Playing with Form: Elizabeth La Pensée's Indigenously-Determined Video-Games

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Abstract

This presentation was delivered as a last-minute replacement for the opening plenary session of the 2018 SANAS conference: “The Genres of Genre: A Conference on Form, Format, and Cultural Formations” at the University of Lausanne. Some of the materials used in the presentation were not new, having appeared in my essay “The Mechanics of Survivance in Indigenously-Determined Video-Games: Invaders and Never Alone” (published in Transmotion, vol. 3, no. 2 (2017): 79-110) and the presentation, “Like oil and water: Extractive Industry, Water Rights, and Aesthetic Activism in Native American Interactive Digital Narrative,” delivered as part of the Journée d’étude facultaire, Faculté des lettres, University of Geneva (May 2018) on the topic “Pour des humanités environnementales.” In the present lecture this material has been reoriented towards the conference topic, specifically the questions posed in the Call For Papers concerning the ways in which “marginal” artists “subvert specific genres to resist and protest social injustices.” Taking these questions into the field of video-games, this […]

Reference


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I am sorry that this morning you have the “Plan B” but it is a compliment to be asked to replace Sarah and I am honored to be here.

This presentation was written at very short notice and so much of the content is not new but the material has been reoriented towards the conference topic, specifically the questions posed in the following part of the CFP:

“While the cultural concept of genre has been crucial in creating North American national literatures and identities, it shows equal potential for resistance, subversion and transformation of these constructed national characters. Thus, how does genre reconcile this seemingly contradictory potential for creating narratives of nation-building as well as counter-culture? How do feminist, queer, Indigenous, Latino/a, African-American/Canadian and Asian-American/Canadian writers use, appropriate, and subvert specific genres to resist and protest social injustices?”

Taking these questions into the field of video-games, what I hope to show is that the rethematization of generic game mechanics, in a combination of digital narrative form with traditional stories serves the project of Indigenous decolorization. Playing with the form of popular video-game genres allows Indigenous-determined games to play with expectations, responses, and narrative meanings.

“Indigenously-determined” games? I will offer a more nuanced definition later, but for now we can say that Indigenously-determined games are games that express an Indigenous view point.

The term was coined by Anishinaabe/Métis games designer Elizabeth LaPensée; I will discuss two of her games: Invaders (2015) and Thunderbird Strike (2017) that play with the mechanics of the video-game genre.

FIRST: the wider context = the combination of traditional stories with digital form →
Indigenous “Tradigital” Media

“Tradigital” = creation using traditional + digital methods (Judith Moncrieff)

Producing –

Native-created digital artifacts that take advantage of strategies presented by New Media to tell Indigenous stories in ways that communicate more effectively (in Indigenous terms) than those offered by print and other broadcast media.

**Key strategy is active user participation: performativity through interactivity.**

The term “tradigital” was coined by Judith Moncrieff to define creative objects produced through a combination of traditional (analogue) and digital methods; in her usage, these objects are **NOT specifically Indigenous**

**Indigenous** tradigital media defines Native-created digital artifacts that take advantage of strategies presented by the new media to tell Indigenous stories in ways that communicate more effectively (in Indigenous terms) than those offered by print and other broadcast media –

Especially the power of interactivity to engage the user in oral storytelling (in the original Indigenous language) and in an interactive process of learning that is more consistent with Indigenous modes of teaching and learning.

**Some brief examples:**
In Australia, the *SharingStories Digital Storytelling Program*. The program is described on the website as follows:

“SharingStories Foundation supports the maintenance and strengthening of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures and languages. We implement innovative, community based digital storytelling programs, work with senior cultural custodians to map Song Cycles and Ancestral Creation tracks on Country, and develop interactive digital platforms to hold language and culture for future generations.”
Indigenous “Tradigital” Media

SharingStories Digital Storytelling
http://sharingstoriesfoundation.org

There is a strong didactic element to Indigenous “Tradigital” media, which is aimed at younger people:
To preserve stories and their languages
To teach transferable skills
To promote Indigenous awareness and cultural pride
To ensure the continuity of traditional values and practices

“Tradigital” artifacts are created –
In consultation and collaboration with Indigenous communities and Elders,
Created in forms that are accessible to Indigenous communities (free to download, need no expensive equipment like super-fast graphics cards, work on mobile or dial-up devices)
Indigenous “Tradigital” Media

http://abtec.org/iif/output/

In North America:

