

# What We See as One River is a Convergence of Many: Three Convergence Commitments in University Teaching

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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# What We See as One River is a Convergence of Many: Three Convergence Commitments in University Teaching

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## Abstract

Michael Marker knew we are never just one thing. He often wrote about concepts that gesture toward convergence: to converge as a way of blurring boundaries; to converge as a challenging process of coming-together; to converge educationally in a murky, “alluvial” place of relationality that is only navigable through artistic and storied methodologies (Marker, 2017). Marker steadfastly resisted colonial structures that attempted to tidily delineate knowledge and compartmentalize the unknowable. In this article, I reflect upon Marker’s scholarship through the idea of convergence and outline three conceptual spaces of convergence that I have observed in his work. Through analysis of Marker’s body of work and attunement to his loving and poetic forms of resistance, I articulate my commitments in my role as a relatively new, non-Indigenous faculty member in his former department at the University of British Columbia. I think of convergence commitments as relational meeting places that can be at once joyful and also tension laden; they are necessary practices that help me decentre and “muddify” western ways of knowing that I have been socialized to enact in institutional spaces.

## Introduction

Michael Marker often wrote about concepts that gesture toward convergence: to converge as a way of blurring boundaries, and not necessarily to flow in one common direction or become one; convergence as a process of tension-laden coming-together; convergence as a murky, “alluvial,” and sometimes unexplainable place of relationality that is only navigable through artistic and storied methodologies (Marker, 2017). Marker knew that we are never just one thing. He steadfastly resisted colonial structures that attempted to tidily delineate knowledge and compartmentalize the unknowable. In an article outlining his fieldwork with the Lummi community, he described his own experience as a convergence of several roles – he was a researcher but also a self-proclaimed school bus driver, a sweeper of floors, a mover of heavy objects. His scholarship lamented and passionately reimagined the “unnatural dualism” imposed by purveyors of existing institutional power structures, and particularly the impacts he felt as an Indigenous scholar: “[c]ertain rules are enforced by the hegemony of this conversation: the past must be segregated from the present; land must be kept apart from identity and ideology” (Marker, 2003, p. 362). He did not just effectively resist these imposed boundaries, however; He saw - and amplified - beauty in the places of convergence.

In this article, I reflect upon Marker’s scholarship through the idea of convergence. In particular, I consider three conceptual spaces of convergence that I have observed in Marker’s work, which help me to articulate my aspirations in my role as a relatively new faculty member in Marker’s former department, UBC’s Department of Educational Studies. As someone who often asks

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myself how I can *live* the values I espouse, I consider Marker's legacy to be one that guides me in the enactment of reconciliation and decolonizing practices in my roles as educator, author, researcher, practitioner, and most importantly, a human-who-loves-and-is-loved-by-others. These three spaces of convergence, I contend, offer a way forward that operationalizes the University of British Columbia's explicit institutional commitments to reconciliation and decolonization (See Indigenous Strategic Plan, 2020). In some ways, I consider these places of convergence to be a series of calls to action – they are aspirations that carry the intention of systemic change. As I consider my own role as an adult educator and in the development of a long-running master's program, I draw on Marker's legacy to enact the following three "convergence commitments":

- a) **Locating of Oneself:** Convergence of "near at hand" and elsewhere [Nelson, 1989, as cited in Marker, 2003];
- b) **Anamnesis:** Convergence of the past, present, and future;
- c) **Poetic, artistic, and storied methodologies:** Convergence of multiple ways of knowing and being.

Convergence, in this conceptualization, is not to be confused with monolithic understandings or the collapse of unique entities into one common or universalized whole. Rather, building on Marker's poetic (2017) exploration of alluvial processes that carry sediments from outer landscapes to a river delta, "alluvial processes combine sediments at one level but the essences remain discrete at another level" (p. 503). I think of convergence commitments as relational meeting places that can be at once joyful and also tension laden; they are necessary practices that help me to decentre and "muddify" western ways of knowing that I have been socialized to enact in institutional spaces.

