It is late July 2017, and I’m sitting next to Muriel Miguel (Kuna/Rappahannock) and Deborah Ratelle, both of New York’s Spiderwoman Theater and director and project manager, respectively, for *Material Witness*, the show we’re watching. The production is a collaboration between Spiderwoman and Nippissing First Nation, Ontario’s Aanmitaagzi, on stage as part of the Living Ritual Festival hosted by Kaha:wi Dance Theatre at Toronto’s Harbourfront. It is a searing revisiting of the serious subject matter of Spiderwoman’s first show, *Woman and Violence* in 1976, and yet Miguel is laughing uproariously from the audience as her nonagenarian sister (and Spiderwoman co-founder), Gloria Miguel, mugs shamelessly and members of the cast don sparkling outer bras, aviation goggles, and ostrich feathers. This is not the sort of event where the audience, and especially the show’s director, observes traditional theatrical decorum. It is a show and a ceremony honouring the women who, in a ‘Pulling Threads’ workshop, literally wove their stories into the large quilt that hangs upstage like a fabric cyclorama, gendered female, in a materialization of Spiderwoman’s ‘storyweaving’ technique.1 And as the closing event of this festival of Indigenous performing arts, there is a celebratory feel to the evening, which is partly about witnessing. Like the Living Ritual Festival at which it was performed, *Material Witness* faced difficult truths head on, but did so as part of an ‘internation’ gathering,2 an affirmation and celebration of Indigenous resurgence globally. ‘Because it’s a ritual, and we’re living’, as Muriel Miguel asserted. ‘We’re living and sending things out into the world’ (qtd in Commanda).

From long before recorded Western history to the present, the Indigenous peoples of the world have engaged in ceremonies and communal performance activities that could not without diminishment be called ‘theatre’,3 but might, from a Western perspective, be called festivals. Settler scholar Shawn Huffman opens his 2003 article on theatre festivals in what are now Canada and the USA with an account of the birch-bark ‘White
Earth scroll’, which he considers to be a ‘pre-contact’ Midē’wiwin record of a ‘theatre festival’ on Anishinaabe territories in Turtle Island (North America). Depicting ‘the different stages of a theatrical initiation festival’, the scroll, he argues, ‘is no mere illustration; it contains rather the coded inscription for a ritual performance, readable only by the Midewiwin, the initiated protectors of the information it contains’ (57). As a settler scholar myself, I do not have access to that protected information, nor can I know whether it is appropriate to consider the initiation ceremony recorded in the White Earth scroll to constitute a festival in any contemporary Western sense. But, given that all accounts of the origins of festivals that I have consulted and considered in my research trace them to some kinds of ritual or ceremony, usually Western, and usually understood to have their origins in fifth-century Athens, I wonder whether Huffman has identified a valuable alternative origin story that might reshape, in a foundational way, scholarly understandings of festivals and their social functions.

In Australia, as on Turtle Island, Indigenous performative forms of exchange and negotiation that might now be called ‘festivals’ existed long before they were witnessed, then popularized as ‘corroborees’, then banned or tightly controlled and commodified for Western touristic consumption in the twentieth century. But, as Peter Phipps has argued, then, as now, ‘among the many functions of Aboriginal ceremonial life is to bring different clan groups together to perform and renew the law at significant times and places in the presence of related peoples. It has been common for people entering one another’s country (in the Aboriginal sense of ancestral domain, not nation-state) to engage in ritual and ceremonial exchanges, frequently exchanging songs, dances and stories with people from far away’ (‘Indigenous’ 685).

On the north-west coast of Turtle Island, similarly, there was the potlach, a gifting ceremony described by Keren Zaiontz as ‘a multifaceted festival that is core to the social order of many Pacific Northwest Peoples and encompasses public ceremonies, the marking of family celebrations, the passing down of history, and the enactment of law’ (Theatre 59). Tseshahnt writer, artist, and actor George Clutesi, in a book-length account of what he calls the last Tloo-qwah-nah (potlatch), which he witnessed as a child, refers to the fourteen- to twenty-eight-day event in terms that align very closely with most contemporary definitions of a theatre festival: he talks frequently of the overarching event as ‘this great play, the Tloo-qwah-nah’ (71), and refers throughout to the many individual performances that constitute the event as ‘plays’ (19, 88, and passim). He also
refers to the location at which the performances took place as a ‘theatre’ (26). And, certainly, the events he describes are both theatrical and festive, demarcating a ‘time-out-of-time’ (Falassi) in which both traditional and innovative performances, sacred and profane, were rehearsed and presented to the larger community as both participants and audiences. Clutesi’s narrative of the Tloo-qwah-nah in his own community describes it, moreover, very much as an occasion for intercultural exchange and solidarity, accounting for its purpose as the confirmation of alliances between visitors and hosts among the tribes that constitute the Nuu-chah-nulth on the west coast of Vancouver Island, solidifying common cause, and generally serving the purpose of ‘getting to know each other’ (136).

