multiple locations in “no time at all” plays a role in shaping how we think about reality, organize, produce and reproduce our existence, moulding selves and the places we live. Texts serve to organize and produce a semblance of durability in face of the ephemeral, constant change of life (Smith, 2001). It is through the social coordination of material texts that institutions as apparently durable, contained forms are erected. In other words, institutions in reality are formed through the textual coordination of social relations which rely inherently, and build upon, the work of people previously, drawing on historical representations, symbols,
expressions and forms of social, political and economic organization. They maintain the semblance of durability in the actual buildings, spatial formations and “roles” of authority that are presented before us as “material manifestations”. Yet these are all produced through social relations and the labour of people and rely fully on the regulatory power of their textual representations in the contemporary period, more materially significant than the edifices that symbolize them, legitimized as they are into the broader legal and economic relations already established.

With the plethora of literature demonstrating how thorough capitalism has been on destroying natural systems, polluting, warming the climate and so forth, why is it that we never quite get right how to deal with or even talk about the environmental problem? Through an historical materialist approach that recognizes the contemporary period as “textually mediated institutional relations”, we have new ground to cultivate towards better understanding and theorizing reality.

I have taken up Smith’s formulation of “institution” as relatively enduring, seemingly solid, yet socially contingent, unfolding historically, dialectically and materially, within capitalist social relations, deeply shaped within the processes of accumulation and private property. In short, institutions in the industrial era are produced through the work of people coordinated through the materiality of text and make up what Smith calls a complex of ruling relations (2005, 2006).

An important ontological assertion, although somewhat beyond the scope of this PhD dissertation, is the recognition that distinct forms of “institution” exist within alternative modes of production and collective forms of social organization, such as has historically been the case for Indigenous communities in Canada, within living memory. While quantitatively and
qualitatively distinct from Smith’s textually-mediated “institution”, the fact that expressions of these alternative, orally based, governing institutions persevere today, in complex relationship with dominating capitalist and textually mediated institutional forms, is important to a critical reading of reality that recognizes Indigenous forms and asserts their presence. Indeed a contention of many Indigenous scholars and writers (Borrows, 1997; LaDuke, 2002; Simpson, 2011; Sherman, 2008), is that Indigenous people while living contemporary lives, maintain direct hunting and harvesting relationships within a territorial area and rely on historically developed knowledge of plants, animals, river systems, and so forth. While attempting to avoid the pitfalls of the “endless debate on modernity” (Bannerji, 2011) my intention is to recognize the existence of Indigenous productive modes as “ways of knowing” that endure in face of the deleterious effects of industrial western societies (Berkes, 1997; Borrows, 1997).

There is a large literature making reference to Indigenous “institution” as groups historically organized according to locally determined social rules and protocols, rooted in productive modes that draw on spiritual and intuitive relationships with land (Smith, 1999; Battiste, 2000; Henderson, 2000), a formulation that does not have to come into tension with Marxist readings of reality. Problems arise when Indigenous forms are posited as a reified, static, formulation, such as “traditional” (versus modern, a binary opposite produced through ideological practices as critiqued by Marx). There is a great deal of literature on “traditional ecological knowledge” (TEK) that, while important for drawing attention to, and contesting the invisibility of Indigenous people, can serve to confuse the ontological formulation put forth here, when read in reified textual representations, outside the lived practice of people. The abstraction of specific Indigenous ways of knowing-in-place within the relations of accumulation, is the
point of critique here (see chapter on TEK). Other problems arise as Indigenous forms of institutionality are presented as nominal systems that existed outside of their historical and geographical conditions. A historical materialist reading demonstrates that Indigenous institutions are born within specific social relations in specific locations, arising from historical encounters with others and within a mode of production that maintains a distinct way of life, largely unrecognized within the relations of accumulation.

Knowledge was historically produced differently in such societies, where rules and protocols, while enduring within a collective sense, tended to shift and adapt, for example following seasonal changes and availability of food sources (Parlee and Berke, 2006) or in response to critical social or environmental events, broader political constraints and other factors. Arguably to their adaptability, such social forms have endured (Feit, 2004; Blaser, 2004) in face of the brutal displacing experiences of colonialism and capitalism, existing parallel to, and in complex interaction within, capitalist modes of being while maintaining core forms of governance and institutionality.

These Indigenous forms of “institution” are rendered invisible, non-existent or made irrelevant by the dominant governing and textually-mediated relations, despite the fact that they are relevant in many Indigenous societies today, representative of the “relatively enduring” social processes. These take the form of historically developed governance systems such as the Midewewin Lodge or Medicine Society for the Anishnaabe people in the Great Lakes area, “a central institution in collecting information relative to the use of plants” (Borrows, 1997, p.440) which continues to provide “formal degrees of tested and accredited learning, ceremonies, and service to the community”(p. 440).
My own practical learning leading to these ontological assertions is grounded in dialogue with Mushkego Inninowuk about the practice of Shabatowan (translated to English as a “traditional Inninowuk way of life”) historically provided an organizing, teaching and governing function as it set out the “rules and protocols” of meaningful cultural practice, including shaping gender roles and practices, protocols for marriage, birth and burial, the rules of hunting, gathering, gift giving, spiritual ritual and so forth (Bird, 2005). Shabatowan was learned, taught and passed on through oral transmission, shaping consciousness and social relationships, unfolding within a specific productive and reproductive practice that depended on the symbols, language and norms that served to coordinate people within the territories they lived.

In an interview with one of the community members involved in the community project, Inninowuk cultural rules and norms were discussed as historically derived “policies”, oral rules and norms that served to organize people in their territories according to what they came to understand as the laws of human-nature interactions. These continue to underpin current practices, and are contemplated here in relation to consciousness and learning and that “clash” with the dispossessing effects of Euro Canadian policy, with material effects on the lives of people and the place they live:

A simple little (local) policy would be telling the youth, don’t take your axe and take the bark off the tree, you will kill the tree if you do that. It’s a simple little policy, but it’s also a guide, a teaching method, for the young people…A policy…[is] a way of life, a belief system, and also learning from long years of living on the land. Let’s talk about water. Each tributary that joins the main artery, the main artery is called Kistachowan. The main artery joins, begins from a large body of
water, that drains into the large body of water, then it empties into another large body of water, that’s what you call the Kistachowan, or the main artery.

The main artery, gets fed by multiple streams and creeks and smaller rivers. Each creek in turn drains the land into the shape of a leaf. If you look at a leaf, there’s the main stem down the middle. Number of smaller stems, and a lot of smaller ones that go around the leaf. The leaf has a boundary line, there is a limit to the size of the leaf. The same thing on the land. There is a limit, a boundary line on the drainage system. So the land gets drained by these creeks and goes into the bigger creeks and rivers, down to the main one, the main creek, the main branch. From them to the main branch joins the main artery. That is the movement of water. In traditional setting, the way of life was: you sit at the junction of the main river and the small creek that drains from the system, that’s where you sit, that’s where the community is.

And upriver from that, is your drainage system, from your region, that’s your area. And nobody goes on the source of water that’s where the water bubbles from the ground. Rain falling on the ground, or from underground systems. Source of water, it’s a very sacred place. Nobody goes there. Nobody dumps anything there, nobody does anything there. For the purpose of keeping the land healthy, you need clean water coming down, and you’re living at the junction, the water you get for drinking purposes and other uses, you are sure that the water is clean, the health is good, cuz you know that the water is safe. And you are the keeper of this water.
You ensure that your little sister is clean, has a good place, and is secure. And that’s the relationship we have with water, we call her our little sister, just to highlight the fact that what you cherish most in the family is your little sister. So keep it secure, in a safe place. So that’s one policy, it’s called ‘a way of life’, a belief system. (Interview with male adult, Fort Albany First Nation)

Moreover, the issue of language for ontology is raised in the dialogue with the community member about differences between text-based industrial society and oral societies that maintain a strong sense of land and territoriality. This raises important questions to address in future studies about oral / text based institutional relations and transmission of knowledge.

In this ontological reading, Indigenous “institution” should not have to run counter to Marxist readings of the social, shaped within a productive mode as put forth by Bannerji (2011) as, “the organizational and social ground for production as well as reproduction and their entailed politics, administration, and cultures”. This takes place within historically specific relations. My intention here is not to explore Indigenous institutions per se nor to complicate the reading of Smith’s text based institution within the context of this study, but to illuminate the existence of alternative Indigenous modes of practice and production as “enduring” a question explored at length in other works.

The dialectical and historical materialism and activism that underpins the ontology of Dorothy Smith’s Institutional Ethnography has been furthered by others inspired by her work and the work of Marx, Allman, and other critical theorists, educators and scholars, has allowed me to find a more comfortable discomfort with the “way things are” and carry out research that recognizes both the ephemerality of life and the appearance of insurmountable hegemonic power
alongside the possibility, the necessity of contesting the subjugating bureaucracies of power, represented by the officialising discourses that permeate the everyday. The decades of activist work and research that have taken up this ontology and allowed for a re-reading of reality, a shift in the way activism is thought through and carried out, provides an impetus for continued efforts and an opening for other voices to be heard, evidenced in Frampton, Kinsman, Thompson and Tilleczek’s (2006) seminal work, *Sociology for Changing the World: Social Movements/Social Research*. It is this ontology of the social that underpins the overall study and its methods of research. I will now move into a more detailed explanation of Institutional Ethnography as a critical approach to inquiry.

**Institutional Ethnography as a Critical Approach to Inquiry**

In Institutional Ethnography, text processes become the focal point of ethnographic study, rather than people themselves. While people inform an understanding of how these text processes come to affect their lives and lands, research itself centres on an examination of an “institutional” set of relations that explicates the textual coordination of organizational forms in specific settings, across locations. The policy process itself in this sense is placed “under the research gaze” rather than people affected by it, while their story is meant to be privileged. IE cannot do justice to space needed for the telling of an Indigenous story, complex in its historical, linguistic and productive origins, and leaves some representational questions unanswered, but it does what it sets out to do, which is to allow for a critical, dialogic theory of reality that recognizes the need for that space where marginalized alterities are afforded the basic right to speak fully for themselves. Through understanding the institutional “text processes” through the lens of IE, how texts are taken up, re-shaped or repudiated by people, I am able to offer critical input to the ongoing community-driven efforts to strengthen historical and local conceptions of
life, labour and land towards their collective revitalization and continued strength as Mushkego Inninowuk in the vast territory they call Innino Aski.

Institutional Ethnography proposes “to realize an alternative form of knowledge of the social in which people’s own knowledge of the world of their everyday practices is systematically extended to the social relationship and institutional orders in which we participate (Smith, 2005, p. 43)”. Dorothy Smith orients our attention to how we are both subjects of ruling relations as we actively engage with them, in creating, maintaining and fostering them, as well as objects or targets of their ‘workings’ as we are ‘hooked up’ to these complexes in ways of which we otherwise may not be aware. What differs from other policy research projects is that we begin with a problematic, rooted in the concerns of people in a specific place and time, who are affected by these text processes and desire to have a more active role in defining what actually happens to their lives and life practices, on their own terms.

Questions of land ownership (tenure arrangements) and rights to a distinct way of life underpin the longstanding tensions and outright conflicts between mainstream Euro-descendent society and many Aboriginal people in this country. These conflicts are deeply rooted in a history of marginalization and racism that cannot be erased through policy or official doctrine. What is at play has to do with the perpetuation of relations that build upon racist policy towards Aboriginal people that undermines relationships they have had historically with their ancestral territories (RCAP, 1996). Important to this study is the parallel between the marginalization and exploitation of Aboriginal people and the ongoing degradation of ecological systems or the environment as extended through text processes.

Institutional Ethnography necessarily has a critical and transformative character. As it commits to critique the abstraction of everyday experience (Marx and Engels, 1970; Smith,
2005, 2006; Allman, 1999), it also commits to a project of fostering critical consciousness based on making explicit the complex of ruling relations (Smith, 2005), how this complex functions, and suggests ways in which people can actively re-direct these relations based on this new knowledge. As Dorothy Smith writes:

The concept of ruling relations does not refer to modes of domination but to a new and distinctive mode of organizing society that comes into prominence during the latter part of the 19th Century in Europe and North America. The ruling relations are forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places. (2006, p. 13).

The reading of the social emphasizes Smith’s (1999, 2005, 2006) orientation of relations as coordinated to other people and across locations via text. Because this coordination happens through texts as words, gestures, symbols, utterances and the like, as an exchange between people, it is necessarily dialogic, and something within which we all take part in some shape or form, even in resistance or non-response.

Importantly, this reading of the social, that critiques the “masquerade of universalizing discourses” (Smith, 2004), opens spaces to explore how experiences of people who do not participate in, or who resist, the imposition of these discourses, have been largely and systematically rendered invisible. As a feminist critique of power, Smith (2005) discusses how “as women learned in the women’s movement, [that] there are experiences of which a discourse will not speak” (Smith, 2005, p. 18). It is through a critique of social relations, through a discovery of how text processes enable these relations based on an “extraordinary form of modern (middle class male) consciousness that is capable of agency in modes that displace or
subdue a local bodily existence”(p. 14), that a recognition of these invisible experiences can be made known and explored.

Institutional Ethnography, whether illuminating issues of racism within police intake processes, the reorganization of long term care in Canadian hospitals (Campbell, 2008); the exploitation of Indigenous ethnobotanical knowledge via trade rules (Dergousoff, 2008); the politics and effects of municipal land development on urban neighbourhoods in Southern Ontario (Turner, 2002); safety issues facing battered women as they navigate the legal system (Pence, 2001); issues of power and potential problems within surveillance systems (Walby, 2005); the oppressive and gendered experiences of single mothers in the educational system (Smith, 2006), or the disorienting effects of environmental policy in a First Nation community, the IE approach offers insight into a reading of the social that allows us to critically read “everyday lived experience” in face of the complex set of institutional relations that undergird our reality. IE allows for a project of solidarity with people who, despite longstanding political struggles, continue to come up against the objectifying and marginalizing experiences in their interactions within institutional relations.

Indeed as Smith explains, “political involvement is integral to how Institutional Ethnography proceeds…a major source of control over the natural expansions of ethnography into neighbouring terrains is the political orientation and concerns of the researcher and those she or he is working with. It is this concern that regulates the researcher’s focus of relevance. (2005, p. 42).

Smith’s (2005) Institutional Ethnography proposes “to realize an alternative form of knowledge of the social in which people’s own knowledge of the world of their everyday practices is systematically extended to the social relationship and institutional orders in which we
participate” (2005, p. 43). In this way Smith orients our attention to how we are both subjects of ruling relations as we actively engage with them, in creating, maintaining and fostering them, as well as objects or targets of their workings as we are hooked up to these complexes in ways of which we otherwise may not be aware. Social relations, Smith stresses, are coordinated across locations via language and text. Expressing through language is a social, dialogic process, whereby utterances are given meaning through their communicating with others.

The point is not to reject all text, all policy as oppressive but rather to carry out a reading of the social processes involved in their creation, and how this shapes how people perceive and are oriented to act. Texts do not determine what people do, nor do they have inherent power. Work, coordinated to that of others through the mediating power of texts, serves to shape learning and as such plays a role in what our consciousness leads us to do in the world, in relation to each other and within nature.

There are few accounts of land use planning that utilize Institutional Ethnography as a way of explicating the ideological processes related to land use planning that come to affect people and land. Susan Turner (2005) is one of the exceptions, offering important and useful insights into the diverse accounts of planning within the sphere of municipal land use planning and development, as well as the effects on people and terrain in a neighbourhood setting in Guelph, Ontario. She provides solid ground upon which to assess “planning” within a dialectical and materialist ontology, most helpful to this project.

This study however, seeks to discover and assess accounts of land use planning in a jurisdictionally distinct First Nation community, to identify the clues and limitations for a more robust explication of how the process unfolds in a complex institutional context of Aboriginal
settler-relations, drawing on concerns related to self-determination and Indigenous modes of being and production. A qualitatively different literature is required.

A Standpoint for Research as Activist/Ally and Learner-Educator

It is based on the insights garnered in large part from the community project, conversations with people in the community, and interviews I either supported or conducted during 2007-2011, that I became compelled to gain insight into how the institutional politics of land in a Treaty 9 community such as Fort Albany actually function, so as to provide some new way of looking at the problems generated by externally driven development and governance, that seemed to be so deeply pervasive. As Institutional Ethnography teaches, the institutional processes I sought would be rooted in the standpoint of people who are deeply affected by them, marginalized and often compromised in their authority to speak for themselves and what takes place in their ancestral homelands, I became motivated to work alongside people as an ally in deciphering the displacing effects of ideological, objectifying processes.

As an ally and someone who had been asked to “do a PhD that would serve the interests of the community”, I firmly rooted my research standpoint alongside people who have been largely marginalized and excluded within the institutional history of the province and nation, but more importantly, who teach an alternative mode of being by the ongoing relationships they foster with each other, within their territory and with visitors who stay long enough to actually hear what they have to say. As people are brought into the institutional relations that coordinate their activities and what happens on land, with other doings and happenings elsewhere, they are faced with major decisions and have incomplete information about these processes. People live out their everyday lives in face of a mess of policies that have deeply shaped life in the small remote community, including such foundational texts as the Indian Act, Residential School
Policy and Treaty 9, and leading up to the highly politicized current environment that has seen more legislation produced that specifically targets the area than ever before, including the Mining Act, the recent Forestry Modernization Act, and the Far North Act to name but three. The latter of these plays a central role in this investigation of the institutional land and development relations in Treaty 9 territory.

The community of Fort Albany First Nation could be viewed by the reader in the same way many other First Nation communities in Ontario are viewed, one among many living in a remote fly-in community, struggling with issues related to health, education, poverty, housing problems, an Indian band under treaty, and negatively affected by Canada’s colonial practices since contact, all of which are ostensibly true. This is in part however, an external, abstracted view of life that gathers people under institutional identities such as “Indian band” or “Aboriginal person” and theorizes their social life by generalizable experiences shared by other Aboriginal people as a point of departure. When we shift to a view that starts with actual people, in actual locations, within a specific history of social relationships and productive processes, the specificity of lived experience can be better understood and represented as it is actually lived, with theory developing from there. Theorizing must not be at the expense of what people live in their everyday, historically shaped by the ways in which they survived and reproduced life, in the regions where they continue to live and thrive. This is necessarily a historical project (Bannerji, 2011) that contemplates racialized and gendered experiences as they are embodied in practice, in face of the bifurcating, reifying experiences of institutional and capitalist relations.

There is indeed an important theorizing of shared historical experience of dispossession among Indigenous people, in the province, country and beyond, as a matter of taking capitalist and colonial power to task. Indeed it is the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous people via
capitalist social relations that must be clearly explored, understood and addressed. The problem lies with method and starting place – how to explain, in useful terms, how dispossession occurs.

When we locate ourselves alongside the specific people in a defined – albeit dynamic and changing - community according to their own experience and understanding of life, we would start in a very different place than that of a theorized subject, such as a place called Peetabeck, within Innino Aski (Land of the People) by elders and other speakers of the Inninowuk (Cree) language, who have lived in the region, and well beyond the reserve boundaries, at some estimates for 10,000 years or longer (Paquataskamik is Home, 2011). The “territory beyond the reserve” as collectively-owned and historically governed by the First Nation people in the area, counter the official historical accounts represented by the treaty and resulting relations.

I will ask you, the reader, to imagine you are someone living in the now contained community, enclosed within boundaries of a “reserve” in a community that has a long, known history passed on through generations, relationships of trust and family bonds that have transmitted important occurrences, ways of relating to land and perceiving life, historically shaped within a mode of production that brought them into direct relationship with their sometimes severe surroundings, as nomadic people, surviving from the land by leaving little trace. This history, linked to others in surrounding communities, has unfolded within a vast territory that you still know and love, an area that you continue to explore and want to pass on to your children, not just to pass on the stories of a place that others perceive as a “frozen past”, but to pass on an active way of knowing land that takes up where your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents (and so on through the course of uncountable centuries) left off.

Imagine you’ve survived with a sense of place, community and way of being in tact – despite the aggressive and violent disruptions by missionaries, the state and those who have
come, and continue to come solely for the extraction of resources. Your family members have built intimate relationships within the areas that speak to where your people have travelled, lived and where they still visit. Knowing that there are stories of almost each curve of every river, you are also familiar with the smells of moss and cedar and sightings of moose, caribou and deer, accustomed to the yearly meeting places for celebrations, having visited grave sites and birth spots of at least your own family sprinkled throughout the territory, if not those of other families that you are likely related to, if at least distantly. Your recent excursions on the river involve community youth whose first time on the Kistachowan Sipi (Albany River) demonstrates how strong the desire is to be able to freely move about, unhindered, to live life how it was meant to be lived.

It is from this place, hearing the above narrative retold countless times in the community of Fort Albany during the course of more than 6 years and hundreds of interviews and conversations carried out, and as I do the work of listening to what is at stake for people in their everyday lives, that I locate my own standpoint and the general IE problematic, and begin to carry out an ethnography, not of the people, but of the institutional text processes that are shaping land, ways of thinking about land, and people’s lives as they go about their daily activities.

I’ll now offer a narrative way “in” to the ethnographic project that places me alongside the community within a text process unfolding elsewhere without our knowledge of its organizing power.
An Entry Point

What a snowy winter’s day it was when the planner came through Fort Albany to inform people about land use planning and how it could be applied in the communities along the James Bay Coast. It was January 2007, long before any official provincial announcements came out about the “Far North Strategy” or the legislative proposal, “Bill 191 an Act with Respect to Land Use Planning and Protection in the Far North” otherwise known as the Far North Act. It was also before the eruption of mining claims that would dramatically increase from 2007 to 2010, including the game-changing discovery of the mineral deposit called the “Ring of Fire”, a “potentially massive chromite deposit located in the James Bay Lowlands, about 530 kilometres northeast of Thunder Bay. It’s estimated the deposit is about 4,000 square kilometres in size, and there are currently about 25,000 claim units held by companies exploring for chromite, nickel, copper, zinc, gold and diamonds” (Ketonen, 2011) which does not include the unpatented claims documented by David Pearson (MNR, 2010b). The discovery of minerals in the ecologically significant and sensitive peatlands (Riley, 2011, p. 5-6) would excite developers and fill environmentalists with dread, as local people bore witness to the events unfolding in their traditional territories with little room to manoeuvre.

I was in Fort Albany that January, helping out with some supply teaching at Northern College for adult learners, while working on a small community audio project with a group of local people. The project was aimed at generating discussion about the importance of the Albany River and involved a small advisory group from different social organizations on the reserve, who gave oversight to the activities that saw youth learning skills to interview peers, adults and elders about their knowledge and experience on the river. The project eventually led to the production of an audio documentary, but more importantly set the stage for what was to become a longer, more sustained effort at building a process to engage people in meaningful dialogue.
about land and water issues in Mushkego Inninowuk traditional territory. The process was led by a few committed community members, a process I accompanied as a friend, colleague, researcher, educator and activist-collaborator.

The community project activities unfolded at a time when new provincial efforts centred on Ontario becoming more “environmentally sustainable”, reflected in policies like the “Green Energy Act” (Ministry of the Environment, 2011); more “economically competitive” in expanded areas, particularly Aboriginal communities, reflected in provincial and federal initiatives like the new proposed “Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development” produced by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry (MNDMF) strategy called, “Ontario Open for Business” for Northern Ontario. The re-articulation of the Mining Act (Bill 173) and the newly elaborated Far North Act were both significant policy processes unfolding during this time targeting the area, as were other industry-specific development proposals including talk of a hydro dam on the Albany River (“Clean, Green Power”, 2007) and the beginnings of new forestry-industry related legislation.

Rather than reacting in response to potential development threats, people involved in the community project continued efforts based on what they had always done: concern themselves with learning among the youth, and passing on stories, insights and experiences about traditional territory. This took place through dialogue, but came to centre on the importance of being out on the land, beyond the reserve or camp, in a region undefined by specific boundaries but necessarily much larger than the small reserve where people sometimes described feeling like “animals in a pen” (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2010) or like they were living in a “jail”. Life in the community came with its harsh stories at times to be sure, stories of survival, but also
of resistance, of beauty, of much joy and sorrow, of unrelenting laughter and ribbing and the ever anchoring sense of historical right to be in the territory they were originally placed and meant to be.

I had seen the notice for the “Land Use Planning Workshops for Fort Albany” and sign-up sheet posted at the Northern Store and read by community members, myself and perhaps others, the day before it took place that January day, on the community information board at the Northern Store, and was drawn in by the title and separate sheet listing a series of dates and other communities, set out in a table-like format. The Notice included a date which it had been posted, which was a day earlier, and the dates that information sessions were to be held in Fort Albany, linking through the text that was assumedly posted as well in other coastal communities such as neighbouring Kashechewan, officially part of the Albany Reserve #67, but living across the frozen river, accessible either through a drive up the winter road or a short flight, more often used in the other, unfrozen seasons; and Attawapiskat, the next community up the coast where people also shared the same language and many of the same names and family ties. The dates had been crossed out and changed from a day earlier to the next day, which may have allowed a few people, including myself as it turned out, to actually find out about it and decide to attend, or others to decide not to attend, as the case may have been. In any case, it was short notice, as was often the case in the small remote community, where workshops and information sessions were often scheduled by someone locally in response to someone, somewhere else, who usually wanted the session to take place to advance proposals and projects planned by someone, in that other office, somewhere else.

The notice stated, “The purpose of the workshop is to train people that are interested in Land Use planning for the community. At present many First Nation Communities are taking the
lead in land use plan (sic) for their communities.” One of the notice’s subheadings read, “Why Plan?” and gave seven bullet-points of reasons to do a land use plan, emphasizing that “planning gives a community the framework and process to examine its core values, create a vision for the future and work toward achieving that vision. The plan allows a community to play an active role in moving in the direction that it wants. It also allows a community to react appropriately to various challenges and opportunities…land use planning is one way of making decisions about the further uses of the territories or homelands of your First Nation. It can help to protect the values and places that are important to the community while also considering economic opportunities.” The Notice was on letterhead with contact information for the Mushkegowuk Council Lands and Resources Program, demonstrating its active involvement and intentions in supporting its constituent communities in learning strategies to protect territorial interests. Interestingly, there was no mention of “Far North” communities, a provincial label for the region, but rather “First Nations” as the MTC’s organizational discourse and boundary terminology were clearly aligned with their Mushkegowuk constituents. As underlying jurisdictional relations were to be asserted, a provincial boundary and regional name of the “Far North” would come to be produced, constituting coastal “First Nations” within it in the process, in a growing set of ruling relations within which the Mushkegowuk Council staff would later begin to navigate along with all people involved in the process.

It is the notice on the community board that strikes me as a pivotal moment in what was to follow in the ensuing few years, a rapidly unfolding set of institutional relations that would come to constitute a new policy regime for development, planning, environmental protection, and jurisdiction in the area called Innino Aski, by people who lived there, also known as the
Treaty 9 region, and the “Far North” by the provincial government and increasingly, other ministries and people working in the region.

It is one of perhaps many moments that represented the entry of a specific institutional land use planning discourse - presented as neutral and intended as an organizational tool for “land management” and increased autonomy in the context of encroaching development - that people at the time did not generally embrace nor reject, nor, as it would turn out, would they find a suitable, agreed-upon translation in the Inninowuk (Cree) language. The entry point speaks to the coordination of local and regional organizational processes, as the regional Mushkegowuk Tribal Council sends an expert to the community, who is in turn hosted by the local Band office, and heard by some 7 or 8 community members at the Community Hall in attendance, either some or all of the presentation. This is an early moment of coordination of organizations, people and learning about land use planning that sets the stage for a tracing of the ensuing institutional relations that would unfold in the region, within the politics of jurisdiction and development.

Here, I am also drawn into the text process, not as someone researching the topic of land use planning, but as a friend and colleague to a number of people in the community, including the Economic Development Officer who is hosting the event, and a couple of his siblings who are present, and as someone interested in land issues in a general sense, having a background in territorial, Indigenous, and other social movements, perhaps most intellectually and emotionally rooted in my Master’s thesis work on forced displacement in Colombia, Latin America (Gruner, 2007) that brought with it a certain level of awareness of the systematic nature of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003) facing Indigenous communities across the Americas.

I attend the meeting and look back on it in relation to the text processes that were to unfold and come to bear on the community activity in the traditional territory of the Mushkego
Inninowuk, realizing, after much work and contemplation, that I along with everyone else, had entered an institutional realm much larger than what was taking place that day in January in the Community Hall. The planner’s words and presentation material would introduce people to a discourse of land use planning that would come to be interpreted in many ways over the subsequent years by different people, whether they were community members, band councilors, Tribal Council representatives, regional chiefs, environmentalists, civil servants for the Ministry of Natural Resources, academics or developers. No matter who they were, they would be implicated and drawn into a set of institutional relations that were not visible in the general speaking about land use planning, and which had more to do with development, jurisdiction and contested ways of being on land than it appeared.

The expert planner, who was hired as a consultant to explain the meaning and relevance of land use planning to the community members, meant well. In the short period I was in attendance however, he was not overly well-received. The dialogue at the end of his presentation that he had with one of the community members in attendance was, however, illuminating, and went something like this:

**Female community workshop participant:** “Why are you here telling us about this [land use planning]? I mean it might be interesting I am not sure, but since you are here why don’t you ask us how we do things here in our own territory first? We already have our way that we know our land. This is from a long time ago…”

**Land Use Planning Consultant:** “No, perhaps you don’t understand, this is just a framework, that you can use to reflect your own cultural values and history, whatever you consider your areas of importance…”
**Female community workshop participant:** “But we already have this, we have our way. Why are you providing us with another way of doing things on our land? I am just not sure why you aren’t asking us how we do things first.”

**Land Use Planning Consultant:** “No I mean that it’s very good that you have your way of doing things on the land, that’s what I am talking about, land use. You can just use the land use planning model to represent those things you are talking about. It will help you…”

**Female community workshop participant:** (to the group) “He doesn’t get what I mean…” (And then to me) “You get it right? Can you explain to him that we have our own way of doing things here already?”

I distinctly recall the sense of knowing both what the land use planner was trying to say and what he didn’t understand about what the community member was emphatically trying to explain. Indeed, it was a moment of illumination for me about how on the one hand, people in roles such as the “planner” must stick to their discipline, in a specific moment of teaching it, must provide and defend the relevant framework, potentially compromising the possibility of seeing that something may exist outside that framework that may be more relevant to people. It was, after all, land use planning that he was hired to explain, and what his discipline had taught him. And on the other hand, there are people in a small Cree community, who resist institutional rumination based on a distinct way of thinking and being Mushkegowuk, and through the awareness that Western models and formats, do not translate well into Cree, in more than just a semantic sense but a very real material one. Before they are identified as such in so many words, it seemed to me that people sensed clearly that their maneuverability, and way of expressing life, could be potentially further compromised in their own territory, an instinct based on longstanding historical encounters with provincial and federal institutional processes.
While I do believe the workshop participant knew exactly what the land use planner was trying to portray through his PowerPoint presentation, of which he left printed copies for the group, she was compelled to try to articulate to him and others that the model would likely serve to change the meaning of what people do on their land and how they do it. She was talking about a way of being that was not available at that moment to the planner. Nor was the Inninowuk way of life on land his starting point or his primary interest, despite perhaps his best intentions. His interest was explaining how people could best fit a way of being on land, into the framework of planning.

The snowy-day January presentation brought a planner and community members, and the odd straggler such as myself, together, in a dialogic encounter that served to coordinate us with broader discourses and institutional processes underway elsewhere. We were coordinated through the textual manifestation of the land use planning presentation delivered by powerpoint slides (and later its printed version) which included the resistance to its content by a local band member who spoke of another way of being on land.

The broader institutional process related to land use planning and protection in the Treaty 9 region that came to be constituted in the years to follow, was unknown to us that day in the Community Hall. But we were in fact, participating in a moment of textual coordination that served to produce a dialogue on land in the community that began to weave us into broader relations of ruling and institutional organization.

This study is thus anchored here then, with the Notice of the Information session on Land Use Planning, grounded in a specific moment in time that brought me and the people I had come to work with, into what I would later become conscious of as an institutional text process tied to development and jurisdiction, one that would unfold with the appearance of great fury and pace,
like a swollen river diverted across a vast landscape, saturating flora and orienting people and their work to the doings of others elsewhere. It would be this orientation of people throughout the region north of the 51st parallel, to existing discourses, terms and sequences of land use planning, development, protection and jurisdictional procedures that would serve to coordinate people’s work, activities and ways of thinking about land in new and unforeseen ways. Through this coordination of work and consciousness, a new era in provincial and First Nation territorial relations would begin to be constituted, effectively producing the textual material of an incipient jurisdictional regime in what has become known as the “Far North” of Ontario over the past few years.
CHAPTER FIVE

RULING RELATIONS AND LAND IN MUSHKEGOWUK TERRITORY: A PROBLEMATIC EXPLORED

Historical Materialism, Dialectical Relations and the Text in Treaty Making

Understanding what is at stake for people of Fort Albany First Nation in the current context cannot be made meaningful without some basic insight into a vast and dynamic history that includes time long before Treaty 9 was first articulated by the provincial and federal governments in 1905. Ideological and material forces at play in the territory of the Inninowuk, are rooted in a long trajectory of colonial policies that have historically been geared towards their dispossession, physical and cultural displacement, as were the goals of federal policies such as the Residential School Policy and the Indian Act to bring Indigenous people into “modernity” (RCAP, 1996; McPherson, 2011; Cannon and Sunseri, 2011). Cannon and Sunseri (2011) summarize the history of colonialism in direct reference to the “impact of colonial policy and legislation that has effected legal categories onto the identities of Indigenous nations and peoples in Canada – a process whereby Indigenous peoples went from being sovereign nations to “Indians” for state administrative purposes and to dispossess us of land.” (Canon and Sunseri, 2011, p.129)

Dispossession and displacement have been the shared experiences of Indigenous people in Ontario and Canada, in the face of European colonialist and capitalist expansion, one that continues to shape life in overt and subtle ways within the contemporary era of capitalist relations. Mushkego Inninowuk share this colonial experience with other Indigenous people, while also maintaining and fostering a sense of history and identity specific to them.
Historical accounts written by both Inninowuk and non-Inninowuk describe a long history of the Mushkego Inninowuk (Swampy Cree) living throughout the vast landscapes of Innino Aski, where people freely moved about and maintained specific forms of production, land based governance and social organization until European settlers arrived in the 17th Century, (Bird, 2005, 2007; Kataquapit, 2003; Hookimaw-Witt, 2006; Long, 2010; Ellis, 1995; Lytwyn, 2002; Russell, 2004) when a new and complex period of transformation began to take hold.

Inninowuk history was unfolding in the area known as Innino Aski or the Hudson and James Bay lowlands (and well beyond), long before European settlers arrived. Estimates have placed people in the region upwards of 5,000 (De la Rosa, 2009), to over 10,000 (Bird, 2007) years ago and recent speculation renders these numbers short. An Inninowuk way of being continues to be expressed today, rooted in what people there refer to as a “spiritual connection to land” (Bird 2005, 2007; Hookimaw-Witt, 2006) rooted in a material relationship to the waters, lands, plants and animals of a vast region, where the sustenance mode of production has deeply shaped the consciousness and forms of social organization that persist, while at the same time are rendered largely invisible to those living elsewhere, obfuscated through the workings of text processes that objectify local identities and abstract the relationship people have with and within their ancestral territories.

The accounts of land, life, and language attest to the extensive geographical and cultural history of the Mushkego Inninowuk in general, which place people from the small reserve community of Fort Albany First Nation (Peetabeck or Peetabego) in a much broader cultural and geographical area than is sometimes assumed the case. While one aspect of “local” identity is derived from within a boundary created through institutional establishment of the “reserve”, Inninowuk identity spans areas and relations well beyond the reserve, linking people and
communities through family relationships and continued productive practice (Berkes et al., 1994), across the vast territory.

Further to this are numerous journal articles that both speak to a way of being on land and of maintaining intimate knowledge of the routes, waters, and landscapes and ecologies of the region of the Western James Bay Cree (Ohmagari, K. and F. Berkes, 1997) discussions of a continued sustenance-based economic practice mixed with informal and formal economic activities that problematize the notion that informal and sustenance production have disappeared (Russell, 2004), drawing attention to people not fully immersed in capitalist social relations but rather a mixed economic mode that continues to draw on Mushkego Inninowuk productive relations (Russell, 1998).