### **Positionality and Relational Accountability**

Before delving further into Marker's scholarship, it is critical that I name my own positionality in relation to this work. As Wilson (2001) contends, "An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational" (p. 176); and given what he calls "relational accountability" – the question of "how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship?" (p. 177) – I come to my teaching and my scholarship as a non-Indigenous settler of Norwegian and English descent, who-draws inspiration – and indeed, *aspirations* – from the work of Dr. Marker. As I reflect on Marker's work, I carry this question with me and return to it often, in perpetuity: *How am I fulfilling my role in this relationship?* I do not consider decolonization to be the centre point of my work as a scholar, but I consider it *central*; I believe that decolonizing practices (and other distinct, urgent explorations such as anti-racism, attention to the climate crisis, and critical power analyses) should be central to any educational endeavor, even when a research question, a course, or a program may not be focused on those topics. I approach this piece through the lens of critical hope, which positions hope as an "ontological need" and a messy practice of grappling with historical and ongoing injustices in order to effectively generate systemic change (Freire, 1994; Grain, 2022). When I reflect on my relationship to my scholarship, I think about my positionality as a white, Canadian-born, cis-gender woman, and how I situate myself vis-a-vis knowledge creation and the many people who have informed and inspired my understandings

thus far. I strive to stay present in the discomfort of my privilege and the inevitability of my own dead angles.<sup>1</sup> I consciously try to be fluid in my “knowing” and imbue my understandings with a willingness to change my mind as new perspectives emerge. “Humility,” perhaps aptly, seems too small a word for the expansiveness of this commitment.

Beyond my identity markers and values that comprise my positionality, I consider my relational accountability to the colleagues and students with whom I share a teaching and learning community in the Department of Educational Studies. This is the department where Michael Marker spent much of his career until his passing in 2019; it is also where I earned my PhD, and where I now lead the Adult Learning and Global Change (ALGC) Master’s of Education Program. Shortly before my doctoral defense in our newly minted Ponderosa Commons building on Musqueam territory, I heard the news that Dr. Marker had passed away. My defense, and the week leading up to it, was colored by a palpable sense of grief among several of my committee members and friends who had loved and admired Marker. Although I didn’t know him well, I have been mentored and guided by folks who were close with Marker, and who gleaned his most heartfelt teachings, so I feel that his legacy moves through me in indiscernible ways that I may never fully comprehend. This is the gift of education and mentorship – it moves like river water, carrying the silt and molecules of hundreds of upstream creeks, fed by innumerable ponds, lakes, and glaciers that we never lay eyes on, and whose watery edges we may never touch. What we see as one river is a convergence of many.

**A brief story:** The week I was welcomed into Educational Studies as a faculty member in 2021, I received an email that I had been assigned my office; as an aside, I was told that it had previously been Michael Marker’s office. This gave me pause. I felt the weight of this news like something heavy draped across my shoulders. It was at once warm and comforting, but I also wondered if it was meant to be mine. I understood that place holds great significance in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and I felt a sense of reverence for the ineffable feeling that remains in place long after a being has departed, and the present moment morphs to past.

Given the significance of place, I couldn’t help but feel troubled by the symbolism of a white scholar moving into a physical place that had once been inhabited by a beloved Indigenous scholar. Just as I have strived to interrupt familial patterns of trauma in my own lineage, I also strive in my professional life to break colonial patterns – even those that are symbolic in nature – laid out by the historically exclusionary institutional regimes in which my current role is situated. In my book, *Critical Hope*, I discuss the importance of “interruptions and invitations” – interrupt that which is a perpetuation of longstanding oppressive or harmful narratives, and – importantly – *invite* an alternative; welcome and usher in the possibility of a new story, a different pattern that delicately interweaves place, heart, intuition, and lived knowledge. I confided in my trusted mentor and decolonial scholar, Dr. Hartej Gill, and asked her whether this embodied feeling of unease was worth honoring. She reflected on it for some time, before agreeing with me that perhaps I could request a different office and express my hope that one day a new Indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> A “dead angle” is being used here to avoid the ableist term, “blind spot.” A dead angle is an angle or a place that cannot be seen from a particular point of view, given various obstructions.

scholar would hold that special place in the halls of our department. I did just that, and my request was granted without contestation. I share this anecdote not as a naïve illusion that this small gesture is significant in the broader struggle for decolonization, nor as any kind of a false “move to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012) that is meant to relieve my settler guilt or abscond me of the complex tensions underlying my participation in a colonial institution. Rather, I share it because even in his absence, Michael Marker’s legacy has taught me about treading gently and thoughtfully – moving slowly, even when – *especially* when – I begin something new, and my entire body craves nothing more than to launch into a full sprint – trusting a quieter wisdom and my intuition when something feels misaligned, or when it speaks the language of metaphor.