*The CyberPowWow project* (1997-2001): consisted of a website, virtual gallery, chatrooms. Then it became Abtec, with the motto:
“even on the Internet, Native people need a self-determined place to call home”

Abtec or *Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace*, offers workshops on video-game development and on Indigenous storytelling in digital media/virtual environments:
http://skins.abtec.org/game_.html

Mobile “Locative media” sites like
*Finding Sacred Ground*: a mobile augmented virtual reality tour that superimposes Indigenous landmarks on the place in which the user is located

and

*Knowing the Land Beneath Our Feet*, developed at UBC Vancouver: a digital mapping tour of the unceded Musqueam lands on which the campus is located

These projects share not only the bringing together of Indigenous knowledge with digital media, they also share a powerful pedagogical aim that serves the project of decolonization.
Traditional Knowledge + Video-Game Form

Preserves Indigenous languages, stories, and ways of knowing.

Disseminates inherited Indigenous values: cooperation, respect for environment, intergenerational wisdom, resiliency, and survival.

Encourages the design of game-play mechanics that are guided by Indigenous traditional knowledge.

IMAGE: Elizabeth LaPensée, “They Are Answering” (2015)

So what ARE “game-play mechanics”?  

This concept is key to the analysis of video-games as digital narrative forms.

“Mechanics” is one of several analytical concepts usefully defined by Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek in their now seminal 2001 article, “MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research”
Video-Game Form

“Fundamental … is the idea that games are more like artifacts than media. By this we mean that the content of a game is its behavior not the media that streams out of it towards the player.

Thinking about games as designed artifacts helps frame them as systems that build behavior via interaction. It supports clearer design choices and analysis at all levels of study and development.”


IMAGE: Elizabeth LaPensée, “They Speak of What Comes” (2015)

In this view, games are to be treated more as active behavioral environments than as passive vessels of media content.

They developed a tripartite approach to the analysis of video games …
Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics

“Mechanics describes the particular components of the game, at the level of data representation and algorithms (e.g. actions, behaviours, rules/control mechanisms)

Dynamics describes the run-time behavior of the mechanics acting on player inputs and each others’ outputs over time (e.g. challenge, fellowship, expression)

Aesthetics describes the desirable emotional responses evoked in the player, when she interacts with the game system (e.g. exploration, discovery, competition).”

Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, Robert Zubek (2001)
IMAGE: Elizabeth LaPensée, “Thunderbird Strike” (2017)

MECHANICS determine all that is made possible by the game system, all the potential choices available to the player;

DYNAMICS describes the player's activation of those potentials by making choices;

AESTHETICS relates to the emotional motivation of the player, as it is anticipated by the design of the game (e.g. competition versus cooperation or collaboration).

Another way to describe the function of game mechanics is offered by Ian Schreiber →
Game Mechanics

“Mechanics are a synonym for the “rules” of the game. These are the constraints under which the game operates. How is the game set up? What actions can players take, and what effects do those actions have on the game state? When does the game end, and how is a resolution determined?”

Ian Schreiber, “Game Design Concepts” (2009); https://gamedesignconcepts.wordpress.com/

IMAGE: Elizabeth LaPensée, “Emblem” (2017)

These kinds of questions offer a way to analyze HOW playing with the mechanics of popular video-game genres can serve an anti-colonial or decolonizing agenda, by thinking of games as …
Video-Game Mechanics

Games are “systems that build behavior via interaction”

“game mechanics” = all the rules that govern interactivity:

• How the player can interact with the game world (console, keyboard, touch-screen etc)
• Possibilities and constraints imposed on potential player actions
• How the game begins
• How the game ends and the conditions for winning/losing

Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek (2001)

IMAGE: Elizabeth LaPensée, “The Path Without End” (2011)

A fairly simple example is Invaders (2015)
A Game You Cannot Win

*Invaders (2015)*

Art by Steven Paul Judd (Kiowa, Choctaw);
Music by Trevino Brings Plenty (Lakota Sioux);
Design and Programming by
Elizabeth LaPensée (Anishinaabe, Métis)

VERSIONS
Web Player
WebGL
Android Phone
iPhone and iPad

www.survivance.org/invaders

Use the web version of the game (WebGL)
www.survivance.org/invaders
Invaders (2015)