Patrick Macklem (2002) a legal scholar also provides some most useful accounts of the encounters during the Treaty signing in Fort Albany and neighbouring communities, offering insights into the institutional workings of the provincial and federal government ministries of the early 20th century, and the clear development interests underpinning the motivations of the treaty commissioners, unbeknownst to the Inninowuk involved in the signing of the treaty at the time. Ensuing questions of jurisdiction would plague the relationship between First Nation communities and the provincial and federal governments from the early 1900s onward. Macklem’s account is useful to gain insight into the legal workings and high stakes involved in defining an adequate land ownership regime, which is expressed as a fiduciary relationship between the province and First Nation communities. There is a long struggle contesting the subjugating identities created via colonial governments (provincial and federal) and their material effects, represented in social movement organizing since the 70s. The relationship of imposed dependency continues to give rise to tense relations between First Nation communities
and the province, and to offer specific insights into the institutional workings of provincial institutions related to lands and resources and discourses on development in the region of James and Hudson Bay lowlands.

Russell (2004) offers clues as to the powerful effects of the treaty as an organizing text that served to both de- and re-territorialize people in a “negligible” part of the landscape through the establishment of a reserve. She quotes the Fort Albany Band Economic Development Office Report (1993) as stating that, “Families of the Fort Albany First Nation have lived on lands along the Albany River, its tributaries, and along the adjoining James Bay Coast for hundreds of years. The Fort Albany reserve was established in 1905, when some area families signed Treaty Number 9” (in Russell, 2004). The fact that some, not all of the families signed the treaty, and the written document subsequently served the legal purposes of the province and nation to establish reserves and establish jurisdiction over the land, points to the far-reaching effects of a standardized legal document applied throughout the north through a series of coordinated meetings where the treaty text was the central material object organizing settler-Indigenous relations; unresolved and ongoing issues of consultation and consent; and the long-standing and unresolved disputes between provincial and First Nation governing bodies linked to underlying conflicting interpretations of the intent of the treaty. The ongoing dispute is held in place by the actual written text, and subsequent texts, and the complex relations that underpin them.

Through the accounts of treaty signing carried out by a number of scholars (Morrison, 1987; Long, 1996, 2010; Macklem, 1997/2002), we can visualize the onset of capitalist social relations in the region, as the settler government and society’s desire for natural resources paralleled efforts to displace the Inninowuk way of being, historically rooted in a nomadic and subsistence based mode of production, and bring them into a wage economy. This was partially
carried out through the forced attendance of Cree children at Residential Schools by missionaries, sanctioned and funded by the state, what would be a determining factor in the inter-generational trauma suffered since that time. The dispossession of lands went hand-in-hand with the attempted eradication of cultural and direct material ties to that land, furthered by the introduction of welfare in 1965. The question of land and the interpretation of the treaty signing is thus no small historical detail, but one that is considered a decisive factor that underlies the current quality of life for people in the community of Peetabeck, and explains in part the underlying, sometimes unspoken but ever present contestations to the institutional versions of history and governance.

Perhaps the most significant recent addition has been John Long’s (2010) account of Treaty 9 called, *Treaty 9: Making the Agreement to Share the Land in Far Northern Ontario in 1905*, which outlines in great detail some of the most salient elements of how First Nation people in the region understood their relationship with land and their expectations in face of the newcomers to share the territory. A non-Indigenous historian, Long has written numerous historical accounts of life and history in the Treaty 9 area, spanning back to the early 70s, and offers important insights on the workings of provincial and federal government representatives and institutions in relation to their dealings with the Cree and Ojibwa people. He raises important questions about the treaty commissioner’s intentions, and includes analysis of commissioners’ diaries including the MacMartin diaries that contradict the official position that the Indigenous people were fully aware of what they were signing. The question of who ultimately has the right to define what happens in Innino-Aski territory is almost entirely based on a historical understanding of the treaty signing, or indeed mis-understanding, and perhaps overt misinformation (Long, 2010; Macklem, 2002) to which there is no full legal accounting, while
people remain affected in their everyday lives in the face of institutional constraints that are backed by courts and other more problematic forms of legal enforcement. Governance within the context of property ownership is a pivotal thread that carries throughout this study, as threats of new forms of “enclosure” come to the fore.

*Etymology and the Power of Naming*

The name for Fort Albany in the Inninowuk language is Peetabeck or Peetabego. The history of the community as a fort speaks to a spatially organizing historic event within colonial history of which remnants remain, the name being the most obvious. Naming is a powerful process as evidenced in the critical literature on mapping (Coronil, 1996; Roth, 2009). The naming of a place or region speaks in many ways to authority and governance (Porter, 2010; Johnson, Louis and Pramono, 2006). The varied original names that continue to be spoken in the Inninowuk (Cree) language for example, orient local people to a specifically Indigenous history. These names, while maintained internally, have been largely lost to English-speaking Canada via the early colonial mapping that took place across the territories and via the continued inattention to the histories of the first peoples.

The region broadly speaking is called Innino Aski (Land of the People) or is commonly referred to as Treaty 9, evoking a collective history among Inninowuk/ Cree, their Oji-Cree and Ojibwa relations. It was sometime over the past decade or so that the region started to be called the “Far North” as in a formal, capitalized, “official” name. This took on new power with the development of the *Far North Act*. There is a very brief history of the term the “Far North” as a common public reference to the region known as Innino Aski by the Mushkego Inninowuk (with variations by Oji-Cree and Ojibwa communities more inland depending on cultural/linguistic origins). Other English terms used to reference the region have included: the District of Patricia,
James and Hudson Bay lowlands, and far northern Ontario, all corresponding to specific political geographic histories that reference a colonial history of naming in relation to settler society and the political and economic drives of the given historical period. The term “The Far North” incorporates the region of Innino Aski together with all communities and geographies throughout the region from James Bay to the Ontario/Manitoba and north of the line of provincially designated areas for approved forestry activity, which places the Far North region in relation to it, in process of being designated as an officially recognized provincial site of jurisdiction and authority, accompanied by the contemporary discourses and practices of development. The introduction and systematic usage of the Far North as the official terminology parallels the unfolding policy processes related to mining and forestry, land use planning and protection, within a widening neoliberal politics of development taking hold. Upon searching the term “Far North” using etymology computer searches, very few results were found before this past decade, which corresponds quite directly with the development of the “Far North” policy strategies centred on development and protection which lead to binding legislative process of the Far North Act. Exploring the history of the term raises interesting questions about how “jurisdictions” are developed through naming, where terms are made official, systematized and replicated across vast geographical areas and beyond, within a ruling process that is able to render invisible, through one encompassing English name, the vast Indigenous histories, site names and governing forms that might otherwise be made explicit.

Formulating a Problematic through Learning of Life on the Coast

The problematic in Institutional Ethnography is based on a generalizable concern about the ways in which texts shape, limit, and undermine people’s ability to live and maneuver in life in ways they otherwise should be able to, if it were not for the ideological and objectifying effects of
these text processes. In this case, it is the relationship Mushkego Inninowuk have with, and within, their traditional territory that is limited by institutional and development processes taking hold in the region, a concern expressed by many people in Fort Albany interviewed and encountered in other ways during the course of study. Examining the problematic does not mean simply theorizing an issue or “problem” as a result of experiences of oppression but rather exploring a complex set of institutional relations and processes that shape the experience of people.

Moreover, while the problematic roots inquiry, it is not meant to start in theory or preconceptions. Smith (2005, p. 40) writes that, “[f]ormulating a problematic…means going beyond to develop a project for inquiry which, while it may be oriented by such interests, must not be constrained by them, or adopt their prejudgments. It means creating a project of exploration. Exploration may begin in talk with those concerned, learning from them sometimes more than they realize they knew about how they participate in an institutional process”.

The problematic of this study has demanded exploration of a complex set of concerns that speak to issues of First-Nation and settler relations, Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, modes of production, conflicting land ownership and governance regimes, and approaches to development. Also relevant but not explicitly explored here are questions of language and spirituality.

The dispossession and displacement of Indigenous people in Canada has been well documented (RCAP, 1996; Borrows, 2005; Hall, 1991, 2003; Blaser, Feit and McRae, 2004) and it is clear that the effects of colonial policy in Canada has left a legacy of trauma in First Nation communities that continues to produce often unbearable results in the area of youth suicide, substance abuse and other social malaise attributed to the mistreatment and cultural
dispossession produced through the forced removal from a spiritual and material connection to land (Little Bear, 2000; Simpson, 2008).

My intention is not to rehash this well-documented history, but to move into a more specific understanding of the institutional and text processes that are not as visible in the experience of de-territorialization and dispossession. The problematic is tied to these broader marginalizing experiences of Indigenous people in face of capitalism and within a history of colonization that has to do with their “invisibility” produced through ideological forms of abstraction. This is reproduced in institutional processes, public talk, sites of work and mediated by texts. As Maori scholar, L.T. Smith, describes:

Indigenous attempts to reclaim land, language, knowledge and sovereignty have usually involved contested accounts of the past by colonizers and the colonized. These have occurred in the courts, before various commissions, tribunals and official enquiries, in the media, in Parliament, in bars and on talkback radio. In these situations contested histories do not exist in the same cultural framework as they do when tribal or clan histories, for example, are being debated within the Indigenous community itself. They are not simply struggles over the ‘facts’ and ‘truth’. The rules by which these struggles take place are never clear (other than that we as the Indigenous community know they are going to be stacked against us); and we are not the final arbiters of what really counts as the truth. (Smith, 1999: 34)

This experience of exclusion, reflected in the “contested accounts of history and knowledge” are pivotal to an interrogation of the institutional processes that produces such experience, and are of serious consequence to both the well-being of Indigenous peoples as well as Indigenous-settler
relations. Smith refers to a different character of debate about history and knowledge at the community level than that which takes place outside the community. When such discussions take place in the community itself, the rules are clear and the risks, if any, are understood. When these debates take place in other, non-Indigenous places, particularly, as she mentions, in the places of text production and official procedure (media, government, tribunals and so forth), the rules change, local accounts are placed within an unknown framing and sequence of operation, the risks are high in how these accounts will be interpreted and used. Historical experience has shown that they will be largely misunderstood, misused or discounted all together. The problem of the interpretation and representation of Indigenous historical and lived experience within broader “western” frames, is not going away and indeed increases in complexity since the onset of institutional relations (Smith, 2005) within a neoliberal era that leaves less space for the meaningful expression of difference than ever before (Bannerji, 2011).

IE, while informed by historical experiences such as colonialism and dispossession, demands we explore, through serious ethnographic inquiry, the text sequences involved in shaping relations for specific people in a specific place and time. This implies a process of critical learning that has an effect on what people choose to do with the knowledge to which they have been exposed. Social relations can be traced and mapped, indeed must be, in order to identify the spaces where real change, revolutionary change, can actually begin to take shape.

Thus in the designing of this project of exploration, the problematic has been informed by broader experiences of displacement and dispossession among Indigenous people, and specifically, by the multiple conversations, interviews, meetings, workshops and my own participation in the community-based research project underway in the community. The Paquatakanik Project while different from the IE study, is driven in by the concerns of people
about continued relationships with, and access to, traditional territory, materialized in conscious efforts to bridge communication between elders and youth about the land and rivers, to carry out community mapping in both English and the Inninowuk language about the sites and stories of the territory, and organize excursions, events and educational experiences out on the land in the context of a re-appropriation of the history and meaning of traditional territory as it gets passed on to the next generation.

The “Paquataskamik Project”

“Paquataskamik” after which the community project was named, is an Inninowuk word referring to the “natural environment”, that that appeared to be going into disuse among the younger generation (Restoule, Gruner and Metatawabin, 2011) and re-introduced through project activities, as “something community members, especially elders, could relate to” (Interview with Community Advisory member, 2011). The word was spray painted on the side of the raft that housed some 15 people at a time during two excursions in 2009 and 2011 as part of the project’s activities. It was brought into the titles of creative materials produced through project activities, including a film (Paquataskamik is Home, 2011), website and audio documentary. Introducing the word spoke to the desire by the older generation to involve the young people more directly in experiencing the vast lands that make up their traditional territory, and raising consciousness about their territories as well beyond the reserve.

The name evoked emotional attachments to land felt on a visceral level as articulated by a female adult who participated in a river excursion, “I [saw]…a phrase. Paquataskamik is home. That’s what I feel. We are going home to the land. The land is what connects us to the ancestors. It’s going to make us stronger and the youth even stronger to be out on the land.” (Interview with female adult from Fort Albany). This “naming in Cree” was an assertion of claim/legitimacy, an
effort to “speak to people in a language they understand” rather than the English and institutional language of projects and policies, as one male adult on the advisory committee asserted. It evoked an Inninowuk way of being that is located specifically in this place, and rooted in everyday activities of people who speak of going to their camps, of the number of goose brought home this season, of making sure the youth and elders are getting the chance to visit and spend time out on the land, of taking the canoe up to Ghost River (Nameo Sipi) or Apamat, of taking part in the next raft excursion along the Kabinakagami, Kenogami and Kistachowan Rivers. Language was always a pivotal thread for people, recognized as deeply rooted in historical land relations, in the words of one member of Fort Albany First Nation who participated in one of the field excursions of the project:

The other thing that I noticed is the language becoming alive, like the words I’ve never heard that are used along the river. And that’s what they always said…that the language is in the land and through the land and I could never quite grasp that concept until I was actually out here and hearing those words. It’s like the language is becomes revitalized or strengthened… (Interview with female adult from Fort Albany First Nation)

The community project reflected a desire among the young people to learn about their history, learn more of the language, and to deepen their own relationship within the territory through being out in the region as they were learning how to conduct interviews with each other, their peers, adults and elders from the community. At the same time, they felt barriers to accessing the traditional territory as they understood their parents and grandparents did. These barriers were both invisible and known: they were the product of institutional encounters during previous periods that had left their mark on the current generations. Still, people actively worked to
overcome these barriers, to reorient the associated negative outcomes, and to foster ways that allowed for a way of life to continue. This was not only a desire of elders or adults, or based on nostalgia for the past. It was a living, breathing drive that included young people moving it forward. As one participant stated in an interview (2008), “Well if I had 10 million dollars I’d take all the youth and go moose hunting” (Interview with male youth from Fort Albany).

The community project had a number of iterations, and while assembled under one name in 2009, built on years of local efforts and more recently, the small funding sources and resulting project activities that brought people together. The process of producing knowledge through audio interviews (“Paquataskamik project: 2008-2009”, 2009) reflected a process of critical learning underway in the community as people became aware of broader institutional and development processes advancing, and focused on developing sites and activities for learning about Inninowuk territory and ways of knowing. This took place at a time when large scale projects were being proposed for the area, including a potential hydro dam (Gorries, 2007) and the “Ring of Fire” developments (Gorries, 2010), and after the Impact Benefit Agreement with DeBeers was signed.

The project was envisioned as a learning project, one of healing, and consciousness about the territory, contesting in many ways the enduring effects of dispossession through the residential education. According to one of project members:

Today through activities like Paquataskamik, in summer and winter, we will take the youth…give them another opening in their minds that the land is there for them to use, for them to learn from, for them to expand their terminology, expand their minds, see scenes of beauty, calmness, and feel all this calmness and beauty on the land. And by seeing all the beauty, their heart will open up. The heart will
begin to feel positive, hopeful, and just be happy to be alive. I think that’s important, that’s what the land can teach you. It’s not so much that we can accumulate a lot of stuff, it’s such a short term vision, that we will accumulate a lot of stuff, destroy everything, take everything for ourselves in our little lifetime, and nothing for the future generations.

That’s a very short sighted vision. It pains us to hear and see people behaving in this fashion because we have such a long time to be here. It’s not for us, it’s for those who aren’t here yet. We have to keep the garden full of food and flowers, and plants. So we are preparing the youth on the land for future generations. The same thing happened in education where there was a separation of youth and adults, youth and parents because of education, take the child to school and in extreme cases take the child to residential school and force them to learn another way.

And then the poor parent had to go into the natural environment by themselves and suffer since their purpose in life is to teach the young and that was taken away from them. I guess we see the results of that injury. It was a big injury on their hearts. Pain loneliness, suffering, crying, missing their child. That’s a big big injury committed on a certain population, and we’re still paying for that.

(Interview with Paquataskamik Project member)

The project member interviewed left no doubt about the goals of the project as critical and transformative, contesting the abstracting effects of capitalist relations and reclaiming “concrete space”. In his words:
Hopefully Paquataskamik can make these small changes and begin…where we can see some changes in the future. We’re always fighting with the foreign system, the Euro Canadian system, an economy that needs to accelerate and accumulate and everything else, versus an economy that wants to live here. This is where we are, where we were put to live together, and be satisfied…to experience everything. (Interview with Paquataskamik Project member)

The project, pushed forward by a local advisory group and project coordinators, attempted to generate an understanding of, and appreciation for, the lived experience of people in the community in relation to their surrounding territory. Traditional territory was explored as an un-boundaried area beyond the reserve, vast and complex with a deeply storied past and present, expressed as more than geography, but as a familial presence, evidenced in this spontaneous conversation about the Albany River that was recorded during the community audio documentary project:

…So it’s quite a mighty river, I have quite a lot of respect for it. Basically, I just love the river myself. I’m on it a lot, almost every day. And just to even look at it is satisfying. I don’t necessarily have to be on it sometimes, I just need to look at it, it’s gratifying; gratifying for me, physically, emotionally, mentally, and it’s like, aah, it’s like getting a hug from mom; that’s what it is for me. (Interview with male adult from Fort Albany)

In more than one instance over the past few years, people, especially elders and adults who have experienced life in the bush for long stretches of time before the residential school period took hold, have been moved to tears when talking about the land. People recall family members born
and buried throughout the river systems, learning from the land in hard-to-articulate ways, and the ways in which life was a challenge, a heartache at times, but whole.

There is a growing awareness of the ways in which the landscape is changing in relation to development in the region, and along with it, changes to the ways people are in relation to the land. While change is inevitable, people are working for recognition as the authority to shape change on their own terms, and better terms, for their communities. In face of proposed hydroelectric developments on the river, for example, people expressed concerns about what will potentially happen to their much loved homelands. After the first raft excursion during the community project in 2009, one of the adults who filmed the excursion, and who also plays a key role as a former chief of Fort Albany and current regional leader, perhaps best summed up the current juncture in an interview just after returning home from the river trip:

…I was just soaking it in, just thinking about the wide open space, and the openness of the river, and wondering to myself, why couldn’t we be on this river, why couldn’t we be living on this river…? I kept thinking that over and over, I saw so many places where I could picture a cabin, or a number of cabins, where certain families could stay or live. That’s what I was thinking about when I was coming down. I was listening to the elders talk about the changes they are seeing, they are witnessing, there’s a lot less animals they say, a lot less birds. So they are seeing that change happen. Again, like I was listening to them, and being amazed and wondering why can’t we be living on this river, and also realizing that for me I know there is talk about developing the river.

So I wonder if people realize what that means. Will they have enough information to make that decision? You know, to allow development. So it kinda
changed me, kinda changed my thinking. I was gung-ho for development, to be honest. I don’t know, I guess I thought it was the next logical step for our community, a way to become, to have opportunity for jobs and stuff. But then again that might only be short term, and the rest would be forever. Like flooding or damage to this system. So it made me wonder, it made me rethink how I viewed the river.

I would recommend to everybody, make that time, do it, see the river, learn the names of the places, learn the history, then decide on your own, do you want to let that go forever? That’s what I was thinking. (Interview with male adult from Fort Albay, 2009)

The everyday world of Inninowuk is demonstrative of an Inninowuk way of being with each other and on the land, even as development advances and as people are hooked up to institutional processes in the current era of advanced capitalism. The questions of how people are affected by the politics of land development over time, and how they might insert more control over institutional processes affecting them emerged as important concerns in the general problematic for study.

Some of the specific questions that have shaped, and been shaped by, the IE problematic deal with the obstacles to exercising the right to be out in traditional territory. How has it come to be that people’s access to land has been so significantly limited? Is it just that people choose not to access the traditional areas as much as they once did (while they continue to clearly demonstrate their presence), or are there other institutional obstacles that shape the ways in which people make these decisions? What are the current experiences of people in their everyday lives with regards to accessing and drawing from the areas beyond the reserve for their continued
sustenance and livelihood? What are the broader institutional processes at play with regards to jurisdiction that shape what happens on land?

If we are to really begin in the lived experience of people as research standpoint, who understand the treaty relationship significantly differently than the official accounts, who see themselves as governing in their own land based on a longstanding history in the territory where “the Creator placed them” (Hookimaw-Witt 2006), who, moreover, feel an ongoing potential threat of further dislocation and disenfranchisement due to the rapid pace of development, how can we explore what is actually taking place for people? Is there a way to make the institutional and development relations more explicit? Can the actual process whereby people are uprooted from forms of being on land – not the end result, but the process itself - be described in detail? Is there a way to explicate the institutional mechanics of de-territorialization, to illuminate the actual text processes involved, how they actually work as sociologically-traceable sequences? How can we shed light on the specific processes of dislocation in relation to access to, and jurisdiction over, land?

Again the approach must be rooted in a deeper understanding of the problematic from the standpoint of local people affected and shaped by it. By “local” I mean Mushkego Inninowuk, or Swampy Cree, from a specific community located in the current day James and Hudson Bay lowlands, who are not deemed “local” based on a static notion of place, but who live in a specific place located, along with other reserve communities, within a broader territory, linked by family ties and history. People find themselves in the insufficient boundaries of a reserve community, despite an immeasurable nomadic experience in a vast territorial area. Narrative and oral history play an important role in keeping the sense of collective self and freedom as Mushkegowuk
alive, to fully engage in land practice as they see fit, to govern themselves as they encounter increasing constraints and demands.

This experience of land is deeply dependent on a living Inninowuk language. In the language are to be found expressions, words, symbols, gestures and utterances that reflect a historical organization rooted in land-oriented ontology (Bird, 2005). As the Inninowuk language and its oral expression (although it does have a syllabic written expression) comes up against the dominant language of commerce, capital and colonization, its meanings and expressions, its historical way of organizing people, are decoded, subverted to broader organizing forms, with its own rules and protocols, defined elsewhere. The experience of invisibilization is heavily reliant on textual reproduction of policies related to land and organization on land, in English, arranged and made official through government ministries. In the following interview with a member of Fort Albany First Nation about the advancing “land use planning” legislation, we can clearly see the issue for people in the First Nation community forming into a problematic for study. He draws on previous collective experience of government policy, and asserts a feeling of disempowerment, invisibility of the oral form of expression in the face of the contemporary, written policy process unfolding:

This activity…where they put into policy on the provincial and federal side…to write down is the operative word. Writing down on paper actually takes away from the oral tradition, it is an attack on the oral tradition, that you take away the ownership, you take away the rights of the Indigenous people and by taking them away, their rights, their [local/pre-existing] policies, you in effect can put them down on paper, file them in a cabinet, and they will be changed, adjusted, in
committee rooms on the provincial or let’s say government level to suit the needs of the government.

In effect if the Indigenous people give away their rights, they have in effect relinquished their rights and I think this is what is happening right now. It is an attempt that we, in the organized territory north of Highway 11, have been insistent on maintaining the lifestyle, activities, occupation of the land, and the use of the land, every year, for various purposes. I think the law wants to put their foot down, and we will see ourselves confined to these 88 acres they call the reserve. Ultimately that is the aim.

I just like to remind everybody that we are aware of the policies, the purpose of policies, and I think it’s an unjust way to go, you have to make an attempt to get around the table, include them around the table and discuss these things, but don’t take them home and write them down, that’s how the Indian Act was done. (Interview with adult male, Fort Albany First Nation)

Narratives and Land Relations

Historian Louis Bird is more than a teller of Omushkego cultural stories and historical events. His narratives (2005, 2007) anchor him in a cultural mode of being that is specifically Mushkego Inninowuk, rooted in life on the land and strong historical oral tradition. From there he also offers insights, through first person narrative, about settler-Mushkegowuk relations, the signing of Treaty 9 adhesions, changes to the institutions that have come to affect life and land in the region. He is a respected historian throughout the Mushkegowuk region and spent time in Ste. Anne’s Residential School in Fort Albany.
Without any sign of dogmatic theoretical frame, Bird (2007) writes of the effects of colonialism and dispossession. As part of his exploration of cultural history, he observes the institutional policy developments taking place in the region (2005) that he sees as likely to expand in the ensuing years, reducing the ability to freely engage in cultural practice and access traditional Mushkegowuk life, in part due to the imposition of capitalist development. His 2005 work, “Telling Our Stories: Omushkego Legends and Histories from Hudson Bay”, provides a view into Mushkegowuk life and reality that in some places in his telling, is a lament for the loss of language and culture and critique of the current and pending text developments that he perceives has significantly limiting the freedom of people and their activities on the land. Through his written work, which is purposefully written as if orally spoken, a clear non-ideological rendition of life is being told and contrasts with the objectifying effects of institutional text.

I pause here to emphasize the importance of Bird’s narratives as reflective of views I have heard expressed in the community of Fort Albany of which this study is concerned. Bird’s texts are one of the few narrative works from a Mushkegowuk perspective that offers a local representation of life past and present, as well as insight into the problematic of land relations that I am compelled to explore here. He clearly speaks to the concerns and frustrations of local people who find themselves limited by federal and provincial policy (the latter perhaps more immediately) and identifies key texts and even processes that help to reference the institutional relations that need to be examined in relation to their specific effects on people and their daily lived experience on land.

Moreover, Bird’s material reminds that there is a Mushkego Inninowuk story to be told, and privileged in face of its longstanding marginalization and invisibility. Efforts like his speak
to a politics of resistance and alternative social relations rooted in non-capitalist, Inninowuk modes of being and viewing the world, that join the work of editors and publishers that have worked with Bird, other Inninowuk authors in the region (Hookimaw-Witt, 2006; Kataquapit, 2003; Metatawabin, 2008, 2009), other academics, artists and people who speak to a way of being on land and in history, in ways that critique the ideological and objectifying relations of capital.

This is crucial to the project of conscientization (Freire, 1974/2009) particularly of European descendent allies who strive to transform the problematic relations that continue to underpin their historical relationship with First Nation people. Consciousness and critique of institutional relations are reflective of revolutionary learning (Allman, 2005; Freire, 1974/2009). We must know who we are, where we come from, and where we are going, in order to confront the alienating effects of reification and displacement. It is only through critical consciousness that the subaltern story can be made visible and while it is true that this work needs to be carried out by both settlers as allies, often long displaced within their own histories, the work must be focused in places where the transformation of relations is most urgent.

While Bird (2005) does not do the work of explaining how the text and text processes function (which is not what he set out to do) he offers insight into the problematic at hand, the power of the province as governing institution, seemingly enduring and unchangeable, wielding ultimate authority and effectively limiting, via text processes, the ability of people to carry out their lives in the way they would otherwise, with the option to freely access areas of traditional practice, despite what the treaty agreement states. Bird offers concrete clues to the textually mediated institutionalization of experience among Mushkegowuk as a key aspect of displacement from land and access to traditional territory. Through reflecting on a set of
provincial rules and policies that make up MNR (the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources) he speaks to an overall complex of ruling relations that comes to bear on the Inninowuk experience that makes visible the institutions of conservation as well as the politics of jurisdiction:

Today we are under provincial rules. If the provincial government wants to apply the rules in the reserves, or on any Native people, they can stop us from hunting at any time. They can stop us hunting out of season. They can stop us shooting the polar bear permanently, and also from shooting any other animals that we don’t use. They can do that. The conservation officers in that MNR have that authority. Regardless if they have said in the treaty that we can still live upon the surface of the land, regardless of the Polar Bear Provincial Park that has been created in the James Bay-Hudson Bay district – that can be erased with one stroke of the pen.

And that will be the end. (Bird, 2005, p. 229)

Bird makes reference to the historical dispossession of First Nation people, as a cumulative, seemingly inevitable, process over time that takes place via text processes related to institutional forms of social organization. “And the rules that apply to the Ontario citizen will apply even to the First Nations. It happens already. It happens in Timmins, it happens wherever there is a township. These rules apply to anyone, doesn’t matter who you are. These things will happen. For now, those of us who live outside the boundary of those township lines, we are still okay, but how long these things will last? It probably will change within twenty years.” (Bird, 2005, p. 229). He identifies in no uncertain terms a broad-based institutional process underway in Innino-Aski, one that needs to be examined and understood, in this case, a gradual move towards turning reserves into townships with the implied dismantling of treaty rights and current organizational arrangements.
He continues further to put the problem of access to land, jurisdiction and institutional forms of organization, into the context of capitalist development being unleashed in the region,

We see that a few years ago, Premier Mike Harris of Ontario opened the territory north of the fifty-fifth parallel. That means the mining activities will take place up into Hudson Bay-James Bay area. They are starting right now, and the country’s going to be open and in no time, the road will come. And when the road comes, the towns will open and the organized territory will come to exist.

Townships will be created and the survey lines will be all over the place, which will do away with freedom of movement of the First Nations; there will be no such thing after that. No more freedom. (Bird, 2005, p. 229)

He sometimes posits the process as inevitable in these orally-inspired written passages, but one that he resists and actively works against in others. He laments language and cultural loss through formal education that is not tied to actual land practice when he states, “the Omushkego language itself will be done soon. And to try to teach the young people their language without living it, it’s a waste of time” (2005, p. 233). This allows us to gain a sense of the complexity of the problematic at hand that goes well beyond simply accessing a broader land base. It speaks to the heart of the experience of being for many people in the region who value the ongoing connection to land that is gained in part through understanding the Inninowuk language.

“There are times,” he writes, “When the Omushkego language does not have a word to express the situation which came from other cultures such as the European culture. That is why we, the Omushkego or First Nation people, have been forced to use the English language…” (2005, p. 233). Bird identifies for us the encounter between the two distinct languages, one that is orally based, and the other, not insignificantly, that relies heavily on the use of text, which in the
end, dominates and imposes itself as the language of ruling. He helps us to recognize this as a question of consciousness and learning and that there is a Mushkego Ininowuk consciousness or mode of existence that is being obscured.

It is the question of how consciousness and learning shapes and is shaped by institutional text-based processes that is of interest here, and necessarily includes analysis of others beyond the community, but includes myself as academic and community researcher, government employees and representatives, Indigenous and environmental organizations who work with the community, and other organizations who are involved in the institutional relations of land in Innino Aski, Treaty 9 territory.

Other Mushkegowuk narratives, treating settler-Indigenous relations coordinated via text processes, similarly express loss, duplicity, and a sense of being constrained within an institutional interpretation of land relations. Stan Louttit, Mushkegowuk Tribal Council Grand Chief, at a meeting on land use planning and the *Far North Act* (2010), summarizes the confrontation between textual and oral understandings of the treaty, and identifies what continues to be at stake for Mushkegowuk First Nation communities, and some of the key issues in the production of policy that continue to be relevant in political processes today, including adequate consultation, consent, translation, differences between oral and written understandings, and so forth. This powerful explanation of the implications of the resurfacing of a treaty commissioner’s diary, offers clues into why the process of text production is so significant for Mushkegowuk:

Anyways it's becoming very clear…that the legal document called the Treaty obviously was developed way beforehand by the lawyers and policy-makers of the government in Ottawa before it was brought…to our people. And there's no
provision in there for translation of that legal document. Did they tell us, tell our grandparents fully, “this is why this, this is what that word means, this is what that phrase means, in your language, in Cree”? No, those Commissioners stood there and held this damn paper like this and talked about this, talked about that, and the words that came out of their mouth is what MacMartin, that Ontario Commissioner wrote in his diaries.

Very different from what's written in the Treaty. So it reinforces what our Elders have been saying in terms of the spirit and intent of that, of our Treaties… I'll give you an example…The…actual Treaty says we gave up our land. Not those exact words, but it says…we gave up when we signed the Treaty. We gave up our land. But in the Commissioner's Diaries, George Martin’s diaries, when he went to New Post, when … Angus Weenusk [Mushkego ancestor]…stood on, and after the Treaty Commissioners spoke…he said, “I agree with everything you said”.

He didn't say I agree with what you've written or I agree with your legal document there, I completely understand those 103 pages - he didn't say that. [He said] “I agree with what you said.” So that means to us that the Treaty Commissioners that were there said things that were good for our people, and they agreed. And that the legal document that was presented was just fraud and lies to us, the actual document. And in the words of that Commissioner it said, the Commissioner said, “you can hunt”…”you may hunt and trap as in the days of yore,” it says…meaning as you did a long time ago, as you've always done, you can continue doing those things.
That's what came out of the Commissioner's mouths when they were talking to these people, but in the Treaty document it doesn't say that, it says the opposite. You can't do those things. So those diaries are very, very, very important, very, very strong, and very, very exciting...Because it reinforces what our Elders said a long time ago. That we heard things, that we understood our Elders. And our Elders understood that when those Commissioners were talking that it was a good thing and they agreed that there should be a Treaty. And damn sure if they understood the Treaty as it was presented that they wouldn't have agreed to it.

My grandfather, my mother's father, Andrew Wesley, his signature is on that Treaty document from Old Post Albany. He put his X there. And I'm darn sure he wouldn't have put his X if they gave him the time to read that legal document and to understand it, there's no way. So he signed it...he must have said, “These are good words. I like this.” Grandpa Wesley, that's what he must have thought. (Presentation, Timmins, 2010)

Through Beardy’s narrative we gain understanding of the dialectical, historical and material relations involved in the treaty signing, and have a firmer rooting in the standpoint of the perspective of local Mushkegowuk within contemporary land politics and the legislative processes unfolding in relation to land use planning and development in Treaty 9.

As I began to interview people in relation to their interpretation of current legislative processes underway, a number of themes begin to recur, one of the most salient ones being that of language and misunderstandings based on use of terminology in English. According to a female elder from the community of Fort Albany:
Coming back to terms of reference, at times they have a different meaning when you change the language. Let’s say for the instance when you talk about the resources. The natural resources are in my language what the elder told me a long time ago, I asked him how do you say resources in our language you know? He says ‘mi sa-gi si we nah’ which means prosperity. Riches. You know?

But when it comes to the non-Native, they automatically think in the sense of money, richness, to be rich, to gain wealth by money. In terms of the Native, when you say misakisiwin, it means you’re rich (interviewee emphasis) with the resources, the food that you eat, the land, what the land provides you, you really feel rich. See that’s the different sense of understanding when it comes to the languages. (Interview with female Elder from Fort Albany, 2010)

This Elder, also a Cree language speaker, has been involved to varying degrees with land issues in her own, and in other communities. She is keenly aware of the nuances of language in Cree, yet also uses the formulation of “terms of reference” to explain the differences in the interpretation of terms in a general sense, rather than how the province has introduced it as a legal term referring to one of the final steps set out by the land use planning process to produce a binding agreement which relies on approval from the province (“Far North Act”, 2010). As she picks up on the legalistic language entrenched in the documents she is exposed to, a bifurcation of consciousness is apparent, reflecting a separation of her experience on the land as an Inninowuk person, and one who must grapple with provincial texts produced about her land on the other, complicated by the nuances of a second language, specific in its institutional meanings that differ from common understandings.
The province as institutional organization presents the region north of the 51st parallel as “unorganized territories” on the map, in need of (Western) organizing through the constitution of regions and through land use plans approved and made official through provincial legislative processes. Environmental organizations, constrained by their organizational mission statements, legal rules of their charitable statuses, their own procedures for reporting to board members and funders, also produce the region as in need of organizing through land use planning as they grapple with the very real threats of large-scale industrial development, which is largely seen as an intractable, uncontrollable force. Indeed the rapid increase in mining, forestry and other large scale industry activity, is notably shifting the terrain in the north, both literally, through physical effects on the land and ecological system, and institutionally, as diverse organizational players move to act to “develop”, “protect from development” or “assert jurisdiction over development” in the area. Large-scale developers are immersed in the practice of objectifying land as product, justified through the provision of limited jobs in the region, as they accumulate wealth from Indigenous territories with the oversight of regulating bodies of the state. Indigenous representative organizations such as Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) and Mushkegowuk Tribal Council and local First Nation governments (among others) are brought into the spheres of negotiation with the state on the terms set out by the province and its ministries, hooked up through English language institutional texts concerning resource development and land use planning, within a highly legalized environment that itself has been constituted through historical processes of treaty making, capitalist accumulation and colonial control.