The ideas that follow this positionality section are situated in my role as a lecturer in UBC’s Department of Educational Studies and as the coordinator of the Adult Learning and Global Change Master’s Program. In this program, I teach the first and last course – aptly named “Locating Oneself in Global Learning” to a group of 60 master’s students from all over the globe; the program is a longstanding collaboration between UBC, Linkoping University, and University of the Western Cape. My account of my aspirations and “convergence commitments” are comprised of a narration of my own experiences and reflections as I perform the role of educator and lecturer. As such, I do not speak for my colleagues in the Department of Educational Studies or the ALGC Program, nor do I speak for the program itself. This paper is a personal endeavor to align my labor with the teachings I have gleaned from Dr. Marker and the calls for Truth and Reconciliation that imbue the decolonizing work of UBC. Paulo Freire wrote that “education is an act of love,” and in this way, to truly be in love with the educational endeavors I pursue, I find it important to consistently and with vulnerability, share my own intentions. Intentions, if we say them and sing them and dance them, have greater potential to become commitments. Marker reminded us that “Ways of thinking...become ways of being” (2015, p. 2). This is an exercise in thinking and feeling my convergence commitments into being.

### **Convergence Commitments**

It bears emphasizing that I question and often feel uneasy about my place in this conversation. I frequently wonder when it is appropriate for me to share ideas such as convergence commitments, and when it is best for me to remain quiet in my attempts at solidarity with my Indigenous friends and colleagues. Often, solidarity is embodied through silence and listening. Other times, it is practiced through sharing and generating ideas, and then walking the talk. Learning the difference and continuously attempting to recognize the moments for each of these actions is a journey that non-Indigenous educators embark upon each day if they are committed to this work. It is work that I am committed to, and that I surely do clumsily at times. And I am aware that this is a common tension among non-Indigenous educators and researchers who see themselves as aligning with goals of Indigenization and decolonization. While I don’t have any answers to this dilemma, I have used this paper as place to walk others through my own thought processes, as I draw on Marker’s legacy to help me wade through the muddy places of convergence.

I hope these convergence commitments offer up one model through which non-Indigenous folks can consider and integrate the work of Michael Marker in their own teaching practice.

Indigenous scholars Louie, Poitras Pratt, Hanson, and Ottman (2017) suggest that faculties of education in Canada are taking a leadership role through the integration of Indigenous ways of knowing into teacher education programs. They emphasize that “institutions of higher learning need to move away from the myopic lens used to view education and implement Indigenizing strategies in order to counteract the systemic monopolization of knowledge and communication” (p. 16). The three convergence commitments below are, in my own pedagogy, a conscious effort in this movement away from a hegemonic monopolization of teaching practices and knowledge production. The commitments illustrate meeting places I have found in Marker’s scholarship, where he advocated for a dissolution of concrete boundaries and compartmentalization and, indeed, where he expressed a sort of reverence for the possibilities that exist at these borderless interfaces.

### 1. **Locating Oneself:** Convergence of the “near at hand” and elsewhere.

To say I have been “haunted” by the question of what it means to “locate oneself” is perhaps a bit dramatic. However, in my role as educator and coordinator in the Adult Learning and Global Change Master’s Program, this question has kept me awake at night, because “Locating Oneself in Global Learning” is the name of the first course (Part 1) and the last course (Part 2) that ALGC students must take in their Master of Education degree. To be *haunted* by something is to be disturbed by that which is mysterious or by a significant presence that we feel but cannot explain. Teaching a pair of courses that bookend the program, my job in essence is first to start students off in a way that sets them up for success, and finally, to help them wrap up and make sense of their learning...through *locating themselves*. A presence that I *feel* when I think about locating oneself, is the land. But in a fully asynchronous and online program, what does it mean to locate oneself, and how do we speak about land?

