UNIVERSITÄT
DES
SAARLANDES

"Personal Totems"

The Poetics of the Popular in Contemporary Indigenous Popular Culture in North America

Dissertation

Zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades eines
Doktors der Philosophie
der Philosophischen Fakultät
der Universität des Saarlandes

vorgelegt von

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aus Saarbrücken

Saarbrücken, November 2018

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Tag der letzten Prüfungsleistung: 15. Juli 2016

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Acknowledgements

As is the case with any lengthy project, this study would not have been possible without the support of many people.

First of all, a warm thank you to my supervisor, Prof. Astrid M. Fellner, for her patience and guidance, intellectual support, thoughtful critique, constant encouragement, for always having my back and, perhaps above all else, her unwavering belief in me through it all.

Thank you to the entire team of the IRTG "Diversity: Mediating Difference in Transcultural Spaces," for financial and organizational support, first-rate mentorship, for providing us with so many amazing opportunities and creating an intellectual climate where thought-provoking exchange and warm friendship could flourish in equal measure. This dissertation would not be what it is without the IRTG community. And to all my IRTG doctoral colleagues and friends: thank you for sharing the journey!

To all my colleagues of the Chair of North American Literary and Culture Studies at Saarland University: thank you for all the encouragement and feedback, for regular pep talks and therapeutic coffee sessions, and for always, always cheering me on.

Last, but certainly not least, thank you to my parents and my son Christian for their support and understanding, for bearing with me, and for being my pillars without whom I could not stand.

The whole is more than the sum of its parts.

Aristotle

[I]f we cannot escape colonial relationships of inequality, neither are we the sum of these relations.

Elaine Coburn, *More Will Sing Their Way to Freedom*, p. 43.

A long time ago on a reservation far, far away, indigenous kids huddled under blankets with flashlights reading their comic books into the wee hours of the morning until their eyes fell heavy with sleep, much like other kids all over the world.

Charles Atlas Sheppard, "Nerdiginous Art"

Introduction: "Coming Home Through Stories"

> The old never dies; it gets supplemented by the new, and the result is diversity.
>
> Scott Lyons (Anishnaabe/Dakota)[1]

> We are all related but we are not the same. It is the variety of meanings and interpretations that make life truthful.
>
> Marjorie Beaucage (Métis)[2]

> And yes—we, too, are stars and starpoints of light in the sky, constellations of brilliance that spiral with the turning of the heavens across time and space, touching the past and future simultaneously, part of an expansive and expanding evolving body of peoples and literatures, intellect and artistry.
>
> ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui (Kanaka Maoli)[3]

In her award-winning novel *The Round House* (2012), Louise Erdrich (Anishinaabe) tells the story of Joe, a thirteen-year old Anishinaabe boy from a reservation in North Dakota who is a passionate *Star Trek: The Next Generation* aficionado. Remembering the great lengths he and his friends had to go to in order to gain access to the show in the face of limited technological opportunities their reservation provided, Joe's narrative voice casually notes: "We loved *Star Wars*, had our favorite quotes, but we lived in *TNG*" (*Round House* 24). After dwelling in detail on the faults and virtues and particularities of the show's most prominent characters, Joe gives the reasons for his and his friends' enduring obsession with *TNG* and explains why this obsession is important:

> The reason I go into this is that because of this show we set ourselves apart. We made drawings, cartoons, and even tried to write an episode. We pretended we had special knowledge. We were starting to get our growth and we were anxious how we'd turn out. In *TNG* we weren't skinny, picked on, poor, motherless, or scared. We were cool because no one else knew what we were talking about. (*Round House* 25)

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[1] Lyons 4.
[2] Beaucage 139.
[3] ho'omanawanui 680.

What this passage illustrates is the enigma popular culture and its products can exert on their audiences and the meaning-making practices these popular cultural products often elicits. Joe's experiences show how, particularly to young audiences, popular storyworlds have the potential to serve as a source of identification around which large aspects of one's self-understanding are built.

But not only that: for Joe and his friends *Star Trek* also provides a shared communal meaning, one which transforms them from a group to a community with a sense of belonging and a distinct archive of knowledge grounded in the show's mythology—their very own "special knowledge" (*Round House* 25). This archive, well-rounded as it is by the show's producers, is still open for the boys' intervention and is subject to expansion through their own creative effort. The boys interact with the outside world partially through the content of the *TNG* and other popular knowledge archives and the meaning they distill from them. In a later scene in the novel, they go so far as to conceptualize their own physiology through the lens of the popular—in this case, the *Star Wars* franchise—as they compare each other's penises:

> Zack had a Darth Vader, circumcised, and I did too. Cappy's and Angus's still had their hoods, so they were Emperors. We argued over whether it was better to be an Emperor or a Darth Vader—which one girls liked better. (*Round House* 77)

Using such narrative strategies of popular intertextuality, the novel not only points towards the importance of popular archives for Erdrich's characters, but also challenges the readers in their familiarity with those same archives. Showing how young boys' thought processes and meaning-making practices are often structured through popular narratives, the novel demonstrates the tension between insider-outsider knowledge of the popular: while most people in North America and beyond would know what *Star Wars'* Darth Vader and the Emperor look like and would therefore "get" the visual basis of the boys' comparisons, the entire depth of their interpretations and sense-making can only be approached by those closely familiar with the narrative universe in question. As Joe's explanations clearly demonstrate, the fact of being privy to such special knowledge strengthens the group-feeling of the boys, and their ability to use popular science fictional

vocabulary as a code in their conversations gives them a sense of empowerment. This sense of empowerment originates in and is illustrative of a recent paradigm shift in popular assessment of what is commonly called geek culture: while only a decade or two ago being called a "nerd" or "geek" rated as an insult, in the present cultural moment both terms have acquired a measure of coolness, as did cultural spaces and contents within which geek culture is being lived and perpetuated. As Judith Kohlenberger persuasively argues, "the former derogative 'nerd' has been re-appropriated into an expression of teenage approval. [...] Today, the geeks have taken center stage as admirable heroes and witty protagonists" (11).

The general idea of the power of stories over lived experience of individuals and communities which Erdrich communicates with the theme of boys' involvement with popular culture in her novel corresponds to the profound importance stories tend to have for Indigenous cultures and worldviews. In his influential essay "Coming Home through Stories," Cree scholar Neal McLeod outlines this importance not only for Indigenous cultures in general but for the ongoing project of decolonization and dealing with the colonial situation in particular. Though, as McLeod asserts, in a colonial situation which brings with it asymmetrical power relations "the dominated group tends to lose some of its narratives" ("Coming Home" 18), agency can still be exercised in and through storytelling. Actively practicing storytelling allows a colonized people to come back to and rebuild what McLeod calls "an ideological home," a term which denotes "the interpretative location of a people" ("Coming Home" 19). For McLeod, the foundation of the process of "coming home," however, does not lie in "a bi-polar differentiation between colonizer and colonized" ("Coming Home" 24), nor in the "romantization of the past" which such dualistic thinking sometimes espouses ("Coming Home" 24). Rather, it rests on "the experience of discerning the liminal space between Cree culture and mainstream society" ("Coming Home" 20):[4] "In the face of colonial pressure, one can struggle to retain an Indigenous

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[4] McLeod's argument, of course, does not only hold true in relation to Cree culture, but also for other North American Indigenous nations: the power of stories is one of the central worldview paradigms which unite virtually all of them.

identity through a process of 'hybridization' […]. The narratives of the colonizer can be subverted through a shifting of interpretative reality and space" (McLeod, "Coming Home" 25). In this among many other views, stories are the key to decolonization.

Through its use of the archives of Eurowestern popular culture as an interpretative meaning-making lens for its young Anishinaabe protagonist, Erdrich's *The Round House* at the same time participates in and contributes to just such a "shifting of interpretative reality and space" (McLeod, "Coming Home" 25). In a way, it shows that the strength of their attachment to stories, even though the way this attachment is lived in a practical sense may be very different, is what unites Indigenous people and popular culture fandoms[5]: to make sense of his reality, Joe uses both popular culture and Indigenous lenses and storytelling in a complementary way, and they appear to have an equally strong impact on his self-understanding and identification as contemporary Indigenous person. At the same time, the interplay of popular and traditional archives[6] and discourses as presented in the novel is complex and dynamic and a clear separation between them can be achieved only in a heuristic sense. The novel accurately mirrors the dynamic of contemporary relationship of Indigenous people with popular culture: it portrays its Indigenous protagonists are active subjects and producers of popular culture rather than stereotyped, one-dimensional objects of (mis)representation. While Erdrich's novel merely features Indigenous engagement with Eurowestern popular culture as one of its themes, other contemporary Indigenous artists of different disciplines, walks of life and tribal affiliations embody this engagement, producing

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[5] This statement is not to deny that popular fandom communities can be a very biased, racist and generally uncomfortable place for non-dominant groups to be. The comparison is only drawn on a very basic level of assigning stories great relevance for the lived experience, even though the context and specific meaning of this assignation by Indigenous communities and individuals is often profoundly different from the ones cultivated by Eurowestern popular fandoms.

[6] In the following, I understand "popular archives" as the body of figures, themes, narrative types, and tropes which recognizably belong to the twenty-first century mainstream popular culture. When speaking of "traditional archives", on the other hand, I mean the historically and culture-specific elements and themes which are recognizably part of the generationally transmitted narratives belonging to various Indigenous nations in North America. It is important to note that this distinction is not made in order to establish or perpetuate a binary opposition between these two cultural archives, and certainly not to enforce any kind of hierarchy of cultural production. Instead, the distinction is to be understood as purely analytical, made for the purpose of enabling a better understanding of cultural dynamics and processes of cultural exchange which play an important role in the meaning-making practices of Indigenous popular culture.

works of art, literature and audiovisual and digital media which are *of* popular culture rather than *about* it. Such artistic productions are the central topic of this study. For the purposes of this study, I propose to call this cultural phenomenon as well as this field of inquiry Indigenous popular culture.

For many people not immersed in the field and unfamiliar with the cultural artifacts in question, the term "Indigenous popular culture" may sound like an oxymoron. The news of the existence of an epic fantasy trilogy by a Cherokee author or an Anishinaabe vampire novel tends to come as a surprise for many audiences. The roots of this surprise effect, I believe, lie in the extensive and ongoing cultural stereotyping which portrays Indigenous peoples of North America as a vanishing race, as being of and belonging to the past. Incidentally, *Visions of a Vanishing Race* is also the title of a collection of photographs by a famous early twentieth-century photographer Edward Sheriff Curtis.[7] According to Pauline Turner Strong, Curtis deliberately staged his photographs in anachronistic ways and "erased clocks and other signs of modern life in his widely distributed photographs of Native individuals" to keep up the illusion of "exoticism and 'authenticity'" (6). Evidently, any association of Indigenous people with even the most basic products of European technology destroyed the illusion.

There is much evidence that this process of discursive archaization of Indigenous people continues into the present; far from being a thing of the past, in

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[7] Curtis' book, of course, is far from the only example of the vanishing race discourse. In fact, such rhetoric has been (and continues to be) routinely applied to the Indigenous nations of North America since shortly after contact, but especially during the nineteenth century and after the so-called closure of the frontier at the end of the nineteenth century. A number of classics of American literature portray Indigenous peoples as doomed or vanishing, most prominent examples being James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855). The discursive impact of such literature on the relations between colonial states and Indigenous people received a fair amount of critical attention. In their discussion of *The Last of the Mohicans*, Barker and Sabin write: [W]hile *Mohicans* was part of the construction of the American myth, it also played a part in molding symbolic representations of native (sic) Americans and preparing the way for their maltreatment" (9). In his 1969 seminal study *The Return of the Vanishing American*, Leslie Fiedler traced the theme of the "vanishing Indian" in American literature and analyzed it in detail. Also in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the vanishing race discourse is far from overcome. In 1922-23, Zane Grey published a novel titled *The Vanishing American* which, though sympathetic in its portrayal of the plight of Indigenous people living under colonialism and critical of the colonial state system and practices, still partakes of the same discourse of vanishing and disappearance (in 1925, the novel was adapted to film under the same title). Fatimah Tobin Rony persuasively argues that the ethnographic film, especially of the first half of the twentieth century, also perpetuates the portrayal of Indigenous peoples as a vanishing race, engaging in what Rony calls "cinematic taxidermy" (qtd. in Pearson and Knabe, "Globalizing Indigenous Film" 4). For a closer discussion of the "vanishing Indian" trope, see pp. 110-112 of this study.

the twenty-first century it is ongoing and powerful. In his influential book *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Philip J. Deloria examines how "a broad set of cultural expectations about Indian people" (3) not only negatively influences the image of Indigenous people the public entertains, but also discursively denies them access to and participation or expertise in any aspect of modernity, including contemporary popular culture which is often seen as the epitome of modern cultural production and technological savviness. Expectations as discursive constructions, Deloria contends, have far-reaching consequences not only in the realm of social relations but also in law, politics and matters of resource distribution:

> Primitivism, technological incompetence, physical distance, and cultural difference—these have been the ways many Americans have imagined Indians […], and such images have remained familiar currency in contemporary dealings with Native people. It is crucial, then, that we question expectations and explore their origins, for they created—and they continue to reproduce—social, political, legal, and economic relations that are asymmetrical, sometimes grossly so. (4)

The perceived oddity and unexpectedness of Indigenous popular culture existing falls into the category of such ideologically charged cultural expectations: in this sense, Indigenous science fiction which partakes of discourses of technoscience is unexpected because one of the central aspects of the discursive construction "Indian" is that he or she is supposed to be pre- or a-technological. In Deloria's view, while such perceptions in and of themselves are "not malicious or hateful or nasty" (3), but they do spring from cultural expectations[8] which are brought to bear on contemporary Indigenous people, expectations whose real-life effects often *are* harmful in a very material sense. As Deloria puts it, "[y]ou might see in *expectation* the ways in which popular culture works to produce—and sometimes to compromise—racism and misogyny" (11). Indigenous popular culture is an artistic and discursive field which works precisely to compromise the racism that mainstream popular culture has been and is producing and perpetuating.

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[8] Here and in the following, I use and understand "expectations" in Philip Deloria's sense, "as a shorthand for the dense economies of meaning, representation, and act that have influenced both American culture writ large and individuals, both Indian and non-Indian. I would like you to think of expectations in terms of the colonial and imperial relations of power and domination existing between Indian people and the United States" (Deloria 11).

As various case studies in Deloria's book aptly show, the perceived discrepancy between popular culture and Indigenous people is an attitude which has history—his focus in the book is the period around the turn of the twentieth century, as he traces evidence of Indigenous participation in sports, film industry, technology and music scene. This means that, ever since the discourse of modernity began to emerge and consolidate, Indigenous people have been discursively construed as standing apart from it, even though, from the start, the reality told a different story. Deloria understands his book as an attempt to tell

> a history that wishes to smash apart the expectations that continue to linger in far too many American hearts and souls. Those expectations have concerned, among other things, Native technological incapacity, natural proclivities towards violence and warfare, a lack of social development, distance from both popular and aesthetic culture, and an inability to engage a modern capitalist market economy. (230)

Denying Indigenous people access to and participation in modernity, hegemonic discourses by implication shut them out of partaking of both popular culture and the consumer culture in general (of which popular culture is an inseparable part). Indigenous popular culture, in its turn, not only tells a counter-history which, similar to Deloria's book project, corrects such notions of incompatibility, but actually embodies it. As a distinct body of cultural texts, it not only participates in contemporary mainstream popular culture, but actively shapes it. In Deloria's words, "In this and other cases […], the agency of people of color has to be seen less in the terms 'we had a voice' or 'we were there too' and more as an affirmative statement: 'We have always participated in the *production* of modern discourse—and of modernity itself'" (238, emphasis in original).

This productive participation continues into the twenty-first century, as do the challenges it faces. Representations and expectations like those Deloria lists are to a large extent responsible for the fact that, in Western popular imagination, Indigenous people became firmly relegated to the past. At the same time, and similarly erroneously, popular culture tends to be viewed as a mode of cultural

production which is necessarily and by definition contemporary.[9] Such popular misconceptions, which are essentially grounded in colonial and imperialist ideologies of superiority, lead to Indigenous people and Eurowestern popular culture still often being viewed as unlikely bed fellows. However, as artists like Kent Monkman (Cree), Sonny Assu (Kwakwaka´wakw), Brain Jungen (Dunne-za First Nation) or Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit/Aleut) become ever more present in the public domain, the general public begins to realize that not only physically and politically, but also culturally and artistically, Indigenous people of North America are far from vanished and their culture(s) is/are evolving as much as any other. As Archer Pechawis (Cree), one of contemporary Indigenous popular artists, puts it:

> "Native culture" is often seen (by both Native and non-native, sadly) as being some monolithic, non-changing thing, immutable and permanent. this is ridiculous. all cultures change and adapt. this is what makes them "culture", and not "history": they live. my "Native culture" is as "modern and everchanging" as quantum mechanics, which have been around for more than one hundred years. (qtd. in Maskegon-Iskwew 211-12)

Put bluntly, "Aboriginal artists in Canada are a contemporary people, creating contemporary art, with contemporary sensibilities" (Townsend xiii). This statement is not only true of visual arts, but also of literature, film and digital media.

Before delving further into the subject of Indigenous popular culture and attempting a definition, it is necessary to consider popular culture in general more closely. As a cultural arena and a field of inquiry, popular culture is notoriously

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[9] Such an assumption, of course, is in itself another misconception, but is nonetheless quite common. Popular culture as a mode of cultural production certainly did not begin with the US-dominated globalized popular culture of today, but had existed for as long as artistic cultural production itself. In her discussion of the work of Joss Whedon, a contemporary popular TV and film producer whose list of productions include such cult classics of TV as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly*, Rhonda V. Wilcox draws a connection between Whedon and Shakespeare, "both (we would do well to remember) popular culture figures of their own day" (Wilcox 2): "The director of Atlanta's Shakespeare Tavern, for one, declares that 'if William Shakespeare were alive today, he'd be Joss Whedon' […]" (Wilcox 2). Diana E. Henderson argues that Shakespeare's "story convincingly demonstrates the instability of the line dividing high and low, elite and popular, revealing the multiple (and sometimes colliding) meanings of those terms" (6). However, despite the academic awareness of Shakespeare's popular standing and notwithstanding his firm presence in contemporary popular culture (for example in films such as *Shakespeare in Love* or Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Julia*, or even in Whedon's own interpretation in his recent film adaptation of *Much Ado about Nothing*), in today's collective imagination the semantic field of the term "popular" has evolved in such a way that, hearing it, people have a tendency to instinctively think of Marvel heroes rather than Shakespearean plays.

difficult to define. Much debate has been generated around questions of what exactly the "popular" in popular culture entails and how to separate popular culture as a phenomenon from the hierarchical thinking which assesses cultural artifacts from the position of value judgment. Simon Frith sees this elusiveness as in itself constitutive of popular culture, pointing out that "the essence of popular culture is its conceptual slipperiness, its fluidity, and lack of clear definition" (2). This excessive open-endedness of popular culture is so prominent that it prompts John Storey to interpret it as "in effect an *empty* conceptual category, one that can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use" (1, emphasis in original). While this nebulousness makes popular culture a challenging object of study, the possibilities for practitioners, for artist and fans, are virtually limitless.

And it is ultimately the practitioners that matter. In her recent book *Interrogating Popular Culture: Key Questions*, Stacey Takacs asserts that the "popular" of popular culture lies in involvement and interaction—between producers and consumers as well as between members of the audience among themselves. When observed from this point of view, popular culture is about "the expression of people's interests, choices, and activities" (Takacs 6). Consequently, one of the main features of popular culture becomes the fact that, within it, "people are active agents in the production of cultural meanings and pleasures and that they use the raw materials provided by the cultural industries to enact their agency" (Takacs 6). Thus, popular culture is not only an arena of interactive creativity but also a potential framework where the status quo may be challenged: though popular culture is not always *necessarily* subversive, *potentially* it is. This is particularly true of science fiction, a storied landscape which, among flashy space ships and mind-blowing genetic mutations, nearly always hides a sharp social critique, or at least a potential for such. Similar to Donna Haraway's cyborgs, popular culture is everywhere and nowhere in that respect, often too glittery to be taken seriously as an arena of politics. Haraway writes: "The ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs is precisely why these sunshine-belt machines are so deadly. They are as hard to see politically as materially" (Haraway 153). If we transfer Haraway's cyborg analogy onto popular culture, her argument continues to hold: the flashy appearance of

popular cultural products and narratives often distracts from its effectiveness in terms of political and cultural change. This inconspicuousness has the potential to drastically increase popular culture's actual impact on the hegemonic mindset. Thus, the antics of popular entertainment always carry within the seeds of subversion.

Hence, even though it tends to be seen as a pastime on a rather mindless and escapist end, popular culture is not divorced from politics. As Liesbet van Zoonen shows in her book *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*, popular entertainment is and has to be part of politics just as politics is and has to be part of entertainment (3). The politics of representation in particular are an inherent part of popular culture, though they and their effects often go unnoticed. In more ways than one contemporary popular culture is a battleground of representations. As such, "popular culture may be used to contest the agenda-setting power of the socially dominant" (Takacs 90). As John Fiske famously theorized, popular culture is a field whose political potential is defined by what he calls "semiotic power, that is, power to make meanings" (*Reading the Popular* 10):

> So semiotic resistance that not only refuses the dominant meanings but constructs oppositional ones that serve the interest of the subordinate is as vital a base for the redistribution of power as is evasion. The ability to think differently, to construct one's own meanings of self and of social relations, is the necessary ground without which no political action can hope to succeed. (*Reading the Popular* 10)

Popular culture, therefore, provides an effective platform on which politics can be engaged: one text or image at a time, popular culture challenges dominant ideologies on the level of everyday lived experience. Particularly for disadvantaged groups whose subordination is held in place through strategic negative or misrepresentation to the extent to which it is the case for Indigenous people, popular culture constitutes a political battlefield. The kind of "guerilla raids" (Fiske, *Reading the Popular* 12) against the status quo which can be undertaken through popular culture, according to Fiske, are potentially even more effective in terms of a material change in social relations than direct defiance:

> [T]he resistances of popular culture are not just evasive or semiotic: they do have a social dimension at the micro level. And at this micro level they may well act as a constant erosive force upon the macro, weakening the system from within so that it is more amenable to change at the structural level. (*Reading the Popular* 11)

In that way, popular culture can be seen as participating directly not only in politics of representation but also in representational politics.