Through a process of unveiling the ways in which the institutional text processes related to traditional territory unfold, I will now return to the story at hand, specifically rooted in my own experience with the community and other players as mentioned above, about the
ideological, work-related and social coordinating aspects of institutional processes that inform
(though do not determine) how people are able to access and experience their traditional territory
at the current juncture.
CHAPTER SIX

IDEOLOGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT IN INDIGENOUS LANDS

Contemporary Ideology and Accumulation as Extension of the Colonial “Past”

The differences in Indigenous and European settler understandings about human relationships with land and water and place in the natural world, play a key role in conflicting definitions of development and the environment, which in turn underpin the contested terrain of jurisdiction in Treaty 9. Conflicting interpretations play out within ruling relations as discursive exchanges are brought into the institutional realm. This chapter will explore ideology in relation to the environment or nature, “land” and the politics of development that reinforce objectified subjectivities, established in colonial times, and setting out contemporary ruling relations.

By ideology, I am not referring here only to the content of “ideological systems” as in a generalized or theorized view of, for example, neoliberalism, socialism, conservatism, environmentalism and so forth but rather, the method in which ideology or the process of abstraction of everyday lived experience and space, through the reification of concepts, takes place in contemporary societies. This ideological work relies on the work of people in institutions and those they engage with in multiple local sites, as texts are created in the attempt to organize people in the places they live.

To be precise, I draw on definitions of ideology put forward by Marx, Smith, Allman, Banerjee, Mojab, and others, captured here by Carpenter and Mojab (2011):

Ideology is understood…as not just a system of ideas or thought content, but as an epistemology, a way of knowing, that abstracts and fragments social life.

Ideological reasoning is accomplished through a complex of tasks that require
researchers to disarticulate everyday experience from the conditions and relations in which it takes place. These dismembered bits of human life are then arranged within the framework of pre-existing interpretive notions. The concepts, categories, and theories that result from this process are then given power to frame and interpret other social phenomena. (Carpenter and Mojab, 2011).

Indeed the production of ideas about the environment and development in Indigenous communities is the ideological work that makes up the complex of ruling relations that serves to fragment social life in Treaty 9 communities. This builds on a long history of colonial and capitalist depictions of objectified nature and work (O’Connor, 1998; Harvey, 1996) and their effects on space and time (Lefebvre, 1991), which will be discussed further on. We will begin however, in an exploration of abstraction in relation to the colonial creation of subjectivities, an important point of departure for understanding the contemporary period of land politics.

Indeed Mushkego Inninowuk have been subjected to deeply ideological and institutional processes since colonial times that continue to shape the terrain of ruling relations in the contemporary period, a terrain shaped by gendered and “raced” processes of accumulation by dispossession (Hookimaw-Witt, 2006; Federici, 2004; Harvey, 2003). During the colonial period, the creation of subjectivities beginning with “Indian”, subverted to colonial and capitalist regulating power, established a fiduciary relationship between the Crown and people. This was pivotal in the establishment of official accounts of authority and territorial jurisdiction, starting with the Royal Proclamation of 1763, and created the procedures and regulations for how legal processes were to ensue, paving the way for the continued extraction of resources and bringing people into new institutional forms of relating to settler governments, each other, and their territories.
New identities were established via the institutional process during the early settler-First Nation encounters, as Inninowuk become “Indians” under the Indian Act in the colonial period, and often assigned European names or rough English translations of Inninowuk names for census purposes and for the reception of meager benefits of Indian status (Long, 2010). This discursive process, which abstracted Inninowuk identity according to colonial formulations of what it meant to be “Indian”, set out ensuing legal arrangements, and established a relationship of dependency on the federal and provincial governments. As was the case for First Nation people across the country, the Indian Act was produced through a text process that excluded Indigenous people directly in its articulation, and they did not participate even in “electing the politicians who legislated the Indian Act, since Native people were not allowed to vote federally until 1960” (Erasmus and Sanders, 1999, p.8)

The “institutional process” did not function as an “objectified” process, but rather was created and furthered by actual people, reflecting the western ontological and epistemological orientation of the period, a “colonial consciousness” that saw lands as empty (“terra nullius”) with “resources” for extraction, and people as to be “brought into the capitalist economy”. Commissioners, civil servants and officials of the colonial era produced categories of Indigeneity according to Crown norms, establishing institutional sequences for the recognition or denial of such categories (Lawrence, 2003). A deeply gendered process, this came to affect women and men differently, as Indigenous women who married a “non-Indian”, were effectively “enfranchised”, forced to give up their Indian status and assimilate into the European-settler governance systems, without the rights and privileges, including access to land, associated with being Indian, that were otherwise “guaranteed” in treaties. Canada has not defined “Native” or “Indigenous” and so regardless of one’s Indian status, one remains Native or Indigenous. Most
non-status Indians were known as “Native” through this period. Native was a term signifying one’s bloodline, heritage or recognition among the community when one didn’t have state-recognised “Indian” status (Restoule, 2011).

The process of enfranchisement, though taken up voluntarily by some, and creating some divisions, was highly contested and by the mid-20th Century there was intense organized resistance of women and men opposing the institutional process that dispossessed people from their sources of meaning, their communities, and the material “benefits” that came with retaining Indian status, that was in effect an agreed-upon exchange “in perpetuity”, for sharing the territory. This has been a long struggle that has seen many iterations along the way, with the recent adjustment in the institutional process that affords, “as of January 31, 2011, grandchildren of women who lost Indian Status as a result of marrying non-Indian men can apply to obtain their Indian Status, in accordance with the Indian Act” (Service Canada, 2011)

During the period of treaty making, paralleling the objectification of identity, Indigenous lands were similarly brought under the abstracting gaze of colonial power. “Home”, the vast territory – Innino Aski - where people derived a living, freely accessed by people, was, in the institutional and written version, converted into a series of “reserves” and “crown lands”. This process of creating an “absolute space” (Lefebvre, 1991), a static, Cartesian, depiction of a bounded area subsequently represented in the developing provincial maps of what was once, “Innino Aski”, a lived space that was historically shaped by the stories, practices and social, political and economic organizational forms of the Mushkegowuk and their relations. New “reserve” boundaries were established through the textual work of civil servants, legal writers, and government officials, who relied on reports of encounters with the new Indian subjects,
which were activated in the production of new treaty texts, written for the purposes of securing Crown lands for future development. The treaty would come to define the boundaries where Inninowuk, called Indians and later Aboriginal, Inuit, Metis and so forth, were directed to live, under the control of Indian Agents (Erasmus and Sanders, 1999). Much has changed since the time when people “could not leave the reserve without passes, [when] they were not legally in charge of a single thing that happened on their land” (Erasmus and Sanders, 1999, p.8), but there is a long way to go.

In the process of establishing reserves, the new Crown lands have become conceptually bound up with First Nation ancestral territories historically, collectively belonging to people living in the area, yet institutionally, legally the property of the Crown. It became a nebulous abstracted notion of space that is neither brought under the complete jurisdiction of the province or federal government, nor recognized fully as Indigenous land, compromising the ability of people living in the region to fully engage in land practice “as if in their own lands” (Bird, 2005). This is the state of “territory” in the Treaty 9 region, with a great deal of conflicting interpretation on the side of governments and First Nation communities as to what the history of the understanding actually is.

Subjectivities created in the encounter between settlers and First Nations were both problematic in terms of the institutional hold established by ruling colonial governments, yet considered necessary, as it became the only form of protection against the encroaching settlers and the vastly expanding capitalist development relations. Inninowuk, as well as those settlers critical of the unfair treatment of Indigenous people, worked to ensure that there was some legal protection, to preserve a “way of life” and undisturbed access to land. Hence the contradictory institutional process that was to unfold over ensuing years allowed for divergent interpretations
of the meaning of the treaty and treaty rights to be recorded. It is well documented that the intentions of Inninowuk and other Indigenous people who entered into written agreements with governments, were to assure that people would be able to assert their legitimate presence in their own lands (for further more in-depth exploration of the treaty signing see Macklem, 2002; Long, 1993, 1996, 2010). According to oral and written accounts, not explicit or explained were the rules, regulations and potential effects of entering into a powerful textually mediated institutional realm, carried out in a second language, without adequate translation, based on a distinct way of conceiving life, land, and property. It is important to remember that the treaty text was written elsewhere, by provincial and federal agents who visited the territory and signatory communities only after the text was completed. There is no known involvement by First Nation people themselves in the elaboration of the document itself.

The power of the textual process was then unknown, and became more complicated over time as the subjectivities established in the Indian Act and treaties were brought to bear on new legislations and policies targeting the region, without meaningful involvement, if any, of the people affected by them. Through a long process of resistance, negotiation and work by both Indigenous people and their allies, new spaces have opened up within the institutional process for the articulation of Indigenous concerns, yet these continue to be shaped and usurped in unwanted ways, in an unending, ever-dynamic, legal, political and social process. Today the Inninowuk are “First Nations” within the Bill 191 process. Rather than “Indians” they are First Nations, a title speaking to the resistance efforts of Indigenous people throughout Canada to have recognized their presence as nations pre-dating colonization. Yet people are not recognized as the Mushkego Inninowuk or the “Cree” nation in the actual legislation, as its aim is to organize
multiple identities translocally, brought into the ruling process as one “authorized” “umbrella” subjectivity.

Driving legislative processes in the region north of the 51st parallel in relation to land beginning with the treaty and continuing with the *Far North Act* among other legislations, is accumulation, which relies on the continued exploitation of land, the regulation of labour, and the abstraction of nature and space rooted in colonial conceptualizations. Marx first discussed “primitive accumulation” as an “initial stage of capitalist development” (Marx, 1977), that forced people from collective ownership of lands (the “Commons”) into wage earning and other laboral roles within capitalist relations. The process produced specific gender and race effects and continues to be resisted throughout the globe as people struggle to protect the new commons (Federici, 2010). This process is arguably at the heart of the struggle for jurisdiction in Treaty 9 territory, as the collective “traditional lands” of the Cree, Oji-Cree and Ojibwa people come under the gaze of advanced neoliberal capitalism and the regulating power of the province to manage the process. Without understanding the objectifications resulting from the colonial history of accumulation and as it is currently expressed, an analysis of what is at stake would be impossible.

Put into historical context, Federici (2004) states that the “discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the Aboriginal population [of the Americas], the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins are…the chief moments of primitive accumulation” (2004, p.63). Federici (2004) demonstrates in her seminal work, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, that it was through accumulation processes that “racial and sexual hierarchies in the colonies” (p.68) were produced. This is
echoed and further detailed by Russell (2004) in the specific context of Fort Albany First Nation, in her assessment of the effects of missionization of the reserve settlement of Fort Albany, as “the mission's settlement was the locus of Euro-Canadian attempts to control the economic, cultural and spiritual life of Cree people through its own economy, residential education and religious evangelism” (Russell, 2004, p.140-142). She states that, “the transformation the mission sought on the economic front was comprehensive of gender and kin relations …as their practices focused on wage-earning heads of nuclear families who would provide for their dependents. The mission sought to normalize this nuclear family by re-creating the capitalist division of labour among its workers, streaming men and women, boys and girls, into jobs considered gender-appropriate” (p. 141). She also recognizes that this process was continually resisted as “the mixed economy, Cree language and culture persisted” (p. 142).

The process of “primitive accumulation” as theorized by Marx is problematized as collective-oriented land tenure arrangements persisted in the Innino Aski area in light of both assertions of Indigenous governance as well as historical arrangements rooted in British law that made it legally “unclear” as to who really has jurisdiction over what lands and waters (Macklem, 2002). Local “mixed economies” such as in Fort Albany, have been nonetheless continuously affected by the processes of accumulation, as it faces economic pressures to “take up” capitalist modes of production, coming under the increased gaze of neoliberalism which works to shift wealth from the peripheries such as remote First Nation territories, to the centres of accumulation. This is the case for the Mushkegowuk, currently grappling with large scale exploitation of traditional areas through the “Ring of Fire” development, as articulated in the proceedings from a conference hosted by the Mushkegowuk Council (2010)
[A member of] Kashechewan First Nation, stated his community and the community of Fort Albany live downstream from the “Ring of Fire and they are sure to be impacted. He stated we have what the world needs, water, minerals, the forests, and the wind. He stated that mining companies like DeBeers offered up Impact Benefit Agreements. The terms of the IBAs, he further stated, are dictated by the mining companies. He asserted that it was time for First Nations people to get back up on their feet, build their own dams and build their own economic systems.

He stated now there is talk of putting 150 windmills on his trap line along the James Bay Coast. He recalled a story about his brother, the “weekend trapper” finding his traps destroyed when the transmission line was being built at Attawapiskat. He concluded that if these mining companies don’t want to share in the revenues, don’t let them onto our land. (Mushkegowuk Council, 2010)

David Harvey (2006) moves beyond Marx’s primitive accumulation as an early stage of capital, to demonstrate that such accumulation practices continue to characterize advanced capitalism in the contemporary period. He describes the multiple displacing and dispossessing strategies and outcomes of capital as a set of relations and practices that unfold in multiple, often hidden ways:

[Within neo-liberalism]…ways had to be found to transfer assets and redistributive wealth and income either from the mass of the population towards the upper classes or from vulnerable to richer countries… “accumulation by dispossession”…the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices that Marx had treated as “primitive” or “original” during the rise of capitalism.
These include the co-modification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations (as in Mexico and India in recent times); conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; co-modification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (Indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land…(Harvey, 2006, p.43, my emphasis)

Harvey discusses dispossession in relation to natural resource development, land speculation and privatization, and the expulsion of Indigenous and other rural people from collective lands and forms of production. This process, mediated and managed through provincial institutions, unfolds in Treaty 9 territory, in the context of the recent “economic opening” and the increase in large scale mining activity, evidenced in the textual production of the Far North Act. As part of the proposal for land use planning in the region, First Nations living there are encouraged to plan for “economic opportunities”, of which there is no guarantee, in exchange for carrying out the work to facilitate the designation of “protected areas”, “areas for development” and assumedly to “mitigate” the negative impacts of development through processes of negotiation already established by the federal and provincial governments that set the rules and procedures of such negotiation.

The Act designates subjectivities created in the text to become involved in the process of large-scale accumulation as “First Nations” (FNA, 2010) are made responsible for helping to manage it, through taking up and setting out local parameters for its activities, without
meaningful jurisdictional power. “Protection” and “development”, are established as the “social and economic interests of all Ontarians” (FNA, 2010) in juxtaposition with First Nation communities who are simultaneously treated as a separate yet somehow integrated group. These seemingly disparate players are set out in relation to each other within the material text in such a way that gives the appearance of mutuality and seamless cooperation between all players. The concerns of environmentalists, scientists, and others, rooted in the broader environmental implications of accumulation, are relegated to the background, as the link between dispossession and environmental decay is not made explicit.

The ideological work allows for continued arrangements of power to be dominated by the bureaucratic institutions of government and the interests of large scale development as it drives the agenda of policy development in the north. Ministry officials and policy makers must consider as a “given” the heavy increase in development interest in the region, supported and facilitated by the existing political landscape of the province and nation-state, within a competitive neoliberal globalized marketplace. For developers, regulatory policies such as Bill 191 become troublesome constraints (Dunick, 2010; PDAC, 2010). These groups maintain a strong government lobby for the opening of north to large scale development opportunities.

The question of jurisdiction over development is pervasively ignored by external development interests and left to the province and inevitably the courts to resolve (see the cases of KI, Ardoch First Nation, Constance Lake First Nation, Mattawa Chiefs etc), a parallel underlying narrative that policy makers must “deal” with. As the drive for development underpins all new policy development in the Treaty 9 region, including education and training (Northern Training Partnership Fund, 2011), jurisdiction is treated as a hornet’s nest that is approached with caution and a great deal of legal support, the environment is the last area that is
recognized as important to the public interest, while made to appear as the driving force of policy, evidenced in Bill 191’s title, An Act with Respect to Land Use Planning and Protection in the Far North.

In the process of producing public policy in the context of capitalist development, reification is a commonplace strategy, wielding power over the localized and particularized. Concepts such as “development priorities”, “Aboriginal cultural values” and “ecological priorities” for example, reflect content of locally defined issues and information orienting them to existing institutional processes, in the terminology that governs them. As “issues” and “priorities” are categorized and brought into official sequences, they are viewed through the lens of ruling, through which they are refracted as bits of its original expression, displaced from their meaning, from a larger, “whole”, and complex way of being, necessarily obfuscated in the process.

This refraction takes place as ideas about everyday life are brought into the governing sequences as descriptors in the ruling process, while disassembling the relations of its original social organization. In such a way the governing process is produced with locally defined content, which appears reflected back to its originators on the one side of the institutional lens, while simultaneously refracted into the many texts and sequences that take up partial bits of content in order to produce the ruling process itself and the appearance of inclusion.

Because “First Nation” descriptors are utilized within an institutional process that builds on the colonial renditions of Indigenous identities, brought into the legal sequences established by, in this case, the provincial government, a seemingly representative process, “inclusive” of the Treaty 9 communities, the underlying questions of jurisdiction are rendered irrelevant, or less relevant, and seemingly, somehow, resolved. In fact, they are not. Contestations continue,
manifested in public demonstrations, road closures, letters of protest, which are then often publicly (or privately) represented as unfair or surprising in face of what had appeared to ministers, civil servants and in some cases even allies, as acquiescence or basic agreement with what appears to people as suddenly legally binding policy.

The process of nominalization reflects an appearance of peoples’ lives back to them, and to the world, within the realm of governing politics and capitalist relationality that may or may not serve their interests. If they do serve the interests of people in the community, it is in a partial way, ultimately within the relations of individual property rights, as the sphere of nationhood or collectivity remains unresolved, relegated to a sub-category that development interests have to “deal with” to appease discontent and potentially explicit resistance. The outcome is on one hand, the perseverance of Indigenous people to resist and protect a way of being and representing life, and on the other, that same representation is eroded within the institutional sphere as it becomes abstracted fragments of its actual material reality.

Concepts and theories about “Aboriginal economic development”, “sustainable development” and “green development” for example, come at a time when developers are now ready to develop the region and highly interested in the resources and profits from the north, which have gained immensely in market value, and environmentalists are deeply concerned with the far-reaching ecological implications. The language and talk about the north reflects “development speak” elsewhere, and brings the region further into the realm of the neoliberal market relations established in the centres of power, shaped and supported by the rules and policies of federal and provincial governments. The actual practices of people are not generally located in development plans and theories, but rather their lives and ideas about their lives continue to be produced as nominal concepts in texts, such as “Aboriginal entrepreneurship”,

“Aboriginal human capital”, “Aboriginal values” with unclear or inaccessible explanations of what these actually mean for people in the places they live.

Indeed provincial governments find themselves under pressure to deal with matters of jurisdiction by both Indigenous people and development interests, for very different, often opposing reasons. The province must align itself with capitalist development interests in order to secure foreign investment dollars and potential jobs (most of them being short-term), reflected in public speak and texts, promoting this as “in the interests of all Ontarians”.

Translated from Indigenous languages to English, produced as institutional text, both historical life practice and the space or territory within which it takes place, become objectified and, in the process, both emerge as constitutive of the relations of ruling in official settings, orienting the writing of funding proposals, the funding of projects, the content of meetings, discussions, negotiations and other spaces of encounter that bring people together to meet, discuss, propose, plan, negotiate and so forth.

As institutional text that denies “nation-to-nation” discussion, little is produced to transform the relations of land politics, property ownership and development in the end, while northern lands are increasingly mined and rivers are brought further into the realm of energy harnessing for the boundless demand of the southern urban centres. People’s access to their traditional territory stands to be further constrained.

Underlying these frames of development is the abstraction of the everyday experience of people who live in the region and who may or may not be included in decisions about development in a meaningful way, with the latter being the general practice. Moreover, these frames rely on a subversion of space and the real threats of ecological decay within the institutional process.
In sum, as Indigenous identities are subjected to categories of colonial institutions, “produced” under the Indian Act and Indigenous spaces are relegated to an “absolute space” through the creation of reserves, Innino Aski or “traditional territory” are abstracted and left either without institutional definition (and thus vulnerable to enclosure) or brought through institutional processing, into the realm and established relations of “managed accumulation” and provincial jurisdiction. This brings us to the topic of Indigenous knowledge (or Traditional Ecological Knowledge, TEK), a growing field of study and scholarship that has tread challenging waters as it attempts to acknowledge and vitalize forms of knowing and being based on relations distinct from accumulation.

**Indigenous Encounters of Western Institutional Relations: Knowledge as Relations**

*Native Americans were not mistaken when they accused the Whites of having forked tongues. By separating the relations of political power from the relations of scientific reasoning while continuing to shore up power with reason and reason with power, the moderns have always had two irons in the fire. They have become invincible.* (Latour, 1993, p. 38)

I initially did not think I would be exploring Indigenous knowledge in-depth when this investigation began, something which effectively began once I started writing. Because I was focusing on understanding the implications for Mushkegowuk, of a legislative policy process concerning development, nature, and territory in the Innino Aski region, my sense was that a critique of the ideological implications of institutional formulations of Indigenous knowledge, while recognizing the validity of actual “Indigenous knowledge” as it is practiced, would suffice. But I began to grapple with the problems and possibilities of intersections between Indigenous knowledge and Marxist disciplinary tradition in the process, in relation to “relations”, which I think may offer some potentially useful insights or inroads to solidarity that are not extensively covered.
elsewhere. Such an exploration is important to the overall project of understanding the depth of what is at stake for Indigenous people in Fort Albany and the Treaty 9 region (and beyond). Moreover, such a reading could provide routes forward towards an approach to critical learning that draws on mutually reinforcing Indigenous and Western ontological readings that see the world in its constant change, while asserting organizational forms that propose less abstracted and ideological conceptualizations of the human-nature relationship. This is the topic of the forthcoming section.

The drive to delve further into the relationships between “Indigenous” and “Western”, critiquing its false dichotomy and exploring mutual concerns and drives for change, consistently arose during the course of this study as a potential project of critical and emancipatory learning, informed by Indigenous epistemology as well as western critical approaches, expressed in practice in relation to the community project underway as well as during the course of the Institutional Ethnography. Drawing from the interview with a female Elder from Fort Albany interviewed in early 2010, the importance of what she refers to as “cross cultural learning” becomes apparent, after she delineates some of the key differences in conceptualizations of “protection” and “jurisdiction” in a previous part of the interview. She stresses that cross cultural learning thus far is missing the involvement of non-Aboriginal people in learning about Indigenous ways of seeing the world, one that needs to take place as the process of land use planning unfolds in the region:

Ok coming back to the cross cultural teaching…it comes back to those terms of reference, how we perceive, our way, how we understand…and I feel that it’s very important that we have to educate other people we want to work with, in
order for them to understand what we want. Simple as that. So the cross cultural training will allow them to have a clear vision of how the Native people see.

They really have to see you from their point of view, they cannot look at it from across from you, they have to be on your side. So we have to bring them to us, so we can provide them the training for what we want, how we understand it. We have to share our information we get in order to have that relationship, trust, that’s what I mean when I say cross-cultural.

I feel very privileged to have encountered, to have lived that [European/western] part. To understand their culture, and I learned to speak their language. I learned survival skills. You know I worked in different fields and you know I enjoyed that. But there is a time when I need to connect for my own survival, way of life, and that’s my own purpose, why I wanted to create the camp. My grandchildren can see that part of my life, so that they can carry on these teachings, to their children too.

Not in the sense of that life will be more important, but to feel that we need to share, balance it out, to work together. And as Native people I feel that we are more fortunate because we have learned to use both skills, the European style skills and our traditional life skills. So combining these together, made us to be more efficient and more understanding and we need to share that.

There is a lot of teaching [that doesn’t] have the Native understanding, and that needs to take place, that’s the missing link here. (Interview with female elder from Fort Albany First Nation)
In the spirit of a more positioned and radical approach to learning, I take up her invitation to combine “ways of knowing”, to “learn from Native understanding”, as well as confront the challenge of exploring what at times appears as disparate connections between theoretical bodies of work, as they play out in the context of land relations in Treaty 9. My hope is that such exploration could contribute to discussion and future collaborations in emancipatory education between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Indeed there is a great deal to “unpack” for meaningful reciprocal learning between settlers and Indigenous people can take place. This has everything to do with divergent concepts about development and nature. An assertion about a key problem inherent in dominant development practices difficult to disagree with, is that development activities that lead to the destruction of habitat and diversion of rivers do not tend to originate among people in the places that will be faced with their effects. Large scale development can thus diminish, exclude or destroy ways of being that have historically not wreaked havoc within nature while conventions and norms establish that society can remain comfortable talking about the environment in ways that are safe, normal, and from where they can retreat, to the perceived comfort of, suburban and urban homes that rely on energy and resources from these Indigenous places. Confrontations in conceptualizations of life, identity and land are originally produced in the colonial period and enter the institutional realm as abstracted representations of actual lived experience and metamorphose in the face of ongoing resistance to the institutional representations of community life and discursive misreadings of traditional knowledge.

There is an extensive literature on Indigenous epistemology as “relations” that, summarized broadly, speaks to a human “reality” in Indigenous epistemologies, as not separate from but within and as part of nature, in reciprocal relationships with animals,
plants, lands, and waters. Many Indigenous writers have described the intimate knowledge and relationships people have with land, animals, water, not as an entity outside of themselves, nor one that needs to be managed or tamed (LaDuke, 2002; Henderson, 2000; Battiste, 2002; Smith, 1999, 2000; Simpson and Ladner, 2010; Simpson, 2011; Little Bear, 1996; Cloutier-Smith). On the contrary, elders and adults speak about an integral relationship with the land. Little Bear (1996) states that “Tribal territory is important because the Earth is our Mother, and this is not a metaphor it is real. The Earth cannot be separated from the actual being of Indians…” (as cited in Henderson, 2000).

Similarly in Mushkegowuk communities, some formulations about land speak to the intimate and dialogic relationship that people have with land, one that it cannot be externalized, as it “teaches” people where and how to live, “a harsh teacher at times, but kind and gentle at others…the land gave us a language and shows us where to hunt, fish and where to set up camp, how to survive the six seasons…” (Conversation with male elder from Fort Albany First Nation, 2009). For many Indigenous communities, animals, the land, water and everything within is spoken of as family relations.

My intention here is not to “idealize” the relationship Indigenous people have with their lands, but to recognize a distinct history, mode of production and subsequent consciousness of land, that plays out in contemporary spaces of resistance. While distinct from a dialectical historical materialist perspective, and not without some conceptual tensions and contradictions, I argue that there is much to be gleaned from paying attention to the points of coincidence and disjuncture in conceptualizations of reality and specifically “nature” in terms of “relations”,


articulated in both Indigenous epistemology and from a critical Marxist, anti-racist and feminist dialectical historical materialist reading.

Debate that has arisen about the validity of Indigenous or “traditional” knowledge is so often disheartening. Indeed the tricks of Western dualisms throughout the history of colonialism in Canada play out in the favour of those who rule and as such, those in power can have the option to recognize, manipulate or dismiss the important claims to place, governance and knowledge produced by Indigenous people, as unresolved in their English language formulations as they appear. A well-known debate, it is problematic that qualifiers such as “traditional” as a dichotomous opposite of “modern” can render this knowledge as somehow lesser, old, past, forgotten, irrelevant, or relevant only in relation to its “modern”, “advanced” counterpart.

Anishnaabe scholar Leanne Simpson (2008) however, puts Indigenous knowledge into a context of resistance and social transformation asserting that, “Recovering and maintaining Indigenous worldviews, philosophies, and ways of knowing and applying those teachings in a contemporary context represents a web of liberation strategies Indigenous Peoples can employ to disentangle themselves from the oppressive control of colonizing state governments” (Simpson, 2008, p.15). This dialectical assertion connotes both localized forms of relating to nature as well as contesting the colonizing project rooted in pervasive capitalist relations.

“Modernity” as a project of the Enlightenment and “scientific thought” is deeply tied to the expansion of capitalism (Escobar, 2003, 2004) and sets out the rules for defining what is and is not legitimate knowledge. Debates are often used to disqualify the existence of Indigenous knowledge, or to legitimize the projects of development that proposes Indigenous knowledge as a static, nominalized, “adornment”. Some reactionary Canadian authors have gone so far as to deny any claims to the very existence of Indigenous knowledge (Widdowson and Howard, 2008;
Flannagan, 2000), confusing and ignoring the relations that give rise to knowledge claims born of the historical struggles and achievements of Indigenous people to survive in an age of continued accumulation, displacement, and dispossession.

These and other similar accounts view “nature” as a repository of resources, a purported reflection of “advanced” western capitalist societies that have learned to exploit resources on a scale previously unknown, while they simultaneously discount Indigenous efforts at taking control of territorial jurisdiction as they are deemed incapable of effectively taking up their own development under their own rules of governance (Flannagan, 2000). Flannagan’s view that “society is a spontaneous order that emerges from the choices of individual beings” (p.8) is an ironic and contradictory as well as uncritical perspective convenient to the maintenance of an elitist, status quo that would see Indigenous lands opened up to global development and people inserted into the project of capitalism as wage earners. Indeed writers on the conservative right have rallied for the “relocation” (read: displacement) of Indigenous peoples so as to insert them into “productive” (read: industrial capitalist wage labour) processes generally, and in the Treaty 9 region specifically. Quesnel (2010) calls for First Nation leaders “to work with Ottawa” to relocate what he calls “non-viable” reserves, potentially to urban centres where they would receive assistance including “employment, social assistance, housing and life-skills training in lieu of reserve funding” (p. 5) which is what he terms a “revenue neutral” proposal. He contends that “the only other possible remedy [outside of relocation] would be for Native communities to voluntarily surrender their Aboriginal title” and qualifies that “this requires a full community vote” (2010, p.5). Quesnel’s assertions reflect a consciousness rooted in western capitalism, one that not only justifies, but celebrates, the dispossession of Indigenous people from land and their training to become “regular wage earning citizens like everyone else”. The only possible routes
forward for Indigenous people, according to these authors, are located in a dismissal of claims to territory and entrance into the wage economy.

Debates, when left to abstract critique, do not make visible the historical relations that condition the need for asserting a collective claim to knowledge as Indigenous or “traditional”, by growing numbers of people critical of the epistemological assumptions of western knowledge (Smith, 1999). Indigenous “ways of knowing” are simultaneously bound by a collective experience of colonization and dispossession, arising in resistance to the imposed losses of language, land, forms of governance and independence and yet also born within specific histories, languages, places, and modes of producing and reproducing life. That the experience of Indigenous people and Indigenous ways of knowing become complicated within capitalist social relations is obvious, as it is for all of human knowledge. But as Marx contends, people as historical subjects or agents make their own history – though not under conditions of their own choosing (Marx, 1977).

While lamenting that there is no simple answer to the questions of identity and representation, Himani Bannerji reminds us that people “need names or a specified agency to make…history…[and that] this cultural-political identity or named agency is central to historical subjectivity (Bannerji, 2005, p. 19).

Thus, when Indigenous or “traditional” knowledge is not linked to an actual, lived political-historical and territorial project of resistance and transformation, rooted in anti-colonial struggle, it is left vulnerable to the dilutions and strategies of co-optation found within dominant ruling relations. In the language of capitalism, English, and within colonial history, Indigenous groups are assembled together under categorized identities in face of a continued settler
presence, and have faced the threats of annihilation since contact: physical, cultural as well as discursive.

“Indigenous knowledge” unpacked as relations among people, and between people and nature, are ways of knowing, being, transferring cultural norms, stories, histories and the like, rearranged in some ways within capitalism, yet still present. Unpacked, Indigenous knowledge becomes knowledge produced by the Mushkego Inninowuk, the Anishnaabe, or the Haudnesuanee in the places they live, within the mixed modes of production that continue to shape their forms of relating to land and each other, as well as to others not from these history-forming places and cultures. History becomes a key project of Indigenous knowledge as are struggles for self-determination. Bannerji explains in her analysis of the importance marginalized people must place on “naming”, despite its apparent contradictions. “This naming or identity… extends beyond the individual to a historical and collective one…[which] point[s] to conscious attempts at recovery, exploration and naming, or re-naming in politically actionable terms (Bannerji, 2005, p.21).

Leanne Simpson in her work, “Anticolonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge” places the project of “Indigenous knowledge” squarely in the movements of resistance and change, “Combined with the political drive toward self-determination, these [knowledge] strategies mark resistance to cultural genocide, vitalize an agenda to rebuild strong and sustainable Indigenous national territories, and promote a just relationship with neighboring states based on the notions of peace and just coexistence embodied in Indigenous Knowledge and encoded in the original treaties (Simpson, 2004, p. 373).

Bannerji also reminds us of Fanon’s assertion that “the colonized person always contains the dual persona of ‘the Native’ and the people. When understood and critiqued in terms of
resistance, then, these projected identities reveal what Dorothy Smith calls ‘a line of fault’ or contradiction running through them” (Bannerji, 2005, p. 29). She adds that “It is from this ‘line of fault’ of a disjunction of fissures in the selves and subjects that possibilities of new identities and of struggle and revolution emerge” (p. 29).

In other words people name and derive meaning from the knowledge and memory of a specific history, language and way of being, but also through resistance to the colonizing presence, in dialogic encounter with it, as people from within their specific histories become “Indigenous”, “First Nation” or “Native” in face of the colonizer, settler, other non-Indigenous person. This is how people legitimately assert “traditional knowledge” and “cultural values” as they are juxtaposed against accumulation, contesting the overexploitation of land, water, forests and asserting the right to have a say in the activities that unfold in their places of living even if on terms that are mediated in some form through the discourses of ruling.

Outside of an anti-colonial, political transformational project, “traditional knowledge” becomes readable as “useful” or “irrelevant” (depending on the political stripe) for the management of lands within the context of capitalist development, but for people on the inside, in their own languages, and places of being, they know and debate meanings, stories, and “truths”, the changing aspects of life, on their own terms, in ways that don’t need to be named “traditional” or “Indigenous”. It is the relations of ruling that establish a need for people to assert subaltern subjectivities, which are powerful without explanation in the spaces silenced to capital. Yet in so doing, their claims are subjected to these relations. As Bannerji puts forth, “This process of construction of identities and resistance begs a return to actual social relations of history, to more than discursively constructed socially similar groups.” (2005, p. 29).
Indigenous “ways of knowing” are simultaneously bound by a collective experience of colonization and dispossession, arising in resistance to the imposed losses of language, land and forms of governance; and from within specific histories, languages, places, and modes of producing and reproducing life. Important battles are being waged in the realm of “Indigenous knowledge” in the governing language of English, which by default discounts a good deal of the meaning and conceptual formulations contained within Indigenous languages (Simpson, 2010). Indigenous peoples throughout the world are experiencing the full presence of injustice in the form of duplicitous development schemes, poverty, landlessness, dispossession, political and religious oppression, and genocide. Traditional Indigenous knowledge can provide some inclusive approaches to current environment problems and critical ideas on how to improve our questions to create more equitable, less oppressive structures from which to approach the numerous crises (Lauderdale, 2008).

The contestations over ways of perceiving nature between European settlers and Indigenous people has evolved over time and currently parallels the ideological treatment of nature and the “environmental crisis” in institutional discourses over the past century or so, particularly within the past few decades. It is through a materialist concept of history that we might begin to unpack the current ecological crisis as more than just a “result” of capitalism, but as inherent to its method, examining how institutional policy processes depend upon the abstraction of real ecological problems, proposing management solutions rooted in objectified views of nature. It is to this I now turn my attention.

**Accumulation, Abstraction and the “Ecological Crisis”**
Displacement via capitalist accumulation is on the rise world-wide (White and Marsella 2008). Conflicts and wars over natural resources continue to abound. It is no longer an extraordinary
claim that this is an era of resource scarcity and peak oil (Heinberg, 2003, 2006; Klare, 2004). It has been argued by many that to maintain the current usage of human and natural energy to keep the machinery of capitalism moving at the current pace will clearly bring upon our demise as a species (Kovel, 2007; Shiva and Mies, 1993; Heinberg, 2006). The environmental “crisis” has come to the fore as a daunting and relentless theme demonstrative of the two contradictions of capital that of labour and that of nature, together.

The erosion of the human-nature relationship through ideological learning shapes forms of consciousness that produce, in effect, the slowing flow of rivers, slipping access to clean drinking water, the disruption of migratory routes of caribou and other animals, increasing loss of species diversity, and so forth. In their seminal work called *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism’s War on the Earth*, Foster, Clark and York (2010) make explicit irreversible planetary boundaries which are being approached by humanity, and in some cases surpassed, attributed to:

[T]he current pattern of global socioeconomic development, that is, the capitalist mode of production and its expansionary tendencies. The whole problem can be called ‘the global ecological rift’ referring to the overall break in the human relation to nature arising from an alienated system of capital accumulation without end. (p. 18)

Foster et al. (2010) make explicit the links between the ecological crisis, consciousness and the rise of industrial capitalism, critiquing the ideological and institutional workings that set humanity’s march in motion towards the planetary boundaries, which if crossed, will make life on Earth unlivable (Foster et al., 2010). The authors take to task qualitative researchers in the social sciences, who have let consciousness be shaped and critical research agendas be
increasingly diluted by the workings of bureaucratic processes and ruling governments with neoliberalism.