I turn to Marker’s scholarship for insights on how locating oneself can be understood in terms of a relationship to land and place. In his 2003 critique of ethnographies *about* rather than *with* Indigenous people, Marker highlighted the importance of enhanced self-reflection on the part of outsider ethnographers. As an exceptional example of self-reflective ethnography, Marker referenced Nelson’s (1989) idea of the “near at hand” as it exists in relationship to elsewhere. Nelson wrote, “My hope is to acclaim the rewards of exploring the place in which a person lives rather than searching afar, of becoming fully involved with the near-at-hand, of nurturing a deeper and more committed relationship with home.” Too often, courses and programs that focus on “global”-anything-can be forgetful about the near-at-hand; in doing so, a rich learning opportunity for peer-to-peer learning about different contexts and lifeworlds is lost. Thus, my convergence commitment to my teaching begins with creating moments, assignments, and activities that prompt students to reflect on their near-at-hand as it is interwoven with the distant or the global. One way to do this is to situate our learning on the land. Marker wrote, “The effects of bringing Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous methodologies into universities have the potential to nurture a paradigm shift recognizing the sacredness of places countering a pervasive view of land as strictly a soulless commodity” (Marker, 2017, p. 502).

To counter the notion of land as a soulless commodity, how can educators invite students to locate themselves *soulfully* on the land? Furthermore, how do we recognize the *sacredness* of

places through our curriculum and pedagogy? “Soulful” and “Sacred,” after all, are notions that do not converse easily with Western epistemologies built upon the brittle foundations of “rigour,” and “evidence.” Despite the challenges of such an interaction, land acknowledgements are often discussed as the first point of departure for these endeavors. And while some Indigenous scholars advocate for the importance of land acknowledgements, others rightly point out that they can be performative, and that they do not go far enough in redressing the continued violence against Indigenous peoples from centuries of land theft and environmental destruction. Although land acknowledgements are fairly common practice in certain spheres, in other spheres I continue to encounter resistance to land acknowledgements from some non-Indigenous folks who have pointed out that they are “too political” or that, “not everybody agrees with the goals of decolonization” or that their inclusion in a course constitutes a curriculum change that should require additional permissions (as opposed to a pedagogical practice which is within the autonomy of the professor). In these spheres particularly, I try to be extra thoughtful with my land acknowledgements, and I often share key resources and teachings that have been offered to me by Indigenous colleagues and Indigenous offices at UBC.

Drawing on Marker’s teachings, then, I aspire to enact the first convergence commitment of locating oneself, in the following ways: first, I can model the *soulful* location of myself (as an educator/researcher/practitioner) on land that has been impacted by colonial histories. I strive for land acknowledgements and pedagogical practices that don’t just name the original inhabitants of where we are located but also engage deeply with stories, vulnerability, and embodied personal connections to land. To be soulful is to be imbued with spirit, to express oneself intuitively, to connect with something bigger than oneself, and to recognize the interconnectedness of all things – including how my own actions are connected to broader struggles for justice.

Second, I can enact this convergence commitment by designing multifaceted assignments that invite students to *soulfully* locate themselves through reflections, stories, and guided experiential activities. I encourage my students to move beyond discussion posts and rote repetition of key concepts; instead, I create space for them – even in “global” locations that are scattered around the world – to connect to the near at hand. I usually begin courses by asking students to write a positionality statement that situates them in relation to the topic we are examining. I ask them to consider their identity, but also their assumptions, their most sacred values, and the tensions or discomforts that they carry in relation to the topic. Even if they live in a place where they do not think that land acknowledgements are necessary, I ask them to consider how histories of colonization have impacted the place where they live; I have yet to encounter a student who could not identify at least one way that colonialism has touched the land or society where they live. And especially important to this discussion is a connection to their own neighborhood, to the municipal politics, local issues, and to the small places on their own block where they are inspired to wonder about a larger web of connection. I often ask my online students to go for a walk, and to take a photo of a special place in their community where social movement learning occurs, or of a body of water where they feel most alive or most soulfully intertwined with the living land surrounding them. By prompting these types of assignments and activities, I can encourage students to locate themselves by noticing and naming that which I consider *sacred* in educational endeavors and also in their own daily lives. Often, these conversations about locating oneself lead naturally into discussions about time.