Like the corroborees in Australia, the potlach was particularly threatening to colonialist, proto-capitalist regulators on Turtle Island, not only because of its role in forging pan-tribal alliances, but also because it conferred social status, not on the accumulation, but the dispersion, of wealth. And, like the corroboree in Australia, the potlach, along with other ceremonial activity and performance, was banned in Canada in 1885, and the ban was not lifted until 1951. But the existence of the Mide’wiwin records, the corroboree, the potlatch, and other ceremonial practices among the Indigenous peoples of the world, as Huffman argues, ‘provides an expanded paradigm for the understanding of the modern theatre festival’ (57). What, then, would it mean for scholars to see theatre and performance festivals, not as having begun within the competitive framework of ancient Greece, but among the relational frameworks of Indigenous communities globally? What would it mean to understand festivals as conferring cultural capital through the dispersion rather than accumulation of worldly goods? To consider festivals as sites of the exchange rather than the commodification of cultures? To consider them as being grounded in the land and in Indigenous knowledge systems rather than in the deterrioralizing and decontextualizing programming practices of most contemporary Western festivals?

I have argued elsewhere (Theatre & 6) that for thousands of years the world’s Indigenous peoples have negotiated difference and facilitated trade in part through performance in ways that might be considered to be trans-Indigenous, and that might speak to a reconsidered role for international festivals today. The term ‘trans-Indigenous’ is used by Chadwick Allen, of Chickasaw ancestry, to indicate a critical methodology for considering a single Indigenous work from a globally Indigenous perspective (in addition to equally valuable but more narrowly nation-specific ones): ‘The point’, he says, ‘is to invite specific studies into different kinds of conversations,
and acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts’ (Trans-Indigenous xiv) by ‘creating purposeful Indigenous juxtapositions’ (xviii, emphasis in original), employing ‘multiperspectivism’ (xxii), and ‘reading across rather than through texts “close together placed” rather than “together equal”’ (xxviii, emphasis in original). I suggest that international, transnational, and especially trans-Indigenous festivals provide unique opportunities for creating such purposeful juxtapositions, for enabling such multiperspectivism, and for such ‘close together placing’ within the context of the festival event, not just for the purposes of analysis, but for those of the artists themselves and the cultures at large. It might, I suggest, prove useful to think about theatre festivals, not within the originary contexts of the competitions and judgements of ancient Greece and the detached eye of the civic theoros (see Nightingale; Zaiontz Theatre 6–7), or within the cathartic context of the medieval or Caribbean carnivalesque, or still less within the context of international diplomacy and national identity construction and assertion provided by the ‘founding’ post-Second World War festivals such as Edinburgh and Avignon, but within that of ancient and contemporary trans-Indigenous negotiation and exchange. Indigenous ‘festivals’, it seems, have always been about learning how to share territory and resources – how to live together ‘in a good way’.7

It’s no secret that Indigenous peoples have not been well treated in Western festivals, fairs, and mega-events, although they have featured in them prominently and consistently since the late nineteenth century and continue to do so. And there have been many efforts to incorporate or represent Indigeneity at non-Indigenous festivals of theatre and performance, some of them more successful, or respectful, than others. The most successful of these festivals – such as the Festival of the Dreaming, held in 1997 as part of the lead-up to the Sydney Olympics in 2000 (see Gilbert and Lo 66–72; Roberts), or the Adelaide Festival under Stephen Page (Yugambeh) in 2004, or the Sydney Festival under Wesley Enoch (Noonuccal-Nughi) since 2017 – have been under the direction of Indigenous artists. My focus here, however, is on Indigenous festivals themselves.