Inspired by a T-shirt
(Steven Paul Judd for the Native American Rights Fund, 2014)

Native American Rights Fund, established in 1970

Later, Steven Paul Judd produced a version for the online Native clothing retailer “NTVS” with the change: “Hi-Score 1970” is replaced with “Hi-Score 1491”. The anti-colonial message is thus made much more explicit.
Invaders (2015)
An Indigenous Remix

Revises the genre of
Space Invaders (1978)

Arcade → casual game

“Casual” game (Jesper Juul, 2010):
• easy to learn,
• appeals to a large number of players,
• works in many different situations,
• can be played in short time bursts,
• uses a mimetic interface.

In games with mimetic interfaces, the physical activity that the player performs mimics the
game activity on the screen.

The player moves their hand, the avatar moves; on a keyboard, the player presses the
“up” arrow and the avatar shoots an arrow up.

Thematically, the game transforms or “remixes” Space Invaders (1978):
• Space as “the final frontier” → late 19thC US Western frontier
• Alien invasion =/ as space invaders → colonial invaders

The historical shift is created through the mechanics (I will turn to that in a minute) and:

Trevino Brings Plenty’s score: an ethereal harmonic line,
a choppy electronic techno-beat alternating with the drum beat,
a reverberating human yell coordinating with the drum beat
And also

Steven Paul Judd’s visual mash-up of the classic arcade-game icons and the image of
tribal warriors that gestures to the photography of Edward Curtis … this is very clear in
the splash screen →
The Image presents frontiers in confrontation.

... and in this game, invaders that cannot be defeated.

In both games, the CHALLENGE (so the aesthetics) is to defeat the invaders

The player can act in response to this challenge only via the means offered by the game mechanics,

So to return to Ian Schreiber's question about mechanics →
A Game You Cannot Win

Ian Schreiber's questions concerning game mechanics:

*What actions can players take, and what effects do those actions have on the game state?*

- The player shoots arrows while dodging the alien bombardment
- These actions gain points but do not stop the invasion
- The player cannot shelter (no shields or bunkers as in Space Invaders)
- The player is equipped only with arrows, the invaders with rockets and bombs
- Defeat of the spacecraft ends the wave but the next begins immediately, relentlessly

Player actions are highly constrained

The game's dominant shooting mechanic requires that, in order to survive, the player must balance the winning of points (firing arrows at the invaders) with the need to play defensively (evading the invaders' weapons). In this way the game mechanic integrates acts of resistance and survival.

LaPensée underlines the mimetic dimension of the game in her description →
A Game You Cannot Win

“The game is meant to be played in quick bursts for the attainment of a high score, much like the original *Space Invaders*. However, in the context of playing as an Indigenous warrior, the design takes on another meaning – no matter what, the aliens eventual obliterate your character and community. Lives are represented not as numbers or even as your own, but instead as the warriors who stand side by side with you. If you get hit, you permanently lose a community member. This mirrors the very real losses experienced as colonizers attacked and decimated Indigenous communities during invasion.”

Elizabeth LaPensée, “Indigenous Game Design” (2011)
A Game You Cannot Win

*When does the game end, and how is a resolution determined?*

When the four warrior avatars have been killed, the game ends.

The aliens *always* invade successfully.

At the end, the player is given one option: “PLAY” that leads back to the launch screen options: “QUIT” or “PLAY”

Failure is guaranteed; how to respond to failure is at issue.

**HOW to respond to failure?**

An ethical act of resistance in the face of overwhelming odds is the only positive response made available to the player of *Invaders*. This is, as noted above, Elizabeth LaPensée's intention for the game; the recognition that, as she says, “we, as Indigenous people, have already experienced the apocalypse. Now we survive to thrive” (“Indigenous Game Design”).

Playing this game involves frequent endings and continual experiences of loss that ask how and why the player has lost. The feedback from the game itself is clear: the player loses because of the superior numbers and firepower of the invaders.

The “aesthetics” of the game – the anticipated emotional response of the player that is coded into the design – comprises: challenge, loss and disappointment, then renewal of action (play again) or surrender/resignation to defeat (quit).

The emotional responses to the game world exist in a mimetic relation with the historical world of Native American experience.
Playing with Form – and Genre

Playing with the form of popular video-game genres (the arcade game in the case of *Invaders*) allows Indigenously-determined games to play with expectations, responses, and narrative meanings.