Finally, an important role in popular culture's appeal and enigma lies in its communal vision. This is another defining feature of popular culture—it is at the same time self-conscious and outward-oriented; in other words, both creators and consumers are mindful of each other. The nature of popular involvement is in many respects affective and rooted in emotional identification with the material. Such identification "involves immersion and interactivity, it is both intimate and engaged. We both invest in the text or practice and personalize it in a way that makes it relevant to us" (Takacs 153). This means that, where popular narratives are concerned, "the power of stories lies in the connections they foster between characters and viewers" (Takacs 173). In the next step, real-life connections are encouraged and forged, from producers to consumers, from consumers to consumers, from individuals to groups. Contemporary popular productions consciously aim at inspiring fan involvement. Around that involvement, fandoms, or "communities of affinity" (Takacs 182) are built:

> These communities of affinity, or **fandoms**, provide mutual aid and support to their members, give them an outlet for their passions and their creativity, and help them expand their horizons by putting them in touch with like-minded but experientially different individuals. (Takacs 182, emphasis in original)

Such communities of affinity effectively embody a popular production or a fictional storyworld in the real world—in the case of conventions and Live Action Role Playing events (LARPs), quite literally—and develop dynamics which affect the real world. So fan forums can develop into sites for political discussion, whether conceptualized in terms of the fictional content or not, and comic cons—into productive events of competing representations, while online fan groups often

become safe spaces which individuals turn to in times of personal crises and psychological stress.

All of these aspects of popular culture inform Indigenous popular culture, albeit in specific ways. For the purposes of this study, I define Indigenous popular culture as a field of cultural production which encompasses cultural texts that make use of specific recurrent tropes, icons, and genres of globalized (mainly American, but also others, for instance, Japanese) popular culture and simultaneously are situated in contemporary discourses on Indigeneity and Indigenous cultural contexts. These are cultural texts in which Indigenous voices of today sound alongside the multiple echoes of Indigenous pasts, colonial and pre-colonial. Apart from being mediators of the past, many of these texts are also meditations on the future, whether hopeful or dystopian. To the extent that their use of Eurowestern popular archives in order to combat colonial misrepresentations and address issues of contemporary coloniality and decolonization informs and unites them, these texts may be called, in Chadwick Allen's terms, "Trans-Indigenous" (*Trans-Indigenous* xxii). At the same time, the Indigenous "raw materials" (Takacs 6) with which different texts work differ, at least partially, in their cultural specificities—from languages to cultural and narrative archives to particularities of historical experiences. To name but a few examples: Daniel Heath Justice's fantasy trilogy is grounded in Cherokee epistemologies, Drew Hayden Taylor's vampire novel uses Anishinaabe cultural archive as one of its central sources, and Eden Robinson's fiction is spun around Haisla cultural traditions and everyday realities. This cultural multivocality may be seen as one of the integral defining features of Indigenous popular culture.

The opportunity for politically charged intervention which, as discussed above, popular culture offers is an important aspect which renders it so fruitful a field for Indigenous artists and concerns. The majority of these artists, regardless of the discipline in which they work, are also real-life activists. This comes as no surprise. In the words of Drew Hayden Taylor, "being born Native in Canada is a political statement in itself. So anything to do with an oppressed people and telling their story is bound to have some level of politics" (Interview 193). As noted above, in the cultural texts that may be considered part of Indigenous popular culture, authors and artists adapt various popular tropes and genre conventions to reflect

contemporary Indigenous needs and issues. These texts, then, at the same time communicate with mainstream popular culture and subvert it for the purposes of the projects of decolonization and resurgence, projects the scope of which prominently features politics. Apart from being entertainment, virtually each of the texts of Indigenous popular culture is ultimately an activist text.

Cultural productions of Indigenous popular culture both reflect the spirit of resurgence and participate in it as contributing cultural artifacts. In fact, I believe that Indigenous resurgence is the larger political, social and cultural framework of reference within which contemporary Indigenous popular culture operates. A concept centered on "joyful affirmation of individual and collective Indigenous self-determination" (Coburn 25), Indigenous resurgence is the most prominent conceptual framework of Indigeneity in twenty-first century North America and Idle No More is the most vocal politically-oriented movement to serve as a mouthpiece of resurgence in the realm of public discourse. Explaining resurgence, Elaine Coburn argues:

> Clearly, […] bare survival is not adequate for meaningful existence. Indigenous resurgence thus is more that resistance; it is about the reinvention of diverse, specifically Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing. Put another way, if resistance signifies challenges to colonial practices and ideas, resurgence decenters colonialism by reimagining and re-creating diverse Indigenous worldviews and practices. Of course, any particular empirical practice may contain elements of both, so that the analytical distinction becomes a matter of interpretative practice. (32-33)

Emma LaRocque argues with even more force that "what may be called 'resurgence' today is actually a continuation of Indigenous resistance and resilience" (Foreword 18). Following LaRocque and Coburn, I understand Indigenous resistance and resurgence not as rivals, opposites or polarities but as continuity. In this view, resurgence does not exclude resistance; it builds upon it. Generally speaking, we could say resurgence is resistance 2.0: both are ultimately geared towards a decolonized world, but resurgence as a term serves to emphasize the tendency to give "joyful affirmation" (Coburn 25) focused on the people precedence over engaging or talking back to the colonial settler state. For that reason, resurgence might be best described as a sensibility rather than a movement.

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One of the foremost features of resurgence is that it allows for extremely diverse forms of enactment. Doing resurgence is an act of creative expression, however defined. Resurgence can be performed through projects like Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning[10] just as well as it can be performed through superheroes, be it in comic books, animated productions like Jay Odjick's *Kagagi*, or in paintings and prints of artists like Sonny Assu, Jeffrey Veregge or Andy Everson, where Indigenous Northwest Coast formline designs and forms break through the surface of images of Stormtroopers, Spiderman, GI Joe and other icons of the whitewashed mainstream popular culture. It is my contention that works and productions of Indigenous popular culture, to use Helen Hoy's words, are "seeking less predictable imaginings, alternative to both the old negative stereotypes and the well-meaning replacements" (167). By writing Indigenous people and their diverse cultural and knowledge archives into the space of popular culture, Indigenous popular artists "joyfully affirm" contemporary Indigenous presence on the land and in the society, and thus participate in the resurgent discourse and action. At the same time, popular culture icons, tropes and genres reinterpreted by Indigenous artists not only address Indigenous audiences, particularly Indigenous youth, in a relatable manner, but also reflect back to the settler culture, exposing its set of Delorian "expectations" (4). The perceived peculiarity of an Indigenous superhero makes visible the extent of whitewashing which the superhero narrative field on the whole displays; the mythological estrangement that a Windigo as the villain-of-the-piece causes makes visible the pervasive domination of Eurocentric mythopoeia in North American societies and cultural industries.

Another important indicator of Indigenous popular culture's resurgent potential and impact is the fact that it serves as a reservoir of knowledges. Neal McLeod writes: "To tell a story is to link, in the moments of telling, the past to the present, and the present to the past" ("Coming Home" 17). Indigenous popular storytelling does just that. One the one hand, writers and artists encode pieces of Indigenous epistemological and, increasingly, linguistic archives into their popular works; on

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[10] Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning is a remote immersive educational facility which specializes in teaching Northern and Indigenous knowledges. It is situated in Blachford Lake Lodge in Canadian Northwest Territories. For more information about the program, see Dechinta's website: http://www.dechinta.ca.

the other hand, the use of popular culture allows them to reach Indigenous (and also, importantly, non-Indigenous) youth more easily, since, for better or worse, they grew up surrounded with stories and productions of Eurowestern popular culture, are familiar with them and fond of aspects of them. Interweaving as they do traditional and popular elements, Indigenous popular stories contribute to bringing together ancestral knowledges and future generations of Indigenous people. By doing so, they fulfill the transmitting function of storytelling which McLeod points out when he writes: "Stories act as the vehicles of cultural transmission by linking one generation to the next" ("Coming Home" 33). Thus, Indigenous popular culture participates in what Jeff Denis calls "intellectual and cultural revitalization efforts" (215). It helps to achieve such revitalization by reaching out particularly to the young people: it contributes to strengthening their bonds—or, perhaps, in some cases altogether reconnecting them—to their respective Indigenous cultures as well as to global Indigenous struggles and concerns, while at the same time recognizing their cultural positionality within the lager contemporary cultural context.

At the same time, Indigenous popular texts write Indigenous people into the archive of Eurowestern popular culture on their own terms which does not only achieve adequate representation where before demeaning stereotyping ruled, but also (re-)educates non-Indigenous audiences about Indigenous histories, issues and experiences. This process reflects back to Indigenous people and communities by boosting their cultural self-esteem which centuries of colonial discourse has corroded and undermined. As Denis argues, "intellectual and cultural revitalization efforts inform the emotional realm in which shame is increasingly replaced by pride in Indigenous identities and a desire to learn and apply traditional knowledge and skills to contemporary world" (2015-16). On the practical level, this aspect is also connected to the issue of "the material control of the means of producing images" (Coburn 36) and narratives: participation in popular cultural activities potentially allows Indigenous artists to gain increasing access to resources, technological means and cultural sites of image production, which in turn makes possible a wider distribution of corrected images and adequate representation. Jeff Denis observes:

Many Indigenous peoples seek well-paid jobs and opportunities in mainstream society (e.g. Environics 2010). At the same time, they seek to protect and revitalize traditional cultures and communities and to live as Indigenous peoples, on their lands, according to their laws and principles […]. Increasingly, they expect to be able to do both. Self-determination does not mean rejecting everything Western, but choosing whether and how to engage with or use traditional knowledge and practices. (213)

Indigenous popular culture both embodies and participates in this social and cultural development. It represents not only a site of cultural activity and representation but also, potentially, a way to earn a living.

The rapid development of technologies and global networks as well as alternative means of securing resources such as crowdfunding significantly widen the range of options as far as practical means of cultural production are concerned. One good example of this is the recently published anthology *Moonshot: The Indigenous Comics Collection, Volume 1*, a collection of comics by various Indigenous writers and artists the production of which was funded by a Kickstarter campaign. The book has received much acclaim, including rave reviews on Amazon and a place on School Library Journal's "Best Books 2015" list. As independent production models—from YouTube to Kickstarter—become more common and sophisticated, more success stories like this are likely to follow, creating more opportunities and a climate for young Indigenous artists to come forward and share their vision unencumbered by constrains of large cultural industries. The growing number of organized sites, such as publishing houses or online streaming services, dedicated to Indigenous content and run by Indigenous executives also creates suitable, open and more easily accessible outlets for Indigenous creativity and culturally responsible marketing.

In his essay entitled "Popular Totems," Laich-kwil-tach visual artist Sonny Assu critically assesses Indigenous audience's engagement with images of contemporary popular culture in North America, stating:

[T]he fact of the matter is that my generation and the generation after me have felt the effects of consumer culture since we began to walk. And this is why I believe that, as pop culture generation, we have the right to use these icons as our own personal totems: we are so inundated

by items and imagery of pop culture, we also have the right to use it as a way to dictate our own lineage. Yes, we are the Pepsi Generation. (139)

At the same time, popular figures and narratives, as, for example, vampire stories, epic fantasy or superhero narratives are what Jennifer K. Stuller calls

American culture's modern expression of myth. […] Modern myth serves a function similar to that of ancient myth, namely, telling and hearing stories helps us make sense of our lives. Narratives reflect the world and comment on it as they document events and also imagine them. (Stuller 3)

Taking my cue from these two assertions, the aim of my project is to examine closely a selection of contemporary works by Native American and First Nations Canadian authors that incorporate various aspects of mainstream Eurowestern popular culture and/or work with popular genre fiction. I am interested in what exact ways popular stories and icons become reinterpreted to mirror the issues that concern Indigenous people of today's North America; that is, I am interested—in Assu's terms—how they become "personal totems," and what constitutes the significance of this reinterpretation.

In my thesis, I argue that through the use of popular genres of fiction and alternative means of storytelling (other-than-print media, (fan) activity in cyberspace), the texts of Indigenous popular culture contribute to a revival and reformulation of Indigenous mythologies and epistemologies so as to adapt them to the realities of Indigenous experiences within the present-day cultural moment, landscape, and mediascape. In my work, therefore, I am also concerned with modes and models of cultural relationality and cultural dialogic practices and pathways as implemented by North American Indigenous authors/producers.

I believe that reinterpretation of Eurowestern generic conventions from a standpoint of non-Western, in this case, Indigenous, cultural and epistemological archives constitutes an example of one of such cultural dialogic practices. Such generic reinterpretation is part and parcel of a great majority of Indigenous popular texts, simply because a high degree of genre consciousness is one of the central characteristics of popular culture in general and popular fiction in particular:

"Popular fiction is, essentially, genre fiction. Whereas genre is less overtly important to literary fiction, the field of popular fiction simply cannot live without it, both culturally *and* industrially" (Gelder 1-2, emphasis in original). With distinct genres come distinct generic conventions, a set of default characteristics which the narrative is expected to engage in more or less detailed way. Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly, it is exactly in diverging from these conventions or in combining them in unexpected ways that most intriguing innovations in the field of popular narratives usually take place. The active subversion of genre conventions allows Indigenous artists, on the one hand, to expose imperialist representational patters encoded in such genres as vampire fiction, epic fantasy or science fiction, to name a few—patterns that have become normalized to a degree that they often go completely unnoticed by readers and audiences; on the other hand, these genre conventions become re-directed through Indigenous narrative and epistemological pathways and made to serve Indigenous causes. What results is a complex interplay of form and content, where the form is determined by Eurowestern genre conventions, but the content is filled with Indigenously-defined and –centered elements, so that the generic form becomes no more than a container for Indigenous expression and creativity.

Indigenous subversion of mainstream popular genre conventions is a strategy which potently defies expectations on several levels: first, it thwarts expectations roused by genre conventions by populating the narrative with Indigenous characters and bending it in accordance to Indigenous experiences and worldviews; second, it challenges expectations invested into the image of Indigenous peoples, expectations produced by mainstream cultural industries and representations which often portray Indigenous peoples as stoic, nostalgically romantic, broken, inferior or pre-modern. Thus, for non-Indigenous audiences, it is the element of surprise, the unexpected that is likely to define the response. For Indigenous audiences, on the other hand, it is the experience of (self-) recognition that is potentially most powerful: after decades of popular misrepresentation or complete absence from popular narratives, they finally see themselves narratively included into the contemporary cultural and social reality as protagonists and well-rounded

characters who adequately represent and address issues of importance to contemporary Indigenous communities.

Popular cultural narratives tend to be sensitive to formulas. In fact, formulas often play a crucial part in these narratives' popular appeal: "As scholarship on plot formulas has shown, reading (or viewing) pleasure is as much derived from the proficient use of familiar, hence reassuring structures as from invention and variation" (Kohlenberger 100, n. 14). George N. Dove writes:

> [W]hen traditions become established and acceptable to later readers, they become conventions which are necessary for a viable relationship between author and reader, and hence a formulaic framework within which both feel comfortable. (8)

In the case of Indigenous popular narratives, the tension between the familiar and the inventive, however, is even more layered. Indigenous popular artists' play with genre formulas reshuffles the distribution of familiarity, de-familiarizing the plot structures and character constellations for non-Indigenous audiences even as they re-familiarize them for Indigenous ones. Manipulated, broken or bent genre formulas, once again, subvert expectations.

At the same time that conventions subversion challenges and undermines pre-inscribed meanings of a particular genre, generic conventions still continue to provide guidance in terms of the interpretation of the text. Much of the alternative meaning Indigenous popular narratives produce depends on the conventions they subvert. On a most basic level, an Anishinaabe vampire as a narrative figure, for instance, is subversive because mainstream vampire fiction rarely to never features Indigenous vampires, much less Indigenous vampire protagonists; using such an Indigenous vampire character to embody and critique the colonial project is the next step which takes the subversion to a new level. Without the existence of default categories there could be no subversion. Therefore, even though a conscious challenge of established genre formulas is one of the most prominent meaning-generating features of Indigenous popular narratives—or exactly because of that—the presence of genre conventions against which the material can be (re-) arranged continues to be "necessary for a viable relationship between author and reader" (Dove 8). Consequently, when interpreting Indigenous popular narratives,

it is important to consider the basic features and makeup of the genre each particular text affiliates with in a broader context, for these generic characteristics will in many respects contribute to unlocking the text.

Though, of course, there is no end to creative possibilities contained within each of the popular genres, different genres tend to lend themselves to explorations of certain issues more readily than others. Of the genres that constitute the analytical body of this study, for example, vampire fiction tends to display a melancholic thrust directed into the past due to the preternatural longevity of its vampire characters. According to Gregory A. Waller, what he calls "*the story of the living and the undead*" is "preoccupied with passing on of knowledge, infused with the air of mortality, and self-conscious about the desire of closure" (viii, emphasis in original). As such, vampire fiction is particularly suitable for imaginative forays into the past and for dealing with questions of linkages and breaks between the past and the present. Generally speaking, vampire fiction can be interpreted as a past-oriented genre, which is why it so frequently includes more or less pronounced historical elements. Science fiction, on the other hand, is famously future-oriented. Especially when it is governed by futuristic speculation, science fiction is the genre-of-choice for those inclined to look into the future as well as to consider issues pertaining to science and technoscience. Therefore, science fiction generally lends itself to speculative explorations of futurity and to addressing questions of knowledge production. Finally, the related genres of action hero and superhero narratives can serve as productive frameworks for a critical examination of current social challenges and structures. They tend to raise issues of the relationship between individual and the state, especially in its judicial manifestation as well as hard questions about responsibility and human relationships. As I hope will become abundantly evident from the respective chapters to follow, Indigenous popular narratives make ample use of these encoded genre inclinations.

Following these semiotic patterns of examined genres, the structure of this study has acquired a certain temporal thrust: at least where the respective case study chapters are concerned, it moves from explorations of the past through speculations about the future to meditations on and critical interrogations of the present. Chapter 1 establishes the groundwork for the analyses of Indigenous popular productions

and puts it into context by exploring the links between Indigenous popular culture and the concept and practice of resurgence. It takes a closer look at the notion of poetics and how it relates to politics in order to emphasize the importance of seeing Indigenous popular culture in the context and dialogue with twenty-first century Indigenous political efforts and struggles in North America. In this chapter, I also consider the role and significance of technology and the digital for Indigenous popular culture and trace its pathways in the networked world. As a whole, Chapter 1 aims at distilling and conceptually framing what I call the poetics of the popular in relation to contemporary Indigenous cultural and artistic production.

Following these theoretical and contextual deliberations are individual case studies, structured according to the genre in which respective Indigenous popular narratives move. Since Indigenous popular culture is a vast field that continues rapidly growing, it is hard to do it justice through generalizations: a closer consideration of these narratives in their respective generic contexts is paramount for the depth of analysis. Each of the analytical chapters, therefore, begins with a general look at the genre in question. This approach aims at discerning generic patterns and genre inclinations and bringing them into a dialogue with Indigenous contexts. Chapter 2 examines the field of vampire fiction and the potential that the popular figure of the vampire has for an exploration of Indigenous issues. Taking its cue from these general findings, the chapter then offers a close reading of two of the most well-known Indigenous vampire novels, A.A. Carr's *The Eye Killers* and Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel*. The analysis pays special attention to how both these texts reconfigure vampire conventions in the service of Indigenous issues, or, in the words of Drew Hayden Taylor, how they "culturally appropriate a European legend and Indigenize it" (qtd. in Henzi 470), at the same time instilling it with their nations' (Navajo and Anishinabe, respectively) mythological and cultural archives.

Chapter 3 turns its attention to speculative futurisms, a term which I understand as a narrative mode capable of incorporating several more or less distinct genres, such as science fiction or horror-related monster (post)apocalypse, under the umbrella concern of futurity. It traces the special significance of the futurist paradigm in Indigenous contexts, a significance which is not only determined by

the genre conventions, but also hinges on historical as well as contemporary hegemonic colonial discourses surrounding Indigeneity. The chapter then proceeds to look at different generic incarnations of the speculative futurist paradigm in three Indigenous fictional texts: critical dystopia in Eden Robinson's "Terminal Avenue," zombie (post)apocalypse in Richard van Camp's "On the Wings of this Prayer" and social science fiction in Zainab Amadahy's novel *Resistance*. The close readings in this chapter expose the ways in which each of these texts uses the futurist lens to foreground different issues of consequence to Indigenous people and struggles of today.

Finally, Chapter 4 focuses on Indigenous action hero and superhero narratives in film and television. This individual chapter is somewhat different from the rest in that it is not only concerned with different genres, but also with different media: where all the previous case studies dealt with different forms of print fiction, Chapter 4 enters the realm of film, television and animation, and with it a whole new semiotic dimension which is absent from conventional print fiction—visuality. In this chapter, I consider the surplus semiotic content which visuality brings to the material as well as the role of the media in question in the project of attaining Indigenous visual sovereignty. The case studies in Chapter 4, dedicated to Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers' short film *A Red Girl's Reasoning* and Jay Odjick's animated series *Kagagi*, explore the related archetypes of action hero and superhero and aspects of their re-interpretations by Indigenous artists.

Having already addressed the "popular" part of the term Indigenous popular culture, it is now necessary to clarify its "Indigenous" component. While doing so, I rely substantially on Elain Coburn's summary of the term's conceptual history and usage (28-32). As Coburn shows, using the term "Indigenous" to refer to North America's (and other colonized regions worldwide) pre-colonial peoples and their descendants has become common roughly since the passing of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples in 2007 (29), so that "the term now, perhaps temporarily, has international currency in policy circles" (29). This widespread usage, however, does not mean that the term is uncontested or unproblematic. One uncomfortable aspect of it is its roots in the colonial discourse: the very concept of Indigeneity can only exist within the colonial framework, and

is thus, at least to an extent, defined by it. Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel write: "Indigenousness is an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism" (597). Another problem with the term "Indigenous" is the illusion of homogeneity it creates, an illusion which sometimes encourages an uncritical lumping together of diverse nations and cultures originating in pre-colonial America without any regard for their specificities and distinctions: "What is obvious is that before colonization more than five hundred years ago, there were no 'Indigenous' peoples and nations. […] Despite immense pressures by colonial governments, since colonization, Indigenous peoples have never ceased to call themselves by their own names" (Coburn 29).

Despite these very serious challenges that the term "Indigenous" presents, it is nevertheless in many respects useful for a discussion of colonial societies and their structures of power and sites of culture. While it does indeed partially swallow distinctions and differences, the strength of the term "Indigenous" lies in its emphasis on relationality and common experiences of diverse Indigenous peoples within as well as outside of the framework of colonialism. Following Coburn, in this study

> I use the term 'Indigenous' to point to some partly shared histories, including prior occupation. They include shared (if often distinct) experiences of colonization, but also shared (if diverse) histories of survival and resistance. […] Indigenousness is arguably best understood in the explicitly political terms of historical, 'peoplehood'-based relationships. (Coburn 30-31)

Also in terms of pointing towards the ongoing nature of the colonial project and relations, the term "Indigenous" has its merits:

> If imperfect, […] both the terms 'Indigenous' and 'non-Indigenous' remain analytically and descriptively useful concepts because they purposefully center on ongoing colonial relationship as a fact of contemporary political and social relations […] They helpfully counter colonial ideologies that imagine colonialism as a merely historical, not contemporary phenomenon. (Coburn 31)

In "Indigenous popular culture," therefore, the descriptor "Indigenous" points toward both shared nature of this particular cultural field and its involvement with

colonial discourses, the later particularly visible through the persistent exploration of diverse aspects of colonialism in the majority of Indigenous popular texts.