Cultural festivals that are organized by Indigenous peoples vary in focus, size, and purpose and are rarely only about theatre or the arts as such, although they are certainly performative. Some, such as the large-scale (one million visitors in five years) Festival Internacional de la Cultura Maya (Yucatán, Mexico), are international, but focus on a single, in this case Mayan, culture. FICMAYA, as it’s called, has broad ambitions, as signalled by the title of the festival and the conference that it hosted in its sixth
incarnation in 2017: ‘Cosmogony and the Preservation of the Planet’. The preservation and celebration of Mayan cultures, cosmologies, and cosmogonies (which might be understood as creation stories) are seen in this festival as invitations to the world to learn and heal. Other, much smaller festivals, such as Riddu Riddu (‘small storm at the coast’), held in Gåivuotna (Kåfjord), Norway, whose mandate is ‘to promote and develop the Sami coastal culture’, are primarily local and focus on cultural preservation, survival, and renewal in the face of resistance, sometimes violent. At the very beginning of Riddu Riddu the festival’s young founders were ridiculed and spat upon.

Aboriginal cultural festivals in Australia have been among the most successful in at once negotiating Indigenous–settler political relationships and maintaining what Méétis scholar David Garneau, from Turtle Island, calls ‘irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality’ (27). In Australia’s far north, the Mapoon Indigenous Festival in Cape York was founded in 2007 as an assertion of the ‘historical continuity, social legitimacy, autonomy and sovereignty’ (Slater, ‘Our Spirit’ 134) of the small Tjungund community of Mapoon, forcibly removed from their homes in 1963 by the Queensland police, who burned their houses to the ground to prevent their return. The 2017 festival celebrated fifty years of resurgence. Other of the more than one hundred Aboriginal festivals in Australia each year as of 2010 (Phipps, ‘Indigenous’ 683), such as the Yeperenye Federation Festival (Alice Springs), the Barunga Festival (Barunga), and the Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival (Cape York), operate more as ‘a means of entering into intercultural dialogue, a testimony to ongoing political struggles and, for both Indigenous performers and their audience, provide an important context for the contemporary negotiation and transmission of Indigenous people’s identities’ (Slater, ‘Our Spirit’ 130–1).

The Garma Festival of Traditional Cultures (north-east Arnhem Land) is exemplary, part of what Peter Phipps calls ‘[a]n effervescence of local indigenous cultural festivals [that] is one manifestation of [a] subtle shift toward a globalizing indigenous identity that emphasizes the specifically local’ (‘Performances’ 220). Garma is an annual, four-day festival held by the Yolŋu people at the Gulkula grounds, a sand-covered ceremonial site on Gumatj clan country. It is, as Phipps says, ‘an intercultural gathering of [Australian] national significance, and simultaneously is a local gathering of Yolŋu [sic] clans on Yolŋu land for Yolŋu political, ceremonial and recreational purposes’ (‘Performing’ 110). The Yolŋu peoples have been prominent in Aboriginal rights movements in Australia, in part because of
their late colonization and their having maintained strong connections to their ancestral lands, laws, language, and performance forms. ‘Our ancient sovereignty is here’, said Djunga Djunga Yunupingu at a ceremonial welcome to Garma 2018 (Davidson), and the festival both grounds itself in that sovereignty and engages Balanda (non-Indigenous visitors) with Yolŋu cultural practices, language, and cosmology. Central to the festival is the bunngull, a dance that encodes Yolŋu history, sovereignty, and the law, and is performed every evening on the festival grounds. It teaches Yolŋu youth languages and cultural practices while also making Yolŋu epistemologies and ontologies – together with their capacity for intercultural, international negotiation, diplomacy, and trade – visible to visiting Balanda politicians and dignitaries. ‘Yolŋu dance’, as anthropologist Franca Tamisari says, ‘because they hold the law’ (qtd in Phipps, ‘Performing’ 116). As a festival requiring ‘complex inter-clan political negotiations on a number of levels, from the sacred ritual and religious to the economic’ (Phipps, ‘Performing’ 118), Garma promotes and models Yolŋu language on the land from which it emerged, and it encodes Yolŋu understandings of interdependence and relatedness with other peoples as well as with the natural and spirit worlds. And, in doing so, ‘Garma ... calls upon the non-Yolŋu guests to enter relations of reciprocity and negotiation with their Yolŋu hosts whose land they are on’ (119).

Garma, then, like other culturally specific Indigenous cultural festivals in Australia, exists in a complex and deeply intercultural world, its goal being, as Lisa Slater argues, ‘to compose anti-colonial relations’ (‘Sovereign’ 132). ‘Indigenous cultural festivals’, she says, constitute ‘innovative responses to keeping culture alive – meaningful lifeworlds comprised [of] local networks of production, circulation, exchange, sociality, and law, embedded in settler, liberal modernity’ (134). Also, however, as ‘expressions and generation of, as well as experiments in, Indigenous modernity’ (138), they enact what she calls ‘relational ontologies’ (137).