The question of consciousness as closely tied to problems of ideology has everything to do with what we actually do to produce and reproduce our material lives from nature. As we work to feed, clothe and nurture ourselves, our consciousness about nature and our relationship to it and each other, is also shaped. Consciousness develops in tandem with the production of material life, which necessarily develops within history. Thus the form or mode of production is elemental to how we learn, what we learn, and what forms of organization we arrange for ourselves on the planet, with obvious reciprocal and cumulative effects on the planet itself. Those effects of course come to influence how we talk about, and develop policy concerning, nature.

Reflective of the current period, ideological renditions of the environment and the “environmental crisis” expand at the same time as awareness around the globe is expressed of the very real material effects of unfettered capitalist industrialization on the trees, water, ozone layer and so forth. So have the institutional forms of managing these effects as governments are increasingly pressured to address these very real problems. As the highly complex “institutional speak”, discourses about nature and the environment inserts itself throughout the broader public, in business, governments, academic disciplines and the media talk about “environmental sustainability” and “greening” of industry, the relations of exploitation of people and nature continue a new era of ideologically-driven environmental discourse begins to be revealed.

Beneath these discourses on the environment are important observations about how people relate to nature that are deeply shaped by the labour-capital relation and are rooted in the introduction of private property. Silvia Federici (2004) explains how the legislated introduction
of private property was the beginning of an enslavement of women which paralleled that of Indigenous people around the world as the colonialist project advanced in tandem with the expansion of capitalism seeking to exploit natural resources (Federici, 2004). Indeed we are still witnessing the accumulation by dispossession worldwide, the continued “expropriation of lands and resources from Indigenous people, along with the multiple other forms of ‘transfer of assets, redistributive wealth and income either from the mass of the population towards the upper classes or from vulnerable to richer countries…” (Harvey, 2003). This process includes the “suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources)” (Harvey, 2003). While this indeed is a crisis for the people faced with uprooting, violence and dispossession, the central public preoccupation, developed within a clearly distinct historical period, has centred on the crisis as primarily ecological, one of increased resource scarcity, environmental decay and climate change.

The concept of an ecological crisis has historical roots leading up to the 20th Century, under increasingly public scrutiny throughout the latter 20th and early 21st Centuries. Indeed Marx and Engels (1970) predicted ecological problems, referred to the “destruction of nature” via capitalist social relations, as a by-product of the inherently flawed division of labour. While acknowledged by many as a crisis of capitalism (Mies & Shiva, 1988; Peet and Watts, 2004; LaDuke, 2002; Kovel, 2007) the ecological question remains not only unresolved but in fact, is deepening in breadth and scope. The message has been hammered home that survival depends on whether we can in fact make fundamental changes to the way we live (Monbiot, 2007; O’Connor, 1998; Shiva and Mies, 1993).
A great deal of discussion of environmental problems has found its way into the mainstream, and subsequently political parties in Canada have taken up significant amounts of “green speak” during and post electoral campaigns. Indeed, environmental protection is one of the driving discourses of the *Far North Act*, premised on very real and pressing concerns about the impacts of development in the sensitive peatlands. Environmentalists pressure the government to act before the crisis hits the region north of the 51st parallel, joining a growing global environmental movement to contest the effects of large scale development on the boreal forests, watersheds and human settlements throughout the planet.

Governments in turn, organize to “manage” the growing environmental crisis as industrial development continues expanding with little constraint. This is the case in the region, evidenced in the big plans for the Ring of Fire mineral development in the heart of Treaty 9 traditional territory, (Gorrie, On Nature “The Ring of Fire”, 2011). At peril for people both locally and around the globe are the sensitive peatlands of the James and Hudson Bay lowlands:

The [peat] bogs [serve as] a capacious storehouse for carbon: they grow less plant matter than areas farther south, but the lack of oxygen in peat bogs ensure that what is in them decomposes very slowly. And the bog plants – such as sphagnum moss and Labrador tea – decompose more slowly than plants in less extreme habitats.

All this means that carbon stays in the boggy ground rather than being released into the atmosphere as the greenhouse gases methane and carbon dioxide. Until, that is, the bogs are disturbed: when they are drained or bulldozed, the dead material, built up over 6,000 to 7,000 years, is exposed to oxygen and decays rapidly. (Gorrie, 2011)
The notion of “ecological crisis” is both motivating and problematic as it becomes abstracted and subverted to the relations of ruling. We are in fact witnessing perhaps one of the most significant discursive “messes” in human history, which has served to further abstract human-nature relationships and render meaningless many actions a seemingly willing public would otherwise take to rectify the situation. This has served the status quo and dominant development interests, exacting a continued heavy toll on ecological systems throughout the planet as the territory in the Treaty 9 region comes under development’s gaze.

As Brett Clark (2008) explains, “The social metabolic order of capitalism is inherently anti-ecological, since it systematically subordinates nature in its pursuit of endless accumulation and production on ever larger scales. Technical fixes to socio-ecological problem typically have unintended consequences and fail to address the root of the problems: the political-economic order.” Technology, as a tool for managing ecological problems, often serves as a justification for the continued exploitation of labour and nature as the premise, the relations of accumulation, remain unchanged. As “green” industries arise, they organize around the premise of “greener exploitation” with potentially grave consequences. So the area contends with industrial mining as well as the potential impacts of “green energy” on the sensitive ecological systems made up largely of carbon-rich peatlands. As Peter Gorrie further explains in a news article concerning the region north of the 51st parallel:

Mining, road building and other activities would disturb the [peat] bogs. Toronto-based Peat Resources Ltd. is a more direct threat: the company says it has identified 200 million tonnes of “fuel-grade” peat that could be stripped off the land and converted into pellets to power electricity-generating stations. “That’s an
environmental disaster waiting to happen,” says Anne Bell, Ontario Nature’s senior director of conservation and education.

The Ontario Power Authority, which manages the province’s electricity generating system, considers peat to be biomass and thus a renewable resource. The Ministry of Natural Resources considers peat to be non-renewable. Ontario Nature is among 14 environmental groups that want the provincial government to issue a clear directive that peat is to be treated as a non-renewable resource.

Indeed alternatives to oil and coal are sorely needed, and finding these alternatives implies changes to the energy-dependent military-industrial war-producing global power arrangements. Yet we have already witnessed the problems generated by oil and coal substitutes such ethanol, a biofuel which has justified U.S. subsidies for corn production, undermining corn farmers in the south under current trade regimes and jeopardizing the food supplies of millions of people worldwide as well as forests in Indonesia, Brazil and elsewhere as fields are created, dedicated solely to the production of corn for fuel in the developed North (Monbiot, 2006).

Clark and York (2005) traced the faulty thinking of “green” accumulation practices that simply shift the source of extraction to a new location or replace one resource with another. In *Rifts and Shifts: Getting to the Route of Environmental Crises*, Clark and York assert that:

One of the drivers of colonialism was clearly the demand for more natural resources in rapidly industrializing European nations. However, expanding the area under the control of global capitalism is only one of the ways in which capitalists shift ecological problems around. There is a qualitative dimension as well, whereby one environmental crisis is 'solved' by changing the type of production process and generating a different crisis, such as how the shift from
the use of wood to plastic in the manufacturing of many consumer goods replaced
the problems associated with wood extraction with those associated with plastics
production and disposal.

Current proposed solutions to the ecological crisis within the industrial realm are focused
primarily on the “greening of technologies”. Writers like Gwynne Dyer (2008) who have gone to
great lengths to explain the scientific climate change language, and what is at stake in terms of
war, mass starvation and death, conclude that the most likely way out for humanity in face of
climate change, is going to be a currently unknown technology that off-sets the carbon emission
problem sometime near the last possible moment available to do so. Technology as a solution
does little itself to change the current paradigm of global capitalist social relations that gives rise
to the deepening crisis at hand. Indeed “green solutions” to the ecological crisis come up far
short and demand a radical re-orienting of the problem itself. We must begin to see ecological
decay in dialogic relation to the exploitation of people and their alienation from nature. This
includes the processes of accumulation by dispossession as people are displaced and
dispossessed via continued accumulation practices and relations within “business as usual”
development practices.

What is perplexing and deeply concerning is the lack of adequate responses from within
the social sciences to address the problem, accompanied by a shift to ecological modernization –
“a managerial approach that sees sustainable technology, sustainable consumption, and market-
based solutions (indeed sustainable capitalism) as providing the answers” (Foster, Clark and
York, 2010, p. 19). Indeed, the “worst crisis of our time” has produced new forms of managing
the environment as well as idealizing the environment as separate from humans, in eco-centric
formulations that contend that all nature must be left alone to its “own systems and processes,
evidenced even in such anti-capitalist theoretical approaches as “deep ecology” (Clark and York, 2005). Clark contends that both the economistic and the deep ecology approach to the environmental crisis is rooted in “ideological” thinking and serves as a way of either idealizing nature without accounting for human activity, or managing the problem rather than addressing the root causes of it as productive of accumulation.

What are the specific processes involved that perpetuate and further institutional approaches to “managing of the environmental crisis”? I will argue here that the development of a “standard environment” has been pivotal to the institutional relations that have been established which serve to produce a kind of environmental code rooted in ideological and economistic thinking that plays out in the everyday.

**The Standardized Environment and Emergence of an Environmental Ideological Code**

Standardized approaches to environmental management are developed in what David Harvey (1996) identifies as interventions only “after the event”, which “in part stems from the belief that no general environmental concerns should stand in the way of ‘progress’ (more precisely, capital accumulation) and that…environmental difficulties can be cleaned up if need be” (Harvey, 1996). The standard view may at times question, or appear to question, the privileging of the neoclassical economic view that allows for the externalization of environmental (and related health) problems, although does so through increased regulation that may or may not be adequately adhered to. As Harvey contends, “[t]his is the domain of monetized cost-benefit analysis which now plays such an important role in shaping environmental politics under the standard view.” (Harvey, 1996, p. 375).

In this standardized view, the environment is objectified and “basic rights of private property and of profit maximization are not fundamentally challenged [while] concerns for
environmental justice (if they exist at all) are kept strictly subservient to concerns for economic efficiency, continuous growth and capital accumulation” (Harvey, 1996, p.375). The only serious question in the standard approach is “how best to manage the environment” within these capitalist formulations and assumptions, where “negative externality effects deserve to be countered” and “serious attention should be given to proper conservation and wise use of resources”, provided that no new barriers are created for continued accumulation. Through Harvey’s description of the standard view, we gain insight into its broad disciplinary reach and the pervasive hegemonic relations of ruling embedded in ways of speaking about the environment:

Powerful and persuasive array of discourses are embedded within this standard view and its associated practices, institutions, beliefs and powers. Environmental economics, environmental engineering, environmental, law, planning and policy analysis, as well as a wide range of scientific endeavors are ranged broadly in support of it.

Such discourses are perfectly acceptable to the dominant forms of political-economic power precisely because there is no challenge implied within them to the hegemony of capital accumulation. Financial and logistical support therefore flows from the state and corporations to those promoting such environmental discourses, making them distinctive discourses of power. (Harvey, 1996, p. 376)

An obvious example pertains to the effects of industrialization on climate change, and subsequent plethora of texts produced to manage the crisis. Policy in this case is largely geared towards acknowledging the problem while seeking to manage it without changing the underlying
relations that lead to it in the first place, often through funding spent on other “greening” efforts such as planting trees or imposing taxes on higher level polluters. These efforts are not illogical within the context of continued capitalist social relations. But for people who are directly affected by the results of development, or who understand the global effects of pervasive large-scale exploitation as inevitably leading to the large-scale depletion of non-renewable resources (Sachs, 1999), the problems generated through ideological processes are important to pay a good deal of attention.

Dorothy Smith (2004) offers a way of understanding the effects of ideology on people, through the exploration of what she refers to as an “ideological code”. She uses the example of SNAF or the “Standard North American Family” to explain her reading of how this code works. For Smith, the ideological code is not necessarily only found in categories, theories or concepts, nor even specific terms, but one that, “reproduces its organization in the discursive texts” (Smith, 2004, p. 163). Smith reveals a set of attitudes in the school system that she is involved in as a single parent, that enables interpretation of what a good or standard family and mother should be, and in fact coordinated her relation to the school and vice versa, as well as the school’s relation to her children. The underlying attitude, organizing the school experience for all involved, and eventually taken up by one of her young sons who had not voiced the concern previously, was that there was something wrong with the family. It was not considered normal, but rather was implicitly “deviant” because it did not follow the standard idea of what a family should be. The power of such normalizing discourses that do not reflect the realities of people’s everyday material experiences is an expression of ideological working that creates deviance and norm through ordering or structuring of texts.
I became intrigued at the notion of ideological code in relation to environmental text-mediated discourse, as it seemed people, the public, generally speak about the environment in ways that enabled interpretation of nature as something beyond and separate from themselves, an ideal green, wild, clean place, and full of resources, out there, to be kept and protected or exploited for its riches. The ideological code provides an inroad into explicating the means of assembling and interpreting information in response to a universalized image of the environment currently in need of help.

An environmental ideological code at play in relation to nature and the environment is taken up textually across disciplines, organizations and institutions and in everyday talk. There is a general notion of what is “good” and “bad” for the environment, what will “help” the environment which is codified in our everyday language, reflecting a long history of nominalization of complex ecological relations. That we can discuss the environment as a thing “out there” to be tamed, controlled, protected, developed, helped and so forth maintains a relation of separation between humans and nature that is reflected in the language we use. This ideological code is related to standardized approaches to managing the environment, but goes beyond to penetrate a general social consciousness, creating a “common sense” notion about the environment that remains unproblematized.

This has a colonial history of displacement and dispossession that is of a discursive character as explained by political ecologist, Paul Robbins (2004), “[The] coding of nature as Eden is rooted more specifically in the tendency to case the political/economic periphery…in the role of the ‘natural’ world contrasted with the ‘ravaged’ human landscapes of core areas…This means that one of the central imperatives of colonial and postcolonial governance is to protect and enclose nature ‘out there’ in the underdeveloped world” (Robbins, 2004). This ideological
code permeates public consciousness, and serves to ignore both the actual ecological deterioration (as a problem of human existence) on the whole, as well as undermine the voice of those who are most directly affected by it. The field of political ecology brings together critical, feminist, property, peasant, policy and ecology studies in ways that trace actual ecological processes in relation to social, political and economic change. Its goals and scholarly material produced finds affinity with the project of Institutional Ethnography in many ways, as it seeks to question underlying relations of ruling, questioning the text and talk (Robbins, 2004, p. 121) of environmental discourses against their social and political relations.

Indeed according to Peet and Watts’ (1996/2004) seminal work entitled, *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*, a focus of political ecology has been on “the complex analytical and practical associations of political ecology and the institutions of civil society…” and a corresponding concern with “recovering disappearing knowledges and management practices...[while] obtaining a better understanding of both the regulatory systems in which they inhere and the…institutional and regulatory spaces in which knowledges and practices are encoded, negotiated and contested” (Peet and Watts, 1996/2004, p.14). Less emphasis however, is placed on the specific dialectics at play, the reifying role of text processes and their effects on specific people and places. There is also no epistemological and ontological consensus in the discipline. This said, exploring how Institutional Ethnography and the policy sub discipline within Political Ecology could be brought together to trace textual practices in relation to ecological change, while beyond the scope of this paper, presents rich possibilities for study. Indeed the field offers tools to enhance a critical theoretical approach to examine the ideological and standardized environment, immersed in colonial and capitalist relations, and its effects on people and within nature.
The public, generally accepted way of talking about the environment in western society is inscribed in everything from ads for green products, to the “clean” techniques of “conflict-free” fossil fuel production in the Alberta oil sands. These centre on “helping the environment” and skimming over the surface of what Indigenous people have stated throughout colonial history about the depths of what is at stake, a way of life and form of relating within a world of reciprocal relationships with other sentient beings. Chief Shawn A-in-chut, Assembly of First Nations summarizes the distinct environmental narrative that problematizes surface ideologically rooted versions of the environment, in the Pembina Institute’s 2010 Briefing Note, “Canadian Aboriginal concerns with oil sands: A compilation of key issues, resolutions and legal activities”:

First Nations across the country are concerned about the impacts of oil sands development on First Nations peoples, the environment, our traditional foods, our cultural and spiritual practices and our rights in our traditional territories. It is crucial that First Nations voices are heard as these meetings may influence U.S. energy policies and purchases of Canadian energy. (Droitsch & Simieritsch, 2010)

Like the SNAF example, the marginalized voice is the one that does not speak about or experience “the environment” in a normalizing way, or a way that is recognized as fully acceptable but rather is considered deviant, not contemporary, and of the “other”. The ruling discourse of the environment, is based on the continued assumption of large scale exploitation, even if “greener” exploitation, of accessing resources as the dominant society increasingly demands and for which the ruling economic plans, policies and projects are made; and development’s dialectical opposite is also implicated in this version, the protection of unused, wild spaces, protected from development, protected from people.
This widely accepted version of “environment” is a “common sense” public understanding. It is not problematized nor is it clear to people where it came from, but serves ruling interests. It reflects what Marx discussed as the ideological method at work, where those in ruling positions develop an idea that then becomes detached from its origins and presented as a free standing, universal “truth”, or common sense, de-historicized and decontextualized (Bannerji, 2011).

Indeed, the ideological code of environmental text mediated discourse serves to “de-socialize and de-politicize” non-capitalist modes of producing, perceiving and relating to nature, attempting to render them non-relevant, true for Indigenous forms. In this way, the environmental ideological code produces invisibility, maintaining a separateness between settler and Indigenous people that is then manifested as racial difference and invariably expressed ultimately in governing spaces as control is overtly imposed over defining the rules of governance and productive practice based on the further marginalization of Indigenous groups.

The permeation of an environmental ideological code is necessarily apparent in institutional processes, which is then taken up, reinforced and in some cases contested and rejected. Harvey (1996) contends this is part of the standard view where there is “abundant room for dispute over the scientific evidence of connection between environmental change and social effects, the extent and measure of damage, the designation of liability…how far into the long run environmental concerns should be projected…and how comprehensive state regulation should be” (Harvey, 1996, p. 376). Of major concern here is the fact that, as Harvey explains, “The intensity of debate within this overall discursive frame often precludes general discussion of broader let alone radically different alternatives” (p. 376).
The trans-local reach of the legislative process of Bill 191, or the *Far North Act*, locates, from elsewhere, multiple communities across a vast geographical area, within the language and relations of environmental protection and development, through the localized textual reproduction of land use planning discourse, which began to be produced and constituted long before the act attained royal assent in the legislature. The textual coordination brought about through land use planning discourse is what is important here. Foucault reminds us that text is constituent of rational knowledge systems through which bodies are administered (in Walby, 2005) which draws our attention to both the fact that there are actual bodies, people (or for that matter, land and water) in material settings often rendered invisible in talk of policy and discourse as neutral, and that they are administered or managed in relation to existing institutional discourses.

To clarify, the issue is not whether environmentalists are “doing the right thing” or not, but rather, of interest is the explication of how environmental discourse as ideological code may play a role in the production of jurisdiction in the region. Indeed environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) in Ontario rightly assert their concerns over the problems generated by aggressive large scale development, and while have worked a great many hours with little pay and often little recognition, have had limited success in terms of circumventing development’s far and deepening reach into the sensitive ecologies of the North, a goal of their involvement in the production of the *Far North Act*. They also have played, and continue to play, an important and decisive role in promoting public awareness about the ecological importance of the region, based on both the scientific research and the knowledge derived from personal insights garnered from work with people in local communities.
The goals of ENGOs that work in the Treaty 9 area are clearly tied to the protection of vulnerable watersheds, forests and ecosystems, and their work reflects a deep commitment to limiting the aggressive reach of intensive large-scale development. Theirs is a globally significant concern that governing bodies such as the provincial ministries involved in the north, cannot ignore. They thus inevitably play a key role in the production of knowledge about Treaty 9 lands and, participating, often unintentionally, or surreptitiously, in the relations of jurisdiction and governance in the region (a topic explored in the following section on work processes as sites of coordination).

Some accounts (Berger, Kenneth and King, 2010) suggest that land use planning in Canada’s North is less about ecological issues despite the general “common sense” thinking that land use planning is primarily an environmental exercise. There is no clear consensus on the role of land use planning in environmental protection and organizations take up the discourse of land use planning for very different reasons (see chapter on land use planning), at times, for opposing ones.

People thus participate in the institutional process, as they write, speak about, activate, take up and in some cases contest the dominant environmental ideological code or frame, expend their time and productive energy, and do the work of making more complex and intricate the ideological threads of ruling. These threads are what Institutional Ethnographers call a “boss” text or ideological “master frame”, an overarching theory that organizes public discourse, with even dissenting views having to operate on its terms, thus reproducing it (Smith 2004, p. 173, 175). The master frame is carried into many discursive sites, including those that outwardly reject it, via the ideological code, a more subtle normalizing code, unseen but present. Smith (2004) contends that once ideological codes are established they are self-reproducing as social
organizing devices or methods. Important here is that the ideological codes and master frames are produced by people’s actual practices, taking place in specific sites, and in many sites, snowballing as the code takes hold. These moments of encounter, mediated by actual, textual material, serve to coordinate social relations, learning and consciousness in ways not immediately apparent.

The Production of “Protection”

*The voice of the Muskegowuck Athinuwick/Cree People of northern Ontario, a recognized stakeholder in polar bear management, has been virtually silenced throughout polar bear debates. Reasons for this exclusion include the geographical isolation of these communities from decision-making centres in southern Canada a lack of communication between management agencies and stakeholders, and a general lack of awareness among most Ontarians—including decision makers—of the existence of polar bears in Ontario. This ongoing failure is even more disconcerting when one considers the consultative obligations flowing from Treaty No. 9. (Lemelin, Peerla and Walmark, 2008)*

As demonstrated by the texts and discourses of the standardized environment, nature becomes reified as separate category within the logic of capitalism, produced as text and debated within the spheres of decision-making. This reification can take place in the apparently contradictory conceptualizations of nature produced within the relations of both development and protection. Two major tendencies in environmental thinking conclude on the one hand, that nature is to be viewed as a repository of resources for the purposes of capital accumulation, active only as a commodity within exchange relations; and on the other hand, that it is to be protected from development, left alone, without human influence, in its idyllic state of “natural wilderness”.

The *Far North Act* sets out to bridge these two seemingly contradictory conceptualizations by involving First Nation communities in the planning for development and protection. Yet this involvement is ambiguous, represented after the fact of legislative writing, reminiscent of other official document signings such as the Treaty in 1905. The involvement of
First Nations has taken place in partial ways, as “cultural values”, and “Aboriginal Ecological Knowledge” are taken up into it, while actual relations and lived experience within a broader history of territorial governance is left aside. Indigenous knowledge as it is actually lived within an Indigenous social and political history becomes obscured.

As explained by Hayden King (2010) the problem is one of abstraction, of the de-materializing a de-contextualizing of Indigenous knowledge in the planning process in the area of environmental protection that seeks to include it, but on the terms of scientific knowledge and management. King explains the technical mechanisms by which this takes place:

…knowledge is removed from cultural contexts (distilled) and, eventually, the “data” are diverted (compartmentalized) to climatologists, geologists, wildlife biologists, and other scientists, so that the knowledge can be made ready for use in land management regimes. In this schema, Indigenous peoples are then encouraged to see the benefits of their knowledge informing Western science, which they are also encouraged to adopt at the expense of their own assumptions.

So, effectively, Indigenous peoples’ participation in state-sponsored projects of co-management has (actually) served to disempower them by creating virtually insurmountable barriers to the inclusion of their values, understandings, knowledge, and institutions into these processes. (Stephenson, The Possibility of Difference, p. 72). Once again the relationship is defined by power. Canadian officials and western scientists wield ultimate authority when it comes to knowledge. Indigenous people can merely contribute some facts…Indigenous people are clearly limited in their ability to affect Northern planning decisions. (King, 2010, p. 93)
First Nation communities in Treaty 9 have not discarded science or the need for addressing ecological problems increasingly apparent throughout the territory, demonstrated in Elder’s reports on changing landscapes, movements of animals, water levels and the like. The communities work with government ministries and ENGOs in the attempts to foster better understanding of the problems and possible solutions. The problem lies in the institutional readings of the environment, highly regulated and often undermining the interests of the people in communities themselves. Environmental protection as a regulatory discourse embedded in the Far North Act presents problems for the communities of Treaty 9. The textual production of land use planning in the region north of the 51st parallel has drawn heavily on the texts of protection and work of environmentalists in dialogue with industry representatives and others, to further the provincial institutional approach to land use planning in Treaty 9. It is “protection” to which I will now turn attention, in an attempt to demystify the underlying relations that play a role in its production.

Environmental protection as a concept and practice arises from a long history of conservation, which, despite its important contestations to accumulation, is charged with contradiction, conflict, and is entrenched in ruling economic and institutional relations. In spite of stated efforts to contain development the principle victims of conservation have been people with strong ties to land in areas deemed environmentally sensitive, largely Indigenous people. There is abundant literature, particularly in the interdisciplinary field of political ecology, concerning the conflicts between conservation and Indigenous people (Robbins, 2004; Peet and Watts, 1996/2004; Escobar, 1998; Sing and van Houtum, 2002; Fairhead and Leach, 2000; Adams and Hutton, 2007; Sandlos, 2008). Marxist ecologists and geographers also problematize
conservation and protection as a colonial project that continues to play out contemporary politics (Robbins, 2004; O’Connor, 1998). As O’Connor explains:

Wilderness is not a species or an ecosystem, but rather a social construct deriving from well-established Romantic (idealist) “nature-loving” sensibilities that are over 200 years old. When governments intervene to designate “wilderness areas” and especially when governments manage these areas…the concept of wilderness becomes a political category. (O’Connor, 1998, p. 138)

First Nation people in the Treaty 9 region express these same problems in face of the reification of nature, based on experiences of the material effects of protection as marginalizing, demonstrated in the following interview with a female adult from Fort Albany:

…That’s the same with the protection, land protection. When the government says protected land it means parks, provincial parks, [they] want to protect that land, no game hunting, no activities in that provincial park, except for recreational services. When it comes to a Native saying protected land he automatically understands that it means to protect the land where he goes hunting, fishing, and camping and [to] snare rabbit, where he can go trap, seasonal, anything, you understand, it’s that concept. (Interview with female adult from Fort Albany)

The problems with protection are not lost on many environmentalists, politicians, and others who work with First Nation people. Efforts to involve First Nation in the land use planning process by representatives of the Far North Advisory Council, a body appointed by the Minister of Natural Resources, are evident as they included Indigenous lands within conceived notions of protection, represented in the advice to the Minister on preparing for land use planning in the region (Far North Planning Advisory Council [FNPAC], 2009). A recommendation of the Far North
Advisory Council concerns a significant valuing of Aboriginal culture in the planning process. In the report, they suggest:

- Giving first priority to identifying lands and waters that have specific cultural value to the community. We believe that preserving these areas will maintain and enhance traditional lifestyles and practices, future opportunities, and the core connection Aboriginal people have to their lands, waters and way of life. The AC expects that a significant component of broader conservation and ecological objectives would also be met by this approach. (FNPAC, 2009)

Discussions about protection and its meaning also took place at the Ministry of Natural Resources “Planning Together Workshop” in May, 2010 in Thunder Bay Ontario. In the workshop report, the word protection was mentioned over fifty times, and was a critical issue over the course of the workshop, where First Nation people in attendance had clear reticence to have the word protection included in the legislation, given its institutional usage that had historically played a problematic role in the lives of people (“Planning together workshop”, 2010). This was evidenced by such documented comments from participants as, “Change the word protected to “undisturbed” as protected could be interpreted as imposing regulations on FN people” (Planning together, 2010, p.17); “First Nations and Ontario have different understandings of what protection means” (Planning together, 2010, p.18); “In communities, protection is about traditional use – not just a point on a map” (Planning together, 2010, p.19) and, “Protection – this word can’t be used. The closest word is care of the land” (Planning together, 2010, p.27). The main interpretation of protection among First Nation people had to do with the protection of a way of life, a “relationship to the land” and the “Protection of Treaty Rights” (Planning together, 2010, p.17) rather than an idealized, untouched wilderness space out
of the reach of people. Despite the vast amount of input and discussion on the topic, there have been no clear routes forward in overcoming the problem: it is a core terminology of Bill 191.

Indeed, the *Far North Act* itself does not offer an alternative terminology to protection but rather is conceived of protected areas as inclusive of both ecological importance and “cultural value”. Section 5 under “Land Use Planning” of the *Far North Act* puts forward the following objective:

The protection of areas of cultural value in the Far North and the protection of ecological systems in the Far North by including at least 225,000 square kilometres of the Far North in an interconnected network of protected areas designated in community based land use plans. (FNA, 2010)

While there are openings for First Nation people to advance or re-shape the meaning of protection, the terminology is still a trigger text that hooks into a broader legal and institutional complex of ruling. And thus, the concept of protection developed and advanced within the social relations of capital and colonialism, will likely continue to raise alarm bells for many First Nation people and continue to coordinate people into an existing form of viewing nature as a separate, reified entity.

As protection, in the *Far North Advisory Council Report* and in the *MNR Planning Together Workshop*, is produced as material text, it links to and activates previously produced textual material on protection, as people’s work is coordinated across locations. The textual coordination is evidenced through these accounts and coordinated activities, and links people to a vast and complex colonizing past that informs the contemporary period of land politics in the North, albeit in more politically correct terms.
Exploring the history of the relations of conservation is important in order to garner more satisfying explanations as to why this issue is so crucial at the current juncture. Insight into these historical relations draws attention to the dialogic character of conservation and protection that underpin the textual material coordinating relations as they currently unfold. Revealing the practices and relations of conservation depends on exploring the field in terms of its deep entrenching in the ideological practices of governing and economic relations. Political ecologists for example, examine ideological representations of nature in colonial history, that have actively placed non-human nature, as Edenic, “wild” to be “tamed and controlled” (Robbins, 2004) or “in need of protection” (Singh and Houtum, 2002), placed in a category separate from, and in some cases, higher than, people, which responds to notions put forward by ruling elites at the expense of local, often impoverished populations. As Robbins (2004) states, “the history of conservation clearly reflects elements of coercive statecraft, engender[ing] conflicts over land claims. Territorializing conservation space and controlling surrounding communities is a central and primary goal in the history of environmental conservation.” (Robbins, 2004, p.150). For global conservation, Robbins claims, the construct of an Edenic wilderness “is commonly used to write human communities, especially those with longstanding residence in a region, out of the environmental history of a place…” (Robbins, 2004, p. 151).

The discursive trajectory of institutional environmental conservation has led to direct conflict with Indigenous people. Conservation has historically played a deeply problematic role for Indigenous people, and others across the planet, who have been uprooted, displaced, politically condemned and deemed anti-ecological for their disagreements with conservation agendas based on their historical claims to place and life practice. In a few extreme documented cases, global conservation has been linked to instigating and financing policies where Indigenous
people have been imprisoned or even killed as they continued hunting in ancestral regions demarcated as conservation areas, evidenced in the research on conservation in Zimbabwe (Duffy, 2000; Neumann, 2004; Singh and van Houtum, 2002; Wolmer, 2003) among others.

Common perception would dictate that the politics of protection and conservation are not as problematic in Northern Ontario. Indeed there is a less brutal expression of these politics, and as in the case elsewhere, there are important and positive relationships between conservation groups and First Nation communities. Yet the history and political economy of conservation continue to play out in problematic ways for Indigenous people in the region, despite have a less publically-known history, that involves the exclusion, marginalization and displacement of people, politics that continue to be at play in recent history in Ontario in overt, as well as less visible but poignant, ways felt viscerally by local people affected by them. In just but two examples, the creation of national and provincial parks have led at times to overt displacement such as documented by John Sandlos’ (2008), Not Wanted in the Boundary: The Expulsion of the Keeseekoowenin Ojibwa Band from Riding Mountain National Park, and to marginalization as researched by Lemelin, Peerla and Walmark’s (2008) critique of exclusion of the Mushkegowuk in northeastern Ontario from the management of polar bears entitled, Voices from the Margins: the Muskegowuk Athinuwick/Cree people of Northern Ontario and the Management of the Wabusk/Polar Bear. The creation of the Polar Bear Provincial Park in the northeastern region of James Bay encompasses the Mushkegowuk village of Peawanuck and serves as a reminder to people of the far reaching provincial institutional power that has moved ahead with “protection” with disregard to the rights established in the Treaty:

If the provincial government wants to apply the rules in the reserves, or on any Native people, they can stop us from hunting at any time. They can stop us
hunting out of season. They can stop us shooting the polar bear permanently, and also from shooting any other animals that we don’t use. They can do that. The conservation officers in that MNR have that authority. Regardless if they have said in the Treaty that we can still live upon the surface of the land… (Bird, 2005, p. 229)

The concept of the “protected” environment takes hold as a project of state and socialized as “common sense”, drawing on, and also producing the standard accounts of the environment, an environment without people. Conceptualizations of the environment become “idealistic” when they render abstract the actual relations between people and nature, and the resulting ideas about the environment as separate from people are then brought into the realm of political debate and subsequently resisted by Indigenous people, those materially affected by the institutional and organizational forms of environmental conservation.

The material consequences of protection have been the result of dominant social relations that bring together diverse and divergent discourses about development, relations and discourses that participate in the exclusionary politics of land development. As Singh and van Houtum (2002) demonstrate, conservation has clear implications for the “production of expert/technical knowledge and its relation to the advancement of the power and control of modern states and customary elites in the developing world” (Singh and van Houtum, 2002, p. 253), an assertion that can be recognized in the “fourth world” Indigenous peoples living within the developed world. Singh and van Houtum (2002) emphasize that, “the territorial connotations of conservation are especially important as they related to the expansion of control of and access to land and resources of actors engaged in conservation through geo-political ideologies, specifically neoliberalism”(Singh and van Houtum, 2002, p.253). There is clearly a raced
character of the project to form national identities around conservation/national parks, which builds on colonial relations and perpetuated in the contemporary era, facilitating the continued domination by ruling classes of Indigenous others.

Conservation and protection are generally unproblematicized in public accounts, presented as neutral, non-political yet also somehow playing an important role in disputing dominant development relations. Critical accounts however present a distinct version of the internal relations between protection and development, which rely on the reification of nature, the standardized environment, while deeply embedded in the contemporary functioning of neoliberal market economies. As explained by Singh and van Houtum (2002), “The marketing of nature and nature protection, on the one hand, and a view of human nature and institutions as fundamentally economic, on the other hand, have permeated environmental theory, programs and popular environmental imagery. . . .Nature has become an emporium, a commercial warehouse awaiting its brokers. Conservation theory now analogizes nature to a stock market: we act to conserve nature because ‘wild nature’ contains potentially useful ‘option values’ (Zerner, 2000, p.4)” (as cited in Singh and van Houtum, 2002).

Adams and Hutton in their 2007 *People, Parks and Poverty: Political Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation* article contend that, “action to conserve biodiversity, particularly through the creation of protected areas (PAs), is inherently political” and assert that “globally, the political challenge of conservation is increasingly being framed in terms of the environmental claims of the rich vs. the subsistence needs of the poor” (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 165). The dialectical relationship, on a global scale, between those in power and those in remote, generally poorer places, is coordinated through the institutional language, mechanisms and relations of protection, as, “…global markets and the consumption patterns of northern elites have been
programmatically linked to the welfare of remote communities…and improved environmental management and protection…” (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 256). “Over the last decade and a half, environmentalists in a variety of non-governmental and governmental organizations, multilateral financial institutions, and corporations have sought to fashion and to implement a new family of environmentalisms based on markets, commodity flows, incentives, and the idea that people are fundamentally economic creatures.” (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 256).

This indeed is evidenced in the public speech about protection in Treaty 9 territory, which is increasingly oriented to economic formulations aimed at demonstrating the value of undisturbed nature in the face of daunting large scale development which sets out the rationale of for large scale production tied to an increased GDP (Gross Domestic Product). A recent independent study from the Pembina Institute and Canadian Boreal Initiative (2009) uses the approach of “natural capital” to critique the GDP as a standard of measurement that does not include other uses of the boreal forest beyond harvesting of timber, as the “ecosystem services” go unnoticed with “no line in the nation’s balance sheet for natural capital” (Anielski and Wilson, 2009). The authors of the report demonstrate in starkly economic terms, that “nonmarket ecological service values jumped from $93.2 billion to $703 billion, primarily due to the revaluation of stored carbon in forests and wetlands, which…is now $582 billion (based on an amortized annuity calculation of stored carbon)” (Anielski and Wilson, 2009). While providing an important, fuller “cost accounting” for the severe gap in valuing the region beyond single-industry production, an important accounting tool which holds potential to slow the pace of aggressive development, the language of protection at the same time becomes increasingly tied to and reflective of the language of development itself and bound by its underlying logic. Despite important efforts to contest development through full cost accounting, ENGOs (environmental
non-governmental organizations) find themselves necessarily and increasingly bound by the institutional language and relations of conservation advanced within existing relations and goals of capitalism, thus shaping the ways in which they can manoeuvre to actually protect ecological systems.