However, it is important to keep in mind that none of the aspects expressed through the terms "Indigenous" completely defines Indigenous popular culture. Like Indigenous nations themselves, Indigenous popular culture is a very diverse and complex phenomenon and generalizations about it can only take us so far. When asked "what constitutes the Aboriginal Fiction genre" (the term "Aboriginal" being used here in the same basic sense as the term "Indigenous"), Richard van Camp answered:

> A great question: I think *this is a term that's external from the process.* All I know is I am Aboriginal and proud to be a part of the genre. I'm also proud to be recognized as a great writer and hilarious storyteller (my opinion)" ("Taking Aboriginal Fiction" n. pag., emphasis mine).

The term "Indigenous (or Aboriginal) fiction," therefore, is used to name a cultural phenomenon in order to be able to critically engage with it. However, the term can only be used as a placeholder signifier, a "conceptual approximation that must be consistently nuanced" (Coburn 31) for a process or a product which is infinitely more complex. The same is true for the term "Indigenous popular culture" the way I use it in my work: as a term, it is a descriptive simplification of a very complex and multilayered cultural field and its processes, and is thus "external from the process" (Van Camp, "Taking Aboriginal Fiction" n. pag.). Still, it is useful as a designation for a perceivably distinct cultural phenomenon, at least until a better term comes along.

There is another important point which van Camp addresses in his above quoted statement. What he emphasizes is the fact that individual creative and experiential aspects of a work of art are just as important as its cultural aspects and context. The application of generalizing ethnocentric terms to Indigenous fiction and other forms of art can have the effect of trapping them in their ethnographic aspect to the detriment of other facets of these artistic works. Van Camp's statement reminds us that, while appreciating the work Indigenous artists do in exploring and representing Indigeneity, we would do well not to forget their identities and aspirations as individual artists.

Chapter 1. Indigenous Popular Culture in the Age of Resurgence

Darkness didn't disappear when Fire came to the Animals; it still stalks at the edge of the flickering light, greedier now that it has resistance.

But our eyes ever seek the firelight through the shadows. This is the gift of the Thunders and Water Spider: we want to join others around the dancing flames, not wander alone in the dark waters of the night.

<div align="right">

Daniel Heath Justice[11]

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[11] Justice, "'Go Away, Water!' 147-48, italics in original.

1.1 Indigenous Resurgence: Concept and Practice

> Say it loud
> We need to be proud
> We've waited it out
> The best day to be Native is now
>
> Plex feat. Lase, "No More"

> We continue to challenge defining terms and their inherent boundaries in part because we have always been philosophical, intellectual peoples who have always engaged critically with the world around us, interpreting for ourselves, our communities, and others who we are, who we want to be.
>
> ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui (Kanaka Maoli)[12]

In the critical landscape of North American literature, Indigenous literary and cultural criticism is currently one of the fastest-growing fields. Changes that worked to reshape and expand the field are manifold, and are not confined to the quantity of the critical texts produced. Not only did the flood of published Indigenous criticism increase at an unprecedented rate in the last two decades or so, but the critical methodologies employed have changed in a revolutionary way to include Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and critical lenses. By now, Indigenous literary and cultural criticism has established itself as a vibrant, ever-expanding field which is no longer unquestioningly governed by Western critical traditions, with ever increasing numbers of prominent Indigenous scholars working to reflect on its past, and to shape its present and future.

Significantly, the field of Indigenous literature and literary study remains tightly linked to Indigenous politics and activism, to questions of Indigenous governance and sovereignty, title and land claims. This is not surprising, since in today's North America (and, in fact, throughout the world), maintaining, affirming, and developing their ways of life unencumbered by settler governments, institutions, and structures remains a continuous struggle for Indigenous people. As Taiaiake Alfred, a prominent Mohawk political scientist, notes,

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[12] ho'omanawanui 675.

Indigenous people today are seeking to transcend the history of pain and loss that began with the coming of Europeans into our world. In the past 500 years, our people have suffered murderous onslaught of greed and disease. Even as history's shadow lengthens to mark the passing of that brutal age, the Western compulsion to control remains strong. To preserve what is left of our cultures and lands is a constant struggle. (xi)

Indigenous literatures and criticism not only reflect but also actively participate in these processes, for, in the words of a Cherokee scholar and writer Daniel Heath Justice, "the survival of indigenous peoples is strengthened by the literature we produce and the critical lenses through which we read them" (149). Indigenous literature and scholarship play a vital role in various discourses on indigeneity and on ways and means of defining and embodying it in this our twenty-first century.

Of course, discourses on Indigeneity are not limited to the field of literary scholarship. In fact, it is becoming more and more detailed and active among Indigenous intellectuals of all disciplines as well as Indigenous activists and community leaders. A paradigm for conceptualizing Indigeneity not only in today's North America, but throughout the world, which is lately increasingly gaining prominence is resurgence. The framework of Indigenous resurgence the way it is currently understood is broad and encompassing various fields and modes of application, and because of that hard to define. In his 2012 article, Jess Crontassel summarizes the main distinctive features of resurgence and its relation to the ongoing struggle for decolonization:

The decolonization process operates at multiple levels and necessitates moving from an awareness of being in struggle, to actively engaging in everyday practices of resurgence. . . . Decolonizing praxis comes from moving beyond political awareness and/or symbolic gestures to everyday practices of resurgence . . . . This shift means rejecting the performativity of a rights discourse geared towards state affirmation and recognition, and embracing a daily experience conditioned by place-based cultural practices. (Corntassel 89)

Thus, possibly the most important feature of resurgence is that it is very practical and community-oriented: acts of resurgence are "'everyday' acts" through which one "disrupts the colonial physical, social and political boundaries designed to

impede our actions to restore our nationhood" (Corntassel 88). As a concept, resurgence is not so much a theory as it is a sensibility. To a certain extent, it follows a similar logic as Jace Weaver's idea of "comminitism," a term and a concept which "is a fusion of 'community' and 'activism' and implies that community-based approach necessarily includes activism" (DiNova 92). The activist thrust of resurgence, however, is inward-oriented, and in that different from the more reactionary resistance. With resurgence paradigm, as Emma LaRocque poignantly puts it, the "focus has shifted from the more explanatory position of 'legitimation' [of Indigenous cultures] to the more proactive stance of cultural affirmation" ("'Resist No Longer'" 10).[13]

Leanne Simpson, at the opening of her book *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, illustrates this culture-affirmative aspect of resurgence: in order to explain the concept, she tells a story about "a community procession of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg dancers, artists, singers, drummers, community leaders, Elders, families and children" (11) in Nogojiwanong (Peterborough) in June 2009. In Simpson's telling, as the procession moved on,

> [s]ettler-Canadians poked their heads out of office buildings and stared at us from the sidelines. 'Indians. What did they want now? What did they want this time?' But that day, we didn't have any *want*. We were not seeking recognition or asking for rights. We were not trying to fit into Canada. We were celebrating our nation on our lands in the spirit of joy, exuberance and individual expression. (11)

This event, Simpson asserts, was carried out in the spirit of resurgence, of putting the energies inside with the people rather than outside with the surrounding settler-state. The procession epitomized the drive to act rather than react, to live and flourish rather than survive. It was a celebration, not a protest, even though its nature was necessarily political:

> This was not a protest. This was not a demonstration. This was a quiet, collective act of resurgence. It was a mobilization and it was political

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[13] At the same time, LaRocque argues that resistance and resurgence are not that different in their outlook, and must be seen as continuity rather than a break or an opposition. She asserts: "We are always resurfacing. And what may be called 'resurgence' today is actually a continuation of Indigenous resistance and resilience" ("'Resist No Longer'" 18).

because it was a reminder. It was a reminder that although we are collectively unseen in the city of Peterborough, when we come together with one mind and one heart we can transform our land and our city into a decolonized space and a place of resurgence, even if it is only for a brief amount of time. It was a reminder of everything good about our traditions, our culture, our songs, dances and performances. It was a celebration of our resistance, a celebration that after everything, we are still here. It was an insertion of Nishnaabeg presence. (*Dancing* 11-12)

This story and Simpson's rendering of it show very clearly the core feature of a resurgence mindset: in the last analysis, it is about the direction into which the energies of the effort flow. It is about fostering a framework and a creativity which begins and ends with the people and which draws its main power from celebration rather than protest, turning one into the other by the force of embodied conviction and an achieved "active sense of presence" (Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance" 1). This sensibility can be observed at work in various contexts in today's Indigenous North America, from the round dances of Idle No More gatherings to the photographs of Red Works photography company (especially its striking series entitled "Concrete Indians"). Resurgence works to turn self-assertive and self-confident expressions of Indigenous cultures—political, social, artistic, etc.—from isolated events into a matter-of-fact social reality: "Indigenous resurgence means having courage and imagination to envision life beyond the state" (Corntassel 89). Alfred and Corntassel conceptualize resurgence as "identifiable directions of movement, patterns of thought and action that reflect a shift to an Indigenous reality from the colonized places we inhabit today in our mindsets and our souls" (612). They identify five "mantras of a resurgent Indigenous movement" (613): "*Land is Life*," "*Language is Power*," "*Freedom is the Other Side of Fear*," "*Decolonize your Diet*," "*Change Happens One Warrior at a Time*" (613, emphasis and caption in original). As is evident from this list, resurgence is at least as much about everyday practices as it is about ideas.

The round dance flash mob tactic which became emblematic of Idle No More events throughout Canada especially during the winter of 2012-2013 is also an example of embodied resurgence not dissimilar to the celebratory procession described by Simpson. While Simpson insists that the Nishnaabeg procession was not a protest, Idle No More organized events certainly are. Starting out in

November 2012 as political protests directed specifically against Bill C-45 (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 21), Idle No More events continue to target, among other things, colonialist legislations that endanger environment or disregard concerns of vulnerable groups (for instance, Canadian government's refusal to initiate a national inquiry into the issue of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal women). However, these events are more than just protests: they are frameworks which initiate and promote resurgence. The Round Dance is a most obvious illustration of that. As Ryan McMahon (Anishinaabe/Metis) explains, large part of the power of the Round Dance events lies in the cultural significance of the drum music which accompanies them:

> We are the Indigenous Peoples of this land. We have held unique worldviews and cultural and spiritual practices for thousands of years. So many of these practices included drums. As kids, we were told that the drum bet represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth. We were told our songs come from Mother Earth. We were told that our communities are only as strong as the sound of our drums. Then "they" came. And many of our drums went silent. Completely silent. Our songs were banned. Torn from our lives. Forcefully. Violently. But, although they were silent for a time, our old people kept their bundles. Some hid them. Some buried them. Then, slowly, the sound of our drums reemerged. They started to spread through our communities again. They signaled hope. They signalled our return. Our drums were being used. And we began to gather again. We danced again. And our communities are slowly regaining their strength. It's perfect. It makes perfect sense. *A Round Dance Revolution*. It has reinvigorated and re-inspired our People. It has lifted the spirits of thousands. The act of the "flash mob" can be called "Political/Guerilla Theatre" but it's not political in and of itself. It's a glimpse into who we are. It is perfect. (100)

Thus, the drum beats of the round dance flash mobs do not merely "#SoundtracktheStruggle" (McMahon 101). As the quote elaborately shows, singing and dancing to the beat of the drum is much more than resistance—it is s resurgent practice of culture and cultural values. In the context of the settler state, it is, of course, highly political, because reminding of and defying past prohibitions designed to eradicate these same cultural values and practices; however, more than that, it is aimed and channeled within, at a "who we are." This is where resurgent practices' most important work and impact lie. This work is most vital and political

in a non-political way, that is to say, it only becomes a political statement in the context of the settler state, not "in and of itself." It is so because, as Leanne Simpson points out, before any meaningful political engagement with the state is possible, Indigenous communities need to regain a strong sense of self which had been taken from them by the colonial rule:

> We need to be able to articulate in a clear manner our visions for the future, for living as *Indigenous Peoples* in contemporary times. […] In essence, we need to not just figure out who we are; we need to reestablish the processes by which we live who we are within the current context we find ourselves. (*Dancing* 17)

This is why a new paradigm of contemporary Indigeneity is so urgently needed, one which would be connected to the people in a fundamental sense, first and foremost:

> We must move ourselves beyond resistance and survival, to flourishment and mino bimaadiziwin.[14] […] Transforming ourselves, our communities and our nations is ultimately the first step in transforming our relationship with the state. (Simpson, *Dancing* 17)

As a whole, the Idle No More movement has made a big step in that direction, as Glen Sean Coulthard points out when he states: "Idle No More offers a productive case study through which to explore what a resurgent Indigenous politics might look like on the ground" (24).

At the same time, Simpson is "careful […] not to define 'resurgence'" (*Dancing* 25). A precise definition would limit the concept and the idea which is meant to be evocative and inspiring rather than prescriptive:

> It is my hope that readers will take the concept and the ideas presented in this book, return to their communities, teachings, languages and Elders or Knowledge Holders and to engage in a process where they figure out what 'resurgence' means to them, and to their collective communities" (Simpson, *Dancing* 25).

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[14]As Simpson explains, in Nishnaabeg language the concept of „mino bimadiziwin" refers to "living the good life" or "the art of living the good life" (*Dancing* 27, n. 18).

Tending towards sensibility and praxis rather than theory as resurgence does, it can play out in an endless variety of ways and be reimagined *ad infinitum*. This is what makes the concept so immensely powerful: it provides a broad working framework, but leaves the particularities to the practitioners, and indeed builds imminent change as a (self-) feature into its own framework. This open-endedness, this refusal to set in stone the details of what resurgent Indigeneity is supposed to look like, is also what allows the concept of resurgence to evade the confines of authenticity discourse.

It is my conviction that it is largely in the overarching spirit of resurgence that Indigenous popular culture emerged and is evolving. I believe those stories to be examples of what Dory Nason (Anishinaabe/Chicana), in a blog entry, describes as "stories and artistic practices [which] recall and recast Indigenous philosophies that express heart knowledge, a radical love and resistance and offer ideas about decolonization, resurgence and better ways to be in solidarity with each other" (2). In terms of art and creative storytelling, resurgence mindset and practice provides a secure footing for creative innovation and experimentation with various forms of settler culture without a danger of being swallowed whole by that culture. For Indigenous artists it means freedom to experiment with the multiplicity of available cultural archives, including mainstream popular culture. Indigenous literary and cultural criticism, too, moves towards the goal of resurgence, working on developing theoretical frameworks of reading and analysis that are in tune with Indigenous self-understanding(s) rather than with the demands of settler academia. This outlook transformed post-Renaissance [15] Indigenous literary studies and criticism in a number of groundbreaking, fundamental ways. At least to a certain extent, this shift was a response to the ever expanding and diversifying scope of Indigenous literatures themselves. As Dean Reder puts it, "[w]e are now post-Renaissance not simply because of a new millennium but also because we have passed the 'rebirth' of Native writing. In fact, we have passed adolescence and moved well into adulthood" (73).

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[15] Approximately post-1995, when the period commonly known among literary critics as Native American Renaissance, a term coined by Kenneth Lincoln, came to its close (Cox and Justice 3).

The recently published *Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, is perhaps the most comprehensive anthology of criticism which summarizes and develops the most important transformations of the field to date. In the introduction to the volume, both editors trace the evolution of the field of Indigenous criticism, looking at different critical-analytical strands it engendered since the agreed-upon closure of the Native American Renaissance era in 1995. As Cox and Justice explain, the transformation of the field

> was precipitated by the introduction of two new modes of inquiry: tribal nation specificity and American Indian literary nationalism. Tribal nation specificity encourages a shift in critical focus from identity, authenticity, hybridity, and cross-cultural mediation to the Native intellectual, cultural, political, historical, and tribal national contexts from which Indigenous literatures emerge. American Indian literary nationalism works more explicitly to produce literary criticism that supports the intellectual and political sovereignty of Indigenous communities and tribal nations. Both literary critical modes affirm that these contexts, communities, and tribal nations are the first concern of the discipline. (1)

Both these critical paradigms not only facilitated and tremendously contributed to the transformation of the institutionalized study of Indigenous literatures, bringing change to universities, establishing new scholarships, and other such measures, they also triggered a "flood of scholarship . . . on recovered writers and new literary histories, methods, genres, and regions" (Cox and Justice 2). Daniel Heath Justice's own book, *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*, published in 2009, is an example of such a nationalist literary history and a part of the "flood." The resurgent impact of such critical works is hard to overestimate.

Apart from tribally specific and literary nationalist critical lenses, the anthology also represents another important strand which recently became prominent in Indigenous literary studies—the transnational paradigm. This strand of criticism is arguably more contested than the tribally oriented paradigms; however, it, too, has developed into an influential mode of inquiry into Indigenous literatures which, notwithstanding some important internal challenges, appears very promising for future studies and the evolution of the field of Indigenous studies:

The *Handbook* also recognizes the significant development of an inter-
and trans-Indigenous orientation in Native American and Indigenous
literary studies. Many scholars in Native American and Indigenous
studies were skeptical about the transnational turn in American studies
and related disciplines. A reluctance to incorporate the transnational
into Indigenous literary studies is a consequence of the legitimate
apprehension that transnationalism is a threat to the basic political act
of speaking and listening at the margins when critics assume that the
only nations under consideration are settler-colonial. Such an
assumption either leaves Indigenous peoples out of the conversation or,
if they are present as bit players, reinforces their marginalized status.
Many of the contributors of the *Handbook* work to reconcile tribal
nation specificity, Indigenous literary nationalism, and trans-
Indigenous methodologies. The field appears poised to embrace
simultaneously all three methods as necessary components of post-
Renaissance Native American and Indigenous literary studies. (Cox and
Justice 2)

The anthology brings together an impressive array of articles and scholars whose
critical lenses are as diverse as Indigenous literature itself, and encompasses studies
which employ literary nationalist perspectives as well as transnational criticism. In
that, the anthology itself seems to walk the integrative path which it foresees as
likely future development for the whole field of Indigenous literary studies and
criticism.

This integrative vision is also paramount for a comprehensive study of
Indigenous popular culture. As mentioned before, the texts which can be grouped
under this analytical category tend to make use of multiple artistic conventions and
resources: some of them are derived from tribally specific cultural and artistic
archives, others are evocative of the tropes of mainstream popular culture, and yet
others employ and participate in trans-Indigenous discourses, exchanges and
concerns. Frequently, all of the above applies. The whole that results from such an
integrative artistic vision is more than the sum of its parts; still, all of the parts need
to be taken into account while looking into individual texts.

When it comes to considering texts of Indigenous popular culture as a group,
the transnational or trans-Indigenous aspect of them gains a somewhat greater
prominence, exactly *because* these texts are grounded in different tribally specific
resources but united by their use of themes and tropes of popular culture. The trans-

Indigenous paradigm provides means of looking at this corpus of texts in a meaningful way which is in alignment with Indigenous decolonial causes. Chadwick Allen, the scholar who particularly championed the trans-Indigenous mode of inquiry, suggests following way of integrating it into the greater scheme of Indigenous literary studies:

> The point is not to displace the necessary, invigorating study of specific traditions and contexts but rather to complement these by augmenting and expanding broader, globally Indigenous fields of inquiry. The point is to invite specific studies into different kinds of conversation, and to acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts. (*Trans-Indigenous* xiv)

Trans-Indigenous paradigm, thus, is formed primarily on the ideas of inclusivity, complementarity and exchange. One of the methods Chadwick uses while conducting trans-Indigenous criticism he calls "Indigenous juxtapositions": "Indigenous juxtapositions place diverse texts close together across genre and media, aesthetic systems and worldviews, technologies and practices, tribes and nations, the Indigenous-settler boundary, and historical periods and geographical regions" (*Trans-Indigenous* xviii). Such an approach allows for a wide range of possible analytical combinations of texts. Moreover, it emphasizes the mobility of cultural archives without building textual hierarchies.

The emphasis the trans-Indigenous paradigm places on the mobility of texts evokes Gerald Vizenor's concept of "storied transmotion" (*Fugitive Poses* 169):

> The connotations of transmotion are creation stories, totemic visions, reincarnation, and sovenance; transmotion, that sense of native motion and active presence, is *sui generis* sovereignty. Native transmotion is survivance, a reciprocal use of nature, not a monotheistic, territorial sovereignty. Native stories of survivance are the creases of transmotion and sovereignty. (Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses* 15)

Combining these two concepts together, it is possible to use the trans-Indigenous paradigm to conceive of the texts of Indigenous popular culture as narratives in transmotion. Such critical focus puts the emphasis on the processes of narrative mobility and the mobility of narratives rather than the final product which appears

to be static, finished, and closed to reinterpretation. In this context, trans-Indigenous would not only refer to the exchange of cultural ideas, symbols, narratives as well as historical experiences among the diverse Indigenous peoples of North America and the world, but also their exchange and interaction with the cultural arenas, formulas and archives of the settle-states which surround them.

1.2 The Poetics of the Popular: Indigenous Art and Popular Culture

When poetry averts conformity it enters into the contemporary: speaking to the pressures and conflicts of the moment with the means just then at hand.

Charles Bernstein[16]

Our literatures . . . have always been more than mere 'ethnographic reportage' and about issues of 'authentic' identity politics. . . . Our arts have always been cornerstones of our cultures, transforming and evolving with us. As the poetic and literary accomplishments of our cultures spiral through time, connecting the past and present with the future, we are reminded that 'the past *and* present is bright with moral, intellectual, and artistic significance,' as the light of understanding shines from the past and illuminates our continuing work today and tomorrow.

ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui (Kanaka Maoli)[17]

I know I'm not the only Native American who's attended a comic convention, watched every *Battlestar Galactica* episode, or debates the worthiness of the Chakotay character on *Star Trek: Voyager*. Geek culture is alive and well in Indian Country! […] Geek culture is traditional in my family!

Arigon Starr (Kickapoo, Creek, Cherokee, Seneca)[18]

The presence of Indigenous writers and artists is increasingly felt on the contemporary popular culture landscape; it is also rapidly becoming more and more varied. They work in every medium currently in existence: fiction and non-fiction, comic books, film, television, computer games, animation, performance, visual art and design, the list continues. When it comes to popular genre fiction, there is hardly a genre in which Indigenous artists have not produced beautiful and entertaining work. Vampire and zombie fiction, science fiction, fantasy, horror, detective novels—Indigenous writers have written books in all of these genres and more. And yet, Indigenous texts that work with tropes of popular culture or genre fiction tend to be far less known to an average reader than other, for lack of better word, more conventional, Indigenous works of fiction or the scores of mainstream genre fiction. One cannot help but wonder: why?

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[16] Bernstein, "State of the Art" 2.
[17] ho'omanawanui 679.
[18] Starr n. pag.