Cultural festivals are one ... route for reinvigorating significant relationships and social identities, with the express purpose of strengthening young people’s capacity to navigate the demands of a deeply intercultural world, and to be innovators and agents of the new roles and possibilities generated by our shared present ... I am arguing that cultural festivals are peaceful weapons in a continuing ontological political contest. (144, emphasis in original)

Festivals of Pacific peoples negotiate less with single national settler governments, as in Australia, but with the geographical oceanic vastness
of the region that they attempt to connect. Phipps’s essay on Indigenous cultural festivals as ‘Performances of Power’ compares Garma to Hawai’i’s Merrie Monarch Festival, which, however, focusing on the hula as a bridge between traditional culture and Indigenous modernities, brings together performances from across the Pacific, including Aotearoa/New Zealand and Tahiti. In this, the Merrie Monarch Festival is representative of festivals of Pacific peoples, which tend to operate on a more explicitly and internationally trans-Indigenous level than do Garma and other more culturally specific events. These festivals serve in part to forge solidarities across Oceanic cultures (Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia).

The Festival of the Pacific Arts (FESTPAC), founded in 1972 in Fiji, takes place every four years hosted by a different country and nation. ‘The Festival of Pacific Arts is not a tourist festival’, Karen Stevenson asserts, ‘but one put on by and for Pacific peoples’ (8). It’s ambitious and wide-ranging guiding principles are as follows:

We, the indigenous peoples of the Pacific, assert our cultural identity, rights and dignity. We do so, mindful of our spiritual and environmental origins, through our dynamic art forms and artistic history and traditions. As indigenous peoples we share the following objectives:

– Encourage awareness of a collective voice
– Foster the protection of cultural heritage
– Explore the creation of dynamic new arts
– Cultivate global awareness and appreciation for Pacific arts and cultures
– Promote our traditional languages
– Value the wisdom of our elders
– Support the aspiration of our youth
– Advocate a cultural peace through dialogue with the cultures of the Pacific
– Promote cultural development within the social, economic and political development of our countries
– Encourage the indigenous peoples of the Pacific to continue their efforts for recognition.

(Stevenson 4–5)

Although the initial goals of the festival had been preservationist, over the festival’s now twelve iterations it has developed into a site where young artists and contemporary arts – music, design, film, dance, and theatre – build on traditional forms and practices to forge new and forward-looking trans-Indigenous, trans-Pacific modernisms. The 2016 festival, held in Guam with 2,700 artists and performers from twenty-seven Pacific Island countries and territories – some arriving in a dozen handcrafted vessels
guided by traditional navigators – also hosted a meeting of the Pacific Ministers of Culture to discuss a regional approach to the 2005 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, as well as a forum on Culture, Arts and Sustainable Development in the Pacific.

But FESTPAC is only one of many festivals that are forging solidarities across the Pacific Islands and their diaspora. In the diaspora itself, in Aotearoa/New Zealand alone there are Pacific festivals in every major urban area, ranging from the Northland through central North Island and Wellington all the way down the east coast of South Island to Ivercargill on the southern tip. These festivals forge and express pan-Pacific solidarities, celebrate Aotearoa as a new, rather than ancestral Pacific homeland, and establish relationships of trans-Indigenous solidarity between Pacific peoples and the Māori (Mackley-Crump, ‘Pacific’). The largest of these festivals, and the largest Pacific festivals in the world, take place in Auckland: the original, student-focused Polyfest (there are now sixteen) and the original, community-based Pasifika Festival (there are now fourteen). In addition to these are the Tu Fa’atasi (‘stand together’) festival in Wellington, and the grandmother of them all, the Polynesian Festival in Rotorua founded in 1972, originally a Māori event but renamed Te Matatini o te Rā, in 2004 to indicate its broadened scope (matatini meaning ‘many faces’).