Playing with form is SERIOUS play

In Indigenously-determined games, *interactivity* allows the performance of *traditional values* through the enactment of *tribal stories* that are embedded in *Indigenous cosmologies*.

I turn now to the more complex instance of LaPensée’s 2017 game *Thunderbird Strike*, which uses the interactive form of the sidescroller game to Perform traditional values of environmental guardianship That are embedded in an Anishinaabe cosmology.

The game uses the story of the Thunderbird People, a story that LaPensée has told in the graphic novel *They Who Walk As Lightning* (2017), which concerns: “A young woman who returns to thunderbird teachings as she works alongside her family to face the impact of toxic spills in their community.”

LaPensée tells the story of the Thunderbirds on the website that accompanies the game.
Anishinaabe Thunderbirds

Story of the Thunderbirds: from the game website
https://www.thunderbirdstrike.com/stories/

“Just as the waters of St. Mary’s River in Baawaating were once rushing “rapids, so too were there once people who walked with lightning in their eyes. Whenever they looked at the people, they would kill them with a strike, and so they were asked to cover their faces. Even so, there were moments when their lightning escaped, and so they were asked to return to the waters. They did so to protect the people, and, from the waters they merged with, emerged all the many birds.

The thunderers remained looking over the people from the skies where they formed into storms to bring life. Sometimes, you can see their wings in the clouds or their talons in the lightning. Veterans who have protected Turtle Island say you can see them by honing your peripheral vision.

For generations, the thunderers brought forth rain and fires that renewed the lands and the waters for the plants, the animals, the fish. However, the unsatisfiable greed of another people brought about such vast changes to the lands and the waters that the people cried out for the return of the thunderbird people and their searing lightning.

And so they walked among the people again, through the people, in their hearts, in their eyes, in their voices, in their songs, and in their motion.”
The Black Snake

The story of the Thunderbirds is combined with that of the insatiable Black Snake:

from the game website https://www.thunderbirdstrike.com/stories/:

“Just as there are many forms of people, so too are there many forms of snakes. There are those which the people put out tobacco for and those which we are to be mindful of.

As we were warned, there would be a generation when there would come to be a snake that would threaten to swallow us whole, a snake with a hunger which could never be satisfied, brought forth from under Grandfather Rocks by the grabbing hands of another people.

The women, they would hold the ground, and with their songs and good intentions would care for the waters just as the waters care for us, bringing forth a gathering of those who walk as lightning.”

TOGETHER:
“In the 2D sidescroller Thunderbird Strike, fly from the Tar Sands to the Great Lakes as a thunderbird protecting Turtle Island with searing lightning against the snake that threatens to swallow the lands and waters whole.”
In the game-world, the snake is the oil pipeline – Enbridge Line 5

This game has come to prominence in the context of Indigenous opposition to oil pipelines on reservation land (notably the “NoDAPL” protests that started in 2016). LaPensée’s game is focused on Enbridge’s Line 5 which runs under the Mackinac Bridge at the point where Lakes Michigan and Huron meet, where an oil spill would poison both of these Great Lakes.

A more immediate context is Enbridge’s current attempts to replace their Line 3. Dating from the 1960s, it is corroded, leaking, and running at 50% capacity. Line 3 runs through two Anishinaabe reservations in Northern Minnesota: Leech Lake and Fond du Lac. Native communities oppose Enbridge’s proposal which is simply to bury the old leaking pipeline and leave it in the ground, while building a new pipeline along a completely new route. This proposal is currently making its way through the Minnesota Court system and the controversy has given LaPensée’s game a particular relevance.
Thunderbird Strike (2017)

The game is:
free-to-download, 2D 3rd-person shooter side-scroller for Windows PC, Android (Phone and Tablet), and iOS (iPhone and iPad). “Casual” game that can be played on a mobile device; easy to learn and quick to play.

(Visual Style) is based on sacred Anishinaabe pictographs. Anishinaabe artist Zhaawano Giizhik:
“The style often emphasizes interconnecting "lines of power" and "lines of communication" radiating from the spines of the creatures portrayed, divided circles ("unity symbols"), and x-ray views of people, animals, plant life and supernatural beings. The X-ray anatomy, exposing the spiritual guts of animals and human beings, represent the source of inner Power."