## 2. **Anamnesis:** Convergence of the past, present, and future

In a field such as education, it can be tempting to orient students to the future and to privilege future building over engagement with the past. Western conceptions of time visualize time as a linear phenomenon with distinct borders between the past, present, and future. Marker lamented both the forgetfulness about the past and the over-reliance on a monolithic understanding of time as linear; he wrote often of the role of history – especially oral histories – in education (see Marker, 2015). I recently took part in an Indigenous-led project called “Walk with Me,” which was a program that included a guided walk with folks who have lived experiences with the toxic drug poisoning crisis in British Columbia. As we walked together in a group, we listened in our own headsets to the same series of recorded stories that folks shared about their pathways to and through struggles with homelessness and addiction. One storyteller expressed his frustration at hearing non-Indigenous onlookers say, “it’s in the past now, it’s time to get over it.” It was not over for him, he emphasized; he still lives it every day.

As I reflected on this temptation to forget historical impacts on the present through a sort of willful amnesia, I wondered if there was a concept that was the opposite of amnesia – something that represented remembrance but also actively interwove the past into the future. Plenty of Indigenous cosmologies and ancient cultures around the world have diverse ways of understanding time in ways that do not subscribe to a linear path. But my curiosity led me to ask about the opposite of amnesia. I imagined strands of history being braided together with present sensory and emotional experiences to craft something integrated and multicolored – something that didn’t cleanly separate three categories of time – past-present-future – onto a deceptively linear plane. It was through this line of questioning that I discovered anamnesis: a philosophical notion that emphasizes the importance of reflecting upon and revisiting the past in order to gain a deeper understanding of oneself, one’s experiences, and the world. In medicine and psychology, anamnesis is understood as the process of gathering a patient’s medical or personal history in order to diagnose illnesses, understand underlying causes, and map out a treatment plan. Through this process, a healthcare professional asks questions about a patient’s symptoms, family history, lifestyle, and other relevant information.

But such an understanding of anamnesis feels strangely pathologizing, as if the past exists only as a canvas for illustrating, recognizing, and treating illness, and on the societal scale, for highlighting the wars that drastically altered the course of history; surely a different approach to anamnesis could include a recognition and reflection on that which is worthy, and meaningful, and enchanting. History, after all, does not just contain the wars, famines, and dispossessions that were so oft documented by those who emerged as victors and who often perpetuated their narratives via violent means; for many folks, depending on their positionality and context, history is also comprised of quiet moments by the water, barely perceptible creaks of a maple bough as the wind moves through it, and the soft skittering sound that a small crab makes as it sidesteps its way back to its watery cave. In my own family’s history, I want to remember how my father taught me to gut a trout, and how my mother taught me the best way to cook it – high heat with just butter, and salt and pepper. The mundane teachings of everyday life are formative to the loving relationships that are worth preserving, strengthening, and aspiring toward.



Anamnesis, as I think about the influence of Marker’s work, and my own work as an educator, is the act of braiding together many strands of then and now – those that we must strive to never repeat, and also those that deserve our efforts to maintain; those that require healing, and those that constitute healing in and of themselves; those that continue to color our present moment, and those whose robust strands fade to a wispy memory.