Auckland is now known as ‘the biggest Polynesian city in the world’ (Mackley-Crump, ‘Pacific’), and its Pasifika Festival is the largest event of its kind globally. The festival is a free, family-friendly event held over two days in late March in, as of 2019, eleven different ‘villages’ in Western Springs Park, representing, respectively, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Aotearoa, Hawaii, Kiribati, Samoa, Tahiti, Tuvalu, Tonga, and Tokelau. The festival’s opening night concert involves each Pacific nation presenting a short performance that recognizes and draws upon the knowledge and experience of community elders. Along with honouring elders, the festival hires and mentors young Pacific people in roles within the organization and management of the festival. Finally, the festival focuses on differences between and diversity among the Pacific communities it represents and brings together. In a key essay that focuses on the Pasifika Festival in Auckland, Jared Mackley-Crump argues that the festivalization of Pacific cultures ‘creates notions of diasporic identity and belonging’, with the festivals functioning as ‘complex transcultural contact zones’ that at once provide opportunities for exchange and solidarities among Pacific peoples
and for the display of Pacifica cultures to outsiders (‘Festivalization’ 29). Pacific festivals, he argues,

are transcultural spaces. They are in that they are meeting places of different Pacific cultures, diverse in their differences, unified by commonalities, and they are also where these different Pacific cultures and peoples meet others. Furthermore, Pacific festivals are transcultural because they are spaces through which Pacific pasts meet contemporary urban Pacific presents, a terrain upon which what it means to be of the Pacific in the twenty-first century can be contested. (28)

Mackley-Crump identifies (28–9) four types of ‘contact parties’ that occur within the context of the festival – the Intergenerational, Intra-Pacific, Intra-national, and International – which cumulatively provide a site for what he calls ‘a multi-local mapping of place’ (34), a reterritorialization of Aotearoa as a place, a ‘sea of islands’ that, drawing on James Clifford, ‘bend[s] together routes and roots to construct alternative public spheres’.

Pacific festivals are perhaps unique, not only in the Indigenous world, in constructing what Mackley-Crump calls ‘urban Oceanic spaces’ (‘Festivalization’ 31) in which diasporic Pacific peoples can forge identities that are no longer neither here nor there, but both here and there, at once based on traditional relationships to the land and, especially, the water, and grounded in newly forged trans-Indigenous modernities. Festivals, then, as ‘spaces through which identities of multiple belongings can be created, asserted and claimed’ (25) offer sites of both the negotiation and stabilization of trans-Indigenous diasporic identities.

Indigenous cultural festivals such as those I have been examining are important sites for the performative negotiation and constitution of identities within individual, intranational, and trans-Indigenous communities. (Trans-)Indigenous festivals dedicated to contemporary theatre and performance take on the extra role of negotiating across aesthetic and formal differences and the derivation of contemporary forms from the languages, territories, and traditional cultural texts and practices of different Indigenous nations. Such festivals are relatively rare, but tend to come in three forms: play development festivals (represented here by Native Earth Performing Arts’s Weesageechak Begins to Dance in Toronto); festivals that represent multiple Indigenous nations within one latter-day nation-state (represented here by Full Circle’s Talking Stick Festival in Vancouver), and globally trans-Indigenous festivals (represented here by the Living Ritual International Indigenous Performing Arts Festival in Toronto in 2017, with which this chapter opened).
Weesageechak Begins to Dance completed its thirty-first annual edition over two weeks in November 2018, featuring new works and works in progress in theatre, dance, and opera.\textsuperscript{10} It also features work by emerging Indigenous artists who are part of the festival’s Animaking Creators Unit dedicated to the diversity of new Indigenous voices, and (since 2017) a 2 Spirit Cabaret produced in conjunction with Buddies in Bad Times (queer) theatre.\textsuperscript{11} Weesageechak is extraordinary in its intergenerational and interdisciplinary assemblage of developing work from First Nations across Turtle Island, and increasingly over the past decade, from Aotearoa and Aboriginal Australia as well, in instances of trans-Indigenous outreach and collaboration. Its focus on development is crucial in allowing it to support the exploration of new, or newly hybrid forms (such as Indigenous opera), and of new relationships across Indigenous nations within and beyond Turtle Island, without the pressures or expenses of full production. The focus, moreover, is on relationships within the room – between artists, directors, dramaturges, and local audiences from different Indigenous cultures, rather than on the festivalization of the space or the eventification and marketing of the festival for international or tourist consumption. Weesagechak is able to take risks. And, far from the competitive frenzy of many fringe festivals, the atmosphere at Weesageechak is one of mutual celebration. It is, in short, festive.