In her article on the intersection of Indigenous fantastic texts and Eurowesten fantasy tradition, Amy H. Sturgis comes up with following suggestion:

> If the experience of this author and her students and colleagues are typical, they suggest that many fantasy lovers do not devour the novels of Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor or Blackfoot/Gros Ventre writer James Welch along with those of Madelene L'Engle and C.S. Lewis because the former books are not found in the fantasy section of book stores or labelled by online sellers as genre-related works. Sometime they are counted among the volumes of general literature; in many cases, they are categorized as Native American literature or even Native American Studies. (11-12)

Indeed, publishing and marketing strategies are an important factor to consider. Just like methodologies *per se* have an impact on academic research and its outcomes (Kovach 13), in the domain of publishing and distribution of cultural texts, marketing strategies say much about a given text and its standing with and interpretation by the readership (which, through the use of aforementioned marketing strategies, becomes a "guided" interpretation). As Sturgis shows in the quote above, even the degree of involvement of general public with a piece of cultural production is affected by the marketing strategies applied to it.

Popular fiction, and in fact the majority of popular media in general, are sensitive to genre formulas and are often classified and marketed in genre-related terms. This is not to say that every text of popular fiction reproduces the same formula blindly and uncritically—in fact, many of them engage in excessive and clever genre-bending and may be assigned to several genres at once—but they do usually employ particular themes and tropes that link certain texts and groups of texts together. Marketing according to genre may in itself be viewed as positive or negative—generally speaking, there are valid arguments for both. What is certain, however, is that ascribed genre categorizations make it easier for fans of certain kinds of texts to stay up-to-date on the new arrivals in the field and to find fresh texts that would be potentially of interest to them.

However, when it comes to Indigenous-authored popular stories, there seems to exist a certain disquieting ghettoizing in terms of content expectations. Instead of being regarded as contributors to their respective genres, these stories tend to be

categorized—by the publishing industry as well as by critics and academics—according to the ethnic origins of the author, as Sturgis points out in her article. Of course, like with so many other issues in Indigenous Studies as well as in contemporary culture in general, there is more than one perspective on this. On the one hand, this kind of publishing and studying based on ethnic exclusivity serves to underline and honor the uniqueness of Indigenous cultures and the particular experiences Indigenous people had, and still have, to go through due to the history of colonization. In and of itself, this seems to be a positive attitude that raises awareness for the cultural specificities of Indigenous-authored cultural texts. On the other hand, however, this ethno-marketing locks those texts in a position of apparent cultural vacuum: not only does it acknowledge but one of the cultural and artistic influences that feed them, but it also stages the Indigeneity of the author as the single most important feature of the text. While this last may be true for some texts, it is not true for all. Especially when studied exclusively from the ethno-centered perspective, Indigenous popular texts run the risk of becoming locked within what Andrea Smith calls "ethnographic entrapment":

> [A]ntiracist activist and scholarly projects often become trapped in ethnographic multiculturalism, what Silva describes as a 'neoliberal multicultural' representation that 'includes never-before-heard languages that speak of never-before-herd things that actualize a never-before-known consciousness.' This project rests on an inherent contradiction, because this strategy, designed to demonstrate our worthiness of being universal subjects, actually rests on the logic that Native peoples are equivalent to nature itself, things to be discovered or to have an essential truth or essence. In other words, the very quest of full subjecthood that is implicit in the ethnographic project to tell our 'truth' is already premised on a logic that requires us to be objects of discovery, unable to escape the status of affectable other. Consequently, Native studies is in a position of ethnographic entrapment because Native peoples become almost unintelligible within the academy outside of this discursive regime. ("Native Studies" 209)

Seeing how varied literature and other forms of creative cultural production by Indigenous artists are, in my opinion, there is something to be said for more diversity in the way they are introduced into the market as well as into the field of literary and cultural studies. When it comes to popular fiction and other media by

Indigenous writers, perhaps one way of achieving such inclusivity of inquiry is to emphasize the 'popular' aspect of this kind of narratives just as strongly as their 'Indigenous' aspect.

Several Indigenous scholars and artists themselves address the need for more attention to the aspect of creative innovation in Indigenous artistic works. In her article "Poetics of Renewal: Indigenous Poetics—Message or Medium?," Lillian Allen asserts that the (cultural) politics of Indigenous art is inseparable from its poetic power: "I believe that in our communities the search for beauty is the search for justice. . . . The great poet June Jordon said that there are two ways to 'worry' words. One is hoping for the greatest possible beauty. The other is to tell the truth" (293). The works of Indigenous writers engage both kinds of word-"worrying" simultaneously. This simultaneity is integral to Indigenous artistic projects, as Allen points out as she speaks of the danger of privileging political concerns of a piece of art over its creative vision:

> Because by necessity this journey of healing and transformation must include a conscious or subconscious strategy of deprogramming a market-driven society, the often identified political (us and them) nature of our work is glommed upon to the detriment of the integrative and generative nature of this vision, a vision whose very gesture is generosity. (296)

Thus, Allen argues in favor of a more balanced critical attention to Indigenous creative works, one which integrates both their political and creative aesthetic aspects for a more complete understanding of the force of their cultural impact and vision.

In her article, Allen speaks specifically of poetry, but her observations ring true for other forms of artistic production as well. Poetics, of course, is not limited to the literary form of poetry; in fact, Jewish American poet Charles Bernstein defines poetics as "*continuation of poetry by other means*. Just as poetry is continuation of politics by other means" ("Optimism and Critical Excess" 160, emphasis in original). Poetics, thus, makes visible both the poetry and the politics of a given cultural text; it expresses the "integrative and generative […] vision" (296) the importance of which Allen stresses. In his essay "Optimism and Critical Excess

(Process)," Bernstein writes: "I imagine poetics as an invasion of the poetic into other realms: overflowing the bounds of genres, spilling into talk, essays, politics, philosophy . . . Poetics as a sort of *applied poetic*, in the sense that engineering is a form of applied mathematics" (151, emphasis in original). In other words, poetics can inform all the different forms of creative and non-creative works and communications.

Texts and artifacts of popular culture—Indigenous or not—have their own politics, and, in many cases, their own poetry: their own poetics. In his introduction to *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, Neal McLeod (Cree) meditates over the question of what constitutes a specifically Indigenous poetics:

> It is my contention that a great deal of what we might call Indigenous poetics is not only embedded in contemporary forms of poetry or poetic narrative, but also in the classical narratives of various nations. Part of the poetic process, in Indigenous context, is bringing the narrative power of our old stories into the present. (3)

Also, according to McLeod,

> [a] key function of Indigenous poetics is to puncture holes in the expectations and understandings of contemporary life. […] As noted before, Indigenous poetics can point to other pathways and other possibilities. Indigenous poetics can puncture holes in how we see the world. […] Thus, not only is Indigenous life contemporary, it can also question the way traditions are articulated and understood. (6)

Similar to Allen's article, McLeod's "Introduction" only applies the notion of poetics to the genre of poetry: the specificity of the concept in the Indigenous context is constituted by its ability to transgress Euroamerican conception(s) and canons of poetry and to expand it to include "the classical narratives of various nations" (3) and to access and articulate "the richness of knowledge stored in the manifold plurality of Indigenous consciousness" (5). However, just as is the case with the general notion of poetics, I believe that the concept of Indigenous poetics can be productively expanded to include poetic narrative as well as visual strategies, themes and modes of expression found within Indigenous (popular) prose or new media like film, animated productions, computer games or comic books. Such an

approach combines Mc Leod's notion of Indigenous poetics with Bernstein's understanding of poetics as "continuation of poetry by other means." Especially works of Indigenous popular culture very much fulfill the functions of Indigenous poetics as formulated by McLeod: by using tropes and icons of contemporary mainstream popular culture and combining them with various Indigenous mythologies, epistemologies, social concerns and artistic styles, these narratives "bring the narrative power of old stories into the present" (3), "puncture holes in the expectations and understandings of contemporary life" and "question the way traditions are articulated and understood" (6).

In his play *alterNatives*, Drew Hayden Taylor (Anishinaabe) addresses both the potential of popular genres of fiction to perform this re-articulation and the cultural prejudice with which Indigenous writers of popular fiction have to deal. As Taylor presents it in his play, there exists a sensibility by the logic of which Indigenous writers who choose to work with popular fiction do not fulfill cultural expectations placed upon them and the texts they produce, which are often defined by what Grace Dillon calls "the constrains of genre expectations, of what 'serious' Native authors are supposed to write" (3). In his play, Taylor explores these expectations and the pressures they exert upon Indigenous authors of popular genre fiction by means of the clash of opinions within the protagonist couple, Angel and Colleen.

Angel is a young aspiring science fiction writer of Anishinaabe descent. His girlfriend Colleen is a Jewish professor of Native Literature, and Angel's preferred genre of writing does not impress her. When Angel receives a rejection letter from a publisher (apparently, not the first one), Colleen (apparently, not for the first time) tries to reason with him:

> COLLEEN. I'm telling you, you should be writing something about your experiences in the Native community and I can guarantee that will get their attention. If they won't take it, the University press would jump at it in a second. I'm positive.
> ANGEL. I don't choose the stories, they choose me. Can't you   respect that? (16)

Later in the play, Colleen again remarks in exasperation about her partner's career choice: "You have such potential, you could create the great Canadian aboriginal

novel, but instead you want to squander it away on this silly genre" (102). Colleen is not alone in making assumptions about what an Indigenous author should or is likely to write. Having for the first time heard about Angel's literary aspirations, Dale promptly asks: "What do you write? Legends, that kind of thing?" (99). Apparently, legends, in a traditional sense of the word, are what the public expects of a Native author. And what the academic establishment expects of him or her is something which "can be a window through which the rest of Canada can see your community" (102). If we accept Colleen's earlier statement, a story which complies with that requirement the university press would publish in a heartbeat; a piece of Indigenous science fiction, less so.

After Colleen's remark, a heated discussion ensues into which all of the play's characters are involved:

> YVONNE. So you, a white university Native Lit professor, want our Angel, a Native writer to write specifically about Native people and the Native community. Sounds a bit like ghettoizing. Do you think Jewish people should only write about Jewish things?
> COLLEEN. No, of course not.
> YVONNE. Then why should Angel just write about Native things?
> DALE. Touché.
> MICHELLE. Dale…
> COLLEEN. I would just like to see Angel stretch himself beyond the limitations the genre of science fiction offers. Look at the work Thomas King is doing. He's Native, a great writer, and he has some things to say. I don't find it limiting for him.
> ANGEL. What about Arthur C. Clark?
> DALE. William Gibson?
> ANGEL. Ursula LeGuin. Their stuff is just as groundbreaking, and I might add, more people have read Clark and Gibson than Thomas King. And because of this they've had a greater impact and are a hell of a lot richer. (104-105)

Several things are happening at once during this dialogic exchange. On the one hand, what Colleen inadvertently promotes with her argument is the same "ethnographic entrapment" of which Andrea Smith spoke as often characterizing the discipline of Native Studies. According to Colleen, Angel's task as an Indigenous writer is to enter, in Smith's words, the "quest of full subjecthood that is implicit in the ethnographic project to tell our 'truth'" ("Native Studies" 209), to

humor Canadian society's ethnographic gaze by putting his energies into the project of making Indigenous people—in this case, more specifically Angel's community—knowable and known. At the same time, through her hostile attitude towards science fiction in general—which is again evident when she later mentions *Star Trek* (of which Angel is a fan) as "a silly show to begin with" (106)—Colleen also displays the bias still existent in the academia about popular genre fiction being an inferior form of literature, not to be compared with great classics. Unfavorably comparing Angel's work to the work of "great writer" Thomas King, Colleen inadvertently projects this hierarchical bias implicit in Western canon-building project onto Indigenous literature. As a response, Angel cites the classics of the science fiction genre—Arthur C. Clark (space travel), William Gibson (cyberpunk) and Ursula LeGuin (social sci-fi)—whose fictions are very complex and multilayered and have a huge following of highly critical fans. Thus, while Colleen builds her argument on a combination of ethnographic gaze and certain semi-subconscious claim at being, as Bobby puts it, "a literary police" (103), Angel is much more interested in experimenting with different artistic influences on the menu, picking those which he considers fun without much concern for what is viewed as proper for a 'serious writer' or a 'serious Native writer.'

Throughout the play, it is evident that, despite Angel's investment into it, Colleen is not familiar with the science fiction genre, never engaged with it or given it any serious thought, so that her prejudice against it apparently is just that—a prejudice. In fact, when at the very end of the play Angel summarizes for Dale the plot of a sci-fi story he envisages, one cannot help but wonder whether Colleen had ever read any of Angel's stories, or whether her contempt for the genre prevented her from doing so. Because the content of the story, space travel or not, is utterly about his "experiences in the Native community" (16), in that it is hooked upon the experience of being on the receiving end of colonization, past, present, and even future:

> ANGEL. . . . Okay, picture it. There's this Native astronaut and he's
> cruising at the edge of the solar system in his space ship. And he's
> in a bad mood because back on Earth everybody is celebrating. The
> biggest party since . . . whenever, because the very last land claim
> has finally been settled. You gotta understand, this is about a hundred

years into the future. It'll take about that long. So everyone on every Reserve is partying it up while this poor guy is stuck alone somewhere past Pluto. He picks something funny up on his scanners and goes to investigate. As he approaches the far rim of the solar system, in uncharted territory, he discovers a big space . . . thing. It's covered in flashing lights, and is just hovering out there, evidently trying to attract attention. The astronaut's sensors are going nuts. The thing wants to be understood but the scanners can't make heads or tails out of its communications. But gradually, the thing understands that the astronaut speaks English and in translation the thing begins to spell out a message from an alien civilization. This big flashing thing suddenly says, in English, 'For Sale'. You get it, it's a huge interstellar billboard. Evidently the solar system is up for sale. The astronaut stares at it in disbelief. Then suddenly the sign slowly begins to change. It now says 'Sold." Somebody's just bought the solar system. The Native astronaut mutters to himself 'Not again.' The end. (143-144)

Thus, what Colleen does not realize in her insistence that Angel should write about "experiences of his community," is that he does. Only these experiences are reframed through the space travel imagery and narrated in a science fictional mode. As David Seed points out, "[s]cience fiction is about the writer's present in the sense that any historical moment will include its own set of expectations and perceived tendencies" (1-2). In his story, Angel reframes the past and re-contextualizes the present. Having an Indigenous protagonist in a science fictionally constructed framework allows him to write Indigenous people into the modern technological world as active participants that they are, thus countering "the narrative of the *Vanishing Indian* who was tragically consumed by his/her 'savage' and 'primitive' ways, fatefully disappearing from the landscape as a consequence of what the settler called *Manifest Destiny*" (Jackson 2Bears, emphasis in original) so prominent in mainstream popular culture in general and, as Sierra S. Adare amply shows in her book *"Indian" Stereotypes in TV Science Fiction*, science fiction genre in particular. In doing that, he joins the efforts of many other Indigenous writers, like Thomas King and Lee Maracle—those same writers whom Colleen would like Angel to use as his literary role models. At the same time, Angel writes himself, an Indigenous science fiction author, into the archive of contemporary popular culture.

In his famous lecture/essay *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King (Cherokee) describes such rewriting and writing-into efforts and the circumstances that rendered them necessary in the first place:

> What Native writers discovered, I believe, was that the North American past, the one that has been created in novels and histories, the one that had been heard on radio and seen on theatre screens and on television, the one that had been part of every school curriculum for the last two hundred years, that past was unusable, for it had not only trapped Native people in a time warp, it also insisted that our past was all we had. No present. No future. And to believe such a past is to be dead. Faced with such a proposition and knowing from empirical evidence that we were very much alive, physically and culturally, Native writers began to use the Native present to resurrect a Native past and to imagine a Native future. To create, in words, as it were, a Native universe." (106)

Indeed, what Angel's sci-fi story does is literally create a "Native universe" which not only centers around a Native space traveler as a protagonist, but also places the whole population of the planet Earth in the same position in which Indigenous people found themselves from the contact on—the positions of a colonized people. Science fiction "has been called a form of fantastic fiction and an historical literature" (Seed 1) for a reason: through its affiliation with both fantasy and history it makes possible speculations which push historical scenarios to fantastic limits, asking: what if? In fact, such speculative approach to history is an integral part of its poetics, just as Angel's insistence that he does not choose his stories as much as they choose him (16) is in tune with Anishinaabe view of "stories understood as myths—the sacred stories described in some Anishinaabe traditions as living entities" (Garroutte and Westcott 62). Incidentally, science fiction too can be considered a form of mythopoeic storytelling.[19]

Taylor's play reminds the audience that, like everybody else in today's North America, Indigenous people are exposed to stories, images, and tropes not just of science fiction, but of popular culture in general. Those of the younger generations in particular grew up with these images and learned to love some of these stories.

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[19] Gregory Schrempp mentions, for instance, "'Star Trek' mythology" (17). Ursula Le Guin, in der famous essay "Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction," calls science fiction "the mythology of the modern world—or one of its mythologies" (74).

So that, when Indigenous artists choose to work with popular images and stories, this evidently does not happen only as a reaction to the stereotypical negativity of mainstream popular culture towards Indigenous people. Rather, Indigenous artists and audiences also choose popular stories because of their aesthetic appeal and narrative potential which make working with popular culture not only culturally useful but also personally pleasurable. After all, one of the central functions of popular culture is "organization of pleasure" (Firth 2). Prior to himself becoming a fantasy writer, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) was, and remains to this day, a fan of Western fantasy fiction and an ardent *Dungeons and Dragons* gamer. In the "Acknowledgements" to his vampire novel *The Night Wanderer*, Drew Hayden Taylor writes: "[Y]ou can't keep a good vampire down, it seems (or a good Ojibway teenager, for that matter)" (no pagination). Jeffrey Veregge (S'Klallam, Suquamish, Duwamish), a writer, a visual artist and a comic book illustrator, delights, among other things, in Marvel heroes and Star Wars Saga, and frequents comic cons. In the biographical statement printed at the end of his short story "The Undead Legacy of the King" he calls himself a "Salish geek" (121).

In a recently published interview, also entitled "Salish Geek," Veregge emphasizes both the multiplicity of cultural influences which inform his artistic work as well as the role popular culture plays in the mix: "In my own tribe, I was exposed to art. . . . But as a kid it was always the printed ink of the comics and the movies that made me the most excited. George Lukas, Steven Spielberg, Ray Harryhausen, and Walt Disney were all like great-uncles that I wished I could hang around with. Their influence can be seen very much in what I create today" (107). Assessing his own cultural affiliation, Veregge states:

> Much like my Vulcan hero, Spock, I am of mixed heritage. My mom is Native (S'Klallam, Suquamish, and Duwamish) and my dad is French/German. At times, it felt like each world had an opinion on what this meant for me. There have been moments where I struggled with this myself. As an artist, I wasn't sure where I could go. I appreciated what both worlds had to offer but never felt like I could choose just one.
>
> The work you see today is years of internal battles, cultures waging war on my heart being brought together by a common interest of just being me. That is why I call myself an Indian Nerd or Salish Geek. I am not just one or the other. I am both equally and I am good with that. (108)

Reading this, one almost wonders whether Taylor's Angel in *alterNatives* was by any chance modeled upon Veregge. Just like Veregge refuses to pick just one cultural tradition as his guiding artistic influence, so "[t]hroughout the play, Angel makes use of the right to move outside the restrictions of protocol, shaping himself by reference to other cultures" (Däwes 34). In his passion for science fiction, Angel also fits a definition of a (Anishinaabe) geek (besides, his name is reminiscent of one of the most famous vampires of contemporary popular TV[20]).

All these considerations evoke the question of fandom. Many of the Indigenous authors and artists in the field of Indigenous popular culture are not only practitioners—they are also fans. Sometimes the fascination with the stories or aspects of them is so strong that even the racist stereotypes in which they often deal cannot quench it: though Disney production studio does not have the best track record when it comes to representation of Indigenous peoples, Veregge cites it as a cultural influence; Daniel Heath Justice, too, on multiple occasions pointed out that, though he is fully aware of fantasy genre's frequently displayed racial bias, he simply loves the stories of magic and sword and sorcery too much to completely give them up because of that bias. This kind of passion is the very essence of "geek," which implies an engagement with cultural objects and narratives which in its intensity surpasses mere fandom, but frequently also brings with it a certain flavor of a challenge to mainstream sensibilities, however defined:

> Geeks are passionate fans of stuff, and particularly of stuff that lies somewhere along one of two cultural axes: *math* and *myth*. The love of math stuff gives us science geeks, computer geeks, chess geek; the love of myth stuff gives us theatre geeks, literary geeks, ancient-Greek geeks. This is why science fiction and role-playing games make up the enduring popular image of modern-day geekdom, mind you, because those are the places where math and myth intersect: literature built on the infinite possibilities of science, improv sword and sorcery shaped by the numerical output of 20-sided dice. (Segal 11)

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[20] Angel, "the vampire with a soul," of Joss Whedon's TV shows *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off *Angel*.

Calling himself a "Salish geek," then, Veregge signals his combined appreciation of and passion for, mostly, "myth stuff" and Northwest Coast art stuff. This passion he then transfers onto his own art, thus constructing his own special kind of poetics the greatest power of which unfolds at the intersection of different kinds of "stuff."

I consider this fan aspect of the engagement of Indigenous authors and audiences with popular culture a very important one, and one which often tends to be overlooked. Viewing it from this angel helps make clear that Indigenous people are not simply observers and correctors of popular culture; they are also very active participants who not so much censor popular culture as they reshape it to reflect their "active sense of presence," in Vizenor's terms ("Aesthetics of Survivance" 1). Simultaneously, writing this kind of fiction, painting this kind of images, and projecting out this kind of personal image serves an important function for Indigenous communities, particularly in the cities: it gives younger Indigenous people of today a whole new framework, a cultural archive which encompasses the multiplicity of cultural influences with which they grew up and to which they can relate. Because writers and artist like Veregge, Justice and others like them are, of course, not the only "geeky" types in the Indian Country: the fact that more and more young people take up popular culture as a framework to create art or to embark on an entrepreneurial enterprise points toward that.[21] The stunning success of Indigenous hip hop, rock bands and pop singers, the rapid growth of Indigenous comic books landscape, the emergence of Indigenously-produced and –themed computer games and (animated) superhero productions all testify to the fact that the ground is fertile, that there is a need and demand for popular Indigenous cultural productions.

One of the most important features that make these productions so valuable for the Indigenous youth of today is that they rework the popular themes of mainstream culture, keeping aspects of them which create fascination but eliminating the

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[21] The recent volume *Dreaming in Indian: Contemporary Native American Voices*, edited by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale, is essentially a collection of just such success stories of young Indigenous artists and entrepreneurs, most of them working in the field of popular culture, from comic books and photography to fashion and hip hop music. In her foreword to the volume, author and poet Lee Maracle (Salish/Cree Stó:lō Nation) states: "All the works in the following pages are part of that amazing struggle to go forward, into modernity, onto the global stage, without leaving our ancient selves behind. . . . Let us all go forward into the future, bound to our ancient selves and as modern as any other" (10).

stereotypical representation of Indigenous peoples of which popular culture is so often guilty: they edit out the Winnetous and Lone Rangers, Tiger Lilys and Disney-ilk Pocahontases. In their popular works, Indigenous writers, artists and producers cleanse mainstream popular culture of the colonial gaze, which renders the fan experience of the Indigenous youth who engage with them by far more meaningful and well-integrated. Besides, Indigenous artists also tend to assume a position of mentors and success role models for young people. Arigon Starr (Kickapoo, Muscogee Creek, Cherokee, and Seneca), the creator of popular *Super Indian* comic books, answering the question "What inspired you to create a Native American super hero?" in an interview, summarizes all of these issues: "Thinking about me and my sister as kids looking for something to read that had Native people in it. Anywhere. Even as a sidekick. I hope my work inspires other kids to write their stories, too" (59). All these aspects make Indigenous popular culture a powerful resurgent practice.