To me, the convergence commitment of anamnesis is a rejection of time as a linear entity that is easily compartmentalized into past, present, or future. A rejection of linearity precludes a turning-away from historical injustices and colonial histories because all moments of time are woven together in one strand. Just as there is much to learn about decolonization practices from traumatic histories of oppression, there is also much to learn about Indigenizing the university through expanding our narrow conceptions of time. Marker wrote,

A growing number of universities in Canada are officially acknowledging the inextricable connection between Indigenous peoples, their landscapes, and the buildings of the institutions, historically placed on the local Indigenous peoples, often unceded, territory. Such discursive moves bring the history of colonization near while implicitly inviting all students and faculty to rethink assumptions about place, human experience, and to consider alternate possibilities for culture and life connected to a primordially expanded consciousness. (Marker, 2017, p. 501)

To bring the history of colonization near is to invite students (and to nudge myself) to consistently connect histories to the subjects we explore. None of this is easy to enact in a classroom of course. I do not pretend to know how to guide students in encountering the past and braiding this complex multicolored future. But when I return to aspirational thinking that guides this paper, I think about facing the past – the deplorables and the battles, the subtle knowledges we glean from our parents, in my case through the buttery taste of my mom’s fried trout. I aspire to create the curricular and pedagogical context for students to face historical traumas and wrongdoings on the land where we learn together, and to connect their current feelings of guilt or anger to the actions we take toward tomorrow. I cannot think of any better pedagogies to guide this work than poetry, story, and other arts-based pedagogies.

### 3. **Poetic, artistic, and storied methodologies:** Convergence of multiple ways of knowing and being

It was a sunny evening in May when my friend, Khari Wendell McClelland, attended my graduate course on experiential pedagogies. Khari is a musician, Black liberation activist, and a gifted facilitator. The theme of the unit was arts-based pedagogies, and we met for class in a garden overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Our first activity together was a song that began with the phrase, “I’m gonna let life move me, I’m gonna let life stir me deep.” He taught us the gestures to go with the lyrics, and he stood in the center of our circle. Khari sang the song, spinning, and asking us to continue the gestures, and, when our bodies felt called to do so, to join him and sing along. After a few rounds, our voices all converged together, as golden sunbeams stretched across and through our circular formation. It was not lost on me that this was one of those moments I thirst for in my teaching practice – when the poignancy of an experience washes over

the group and something imponderable happens. In our time with Khari, we shifted from singing to miming to storytelling. He reminded us that it wasn't so long ago when Indigenous folks were not allowed to sing their own songs in their own languages on this land, and that likewise, it was only a few generations ago that his Black ancestors were prohibited from making their music. It wasn't just beautiful and connecting to learn this way, through music and embodiment – it was also imbued with a spirit of resistance and remembrance – of anamnesis. Reflecting on the past, allowing it to mingle with us in a moment of togetherness, and asking it to shape us.

One of the activities that Khari led us through was a layered theatre game that involved four volunteers at a time, standing in front of the rest of the class. Three students would face away from the audience, and one student would turn toward the audience and fulfil a prompt. We did iterations where the person facing forward would tell a story from their childhood only until one of the others turned to face forward, at which point the other person's story was cut off, and that forward-facing person would tell (or continue to tell) their childhood story. The final iteration of this game involved the prompting question, "Why are you here? When you turn around, tell me why you are you using your precious life to be here in this class and learning about experiential pedagogies?" Since I was participating along with the students, I found myself in this group. When I turned toward the class, I recounted stories from early elementary school, a time in which I had too much enthusiasm and energy to be contained at a desk; I often got in trouble, along with a group of several boys, for throwing snowballs or getting in plasticine throwing fights. And when I remember the moments of learning that actually captured my attention in elementary school, it was when we went out to the pond behind the school, and I wrote poetry about the red-winged blackbirds. Learning felt meaningful there. I felt so trapped and claustrophobic when learning happened at a desk indoors or when our instructions were essentially to memorize knowledge or pay attention for long stretches of time. I wanted to *do*, and *feel*, and *experience*. I longed for intensity and sensory stimuli. Playfulness. Challenging emotions and big questions. Fast forward to my career teaching adults in a university, and I still feel most drawn to pedagogies that integrate poetry, music, stories, and movement. Adult me still feels as much of a craving to feel *alive* and *connected* in a learning space as six-year-old me did.