Vancouver’s Talking Stick Festival, presented annually by Full Circle: First Nations Performance, is a two-week interdisciplinary festival featuring traditional and contemporary visual arts, dance, theatre, music, powwow, and film by Indigenous artists from across what is now Canada. It was founded in 2001 in the wake of the experience of Full Circle founder and artistic director Margo Kane (Cree/Salteaux) performing her solo show, \textit{Moonlodge}, at the Festival of the Dreaming in the lead-up to the Sydney Olympics,\textsuperscript{12} an example of the beneficial effects of trans-Indigenous exchange. In 2018, Talking Stick featured, as ‘headliners’, \textit{Scháyilhen (Salmon Going Up the River)}, an exhibition curated by mixed-race Cree artist Richard Heikkilä-Sawan; \textit{Sokalo}, by Quebec’s [ZOGMA], a percussive dance company in collaboration with Vancouver’s Louis Riel Métis Dancers; \textit{Map of the Land, Map of the Stars}, a collective creation by Gwaandak Theatre in Whitehorse, Yukon, combining theatre, dance, and music; and ‘Reel Reservations’, a ‘cinematic Indigenous sovereignty series’ (Full Circle, ‘Headliners’). In addition, the festival offered a ‘family fun’ series consisting of Axis Theatre Company’s \textit{Th’owxiya: The Hungry Feast Dish}, a Theatre for Young Audiences show written by Joseph Dandurand
(Kwantlen First Nation); Raven Spirit Dance’s *Salmon Girl*, directed by Quelmina Sparrow (Musqueam) and choreographed by Michelle Olson (Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in); a Métis kitchen party; and a pow wow. There was also ‘Nightlife’, which included *Heartbeat! and Indigi Groove* (performance series featuring Tutchone/Tlingit, Métis, Squamish, and other musicians); *Indigifemme*, a burlesque performance exploring contemporary Indigenous sexualities; and a closing Kw’iyilshwit dance party. Finally, the festival hosted the four-day Scháyilhen Industry Series for presenters, artists, scholars, and audience members interested in the development of Indigenous arts. It was, in short, an extraordinarily eclectic and trans-Indigenous meta-performance, fulfilling the festival’s mandate to ‘to showcase and celebrate Indigenous art and performance to a wider audience’ (Full Circle First Nations Performance, ‘About’).

While *Weesageechak Begins to Dance* and *Talking Stick* are long-standing annual events, the small-scale Living Ritual Festival has only happened twice in a little over a decade, but, in spite of its size, is an example of a more widely transnational, trans-Indigenous event.\(^1\) The first festival in 2006, organized by Kaha:wi Dance Theatre’s Kahnnyen’kehà:ka (Mohawk) artistic director Tekaronhià:khwa Santee Smith from Six Nations of the Grand River, highlighted ‘ritual’, was subtitled ‘World Indigenous Dance Festival’, and featured traditional and community-based work. The second, in 2017, again organized by Smith (along with Kaha:wi’s Mohawk then general manager Cynthia Lickers-Sage), highlighted ‘living’, was subtitled ‘International Indigenous Performing Arts Festival’, and featured contemporary, interdisciplinary, and experimental work.

Living Ritual was in many ways exemplary in grounding its international trans-Indigeneity in the local and programming meaningful encounters among all participants in the form of workshops, panels, and keynote ‘provocations’ rather than the often-under-achieved aspirational rhetoric of festivals that are not so carefully curated. The 2017 iteration of the festival provided an opportunity for precisely the kinds of trans-Indigenous analysis that Chadwick Allen calls for by juxtaposing performances at Toronto’s Harbourfront ‘synchronically and globally’ (*Trans-Indigenous* xxvi) over three intensive days in July 2017. It was presented as a forum for dialogue on decolonization and artistic exploration, promoting trans-Indigenous creative cross-pollination. Living Ritual in 2017 was also deeply grounded in the cultures and practices of the Haudenosaunee (primarily Mohawk), who hosted artists from Turtle Island, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Australia as well as arrivant\(^1\) and white settler participants. The event opened with an Onkwehón:we Edge of the Woods
ceremony, in which visitors, having affirmed that they came in peace, were welcomed into the acknowledged territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabe (Mississaugas of the Credit River), and Huron-Wendat. In addition to songs, speeches, and smudging, each visitor was presented with a feather and a cup of water with which to clear the dust of travel from our eyes and ears and clear our throats in preparation to see, hear, and speak ‘in a good way’. The hour-long ceremony – a living ritual – was powerful and gracious, but, like every welcome (as Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson reminds us), it was also a declaration and acknowledgement of sovereignty. Indigenous visitors from Aotearoa, Australia, and elsewhere on Turtle Island also offered songs and greetings before the ceremony concluded with an all-inclusive Round Dance.