Lauderdale (2008) goes further to critique other forms of conservation efforts as actually resulting in the continued domination of nature:

And recent social control in the form of new laws and related social regulations that intend to protect the environment are usually shortsighted and fragmented and often focus on modern notions of developing the environment. Most ostensible developers attempt to control and dominate nature and then define this process as progress. Rather than learning the diverse lessons of nature, the modern linear, univariate, so-called global development plan is one of controlling and dominating nature, including rainforests, animals/humans, and natural technologies. (Lauderdale, 2008)

The agendas of development and protection collide in their goals of accessing, whether it is for extraction or protection, Indigenous territories that have not historically posed significant ecological problems (quite to the contrary), and necessarily articulate their relationship with and understanding of nature in forms quite distinct from (though increasingly bound up in) the language of dominant development, in relation to both industry and conservation. Both of the disciplinary areas of development and protection are mutually reinforcing in many ways, and produced reified notions of nature. This continues to play a significant role in the political realm in Ontario, and is pivotal in the production of the Far North Act text process, as development and protection are brought together as complimentary and purported to address the contradictions
inherent in emphasizing one approach over the other, while including First Nation people in identifying protected lands thus broadening its definition to include “cultural priorities” in the meaning of protection.

The contradictions between institutional and Indigenous conceptualizations persist however, with regards to the implications of usage of the loaded language of protection, which in part reflects a clash between representations of space, on the one hand rooted in actual life practice and relations, and on the other, in abstract, conceived representations. As David Harvey suggests, we must work in between conceived and concrete space, and constantly check in between the two (Harvey, 2006) based on critically informed analysis, and while it appears the *Far North Act* has opened the possibility to do this, with documented divergences in definitions of protection it is not clear how it will play out in actual practice given its extensive loaded past. The main question I have attempted to begin to address here is how protection has historically developed as a discursive practice and how it attains its legitimacy as a ruling force in political/ruling processes, and thus, how it is and can be contested, and potentially re-shaped in such a way that furthers the jurisdictional and life interests of First Nation people while addressing contemporary ecological problems. Does the inclusion in the Far North Land Use Planning strategy of First Nation communities in the identifying areas for protection change the underlying relations of development and jurisdiction? How do to the discursive practices of “planning” itself shape social relations with regards to Indigenous communities? Let us examine accounts of land use planning in Indigenous communities broadly speaking to determine whether there are insights or helpful methods in determining *how* planning and the practices of planning may shape these relations.
CHAPTER SEVEN

UNCOVERING THE INSTITUTIONAL: FROM CONCRETE TO ABSTRACT SPACE

Accounts of Land Use Planning in Indigenous Communities

My intention is not to add to the debate about the usefulness or ineffectualness of land use planning as a model or framework for communities north of the 51st parallel in Ontario per se. My principal concern lies elsewhere, in the ideological and textually mediated processes that shape relations, ultimately affecting people and land in the region called Innino Aski. This concern however, has brought me directly into the realm of Indigenous, community-based land use planning and protection discourse, as the governing and textually mediated processes unfolding in relation to Bill 191, the *Far North Act*, raise concerns about the ultimate effects on people living in the region and the lands upon which they live.

Generally people involved in speaking about land use planning in the north of Ontario appropriately agree with its stated principles and goals, including the protection of species at risk, ecologically sensitive areas, water sources, identification of cultural areas of significance including cemeteries, gravesites, meeting places to name a few, as well as the recognition and defense of Indigenous livelihoods and territories. These principles are hard to argue with. Indeed to oppose them would be politically naïve and appear morally corrupt. These assertions of principles offer, however, little insight into how preparing for planning in an Indigenous context actually functions as an institutional textually mediated process that affects people and their lands in specific ways, seemingly out of their control.

The broader implications of land use planning run much more deeply than the idealized version of it, and it is through tracing of the actual practices of specific planning processes in
specific places that we can assess the verifiable effects on people and landscapes as a material practice. First let us begin with exploring what is said about the topic in the scholarly literature.

The vast disciplinary theorizing on land use planning in Indigenous communities spans multiple disciplines, including Planning, Geography, Environmental Studies, Indigenous Studies, Sociology, Conflict Studies, Law, Management Studies, among others. Each contains its own discourse, language and terminologies, whether it is looking at the framework from a legal standpoint using the language of law for example, or from the perspective of environmental protection, deriving from the language of conservation, or planning itself, centred on the lexicon and categories of land management and mapping. In the literature on land use planning in Indigenous communities, there are arguments both for and against and compelling reasons for both.

In an era of rapidly increasing development and state interests in increased jurisdiction and control over Indigenous lands, pro-planning accounts present the argument that Indigenous claims to territory can be furthered (Lane and Hibbard, 2005; Tobias, 2000) and Indigenous land use planning can protect areas against overly aggressive development (Glover, Steward and Gladdys, 2008; Bagheri and Hijorth, 2007). Lane and Hibbard (2005) assert that “planning offers an indispensable conceptual and operational lens through which to examine state responses to Indigenous claims”, suggesting that in order to find out what the state response will be to claims in the face of development and other interests, the community would first need to immerse itself in planning. Tobias (2000) puts forward that occupancy mapping instead of land use mapping is “likely respectful of the nations’ true territorial limits…[and will] be more constructive in reconciling First Nations’ interests” (Tobias, 2000, p.3)
Other pro-planning accounts such as Zaferatos (2004) assert that the model, applied in Native communities can “align a tribe’s community development objectives with its historical experiences” and intersect with other authors who are sympathetic to Indigenous concerns, cautioning at times against the potential threats to Indigenous people in way of increased boundary conflicts, but supportive of the model in principle. Lane and Hibbard (2005), for example, go so far as to suggest that planning can aid in “resolving resource conflicts, enhancing Indigenous capacity to regain and manage custodial lands, and developing community autonomy”. The well-known Canadian legal expert, Thomas Berger, famous for his efforts in support of the Dene people in North West Territories during the Mackenzie Pipeline Inquiry states that, “[l]and claims agreements have been a positive force for re-establishing the political relationship—indeed, establishing a new relationship—between the Government of Canada and the Aboriginal peoples of the North” (Berger et al., 2010).

Indeed planning is posited by some as helpful in terms of resolving disputes over land and land jurisdiction. Campbell (2003) theorizes that conflict in planning is a technical problem that can be managed through the better training of planners. Disputes she contends are “by their very nature unusually resistant to resolution, rendering them especially difficult for planners to manage without significant mediation training and skill” (Campbell, 2003). Presented as a technical problem that can be addressed through “transformative mediation approach for managing intractable disputes” her seemingly neutral approach to conflict resolution ironically seems to void possibility of actually taking a stand on the historical, deeply marginalizing practice of planning in support of Indigenous communities. Hers, along with many accounts, are centred on an attempt to improve planning practices, without explaining just how they occur in their specificities.
Tobias (2000) readily cautions Indigenous communities about issues related to land jurisdiction in his book called *Chief Kerry’s Moose: A Guidebook to Land Use and Occupancy Research and Data Collection* and cautions against “prepackaged research designs, in the form or policy guidelines or how-to manuals [which] usually have big problems” (Tobias, 2000, p.29), offering clues that there are underlying institutional and technical problems with theorizing planning in Indigenous communities, without, however, providing insights as to what the problems precisely are. At the same time he is somehow optimistic that “funding guidelines always leave a lot of room to manoeuvre” (Tobias, 2000, p. 29) but yet offers no methods to navigate these institutional processes that come to bear significantly on the practice of planning and its actual effects on people and their territories. The message of these pro-planning accounts seems to be that without planning, development would run rampant and territory would be “unorganized”. This assumption needs to be critically examined alongside the effects of planning processes as they serve to further development and undermine Indigenous and other forms of organizing within ecosystems and territories.

Other accounts are more critical. Academics and practitioners are increasingly recognizing the multiple ways and effects of using the tool of land use planning and caution that applying such a model in Indigenous communities can have detrimental, perhaps devastating effects. In *The Split Personality of Planning: Indigenous Peoples and Planning for Land and Resource Management*, authors Hibbard, Lane and Rasmussen (2008) are more explicit about the problems inherent to planning’s epistemological framing that “have made it difficult for the field to grasp the moral-historical aspects of Indigenous claims and their insistence on viewing land and natural resources in cultural and religious terms.” Indigenous peoples argue, the authors contend, “[that] state-directed land and resource planning has largely failed them and has
contributed in many instances to their marginalization. Such a position flies in the face of planning’s idealized self-image” (Hibbard et al, 2008, p.136).

Indeed critical authors scrutinize land use planning in Indigenous communities as continued colonialist practice. Most accounts in the Ontario context refer to lands and Indigenous communities in the southern part of the province and theorize legal, cultural, environmental and conflict-related problems with planning, as well as the broader development context that privileges western, white interests without taking into account Indigenous histories and worldview. Some of these narratives provide useful insights into the problematic of planning discourses in Indigenous communities; others theorize problems with planning as issues to be better managed; and yet few offer clear, traceable accounts of how planning functions as an ethnographically traceable institutional process.

John Borrows, an Anishnaabe legal scholar from UBC, provides an insightful rendition of what is at stake for Indigenous people in face of an institutional planning regime in Ontario, in his comprehensive overview (1997) of the effects of land use planning in Neyaashiiniigming (known in English as Cape Croker Reserve), called Living Between Water and Rocks: First Nations, Environmental Planning and Democracy. In his critical account of a land use planning experience for the Chippewa of Nawash, he contends that Indigenous people “exist beyond the borders of the North American legal imagination” stating that “in the land use planning process, they are caught between the periphery of competing jurisdictions” (Borrows, 1997, p.417). Borrows’ important chronicle offers inroads to the institutional forms of subjugation and marginalization that Indigenous people in Ontario and Canada must contend with under federal rule reflected in the Indian Act on the one hand, “a racist…and archaic federal document that casts long dark shadows on First Nations governmental powers” (Borrows, 2007, p.419) and
provincial rule on the other, “which makes no provision for their interests” (Borrows, 2007) under the Planning Act. His is a call for serious consideration for the life practices of Anishnaabe people to be made visible and recognized as viable environmentally-sound alternatives to the resource-depleting and planet-destroying practices that characterize Western democratic societies, and as such their involvement in environmental planning should be facilitated rather than further obstructed. Borrows’ account is deeply useful for identifying the legal framing and jurisdictional problems in planning for Indigenous people, and while he does not explicate the specific sequences of practice that lead to their exclusion, he strengthens the case for needing to explore the institutional terrain of planning as problematic for First Nation people.

Libby Porter also interrogates planning in Indigenous communities in her book called Unlearning the Colonial Cultures of Planning (2010), raising a generalizable trend that “Indigenous claims for land, justice, self-determination and sovereignty are unsettling the certainties and central tenets of land use planning around the world” (Porter, 2010, p.1). She provides an important historical context to planning in Indigenous communities and its material effects contending that,

Planning was used to appropriate and then produce territory for management by the state and in doing so, became central to the colonial invasion of settler states. Moreover…colonial roots of planning endure in complex (post)colonial societies and such roots, manifest in everyday planning practice, continue to shape land use contests between Indigenous people and planning systems in contemporary (post)colonial states. (Porter, 2010)
Dorries (2011) similarly critically examines planning for Indigenous people, drawing attention to increased conflicts produced by the planning process, explained as its exclusionary politics. Conflict in this conception, is actually brought on by planning rather than solved by it, as earlier authors such as Campbell (2003) contend.

**Mapping and Power in Indigenous Lands**

*The dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there. Differences, for their part, are forced into the symbolic forms of an art that is itself abstract.* -Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (1991, p.48)

Land use planning and mapping each have its own literatures that cross disciplines between planning, geography, sociology, anthropology and environmental studies. There is much to be gleaned from diverse, intersecting and divergent literatures on the practices of planning and mapping and their implications for Indigenous communities, although few accounts problematize the language and institutional processes embedded within their textual representations, or the relations that underpin them, let alone trace the actual discursive and textually mediated practices that constitute them.

While oriented to issues of spatial delineation western mapping in land use planning is centred on territorial organization and re-organization. Mapping as a tool of planning, upon which it depends, has a lengthy colonial history. In western mapping, epistemologies have centred on Cartesian-type maps that have represented “absolute space”, a tool of racial and colonizing power, represented dynamic nature as static and unchanging, capturing names and places within set measured areas under control of the state as authorizing power. Its dialogical offspring, the subsequent modern maps of “abstract space” arise from the absolute, produced through ideological work that dissolves lived experience as it creates pseudo-subjects (Lefebvre
1974/1991), also concealing the relations that give rise to it as well as the “real ‘subject’, namely state power” (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 51)

There are accounts of mapping including critical and Indigenous mapping (Elanna et al., 1985; Chapin, Lamb and Threlkeld, 2005; Warhus, 1997; Roth, 2009; Johnson, Louis and Pramono, 2006). However, despite increasing attention paid to Indigenous forms of mapping that counter the Cartesian logics of conventional western maps (Johnson, Louis and Pramono, 2006; Warhus, 1997; Rudstrom, 1987; Simpson 2000; ) they are marginal both in the literature of planning and in its practice.

Critical accounts of mapping problematize the dominating, alienating effects of conventional mapping. In Race, space and the law: Unmapping a white settler society Sherene Razack (2002) critiques the mapping in Canada as colonial practice. Mapping is theorized as a deeply racialized and gendered process in its exclusive practices of naming and organizing place through legal process, effectively marginalizing, erasing, displacing and dispossessing Native people historically and currently (Razack, 2002).

Coronil (1996) critiques Western development for “unwittingly obscuring the role of non-Western peoples in the making of the modern world, subtly reiterating the distinction between Other and Self that underwrites Europe’s imperial expansion” (Coronil, 1996, p. 61). He examines the work of Eric Wolf’s critical work on naming in Cartesian mapping, that sees the West as producing a metaphor of the world within history as a “pool table in which isolated units bound against each other without being affected internally by their collision” (Coronil, 1996, p. 62). Wolf (1982) points us towards the problem of reification that takes place through naming:

By turning names into things we create false models of reality. By endowing nations, societies, or cultures with the qualities of internally homogenous and
externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world...[that] becomes easy to sort into differently colours balls, to declare that “east is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet (as cited in Coronil, 1996, p. 62.)

Roth (2009) further outlines the contested terrain of mapping in Indigenous communities, and identifies the dilemma of whether to “counter-map” the often simplistic boundaried maps that serve the interests of the state and developers rather than the communities themselves, with often detrimental effects. Roth states that the majority answer is that the “benefits of mapping outweigh the costs”, to her, both an inadequate and unnecessary conclusion.

The problem Roth identifies lies in the practice of mapping abstract spaces. “Community-based mapping using abstract space insists upon a singular representation of Indigenous territory in a way legible to the state; insists upon fitting ‘Indigenous people into the spatial configurations of modern politics’”(Roth, 2009, p.208). Interesting is her usage of “community-based mapping” as similar to any type of mapping that insists on mapping abstract space. The problem lies not in the name of the approach, but rather what the underlying relations produce. Community-based mapping in this way is akin to expert or conventional mapping as it becomes oriented to dominant spatial practice.

Intriguing and useful about Roth’s account is her reference to the practice of mapping as reflective of broader institutional relations as mappers “take the special form of Indigenous territory, delineate it into legible two dimensional zones of use, management and tenure – and attempt to use such a spatial conception to claim an accurate representation of local land use and management” (Roth, 2009, p.208). She offers insight into the activities of community cartographers becoming oriented to the ideological concerns of the nation state and “new forms
of property relations necessitated by the extension of capitalism” (Pickles 2004 in Roth 2009, p.209).

The problem of spatial conception in mapping as a tool of planning is an important one that has particularly far-reaching effects on Indigenous people (Roth, 2009; Borrows, 1997; Porter, 2010). “Conceived space” (Lefebvre, 1974/1991) is produced through an ideological process characteristic of the institutional disciplines involved in planning, which yet stand to be adequately interrogated. Porter (2010) outlines the confrontation between abstract and lived space in the following passage:

It is the “mental or ideational field” of spatial imagination that is the work of dominant systems of thinking for the purposes of administering and remaking space. Lived space is the “life story of space” (Soja 2000, 11) that encapsulates the everyday lived experience and expression of the social in space. A key concern is the extent to which conceived space has come to “penetrate and dominate the way we live today” (Healey 2007, 204) and in doing so reduce space as an analytical category to be explained rather than a lived phenomenon (Soja 2000). (Porter, 2010)

Critical spatial theorists’ concerns, which I share, are to understand and address the negative consequences of the reifying effects of textual representations of land and Indigenous forms of being on land, the abstraction of space which is produced through the social relations of power, and to address the immediate and material problem that, “in Lefebvre’s words, ‘lived experience is crushed, vanquished by what is conceived of’” (1974/1991). It is this privileging of the idea rather than the practice of being on land that is the problem identified here. This is indeed rooted, for Indigenous peoples, in the terminology pivotal to the colonialist project that produced
Indigenous lands as terra nullius, or empty lands (O’Connor, 1998; Macklem, 1997/2002; Borrows, 1991; Gosine and Teelucksingh, 2008, Whitehead, 2010) and subsequently produced the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous people. Judith Whitehead (2010) describes the term as a “disciplinary enabler” in the current context. She contends that this reifying concept “wedded the rights of conquest to areas and resources that could be profitably enclosed, privatized and sold” (2010, p.21), a process that continues today, theorized as accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003).

Indeed critical accounts of land use planning, community based mapping and related, offer insight into the effects of these objectifying tools. Yet they also lack in explicating the specific ways in which the objectification of land and Indigenous forms of being on land actually takes place; how people who are not experts in the field encounter the discourse and texts of land use planning as a mediating force; and the ways in which theirs and others’ work processes produce a broader, textually mediated set of institutional relations that make up the politics of land development.

I will now turn my attention to the textual landscape in Canada and Ontario to familiarize the reader with standard features of planning texts in the national and regional experience, terrain upon which Treaty 9 and Mushkegowuk communities begin to be coordinated within the provincial relations of land use planning and development.

**Standard Features of Planning in Indigenous Lands in Canada and Ontario**

There are many land use planning case studies based on frameworks applied in Indigenous communities throughout Canada, such as British Colombia (Lil’Wat First Nation, 1998); Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut (Berger, Kennett and King, 2010), and in southern and the “middle north” of Ontario (Tobias, 2000) and more recently over the past
decade, in the more remote northern parts of the province, with an evident increase since the Premier’s public announcement on the Far North Land Use Planning and Protection strategy in July 2008 (“Far North Land Use Planning”, 2010; King, 2010). These planning activities are coordinated through the textually mediated work of ministries, Indigenous and environmental organizations among others and rely on the standard features, relations and practices of planning, including legal-jurisdictional relations that are present throughout planning generally (see Turner 2002), but are made more complex in the context of First Nation-settler relations. I draw briefly on a few cases, including the Lil’Wat First Nation in British Colombia, Pikangikum and the Little Grand Rapids First Nations in the Treaty 9 area in Ontario, to inquire into the standardized ways in which planning unfolds in other First Nation communities. Fort Albany has not yet embarked on a “terms of reference” for land use planning and may yet decide (or not) to. This overview is meant to draw attention to some of the textual issues and standard features of planning within the provincial planning processes and the actual textual mechanisms, work and coordination that takes place in other First Nation communities, hopefully serving as a reference to some of the generalizable tendencies within the institutional process at hand that can be viewed alongside some of the specific experiences that the community has been exposed to thus far.

Standard accounts of planning serve to organize space in conventional western forms, standardized in such areas as Cartesian and other forms of mapping and naming practices; setting out a planning area that corresponds to specific delineated and boundaried spaces; establishing a planning process that sets up relations of authority and decision making; and establishing “phases and timelines” for the implementation of planning in the delineated “Traditional Land Use Planning Area”. A “Terms of Reference” is required before First Nation community land
use plans in northern Ontario can legally be approved and fully funded (MNR, 2010), tying signing communities into a broader provincial planning regime established by the Ministry of Natural Resources in conversation with other ministries with interest in the region, including that of the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry who wields a significant amount of power over development in the area North of the 51st parallel.

In turning attention to the legal-jurisdictional issues that arise in planning exercises in Indigenous areas in other parts of Canada, we see these orienting to a broader development context, with the promise of “accessing development opportunities” as a key orienting feature. In an introduction to the land use planning strategy in the Lil’wat First Nation in British Colombia, we can see that planning is deeply concerned with increased development, and their potential control over it. The following excerpt is from a paper prepared by a legal firm, which speaks directly to the question of land rights and title:

Increasingly, these First Nation communities are questioning the number and types of proposed developments in their territories. This stems in part from the affirmations by our highest court of the ongoing Aboriginal title and rights to land and resources (Guerin v. The Queen, [1984] 2 S.C.R. 335), as well as from the Province’s response to directions from the courts to consult with First Nations on potential impacts to Aboriginal title and rights (Haida Nation v. BC, 2004 SCC 73).

The result is the referral of pending government decisions to a First Nation with the expectation that the First Nation will identify its concerns. This requires an internal assessment and decision-making process on the part of the First Nation, which may in turn result in the identification of potential economic
opportunities and some form of impact benefit agreement between the proponent and the First Nation. (Donovan & Co., 2008, p.1)

The accounts of actual planning in First Nation communities provides a rich site for the mining of ethnographic clues as to how planning is put together in First Nation communities and standardized through the use of textually mediated processes. There are steps that a community such as the Lil’wat Nation “is taking to implement its Lil’wat Land Use Plan, including government to government discussions with the Province in relation to the recently completed “Sea to Sky Land and Resource Management Plan.” Here we gain insight into some of the specific moments of textual coordination that takes place in a First Nation community through the planning process.

Once a land use plan has been developed, there are a number of steps a First Nation should take to implement the land use plan. Where there is an opportunity to work with the Province to incorporate aspects of the land use plan into provincial initiatives, the First Nation may be able to take advantage of provincial legislative powers to assist in the implementation of its plan, as the Lil’wat Nation has been able to do in the Sea to Sky LRMP process. (Donovan & Co., 2008, p.13)

The steps are established elsewhere, in this case the province of British Colombia. There are “opportunities” set out by an authority that can create them, necessarily outside of the First Nation who are considered marginal and in need of access to them. These opportunities, it is implied, are of an economic nature and will be accessible to those who follow the rules and procedures set out for accessing such opportunities. Despite the full participation of the First Nation in developing a land use plan there is strangely still no guarantee that the province will
support its implementation, which appears to only happen in special cases such as through the Sea to Sky LRMP process.

The features of the Lil’wat Land Use Planning material intersect with case studies of land use planning in First Nation communities in Ontario. Media accounts take up the language of planning according to its discipline, without interrogating what organizing references such as “economic development” actually mean to planning. The Native issues journal, Ontario Birchpath (2006), reported on the land-use strategy called *Keeping the Land: A Land Use Strategy for the White Feather Forest and Adjacent Areas* stating that “the initiative aims at resource-based economic development” and that “First Nation communities like Pikangikum can make use of this initiative for community-based land use planning…[and] help in balancing economic development and Aboriginal values, traditions and way of life.” (Ontario puts Pikangikum in the driver’s seat, 2006). This initiative was developed within the provincial institutional process “in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources” (Pikangikum First Nation and Ministry of Natural Resources, 2006).

Upon examination of the “Little Grand Rapids First Nation Terms of Reference for a Community-based Land Use Planning Process” (Little Grand Rapids First Nation & Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources [LGFRN & MNR], 2009) available on the Ministry of Natural Resources, Far North Branch Website, we see the same features that are textually presented elsewhere in Canada, drawing on the established representations, practices and relations of planning. The Terms of Reference is an official document that outlines a legal partnership between Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the community, including contact information for both as seemingly those ultimately legitimately knowledgeable about, and perhaps legally responsible for, the process, particularly how it is written up and who can speak
for the plan. The title page comes with a date and an emblem of the First Nation and leads into a table of contents that comes with the standard set of reporting sections including Foreword, Vision, Context, Purpose, Goals, Principles and Objectives, and so forth. While the Little Grand Rapids First Nation (LGRFN) has been involved in planning on their own in relation to the Ontario planning context prior to 2008 established in the “Ontario policy for Community-based Land use Planning” (“Community based land”, 2002), it was faced with a new jurisdictional arena in 2008 after the Far North Planning Initiative was launched as part of the Premier’s announcement. In the foreword, it states that the “planning process will be guided by LGRFN and the emerging policies and processes established in the Far North Planning Framework” and that the parties are committed to contributing to both goals of planning for the “traditional area” as well as to “achieve the objectives of the Far North Initiative” (LGRFN & MNR, 2009).

As the document is dated April 24, 2009, it is assumed a great deal of work, perhaps a few years at least, went into the planning exercise leading up to that, drawing attention to a jurisdictional regime prior to 2009, and in fact makes reference to an earlier provincial planning regulatory framing from 2002. There is a “Note” within the foreword however, drawing attention to the fact of the Premier’s announcement in 2008 and the introduction of Bill 191 on June 2, 2009 into the Ontario legislature. The community, for better or for worse, would necessarily enter this new legal realm at the time of signing, after the weighty work of preparing the Terms of Reference for Land Use Planning was already complete. In this sense, the work already carried out in the LGRFN land use planning process would serve to bring the community in to the Bill 191 process, legitimize it, and do the work of producing the legislative process, a “success story”, as one of the First Nation communities that has “successfully completed a Terms of Reference”. Bill 191 would then carry with it this previous work of a community
previously unseen discourses of protection and development that would play a role in the changing landscapes of local land use planning.

The LGRFN Terms of Reference for Land Use Planning then establishes “stakeholder involvement” in planning and sets out the planning area, as a boundaried area localizable on a standard Ontario map. The planning process is then established as a sequence of authorized moments, including establishing responsibilities and decision-making procedures, phases and timelines. A section on “dispute resolution sets out a process where unresolved issues with the planning team can be “addressed directly to the MNR Red Lake District Manager and Little Grand Rapids First Nation” (LGRFN & MNR, 2009), offering a sense of partnership in conflict resolution. If it goes that far however, ultimately it is the provincial ruling apparatus that makes decisions of a legal nature, pointing to the broader relations of ruling within which the plan, through its standard features and texts, is placed.

The standard features of the Little Grand Rapids Terms of Reference allow for insight into the specific textual mechanisms that serve to orient a community to broader provincial forms of organizing or re-organizing ancestral territories according to rational logics that correspond to broader development goals and may or may not recognize actual practices of people living in these spaces when they are applied.

The question of whether to engage in land use planning in Treaty 9 has taken up vast amounts of thought-space among communities in Treaty 9 region and their allies, as people are confronted with a new set of legal rules, procedures, and framings that correspond to institutional processes developed elsewhere, and set in motion a new planning language for the people of the territory, new ways of talking about land and what may happen there. While a few communities had advanced land use plans before the legislation was in place, others take up the frame and still
further others reject it, there are those left contemplating land use planning with trepidation and grapple with the lack of certainty on what the implications actually are. The theorized debates for and against land use planning can only go so far, and in many cases are not useful in explicating the material and relational processes underway.
CHAPTER EIGHT

The Ruling Relations of Land Politics in Treaty 9

*I think each community should claim the whole Mushkegowuk territory as their traditional lands and never mind reserve boundaries, so we would own all the land, there would be no Fort Albany First Nation just Fort Albany traditional territory, which is the whole Mushkegowuk area...same with the other communities...we would claim the whole area, we would put all these land use plans together and show that we are claiming the whole mush territory...one land base accommodating all these communities.* - Interview with male adult from Fort Albany First Nation

The Mushkegowuk in Fort Albany have not yet decided whether they will enter into a legal Terms of Reference for land use planning. Yet they, along with all Treaty 9 communities and others living in the planning area are brought into the textually coordinated relations and processes of land use planning, under the new legislation as of October 2010, whether actively deciding to or not. Such is the nature of provincial legislative ruling relations of which all subjects of Ontario, including First Nation communities who border multiple subjectivities, are a part. As small reserve communities take strides to become informed of the land use planning process and what it implies, they along with their allies, and all involved in the debate and politics of development and protection, move further within these relations and become productive of them.

First Nation communities who have already embarked on, or who contemplate doing land use planning (such as Little Grand Rapids First Nation, Pikangekum First Nation among others – see MNR “Far North Land Use Planning Strategy”, 2010) aim at accessing a better future for their people. They are drawn in to the promise of increased certainty about the control over and access to traditional territories through land use planning, and perhaps increased economic opportunity or increased potential for protecting lands. They necessarily must enter into the
standard practices of planning contained in its texts which are hooked up to broader planning regimes – municipal, provincial, territorial and federal - and the powerful, already established relations and politics of property, development and protection, historically not set out in their favour. That is, unless they fully participate as constituents in the provincial governing processes which, to them and organizations such as NAN, implies further relinquishing of jurisdiction over lands as the province is recognized on new levels as the ultimate approving “authority” over the lands, bringing us back to the heart of the matter.

To engage in planning is therefore necessarily a more complex exercise for First Nation people than others in Canada, given the bifurcated history of land relations evidenced in history, through the stories of Elders and the everyday practices of people out on the land and the Treaties and other legal agreements that set out to protect a way of being, and the subsequent institutional relations that grew from the colonial encounter. People are motivated to be explicit about their ways of being in, and perceiving of, territories as they come up against the dispossessing tendencies of these institutional relations, and enter into already established legal systems that set out the rules for planning in specific ways that have historically set out to displace them. In this complex dialectical encounter, new conceptualizations are produced through the actual work of people who both represent them in text and check back in with the lived practices and local knowledge holders within the communities where they are located.

Today, land relations in Innino Aski are immersed in a new politics of occupancy, development and protection and more immersed than ever within the related institutional processes inclusive of them. The Ring of Fire (and Arch of Fire), are significant mineral deposits found in Mushkegowuk traditional territory, pointing to increased accumulation plans and practices in the ecologically sensitive muskeg that orient companies, environmentalists and local
people to the politics of development and protection. Occupancy by Mushkegowuk of these lands beyond immediately recognizable borders, is subverted to these politics, as it becomes less important politically as a driving factor than the subsistence and mixed economic practices of Indigenous people which are yet considered a significant legal barrier for developers to be overcome. Yet for people, who live and breathe these lands, a broader sense of territory is of the greatest significance and starts in the everyday activities bound to productive and conceptual practices that set out their legitimacy.

Material produced on lived practices, including sustenance practices in the broader Mushkegowuk traditional area, has consistently shown a usage or occupancy of land that goes beyond the reserve areas, beyond a given community’s family traplines, in large part established through earlier MNR processes. Scholarly work on Cree land use and occupancy such as the article titled *The Persistence of Aboriginal Land Use: Fish and Wildlife Harvest Areas in the Hudson and James Bay Lowland, Ontario* (Berkes, Hughes, George, Preston, Cummins and Turner, 1995) describes the activities of land use in relation to the subsistence oriented economic mode of production throughout the entire Mushkegowuk region. There is no mention of land use planning as a frame for organizing what should happen there, but what actually does, and has occurred as lived experience.

Given the recognized low environmental impact of sustenance practices, it is interesting that the proposal to protect 225,000 km² of land through an Ontario-defined process closely matches the size of area that Berkes et al. (1995) estimates as the area of small scale harvesting practice that continues to be in use, based on information as recent as 15 years ago:

Results show that geographically extensive land use for hunting and fishing persists in the Mushkegowuk region, some 250 000 km². However, the activity
pattern of Omushkego (West Main) Cree harvesters has changed much over the decades; contemporary harvesting involves numerous short trips of a few days’ duration instead of the traditional long trips. Although the First Nations control only 900 km2 (0.36% of the region) as Indian reserve land, they continue to use large parts of their traditional territory. (Berkes et al., 1995, p.81)

The descriptive research on actual life practice serves to emphasize that people continue to maintain a way of life across the region broadly speaking. This account of land use and occupancy outside of the framing of planning problematizes framings of development and protection that seek to delineate uses of land into categories that serve to separate sites and practices. Mushkegowuk productive practices serve to organize people in territory in ways not immediately visible within institutional relations or conceptions, nor are they enabling of the standardized regulation of land. Descriptive accounts of land occupancy and use reflect historical non-textual forms of organization, and de-centre the privileged accounts of planning, as much as self-determination is a stated concern in some planning accounts that are progressive in intention (Minkin, 2009). One is a call to recognize existing land practice in its own right, while the other puts existing land practice into a context of institutional relations implicit in its framing.

The production of abstract space in Indigenous communities is what is of concern here more than the actual result of it, but rather how the abstraction takes place. We can see how accounts or descriptions of land use, move from one of documentation of productive practices to one of planning that centres on a framework for decision making about those practices, through the use of texts that are embedded in broader politics of development and protection. These planning texts are laden with underlying often hidden relations of jurisdiction and property ownership. The textual production has been critically important, as the standardized and
standardizing ways of advancing land use planning in the province are produced widely within some First Nation communities, in governing spheres and within the context of the production of the *Far North Act* and related legislative developments. Dorothy Smith (2005) reminds us of the industrial era in the mid-nineteenth century as the period in which “new forms of social organization enabled by print and other technologies for reproducing words and images expanded rapidly” (Smith, 2005, p.15) and that this began an era that “progressively expropriates locally developed forms of social organization embedded in particularized relationships…”, (Smith, 2005, p.16) in part through the unregulated processes of the market. It is this ability to produce and reproduce texts in print, on the internet, as faxes, in the news media, verbally reproduced on the radio, as notes in parliamentary debate, as scholarly papers in academia, as campaigns in environmental and development organizations, projects and programs in band offices and tribal organizations, as legal cases and files and so forth, that the texts of land use planning, development and protection in Treaty 9 (as well as 3 and 5) take over and subvert the productive practices that actually take place in the “lived space” of local people and their communities.

**The Public Texts and Institutional Workings of Planning**

The speech and texts of land use planning in the region north of the 51st parallel are deeply entwined with development and protection and respond to established, standardized and ideologically coded ways of talking about both. I argue here that there are three main strands of discourse on land use planning in Innino Aski that are underpinned by and shape the public debate about it, and ultimately serve to produce the provincial relations of planning through the *Far North Act*. They are generally set up as “pro-planning”, “planning as neutral” or “resistance to planning” positions taken up in public accounts, all of which are oriented to the provincial
process underway and do less to explicate the actual institutional workings than produce speech and learning about planning, producing in turn the provincial Far North Land Use Planning Process itself. The underlying relations of jurisdiction are obfuscated through the ideological power of planning as governing frame, and thus the issues of most interest and concern to Indigenous people are often relegated to areas of lesser importance, are manipulated within the relations of accumulation and development or left out altogether.

Environmental protection is deeply entwined with development in the public speech about land use planning. Vast amounts of website and news items coming out of governing ministries reflects preoccupation with environmental problems in the North as evidenced in the following Environmental Commissioner of Ontario’s Report in 2006-7, setting the stage for the Premier made his announcement about Far North Land Use Planning:

Northern Ontario’s unique and varied ecology merits, at least, the same standard of planning that applies to the rest of the province. The establishment of a comprehensive land use planning system for northern Ontario is critical to ensure that future decision-making is guided by sound principles, public scrutiny, and a precautionary approach to environmental protection. If action is not taken soon to embrace a new vision for the north, the consequences may be grave. Without effective planning, irreparable harm may be inflicted on the fragile northern environment. Moreover, harm to the natural environment may have significant negative impacts on the social and economic sustainability of northern communities. (“2006-7 Annual Report”, 2006-7)

Environmental groups have similarly taken a strong pro-planning stance, and have been heavily involved in the lobby for the Far North Act. Planning is generally seen as a neutral tool of high
value for the protection of ecological systems. An environmentalist interviewed for the study, when asked to define land use planning in the context of the developments in Treaty 9:

So land use planning is a principle and a tool that is used worldwide…a rational approach, so ok, the reason it’s so important is because, in the absence of land use planning, we just kind of live in this ecosystem and you are going to build a road here, you are going to put a subdivision here, and you’re going to put a mall here, but if you don’t do a land use plan first, you don’t actually plan for the ecosystem ahead of time, maybe you actually destroy this important river, you destroy a migratory habitat…if you do land use planning first, then you figure out ahead of time what you want to protect, what you want to keep. (Interview with Female environmentalist)

In the provincial plans to produce the legislation for land use planning and protection in the far northern region, development works as a central force that orients the speech and work of environmental organizations (ENGOs) in face of the very real material crises it generates. Indeed ENGOs were anticipating aggressive development from the early part of the decade, which motivated them to introduce land use planning in the region in the first place. An environmentalist interviewed for this study identified a key role her organization, and others like hers, played in introducing the idea to the province:

So in the early 2000s we had looked at some maps produced by the world resources institute (WRI) that showed there were only 3 big intact forests on the planet – so, Russia, the Amazon and Canada’s boreal forest. And Canada’s Boreal forest, there had been no attention paid to it at all. Pretty much no one knew we
had the boreal forest, I mean the general public there was no awareness…most people just referred to it as the bush.