Michael Marker understood the longings of learners like me, and he was known not only in his scholarship, but also in his interactions with others, as a lover of the arts, music, and storytelling. He was a banjo player and shared his musical gifts openly. As I have noted already, he resisted oppressive epistemologies that tried to compartmentalize knowledge, experience, and existence. The following excerpt from Michael Marker, for me, offers one of the most compelling and robust frameworks for all three convergence commitments, but particularly the power of story and the arts:

I never understood the phrase apples and oranges very well; it was always a kind of "shadow metaphor" from a world that I didn't completely believe in. I said that I did understand the metaphor of fish and rivers. A fish is not a river, and a river is not a fish. However, to understand a river, one must understand the ecology of fish. And, no one can study fish without knowing a great deal about the river that they live in. To explain these deep ecological relationships, our ancestors used stories; oral tradition. Of course, experiencing the physicality of the fish and the river is also required for knowledge of

the two entities. Beginning to think this holistic way about reality/science can soften and dissolve the concrete walls between categories that enforce dangerous binaries in our present world. Such a move toward this holistic mind also implicitly *re-purposes* both science and education more broadly.” (Marker, 2016, p. 479)

To *soften and dissolve the concrete walls between categories*. To understand a river, and indeed, to understand any topic in a university curriculum, learners must know about the relationships that animate connection points between a constellation of factors. To *soften*. So often, learners arrive in a classroom hardened and compartmentalized – taught by years and decades of a compartmentalized system, that there is no room for visual arts, no time for music, no purpose for poetry. Those things are for you to do on your free time. But when an educator can courageously welcome in the messiness and unknowns that accompany a poem, a story, a song, or a sustained engagement with the arts, both the educator and the learners are rewarded with *softening*. I have witnessed it vividly during my undergraduate degree when my professor at the University of Victoria walked into class on the first day, playing a song on her guitar and singing to us in her language. We were stunned. I felt awkward and awe-struck. It changed the entire mood of the semester from day one. By showing us the vulnerability of her shaky but beautiful voice, she gave us permission to show ourselves too. Dr. Carmen Rodriguez taught me a course in 2006, and I still remember most of it because she *softened* us. When she graded my final project, she did not write corrections in red marker or focus on a number. Instead, she gifted me a Navajo prayer poem, “Walking in Beauty.” I kept that handwritten prayer in a box of memories that I still have today. As we can see in Michael Marker’s writings, he knew that in order to enact the convergence commitment that brings together multiple ways of knowing and being, we must *soften*. And there is no greater agent for this change than the courage and vulnerability embodied through the arts.

### Conclusion

I have written here about three convergence commitments that Marker’s work has inspired me to enact in my own teaching practices. My positionality as a non-Indigenous writer and educator has prompted me to pause at many points in this writing process, to ask myself whether I am saying something of value, and to quietly ask myself whether I am performing solidarity or living it. To whom am I accountable? I am well aware that my silence as a white scholar in a large institution can amount to complicity, but also that the projection of my voice and ideas in relation to Indigenous scholarship can amount to a sort of recolonization or romanticization of Indigenous ideas. I have wondered who I am writing this for – who my audience is. As a relatively newly published book author, I have found that audiences often surprise me, and the people who resonate with a piece are not always the ones who I expect. In terms of intentionality, I have written this piece for educators who care deeply about the soulfulness and relational accountability of their teaching and scholarship. As a white educator who aims to imbue my work with the decolonizing teachings of Michael Marker and other Indigenous scholars, I imagine that this piece could be of value to others who are non-Indigenous, and who often pause and wonder what their role is in implementing “Indigenizing strategies in order to counteract the systemic monopolization of knowledge and communication” (Louie et al, 2017, p. 16). I have also wondered: can I truly enact these convergence commitments in my teaching? Though many of the ideas here are already aspects that I have attempted to integrate into my

pedagogy, I am aware that publishing a paper about them writes them into being. Being important. Being foundational. Being commitments rather than aspirations.