The brevity and scale of Living Ritual 2017 meant that all participants were there for the duration, and, in addition to sharing six eclectic dance, theatre, and dance-theatre performances in the evenings (open to a general public), they shared techniques and strategies throughout the day in a series of intensive workshops, shared positions in keynote provocations, and shared information and strategies at participatory panels on, for example, Indigenous ‘Process and Methodologies’, ‘Documentation’, ‘Platforms and Presence’, ‘Collaboration’, ‘Protocols for Consent’, and ‘Ensemble and Sovereignty’. The evening performances, two per evening, ranged from Indigenous variations on contemporary dance and documentary (or ‘documemory’), through Māori Kapa Haka and a mash-up of ‘hip hop, physical percussion, and rhythmic cultural pattern’ (Living Ritual), to theatricalized Inuit storytelling and, of course, the Spiderwoman-styled ‘storyweaving’ with which I began.

One of the strengths of the festival is that the artists not only saw one another’s work, but they participated in intensive workshops that allowed for deeper aesthetic, technical, political, and cultural exchange than is available at most festivals. These workshops provided some of the most invigorating moments of the festival, as when Kalaallit artist Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, from Iqaluit, Nunavut, orchestrated a participatory full-body workshop on the Greenlandic mask dance, uaajeerneq. Participants from various Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures around the world smeared our faces with black greasepaint (for humility) and then added white (to evoke the ancestors’ bones) and red (for female genitalia). Mouths were stuffed, grotesquely, with bits of apple and carrot (for male genitalia). (‘In our language’, Williamson-Bathory said, ‘the word for “art” is “the making of eccentric things.”’) We were instructed to squat, keeping our genitals close to the ground so there would be a connection between

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our sexual beings and the earth; to move our eyes around; and to explore, in an orgy of improvisation, our animal, glutton, sexual, male and/or female, scary and suggestive selves – a very visceral and earthy kind of transcultural, interpersonal exchange. From the other side of the world, the Māori Hawaiki TŪ Productions’ Kapa Haka warrior dance/theatre production of *Honanga* was complemented by a vigorous Kapa Haka workshop led by Beez Ngarino Watt, but also balanced by a different side of Māori culture through a much gentler workshop and solo performance, *Manawa*, by Taane Mete. Mete’s performative lecture and workshop was a highlight of the festival. Less demonstration than sharing, it began with a moving account of serving Mete’s mother by helping transport her to the other side, then shifted into a fluid solo dance-demonstration based on that experience, before concluding with a workshop in which he choreographed all of us, as participant-performers, in a delicate exercise of connecting sky and earth worlds through a bucket and a cloud. Simple, evocative, and empowering, it felt exemplary of the trans-Indigenous sharing that the festival set out to enable.

The Living Ritual Festival was limited in many ways. It was a small, physically and temporally contained event without the pressures of long-term sustainability. Although well-funded by the colonialist Canadian government’s ‘Canada 150’ programme, apart from the evening performances, it was not broadly advertised, in part, I assume, because it was intended to be dominated by the participating Indigenous artists and performers rather than curious onlookers. And the conference and workshop components mostly took place in the intimate space of the Fleck Dance Theatre’s lobby area, where Euro/Mushkegowuk Cree designer Andy Moro, of ARTICLE 11, had designed and installed a welcoming and flexible modular environment. This festival was not primarily meant for outsiders, and, while visitors were made welcome, there were very few white settlers in evidence. But, on its own terms, both physically and discursively, the festival enabled and modelled productive and empowering circles of conversation across latter-day artificial and divisive international boundaries, and it took care to situate itself on the land and to welcome visiting companies to bring their own land-based epistemologies and practices with them as guests. Living Ritual was a partial realisation of Allen’s vision of a trans-Indigeneity that ‘will require reviving old networks of trade and exchange – and creating new networks of Indigenous interactions as yet unimagined’ (‘Decolonizing’ 392).

I began this chapter asking what it would mean to see theatre and performance festivals, not as having begun within the competitive
framework of ancient Greece, but among the relational frameworks of resurgent Indigenous communities globally. The chapter has suggested that festivals can perhaps best function when they are both genuinely ‘internation’, and grounded in the land and the knowledge systems that emerge from it rather than in the deterritorializing and decontextualizing programming practices of many contemporary international festivals. As events participating in Indigenous resurgence globally, Indigenous festivals, in the words of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson about resurgent organizing more generally, are ‘necessarily place-based and local, but . . . also necessarily networked and global’ (178).