I mean people who lived in it knew it was a forest and a bush but in terms of its global significance, how important it was to Canada and the planet there wasn’t a high awareness. And then if you look at Ontario, Ontario has allowed for commercial logging, kind of like around Red Lake, Sioux Lookout area, they call it the 51st parallel, so commercial logging was allowed up to a certain point. North of that was intact, in this incredible, spectacular, still-functioning ecosystem. So we knew what ever happened there we had to be very careful and thoughtful.

So what some folks did was they sought a promise from the then Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty, he was the opposition leader, and asked him, that if he was elected would he implement meaningful land use planning, with the people who lived there, so the local First Nations, to protect the ecological integrity of the forests as well as…prosperity and all that.(interview with female ENGO rep, June 2011)

Indeed her emphasis, as an environmentalist, is clearly rooted in the very valid concerns about threats to ecosystems, particularly in face of the heavy increase in development activity in the region and the immense ecological importance of the area on a global scale (Riley, 2011).

Shaping her consciousness of land is her direct exposure to the problems generated in the territories of concern, and a demonstrated knowledge of the workings of ecological systems and threats to them garnered through extensive applied advocacy work to raise awareness of the scientific facts related to peatlands. She is also not unfamiliar with the jurisdictional problems
that clearly arise for First Nation communities in the region, and sympathizes with them, advocating on their behalf at times, yet find herself also bound by the institutional framing of her environmental organization that does not allow her to go beyond an official position that represents the stakeholders and board of her organization.

And the First Nations felt that if we sided with the government and supported the bill that we were taking a stand on jurisdiction. And it’s actually not in our mandate to take a stand on jurisdiction, it’s not who we are. Our charitable mandates are not about who has jurisdiction of resources in Ontario, our charitable mandate is about wildlands, and wild waters in Ontario, and wild species…so the First Nations interpreted us in the bill as we supported Ontario’s jurisdiction, and we couldn’t take a position on Ontario’s jurisdiction, we just support what we thought was good land use planning law. (Interview with female environmentalist)

These legal constraints broadly define relations of protection in the region north of the 51st parallel and set out the reasons why environmentalists can only go so far in the work that they do in support of First Nation communities, despite their full commitment to the lands upon which they live. At the same time are important inroads that environmentalists have been able to make, and these have been directly related to the development of personal relationships with people on the ground and through their advocacy work.

Indigenous jurisdiction, even when openly discussed in public spaces, is subdued within highly legal and technical debates that serve the interests of ruling, tending to frame planning as neutral within the legal environment. A Conference Board of Canada’s publication perhaps best summarizes the three main formulations in which legal and jurisdictional debates about land use
planning in Canada’s North (primarily in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and Yukon, with some mention of Ontario’s *Far North Act*) are taking place in the public, indicated by the titles of each section of the publication called *Canada’s North, What’s the Plan?* (Berger, Kennett and King, 2010). In the first section, renowned legal figure Thomas Berger presents a “Keep it Up” account argues that land use planning in Canada’s North is “crucial to sustainable economic development and to the self-determination of Canada’s Northern Aboriginal Peoples”. Steven Kennett’s “Fix it Up” account makes an argument, “contending that Northern land use planning needs substantial fixing in order to overcome regulatory, institutional, and legal complexities, but that the process will be valuable and workable once changes are made”; while Hayden King posits that land use planning is a detrimental approach in the section called “Give it Up” account, maintaining that “land use planning in Northern regions is a flawed and inappropriate concept that has failed Northerners in practice, even as it has been implemented increasingly over the past decade.” (Berger et al., 2010). Interestingly the above summary, provided by the Conference Board of Canada on a website, makes very sparse if any meaningful mention of environmental protection or issues related to ecology. The content of the chapters touch on these issues in a very brief way if at all (such as two paragraphs in one of the chapters called “Living Within Limits” in a chapter that is over 35 pages long (Berger et al., 2010, p. 46). As a public representation of the key issues, the environment doesn’t appear to be very high on the radar in this ‘representative work’. This raises important questions about whether land use planning will actually privilege protection in the way that environmentalists hope it will.

The above accounts however, demonstrate just how intertwined land use planning, development and jurisdiction actually are, and how discourses and public debates are set up. The authors offer insights into the institutional issues at play from Berger’s legal status quo (Keep it
Up), to Steven Kennett’s liberal-reformist (Fix it Up) and Hayden King’s critical Indigenous (Give it Up) perspectives, which lay out the formulations that frame discussion in the Arctic, and as it hooks into public perspectives and speech about land use planning in the Far North of Ontario. Kennett offers that “Northern land use planning institutionalizes the accommodation of competing values and interests by requiring both bottom-up community input and the approval of plans by government parties to land claims agreements” (Berger et al., 2010, p.57) suggesting that the institutionalization of interests will help out in the long run, while he admits there is no guarantee of this, and other potentialities may actually be the outcome, pointing to the dependency of this on the specific practices of people involved in the text process itself. King however argues succinctly that through “the institutional and cultural assumptions of land use regimes, it becomes clear that their design, structure, and implementation are so steeped in the technical language and procedure of bureaucracy that Indigenous peoples have immense difficulty accessing or participating in them in earnest” (Berger et al., 2010, p.79), pointing to a very different position that frames the debates on land use planning in the North from the perspective of Indigenous people’s jurisdiction. Within the debate, we are oriented to the legal processes and established assumptions about jurisdiction, through the full support, tacit acceptance or rejection of the framing. While King’s rejection of land use planning sets it up in this way, his critical perspective is so, not because it is against land use planning, but rather because it critiques the underlying relations of power inherent in planning as an institutional process. King’s chapter offers important insights into the institutional mechanisms that serve to exclude Indigenous people from planning, and point to under examined areas of planning discourse and institutional relations.
These debates are identifiable in the public speech, or discourse, on land use planning. News accounts refer to the *Far North Act* as potential panacea for First Nation communities, as a tentative option that may need some adjustment, and as an extension of colonial practice. Identifying the specific texts and mechanisms of its discourse as productive of a process of planning demonstrates how powerful the text process actually is and how it actually takes place. Development from a provincial point of view depends on access to remote lands via textual representations that can be mapped in similar ways across locations. Communities in these areas are drawn into a development policy complex through the funding formulas, of small to large-scale projects and events such as workshops, training sessions. Some of the key discourses they draw on include “sustainable development”, proposing to marry environmental, economic and political approaches, and “Aboriginal economic development” advanced through national, provincial and regional policy making bodies, and reflected in countless well-funded academic, governmental and business summits, conferences and workshops throughout the province and beyond. That the advancement of this discourse coincides with a significant increase in resource development interest in the region is an obvious indicator of neoliberal development plans for the area. While these conferences are inaccessibly expensive for the average person, anywhere from $200 - $3000, perhaps averaging around $1800 just to attend a conference on economic opportunities in Aboriginal economic development[ix], they represent a significant backdrop to what has served to move the *Far North Act* forward, to offset the potential negative environmental impacts of such widespread development while providing justification for it at the same time. The elitist Aboriginal Economic Development fora move ahead with generating buzz and consensus on development and it serves to help produce the land use planning legislation.
The point here is not to delve into each of these discursive areas, but to paint a picture of a landscape of textually coordinated institutional discourses that is unprecedented in the history of Treaty 9 communities, an ideological environment that ultimately shapes the institutional relations unfolding in the region. While representing a set of texts and rules all of its own, land use planning ties all of the other discursive areas together in a way that has direct bearing on what actually happens on the land and to people’s lives. The logic in the *Far North Act* texts, it seems, is to move development to areas that have not been “protected”, or to protect areas that have not been developed, in a kind of ironically unplanned race to see what takes place first.

**Taking up Texts Locally and the Bifurcation of Consciousness**

As people take up and contemplate the public speech and texts of planning, protection and development, through doing the work of participating in discussions with environmentalists, developers and ministry officials, surfing the internet for information on land use planning, or becoming trained in Aboriginal economic development, attending planning workshops and reading up on planning in other First Nation communities, they participate in the complex of processes that coordinate the work and the relations that shape decisions about the land where they live. These texts are “integral to local practices as they connect what individuals are doing to processes going on and organized elsewhere (Smith, 2004).

As the texts are taken up at the local level and the language of land use planning entered people’s everyday talk and workplaces, the definitions, concerns and orientation are still explicitly distinct from other views, evidenced in the following interview carried out in 2009 with a band office worker in Fort Albany:

For me it’s [land use planning is] telling people we own all this area, the Mushkegowuk territory. For me there is no such thing as a Fort Albany Reserve,
living on 88 acres. I think we have a right to claim all of the Mushkegowuk territory, that our ancestors went all over the place, no political boundaries, they could do down there, up there, all over the place and they used the land.

(Interview with male adult from Fort Albany First Nation)

The critical insight that the process was being driven by the province reflected a long history of interaction between the First Nation and settler governments, and historical memory of land dispossession, that underwrote the unfolding land use planning process for some:

That’s being defined by the government relationship. They want you to put up boundaries…but we’ll need to claim all the Mushkegowuk traditional territory as one land base for all Mushkegowuk, instead of little pieces, each community claiming its own reserve size. Fort Albany First Nation is not willing to have 88 acres of land – we want the whole of Mushkegowuk territory as our own land to move around...(Interview with male adult from Fort Albany First Nation)

It was not, in contrast to Turner’s (2005) neighbourhood case study of municipal land use planning process, the fact that people, did not have knowledge of what the land use planning process could imply in terms of continued limits to their land base. Rather, they were overwhelmed at times with the amount of policy that was being sent to them on a regular basis, in language that was often inaccessible and highly technical, and about which they were expected to make decisions on someone else’s schedule. The problem as the interviewee identifies, is related to a process of having to learn these new policies, while trying to maintain a sense of local identity and territoriality.

This is where the Mushkegowuk vision needs to be really clear, [in face of] some of the key words being used that confuse…policies like governance, economic
development, land use planning green energy…That’s new stuff green energy, new emerging industries, we never had any dealings with green energy before now all of a sudden we have to learn about GEA…solar, nuclear…(Interview with male adult from Fort Albany First Nation)

The bifurcation of consciousness that results from the institutional processes underway is clear to people in remote communities, though perhaps expressed differently, and is particularly known to those directly exposed to the policy processes underway created elsewhere, that they are pressured to take up, contemplate and respond to. In an interview about land use planning, the conversation turns to numerous related policies, including that of Aboriginal Economic Development, and speaks to the deeply bifurcating experience felt by local people:

Policies do not consider people, they just focus on business, professional occupations, no time for emotions, “maintain the bottom line”, “stay in the black”, can’t operate in a deficit. The bottom line is defining people – administrators they don’t see the social short falls in the community, there is a big gap in the aboriginal economic policy and life in the community. (Interview with male adult from Fort Albany First Nation)

Walby (2005), drawing on the work of Dorothy Smith, explains that “A bifurcation of consciousness exists for those at [a] line of fault, where they must do routine work and organize their daily life under conditions not of their choosing, yet sometimes participate in the peculiar out-of-body modes of consciousness specific to the ruling relations (Walby, 2005, p.159). In this sense, we see the onslaught of texts including those of the Far North Act contributing to the sense of disempowerment, dislocation from meaning at the level of bodily or emotional lived experience which is still present even as these policies come to play out in the lives of people.
The bifurcation of consciousness instigated by textual representations of land within planning processes shift emphasis from emotional attachments and experience of life on the land rooted in memory of family, of the trauma and joy of lived relations, of birth and burial, of the healing and teachings offered by land to a neutral and objective method of classifying land and land uses that shuts out relationality, shuts out people within/as part of land, objectifies and abstracts relations as they are codified into the sequences of its standardized logic.
CHAPTER NINE

TEXTUAL MEDIATION, WORK AND SOCIAL RELATIONS ACROSS SITES

To recapitulate, in Institutional Ethnography, texts are considered written words, discourses or images, sounds, and even gestures, that can be *replicated across sites and serve to have an organizing effect on people* (Smith, 2005, 2006; Campbell, 2008 emphasis my own). Official or institutional texts, manifest of class relations, are created and moved through governing processes by those who have the means to do so, and sent to other readers and writers who work with the textual information. The sending and receiving of this information through various means (email, fax, or public notice, through a workshop presentation, a media spot, conference material etc) instigates a type of unanticipated learning among all listeners, readers and writers, and subsequently those with whom they speak, hooking them up in peculiar ways to the relations of ruling (Smith, 2005). Peter Grahame (1998) summarizes Smith’s method as examining, “how the scenes of everyday life are shaped by forms of social organization which cannot be fully grasped from within those scenes” (Grahame, 1998, p.347). Such an examination must be carried out through dialectical analysis that involves, “describing the coordination of activities…discovering how ideological accounts define those activities in relation to institutional imperatives and examining the broader social relations in which local sites of activity are embedded” (Grahame, 1998, p. 347). The activities or work that people do towards producing a text process are pivotal to analyzing the materialist nature of the process, necessarily a historical one.

Knowing what we now know about the social and spatial elements at play, historical concerns that inform the problematic, some of the key texts and people involved in the production of texts related to provincial land use planning, development and protection, in the
following section I will set out to examine practices of textually mediated social coordination. In other words, I will explicate the ways in which people, through their work, across diverse locations are coordinated within an institutional process that relies on the ongoing production of texts related to land use planning, development, and protection in the Treaty 9 region. People, including members of Fort Albany, other Mushkegowuk and Treaty 9 communities, local and regional Indigenous representative organizations such as NAN and the MTC, academics, environmental organizations, consultants, developers, planners and other experts, civil servants and policy makers working for the Ministry of Natural Resources, among other groups and individuals, are brought into coordination through their work efforts (time and energy) as they engage with, discuss, and consider the texts and relations of land use planning, environmental protection and development. People take up and activate the written texts of land use planning, in their places of work activity, according to their organizational frames, within existing institutional and legal constraints, and in the face of criteria set by provincial ministries and other funding agencies. The public talk of planning, protection and development, including support for, and resistance to, the proposed legislation, is found in the news, on websites and in the hallways of public places, generating a broader discursive landscape. This cumulative work contributes to the production of new jurisdical terrain that makes up, in this case, the legislative process known as Bill 191, or the Far North Act with its multiple implications for learning, life and land in Indigenous communities.

To this ends, I will ground analysis in the productive or everyday work activities related to the community project, as people involved unknowingly, and later more knowingly, enter a general realm of provincial politics, and become hooked up within institutional relations in unexpected ways. I will trace key moments or sites (they are both) of social coordination and
work, located in local, regional and provincial organizational work efforts, recognizing that these are only a small representation of the many other moments and sites, activities and work that arise in relation to the textual production of land use planning and jurisdiction in the province, that are traceable from within Fort Albany community members’ actuality, or everyday lived experience, linked also to that of mine as I stand alongside people in the attempt to understand how these processes unfold. These moments are chosen as relevant for gaining insight into a complex institutional process, to be able to examine how textual coordination takes place and comes to bear on people, consciousness, and the spatial dynamics of particular places as they become conceived space, through processes of textual representation.

I will centre discussion on three particular sites of coordination ("local", "regional", and "provincial") where the actual or lived experience of Mushkego Inninowuk in this case, is brought into the provincial land use planning text process. All sites are actually local but transformed into divided realms through the taking up of concepts of jurisdictional and spatial boundaries that reflect broader, historically-developed categories of place in relation to centres of power, wealth and decision-making, produced within ruling relations. The first site is located in the community, as an instance of the community research project and funding process involving the coordination of organizational relations, among community members, external community research institutions, and the MNR Far North Branch, through the texts and language of land use planning and related financial and legal arrangements. The second moment arises in Timmins, a regional site, involving Mushkegowuk Council land use planning information and coordinator meetings taking place between 2008 and 2011. Timmins serves as a site where texts have served to coordinate relations among diverse groups, starting with the textual invitations to participants, read by people from Fort Albany and other communities, the leadership of Indigenous
organizations, provincial institutions, experts, and others, as well as through planning texts that relay information, organize training and “community coordinator” sessions as well as orient negotiations and conversations with the province in the attempt to consolidate and advance a regional planning approach representing the interests of the Mushkegowuk. A third moment, among many possible moments, is specific to the provincial level, taking place in Thunder Bay, where the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources organized the Planning Together: First Nations/Ontario Workshop on the Far North Land Use Planning Initiative, taking place May 4-6, 2010. The site brings together a similar assortment of people but under the overt auspices of the province as ultimate organizing institution and relaying information specific to the Far North Act legislative process. These three sites provide a comprehensive view of how textual mediation of social relations occurs across locations, serving to produce, through the coordinated work of people, the Far North Act as a text process.

The formulation I put forward here is that through the textual mediation of social relations relying on the active involvement, time and energy (work) of people, the so-called local, regional and provincial as actual multiple local sites, are coordinated within dominant capitalist relations as expressed in contemporary politics in the region north of the 51st parallel. Dialogic relations, or social coordination, is made explicit among a specific group of people with whom I, as researcher, have worked with, or come into contact with, or listened to in public meetings and fora, in short, people with whom I have participated in a number of productive activities, coordinated via the apparent, and less apparent, texts and text processes of land use planning, protection and development. It is these (among many other) moments of which I have some direct knowledge and for which I can tie to the other aspects of analysis covered in this investigation. These moments are mutually reinforcing as they are woven across diverse local
sites to other places, also local and immediate, activated as concepts established through productive relations, often referred to as regional, provincial, and in some cases national or global. Just as these are elaborated and presented in relation to established jurisdictional understandings reflective of ruling relations, they are also readily problematized through Indigenous perceptions, productive modes and histories of governance.

On a cautionary note, the idea here is not the rejection of all textual material that enters a community, an absurd proposition in contemporary politics and organizational practice. Rather the intention is to generate a critical understanding of the underlying institutional relations involved, how they are put together and how they play out; so that communities are afforded a chance to inspect the process in detail; so that they do not feel backed into a corner as they are forced to make quick decisions; so that they do not lose out on potential supports for gaining ground in accessing or deciding what happens in traditional territories and better possibilities for self-determination; or are further limited through the shaping of how people come to perceive territorial space and might access it in the future, for the generations to come.

The subtle ways in which institutional workings and textual processes unfold, the increased intensity at which they are expanding in the North, and the resulting “cognitive dissonance” that many Indigenous scholars decry (Little Bear, 2000; Henderson, 2000), generally goes unrecognized and under-examined. Presupposing the goals and interests of civil servants, provincial planners, ministry officials as well as environmentalists and others is also bound up in the desire to effect positive change for both First Nation people and the territories within which they live, the collective dialogic work of all implicated in the institutional process at hand merits careful analysis, given the potential for misunderstanding and “stepping on the feet” of potential allies both within and external to the provincial institutional realm. The hope is
that all levels of leadership will take seriously the implications of policy production for Indigenous communities, having a mapping of institutional workings and their implications for local people to draw on. With this in mind, let us delve further into the workings of institutional relations as they are mediated through the texts of land use planning as they play out in the context of a community project.

A Local Community Research Project and its Organizational Relations

Through the work of a community project in Fort Albany people both take-up and resist provincial institutional planning relations. Established institutional forms permeate community life through the take up of their logic, sequences, rules and regulations by people working in organizations relying on funding supports, the norm for community organizations across the province and country, perhaps especially in First Nation communities that have been compromised in their ability to be self-determining through the mechanisms of colonialism, including its problematic policies (see Chapter One). Such is the case in Fort Albany, in much need of development funds evidenced in the official and institutional work of community project that received provincial funding between 2009 and 2011. Funding arrangements, criteria and legal agreement texts are designed by the Ministry and shape the spatial and cognitive work of people in local organizations, such as the band office and the allies and consultants they work with, as their work centres on participating in the official process of funding a local project.

The work of advisors and other participants, myself and including students and staff from the local high school, staff of the health centre, and people broader community contributed their work to a local initiative, which became, at times, coordinated with the work of others in regional councils, further away community research centres and even further away government
ministries, as the project activities took place in actuality: proposed, planned for, approved of, funded and reported on.

The permeation of ruling institutional relations into the community takes place via local institutions or “organizational forms” that are configured through texts linking to other texts, produced by people across diverse sites within established relations. This local institutional form is organized ways that respond to and take up other ruling text processes (in order to receive funding etc). This process is repeated many times to build up local capital and capacity in order to create a functioning organization that can hire and sustain staff members and productive activities. Knowing this is how organizations come into being, we can shine light on a specific text process – that of provincial land use planning – and examine how it facilitates the local take-up of its discourses and relations, as well as set the stage for how such a process is also rejected, resisted and potentially reoriented. People resist the impositions of institutionality in multiple ways as community continues to be contested terrain as does the broader meaning of “organization” to First Nation communities who continue to maintain other forms of social relationality that informs the organizational form itself. These conceptual landscapes, based on divergent spatial and cultural conceptualizations enter into tension at times, sometimes local and bounded within the borders of the reserve settlement, sometimes broader, inclusive of the other coastal communities or Treaty 9 and beyond. Mushkego Inninowuk cultural and productive relations with land are remembered, recorded, discussed and put into practice through daily activities, both discursively and practically, within the broader ancestral territory, including those of the community project.

The textually-mediated coordination is located in the multiple dialogic encounters present in the complex organizational forms, activities and events of community life in Fort Albany, and
a mapping of this coordination demonstrates how people come to inadvertently participate in the production of the discursive ruling landscapes of provincial land use planning. Provincial land use planning initially appears as objective and neutral, reflected in the textual material that has been produced elsewhere, in Timmins, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Ottawa and so forth, by Ministers and civil servants, planners, policy makers, lawyers, environmental and industry advisors, consultants, among others. As community members receive textual information geared to First Nations and contemplate the meaning of land use planning through calls for proposals, invites to workshops and information sessions, they activate planning texts, the subjectivities located within them, and enter into the already established institutionally-defined relations for negotiating projects, proposals and funding agreements, based on assigned roles within their own organizations such as “community planner”, “project facilitator”, “economic development officer”, “band councilor” and so forth.

The process facilitated through the relations of an organizational form is exemplified, in this case, in the band office, which is linked to established ruling forms of governance through the federal and provincial legal texts that establish it as such, which in turn identify and legitimate the appropriate people responsible for contemplating land use planning texts, as they formalize roles and supervisory procedures, through such textual material as the job description, the workplan, in relation to the “organizational chart” that sets out the chain of command for decision-making and reporting. This sampling of the texts and productive work offers insight into what makes up the organizational form known as the band office, the backdrop, and epicenter of local First Nation governance, where approval through band council resolution (BCR) is required for the validation and authorization of the land use planning texts at the local level, which in turns legitimates, activates and produces the broader process underway.
I pause here to clarify my reading of organization in light of the “problem of the ontology of organizations and institutions” that Dorothy Smith problematizes for us (Smith, 2001, p. 159). The problem Smith refers to concerns how organizations and institutions appear as objective, “freestanding things” and tend to be nominalized concepts, which performs a “lexical suppression of the presence of subjects and the local practices that produce the extra local and objective…the organization itself is [thus] taken for granted. The problem of how what is thus named comes into being out of the located ephemerae of people’s everyday doings is bypassed” (Smith, 2001, p.159). Smith draws on the work of a number of sociologists and institutional ethnographers as they demonstrate how it is “possible to trace sequences of action through institutional paths, identifying where and how the institutional texts produce the standardize controls of everyday work activities” (Smith, 2001, p. 160). In other words, organizations, such as the “Band Office”, or the “Ministry of Natural Resources”, or a “community based research institute” for that matter, rather than being an objective entity actually fully depend on the institutional texts and people’s work, standardized and coordinated via those texts as they hook up to established forms of governing elsewhere that authorize and legitimate them.

As land use planning texts are brought within the organization of the band office, a series of roles and responsibilities are triggered and hooked up to the relations of ruling established via government ministry officials who work with band office employees, councilors, chiefs, and their land use planning consultants and researchers. This backdrop made explicit, offers a way “in” to critiquing the idea that the world of First Nation people in a remote reserve is somehow self-contained, but simultaneously recognizes that people are also not defined by the institutional relations that they have resisted and continue to resist since the onset of colonization. They both take up and reject the institutionality that sets out to define them. They, along with all people
marginalized within the social relations of capital and ruling, enter into dialogic relations within the institutionality of the contemporary era, while at the same time, have intimate and specific knowledge, distinct from institutional representations, of the places they call home and the lives they live, both historical and contemporary, as Mushkegowuk. As “consciousness is embodied in the actuality of people’s lives” (Smith, 2001, p. 160) people in the First Nation community develop a bifurcated consciousness instigated within the processes of colonialism and capitalism, as they straddle a dynamic, complex, oral, cultural world as well as the often contradictory institutional and highly bureaucratic world mediated through textually coordinated social relations. People continue to maintain a historical sense of place and cultural identity, while people’s work in their organizations and lives are shaped by the institutions they enter into dialogue with, subsequently shaping the contested terrain of how land is conceived, as they take up or activate through the contemplation, reproduction, and in some cases reorientation or outward rejection, of its material texts.

**Project Activities Prior to 2009**

In 2007-8 there were exciting discussions underway for organizing a raft excursion along the river system, with plans underway for spring 2009. There was also a constant sense of pending development in the area, of the rivers, minerals, forests and so forth, as the neoliberal policy process moved into the northern region of Ontario. People discussed both potential “job opportunities”, desperately needed, as well as the desire to make sure their land, the rivers and the Mushkegowuk way of life were available to their children and grandchildren. In the words of one project advisory member “I want my kids and grandchildren to know the rivers as they, so they know who they are and are proud of who they are, and where they come from” (Interview with female adult from Fort Albany First Nation, 2008).
Another project advisor wrote about the work being undertaken in the Paquataskamik Project, in a conference presentation that took place in June 2009. He wrote powerfully about the project as one of learning about land and water and the history of the Mushkegowuk in Fort Albany that was deeply immersed in the contours, landscapes and rivers of the territory intimately tied to the embodied attachments to place:

Prior to contact there was a community along each tributary. In addition there was a pathway connecting each community to the next one. One important purpose of this pathway was for the use of runners who brought news to a neighboring community.

News could travel instantly with runners taking news to the next as soon as they received it. It was the river that bounded people and communities together. One such name is Nameo Sipi (Ghost River) which now is a cultural camp for Kashechewan and Fort Albany. It is an old trading post, a place where sturgeon are to be found and an old village site. Old trails still intersect at that site.

What happens to a child without seeing trees? Is learning complete without hearing the sound of birds welcoming a new day? Have you seen everything if you have not seen the otter at play, the beaver dragging a branch for his house, the eagle swooping down to grab a fish from the water? Have you really seen a sunset without anything to impede the sight except for the waters reflecting the display?

The river is our life; a way of life that is thousands of years old. Yes the Mushkegowuk have been in the area for a long, long time. (Metatawabin, 2009)
Project activities took up the passionate drive among people to encourage learning and a broader understanding of territory. Prior to 2009 the community project had a life of its own, relatively unhindered and unconstrained, and reflective of the pace and inclinations of a small group of advisors and participants, including myself. Between eight and ten community members, depending on the day and circumstances, engaged otherwise in the day-to-day of their lives, became involved to varying degrees in the community project, as they saw relevant and possible. There was no staff at the outset. The various people involved contributed their labour to produce the material stuff of the project. Initially, in early 2007, informal spaces were created to teach youth the basic skills of interviewing so they could generate their own research based on interviews with peers, adults and elders, which resulted in a short audio documentary that aired later on the regional radio station, Wawatay News (“Paquataskamik Project 2008-2009”, n.d.). The project began to draw on other organizational resources to assemble a small programme of activities that grew with sparse funds, used to purchase a few recorders, produce some other creative material such as a girls zine (informal low-cost magazine) which fostered dialogue among girls about the importance of the Albany River from their perspectives, as well as plan and implement a few meetings to discuss strategies for youth engagement, high school land graduate education, Mushkegowuk cultural learning and traditional territory.

The initial activities were enabled through relationships developed with research institutes and networks that had a community-centred focus, such as the Social Economy Centre of the University of Toronto, Rural Women Making Change from Guelph University, and NORDIK Institute, based at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie. These initiatives initially provided small amounts of funding through generally open and enabling processes for that allowed for a community to develop project ideas based on the interests, pace, motivations and
perspectives of community members. As research organizations, made up of people’s work and the texts they produce, rather than nominal entities, they were also sites of a certain kind of unexpected coordination to broader ruling processes underway, and at the same time, were sources of critical engagement with those very processes based on varying kinds of “actual practices” and critically-informed community work that depended on the historical, cultural and material consciousness of specific people involved.

This spoke to the complex dialectics of organizations and the organizational forms that Smith (2001) would have us pay attention to, and of which I, for my own part, was linked to all three and between each one, the community, and subsequently to other institutions and organizations including that of government funding agencies. Reading these relationships as historical, material and dialogic rather than between separate freestanding entities that exist in relationship bound by financial agreements and objectified “commitments to community”, offers the potential to see the complexity of textual production involved in community projects, that makes them explicitly bound within ruling relations, but that demands they critically assess their engagements and the institutional relations within which they are involved.

Community research institutes and networks have intense demands on them from both their own funders, as well as the communities they serve, sometimes being both, and the obligation to critically engage with institutional power on behalf of communities, producing or reproducing at times conflicting accounts of community development practice depending on the consciousness and relations of trust among people involved in research itself. While beyond the scope of this study, there is a great deal to be gleaned from these organizational forms as both potentially participating in and critiquing the institutional relations that shape how they work and what they are able to do in and with communities, including their own disciplinary biases, but
they generally have a much greater capacity to critique than other conventional organizational forms that propose little reflective capacity with regards to institutional and organizational relations. In the end, the work of these research institutes and networks, as they have coordinated, through myself as liaison, with communities, link however distantly, to the growing material relations of land use planning, making what happens in the North, in terms of planning and development, relevant to people in related organizations, institutions and locales across the province.

As my own involvement is implied in the coordinating of social relations as I actively participated in the community advisory meetings and project activities, acting as liaison and supporting the EDO in proposal development for community based research efforts, I can speak from a place of actual experience alongside people in the community, about the textually mediated dialogic encounters that become apparent upon critical examination. Returning to the initial information session on land use planning that took place that snowy January day in 2007, a benign example of learning about land use planning as a neutral tool, the moment offers insight into how relations are coordinated through text, drawing on multiple people’s coordinated work efforts. As the land use planner attempts to place the experience of people and their way of viewing land into what would become an officializing discourse of the province through a master frame (Smith, 2001) of land use planning, we begin to see how people in a local site – the Community Hall – are brought into coordination with people in other sites through the work they are involved in – the expert planner from a southern university, the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council (MTC) office in Timmins who contacted and sent the expert; Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) who were discussing issues of land use planning at the time with the Province and channeled some initial funds to communities for these and other workshops and research on land
use planning, and the officials and civil servants of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) who entered into these earlier funding arrangements with both Mushkegowuk Council and NAN to provide the initial purse, which accounted for the small portion of funds earmarked to begin these conversations and get the communities on board with land use planning in the first place. The texts of land use planning, through the work of diverse people, had already begun the work of coordinating the social relations of people involved in producing the event at the Community Hall.

As project activities developed, and a group of people began to meet more regularly, including myself, as I made efforts to travel more regularly to the community, a kind of character and rhythm took hold, that was particular to the time, place and people involved. The institutional speak and bureaucratic processes were limited to behind-the-scene moments of submission of budgets and reports for funding and complying with established regulations and protocols. The character of project activities on the ground was one of mutuality, of reciprocal dialogic encounter as people participated as they could, based on their own interest, motivation, availability, without pay or project involvements were integrated into the existing work activities, making it possible to do more than expected, with few constraints.

At the time I was learning to see the world in terms of social relations, textual coordination and materiality and I found myself noticing odd written documents, notices and reports related to land issues, making notes or contemplating the institutional speak in official meetings and conferences, and contemplating the everyday-ness of the activities of the community project, the ongoing everyday work of people in running the organizations of the community, such as the band office, health centre and school as they were driven to bring youth out on the land and generate awareness of elder knowledge and ways of relating to the vast
territory. I was learning how community was constituted in the small reserve in face of such a complex history of nomadicity and settlement, displacement, dispossession and survival, and ongoing efforts to create meaning within the community in face of such vast institutional challenges.

The community research project was developed and conceptually stood on its own well before entering into a funding arrangement with the Ministry of Natural Resources in 2009. The new project arrangement with MNR would build on existing efforts so that the dreams of people in the community to engage community members broadly in learning about, researching and experiencing traditional territory, could be furthered along through better funded activities, including field excursions and some paid employment. Entering into this new funding arrangement, it was to be revealed, brought us, myself and community members, unexpectedly, into the seemingly distant world of provincial-First Nation jurisdictional discussions and into an institutional frame of reference that privileged talking about land relations through the lens of land use planning and protection, in ways that began to abstract the territorial space of Innino Aski and supplant local experience.

**Advancing Institutional Relations in 2009**

It is only in retrospect that the moments and sequences that coordinated us to others including tribal councils, regional governing bodies, environmentalists, provincial civil servants, journalists to name a few, within a broader institutional process unfolding elsewhere, have become apparent. The problematic related to Fort Albany’s concerns for self-determination and continued access to land (see Chapter Four) roots the analysis of the Institutional Ethnography presented here, as the “Entry Point” described in Chapter Two, placing me as learner-educator, activist and researcher within the complex of institutional relations, demonstrates the “hooking-
“up” along with local people to institutional relations via the events unfolded over the subsequent few years, during the life of the project.

From within the relations of the community project, things began to change, in unseen and unforeseen ways in 2009, in the face of the advancing developing provincial land use planning process and its accompanying texts. Up until then, the community project activities carried on in their everyday way, in a pace reflective of what was going on in the community, always complex and involved, including for me, participating as researcher/advisor, facing the challenges of distance, teaching and graduate studies. In the early days, before relations with funders became noticeably more formal and legalized through the orienting language of funding agreements, what was taking place, and came together as a project, was in actuality a relatively unconstrained set of activities, fluid actions based on the talk and exchanges within local meetings, or based on ideas erupting in spontaneous conversations and the everyday work that people were involved in, rooted in the concerns and interests that people articulated about the community’s access to traditional territory, relationships between elders and youth, cultural ways of knowing. The Mushkegowuk as knowers of their territory shaped and continue to shape, activities according to their specific experience, historical and cultural understanding of the land, and drive to maintain and develop a presence of authority in the region beyond the categories of representation set out in the often limiting definitions of consultation processes, impact benefit agreements and the like.

From within this everyday experience of community members and my own, a new form of learning was taking place, arising from the pressure to straddle both the institutional and local/Indigenous worlds, evidenced in the contradictory institutional relations of the community project as it entered funding arrangements with the Ministry of Natural Resources in 2009. This
in-between space would come to offer great potential for understanding key differences at play with regards to conceptions of territory and land relations as well as how the funding process plays out as a textually-mediating process, shaping consciousness and the relations of ruling.

The official provincial land use planning process had already long began to take on material form, by way of the production of written material including web and other virtual textual expression, public announcements, the forming of an environmental and industry representative Far North Advisory Council (FNAC, 2010), the coordination of work among diverse institutions and organizations, and so forth, which, along with activities arising from and linked to such work, contributed to the production of the provincial land use planning process. The institutional process for advancing land use planning and protection legislation was taking place at the same time that the community project activities were unfolding, although the two instances did not encounter each other until an actual funding arrangement was written up. It was then that through the project, despite having a life of its own, based on actual lived activities, localized and discrete practices, we also came to be hooked-up into the realm of provincial planning relations.