In this image, which opens the game, the “lines of power” connect Thunderbird's inner spiritual power, through the eye that shoots lightning, to the external world of Creation.

Note that in the game, only living beings have spiritual interiors or “Inner Power”: the mechanical infrastructure of the oil industry (trucks, derricks, pipeline), and also the devouring Snake that symbolizes Line 5, are soulless. The humans and other-than-human animals (bison, caribou, deer) that have been destroyed by the extractive oil industry acquire “Inner Power” only after they have been restored by the Thunderbird’s lightning strikes.

PLAY THE GAME TRAILER
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFACKHuruAU
A Game You Cannot Lose
Thunderbird Strike (2017)

OPENING cut-scenes: establish the major locations and figures

0:25 LEVEL 1: cut scenes: environmental devastation of the Alberta tar sands, the living creatures that have been destroyed (especially the iconic bison).

Thunderbird's inner power is white when charged, green when the lightning has been used up; at each point, the player must choose how to use the limited lightning and when to fly into the clouds to recharge: there is not enough charge both to destroy and restore all the targets presented.

As a sidescroller, the player's choice of movement is limited (fly up to charge; up or down to aim); the primary choice is the identification of the target to hit with the Thunderbird's lightning.
At the end of the level a score is given but there are no objective rewards (e.g. additional powers); movement to the next level is automatic.

0:52 LEVEL 2: cut scenes: industrial vehicles, forests, Thunder people, activists carrying signs "no pipelines on indigenous lands". The targets now are sections of unlaid pipeline to destroy; and humans to restore to life. Where the reanimated animals in Level 1 assumed their living form and ran off-screen, the restored humans simply acquire their Inner spiritual Power. On this level, the player is assisted by occasional tornadoes that can destroy pipeline but cannot restore life.

1:06 LEVEL 3: cut scenes: Mackinac Bridge, the Great Snake, Thunderbird.
There is a single opponent, the “boss,” the giant snake which is clearly mechanical (it is articulated by riveted sections) that spews droplets of toxic oil. The player can EITHER avoid the oil droplets and shoot the snake OR protect the waters by neutralizing as much of this polluting oil as possible by placing the body of the Thunderbird in the path of the droplets.
Thunderbird Strike and Aesthetic Activism

Formal aesthetic strategies + Socially reconstructive purpose

→ promotes awareness and discussion of social, economic and political issues

→ with the aim of motivating direct action to change policies by: governments and corporations, and also individuals

IMAGE: Elizabeth LaPensée, from “Thunderbird Strike” (2017)

*Thunderbird Strike* “plays with” the form of the 2D shooter sidescroller game by blending it with another viseogame category: the social impact game

This genre has been especially attractive to Indigenous game designers such as Elizabeth LaPensée, who creates

Indigenously-determined video-games

that she describes as constituting ...
Indigenously-Determined Video-Games

... constitute a “path for passing on teachings, telling our stories, and expressing our ways of knowing. ... [g]ames with our people represented in our own ways, with our place-names, with our stories, with manidoo ... game engines that comprehend our ways of knowing”

Elizabeth LaPensée, “Indigenously-Determined Games of the Future” (2014)

An Indigenously-determined game preserves and disseminates Indigenous patrimony by performing stories and teachings in Indigenous game-worlds that are designed according to mechanics informed by Indigenous epistemologies.

An important element of the game aesthetic is then the creation of potential for identification or empathy.

But we must remember that neuroscience recognizes (at least) two distinct kinds of empathy: affective versus cognitive empathy.
Affective versus Cognitive Empathy

Affective empathy = feeling the emotions of others

Cognitive empathy = understanding emotive states to explain others' behavior

- “the attribution of mental states to self and others to explain and predict behavior” (Blair 2005)
- a “cognitive perspective-taking system” (Shamay-Tsoory et al. 2009)

Understanding, in order to predict and explain behavior, applies also to the behavior of game systems.