Notes
1 Storyweaving is a play creation method created by Muriel Miguel and employed by Spiderwoman in all of their work. It is used, according to Miguel, ‘to entwine stories and fragments of stories with words, music, song, film, dance and movement, thereby creating a production that is multi-layered and complex; an emotional, cultural, and political tapestry’ (qtd in Mojica 165). Miguel and Aanmitaagzi’s artistic director Penny Couchie (Mohawk and Anishinaabe) led a workshop on the technique at the festival.
2 ‘Internation’, referring to Indigenous nations, is a term used by Penny Couchie in a panel at the festival on Indigenous collaboration.
3 Indeed, Plains Cree director Floyd Favel, of the Poundmaker First Nation calls theatre (in an unfortunately gendered phrase), ‘the younger brother of tradition’, which, arriving relatively recently on Turtle Island from across the ‘Big Water’, shares with ceremony the capacity ‘to connect us to our “higher self”’ (31). Theatre, however, ‘has a social and cultural function and it serves the society while Tradition is at the service of spirit and spiritual forces’ (31). Favel situates Indigenous theatre in a ‘Shadow Zone’ between the two.
4 For a nineteenth-century anthropological account of the scroll, the ceremonies, and the Midē’wiwin see Hoffman, and for a late twentieth century account that attempts to encapsulate both European and Anishinaabe views of the ceremonies, see Angel.
5 Henceforth, unless they are identified by Indigenous nation, all scholars cited are understood to be non-Indigenous.
6 ‘Potlatch’, according to Clutesi, is an early European distortion of the Nootka words Pa-chitle, to give, and Pa-chuck, gift, which would have been heard frequently enough during the occasion to have been mistaken for the name of the event itself (10).
7 Mino-bimaadiziwin, Anishinaabemowin for ‘the good life’, is the result of living ‘in a good way’, according to the teachings of the ancestors. For the Anishinaabe, this involves Anishinaabemowin (language, ways of communicating), Inendamowin (ways of thinking), Gikendaasowin (ways of knowing),
Inaadiziwin (ways of being), Izhichigewin (ways of doing, or taking action), Enawendiiwin (ways of relating to all of creation, human and non-human – all our relations), and Gidakiiminaan (ways of relating to the earth and the environment). This is specific to the Anishinaabe, but most Indigenous nations, particularly on Turtle Island, have similar concepts that guide the people towards living ‘in a good way’, and the phrase has been widely adopted. See ‘Anishinaabe’; Seven Generations Education Institute.

8 Indeed, other Aboriginal communities within Australia who have lost many of their performance traditions in the wake of colonization draw upon and adapt those of Yolŋu as part of their own process of reconstruction and growth (see Magowan 313–14), to the point that ‘the dance traditions of Arnhem Land have played, and continue to play, a key role in the construction of indigeneity in Australia today’ (309).

9 ‘Pasifika’ is a term that is unique to Aotearoa/New Zealand but is roughly equivalent to ‘Oceana’ or ‘the Pacific Islands’. ‘Pacific peoples’, and ‘Pacific Islanders’, refer to the diverse Indigenous peoples of this vast region; ‘Polynesians’, ‘Melanesians’, and ‘Micronesians’ are regional trans-Indigenous designations. Otherwise island- or nation-specific terms are used wherever possible.

10 For the early history of Weesageechak Begins to Dance, see Preston.

11 The umbrella term 2 Spirit, coined in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1990, brings together culturally specific terminology from various Indigenous peoples. It refers to people who have both a male and female spirit within them, are ‘blessed by the creator to see life through the eyes of both genders’, and serve their different communities in different ways, often as ‘balance keepers’ (Enos).

12 I am indebted for this information to Lindsay Lachance (Algonquin Anishinaabe) and Selena Couture, who cite Kane’s interview with Michelle La Flamme (Creek/Métis). See Lachance and Couture; La Flamme.

13 For a more complete treatment of the Living Ritual Festival, see Knowles, ‘Because’.

14 ‘Arrivant’ is Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd’s term for non-Natives who live in Indigenous territory but share the experience of racialization and colonialism. In Canada, this often means refugees and immigrants of colour as well as the descendants of formerly enslaved peoples.

15 Onkwehon:we, in the Mohawk language, means ‘human beings forever’.

16 ‘Indigenous protocols of welcome’, Dylan Robinson points out, ‘remind guests that they are guests’ (16). I am using ‘sovereignty’ here as it is understood by many Indigenous scholars to mean more than Western legal definitions, which have to do with property, legal documents, ownership, and power over others, as opposed, for example, to ‘self-government’, broadly understood to include self-determination, control over one’s own culture, ‘spheres of autonomy’ (Anaya 79), ‘a regime of respect’ (Alfred 471), and what the Māori call ‘mana’, one meaning of which is ‘one’s standing in one’s own eyes’.