In his article "Fear of the Changeling Moon: A Rather Queer Tale from a Cherokee Hillbilly," Daniel Heath Justice recalls how, in his youth, even the conventional Euroamerican fantastic stories had the power to lift his spirits among the double discrimination and bullying to which he as a homosexual Indigenous teen had been subjected:

> The worlds I wanted to go to were Faerie, the marvelous land of Oz, Krynn, Middle-earth—all the places where freaks and misfits fled to be heroes and magicians, where their essence and integrity were more important than who they failed to be, couldn't be . . . or refused to be. I wouldn't be a Cherokee kid with delusions of European grandeur or a misfit nerd who desperately wanted to be popular but couldn't surrender to the demands of conformity. And I wouldn't be a boy unsure about his masculinity, a boy for whom beauty and gentility meant more than muscle and meanness. When I'd walk with my dogs through pine and aspen woods, I'd fantasize about walking unaware through the veil between our world and that of the Fair Folk, never to return to the pain of adolescence again. There was certainly shadow in Faerie—the dark side of the moon—but it belonged here and, if treated with respect, took no notice of intruders. Even werewolves could be mastered in Faerie. (93-94)

This power of fantastic and speculative stories to transcend the limitations of immediate empirical and social reality and imagine social change implemented in an unconventional way is what makes these genres one of the most subversive cultural sites of today. Claiming them as one of the cultural influences and using them as an experimental sandbox, Indigenous artists fill these genre stories with Indigenous poetics in McLeod's sense, creating a growing body of literature and media which has a potential to be a tremendous source of empowerment and identification for those inclined to turn to it.

Another Indigenous artist who recently theorized the relationship between contemporary Indigenous cultures and popular culture is Sonny Assu, a Laich-kwil-tach painter and visual artist. In his essay tellingly entitled "Popular Totems" he, too, stresses the importance of contemporary Eurowestern popular culture and popular mythology for the younger generations of Indigenous people, and argues their right to claim popular artifacts and cultural products as part of their indigeneity in modern times (139). When Assu boisterously affirms "Yes, we are the Pepsi Generation" (139), in essence he expresses the same cultural and personal sentiment as Emma LaRocque does when she writes: "As far as I am concerned, Shakespeare is as much my heritage as a human being as is *Wehsakehcha*, the central Cree comic-psychologist, shape-shifting character in the numerous stories my mother entertained her children with" ("'Resist No Longer'" 16). Both these statements, as well as works of Indigenous popular culture themselves, aptly illustrate the truth of another one of LaRocque's statements: "Our knowledges are transcolonial, expansive, unsedimented, and both ancient and contemporary" (16). All of these adjectives can without hesitation also be applied to contemporary Indigenous art.

Assu interprets the process of personal identification and its outward performative enactment, which in today's cultural moment frequently happens by means of appropriation of commercial brands and/or such icons of popular culture as Marvel heroes or aspects of *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* universes, in Indigenous Northwest Coast terms as the process of modern totemization. Within this process, brands and cultural icons are used by Indigenous people as "personal totems" which, taken as a sum total with other cultural affiliations a person possesses and

recognizes, project into the world a set of images that comprise individual self-identification. Veregge's self-identification as a "Salish geek" can serve as a prime example of that. In Assu's own body of work, the idea of personal totems translates into artistic objects like drums painted with images of iPods, Spider Man, or Mickey Mouse, all rendered in a particular kind of stylization and paintwork characteristic of what is commonly called Northwest Coast style of North American Indigenous art. Or he uses the specific visual make-up and design of famous brands like Coca Cola to convey messages that are related to such issues like land claims ("Coke Salish" piece) and decolonization ("Decolonize" series). These pieces of art are immediately recognizable as using both Indigenous and Eurowestern popular poetics, which are so masterfully balanced that no part is more dominant than the other. The visual effect of such art pieces can be quite striking due to the unconventional mixture of form, style and content.

Assu's metaphor of personal totems suggests a coming together of different systems of knowledge, representation and poetics to produce a composite cultural image tailored to the present cultural moment and its complex interrelations. For the Indigenous artists, such theories and artistic experiments again serve to expand the horizon of what is possible, emphasizing as they do creativity over reactionism, as Assu points out:

> My base mandate for most, if not all of my work, is to forge something new out of the old. At the time, I was toying with using new media to tell old stories. I was successful in my technique, but what failed me was the message. I was more content with trying to fight the stereotypes of what was 'Indian art' than actually trying to come up with something uniquely my own. My work, ironically West Coast, was based more in theory than image. At the same time, what I was creating was no different in my eyes than what was already created. Whether it was work created by a master carver of the past, the most sought after contemporary master carver, or some dude sitting on the corner of Robinson and Howe carving up five-dollar plaques for the tourists, it was all the same—it promoted a stereotype of what that Indian art should be, a stereotype that not only dictated what Indian art should be, but what a 'real Indian' is. For me, the challenge was, and has been since then, to overcome the wall of stereotype, to extend the boundaries of First Nations art, to push contemporary art and ideals in a new direction. (143)

One of the main end results for which Sonny Assu hopes with his projects and his artistic work is "to have . . . First Nations art hung alongside other masterful works in an art museum, instead of an anthropology museum" (145). In other words, he uses popular culture among other things to fight the ethnographic ghettoizing of both Indigenous art and Indigenous peoples and to fight the constraints which the discourse of authenticity puts onto Indigenous artists. Significantly, the process of fusion of different cultural elements evident in Assu's work follows the same logic as Joanne R. DiNova's construction of what she calls an "indigenist framework," in that "the apparently rigid Aboriginal/Western binary" of culturally specific art conventions remains but "a temporary epistemological template" that, in the end, will be "dismantl[ed]" (DiNova 92).

Assu's objective described above is very similar to that of Sherman Alexie, a Native American writer of Coeur d'Alene and Spokane descent, whom Lara Narcisi, in her article "Sherman Alexie and Popular Culture: Magic in the Mix," calls "one of contemporary America's most fluent practitioners of multiple artistic genres" (47). In an interview quoted in Narcisi's article, Alexie elaborates on the cultural-psychological background of his fondness for making use of popular culture in his creative work:

> In my dictionary, 'Indian' and 'nostalgic' are synonyms. As colonized people, I think we're always looking to the past for some real or imaginary sense of purity and authenticity. But I hate my nostalgia. I think I'm pop-culture obsessed because I hope it's an antidote to the disease of nostalgia. So I think the past and the present are always duking it out in my work. The Lone Ranger and Tonto will always be fistfighting. (47)

Thus, Alexie uses the perceived novelty and modernity-boundedness of popular culture as a cultural phenomenon to push against the nostalgic over-historicizing of Indigenous people—of a sort which Sheriff Curtis employed in and promoted with his photography, [22] and which, in Alexie's opinion, after centuries of

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[22] For a collection of Curtis's images and introduction to his work, see, for example, Graybill and Boesen (1994).

colonization Indigenous people have internalized. But, like Sonny Assu, he also uses popular culture as a means of artistic innovation.[23] As Narcisi puts it,

> Alexie's work is so powerful precisely because it moves beyond subversion onto creative reinvention. Native culture does not, Alexie suggests, have to be assimilated into nor itself assimilate popular culture; the two can communicate and create something contemporary and new. Popular culture is powerful in Alexie's work because it offers a means of bridging cultural divides, acting as a form of unification. (53)

As is evident from this collection of points-of-view and testimonials of Indigenous artists, Indigenous artistic engagement with popular culture is a site of a lively debate. Different artists conceptualize it differently and stress different aspects of it. The above examples serve to show that there already exists a dynamic discourse around the issue of Indigenous popular culture, one which is sure to become increasingly intense and complex in the future, as even more cultural texts of Indigenous popular culture appear on the scene. What all of these statements seem to have in common, though, is the assumption that the field of Indigenous popular culture has much to do with artistic innovation, with combining and reinventing things that had not been combined in this form before and experimenting with the results. Furthermore, all of them stress the immediacy, the contemporariness of Indigenous popular culture. Importantly, though, this is a contemporariness which strives to create a sense of continuity, which for many Indigenous peoples had been at least fractured due to the experience of colonization. This contemporariness that tends towards continuity, to my mind, is also a distinctive feature of Indigenous popular poetics.

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[23] In Assu's work, however, popular images are fitted harmoniously into the whole, and there is no discernible "fistfighting." While Alexi sees popular culture as a way to counteract nostalgia, Assu treats them rather as an everyday reality.

1.3 "The Medium is the Message": "Digital Natives" and Community Building

> In the twentieth century, our feet sprouted horsepower as we put the pedal to the metal, we happily collect airline miles as we jet around the globe, zip through cyberspace like digital natives, prepare to board *wa'a* transformed into rocket ships and space shuttles that carry us into the heavens to traverse the realm of our gods. Likewise, our literature, theories, and critical analyses travel with us and beyond us, in words spoken, recorded in audio, video and written, in articles, books, and blogs. Our ancestors were global before globalization, and today we still are.
>
> ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui (Kanaka Maoli)[24]

When talking about the affective and personal aspects of Indigenous artists' and audiences' engagement with popular culture, it is important to stress that, however great a fascination they induce on the personal level, the significance of Indigenous popular literatures, media and art goes beyond the individual. In fact, in the overwhelming majority of cases and in accordance with the internal dynamics of resurgence, they are communally oriented, or even community-building, cultural activities. By that, I do not necessarily mean one particular kind of community, but communities in their multiple variations. In Indigenous context, they could be, for example, tribally specific, or/and trans-Indigenous in their nature, but also communities that are built around an emotional affiliation to the medium, the form, or the content of a text, that is, "communities of common interest" (Duffet 244). I believe that, frequently, it is a complex combination of all those factors. Richard van Camp (Tlicho) has written both of his comic books, *Kiss Me Deadly* and *The Path of the Warrior*, expressly to address social issues important for Indigenous communities: safe sex and gang violence. The medium of a comic book through which he chose to approach Indigenous youth—clearly the target audience of both titles—is much more effective for his purposes than an educational pamphlet or lecture could be expected to be. Comic books, genre fiction, computer games, Indigenous rock and hip hop music etc. all serve as a bridge between generations,

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[24] ho'omanawanui 679.

combining ancestral knowledge of various Indigenous cultures with contemporary modes of artistic and mythopoeic expression in a mix that has a potential to speak to both older and younger Indigenous people. Honoring the past while looking into the future, these imaginative works contribute to the continuity and ongoing circulation of Indigenous knowledges and systems of symbols. The larger the variety of media participating in the project the better, since every medium has its own dynamics and a potential to reach certain kinds of audiences.

In a way, community-generative function is inbuilt in popular culture as such—its narratives and productions tend to facilitate fandom, and fans tend to understand themselves in terms of communities:

> Fandom can begin in private, though 'private' is not quite the requisite term: friends and family make recommendations, and potential fans always engage with media products and performances that they know are *collectively valued*. . . . Public social groupings act to foster, facilitate and maintain fandom. Many fans characterize their entry into fandom as a move from social and cultural *isolation* – whether as rogue readers, women in patriarchy or gay men in heteronormative culture – into more active communality with kindred spirits . . . (Duffett 244)

Social media very effectively promote this function: a fan page of a show, a movie, or an actor or actress on Facebook, for instance, is largely there to collect 'likes,' that is, to collect fans into a group in cyberspace; its posts often refer to the fans as "friends," thus emphasizing communal togetherness and like-mindedness (no pun intended) which, at least initially, is oftentimes based exclusively on fan affiliation. That is, such sites provide initial and accessible platforms where a fan base can gather and become a fan community:

> While an artist's *fan base* is the collective made of people who feel a connection to him/her, the *fan community* is a physical manifestation of the fan base, a mutually supportive social network of people that can – and do – regularly communicate with each other as individuals. The fan community can enhance an artist's appeal in various ways: sharing information, lobbying to get their artist greater media exposure, demonstrating mass support, offering friendly welcome to new members. (Duffett 244)

In terms of such artist support, fan communities are possibly even more important for Indigenous artist, because very often they do not have the überpower of the industry behind them since many Indigenous productions run as low budget independent productions. Under such circumstances, the promotional and emotional support provided by an active fan community, but also the vital monetary support through online-based crowdfunding and fundraising sites like Kickstarter or Indiegogo, can prove invaluable, and, in extreme cases, spell life or death of a production or a project.

The scope of the kinds of media in which Indigenous artists work has increased dramatically in the last couple of decades. Some of these developments are fairly recent: Indigenous comic books have only been around for some years, during which time Indigenous TV and animation also started to blossom, propelled forward to no small extent by the founding in Canada of Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) which to this day remains the only North American network expressly dedicated to Indigenous and Indigenous-themed programming. Indigenous creators of video games have only started to penetrate the world of gaming last year, with computer games like *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna),* released in November 2013. Working in these media allows Indigenous artists to participate in the 'nerd scene,' a cultural arena which is continuously growing and gaining cultural influence, not least because of its extensive transmediality and wide-reaching cultural resourcing.

In 2013, APTN aired the first season of *Animism: The God's Lake*, an animated series featuring Indigenous-inspired mythologies and cosmologies, currently relevant environmental activist causes, and an Indigenous female action hero, Melody Ravensfall, as protagonist. The season only comprises six episodes, but is packed with meaning. In terms of its form, content, and media behavior, *Animism* appears to be heavily influenced by Japanese anime tradition and to be governed to a large extent by anime conventions. In his book *The Soul of Anime*, Ian Condry explains: "Anime . . . refers to Japanese animated film and television, but the worlds of anime extend far beyond what appears on the screen. Anime is characteristic of contemporary media in its interconnected webs of commercial and cultural activities that reach across industries and national boundaries" (1). Thus,

the story in anime is not contained within the animated film medium only, but reaches out to other media such as comic books (in a majority of cases, Japanese anime is based on manga, Japanese comic books), conventions and computer games, as well as fan activities in cyberspace and beyond. In fact, anime is virtually inseparable from the culture of conventions and cos players. This, among other things, provides connections between the production team and the audience, especially the fan community, arguably more so than in any other storytelling new medium, to the point where the audience can directly influence the production. Condry calls this phenomenon "collaborative creativity" and points towards its community-building nature and potential:

> I argue that collaborative creativity, which operates across media industries and connects official producers to unofficial fan production, is what led to anime's global success. Put simply, success arises from social dynamics that led people to put their energy in today's media worlds. This collective social energy is what I mean by the 'soul' of anime. (1-2)

In accordance with all the medium dynamics that Condry describes for anime, *Animism: The God's Lake* also expanded beyond the boundaries of the television screen. The show has its own fan page on Facebook which keeps up the newsfeed pertaining to the show as well as a free-to-play online computer game which is based on the world of the show and which, in speaking back to the show and providing narrative backgrounds and lore supplements, rounds up its narrative. A fan fiction contest was planned and announced, resulting in the publication of *The Book of the Emissaries: An Animism Short Fiction Anthology*, an e-book constructed as a fictional codex of lore featured in the show.[25] The multimedia content of *Animism* goes so far as to include the fictional Grind City University into which players can "enroll."

On the website of Zeros2Heroes Media, the media platform and group which launched *Animism*, the show and its objectives are described in a following way:

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[25] The contest entries can be viewed and read on the homepage of the show: http://animism.zeros2heroes.com/fiction-contest/browse-entries.

> Animism is a landmark transmedia property that spans video games, short fiction, graphic novels, alternate reality experiences and a nationally televised animated series. Half Harry Potter and half Hunger Games, Animism is entertainment designed for young adults comfortable with a wide range of media channels.[26]

As is evident from this statement, *Animism* from the start was conceived of as a multimedia event rather than an isolated show. It seems to be an example of what Astrid Ensslin calls "literary gaming" (1), which she defines as "a hybrid subgroup of creative media that has both *readerly* and *playerly* characteristics" (1). Such transmediality tends to create interrelated networks and communities of fans united by their responses to the themes and imagery of the show. In the case of *Animism*, these themes are largely Indigenous-inspired. That said, *Animism*, though employing Indigenous themes built around an Indigenous protagonist, was not created exclusively by Indigenous artists but is a result of collaboration between non-Indigenous and Indigenous digital artists and writers. In his introduction to *The Book of the Emissaries*, Ken Scholes notes: "I suspect it's been done before but this is the first time I've seen North American Aboriginal mythology featured so heavily in a fantasy series, and from what I can see, it's particularly well served by the fact that Aboriginal writers are involved deeply in the project" (n. pag.). Thus, though not purely Indigenously-produced, *Animism* is nevertheless culturally significant and an important platform for Indigenous artists.

One of APTN's objectives in airing the show is doubtlessly an attempt to reach specific demographic which is an important target group and part of the network's "ideal audience" (Bredin 75):

> Several of the people I spoke to addressed the desire to use APTN programming to reach Aboriginal youth. As one person put it, young Aboriginal people, like young people across North America, have grown up immersed in a global popular culture sustained largely by television and popular music. Influenced by consumer-driven trends in TV drama, music video, and entertainment programming, young viewers are looking for that kind of content on APTN. While one person pointed out that it was good marketing strategy to try to reach the youth segment, she also admitted that it was 'tough to do programs that keep their attention, when there's so much to see and do and be.' Another

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[26] http://www.zeros2heroes.com/#projects. 01 Sept. 2014.

person felt that youth wanted programs similar to those available on mainstream networks, but they wanted them with a cultural awareness that supports their identity: 'They want this kind of edgier cultural expression while living in their own Nation.' These examples reflect the technical and institutional formation of young APTN viewers as a mobile and dispersed audience. Moving easily between majority and minority cultures, between the global and the local, they will require specific audience-building strategies to keep them engaged in APTN programs. (Bredin 78)

Constructed as it is, *Animism* clearly addresses just that need for contemporary popular cultural tropes paired with Indigenous-themed points of identification. Even if the show is not predominantly indigenously produced, it does invest considerable energy and effort into constructing an "indigenist framework" (DiNova 92). It is an action animation, featuring a badass female protagonist of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Xena the Warrior Princess*'s ilk, on a quest to safe something precious. It is at the same time mythopoeic and aware of the current issues of contention into which many of the Indigenous youth are directly involved. Neither did it fare badly in terms of critical reception, having become a finalist of the prestigious SXSW festival, a film and music festival held annually in Austin, Texas. However, it appears to have been marginally successful with fans and to never really have managed to build up too active a fan community. The second season, *Animism: Titan Falls*, is announced to be in the making, but as of this writing no projected completion or release date has been made public.

Also in terms of its narrative content, *Animism* is self-conscious about the question of media and technology. In fact, the themes of the goods and evils of technology and its potential in the hands of technologically and medially savvy young people trying, to use Thomas King's words in his novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, to "fix up the world" (133) is very much central to the plot. The show's portrayal of environmental activist tactics with regard to the use of media and technology to spread the message and organize protests reminds both of the Occupy movement (which, in fact, is called upon by its name in the show) and the Idle No More movement. Both social movements used media presence and online platforms to advance their causes, and both relied on flash mobs as their protest strategy (albeit in different manners). *Animism* arguably not only thematizes this in

its narrative but also to an extent sees itself as part of the social effort they represent, whether it is successful in it or not. It also promotes the necessity of a joint effort on the part of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in order to counter the threat of environmental disaster which affects all. In that, it again echoes Joanne DiNova's emphasis on the importance of relationality, of a common cause and shared world view and sensibility: "Ultimately, an indigenist framework must include all people" (92). It also evokes Rick Wallace's argument that "grassroots, community-based peacebuilding is a cite of transformative political and cultural engagement" (8) which is "[g]uided by emerging principles of solidarity and the re-negotiation of power" and examples of which "are unique efforts to create collaborative decolonizing projects that give force to the aspirations of Indigenous communities while also demanding change from non-Indigenous activists and communities" (9).

As part of the APTN programming, *Animism* in a way tested the ground for another show which started airing in 2014, released into the programming on October 5, 2014, and which is in many ways similar to and different from *Animism*—an animated series entitled *Kagagi*. Following the anime conventions even closer than *Animism*, *Kagagi* animated series is based on a preceding comic book, namely *Kagagi: The Raven*, created by Jay Odjick (Anishinaabe) who is also the executive producer, lead writer and designer of the follow-up anime. The series exists in two language versions: Algonquin dubbed and English dubbed. The protagonist of *Kagagi* is a teenager who leads a double existence—as an ordinary person by the name of Matthew Carver in his everyday (school)life and as a superhero Kagagi the Raven whenever the world is in need of some saving. Such a double life is a very common theme of popular superhero narratives, from *Superman* to *Shadow* to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or, to name an animated example, Prince Adam/He-Man in *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. Kagagi's adversary, on the other hand, has by now become a wide-spread trope, a figure much used in Indigenous popular culture—he is Windigo, the spirit of greed. Numerous comic books created by Indigenous authors use Windigo/Wetigo as the Big Bad, the evil of the piece, and so does *Animism: The God's Lake*. In *The Night Wanderer*, Drew Hayden Taylor compares European vampires to Windigo. The

choice of the monster—the insatiable consumerist becoming more hungry the more he feeds in many Indigenous storytelling traditions—is, of course, historically and socio-critically significant. Taking all this into account, it is easy to see how *Kagagi* participates in that complex interplay of tropes and traditions which ultimately leads to creation of new cultural archives of texts—in this case, Indigenous popular culture.

Like *Animism: The God's* Lake, though not to the same degree of cutting-edge technologies involved, *Kagagi* has become a transmedial phenomenon. Apart from the comic book-to-anime conversion itself, show-related content and franchise include motivational clips targeted at young audience promoting issues like healthy lifestyle (similar to aforementioned Richard van Camp's comic books) and paper cut-out toys. In terms of producing a fan community, *Kagagi* maintains a rather lively Facebook presence on the show's fan page, and there also exists a separate fan open group dedicated to the show on Facebook, currently counting almost 900 members. By the logic of the same dynamics Duffett describes, these platforms function as engines of discussion and promotion—gathering spaces for the fan community. *Kagagi* even managed the leap across the border and is currently also airing in the United States on FNX (First Nations Experience). Gracy Dove (Shuswap), an Indigenous actress who gave her voice to Cassie on *Kagagi*, went on to star in Leonardo DiCaprio's award-winning cinematic event *The Revenant*.