IMAGE: Elizabeth LaPensée, from “Thunderbird Strike” (2017)
Cognitive Empathy and Video-Game Mechanics

The epistemological conditions for understanding the game
= The pre-determined, coded rules that govern the system

Games are “systems that build behavior via interaction” in which
“game mechanics” = all the rules that govern Interactivity. RECALL:
• How the player can interact with the game world (console, keyboard, touch-screen etc)
• Possibilities and constraints imposed on potential player actions
• How the game begins
• How the game ends and the conditions for winning/losing

Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek 2001

Game mechanics not only control the “rules of the game” but more fundamentally the cognitive conditions for a player’s interactivity with the video-game.
“Indigenously-Determined” Game Mechanics

... conform to Indigenous epistemological principles, informed by Indigenous moral, ethical, spiritual values, and codes of behavior:
E.g. Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (living the good life): how to speak, think, perceive, act, and relate to Spirit based on custodial responsibility to, and reciprocity with, the total, inter-connected environment of Creation.
“In our Anishinaabe tradition, one is a warrior by doing what must be done to protect the environment and society and advance their cause - even if it’s on a modest scale or in the smallest of ways.”

Zhaawano Giizhik (2016)

“Gidakiiminaan is our connection and our relationship to the Land, and all of Creation. It is the experience of knowing and understanding the relationships that exist throughout Creation, and understanding your own role and responsibility in this relationship. This connection is the primary shaper of Anishinaabe identity, and it is this total relationship with Creation that informs our environmental ethic.”

Seven Generations Education Institute (2015)

Minnesota State Senator David Osmek accused LaPensée of creating “an eco-terrorist version of Angry Birds” (2017). Osmek, an influential legislative supporter of the oil industry in general and Enbridge in particular, focuses on the destructive potential in the gameplay and ignores the restorative dimension. This work of protection and conservation is in keeping with the Anishinaabe understanding of humans as custodians of the environment and keepers of an environmental legacy for the next seven generations.

The Seven Generations Education Institute, an Anishinaabe education provider based in Ontario, explains the principle of Gidakiiminaan (quotation in slide)

This environmental ethic powers the game mechanics of Thunderbird Strike, promoting cognitive empathy with the Anishinaabe principles of Mino-Bimaadiziwin (living the good life): specifically

- to think,
- to perceive,
- to act, and
- to relate to Spirit,

based on custodial responsibility to, and reciprocity with, the total, inter-connected environment of Creation.

Controlling the Thunderbird avatar, the player mediates between the sacred lightning and its powers of destruction or restoration to perform the principle of Gidakiiminaan and, by extension, of Mino-Bimaadiziwin.
Eco-Terrorist versus Eco-Warrior

*Bishkaabayaang*: “the returning to our Teachings”

**Beginning**: only one option, “play”
A screen of simple instructions:
“fly into clouds to gather lightning” and “tap thunderbird to strike”

**Ending**: Finally, the Snake either dies or disappears and the Thunderbird flies offscreen.

**Outcome**: There is no option to fail; every player “wins”; indeed, to play is to win.

*IMAGE: Elizabeth LaPensée, “Returning to Ourselves” (2016)*

Thunderbird Strike represents a digital “return to traditional teachings” through stories (Thunderbird and Black Snake) and through storying that promotes cognitive empathy – an Anishinaabe “cognitive perspective-taking system” to use (or adapt) Shamay-Tsoory’s phrase.

The aim is to further the project of decolonization by embedding the game-world in Anishinaabe values of *Mino-Bimaadiziwin*.

Other Indigenously-determined VGs by Elizabeth LaPensée include →
Honour Water (2016)

Honour Water is a singing game for mobile (iOS) developed by Pinnguaq with art and design by Elizabeth LaPensée. Songs by Anishinaabe elders and Sharon Day sung by the Oshkii Giizhik Singers pass on teachings about water in Anishinaabemowin.
Mikan (2017)

Inspired by traditional moccasin game, Mikan is a finding game on mobile (Android and iOS) created for the Duluth Children’s Museum with design and art by Elizabeth LaPensée, programming by Tyler Coleman, and sound by Jon Whiting that passes on phrases such as jiimaan (canoe) in Anishinaabemowin.

... and the animation →
Hands to the Sky (2016)

The experimental stop motion animation *Hands to the Sky* directed and animated by Elizabeth LaPensée with music by the Métis Fiddler Quartet follows fallout from oil extraction and transforms into healing.

And images like →
I encourage you to explore Elizabeth LaPensée's website:

www.elizabethlapensee.com

Where you will find a treasure-trove of her inspiring – and beautiful – work.

Thank you for your attention.