Ministry planners and civil servants of the MNR had approached a community member and myself during a regional meeting in Timmins to discuss possible funding of our project activities. The pre-conditions for entering a funding arrangement included the standard writing of a proposal, its approval, the development of timelines, deliverables, a signed memorandum of understanding (MOU as it was referred to at the time) between the First Nation and the Ministry. Once these conditions were in place, an MOU between the community and NORDIK Research Institute, the research centre hired to support the development of the research process where I was located, was then developed.
Initially, there was no template for proposals nor criteria established in advance by the Ministry, with the contractual arrangement setting out the agreed upon activities, deliverables and project outcomes in relation to the proposed budget, a standard kind of agreement that set out a timeline, with payment deadlines and so forth. In the first proposal, the civil servants in charge of the file left the process open for the community to articulate as wide and far-reaching a strategy as possible. No limits were placed on the amount of funding requested with the stated clarification that “there would be no guarantee on funding the whole effort, but we’d like to see what you would ideally like to do regardless of funds.” This left us both a bit hopeful and a bit tenuous about what to submit for funding, and facilitated a fit with the funding process, easing entry into it. A three year community engagement process was proposed that brought together various community organizations as overseers of the process, myself as a support/facilitator for research and education, and set out a program of activities that built on the developing vision of local community members and advisory group. Yet only a small portion of the project was initially funded, with no guarantee of follow up funding. This served to both stunt the scope of the project through limiting planned activities, and advancing only partial aspects of the overall vision while hooking the project up to a set of relations and ruling sequences that at that time were out of sight to us. The character and spirit of the group involved however, remained the same, and continued to be driven forward by a desire to have young people out on the land, learning about life, land and language within an Inninowuk mode of thinking and being.

The Far North Act legislative proposal had not yet been announced. We had yet no inkling of the impending vast political discussions that would take hold, and that were already unfolding at a furious pace in other places. Few people in the community had heard of land use planning, beyond perhaps the very few who had participated in workshops and discussions, amid
a plethora of other workshops and discussions taking place in a vast and unending barrage of development proposals, resource protocols, funding through the New Relationship Fund (intended to forge a new form of doing business between the provincial and First Nation governments), governance surveys, legislative proposals (including the Mining Act) not to mention impact benefit agreements and other projects already underway in the small First Nation community.

The initial entry into the funding relationship with the Ministry of Natural Resources Far North Branch suggested that the community project would find some more solid footing and be able to plan longer term for the community activities underway, which in fact it did, although wasn’t something we could plan for at the time, due to disrupted and unpredictable funding cycles and sequences. Envisioned was a complex learning and community engagement process that was overseen by an advisory group, and involved youth, adults and elders who would be involved in collecting stories, mapping sites, and traveling throughout the Mushkegowuk ancestral homelands. The funding helped move this vision forward, while simultaneously bringing project members and myself, into conversation with MNR staff and officials, who were advancing a project process of their own, reflective of the broader provincial vision announced by the Premier in 2008. As the community project centred on mapping sites and stories of traditional territory through field excursions and community-based research, the Far North Branch of the MNR, created through the Far North Strategy, which prefaces the Far North Act legislative proposal, worked to develop policies and procedures for project proposals related to land use planning that could offer financial support to the provincial version of community-based land use planning in First Nation communities north of the 51st parallel.
A key site of learning was indeed centred on the drafting of proposals, funding agreements, and writing up of reports using the language of community based research which appeared to coincide with the discourse of the province on community-based land use planning. There was learning among all involved (whether conscious or not), including ministry officials, myself and community members, as each of us grappled with complicated procedures for getting a funding agreement in place in the context of the community project. Here, the critical origins of community-based research are brought into tension, potentially reoriented as they are brought within a ruling complex that was already advancing established jurisdictional and development relations otherwise out of sight to all involved. Out of sight also, perhaps, to the ministry officials working with us who saw the funding as supporting an innovative community engagement process unfolding, which they valued as legitimately “community-based” and may not have problematized the wider jurisdictional policy implications that would come to weigh heavily on the legitimacy of the overall process as perceived by First Nation organizations such as NAN.

How does this hooking-up to ruling relations through learning take place within a process of writing a proposal, with no set criteria, and through the setting-up of a funding agreement? How are the more critical and transformative origins of community-based research potentially compromised? As an initial proposal for funding includes “engaging the community” in a collaborative process, the stages of the land use planning sequence are triggered, but with divergent underlying goals from those of the community. As the legal paperwork accompanying the funding agreement is presented as standard and outside the realm of change, the ability to manoeuvre and act on behalf of community goals for self-determination is constrained and project members become oriented to the goals of the province driven by its specific development
and protection agenda that comes to shape the logic of the MNR planners, who set the terms of the discussion, despite most often respectful and encouraging intentions on their behalf. The freedom to act and plan in consequence to the dynamic and changing needs of the project and engagement process is inhibited by the printed version of plans and funds allocated to them, accompanied by the results based framework that sets out a series of questions elaborated by a provincial planner or civil servant, that the project team would be prompted to contemplate and respond to in order to demonstrate results to the Far North Planning Unit. While the intentions of planners are to support what they consider meaningful planning activities in the community, the textually mediated process places constraints on all involved, and creates confusion and disjuncture between what was intended and what should happen next. Rather than enabling community engagement, the ruling process, particularly in the realm of funding, becomes highly bureaucratic such that the timeframe between the promise and the reception of funds for the year period shifts dramatically (in one case by nearly ten months), in effect placing project members who rely on funding as salary, in precarious positions. Moreover, the planned project activities that depended on the raising of expectations (through public engagement) among community members shaped the project team’s ability to be able to confidently propose to people in the broader community, some of the activities in which they could potentially participate. More important to MNR in the latter period, was getting the document right, with the right wording, that would carefully navigate the language of the proposal in response to legal language requirements of the province. Arguably, this was not the ultimate goal of anyone, but the institutional environment as ruling relations required the process to be so.

Activities set out in the funding agreements are lived activities in the community and out on the territory, and become deliverables within the funding process. While the process is set out
to ensure accountability within the provincial budget, it also serves to bind communities through
the work carried out by people (the band office, the project team members, researchers, the civil
servants, and myself) - including the production of the funding agreement texts, which take place
within a broader legal framework - to the relations and goals of provincial planning. This
process, repeated across communities in Treaty 9 has significant organizing power, effectively
drawing on the work processes of multiple communities throughout the region, to produce the
legitimacy of the Far North planning process and indeed, the provincial jurisdiction of the Far
North in what Smith (2006) and others call the “translocal replication of texts” with its
accompanying underlying organizational power over the everyday and over landscapes
themselves.

The critical and transformative intentions of the community based research project, aimed
at promoting autonomy and self-determination through critical engagement, dialogue and
research related to traditional territory came into tension with the broader politics and social
relations of planning and development. This said, people involved in the project maintained a
sense of what the activities were for, and civil servants of the MNR certainly did not actively set
out to undermine the character of what was unfolding, on the contrary individual people within
the ministry congratulated local participants on their efforts and bought materials produced by
the project, a project which was becoming publically recognized also in a wider regional context
(Thom, 2009; “Film Screening”, 2011; Kornacki, 2011; Talaga, 2011). At the same time it was a
non-conventional approach to community engagement, mapping and learning/education and did
not easily fit into the funding processes set out within the institutional framing for projects. Far
North staff were constrained to funding projects as (provincial) land use planning while
definitions of “use” of the land for First Nation people, were rooted in historical and cultural
understandings which problematized the very idea of ownership and ran counter to the idea of provincial jurisdictional authority over what could happen or be approved to take place on the land. This disjunction was underlying, seemingly dormant, but present in the exchanges with MNR staff in the development of funding discussions. The words “community-based land use planning” would appear in front of the community project’s local title “Paquataskamik” in corrected versions of the agreement. In clarifying addendums to project agreements, stating that treaty rights would not be altered in any way submitted by the project team who were uncomfortable with the lengthy legal documents that MNR required the band leadership to sign, MNR lawyers insisted on including the phrase “in this land use planning exercise”. There seemed to be a real emphasis to identify whatever the community was doing as land use planning. Meanwhile the project activities continued, as a community-based research project lead by the advisory group, with knowledge and support from the leadership and community members.

The community project was rooted in a premise that the territory, “Paquataskamik”, Innino Aski, belonged to and would be shaped by the living history and life practices of the Mushkego Inninowuk. Yet the historical problem of settler-Indigenous relations would persist in the newly unfolding relations of provincial planning in the region north of the 51st parallel. The question would simmer for many NAN communities, why would the people of the region need to attain approval from the province to recognize or claim what was already theirs, perhaps shared but still their own territory, already acknowledged as such through the Treaty, based on the oral understanding at the time of signing (Long, 2010)? At the same time, English language and institutional maps and all the official textual information, pointed to the limited reserve size, within a boundaried area that was surrounded by Crown Land which was a textual/ material
reality that continued to affect the lives of people, produced and building on colonialis
ter relations and formulations. If anyone had thought that colonial presence or resistance to it had disappeared with the signing of the treaty, they were mistaken. This “Crown Land” on Inninowuk terms, is and continues to be ancestral territory, not belonging to anyone specifically but all of the Inninowuk and their neighbours, families and those who they have shared the land with from time before written history. Funding for the project activities could on the one hand, support the creation of a Cree language map, but on the other, as higher level jurisdictional discussions demonstrated, could not consider actual recognition of Inninowuk collective ownership of lands or broader issues related to Inninowuk governance.

The underlying relations concerning land become apparent, as it is in process of becoming conceived and abstracted space by government officials, legal experts, planners, and those they work with, through the texts of planning. People who live in the community and travel within the territory live the land as historical space (Lefebvre, 1991) based on what actually takes place there, and has taken place, within history. But through the process of abstraction in the writing up of proposals and reports that require a standard sequence to be followed, the Mushkegowuk as knowers of their territory and history are brought to waver on the border of disappearing into land use planning language that serves to hook up local practices to standardized ways of knowing and institutional forms of governance. It reflects an ideological process as “local experience is supplanted by a conceptual framework” (Campbell, 2001).

This point of dialogic encounter between the community represented by project members, myself as a liaison and research support and MNR was pivotal in many ways, as we began to formalize the relationship through the signed funding arrangements and thus we began to unknowingly enter a sequence set out by the Ministry that related specifically to the provincial
land use planning process underway. This sequence, involving 8 stages, was to be later made public in written materials produced by the ministry, but was initially unknown to us, the community members or myself. These stages were eventually identified publically in 2010, located as a website link called “Community-Based Land Use Planning Brochure”, which has the title of *What is Land Use Planning in the Far North? The Far North Land Use Planning Initiative*, available on the Ministry of Natural Resources website and distributed in MNR workshops and information sessions across the north (see Figure 3). In the view of MNR, it was to become apparent that the project was considered somewhere in between stage 1-2, based on funding received that obliged the community to consider itself in the initial stages of provincial land use planning that are “initiated by First Nations who have an interest in preparing a community-based land use plan” (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources [MNR], 2010) or in the “background information” stages that sees communities “gathering and documenting Aboriginal traditional knowledge, science, land and resource information” (MNR, 2010).

These stages however, did not necessarily have meaning or relevance to the community who did not see project activities as “constitutive” of planning on the terms of the province. People were not thinking of “being out on the land” so they could assemble a process that would serve the jurisdictional goals of the province. Rather, the community members saw funds received as a way to bring youth, adults and elders into a broader Mushkegowuk learning process that centred on Inninowuk mapping of the sites and stories of traditional territory, for their own cultural, pedagogic and territorial purposes that would serve their own goals including those of self-determination.

It was not that the community was explicitly for or against land use planning, but rather the fact that the work and activities of the community project were brought into an institutional
realm that produced its legitimacy was of concern. Thus is the “magic of the text” that Turner (2001, 2002) and others explore in the narratives and cases of Institutional Ethnography.

Figure 3 MNR Land Use Planning Process (8 Stages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIAL ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>Initiated by First Nations who have an interest in preparing a community based land use plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND INFORMATION</td>
<td>Gathering and documenting Aboriginal traditional knowledge, science, land and resource information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESTABLISHING THE JOINT PLANNING TEAM</td>
<td>Joint planning team led by First Nations in partnership with Ontario; it establishes roles and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETTING OUT THE PLANNING AREA OF INTEREST</td>
<td>Informed by current uses of the land, historical relationships, dialogue with other neighbouring First Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TERMS OF REFERENCE</td>
<td>Agreement between First Nations and Ontario; sets objectives and process that will guide the development of a community based land use plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRAFT LAND USE PLAN</td>
<td>Direction/principles/guidance, land use designation, permitted uses, review requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINAL LAND USE PLAN</td>
<td>Approved jointly by First Nations, through band council resolution, and Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW AND AMENDMENTS</td>
<td>First Nations and Ontario work together through a joint process to review and amend community based land use plans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As we became more aware of the legislative proposal, and learned of the jurisdictional discussions underway between NAN and Ontario, a type of unease set in. This was due to a general, historically rooted mistrust of institutional processes, the lack of confidence in being able to predict an outcome that may or may not be of benefit to the community, and a lack of
knowledge about into how land use planning was actually put together as a ruling discourse and process and the potential areas for maneuverability by the community so they would not be locked-in to what people identified as status quo definitions of land use and territorial boundary. In the meantime, the work being carried out at the local level in the community project was being viewed by officials, within the provincial politics of land use planning legislation in Ottawa and other centres of decision making, as resistance to it served also to constitute the relations of provincial ruling.

The Minister of Natural Resources had begun to make public reference to communities involved in “various levels of discussion on land use planning” that included a number of smaller communities having received funding in the first stage of land use planning, not having yet signed a Terms of Reference. This appeared in public arenas and reports, which served to legitimate the process in parliament and publicly, bringing the activities of the community project into a realm productive of the far north land use planning process. The message from the Minister was that:

Our government remains committed to working with First Nations in the Far North. It’s important to note that individual communities remain very interested in land use planning and Bill 191—so interested, in fact, that we had 33 out of 34 Far North First Nation communities participating in the land use planning workshops we held in Thunder Bay. I don’t think you would have had that much uptake from the First Nations community unless they were interested and engaged. In any of the communities that I visited, the chiefs were finding how they could get engaged and what the process was. They want development. They want to manage it, they want to do it thoughtfully and carefully, and I have heard
nothing but positive responses from the First Nations communities. Certainly, their leadership is engaged and wants to be participatory. (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, May 18, 2010)

Further, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources website (accessed July 29, 2011), “Almost 90% of First Nations who may develop community based land use plans are involved to some degree with the MNR-ranging from initial engagement to more advanced stages of planning” (MNR, 2011). Indeed a major goal of the Far North Act was to bring in Treaty 9 and other Treaty communities into the process, as King (2010) summarizes in his submission to the Conference Board of Canada:

   The Far North Act, which the Ontario Legislature passed as Bill 191 in September 2010, is designed to bring Ojibwa and Cree peoples into the land use planning process. In fact, the stated purpose of the Act is to provide “land use planning in the Far North that directly involves First Nations in the planning”…In the actual legislation, the term “First Nation” is mentioned 55 times in 24 terse sections.

(King, 2010)

According to the Ontario Environmental Registry, “the Far North Act would enable community-based land use planning in the Far North in partnership with Far North First Nations that supports environmental, social and economic objectives for land use planning for the peoples of Ontario.” (Environmental Registry, 2010). As such Inninowuk become “Far North First Nations” as subjects of the process, and legitimize it through their active involvement and work contributed through project activities funded through the Far North Branch.
This public speech, or discourse, recorded in the minutes of parliamentary debate, served their purpose to create new subjects of planning, new issues for debate, and to begin to challenge the grey areas of Indigenous-provincial jurisdiction. The official position about the take-up among First Nation communities contrasted starkly with the position put forth by the representative organized leadership at Nishnawbe Aski Nation, who stated in June 2010 that the communities they represented were not being adequately accommodated in their requests for consultations, and openly objected to the continued parliamentary process (“NAN Chiefs Offer Counter Proposal”, 2010). By the time the third reading of the Far North Act in parliament came about in September 2010, opposition by NAN was explicit, evidenced in this Open Letter to Colleges and Universities:

NAN First Nations have not been adequately consulted and accommodated on Bill 191. The Canadian Constitution Act (Section 35) recognizes and affirms Treaty and Aboriginal rights and the Supreme Court of Canada requires First Nations have the right to be consulted and accommodated on matters that impact them or their lands and resources. The impact of Bill 191 is so severe and specific in relation to NAN, that the free and informed consent of NAN First Nations is required. On July 6, 2009, the NAN Chiefs-in-Assembly passed a resolution opposing Bill 191 and since then, have passed resolutions to strengthen and support that position.

NAN Chiefs have many fundamental concerns regarding Bill 191 including, but not limited to: NAN First Nations will be split between North and South and there will be Ontario Government control over the Land Use Planning process; provides a protected area of at least 225,000 sq. km. which is inconsistent
with Treaty No. 9 and Treaty No. 5 and the long-term economic development prospects of NAN; violates the Aboriginal and Treaty rights of all NAN First Nations, including the inherent right of self-government… NAN opposes Bill 191 in the strongest possible terms (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2010).

As new resolutions against Bill 191 were passed at NAN, and Bill 191 itself was passed through the legislative process, it became unclear what position the community should or could take. NAN had outlined reasons why the legislation further undermined the jurisdiction of local First Nations, while the Mushkegowuk Council worked on a regional land use planning strategy aimed at involving the coastal Mushkegowuk communities; some Treaty 9 communities had already committed to land use plans that were authorized and legitimated through the Bill 191 process, and others strongly opposed participation in the process all together. In any of these cases, the fact that there was a dialogue on provincial land use planning, the fact that there were differences that were debated, which in turn produced new textual representations based on the work of the people involved in them, served to coordinate relations and produce the legislative process itself.

Ruling relations are such that as the process is established as governing, resistance and opposition to it become part of the process, useful for the actual material production of its texts, of subsequent texts tied to it, of the fostering a sense of general consensus that there is a process to be paid attention to. Such is the terrain that First Nation people have continued to encounter. During a December 2010 project planning meeting, the issue of legality arose with civil servants of the ministry, who did their best to reassure the project team that concerns could be addressed through clarifying statements in the funding agreement but that, as civil servants, they were locked into an existing framework of procedures and regulations. We began to become aware
that as we entered discussions and agreements, MNR policy makers had already long established a process of working on the production of the legislative proposal, consulted with legal teams and sought input from planners/civil servants at the ministry, as well as environmentalists and industry representatives who had been invited by the Minister to be representatives of the Far North Advisory Council in 2008, and to give “consensus advice” that was produced in the form of a report, released in March 2009 (Far North Planning Advisory Council, 2009), just after the local project team had submitted the original proposal and were to receive the first small allotment of funds for a field excursion and set of project activities.

The Far North Advisory report, which stressed the importance of First Nation involvement, was not also made public until well after its publishing date, which had significant consequences for re-shaping the problematic route the legislation seemed to be traveling that largely excluded the kind of Nation-to-Nation discussions so desired by NAN. According to one of the members of the Far North Advisory Council:

Because the government buried the report and didn’t release it until after first reading, they lost a tremendous opportunity to build support in the broader public around our report and with the First Nations, they released our report in the summer. They put it on a website. By that point it was too late. And they had missed the opportunity to build consensus with everybody else. (Interview with member of an organization participating in the Far North Advisory Council)

Indeed the rhythm of the community project activities, fluid and responsive to the actual life practices, concerns and interests of people had noticeably changed in the first 12 month period after external funding for local workers was received from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) in 2009. By 2010, we had two funded positions and had created expectations for their
continuation, which depended at that time on continued funding from MNR. Despite promises of more timely arrival of funds from the Ministry, a nearly ten month lag in the actual time between when funding was promised in May 2010, and when it was received in March 2011, a new set of institutionally instigated problems were to arise for the project. As we got closer to the actual signing of the funding agreement based on a long established promise of funding by ministry planners no longer working on the project, different, and more detailed bureaucratic demands were placed into the funding agreement. The lengthy, standard legal agreement was accompanied by a new section on “project background” prepared by a ministry planner that named the community project as its “community-based planning initiative”. For the purposes of the planner, this is in fact what it was. For the purposes of the community, the project wasn’t about provincial jurisdiction over land use planning, the identification of planning areas nor other land use planning-specific activities per se, but one of asserting presence in the territory through its research activities. For the purposes of the ministry, because it entailed cultural elements, engagement and community mapping on the broader landscape, it was considered in terms of “cultural and ecological values collection”, an activity of land use planning that brought the project into the overall stages of provincially defined planning. Unpacking the assumptions at play in the process demonstrated clear divergences in expectations and understandings of community based land use planning, deeply implied in questions of governance, that otherwise would go unnoticed and potentially draw people further into the provincial process without their knowledge, understanding or agreement in relation to the further reaching implications.

The work involved in preparing proposals and funding agreements for such community projects (often unpaid or partially paid on the part of communities who involve multiple people in discussions to define plans and activities), is thus brought into the provincial realm, producing
the institutional legitimacy of provincially-defined planning at the local level. The ministry planner carries out the job set out by the Far North Branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources, within the regulations and using the standardized formats for funding agreements, going perhaps beyond the previous planners in terms of assuring a high level of thoroughness in project language, towards establishing more certainty that the project funds were actually going to finance land use planning at the community level. Indeed, this would be considered part of the standard practices for ensuring accountability to the province.

This institutional work is carried out within ruling relations that link ministry planners who prepare funding agreements or oversee and edit proposals, to broader legislative texts processes, thus activating the legislative text as they are then taken up at the local level through the mutual work of preparing the funding agreement. Discourses of planning, development and protection also shape the consciousness of planners and policy makers as they, based on their accumulated knowledge in this area, set out the logic of how they negotiate project proposals and agreements with communities. Those with more direct experience working with First Nation communities have a better chance to understand the complex political as well as cultural and socio-economic challenges involved in the writing of such proposals and agreements and can take measures to avert misunderstandings and/or ensure clarity in discussing the further reaching implications of such agreements. This said, the institutional process is a very complex one to navigate and only in careful analysis rooted in an explicitly defined standpoint are people able to actually see how it is mediated through textual coordination.

There had been no actual decision made by the community, by the Chief and Council, band council resolution (BCR), or other process/party, to carry out a formal land use planning process. It appeared that the project we were involved in was the official entry point, made so
through funding, of the community into the sequence of planning established by the province, and the province into the organizational workings and activities of the community through land use planning. It would be clear from the outset in the minds of the civil servants of the ministry that they were engaging the community in land use planning, despite written reports that centred on community mapping and engagement, but it would not be until 2011 that the differences in interpretation would become more clear, as planners began to insert provincial land use planning terminology into funding arrangements and First Nation community members locally and elsewhere would start to discuss the relevance of the legal process underway. At the community level there had been neither take-up nor rejection of the land use planning for a number of reasons, which seemed to contradict the written texts of funding agreements yet was not inconsistent with the intentions of the community project and communication within the funding process about engaging in a community process to map the sites and stories of traditional territory and discuss the implications of land use planning and other provincial policies related to land.

My intention in reviewing this process is explicitly to draw attention to the effects of such institutional workings on people (provincial planners, researchers and community members alike), the resulting potential strains on relationships, and the compromising positions that communities are placed in, sometimes unintentionally, due to divergent historical locations, conceptualizations of process and place, and differing ultimate goals between community members and ministry officials, in this case planners in the Ministry of Natural Resources Far North Branch. Ultimately my hope is that in learning about how the process is put together new allies who seek to “right historical wrongs” can gain a better sense of how wrongs are prolonged through institutional textual processes and how the problems they generate might be addressed.
Civil servants initiating support for the project were encouraging, supportive and strived to enable the project to develop on its own terms through agreeing in principle with the approaches taken by the community and articulated in the project proposal submitted to them. Yet they were noticeably and admittedly constrained by a broader set of regulatory sequences that deeply affected their ability to support what was taking place locally in effective ways, recognizing the challenges of the funding process, one that saw the community receive small piecemeal funding often disrupting the project planning efforts, given the slow approval process and subsequent short fiscal periods in which activities could take place, shifting timelines and deflating expectations. The frustration was shared by both community members and at least one ministry planner, a process that they felt was out of their hands. The bureaucratic funding process was one that people, myself, the EDO and others would “have to accept” if we wanted the funding for important community level activities. Indeed a great deal of learning was taking place, in often unexpected ways, by myself, members of the community, and perhaps the civil servants themselves about the institutional workings of planning, and its contested landscape in the field.

Yet while the institutional learning in relation to the abstraction of space is taking place in offices, on planes, in the computer exchanges of proposals and project reports, there is another learning taking place in the lived space of people’s everyday experiences, including the activities of the community project. This concrete space is shaped in terms of productive practices and relations, that broadly speaking would include hunting and fishing, fixing up burial sites and remembering birth places, to preparing and participating in ceremonial meetings, sampling water for toxins, collecting wood for furniture, or taking 14 people on a raft as part of a community project and recording the sites and stories of the Kistachowan Sipi. While community people are
involved in the actual productive activities of the project, and I along with them feel the intense power of presence that the land exudes, territory is perceived in ways that are materially present: moose that “offer themselves like a gift from the spirit world” (Paquataskamik is Home, 2011) as food for the 10 day raft excursion; polar bear tracks that appear en route to the Kapiskau winter camp and are photographed with other ephemeral but ever meaningful representations of life in the north; youth who interview peers and elders such that new stories are told and recorded, later to be transcribed, and otherwise unexpressed enthusiasm for the beauty of the land is uttered out loud; English language topographical maps are scribbled over in Cree syllabics, and people gather in community halls to celebrate the sending off or coming home of people from camps and field excursions. It is this learning that was taking place out in the territory, the learning and teaching of history by community members, the assertion of legitimate presence in the area.

In summary, it was through the textually mediated coordination of social relations, talk and work across sites that brought me and Fort Albany community members into conversation with civil servants of the MNR and people from multiple other organizations in the territory and province. In some cases, land use planning texts were taken up, in others re-oriented or problematized, and in yet others, outright rejected as I was to find out in conversation with members from other communities in the Treaty 9 region. In any of these cases, organizational work and attention became necessarily oriented to questions of land and territory broadly speaking in relation to existing and proposed provincial rules and regulations, as issues of development and environmental protection entered the local and public spheres and become topics for political debate. There was also a parallel and deeply implicated land use process underway organized and driven by the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council in Timmins, to which we will now turn attention.
Regional Land Use Planning Information and Coordinator Meetings in Timmins

I don’t think people back home would want to lock ourselves into [the established] acres of land that is considered our reserve given to us by Indian Affairs. The elders say the whole Mushkegowuk area is our land so we want to keep it. Even the overlapping issue that MNR highlights we do not believe in that issue, we are a family. All the Mushkegowuk communities are one big family, one nation, we should be running around that whole territory to hunt fish and trap, we should not be locked into any boundaries, fences, we do not believe in that...
(Interview with male adult from Fort Albany)

Parallel and linked to what was going on in the community as well as within the provincial realm of land use planning, information sessions and workshops were part of a regional strategy already underway in Timmins, organized by the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council (MTC). The MTC had been in discussions with the province on land use planning for at least a few years before the Premier’s “Far North Announcement” in 2008 (“Protecting Ontario’s Northern”, 2008). There was no apparent connection to the plans of the MTC for the communities and the provincial legislative process at that time but of course this would soon change as the legislative process began to unfold. Land use planning was seen as a neutral, helpful tool “to make decisions about how land will or will not be used in the future”; which could “result in a map of zones or areas with different rules about how land could be used”; and was simply another name for how “the Omushkego have always managed and planned for the land” (MTC, 2009).

The community project did not actually enter the realm of the provincial land use planning discourse and process until January 2009 when community members attended a workshop on land use planning announced by Mushkegowuk Tribal Council (MTC) to which representatives of the coastal First Nation communities, and other MTC affiliates were invited as participants. Guest speakers were also invited: ministry officials, expert planners, environmental technicians, among others. I will present here that this workshop (and subsequent ones like it) constitutes key formative moments in the textually mediated coordination of work and social
relations among people and institutions, bringing the community project into the realm of officializing discourse in unexpected ways, including, as is the focus here, through the commencement of the funding process that served to draw the community in to the broader provincial process underway.

How does the textual mediation actually occur in this example? We can start with the actual people, carrying out their everyday work in their organizational settings. The Economic Development Officer at the band office would have received an invitation designed by MTC staff and sent via email, perhaps also making a phone call or sending a fax, as such producing the informal textual material where land use planning discourse was socialized: considered, discussed with others, learned, and taken up. The invitation to participate in effect is a text that draws on a broader discourse and process that was also underway, elsewhere, at the provincial level. The “invitation to attend” can be conceived of as an utterance (Bakhtin, 1981 in Turner, 2005), or textual speech that is initiated, which invites a response, while setting the terms of the impending dialogue, setting up the response in relation to land use planning: such as “yes I will attend the land use planning workshop”; “no we are not interested in attending the land use planning information session”, etc; or even a non-response, an active silent response to the utterance, also contemplated within the context of land use planning, and in this sense “taken up”. As Turner (2005) notes, “Bakhtin proposes that specific spheres of language activity develop their own forms of appropriating a story or ongoing chain of utterances, another’s speech and valuing it…[1981, p.304]” (Turner, 2005). The invitation corresponded to existing discourses on land use planning, and as it would turn out, to developments under way in the province that the MTC was already immersed in yet perhaps not at a level that would yet make explicate the complex jurisdictional landscape that was to unfold.
The invitation to the land use planning workshop in Timmins (one among many) took up the utterance of a discourse linked into governing relations and a broader context of development to which it also responded. The invitation became part of the organization of people’s work as they arranged to travel to the workshop, read over agendas sent to them in advance, to discuss with other community members and leaders what it was all about, and then fly in to Timmins and spend up to 3-4 days in long sessions, contemplate and learn about the expert definitions of land use planning, and offer input on what it meant to them as participants and as community members. This was work, the actual time spent and activities undertaken by people that made the land use planning workshop an actual formed moment of encounter, a legitimate meeting that was coordinated by specific land use planning texts that organized its functioning, from approved agenda, to the workshop materials on land use planning distributed to all its participants, starting with the invitation.

The workshop invitation was a textual utterance in a long series of utterances hooked into a broader discourse unfolding provincially, and served to arrange a site of coordination among many people, organizing the speech of people within specific agenda items set out in advance and oriented to land use planning. An invitation was also extended to me to attend the January workshop, as someone accompanying the community process and an ally/support in discussions with potential funders, officials and others, bringing me directly into the realm of the relations of planning and organizational relations. Also in attendance were ministry officials from at least two ministries – that of Natural Resources and the then Northern Development and Mines (later to become the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry or MNDMF); expert planners, the Mushkegowuk Environmental Research Centre, consultants involved in other First Nation planning exercises and hired to facilitate sessions, Nishnawbe Aski Nation
representatives, and various members of Mushkegowuk communities from along the coast and inland, some with lengthy land use planning experience such as Moose Cree First Nation, and others without, skeptical and even perhaps suspicious at times, of government intentions.

The workshop was one among many to come over the ensuing years, fostering informal and perhaps semi-formal learning about land use planning as people discussed definitions and meanings of planning, participated in expert presentations, and drew on some of the scholarly and other materials made available. It built on what was becoming a regular exposure of the speech, discourse, tools, principles and practices of land use planning among the people in attendance. Since the first workshop in Fort Albany that I had stumbled upon in 2007, there had been a number of others that people from the coastal communities were regularly participating in, learning about what land use planning meant, its related technical speech, and the organizational processes involved.

By that January 2009, I had also begun to learn new discourses and language, as someone relatively new to the technical language of land use planning, and generally unfamiliar with the actual applications for such terms, even having heard them before. This could include any number of technical terms such as GIS (geographical information systems), baseline studies, protected areas strategy, screening and environmental assessment, conformity requirements, proposed uses maps, zoning maps and so forth. I began to identify much of the technical language that was being used in powerpoint presentations and printed material that was made available during the workshop as expert knowledge that was largely out of reach to people, deeply embedded in its given discipline (Harvey, 2003). The material texts had been produced and were circulated including lengthy how-to manuals provided in CD form, case studies of land
use plans in other First Nation communities, powerpoints on key issues, needs assessments and various information guides.

We had, before 2009, no real awareness of the legislative process unfolding in the broader region and province related to land use planning and protection, nor the goals of ministries, public officials, prospectors, and so forth to develop and “organize” the Treaty 9 area. The Premier’s Announcement in 2008 to “protect half the territory of the far north through community based land use planning” (“Protecting”, 2008) was relayed to the people at the workshop, many for the first time. There was no material critical of land use planning in Indigenous communities provided or discussed in the main sessions. Critical discussions rather took place in the inner-meeting spaces of Indigenous leaders and membership. During the sessions themselves, people were left to their own devices, conversations in between technical sessions, perhaps quieter discussions between participants during presentations by developers and ministers, and during pre-arranged question-answer periods.

There was a public character to the regional workshops where people learned what would be acceptable or competent interventions from their Cree counterparts from other Mushkegowuk communities but also in relation to the dialogue on land use planning, development and protection that was being led by MNR, while the actual work of facilitating the process was carried out by regional representatives. Texts were activated (Smith, 2001; Turner, 2002) by those who contemplated them and returned home to consider taking them up using the methods in the material provided to them. By 2010 some of the communities had decided to take up land use planning explicitly, and Fort Albany continued as hesitant, questioning the process for its potential further reaching implications and raising concerns about their limited reserve size, the smallest allotment of all the communities on the coast.
Subsequent workshops would also be planned, information as well as training sessions for people who were designated as “Community Coordinator”, which implied their involvement and coordination of land use planning activities in a given community. People had not necessarily yet officially confirmed their involvement in doing formal land use planning, but MTC strived to involve all Mushkegowuk communities equally despite various levels of take-up. They also recognized that there was important and relevant work being carried out within the project in Fort Albany, and supported a number of public events that took place. Much of the work of the MTC around land use planning was related to attaining adequate funding from the province for carrying out activities, which was no easy task.

According to a participant in more than one of the land use planning meetings in Timmins, “It’s always about land use planning and it’s always about MNR’s funds, basically that’s what they were, what they can get out of it, how long they can run a project…and then from there for each community…” (Interview with Mushkegowuk participant).

The learning of land use planning models, replete with standardized tools to map hunting, harvesting and sacred grounds, methods to identify areas for protection, and for permitting development, was taking place across a number of locations as Mushkegowuk community members returned home from the land use planning meetings to share their learnings and to work on their plans for their specific, perhaps now more conceptually-distinct communities. The community “readers”, of the material provided by planners, the province and made available by the tribal council, were invited into a pre-determined sequence that would “organize and regulate their dialogue” about how and where to do land use planning, defining the position of anyone (or specific group) actually doing a land use plan, in relation to other communities, and more importantly, to the province.
Indeed, textual mediation across locations had been taking place throughout the province as the ministry sets out to standardize the entire “Far North” area according to the rules and protocols set out in Bill 191. The translocal reach of textually coordinated provincial land use planning relations went far beyond the Mushkegowuk communities, throughout indeed the entire Treaty 9 region. A pivotal event organized by the province is demonstrative of one of the key moments/sites of textually-coordinated work and social relations of planning, protection and development across locations, to which we will now centre a brief explication.

“Planning Together”: A Site for Translocal Coordination with the Relations of Ruling

The third key site brought into discussion here is that of the provincial level, a workshop called “Planning Together: A First Nations / Ontario Workshop on the Far North Land Use Planning Initiative” (MNR, 2010).

By May, 2010, “Bill 191: An Act with Respect to Land Use Planning and Protection” was moved ahead through parliament and the Liberal government sought to complete third reading before the parliamentary session ended for summer, if possible. A critique had arisen after first reading, that there had not been adequate consultation with the actual communities to be affected by the legislation, given that the public consultation process for Bill 191 had taken place in larger urban centres of southern and central-north Ontario, including Toronto, Timmins, Thunder Bay, Chapleau and Sioux Lookout (“Committee Transcripts: Standing…”, 2009). People in the interior or fly-in communities, who stood to be most affected, could not attend the public consultations, unless they came up with sponsorship for the costly flight and accommodation expenses. The general public from these communities was thus excluded from the initial consultation process.
One representative of an environmental non-governmental organization (ENGO) who was involved in the Far North Advisory, summarized her perspective on some of the problems with the process up to that point, pointing to the deterioration of what had been a great amount of work with positive results in the development of the Far North Advisory Report, which proposed an independent joint body made up of government and First Nation leadership, and to make sure there was a shared use of land for development and protection that was integrated into community based land use planning intending that these would not be imposed on First Nation communities. She laments the disintegration of consensus and the subsequent return to status quo development politics:

For the most part we [Far North Advisory] held together the consensus [between industry and environmental groups], we held together all these disparate groups, we managed even to get the forest industry to agree…But because the gov’t buried the report and didn’t release it until after first reading, they lost a tremendous opportunity to build support in the broader public around our report and with the First Nations, they released our report in the summer. They put it on a website. By that point it was too late. And they had missed the opportunity to build consensus with everybody else…And then the groups started to be pulled…they started to walk away from the consensus that we had built. So a lot of the prospectors started…at the table, they were awesome…[they said that] protecting half the far north is reasonable. We’ll have the other half to work on. Reasonable.