Productions like *Kagagi*, Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers' short film *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, or Jeff Barnaby's movie *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, though very different from each other, can all be considered examples of productions that comprise what Howard and Prolux, in their introduction to *Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian Cities: Transformations and Continuities*, theorize as "Aboriginal mediascapes":

> A further strain of thought useful for understanding urban Aboriginal community constitution is through Aboriginal mediascapes, a concept devised by Arjun Appadurai and effectively applied by Buddle to Aboriginal radio, films, and television. She describes this process as providing city dwellers with opportunities to learn and/or re-learn Aboriginal traditions, to embed themselves within real or virtual community relations and to participate in cultural productions . . . Aboriginal peoples, therefore, relationally combine ideational and

practical/social action resources across spatial, interactional, and epistemological boundaries to build and to maintain community in cities. (14-15)

Both *Kagagi* and *A Red Girl's Reasoning* can be analyzed in these terms, since they do not only formally and thematically relate to popular culture and the challenges of urban community-building, but also display a transmedial presence in the virtual space and participate in fan culture.

In the above quote, Howard and Proloux stress the importance and the potential of popular media to create communities grounded in cyberspace and/or more abstract culture spaces rather than an actual unifying physical territory, which is especially useful for Indigenous people based in the cities rather than living on ancestral lands. Such project seems a vital one "in the context of growing numbers of Indigenous people living in urban areas" (1), as Peters and Andersen put it: "Urban Indigenous peoples have resisted expectations of assimilation by building communities in and beyond urban areas and by reformulating Western institutions and practices to support their particular Indigenous identities. Indigeneity survives, adapts, and innovates in the cities" (2). This includes virtual communities in cyberspace, some of which are built around experiences of fandom and artist-support. Communities that are formed through such activities will in overwhelming majority of cases be intertribal and transnational.

However, tribal specificity and affiliation is not necessarily lost in these types of communities. As Renya K. Ramirez argues, those who live in the city but maintain active connections to their respective tribal nations facilitate and maintain knowledge exchange and two-directional cultural flows between the city and the reservation/reserve. Ramirez calls this model of interaction and networking "a Native hub." In her book entitled *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*, Ramirez shows how the movement into an urban environment actually helps create transnational Indigenous communities and alliances: "Indians' movement into the cities has increased the possibility of gathering and politically organizing, rather than causing the Native Americans to assimilate and lose a sense of their Native identities" (2). Ramirez's hub is a concept which includes simultaneously stability and mobility: "The hub is a

geographical concept. Hubs can represent actual places. Gathering sites or hubs include cultural events, such as powwows and sweat lodge ceremonies, as well as social and political activities, such as meetings and family gatherings. In fact, urban hubs are often portable" (3). This generative tension between stability and mobility is especially strong in cyberspace, where space is not attached to territory. As Ramirez explains,

> the hub suggests how landless Native Americans maintain a sense of connection to their tribal homelands and urban spaces through participation in cultural circuits and maintenance of social networks, as well as shared activity with other Native Americans in the city and on the reservation. Urban Indians create hubs through sigs and behavior, such as phone-calling, e-mailing, memory sharing, storytelling, ritual, music, style, Native banners and other symbols. Some of these hubs are, therefore, not based in space but include virtual activities, such as reading tribal newspapers on the Internet and e-mailing. (3)

Since Ramirez's book was published in 2007, the list of possible activities that function as and/or promote the "hubs" has grown to include (online) gaming, network TV, blogging, etc. As data collected in 2003-2004 shows, APTN has itself become an important hub which connects Canada's urban Indigenous population to reserves:

> Southern and urban Aboriginal viewers are clearly aware of APTN, and it has an average weekly reach of 31 percent of these viewers. This rises to 46 percent in the all-important eighteen to twenty-four year-old segment . . . Most importantly, among urban Aboriginal viewers APTN is ranked as the third most watched network, behind only Discovery Channel and MuchMusic. (Bredin 83)

APTN programming itself reflects this hub status, with inclusion of programs in English as well as Indigenous languages, and programs which are reserve-themed as well as urban-themed (both *Animism: The God's Lake* and *Kagagi* belong to this latter category).

While APTN may be the most important provider and distributor of Indigenous television and serialized (animated) productions, in terms of Indigenous film festivals are much more important. The number of regularly held Indigenous film

festivals has grown exceptionally fast in recent years, in response to rapidly increasing numbers of Indigenous cinematic productions. Increasingly, such productions need marketing outlet as well as an artistic space of exchange and network-building. Indigenous film festivals like American Indian Film Festival, First Peoples' Festival, ImagiNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival, Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival, Dreamspeakers Film Festival and many more cater to this need, providing cultural hubs for "digital natives."

In fact, it can be argued that transmedially constructed phenomena like *Kagagi* in themselves become examples of hubs, as do many other cultural artifacts which combine into a growing body of artistic work which may be called Indigenous popular culture. To my mind, this body of art is becoming increasingly important in this day and age. Indigenous popular culture is hardly ever entertainment only. Instead, it is geared towards addressing real-life problems of many Indigenous communities: Richard van Camp's comic *Kiss Me Deadly* promotes safe sex; Drew Hayden Taylor's vampire novel *Night Wanderer*, among other issues, speaks of the challenges of broken families and youth suicide; *A Red Girl's Reasoning* addresses the issue of sexual violence against Indigenous women, and so on. Needless to say, on its own, popular culture does not solve these problems. It does not make the darkness of colonialism in all its million guises disappear; but it does offer another fire for the people to gather around.

Chapter 2. Bloodsucking Strangers: Vampires and Vampirism in A. A. Carr's *The Eye Killers* and Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer*

2.1 On Vampiric Involvement: Vampire Conventions and Vampire Transgressions

> Governments, they're the real fucking terrorists
> Ever since they came to the Americas
> […]
> Vampires, they're out for blood
>
> Plex feat. Lase, "No More"

Contemporary popular culture loves its vampires. Since roughly 1980s, arguably starting with the publication of *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), the first novel of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, vampire genre fiction exploded like hardly any other, with the possible exception of fantasy. The mere scope and richness of the material make it difficult to generalize about the genre. It is fairly safe to say, however, that up to the 2000s, vampire fiction mainly targeted adult audiences, with authors like Anne Rice, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro and Suzy McKee Charnas, to name the most prominent. The publication in 2005 of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight*, the first book of a series now known as the Twilight Saga, vampire genre entered the realm of young adult fiction, where since then it has been prospering.[27]

In a much-quoted statement, Nina Auerbach remarks that "every age embraces the vampire it needs" (145). As evidence suggests, so does every culture. Tales of bloodsucking creatures are certainly not endemic to Western popular culture, nor to Western storytelling in general. Studies like Giselle Liza Anatol's examination of the Caribbean *soucouyant* tales and their derivatives or Zacharias P. Thunday's survey of the "Indian supernatural vampire-figures" (43) aptly demonstrate that. In

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[27] The TV has made this move somewhat earlier, most significantly with Joss Whedon's show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) which initially targeted young adult audiences but quickly developed into an all-age success.

fact, vampire's wide-spread dissemination through time and space is remarkable, as Matthew Beresford summarizes:

> Belief in vampires is well documented throughout history, from the shores of Ancient Greece and Rome to the wind-swept deserts of Ancient Egypt; from Babylonia and India in the East to France and England in the West. There are vampires in Norse mythology, in the plague and witch trials of the Middle Ages, in the seventeenth-century 'Age of Reason' and in the Gothic literature of Victorian England. (7)

This wide-spread cultural dispersion became part of the fictional vampire lore. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, it is van Helsing who speaks of the ubiquitous historical and spatial omnipresence of the vampire-kind:

> For, let me tell you, he is known everywhere that men have been. In old Greece, in old Rome; he flourish in Germany all over, in France, in India, even in the Chersonese; and in China, so far from us in all ways, there even is he, and the people fear him at this day. (254)

Indigenous cultures and storytelling traditions of North America are no exception in that respect. They, too, have figures in their mythological repertoire whose nature is characterized by a vampiric involvement with the living, conceptualized in a variety of ways depending on the nation in question. The two novels which are the focus of this chapter—A.A. Carr's *Eye Killers* and Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer*—both bring these traditional figures into play vis-á-vis contemporary vampire figurations of Eurowestern popular culture.

But very different in tone and plot, both these novels construct vampirism as an allegory of colonial (dis)possession of Indigenous lives and bodies. Regarded from a point of view of Indigenous inhabitants of North America, vampires in both texts are pale bloodsucking monsters of uncertain origin and unquestionable cruelty who aim to extract and infect. Significantly, both novels also center on an Indigenous teenage female potential victim. Though conceptualized very differently, at stake in both novels are first and foremost young Indigenous lives.

But why vampires? Why use this particular figure to address colonization and dispossession and all their grim by-products? I believe the answer involves a complex interplay of the history of the vampire fiction genre in general, the

particular makeup of the vampire figure, as well as the revisionary possibilities offered by the parallels between Indigenous mythological figures like windigo (Anishinabe) or skinwalker (Navajo) and Eurowestern popular vampires. In Jodi A. Byrd's words,

> [i]t is [the] tension between modernity and tradition, between story and literature, between becoming and unbecoming other, that make the vampire novel such an appealing transgenre for Navajo and Laguna Pueblo author A. A. Carr and Ojibwa writer Drew Hayden Taylor, for instance, to explore issues of blood, orality, suicide, and redemption within the context of Native worlds and epistemologies. (351)

Byrd's last point here is paramount. The fact that eurowesternly constructed vampire figures are transported into an Indigenous cultural and philosophical context and dealt with from that standpoint is one of the most defining features of both Carr's and Taylor's novels. Ultimately, in both texts the consumptive greed of vampirism is defeated through an Indigenous intervention, based on Indigenous worldviews, codes of behavior and knowledge archives and resulting in restoration of endangered Indigenous future. I will revisit this point later in the chapter.

In terms of genre affiliation, vampire fictions in general tend to be seen as a subgenre of the Gothic. Even if a particular vampire narrative—such as, for example, Suzy McKee Charnas' *The Vampire Tapestry*—refuses to overly partake of the sentiment of the Gothic terror characteristic of the genre by constructing the vampire as a natural product of evolution rather than a being aligned to the supernatural, between the lines it still evokes the tradition. As Martin J. Wood, quoting Gregory Waller, notes, "each vampire story 'participates in an ongoing series of narratives' including all previous vampire tales" (64). Or, as Robert Stam puts it, "[a]ny text that has slept with another text has necessarily slept with all the texts the other text has slept with" (qtd. in Wilcox and Lavery xxiv). Therefore, by virtue of vampire figure's connection to the Gothic, each vampire story partakes of an even larger narrative framework. This is also true for both vampire novels to be examined in this chapter. Both Carr's and Taylor's texts engage in a complex interplay of cultural archives, prominently evoking Eurowestern vampire tradition among other themes and sources. By giving his novel the subtitle *A Native Gothic*

Novel, Drew Hayden Taylor references this connection even more prominently and explicitly. Through the figure of a Eurowestern vampire, these texts are in constant and conscious dialogue with the Gothic tradition, re-configuring it for their own meaning-producing purposes.

As has been repeatedly pointed out, preoccupation with the past, especially with past horrors haunting the present, is one of the defining features of the Gothic. Caterine Spooner, for one, notes: "Gothic is conventionally a backward-looking genre. Whether set in a barbarous former age, or haunted by that age's remnants and vestiges, the past weighs heavily on Gothic narratives" (ix). By virtue of its immortality, or at least extreme longevity, as a walker through the centuries, the vampire figure is an especially suitable tool for narratively bringing the past into the present. When this process is interpreted and experienced as haunting, it generally has a negative connotation. However, the past reaching into the present can also be seen as continuity, in which case it may be interpreted as helpful and even therapeutic. Continuity is the interpretation that the vampire Marius, in Anne Rice's novel *The Vampire Lestat*, gives vampirism when he states: "I am a continual awareness onto myself" (66).

I believe that both these interpretations—the past as haunting and the past as instructing continuity—are important for Carr's and Taylor's novels and their vampire figurations. The haunting past signifies the intergenerational traumatic impact the European colonial project inflicted upon the Indigenous inhabitants of North America. In her autobiographical book, Lori Arviso Alvord, a Navajo surgeon, calls it "'historical grief'" (12):

> My sister and I did not inherit our spoken language, as English was the primary language in our home, but we did inherit the grief of our people. It is often referred to as 'historical grief'—coming into this world with the burden of centuries of suffering behind you. Grief for crimes committed hundreds of years ago that as you grow older and learn of it, becomes your own. […] Navajo children are told of the capture and murder of their forefathers and mothers, and then they too must share in the legacy of grief. In addition to dealing with the stories of the past, each new generation must also deal with the effects of this grief on the previous generation—poverty, depression, and alcoholism. It snowballs. As I grew older and learned more about the history of my tribe, I too grieved—and became angry. (12)

It is this historical grief that animates Carr's and Taylor's vampires. The apocalyptic experiences of the contact which resulted in centuries-long, on-going collective trauma of colonization are ingrained in vampire manifestations of both novels, albeit in a different way. Transformed into a vampire by an unidentified creature in France, Owl, young Anishinaabe boy in Taylor's novel, becomes a monster with an insatiable appetite who attacks and kills even those who show him kindness, and who would feed on his own people given the chance. Thus, the alien infection of vampirism forever separates Owl from his people; as a vampire, he literally walks through generations carrying this burden and this grief. Furthermore, vampirism here is also symbolic of colonialism's rampant consumption, greed so strong it cannot be controlled, sucking dry the land, its resources and its people.

Similarly, Carr's vampire Falke drifts through centuries consuming lives of young women, turning them into his vampire brides in order to stuff the bottomless, gaping hole in himself that the loss of his mortal love Christiane left behind. To bring her into the vampire un-life is also his intention for Melissa, a young Navajo girl and his latest love interest or, rather, Christiane substitute. Similar to Taylor's novel, the exposure to the vampire curse alienates Melissa from her Indigenous roots. Even as a fledgling, not yet a fully formed vampire, Melissa instinctively feels an aversion to all things that tie her to her family and her Navajo past, a circumstance which causes her much distress:

> Melissa remembered a sun-washed house that her mother had taken her to, a house which had smelled of dust and rain and corn, a house where her grandfather herded his sheep and where he had taught her the Navajo names of all the guardian animals; a beautiful house that had how become pestilent and hellish in her vampire sight. Melissa wept. (*Eye Killers* 332).

If Falke were to succeed in making her into a full-fledged vampire, Melissa's fate would be the same as Owl's—the choice of either bringing harm to her family and people or eternal separation from them.

For Indigenous people of today, colonial assault is both the past and the present: colonialism is a vampiric creature that lives on for centuries. When the Human

Genome Diversity Project (HGDP) was set in motion for the purpose of collecting and storing cell lines created from the DNA of diverse peoples, the initiative, tellingly, "was dubbed the 'vampire project' by indigenous delegates to the United Nations" (Whitt 157). Laurie Anne Whitt records:

> In January 1994, John Liddle, director of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, protested, 'If the Vampire Project goes ahead and patents are put on genetic material from Aboriginal people, this would be legalized theft. Over the last 200 years, non-Aboriginal people have taken our land, language, culture and health—even our children. Now they want to take the genetic material which makes us Aboriginal people as well.' (157)

This rhetoric demonstrates how colonial practices of cultural imperialism are construed as vampiric in nature and conceptualized through the metaphor of a vampire within Indigenous discourses. In this view, HGDP, the "Vampire Project," targets Indigenous bodies just like a vampire targets the blood of its victims, slowly draining them of life. Colonialism as vampirism is the paradigm of a haunting past—the past that does not let go and continues, in one way or another, to place its demands on the colonized—through which Carr's and Taylor's vampires can be read. Colonialism is the foreign monster, the bloodsucking stranger who, for centuries, threatens the people, their survival and "survivance" (Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance" 1).

However, the second paradigm, that of the past as continuity, is also an important aspect of both novels' construction of their respective vampires. Pierre L'Errant (formerly the boy Owl), the vampire of Drew Hayden Taylor's novel, is able to educate Tiffany, a contemporary Anishinaabe teenager with only a feeble connection to the cultural archives of her Indigenous heritage, about the history and way of life of her ancestors. His intimate personal knowledge of the region's pre-contact past allows him to do so, while his first-hand experience of the contact itself and his centuries-old wandering existence give him perspective to be able to meaningfully address Tiffany's cultural uncertainty when she confides in him: "Sometimes I don't know what being Anishinabe means" (*Night Wanderer* 201). In A.A. Carr's *Eye Killers*, the vampire Falke is a former king from the region of "the Semming (sic) Pass near Vienna" (*Eye Killers* 99) who came to the Americas

sometime during the eighteenth century already as a centuries-old vampire and who has no positive connection to the land's Indigenous cultures (*Eye Killers* 45, 100). Nevertheless, it is Falke's appearance on the scene that causes Michael, the grandfather of Melissa whom Falke abducted, to start digging into the ancient medicine of his nation, one of the pivotal resources that will prove instrumental in defeating the age-old vampire. Ultimately, it is Falke's threat and malicious schemes that force Michael to genuinely open up to "trying to remember the ancient Navajo way" (*Eye Killers* 144).

This theme of historical and cultural continuity which a vampire either provides or triggers and revives gives vampires of both novels a certain positive aspect. In Carr's and Taylor's novels, vampires are the agents who, in one way or another, facilitate the process of reaching back into the past not only to rework its traumas, but to retrieve its treasures. However, once the treasures of the past had been accessed and fully transferred into the present and, by implication, the future, the vampire continuity becomes obsolete and is no longer useful but merely hostile, and therefore has to be destroyed. Jody Byrd argues in relation to *Eye Killers*:

> Carr's *Eye Killers* reworlds the conventions of its generic context in order to disrupt and displace the binaries that separate modernity from tradition in order to imagine Indigenous futurities out of the incestuous, predatory death of vampire continuance. (352)

In both *Eye Killers* and *The Night Wanderer*, "Indigenous futurities" (352) of which Byrd speaks are encoded into the fate of Indigenous children who are initially alienated from their families and disconnected from their respective Indigenous cultures, and to a greater or lesser extent threatened by vampires. Both their physical safety and their emotional and cultural wellbeing have to be restored and reconstituted in order for Indigenous futurities to take hold and bear fruit. The two novels address this necessity and resolve this conflict in a different manner, but with the same ultimate result. I will look at this more closely in the respective sections dedicated to each of the novels.

It seems significant that both potential vampire victims—Melissa in *Eye Killers* and Tiffany in *The Night Wanderer*—are young girls. At the moment of their vampire encounter, they are both sixteen. Why is it apparently so beneficial for the

story to have a young female in one way or another threatened by a vampire? I believe a number of factors are important in this respect.

A male threat towards a defenseless female has been ingrained in the vampire genre from early examples on. John Polidori's "The Vampyre" and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, two of the four texts Beresford lists as foundational to the genre (115), capitalize extensively on this theme. In fact, Stoker's *Dracula* is very much a damsel-in-distress narrative, with a band of male vampire hunters trying to save first Lucy, and later Mina, from the clearly sexually charged vampiric advances of the Count. At the same time, in both "The Vampyre" and *Dracula*, women are seen and used as a gateway to get to the men. In "The Vampyre," the novel's vampire Lord Ruthven uses Aubrey's fiancée and later his sister to exercise revenge on Aubrey himself. In *Dracula*, speaking to the male contingent of the vampire hunters, the Count bluntly states:

> My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed. (326)

In both cases, it is a male vampiric stranger who, with varying degree of success, tries to take possession of the local females and, by doing so, to extend his influence to men, and perhaps the entire population. On the one hand, the vampires objectify women not only as wellsprings for feeding but also as a means to an almost political end. On the other, particularly Dracula treats women as cultural and physical gatekeepers of a population.

All this serves as a framework from which to interpret the roles of Melissa and Tiffany in Carr's and Taylor's novels respectively. Tapping into this tradition allows both authors to stress the cultural dimensions of the vampires of their particular makeup. If these vampires represent colonial violence, then patriarchy and sexism are necessarily a part of that because, as Andrea Smith argues, "gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism. That is, colonial relationships themselves are gendered and sexualized" (*Conquest* 1). Thus, colonial violence is gendered violence, and so

these vampires target young Indigenous women not only to satisfy their bloodlust but also to assert and spread colonial oppression.

When read against a long tradition of Eurowestern vampire texts in which women are vampire's primary targets—physically, sexually and culturally—the choice of victims (and the vampiric involvement in general) in Taylor's and especially Carr's texts acquires an even greater weight. Particularly in light of the ongoing and still unresolved issue of Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and the reports of high levels of domestic abuse Indigenous women suffer at the hands of Indigenous men,[28] vampire violence in these texts takes on an immense cultural significance. The issue of domestic abuse is often seen as a direct result of colonization which becomes internalized, including its patriarchal ideology and sexist practices (Maracle ix; Smith, Andrea, *Conquest* 19-20).[29] While Carr's Falke as a stranger vampire symbolizes direct colonial violence targeted at Indigenous women, Taylor's Pierre L'Errant is an Anishinaabe infected with vampirism while in Europe, so that his attempted assault against Tiffany can easily be read as a result and an example of internalized colonial sexist violence.

However, as discussed above, vampires in *Eye Killers* and *The Night Wanderer* not only pose a threat, they also offer an opportunity. Both Melissa and Tiffany emerge from their respective encounters with vampires culturally and emotionally empowered. Though in very different ways, both Falke and Pierre serve as triggers of cultural awakening for their young would-be victims. While Falke merely

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[28] As Andrea Smith reports in her book *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, "according to U.S. Department of Justice statistics, Indian women suffer death rates twice as high as any other women in this country from domestic violence" (138).

[29] However, Emma LaRocque advises to exercise caution when confronted with such sweeping statements which in a way acquit Indigenous men of personal responsibility for violence against Indigenous women: "Previously, I have tried to address the topic of violence against women within Native communities (1993, 1997). I have tried to place this troubling issue in the context of colonialism, yet at the same time, have emphasized that for many reasons, male violence cannot be fully explained by social or political conditions. In other words, neither colonization nor poverty explains everything about why or how Native men (and societies) may assume sexist attitudes or behaviors. This point has to be emphasized because male violence continues to be much tolerated, explained or virtually absolved by many women of color, including Aboriginal women, usually in defense of cultural difference, community loyalties or nationalist agendas, or out of reaction to white feminist critiques. I am concerned too that sexual violence, in particular, is often treated as only one of many colonial-generated problems that we face. But as numerous studies show, this is no ordinary social problem. Sexual violence devastates human dignity and freedom and rips apart the lives of victims, their families, kinships and other crucial community seams […]. As far back as humans have existed this crime against humanity has existed and remains global in scope and obviously requires much greater analyses and confrontation than it has received" ("Métis and Feminist" 60-61).

indirectly provokes it for Melissa, Pierre actually functions as direct facilitator of Tiffany's (re)connection to the Anishinaabe matrix.[30] Donna Ellwood Flett reads this as passing on, or rather returning, to Indigenous women the power that had been taken away from them by the colonial order:

> [Tim] Schouls makes one final observation about changing roles in contemporary identity that fits well with the transformation in *The Night Wanderer*. He quotes RCAP testimony that strongly supports the transfer of power from male to female in establishing modern Aboriginal identity. When Aboriginal peoples were first colonized by patriarchal European nations, power was often given to the men in Aboriginal communities that had traditionally looked to women for strength and wisdom. Many contemporary Aboriginal communities advocate that power be reinstated in the women. (37)

Andrea Smith also states:

> In contrast to the deeply patriarchal nature of European societies, prior to colonization, Indian societies for the most part were not male dominated. Women served as spiritual, political, and military leaders, and many societies were matrilineal. (*Conquest* 18)

The implication in *The Night Wanderer* seems to be that, by learning from Pierre, Tiffany is set up to one day become a full-fledged matriarch in that matrilineal tradition, with strong ties to her Indigenous culture (Flett 29-30). Thus, a seed whose fruit may eventually bring down the colonial order is planted, the cycle of gendered colonial violence is broken, and so is the hold of vampirism.