A throughline that animates decades of Marker's work is his deep desire to decolonize education and research through the dissolution of borders that separate knowledge systems, land, people, and ways of knowing. Thinking holistically, he said, *can soften and dissolve the concrete walls between categories that enforce dangerous binaries* (2016, p. 479). He echoed this troubling imagery of concrete walls in a 2017 article, when he described working as an Indigenous professor in a rigid institution as a "manoeuvre through an institutional landscape that is at once an alluvial floodplain and, at the same time, a kind of concrete maze" (2017, p. 501). Walls and borders, in his words, are "conceptual impediments" for understanding Indigenous cosmologies. Borders that colonial powers cut through Indigenous land (see Marker 2015) bear a qualitative resemblance to the concrete walls that represented categorical western thought systems in higher education institutions. He emphasized, however, in his description of the metaphorical alluvial floodplains, that he was not proposing any kind of "mixing" of knowledges: "I must be clear, at this point, that I do not mean to assert a simple binary of Indigenous and Western knowledge production that might mix even in this alluvium." (2017, p. 510). Following Marker's lead, convergence in this paper is, importantly, illustrative of a *meeting place* that is only possible in the absence of concrete walls. Convergence is not meant as an amalgam or a mixing, but of a moment and an edge where demarcations have dissolved and meeting is made possible, like marbled arms of color reaching and twisting into the depths of previously monochromatic spaces. But in the practice of teaching, what are these marbled arms of color that seep across boundaries and swirl in unpredictable directions?

Before I attempt to respond to that question, it bears repeating that the convergence and alluvial marbling in Marker's teachings, as I have illustrated in this paper, can be taken up in my own teaching practice through the three convergence commitments: (soulfully) locating oneself through the convergence between here and the near-at-hand; anamnesis as a representation of the convergence of previously delineated past, present, and future; and arts-based ways of knowing such as poetry, storytelling, and music. But the marbled arms of color themselves – across all three convergence commitments – are perhaps best embodied as curiosities and questions.

In one of his last known pieces, Marker invoked JoAnn Archibald's (2008) suggestion to *think through stories rather than just about them* (Marker & Hardman, 2020), and he believed that *asking questions* was a vital way to go about this. He emphasized that "sometimes, early forms of ideas begin as questions" (p. 295), and he encouraged folks to spend time together with important questions. In the context of that article, he was offering an Indigenous perspective on the "M" in "STEM," but what he did was more expansive. He offered four questions, which I believe can be applied more broadly than just in math education. I believe they can be applied across many areas of education:

- "What should be counted?" (In education broadly, I interpret this question as where do we place value? What matters?)
- "How do we do the calculations?" (Process matters. How we get there matters. How do we choose the path forward?)

- “What is math and where does it come from? Who are mathematicians and where do they come from?” (How can we soulfully *locate* ourselves and the subjects that matter to us? How can we engage with anamnesis and consciously remember, through story, the broad spectrum of time so that our present and future are colored by the past?)
- “Can we use mathematics to expose hidden curriculum and hegemonies of settler colonialism?” (How can we use any given subject to expose hidden curriculum and hegemonies of settler colonialism?)

In my exploration of these convergence commitments and of Marker’s body of work, I have taken to heart his 2017 call to non-Indigenous scholars: to question the “normative and ideological assumptions of universalized truth from modernist and scientific taxonomies of reality” (p. 510) and to “seek out Indigenous scholars and Indigenous critiques of the Western modernist hegemonies” (p. 510). For me, these critiques of western hegemonies have been guided by Marker’s work and inspired by my love of teaching through experiential and arts-based pedagogies. The writing of this paper has not been primarily motivated by the quest for the “product” or the finished piece. Rather, my reflections, experiences, and collegial conversations with respected peers have converged to offer something that soulfully locates me and my teaching, as I do this work downstream from the legacy and life of Michael Marker.

The places of convergence are so often found when we soften and dissolve the “knowing” that concrete walls are made of. Instead of *knowing*, I can soften into my questions:

How am I being accountable to this relationship?  
 How can I live the values I espouse?  
 How can my pedagogy be infused with convergence?  
 How can I soulfully *locate myself* when I am lost?  
 How – by what process - do I gut this trout?  
 How can I cook it to taste just like my Mom’s?  
 What does solidarity look like in this moment?  
 Is it even possible? How?  
 Is now the time to listen, to walk, or to talk?  
 How do I let life stir me deep?

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