Then the board members of the groups kind of got wind of this, and then got all upset, and then the prospectors got upset and the PDAC never was really
comfortable with it, and they put in an unresolved issue at the end…The prospectors didn’t want areas closed to staking after that. And so, because a lot of these folks who are regressive in the North, their narrative started to take hold. So instead of taking the report and saying look at this great report, industry and enviros agree, and building support for that, the government buried it, and then the regressive types started to get, they’re like what? You want to protect the north? No, they’ll be no protection.

So those guys got louder and louder and louder, and they forced the prospectors association, to not support 191 at all, so by the time it got to committee hearing again, OPA was not supporting it, PDAC was not supporting it OFA was not supporting it. And this is the really important part too, there was a lot of voices that were mad about 191 and what was in there, but they weren’t all for the same reasons. And a lot of them jumped on the FN bandwagon and pretended they were supporting First Nation issues. They were absolutely opposed to anything that they perceived as slowing down development. And in their minds a community approved land use plan slows down development, that’s why they were opposing Bill 191. And they felt that protecting half of the far north was too much, when the other half was still going to be, in some future time, was going to be available.

I don’t understand, the mining industry had no reason to complain, staking was still going on, it was being grandfathered in to all the processes. Nobody was stopping their exploration projects. [The Bill proposed that] a mine would only open if there was a community approved land use plan, like these were reasonable
things, and yet they came out and vehemently opposed all this. And it was very brown, it was a very brown attack, by brown I mean opposite of green, it was very brown, it was very regressive, it wasn’t consistent, it was unfortunate…So in between first and second reading, that’s when the pause happened. So we worked really really hard to try and get this government to change and change the MNR approach to it.

As second reading of the legislation in parliament was fast approaching, an information session on Bill 191, and workshop on community based land use planning, was being organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources in the early days of May, 2010. This event was geared towards First Nation communities from across Treaty 9 and included others from Treaty 3 and 5, some of whom lived just across the border in Manitoba. Ministry facilitators and organizers worked to include as many of the communities as possible, and paid the costs for almost all First Nation communities to send one or two representatives to the information session, allowing in some cases for others accompanying community projects, land use planning efforts and related, as well as a few industry people, scientists and ENGOs who were part of the Far North Advisory to be present.
Figure 4. The diagram demonstrates the institutional/ruling relations of provincial land use planning, protection and development. People from across Treaty 9 territory receive notices about land use planning, including an invite to the “Planning Together Workshop” in May 2010 in Thunder Bay, ON. They contemplate and activate these texts using their time/effort (work and learning) in coordination with others, who attend or are present as experts, working in small groups or listening to expert panelists during the three day workshop. Ideas about Inninowuk life are brought into categories (development, science, protection) and the “everyday” is abstracted and reified, represented as fragments in discourses of development and protection. Through the continued creation of texts, coordinated in the work of policy makers, civil servants, ministers, and so forth, subsequent texts are produced in local and regional sites (trans local replication) and serve to produce the textual process of Bill 191, which refracts back a conception of life to people that is externally produced in the language of planning and provincial governance. The process unfolds within, and serves to constitute, the relations of neoliberal development into Northern Ontario, further extending them into new terrain and effectively shaping landscapes and ways of contemplating land.
The diagram (Figure 4) demonstrates the institutional / ruling relations of provincial land use planning, protection and development. People from across Treaty 9 territory receive notices about land use planning, including an invite to the “Planning Together Workshop” in May 2010 in Thunder Bay, ON. They contemplate and activate these texts using their time/effort (work and learning) in coordination with others, who attend or are present as experts, working in small groups or listening to expert panelists during the three day workshop. Ideas about Inninowuk life are brought into categories (development, science, protection) and the everyday is abstracted and reified, represented as fragments in discourses of development and protection. Through the continued creation of texts, coordinated in the work of policy makers, civil servants, ministers and so forth, subsequent texts are produced in local and regional sites (translocal replication) and serve to produce the textual process of Bill 191, which refracts back a conception of life to people that is externally produced in the language of planning and provincial governance. The process unfolds within, and serves to constitute, the relations of neoliberal development into Northern Ontario, further extending them into new terrain and effectively shaping landscapes and ways of contemplating land.

**Discursive Enclosures on the Coast or Protection for a Way of Life?**

Through interviews and conversations with a number of participants in the land use planning workshops in Timmins and Thunder Bay, with environmentalists as well as civil servants and others working with the communities on the coast, I began to become aware of a clear disjuncture in perceptions of what was at stake within the provincial land use planning exercise. For some, land use planning was going to be the best shot at asserting some control over economic development in the region, while also gaining some say in the jurisdictional landscape which had been denied for so long. It would be a way to protect against the massive
encroachment of externally driven large scale development that was perceived to be otherwise unstoppable. For others, it was just the opposite. The longstanding historical struggle of people throughout the Treaty 9 region and beyond to have treaty rights upheld and sovereignty recognized and respected by settler governments, was under new threat by Bill 191, the *Far North Act*. A way of life, perceiving and living on land, and the right to govern in that land, had become precarious in face of the provincial land use planning process, which was perceived as a neo colonial tool for a new stage of displacement and dispossesson.

At one regional meeting a provincial representative presenting on the funding mechanism, explained how each community would be supported to negotiate individual land use plans with MNR if they chose to do so, outside of any regional or treaty body, and that MNR would respect a community’s request to engage with the province in these discussions. The emphasis was on an individual community’s right to have their own process and eventual Terms of Reference, which would require a Band Council Resolution and legal agreement between a given First Nation community and the province. At the same time, there was a clear indication that a regional land use plan would be acceptable if that was the way that the communities wanted to go, but in any case, it was made clear that each community should start doing the work to identify their traditional land use area, for which individual funding agreements would continue to move in the direction of a community based land use plan.

It was not clear whether the planners and ministry people at the meeting understood the implications of a process where the Mushkegowuk, living across a vast geographical landscape and bound by the historical ties of culture, language, and Inninowuk governance, would be expected to enter a process whereby individual communities would map out the territory, their own territory, and divide it into sections that would correspond to individual First Nation
settlements, like drawing municipal lines on the land. In context of the overall legislation, this would mean staking out areas for protection and development and in effect reducing the vast territory into neighbourhood-like sections while perhaps inadvertently negotiating permission for development in the staking out of such areas.

The emphasis of MNR to negotiate plans with individual communities spoke to a reduction in the conceptual view of land that saw the Mushkegowuk as a vast and far reaching nation, to one that became more oriented to thinking in terms of individual communities and pieces of land. It struck me people had also entered a realm where there was a new way to talk about land involving boundaries and overlapping areas that previously did not exist in the minds of people. The issue of “overlapping areas” became a point of contention, as it made reference to areas that people had always mutually used and respected across the whole territory, from Peawanuck to Moose Factory and to speak about an overlap implied differences that did not exist.

One Mushkegowuk First Nation member exclaimed in frustration in a conversation, “I am sick and tired of hearing about the ‘overlapping problem’. That doesn’t exist! We all use the land…there are no boundaries to be ‘overlapped’…!” (conversation with male participant in land use planning workshop). This struck me as a very relevant and indeed a telling reaction to the ways in which Mushkegowuk territory, and indeed Treaty 9 territory, was starting to be discussed as a result of the land use planning process. There had always been a respect among people for the different areas of family hunting grounds, which had been disrupted in an earlier point in history when MNR introduced an official trapline boundary process defined by the ministry (Bird, 2005). This was as far as the boundaries had gone until now. Historically and up to the very recent past, there had been never been any overtly political boundaries mapped out in
the broader traditional territory, which was something that stood to potentially set up new kinds of potential divisions or tensions, which were starting to be perceived in some of the conversations taking place about the land use planning process lead by the province. People had historically traveled to and from all the communities, many having family members and relations located throughout the whole region. People shared a common history, a common language, and a shared way of understanding the uses of space rooted in forms of governance and spirituality in relation to nature, that depended on a sense of common un-owned territory, one that set out how people saw themselves in relation to each other.

It struck me that this was a new pressure towards a kind of cognitive dissonance or separation that was being thrust, however subtly upon people through the textual process of planning. Through the work of the Paquataskamik Project we had learned about the concerns of adults who felt that the youth were losing some of the significant words related to land (like “paquataskamik” itself) that indicated a broader understanding of territory than just the reserve or bush, something that could be interpreted as a cognitive or cultural displacement, resulting from the residential school period that had greatly undermined the passing on of the language and land practices to the younger generation. The provincial land use planning process now appeared to be a new frontier of pressure that was serving to shape the way people thought about land, through the institutional workings of planning language taken up in regional and provincial land use planning spaces, through the coordinated work of the very people who stood to be most affected.

Another participant expressed the feeling of “being encroached” as he participated in diverse regional and provincial meetings on land use planning, where new boundaries implied a sense of ownership that corresponded to foreign (western) notions of private property:
Yes being encroached, this idea that the land use, that the community based land use plan that MNR is proposing that we all do, each community staking out their territory, it’s exactly what it’s doing, dividing the Moose Cree FN with FAFN, Kash, Winisk, all of us, dividing us, who assume a ‘possession’ feeling, how do you call that? The idea of possession, the idea that that’s their territory, to present the idea that that’s their boundary, but that’s not real it’s imaginary, there’s no reality to the Aboriginal person living in any those communities in a sense eh. All the MNR needs is a signature from each of those areas, that’s it. (Interview with male adult from Treaty 9 community)

The expressed reticence in the face of the institutional process is deeply engrained, as the signature on land use plans speaks of the treaty signing, where people believed a way of life was being protected while in actual fact, here they were again, working to act in their own best interest, but in face of rules and regulations that seemed to consistently place them on the losing end. There were indeed problems related to the abstraction of territorial space and production of new definitions and boundaries in the provincial planning process that otherwise would not exist, speaking to a kind of discursive enclosure that may in effect have real material consequences for people on the coast. In light of the vast development interest growing throughout the region, planners, representatives and indeed members of coastal communities and representative organizations themselves have been undoubtedly convinced that planning is the best shot they have at the protection for a way of life, promised back in 1905.
CHAPTER TEN

LEARNING, LAND, AND THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE: REORIENTING RELATIONS FOR REGENERATION

We never gave up the right to govern ourselves. As a sovereign state we still maintain that right. We may agree to share the land from time to time, but the provincial government does not have the right to let third parties onto the land. – Stan Beardy in Wawatay News (Bell, 2011)

There is a great deal at stake for people in the community of Fort Albany, the coastal Mushkegowuk communities, throughout Treaty 9, and indeed for Indigenous-settler relations in the province and Canada. The textual coordination and institutional processes involved in the production of Bill 191 are directly implied in the problems and possibilities involved in the historically established treaty arrangements, and merit a great deal of attention if we are truly to take seriously the call for critical transformation of Indigenous-settler relations and the defense of ecological integrity in the vitally important muskeg and regional watershed.

Using Institutional Ethnography as an approach to research as a collaborative, critical research and learning initiative allows for a deepened more nuanced understanding of the specific processes and relations involved in the particular case of Peetabego or Fort Albany First Nation as it becomes involved in the policy processes related to planning, protection and development. IE has allowed for the research gaze to fall on the sequences and mechanics of policy processes while the community research project continues to foster consciousness and learning from within the Mushkego worldview, together offering a great deal of potential for imagining possible worlds both within, and from outside the community. As an ally and researcher involved in this research endeavour, I also enter into the dialogic relations of the IE, which allows insights to be rooted in concerns of the community and subsequently foray into
the broader policy landscape rooted in a deeply concerning development context that appears to continue with increasingly less constraints.

There are potential contradictions in any arrangement that unfolds in the contemporary relations of neoliberal development in Ontario, and Northern Ontario specifically. As such, the learning, and consciousness, of people involved in putting together a text process, from the ministers, lawyers, and policy makers, to the planners, environmentalists, researchers and community members themselves, are pivotal to what unfolds and what might unfold in the area. If we are able to move beyond the legalistic and often bureaucratic processes that orient the dialogue, establishing what is “allowable” to discuss across social locations, we might have a chance for the actual transformation of problematic settler-First Nation relations that have so impeded people in the territories they live, and in effect, serve to manage, yet also enable, large-scale development efforts that threaten ecosystems rather than ensure their intended protection.

Indigenous leadership in the Mushkegowuk communities and Treaty 9 region know that the problems lie with the institutional processes of settler governments that result in the undermining of Indigenous people’s ability to govern in their own lands and make decisions about development that reflect complex value systems and relationships intended to ensure cultural and physical survival for generations to come. Allies of First Nation people are tasked with developing critical understanding of contemporary text processes that historically unfold in relation to, and building upon, colonialist policies and practices, and to supporting struggles in face of the problematic - actual and potential - effects of such processes. This is no easy task, and demands time, effort and careful analysis.

Sometime earlier this year I ran into an old friend from my undergraduate days in Toronto, who is now working for a high profile national environmental group and had worked as
part of the lobby for Bill 191. His enthusiasm for the bill was genuine, convinced of its potential for protecting land while being a much more progressive force for First Nation communities than ever before. I had just arrived back from the James Bay region and Timmins, and was struck by his passionate tone for progressive change juxtaposed against the feeling of unease exuding from community members, outright indignation and publicly expressed resistance from Indigenous organizations such as NAN, and the quieter take-up of other First Nation communities who had been already on-track with land use planning or deciding to move in that direction before the Bill came into effect. It was really quite polemical at the best of times. And it wasn’t just some people in Treaty 9, environmentalists and developers that took strong opinions on the matter. Hayden King, an Indigenous professor at McMaster University, who compares land use planning in Nunavut and in the Far North Land Use Planning strategy in Northern Ontario (2010) said in no uncertain terms, that through Bill 191, “Ontario represents the worst type of planning with Indigenous peoples – a seemingly complete disregard for the perspectives and opinions of the people who will be most directly affected by the land use plans” (King, 2010, p. 102).

For many people in the general public, outside of the communities and spheres of debate, it is difficult to develop an informed opinion in such a climate of controversy, and take active steps to build a more meaningful and reciprocal space for dialogue and learning about what is actually at the heart of the matter for people most directly affected. The standard methods for assessing what is taking place in such remote communities become limited to discipline-specific approaches, where people become entrenched in organizational forms, logics, theories and practices that can obfuscate the actual lived experience of people, their historically developed knowledge and ways of being-in-place. These approaches are underwritten by regulated processes and protocols, all of which
serve to shape consciousness in ways that limit critique of status quo ruling relations, which, in this case, set up problematic jurisdictional arrangements and relations between settlers and First Nation people, derived from earlier colonial periods.

An explication of the complexities of institutional processes, the ways in which the discourses of planning, development and protection can help problematize assumptions of what is actually at stake, and centres a discussion on the importance for critical learning in face of the text processes underway. Insights result from ethnographic analysis of institutional processes such as that of provincial land use planning, offering inroads into specific types of learning taking place, specialized on the surface in relation to planning, but necessarily shaping underlying learning about development and jurisdiction in the Treaty 9 region. The expected ideological process at play is related to the de-materializing and de-historicizing of the actual life practices of people living in a specific, vast and otherwise un-boundaried region, based on a long history of family relationships that intersect throughout the entire region. The initial work being carried out through the process by people involved in it, made reference to a form of property ownership, if not yet formal or official. This was appearing through the newly forming jurisdictional arrangements developing via land use planning, centring on individual reserve communities rather than the collective region as a whole (currently represented by Nishnawbe Aski Nation as a governing body for the Treaty 9, 5, and 3 communities). New boundaries were shaping consciousness, through actual, coordinated work as individual communities would work to research and delineate their land use area. This reminded me of the prophetic words of Mushkegowuk historian Louis Bird who lamented
the coming of the “lines upon land” and municipal-type approaches to organizing
territory that provincial governments would soon be taking (Bird, 2005).

Yet also visible was the consciousness and learning founded on the spirit of
Mushkegowuk resistance that inserts itself into the discursive space of the institutional land use
planning dialogue and reshapes it, even while it is vulnerable to the broader jurisdictional goals
of provincial institutional ruling relations. As such it straddles the space between the institutional
and subaltern, in a seemingly perpetual state of resistance refusal to acquiesce to the obfuscating
power of institutional discourse, remembering, speaking in language from the heart, drawing
attention to the broader relations of life on land, still rejecting the boundaries imposed during the
early colonial period. This speaks to a way of being that is defined from both within and beyond
resistance, from within a living memory that continues to produce meaning in its historically
informed terms. The work of IE indeed is to make apparent the often messy, complicating and
restraining regulatory arrangements so as to uncover the life underneath, so that there is space
afforded to the voices of people consistently and dangerously left out. Land, and relationship to
territory lies at the heart of Mushkegowuk voices, as a living memory which anchors younger
generations to their ancestors’ understanding of life beyond the reserve. This is integral to the
vast complex ecology of the region, an understanding passed on through oral teaching and
learning specific to the Mushkegowuk:

Innino aski…that’s how my grandmother described it…at that time, when I was a
boy, my grandmother [told me they were talking about the reserve] and they were
talking about Innino Aski meaning the reserve land….but she said no, it’s [the
reserve is] called ishkwininguun or left over land from the treaty days .that’s
where we’re living now, on ishkwininguun land, so she described to me, what
Innino Aski meant to her and her ancestors, where she got that information, and it’s basically the boreal forest, where the black spruce stands, the moose live, and the rabbits hop…and she went on…she mentioned rivers, waters, and the air we breathe…how (land) it cleanses the air we breathe, the water we drink,[is] the livelihood for all…we are exactly how the animals live, all the living things, we are all the same, and that’s how she described how our ‘land use plan’ was…(Interview with male adult from Fort Albany)

For many, discussions of an Inninowuk way of being have always been at the heart of involvement in discussions on land use planning, at least in Cree. Despite how the institutional language inserts itself, a distinct mode of cultural knowledge is ever present:

Like one of our elders who passed away twenty years ago, in 1976 James Wesley said, there are 2 things that the creator gave us, 1 our spirit, and 2 our land and we have to take care of both. Just as chief joseph said, south of us, said,” the earth and myself are one”. That’s where our land use philosophy comes in…(Interview with adult male from Fort Albany)

In the early days, before relations with funders became noticeably more formal and “legalized” through the orienting language of funding agreements, what was taking place, and came together as a “project”, was in actuality a relatively unconstrained set of activities, fluid actions based on the talk and exchanges within local meetings, or based on ideas erupting in spontaneous conversations and the everyday work that people were involved in, rooted in the concerns and interests that people articulated about the community’s access to traditional territory, relationships between elders and youth, cultural ways of knowing. The Mushkegowuk as “knowers” of their territory shaped activities according to their specific experience, historical
and cultural understanding of the land, and drive to maintain and develop a presence of authority in the region beyond the categories of representation set out in the often limiting definitions of consultation processes, impact benefit agreements and the like.

Through the eyes of one of the community members who was beginning to follow the provincial process, and had a clear critique of the “ruling” approach to planning based on a Mushkegowuk way of viewing the land:

The community based land use plan is a form of ownership, a control over the land in terms of ownership, a solid ownership that MNR insists on having because they do promote resource development. Now on the other scale, the traditional knowledge…how do I say that, the cultural, it exists in the culture… it’s not in a (book) or a note, or a paper, or on a map, a paper map, but is transferred from one mind to the next mind…that’s a traditional thing there…and there is no difference between the spirit of the land and the spirit of the human being, they are one in the same, that’s the basis of our ‘land use plan’…(Interview with male adult, Fort Albany First Nation)

The community of Fort Albany continues to work from all angles to benefit their community and the people of the region. They have not discounted participation in any space that may work to their benefit, while being cautious of what these processes imply beyond the apparent.

So our community is looking at it, and wants to understand it more and we want to have more people in our community sit around and talk and discuss what direction we should be taking. And we do want to be at the table of decision making with the government, miners, companies, developers… we’d like to be at those tables because we’d like to know what’s going on…apart from that we’d
like to hold off for a while yet to see how we’re going to address it when we get
to sit at those tables…(*Interview with adult male from Fort Albany First Nation*).

The institutional processes are unpredictable yet necessary to navigate. What is more certain for people I have worked with over the years are the deeply engrained histories and landscapes that continue to inspire work that brings together people across the generations to restore strong familial and cultural ties that weave the stories and places that are genuinely Mushkego Inninowuk. As people continue to work towards defending a way of life and to be able to govern in their own land, their efforts move them to a much different understanding of social relations than those of neoliberal development. This happens because people have a broad and integrated understanding of the significance of land/territory for social and economic well-being, a constant element woven into Mushkego identity produced over a lengthy known oral history. It is clear that this underpins the drive for self-determination and right of people to engage in development on their own terms which relies so fully on a continued passing on of – on teaching and learning – of these aspects. Perhaps best summarized in the words of this Paquataskamik Project advisory member:

*Over the years I have been working with youth and they all want more programs for being out on the land, though funding ends up being a big issue. People need to be acknowledged for the work they do to take people out on the land. I would like to see all youth, including youth at risk, to participate in excursion and activities out on the land – we’ve found that these youth in particular thrive and we want to keep it going further. Laughter – humour is always present, I have never seen elders laugh so loud and openly as when they are out on the land. There is a BIG difference between on reserve and being out on the land. I didn’t*
realize how much we were all already involved in this kind of work and I aim to keep it going. Being at home and out on the land, you help children/youth succeed in life. That’s what I’ve learned, communication, commitment, consistency, confidence is built this way. People still ask about the raft trip and say “I want to go next time!” (Conversation with Paquataskamik Project advisory member).

Reorienting the Institutional through Dialectical Historical Materialist Critique

The dialectical historical materialist analysis of social relations allows for a fuller view of the complexity of life in the north, rather than a small, objectified version of what is at stake in a narrowly defined land use planning framing that brings complex relationality within rich cultural and geographical regions into established planning, conservation and development formulations. There is a certain affirmation of the possibility of locating and changing problematic aspects of land relations in the region north of the 51st parallel, in face of the recent developments of the Far North Act. After having examined underlying power relations that continue to concentrate within the dialectics of development, based on assumptions found within abstracted, standardized and standardizing notions of the environment, protection and planning, new routes forward in learning that privilege Mushkego Inninowuk narratives and concerns, become visible.

The work of people in ministries, industry, environmental and Indigenous organizations, academics, activists and community members, are brought into coordination, as they work within existing legal constraints, organizational frames and criteria set by funders. Their work contributes to the production of new jurisdictional terrain that makes up, in this case, the legislative process known as Bill 191, the Far North Act. The official process of fostering a legal environment for increased jurisdiction in Treaty 9 territory is advanced through the textually mediated coordination of social relations, talk and work across sites, relying on the discursive
features of planning, environmental protection and development. Planning texts throughout Treaty 9 communities are taken up, shaped and in some cases outright rejected, organizational work and attention becomes necessarily oriented to questions of land and territory broadly speaking in relation to provincial rules and regulations, as issues of development and environmental protection enter the public sphere and become topics for political debate.

The community project is a site of actual lived practice on land, and a critique of the institutional forms that sought to take these practices up as productive of the provincial ruling process through the discourse and legislation related to land use planning and protection. The project is also a site of conscientization and learning, a broad community oriented, critical, praxis-based initiative that makes it possible for people to actually engage in their own development decisions as they experience land and history in a more integrated way. It is through these spaces of tension between the local/critical and the reified/abstract, between the actual lived experiences of people and the officializing ideological discourse that they, indeed we, have had to navigate during the course of the projects funding cycles that insights can be formed about the social production of knowledge and the relations of ruling. It has also and not insignificantly been a site of learning for many other people outside the community who have been willing to listen and engage, starting with my own learning and hopefully that of people from ministries, other institutional locations, academics, activists and perhaps developers who have been able to recognize the significance of such critically driven community efforts. There is something going on in the Kistachowan watershed that needs to be heard. Agency lies here, with both the drive of those who are conscious of the dialogic relations at play and a vision for change, as well as the possibility to critically engage those who sit within the places of ruling and policy-making.
It is in the retelling of the story - from what was happening in the community in terms of people’s activities on land and their everyday work, to the “final organizational occasion” (Pence, 2001) represented on some levels by the Far North Act – that the production of a social organization of ruling becomes apparent, otherwise largely invisible to those who are immediately involved throughout this course of textually mediated action and coordination. It is through explicating the less visible processes at play, that changes to existing policy processes and more informed advocacy in support of locally driven and environmentally-sound practice might take place.

As accumulation moves north and people enter more deeply into dialectical relationships that shape both how they see the world and what actually happens on the landscape, learning is shaped in new ways. This learning should be seen in its dialectical character, which is less about one particular group of people, than it is about how many people, within dramatically different circumstances and backgrounds, relate to each other and either transform or take up the discursive assumptions that strengthen prevailing relations of ruling. There indeed continues to be a great deal at stake, in the case of the Far North Act particularly for the people of the region itself. Through the use of Institutional Ethnography as method I have gained insight into complex interconnected disciplinary modes and sequences that shape consciousness, rooted in a history of relations that are often hidden within the obfuscating power of ruling relations. IE has offered a method for shifting an emphasis in learning from “training and employment” in the North, to one that centres on critical examination of institutional processes and relations that hinder efforts for self-determination in Fort Albany and the Treaty 9 region.

As the moments of textual coordination of work across sites, evidenced in the meetings and materials related to the provincial Far North Land Use Planning process and their regional
and local take-up across multiple sites, we are drawn further into examining the rules, procedures, and regulatory machinery of multiple discursive and disciplinary biases that shape this learning. Texts of land use planning, environmental protection and development are taken up in funding agreements, activities and meetings arranged by the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Mushkegowuk Tribal Council and involving environmentalists, researchers, academics, developers, and local residents, the work of multiple people is coordinated across sites, throughout Treaty 9 territory, effectively producing the beginnings of a new jurisdicational regime in Ontario. Other instances of coordination occur through materially produced text found and taken up in funding proposal and project language, public media accounts, email and internet exchanges, which also contribute to produce Innino Aski as the Far North, a new jurisdicational area under the rule of the province, one that did not exist as such prior to the entrance of the legislation, and relied on the discursive ideological workings of land use planning and protection texts to do so.

Mushkegowuk in Fort Albany have a long history of living and surviving in the vast territory of Innino Aski, and maintain consciousness of a collective land base and identity that are bound to other Mushkegowuk communities along the coasts and First Nation communities living across the Treaty 9 area. Yet they are also confronted with the alienating effects of institutional relations that serve to subvert concepts of collectivity and potentially discursively and politically enclose them and others as individual reserve communities as they become spatially regulated through the provincial process. Early institutionally-regulated enclosures of Mushkegowuk lands took place in the colonial period as reserves were created and people displaced from their ancestral territories for the purposes of capitalist accumulation. While some contend that land use planning may play a role in facilitating access to a broader land base, it is
neither clear whether this will be the case, nor if through such efforts to produce new planning areas would become entrenched in law that may be linked to land claims, nor what relationship the provincial jurisdiction produced via the Far North legislative process will effectively have in relation to the federally regulated Treaty. These are questions to be explored as the legislation is tested through the courts and as new conflicts arise in face of large scale extractive development set to have far reaching effects on the ecology of the muskeg.

The continued tension between distinct modes of being-on-land are exacerbated by a planning process that tends to abstract lived experience through representations of territorial space that correspond to western formulations of land protection and development. Ultimately this serves to produce a bifurcated consciousness among people as they tend to the everyday work of encouraging and revitalizing cultural modes of learning and being-on-land and are simultaneously brought into the complex relations of ruling that seeks to regulate that same being-on-land.

A theoretical insight that emerges from the study concerns how accumulation by dispossession in Indigenous lands, parallels the disruption of human-nature relationship, as capital seeks new territories, resources and labour to exploit through textually mediated processes that reify nature, that objectify the environment and conceptually displace people from a direct relationship. The discursive tendency becomes one of seeing nature as a “commodified” or “commodifiable” entity to either develop or protect from development. This relies on the fact that the discursive practices of development shape consciousness locally. As people are brought into broader standardized ways of viewing the environment entrenched in environmental disciplinary discourses that are set out in diverse policies they must take these up in their sites of work and learning. Provincial land use planning, assembled to respond to a growing industrial
scale interest in developing the region north of the 51st parallel, draws on such discursive practices that hook into other existing legal frameworks, and emphasize specific ways of conceiving of development and nature, encouraged through the land use planning. The textual process relies on the already established objectification of Indigenous subjectivities in policy frameworks that then serve to relegate Inninowuk lived experiences and territories to the categories established in the *Far North Act*, activated through the productive work of local funding arrangements, projects, reports, and multiple sites of coordinated work and action locally, regionally and provincially.

This project is a contribution, with much remaining to be explored, to the formidable task of fostering a collaborative approach to critical learning in Ontario’s North involving those committed to decolonizing educational, research and development policies and practices towards the production of actual material changes to settler-Indigenous relationships. It is a contribution to understanding the importance of consciousness and learning as it is shaped in the everyday, necessary in face of dominant approaches to education in the North, particularly in First Nation communities which is primarily geared towards learning skills for entry into accumulation-centred activities. The dominant focus in education on skills-for-employment de-historicizes productive relations and Indigenous ways-of-being on land while furthering the processes of ideological abstraction deeply engrained in institutional consciousness, including those made apparent here in the terrain of land use planning, development and protection. The material outcomes of ideological consciousness, of institutional approaches to learning and education are visible in the contradictory terrain produced, exacerbating the relations of competition, marginalization, and dispossession as land is taken up for large-scale development or projects of conservation, without jurisdictional authority afforded to First Nation people to set the terms of
such activities or assert ownership over them. There is a great deal taking place by Mushkego Inninowuk that point to important critical and liberatory routes forward in learning, education and local development, largely out of site to those institutional representatives tasked with advancing institutional forms of developing and administering policies and programs. This is largely due to their immersion in textually mediated and ideological forms of consciousness that shape material outcomes, including texts themselves, as critiqued in this study. As such it is hoped that a critical approach might be taken up more seriously and broadly in the North, not only by those living in, and working with, Indigenous communities or in the area of educational programming, but by people within provincial and federal institutions and beyond who are concerned with the complexities of treaty relations, land planning, conservation and development in Indigenous lands. Agency lies where we can bring together those who understand that consciousness and learning takes place in our everyday in relation to broader productive and institutional relations and effectively set in motion routes forward towards a meaningful transfer to Indigenous people, of ownership over development decisions, productive practices and jurisdiction over lands.

Questions remain about whether the institutional process underway related to Bill 191 will lead to a further “enclosing” of James Bay communities, particularly Fort Albany, within a restricted boundary not significantly beyond that delineated at the time of Treaty making, or whether it will lead to new possibilities for an increase in land base and subsequently the possibilities for increased political and economic self-determination. Questions also remain about how new boundaried areas delineated into legal categories that regulate what happens therein, may effectively determine the productive options for local people, speaking also to
processes of accumulation by dispossession, where “all one has left is to sell one’s labour” in the areas sanctioned for development, a development defined in the terms of neoliberal capitalism.

There are ongoing discussions throughout the region, on Wawatay radio, in the news, in the boardrooms of band offices and the kitchen tables, about what is taking place in relation to the traditional territories of the people in Treaty 9. Indeed there is a great deal of work being carried out by Chiefs and their Councils, by other community leaders and members, their allies and supports, to ensure that people continue to access lands on their own terms, based on a long historical trajectory of land politics, organizational achievements, and successes in face of potential threats of dispossession. There is a well-developed and effective critical capacity within the community to deal with ministries, developers and others who express interest to work with or develop sites of ancestral territories evidenced in their continued presence and recognized legitimacy as territorial stewards. More importantly the social fabric among families and within the community is such that a sense of identity and historical authority is strongly present and passed through the generations through continued Mushkego Inninowuk processes of learning that exist outside of institutional norms and are taught on the land, in specific places, based on protocols that are known within, allowing for the continued resistance to institutional forms to persist.
REFERENCES


http://www.borealcanada.ca/index-e.php


Fenwick, T, Nesbit, T. and Spencer, B. *Contexts of adult education: Canadian perspectives*.


22, 2011, from http://www.northernontariobusiness.com/Industry-
News/government/Finance-minister-compar...Algonquin-
Park.aspx


html

Fischer, A. (2009). Settling Accounts with the Sociology of Knowledge: The Frankfurt School,
Mannheim, and the Marxian Critique of Ideology qua Mental Labor. South Atlantic

Press.


Publishing Company.


http://www.onlta.on.ca/committee-proceedings/transcripts/files_html/13-SEP-
2010_G005.htm

http://www.onlta.on.ca/committee-proceedings/transcripts/files_html/15-SEP-
2010_G006.htm

http://www.ontla.on.ca/committee-proceedings/transcripts/files_html/19-OCT-2009_G044.htm


doi:10.1177/0038038510381609


Harvey, David. (2006). *Spaces of global capitalism: Towards a theory of uneven geographical*


Hookimaw-Witt, J. (2006). *The politics of maintaining aboriginal feminism and aboriginal women's roles of sacred responsibility to the land.* University of Toronto (Canada). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Retrieved from

http://search.proquest.com/docview/304924884?accountid=14771


Long, J. (1993). “The government is asking you for your land”: The treaty made in 1905 at Fort Albany according to Cree oral tradition. [unpublished manuscript]


doi:10.1007/s10734-008-9142-4


Mining Watch Canada. (2008, November 28). *Aboriginal leaders face jail time in spreading disputes over first nations rights and mining claims - consultation and conservation demands conflict with outdated mining law across Canada’s boreal forest*. Retrieved


NAN continues opposition to Ontario’s new forestry modernization act: Stresses the importance


http://www.nan.on.ca/article/ontarios-far-north-act-463.asp

http://www.nan.on.ca/article/about-us-3.asp

Northern Training Partnership Fund (NTPF) - Far North Land Use Planning - Far North Branch -


among the Western James Bay Cree women of subarctic Canada. *Human Ecology*, 25(2),
197-222.


http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790eedea78258693055c19dca11eae8ad8b2aef81341220b807187693c0e615a7&fmt=C


http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/goc/indian_registration.shtml


Simpson, L. (2011). *Dancing on our turtle’s back: Stories of Nishnaabeg re-creation,*
resurgence, and a new emergence. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Press.


doi:10.1177/1368431004046702


doi:10.1177/1468794109348680


The “Ring of Fire” development has brought First Nation chiefs into direct tension with the provincial and federal governments. According to a media advisory dated Oct, 2011, one of the Chiefs stated that “We will be forced to resort to alternative measures if Canada and Ontario continue to ignore the First Nations that are being impacted by Ring of Fire developments.” The Advisory states that Matawa Chiefs are outraged that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) is proceeding with a Comprehensive Study EA. The Chiefs and their people have been calling for a Joint Review Panel EA for five months but the government is still not listening. Both the provincial and the federal governments are failing in their constitutional duty to consult and accommodate First Nations. According to the Chiefs, the government is telling them what they plan to do, but it is not consulting or accommodating them about how they want to be involved. The Chiefs maintain that the manner in which the government is proceeding with development in Northern Ontario is going to slowly destroy their traditional way of life, extinguish their treaty rights and destroy their homelands and their children’s future.


See Allman, D. Smith, Harvey, Lefebvre, Ollman, Mojab, Bannerji and others for more detailed background on the disciplinary roots of the critical dialectical tradition


Early Indigenous organizing that involved Mushkego Inninowuk, included the formation of the Union of Ontario Indians, and the Grand Council Treaty 9, founded by Andrew Rickard, a Cree (Innino) from Western James Bay (Moose Cree First Nation), which later gave rise to Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN). Rickard also helped found the National Indian Brotherhood, which became known as the Assembly of First Nations.

Bird uses the term Omushkego, an equivalent term for Mushkego (singular) or Mushkegowuk (plural), or the people from the James and Hudson Bay lowlands. I use the terms interchangeably.

Anishnaabe is an Ojibwa term that Borrows translates as “the good beings” and refers to all Indigenous people in a general sense, for the Ojibwa people

A search on prices for conferences and workshops related to Aboriginal Economic Development conference registration produced over 10 examples of costs at or over $1000, including events in Toronto, Halifax, Vancouver and Edmonton. For a concise list of related events and prices see: 