There is another aspect of the revisionist work Carr's and Taylor's vampire novels perform which becomes clear when the texts are read against Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in particular. As Monika Tomaszewska convincingly argues, in Stoker's novel, "the vampire does not represent a single disruptive figure but a subversive primitive alien force that threatens the civilized, ordered world" (3). The civilized world is, of course, represented by England, the heart of the enormous colonial enterprise—the British Empire. It is this place that is being threatened by a

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[30] I am using the word 'matrix' in Viola F. Cordova's sense. As Lloyd F. Lee explains, "Cordova used the term 'matrix,' since it implies a web of related concepts. The term is defined as something within that something else originates and forms. A matrix forms a foundation, becomes a world picture for the individual and the community, and is culture specified" (3).

bloodsucking foreigner, the vampire Count from Transylvania. Tomaszewska points out that such plot structure, and the ideological thrust it supports, were not uncommon for British literature and imagination of the period:

> [t]he main danger was posed by the atavistic degenerates who attempted to hinder the development of Western civilization. In late Victorian England the threatening degenerate was commonly identified as the racial Other, the alien intruder who invades the country to disrupt the domestic order and enfeeble the host race. (3)

This fear of invasion by a deviant, uncivilized outsider characteristic for the late Victorian imagination and encoded in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is flipped in Carr's and Taylor's novels. By making white vampires pray on Indigenous characters both authors turn the supposedly civilized and superior European newcomers into an invading and infecting deviant outsider, thus challenging the foundational narrative of colonial superiority encoded in literary texts such as *Dracula*. The vampire that turned the Anishinaabe boy Owl into the vampire Pierre L'Errant in *The Night Wanderer* is an unidentified European monster. He turns Owl without consent and for no other reason than curiosity, as he tells him after the blood exchange: "You come from a new land, a new people. I am intrigued. I will let you become the first of your kind to join my kind. If you survive long enough, maybe you will return to your home" (*Night Wanderer* 180). The scene is full of symbolic meaning: just as the unnamed European vampire violates and corrupts Owl's body, European colonization violates and distorts Indigenous lands and ways of life of Owl's homeland.

The first thing that the newly turned Owl does is attack and kill Anne, a young French servant who was the only person to show him kindness and who tended to him as he was dying of measles and no one else dared approach him for fear of infection. This person, who, in Owl's own words, was the only sign that "this country did not contain just demons and liars" (*Night Wanderer* 161) and with whom just a short while ago, in what he believed to be his final moments on earth, he contemplated that he might be in love, becomes his first victim. As he feeds, the narrative voice of the novel ruefully observes: "Somewhere deep inside, what was once the young Anishinabe boy known as Owl mourned the lost life of the young

French girl, as the thing he had become feasted. Then everything went dead" (181). This last sentence is full of grim meaning: not only did Anne die, but with this deed, the young and gentle Anishinabe boy Owl died also, and the vampire Pierre L'Errant was born.

It is the bite of a European vampire that turns a gentle and curious "young Anishinabe boy" into "a thing" that does not shy away from feasting on blood of those he professed to love. It turns a kind human being into a killing monster, facilitating degeneration, making Owl join the "demons and liars" of "this country" (*Night Wanderer* 161). What is more, the creature expressed hope that maybe one day this new-born monster with all his destructive urges will return home to his people. This Owl never does, understanding that due to his vampiric nature he would inevitably wreak havoc among them, until one day, as vampire Pierre L'Errant, he decides to come back home to die. Returning home, he subjects himself to a purifying fast thus refusing the violent impulse to consume which colonial world has planted in him and which is very much at the heart of the colonial project. Using such character constellation, Taylor turns the discourse of "savagery and civilization" (Turner 85) that frequently has been used to justify colonial subjugation of Indigenous peoples not only in North America but throughout the world on its head, pointing at colonialists as the real savages who viciously attack Indigenous civilizations.

Both *Eye Killers* and *The Night Wanderer* reinforce this aspect of alien invasion even further by using Indigenous—in this case, Navajo and Anishinaabe— mythological vampiric figurations alongside the recognizably Eurowestern vampire mythology. In Jodi Byrd's words, the novels "[mix] generic conventions across cultural contexts and through vampiric oral traditions of consumption and bloodsucking" (352). In *Eye Killers*, Carr draws parallels between vampires and the Navajo myth of skinwalkers,

> human wolves, people who can assume the shapes of animals and people and move through the world in these guises. If a skinwalker comes into your life or follows you, you could become sick. You could even die. (Alvord 17)

In *The Night Wanderer*, on the other hand, vampires are compared to wendigo, a cannibal monster of Anishinaabe tales. In Pierre's rendition of the story, wendigos are

> [d]emons. Or monsters. Cannibals whose souls are lost. They eat and eat, anything and everything. And everybody. They never get satisfied. In fact, the more they eat, the bigger they get, and the bigger their appetite becomes. It's a never-ending cycle. They become giant, ravenous monsters marauding across the countryside, laying waste to it. They come in winter time, from the north. (170)

Granny Ruth offers a different version of the story, one in which wendigo creatures "were once humans who, during winter when food was scarce, had resorted to cannibalism. By eating the flesh of humans, they condemned themselves to aimless wandering, trying to feed a hunger that will not be satisfied" (*Night Wanderer* 170).

Both skinwalkers and the wendigo display certain similarities to typical Eurowestern vampire figurations, but neither of them is quite the same. In *Eye Killers*, Michael realizes that when he says to Diana: "Vampire. […] Explain these things to me. Maybe they're not skinwalkers after all" (221). The novel ultimately gives Falke and his fellow vampires another name—Eye Killers. Because vampires in their Eurowestern form are an unfamiliar menace to them, Navajo Elders insist that Diana, a white woman, a self-described "latent Irish-Catholic white girl" (148), shall be the one to hunt them down and release Melissa from their thrall: "You've seen much more than what we've seen, Diana. You know of these vampires. You are not Pueblo or Navajo, but you've told a story that Emily recognizes" (244-45).

Thus, even more than monsters usually already are in Eurowestern narrative traditions, vampires are an alien element in the cultural contexts of Carr's and Talor's novels. Even as monsters, vampires have no place in this land: it already has its own monsters. Making their appearance in Indigenous North America, Eurowestern vampires intrude on cosmologies that are already established, and they are defeated by means of those cosmologies: Pierre conducts cleansing rituals of his people to purge himself of evil before facing the sun of his own accord; Diana is also prepared ritually according to Navajo cultural codes before going off to face Falke, and when she does, she uses prayersticks, ancient Navajo ritual objects that

the Elder Emily gave her, to destroy him. All of this reinforces the theme of physical and cultural invasion that is inherent in Carr's and Taylor's vampire symbolism. In context of *The Night Wanderer*, Jody Byrd argues:

> Translating the generic conventions of vampires into and through Anishinaabe cultural contexts, Taylor's novel recodes the settler anxieties of the racial, sexual, and colonial other allegorically embodied by the vampire into figurations that are meaningful to Anishinaabe youth. (353)

I believe that in *Eye Killers* A.A. Carr accomplishes the same for the Navajo youth.

2.2 "Trying to Remember the Ancient Navajo Way": Vampire as Settler Colonialist and the Power of Remembrance in A. A. Carr's *Eye Killers*

In the exhilarating development that is Indigenous popular culture, A.A. Carr's (Navajo/Laguna Pueblo) vampire novel *Eye Killers* arguably stands at the very point of origin. Published in 1995, it is among the very first Indigenous texts that ventured into the field of genre fiction and made use of popular cultural tropes in their narrative fabric.[31] In a way, the novel mirrors the plot structure of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in that the plot is driven by a quest to save a young female from the murderous advances of a male vampire and all their morbid implications. At the same time, it bears resemblance to the founding texts of the Native American Renaissance, N. Scott Momaday's *The House Made of Dawn* (1966) and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), in that it is very much a story of cultural and emotional recovery.

In fact, by rearranging mythologies and weaving diverse cultural imagery into a complex tapestry of an epic struggle, the novel embodies this recovery. Jodi Byrd notes,

> Carr's novel adapts the vampire genre to retell a specific ceremonial story of healing for Michael Roanhorse and his granddaughter Melissa as they enter into an epic battle with European vampirism that is recognized by the elders in the novel as skinwalker witchery. (351)

Thus, with his vampire novel, Carr participates in a tradition in which "every myth is renewed with each time and in each place it is told" (Cajete 115). Meshing together Navajo stories and Euroamerican vampire mythology, he produces a modern myth adapted to the time and place of its telling.

The characters in *Eye Killers* are constantly trying to recover something that was lost or is in danger of being lost: the vampire Falke is trying to recreate his lost

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[31] The only earlier example of Indigenous genre fiction that I am aware of as of this writing is fantasy and science fiction by Craig Kee Strete (Cherokee), most of which had been written and published in the seventies and eighties. In her Foreword to Strete's short stories collection *The Bleeding Man and Other Science Fiction Stories*, Virginia Hamilton calles him "[t]he first American Indian to become a successful Science Fiction writer" (v).

love Christiane in each woman he turns into a vampire; Elizabeth is pining after her lost humanity; Hanna is jealous for Falke's slipping affection; Diana is mourning her failed marriage and looking for her lost student, Melissa; and Michael is searching for his disappeared daughter and granddaughter while all the time "trying to remember the ancient Navajo way" (*Eye Killers* 144). Though the plot of the novel revolves around the search for Melissa and her fate, as a character she seems to possess primarily a symbolic quality, symbolizing a threatened hope for cultural continuity and the struggle such continuity entails in a colonial context.

From the very beginning of the novel there are clues that the path to finding Melissa is the path of healing and remembering, healing *through* remembering. Also from the beginning it is evident that the person most responsible for the remembering in the novel is Michael Roanhorse, Melissa's estranged Navajo grandfather. From the early pages on, even before Melissa herself enters the equation, Michael is set up in contrast to Falke and foreshadowed as the antagonist of Melissa's future destructive lover. But before he will have the power to become an effective adversary of the master vampire, he will have to wrestle with his memory and the stasis of old habits in order to recover the cultural knowledge he needs for the task.

The early sense of antagonism between Michael and Falke is established in the text through the description of Michael's and Falke's respective relationships to the land and the moon. In the opening scene of the novel we see the ancient vampire Falke reawaken on a moonlit night after a decades-long healing slumber following a grave injury. As he fights his way from beneath the earth onto its surface, he encounters moonlight and his reactions suggest it is not a pleasant encounter. Even from underneath the soil, Falke "sensed the moon in passing clouds, a reflecting disc grating his nerves" (*Eye Killers* 1). When he rises above the surface, "[t]he stinging moon settle[s] in his eye" (*Eye Killers* 1). As he rises, Falke's first thoughts are memories:

> The moon, a pale eye, glared above a barren land. Blocky, buttressed towers rose above an ocean of sand and shattered rock. He remembered fragments of crossing the still, dead sea: a turning bowl of alien constellations; shifting sand hills; twin star-imprinted masked heads emerging from red boulders and white sands, sleepless eyeholes

watching and hunting. […] He remembered a lithe, dark-eyed girl; how he howled her name when the sun's fire descended. He remembered his name. (*Eye Killers* 1)

The passage communicates a sense that this catalogue of memories, of things that Falke *remembers* is a large part of what gives the vampire his strength. He remembers his name, and thus he is situated, in possession of his identity and his being; he remembers Christiane, the doomed passion which is the driving force and motivation in his vampire un-life the same way she used to be during his mortal existence; and he remembers the sun's fire which almost proved his undoing. Armed with these memories, he returns to active existence almost in full possession of his power.

At the same time, the passage also reveals Falke's weaknesses. The land he now inhabits seems alien to him. He sees it in fragments and shattered pieces rather than as a cohesive whole. He remembers creatures or symbols which he does not appear to be able to identify, let alone understand or explain. The driving motivation of his existence is a doomed passion. And, though it does not have the sun's devastating effect on him, Falke cringes away from moonlight. Despite all his feeling of power and entitlement, Falke seems a stranger in this land, someone who does not understand it and has no real connection to it.

Immediately in the following scene, Michael is presented for the first time:

Michael Roanhorse felt the October winds eating at his body, removing whole chunks from his legs, mind, and heart, carrying them in clouds to the domain of old man Moon-bearer. Stars flew in the black water sky, whirling shapes that reminded Michael of the ancient Navajo stories told only after the first snowfall. The living stories his granddaughter, Melissa, should be learning and keeping secure in her heart. (*Night Wanderer* 5)

Like Falke in the previous passage, Michael mentally interacts with the landscape, but his vision of it is very different. While Falke perceives the land as "barren" and "dead" (1), Michael's is a dynamic world, full of stories and beings that invoke and interact with each other. There is a sense of Michael's embeddedness into a coherent order tied to the land, with certain "living stories" being told at certain appropriate times and with a continuity which is ensured by passing on of those

stories to the next generation. If Falke sees the land as alien and threatening, Michael is firmly a part of its cosmology and of a web of interconnected relationships it sustains. And where Falke fears the moon, or at least finds its light highly unpleasant, Michael talks to the moon as to an old friend: "'You know about me, too, the way Margaret used to. I'm just a dreaming old man. […] Help me to remember my grandmother's stories, old man,' he said to the moon. 'Come down and sit with me and Lee'" (*Eye Killers* 5). Talking like this, Michael establishes a relationship between himself, the memory of his dead wife Margaret, his dog Lee, and the "old man" moon; this seemingly effortless interconnectedness is what to a large extent situates Michael.

Falke, on the other hand, does not possess the knowledge to interpret and recognize the legends that the land holds and enacts. As the readers learn later in the novel, the "twin star-imprinted masked heads" (1) which Falke remembers with discernible terror as he awakes are in fact prominent characters of Navajo legends, Changing Woman's "twin sons: Child of the Water and Monster Slayer" (63).[32] Falke's ignorance and arrogance will cost him dearly, for, as becomes clear from the story he tells Hanna later in the novel, it was the twins who brought him down for the first time, burning him with the sun's fire and incapacitating him for decades. This happened not long after Falke came to the land and the reason why the twins attacked him was because Falke fed off "a native girl" (*Eye Killers* 45): "As I fed upon the girl, twin moonlit masks, pale as bone and grimly chanting, rose from the sand dunes. Howling flames shot from their mouths. They opened up the sky, Hanna, brought down the sun" (45).

It seems as if the ancient forces that guard the land had risen in the form of Changing Woman's twins to attack the vampire—an alien monster—when he kills one of the land's Indigenous inhabitants. Yet, a century after the event, Falke still does not really understand what exactly happened to him as he was burnt and why—he lacks the cultural knowledge and the connection to the land's legends to do so. He is not familiar with the legends of the twins and thus remains blind to the origin of his own destruction.

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[32] In this analysis, I only draw on mythological explanations that the novel itself gives, without using any additional ethnographic sources.

Against Falke's ignorance stands Michael's knowledge. The readers learn about the legend of the twins from Michael, who strains his memory in order to remember every last detail of the creation story as taught to him by his grandmother: "Michael sung snatches of his grandmother's song, deciphering the words and remembering their meaning, so that he could give the complete song to Melissa, for her unborn children" (63-64). As he strives to remember and reconstruct the song in its entirety, Michael works to ensure cultural continuity. Through his knowledge, however fragmented by disuse, of the origins and the legend of Falke's bane, the twin "cheerless masks" (45), Michael is again contrasted to the ignorant vampire whose un-life is haunted by the fear of the unknown and uninterpretable.

The continuity which the image of Michael and the glimpse of his thoughts invoke in these early passages in the novel, however, is also presented as weak and threatened. Michael feels physically frail and the stories that he should be teaching to his granddaughter remain untold and untaught. Even the story of the twins has fallen into disuse and is in need of thorough remembering. There is no longer a family to be held together by stories: Michael's grandmother is dead and so is his wife Margaret, and his daughter and granddaughter live estranged in the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, while, as the novel begins, Michael himself has been living a hermit's life for years. Relationships and stories are frequently linked together in the novel. They cannot function without one another, and so when relationships deteriorate the stories go stale and vice versa. Eventually, the stories become forgotten, and so are the knowledge and power to keep a culture alive and connected to the land to which they belong.

This is what is happening to Michael. From the very beginning, he is haunted by lost songs and lost stories, cultural treasures his grandmother passed on to him which he is progressively forgetting and desperately trying to remember. Within a single page, he first thinks of a song his grandmother used to sing, "the words flowing just beyond the reach of his hearing. […] Now it was gone" (15), and then of a story she used to tell him on early mornings: "A story about Changing Woman. Michael searched through fifty years or so of crowded memory, but he couldn't find it. He had lost the story" (15). There is an acute urgency to Michael's need to

remember these things, because every song and every story that he cannot recall may be lost forever:

> Only a tiny portion of those powerful Navajo songs and stories was left here on earth, if he could believe what Nanibaa' had told him before she died. And those few elders who held the remaining wisdom and stories and knowledge in their hearts were dying like butterflies in a freak spring frost. (7)

The possibility of a total loss of Indigenous stories is felt as a very real threat in *Eye Killers*. In Gregory Cajete's words, "myths live or die through people" (116), and throughout the novel Michael is surrounded by death: of his younger brother killed in Korea, of his grandmother, of his wife, of his daughter, killed by the vampire. The life of his granddaughter is also endangered by her alliance to Falke—a vampire, an embodiment and harbinger of death. Seen through this lens, Falke's threat becomes all-encompassing: not only does he endanger physical survival of Michael and his remaining family, but with them also the survival of the stories and, by extension, the Navajo/Pueblo cultures. In order to prevent this, not only does Michael have to remember the songs, stories and rituals of his people, but the rift between him, his daughter Sarah and his granddaughter Melissa has to be healed and the connection reestablished. Remembering and relationships are tied together through stories and myths since "[m]yths and their enactment in every form were the way a tribe remembered to remember their shared experience as a people" (Cajete 115).

As Jody Byrd points out, what Carr does with the figure of Michael is "present an elder disconnected from stories and traditions" (351-52). This disconnection, however, is not accidental or forced but a conscious choice on Michael's part, albeit made under severe emotional stress. In relation to Michael's rejection of his culture of origin, Jesse Peters argues:

> His rejection of traditional Navajo beliefs is a rare moment in Native American fiction. Carr constructs an Indian character who is not separated from his traditional, cultural faith because of ignorance, distance, or cultural poisoning through contact with dominant society. Instead, Michael Roanhorse has chosen to give up the Navajo way

because he failed to see its power, failed to see the importance of that faith to his own well-being and to the culture in general. (186)

However, more than a mere failure of cultural judgment, Michael's rejection of the Navajo way also seems to represent a way for him to deal with a personal trauma. The impetus for his decision to distance himself from the Navajo way came from the death of the most important Elder in Michael's own life—his grandmother, Nanibaa', whom he believed to have been "the most powerful human being alive. Her presence was enough to drive away all of his childhood monsters" (*Eye Killers* 62). Throughout the novel, it is clear that his grandmother was the person who fostered and nurtured Michael's connection to his Indigenous culture the most and who acted as a strong role model for him. When "Nanibaa'" sang her prayers, "[h]e had felt the power of them echoing in his soul" (62). When she withered and died of cancer, and the relatives believed the cause of her sickness to lie in "a witch's chant" (62), "Michael's faith had followed her" (62) and he decided to discard the old ways for good:

> [H]e had sat all the Navajo curing chants aside after Nanibaa' had died from cancer. Nothing, now, could have gotten him to a sing even if not showing meant life or death for him. […] After Nanibaa's death, he had flung away his charred prayer sticks, eagle feathers, and bits of dried sage over the snowy edge of Canyon de Chelly. […] He would never return to the old ways, the ancient ways of his people. Some Navajos would say he had forsaken his Beauty Way and would shun him. He didn't care. In his heart, there was nothing beautiful about the Navajo medicine anymore. It was a dark and fierce power, powerful and frightening, something that should have never been born. He believed in its potency, but that part in which he had trusted, the beauty of it, had spoiled. (62)

Having severed his ties to the Navajo cultural archives so completely, Michael eventually had forgotten large parts of it. However, if it was death that caused him to despair, reject and forget, it is a threat of death that leads him to remember and reconsider. A vampire intervention into his world serves as a catalyst for Michael to review his decision to separate himself from the Navajo way.

All of this comes together in the novel in the theme of Falke seducing Melissa away from her family and community and Michael's and Diana's search for her.

These events will demonstrate to Michael that by giving up Navajo cultural knowledge he had made his family vulnerable to the schemes of a damaged, bloodthirsty intruder. Thus it becomes primarily his responsibility to right this wrong; in order to do that, he has to rediscover all he had forgotten of the Navajo culture and more. Though Michael mourns that "he couldn't remember one song to save his life" (7), he will have to remember to save Melissa's.

Michael's decision to part ways with the Navajo cultural knowledge has far-reaching implications for his granddaughter. With every other member of the older generation gone, Michael is the only Elder in the family to whom Melissa could go for Indigenous cultural knowledge. His break with the Navajo culture, however, makes him ill-equipped to meet the task. It is evident in the novel that Michael has grown increasingly apart from his daughter and his granddaughter, so much so that Melissa refers to him as a "[f]unny old sheepherder" (10) and does not really identify as a Navajo and severely doubts the power of the nation's cultural traditions: "Besides, she thought, I am only a little bit Navajo, not really noticeable at all. What does all that bullshit magic matter to me?" (10)

When Melissa is targeted by her own childhood monsters, Michael also proves ill-equipped to fight them off, initially. When the vampire trouble begins for Melissa and Sarah, a coyote appears at Michael's house to warn him, but even though "the coyote had spoken to him, with clear words, […] Michael had not understood what it was saying" (61). Still, the coyote vision and its, for him now unintelligible, message continues to haunt Michael and makes him think of going to visit his family: "He needed to give Melissa her Navajo name, before it died with him. There was no hurry, he told himself. His family was not all dead and neither was he" (63). Thus, the moment Michael remembers of his duties towards his granddaughter as a Navajo Elder, he finds an excuse to put off their execution. He believes he has time, but what he does not know is that at the moment of his contemplation his daughter Sarah has already been killed by vampires and his granddaughter is half way through becoming one. Although all the signs his culture knows of are pointing at trouble, it takes a visit from Melissa's school teacher, Diana Logan, for Michael to take action.

For Melissa's generation living in the city, the childhood monsters are vampires. In his novel Carr creates "bad" vampires and "good" vampires who are mostly arranged in opposition to one another. The 'bad' ones act in an intrusive, parasitic way which is associated both with vampirism and settler colonialism. The main representatives of "bad" vampires in the novel are Falke and Hanna. Both of them, but Falke especially, routinely behave in a colonialist fashion. Falke's rhetoric is often one of colonialist superiority. He uses the word 'savage' repeatedly when talking or referring to Michael or the Indigenous cultures in general. Visiting a night club one night Falke is appalled by the music and the dancing he witnesses there: "The music started again, a deep percussive rhythm. The children began their primal dance. What had happened to gracefulness and sidestepping like water? In his absence, the world had embraced the savage's way" (98). In Peters' words, in this scene "Falke judges his environment from an ethnocentric and chronocentirc point of view" (192). He came to the club to hunt, to find a human victim to satisfy his vampire bloodlust, yet it is the night club extravaganza that he considers savage. Historically, such hypocritical attitude is common for colonial ideology, with colonial powers committing the worst kinds of atrocities all while rhetorically constructing Indigenous populations as inferior and fierce savages. In the above passage, Falke embodies this colonialist mindset completely.

At the same time, Falke and other vampires are vulnerable to Indigenous medicines. Instead of crosses, these vampires are repelled by corn pollen (*Eye Killers* 126), which is 'the essence of First Man and First Woman" (127). Though they are afraid of sunlight, it is not sunlight that burns Falke almost to a cinder for the first time, but the "Warrior Twins" (285). And Falke's ultimate undoing is achieved not by means of stakes or holy water, but through Navajo prayersticks blessed in ceremony (*Eye Killers* 328, 334). Though without real understanding, Falke himself realizes that Indigenous cultural archives contain knowledge which is dangerous to him, as becomes evident when he talks to the armed with prayersticks Diana:

> The weapons you carry are not to be played with. They contain a power
> that is strange to me. I have lived nine hundred years, and still I do not
> understand such might. […] I will not touch them. I do not understand

> their savage's magic, but I respect it. I believe in it, also, Diana. It comes from a world apart from this one you inhabit. The ancestors of your old savages understood such power. They understood creatures such as me, though they gave us different names. I believe that you have begun to trust their songs . . . and that is very good. Together, we will destroy them. (317)

As the passage shows, even as he admits to not understanding the power of Indigenous knowledge, Falke seeks to colonize it, to extract what he needs from it and turn it against its carriers, to use it as a weapon of their own destruction. His arrogant contempt for Indigenous cultures in general does not prevent him from attempting to take from them that which he wishes to possess: the power that lies in their knowledge and, most importantly, Melissa. By turning her into a vampire fledgling he already implanted in her an instinctual hatred for her Indigenous culture and family, to the point where, when she thinks of her grandparents' house, she remembers "a beautiful house that had now become pestilent and hellish in her vampire sight" (332). If Falke succeeded in transforming Melissa into a vampire completely, she would be forever lost not only to her family, but to her people. She would also, quite simply, die. In that sense, Melissa stands for all the Indigenous young people seduced or pushed away from their cultures by the promises of colonialist capitalist society. Taking all of these details into account, it seems as if virtually every aspect of the fight against Falke—the fight which to a large extent structures *Eye Killers*—were imagined in such a way as to turn it into a symbolic fight against the impulse of greed and destruction inherent in settler colonialism.

If Falke is constructed as a disconnected colonizer guided by his self-interest and nothing else, all of the 'good' vampires in the novel display some sort of connection to the region's Indigenous cultures: Melissa and Michael are themselves Navajo and Elizabeth is their ally throughout the novel. Though Elizabeth herself does not belong to any Indigenous culture, in the moments when she fears she is losing her remaining humanity, she seeks hope and healing in a song she once heard an old man sing in an Indigenous language she could not understand (*Eye Killers* 36-37). All three of them are also not yet quite vampires: though all infected with the vampire blood and tainted by vampirism at one time or another in the narrative, they yet remain human and alive, in Falke's own words, "equal to both worlds"

(74). Their connection to Indigenous cultures is what ultimately saves all of them from the vampire curse, in one way or another.

Though he is not the one to finally break Falke—Diana does that— Michael's remembering "the ancient Navajo way" (144) plays a pivotal part in the vampire's demise. He who at the beginning of the novel was painfully trying to remember bits and pieces of Navajo songs and stories, by the end of the novel physically turns into Coyote, a figure of stories and legends, in order to face the vampire and save Melissa (*Eye Killers* 314-15). Neither is his remembrance only a means to an end or performed for his own benefit. As he tends to his daughter's dead body, laying it out according to the Navajo rituals for the dead, he makes a commitment to continue rediscovering his culture's ancient knowledge and promises her to pass the knowledge on to those who come after him—not only Melissa, but her yet unborn children as well. He tells Sarah how he would "make a cradleboard for Melissa's first child" (284):

> It should be made of rainbow, but I don't know where to find that. I made a cradleboard for you, *shi'yazhi*, a long time ago. It was the first and the best one. Margaret was happy with it. But now that I have knowledge with me, I will make an older one for Melissa. I will find a rainbow, from somewhere. And the lacings will be zigzag lightning, as they should be. But I don't know where I will find them. (284)

In the face of death, a passing of his own child, Michael invokes life thinking and speaking of other children who will come and infusing the moment and the hope he has for them with a sense of Navajo presence, physical and cultural. Though full of doubts and not knowing whether Melissa is alive or dead, he defies the vampire by imagining a Navajo future. Michael's reaction to Sarah's death clearly demonstrates the character development he underwent in the plot so far: while the deaths of his grandmother and his wife left him devastated and steeped in cultural rejection and forgetting, the death of Sarah and the threat to Melissa activate his connection to the Navajo roots and rekindle his faith in their power of good.

By reviving and actively utilizing Navajo cultural knowledge, the characters manage to defeat Falke and, by extension, the colonial order he symbolizes. This idea also seems to be the central message of Carr's novel as a whole: by

remembering "the ancient Navajo way" (144) and applying it creatively to contemporary challenges, the vampiric colonial order and its representative structures may yet be overcome. However, the novel also insists that, in order to successfully fight the vampire of colonialism, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have to work together. Elizabeth is certainly a part of this theme, but mostly it is channeled through the character of Diana. As a white woman—Melissa's English teacher—she is the one chosen by the Navajo Elders to be the wielder of the prayersticks, the one to face the vampire in combat. When Diana points out that she is "not remotely Indian" (244), Doris explains:

> You've seen much more than what we've seen, Diana. You know of these vampires. You are not Pueblo or Navajo, but you've told a story that Emily recognizes. And it's not only Melissa that needs healing. It is you too. (245)

The Elders recognize that Diana is familiar with the cultural archive which conceived this unfamiliar to them monster—the vampire, and that they need to merge their knowledge with hers in order to defeat him.

But more than that, entering the fight together is an opportunity to heal the rift between cultures which the colonial project caused:

> It's time to heal the wounds that the government soldiers caused us, time to heal the hurt, the weeping, and distrust that still lives between our people. Emily has seen this in ceremony. You must accept it now. (245)

Thus, urging Diana to accept her role in the vampire hunt, Doris straightforwardly draws a connection between this enterprise and dismantling the effects of the colonial rule on people of both cultures and their relationship to one another. Jesse Peters argues that the theme of a positively connoted "transcultural contact" (184) is one of the most significant in Carr's novel, observing that, in the text, "this zone of uncertainty brought about by transcultural contact is a positive space in which positive growth and change occur" (184).

The transcultural relationship, exemplified in the novel by the relationship between Diana and Michael, is indeed healed by the end of the novel. Throughout

their search for Melissa, Michael and Diana often do not "get" each other; they repeatedly criticize one another's attitudes and lifestyles and even get into a few heated arguments. Both of them, but especially Diana, oscillate between the feelings of inferiority and superiority towards one another. In the scene after Falke's death, however, they meet each other as equals and Michael, finally fully understanding the Elders' choice, acknowledges Diana and her contribution to the fight against the vampire:

> I'm not through with this Eye Killer. Long ago, the first chanter sang a powerful song of fire, which destroyed it; but didn't break apart its body. That first chanter didn't understand the vampire way. And didn't have a warrior helping him who understood the vampire's chant. […] That's why Eye Killer came back . . . grew again. But Emily remembered that first chanter's song, and where it was born. She gave it to you, *shi'yazhi*. You have broken Falke. And you helped me understand him too. Helped all of us. You have brought Melissa back home. I don't know what to say, except—you are a fine, strong woman. (*Eye Killers* 340)

Not only does Michael call Diana a warrior, thus acknowledging her as his comrade socially, but he also addresses her as *shi'yazhi,* "little one," the nickname he only uses when referring to his daughter and his granddaughter. In doing so, Michael accepts Diana not only as adopted into his culture, but also into his family. The misunderstandings of their early days, the ones spurred by the stereotyping and separation which hegemonic colonial order induces, are healed and gone together with the vampire. In their final goodbye, they call each other "Grandfather" and "granddaughter" (341). Chick Flynn points out that the novel's hopeful ending in itself defies the conventions of most of the vampire literature available prior to the publication of Carr's text: "Steeped in myth and legend, the surprising final pages bring the story full-circle, and allow the healing process to begin, which is an element that has never before been introduced in vampire literature" (qtd. in Peters 196).

The hope that the novel's ending spells is not only implicit, but in fact realized. In the closing lines of the novel, when Falke has been defeated and Michael committed Melissa to Diana's and Emily's care, after he safely disposes of Falke's remains so as not to have him rise again, Michael finally "remembered fully the

song his grandmother had given him long ago" (343). As he starts dancing and singing, the beings of Navajo cosmology re-appear:

> They appeared over the crests of the hills and mountains; the Old Ones who had vanished long ago. They raised thundering, rolling chants to the clouds, unafraid. They swept around Michael, surrounding him, and he raced them, keeping his beat steady. They recognized his song. (343)

Thus, as the vampire is securely buried and Michael's remembering is complete, he brings the essence of Navajo cosmology back into the land.

2.3 "A Native Vampire! That is so Cool!": Vampire as Educator in Drew Hayden Taylor's *The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel*

Drew Hayden Taylor's vampire story *The Night Wanderer* is very much a novel concerned with education. Many of its themes center around young people and their thirst for knowledge, and the question to which extent the society is able to adequately meet this thirst and cater to it. As Taylor recounts in the Acknowledgements to the novel, *The Night Wanderer* was long in the making and "Pierre L'Errant and Tiffany Hunter have been kicking around for almost fifteen years" (n. p.). Also here, in the Acknowledgments, Taylor tells us that "*The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel* began as a play, *A Contemporary Gothic Indian Vampire Story*, commissioned by Young Peoples Theatre in Toronto and originally produced by Persephone theatre in Saskatoon" (n.pag.). Thus, from its early beginnings on, the story was directed at young people and their issues and addressed them first and foremost. Though *The Night Wanderer* has all it takes to be a successful all-age genre read, it is mostly read as a young adult novel.

The novel is, of course, conscious about that and seems to pose itself not only as a fun piece of genre fiction but also as an instructional and educational text. This is evident from the very beginning of the novel. *The Night Wanderer* starts with a Prologue which sets the scene for what is to follow. Significantly, the Prologue shows a storytelling session in which the readers witness an Anishinaabe Elder "teaching his beloved grandchildren about the ways of life" (v) by telling them a story of two wolves. By starting its narrative with a scene of instruction, the novel to a certain extent sets itself up as just such an educational story which is being told to instruct the youth.

The Night Wanderer centers around two protagonists, Pierre L'Errant and Tiffany Hunter, both of whom in one way or another encounter a vampire and between whom the text establishes a peculiar kind of continuity: they almost seem to be reincarnations of one another, the two manifestations of the same person, or at least the same inner and outer conflict. The novel's narrative time only spans about three days, but with flashbacks that reach back centuries. During this short period, even though they only see each other a handful of times, Pierre and Tiffany develop a relationship similar to that of an educator and a pupil, an Elder and a

youngling: almost every time these two communicate, Pierre is explaining something to Tiffany. In the end, Pierre, who as a vampire represents a constant potential threat to Tiffany's life, arguably ends up saving it.

Tiffany is a high-school student, and throughout the novel it is emphasized that she is not doing particularly well or feeling particularly inspired by this institution of learning. School library for Tiffany is a "place where geeks went to practice geekiness" (8). Tiffany's school problems do not stem from a lack of intelligence on her part, however. Rather, it is the inadequacy of the school program, its distance from the practical concerns of an Indigenous teenager that make it difficult for her to connect with the material in a meaningful way:

> There she was, going through a bunch of car books—specifically stuff for carburetor settings—or at least that was what she thought she was researching. Like a lot of her subjects in school, she had trouble understanding the relevance of the material. (*Night Wanderer* 8)

Also when it comes to teaching history of Canada, the mainstream school curriculum displays an obvious disconnect from reality and the students it is supposed to be educating. The content of Tiffany's history book is a mystery to her:

> Somehow it had remained open on the page she was supposed to be reading. Something about the fur trade. The topic appealed to her about as much as the ancient mangy furs she'd seen in the local museum. All this fur-trading stuff happened so long ago, what possible relevance could it have in her life now? Canadian history teachers seemed obsessed with the topic.
> Those days were long gone and though she was proud of her Native heritage, she found the annual powwow events quite culturally satisfying enough, thank you very much. The thought of herself in a buckskin dress, skinning a beaver, almost made her laugh and throw up at the same time. But while she wasn't particularly fond of buckskin, Tiffany did have a love for leather jackets. If there was only something called Versace trade. (29)

Thus, when she tries to study history and understand her own place in it with the help of her school textbook, the only images of her people she can find in there are archaistic and culturally and chronologically removed. Since they are not put into

a proper context vis-à-vis the present, they do not make any sense to Tiffany. The main problem is that the textbook only seems to be able to imagine Canadian Indigenous populations as people of the past, artifacts rather than contemporary human beings. While Tiffany is dreaming of Versace leather jackets, she feels her schoolbook trying to force her into a buckskin dress which is devoid of any real meaning to her. In other words, the representations she finds in the book only reflect the exoticizing colonial gaze, not a history in which she could root herself. Produced as it was by white people exclusively, the book only uses Eurowestern historiographic material and only tells their version of the story. Not seeing herself reflected in her study materials, Tiffany eventually loses interest in even trying:

> Then she came upon an artist's rendition of old-fashioned Indians handing over a pile of furs to some bizarrely dressed merchant in exchange for a rifle. Tiffany tried to find herself or even her father or grandmother in that picture, in the faces of those Indians, but couldn't. The image in the book had about as much in common with her as carvings on the wall of King Tut's tomb had with modern Egyptians. Though those pictures had been carved by actual Egyptians. These ones had been drawn by Europeans, and the Native people looked like demented savages. They weren't the people she knew or had heard of. Therefore, why should she care? (30)

With this theme, Taylor tackles the ongoing issue of stereotypical misrepresentation of Indigenous people in Eurowestern historiographic, educational and cultural texts. Such misrepresentation usually produces images of, in Thomas King's words, "[a]n Indian who could be a cultural treasure, a piece of North American antiquity" (*Truth about Stories* 79) rather than a cultural contemporary. Being confronted with these disconnected images often has a (self) alienating effect on whole generations: "There continue to be educational conflicts, frustrations, and varying levels of alienation experienced by many Indian people because of their encounters with mainstream education" (Cajete 19). As she recounts her own involvement with mainstream educational institutions, Leanne Simpson writes:

> My experience of education, from kindergarten to graduate school, was one of coping with some else's agenda, curriculum, and pedagogy,

someone who was neither interested in my well being (sic) as kwezens[33], nor interested in my connection to my homeland, my history, nor my Nishnaabeg intelligence. ("Land as Pedagogy" 6)

Young people are particularly vulnerable to this kind of frustration and alienating experiences, since they are usually the ones who are embedded into the Eurowestern educational system and therefore have to deal with it first-hand.

Tiffany's history book represents just such a conflict in *The Night Wanderer*, and as the novel unfolds, the book increasingly acquires a symbolic meaning. It is the only one of Tiffany's schoolbooks mentioned specifically, and it is mentioned more than once in circumstances which are significant. When Tiffany's father Keith finds her unflattering progress report which jumpstarts the dramatic events towards the end of the book, with Tiffany eventually running away from home and contemplating suicide, he finds it tucked into the history book of all places. It is almost as if the history book is responsible for Tiffany "failing practically everything in school, except art" (101). When Keith grounds Tiffany after finding the report, she has a history test to prepare for (152). Moments before her worst ever fight with her father, "Tiffany took out her history book and started leafing through it" (152). Much rather than doing that, she would "drive around and see what this country does at dawn" (135).

In a way, *The Night Wanderer* sets itself in opposition to Tiffany's history schoolbook, offering itself as an alternative educational text. This function of the novel is largely encoded in the text's Indigenous vampire character, Pierre L'Errant. If Falke in Carr's *Eye Killers* is a straightforward villain, Taylor's vampire figure is a much more ambiguous evil. Though the horrors he has inflicted upon this earth's unsuspecting inhabitants are constantly referred to and recounted in the novel, during his time in Otter Lake he is mostly helpful if not good. At the same time, Taylor is careful not to celebrate the vampire existence *per se* in any way. Pierre drives this point home especially clearly when he says to Tiffany who, at that point, is contemplating taking her own life: "You should never glamorize death because it won't glamorize you. You'll become just a statistic with a tombstone"

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[33] "Kwezens literally means 'little woman' and is used to mean girl" (Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy" 2, n. 3).

(194). Thus, Taylor at the same time participates in the current trend in the vampire genre fiction (especially young adult fiction) to create sympathetic vampire protagonists and distances himself from its by-implication idea that death can somehow be desirable or turn out glorious.

This is an important point, because one of the pressing social issues that Taylor addresses with *The Night Wanderer* is the problem of Indigenous teenage suicide. As Lynda Gray explains, suicide rates continue to be a very problematic statistic for the First Nations in Canada: "Health Canada reports that the First Nations suicide rate is 5 to 7 times the national average, and is even higher for Inuit people. Youth continue to be the most vulnerable population, especially young males" (143). Much of the hopelessness that drives young Indigenous people into suicide stems from their cultural and political situation as a colonized people. The extent to which colonialism corrodes self-determination, social structures and cultural self-understanding of a particular Indigenous nation determines how vulnerable the community is to suicide (Gray 143). A key to the suicide prevention among the First Nations, therefore, lies not only in creation of tangible material opportunities, but also in reconnection to culture and rebuilding of the autonomous self-understanding as well as mending social and familial problems that result from the deterioration of Indigenous inter-relational and support structures under the colonial assault:

> As individual communities begin to regain their autonomy, pride, culture, traditional governance practices, and access to their resources, our young people will become more hopeful that they can have a better life. However, it is also important to note that these improvements also help to reduce social and economic conditions that lead to individual and family problems that also lead to suicide attempts. (Gray 143)

Tiffany's personal problems that eventually snowball into her considering suicide as the way out also, directly or indirectly, have to do with confusion and trauma of a colonized culture and society: her mother left the unhappy marriage to Tiffany's father, and with it the family, and is now living in the city with a white man and expecting his baby; her father, still shell-shocked from his wife's leaving, is ill-equipped to deal with the demands of a teenager; her white boyfriend Tony

eventually breaks up with her under pressure from his white friends and parents who would not accept his relationship with an Indigenous girl; finally, her school situation puts more and more pressure on Tiffany, a pressure which she feels less and less able to meet as the crisis escalates. All of this speaks urgently to the actual situation of many First Nations young people and maps the complex landscape of hopelessness which so often drives them into self-destruction. *The Night Wanderer* confronts the issue head-on through the contrast and the exchange between Tiffany, who is contemplating dying, and a person who is actually dead—a vampire.

The vampire Pierre proves instrumental in getting Tiffany to reconsider the desirability of killing herself. As a vampire, he is both a terrifying presence and a savior of sorts. In order to change her mind, to turn it back in the direction of life, Pierre educates Tiffany through land and the exploration of land. He is able to do so because, as a vampire, he is history incarnate—he experienced pre-colonial Anishinabe life first-hand and carries historical and cultural knowledge of and about those days. He knows the land's pre-colonial topography intimately, and though the present-day situation of the twenty-first century baffles him, it is often emphasized in the novel that "the very essence of this country flow[s] through him" (35). Pierre's immediate, direct connection to the past made possible by his vampire ontology is the source of his knowledge. Before he ends his vampire existence forever, he passes this knowledge and his story on to Tiffany not only so that they would continue, but so Tiffany would regain her connection to life.

Generally speaking, Tiffany is presented in the novel as an intelligent and curious teen whose self-confidence is undermined by the educational system as well as larger colonial societal structures:

> She sighed at the mysteries of the world surrounding her and was saddened by the fact she didn't feel smart enough to understand them. Someday she wanted to explore those mysteries, see them for herself. But she feared her entire destiny could be summed up in two words: Otter Lake. (112)

Looking up at the star-strewn sky, Tiffany longs to search for mysteries somewhere else, not in her Otter Lake community which, she believes, does not hold any mysteries anymore. By letting her discover for herself the remnants of the old

Anishinaabe village on the shore of the Otter Lake, Pierre demonstrates to her that is it not so. He shows her that this very place keeps many secrets, secrets that are Tiffany's and her generation's to discover, if only they learn to interact with the land, to read and appreciate its history: "Tiffany, my dear, you look but you do not see. To some, this might be a simple hunk of rock. To you and me, it's more than that, it's an arrowhead. It's a heritage. A history" (197).

As Leanne Simpson pointedly states, "Indigenous education is not Indigenous or education from within our intellectual traditions unless it comes though land, unless it occurs in an Indigenous context using Indigenous processes" ("Land as Pedagogy" 9). The lack of such ability to learn from and through the land on the part of many Indigenous young people is often emphasized in *The Night Wanderer*. Granny Ruth admires Pierre's nightly bouts of land exploration precisely because land curiosity is no longer often seen these days: "But I wish more kids today would have your connection to the land. Two generations removed, and you still want to see and walk the land" (168). When as a young child Tiffany asks Granny Ruth about God, she tells her

> to listen. […] To the world around you. And I want you to smell it too.
> And feel it on your skin and hair. And if you can, taste it on the wind.
> […] That, my little granddaughter, is what God is all about. (110)

Essentially, Granny Ruth lets Tiffany explore her surroundings through all of her senses in order to explain to her spirituality and spiritual connection. This also is Indigenous education, as Leanne Simpson explains: "Within Nishnabeg epistemology, spiritual knowledge is a tremendous, ubiquitous source of wisdom that is the core of every system in the physical world" ("Land as Pedagogy" 12). Granny Ruth's lesson is in embodied knowledge, in exploration though feeling and the senses.

When Pierre gives Tiffany his own lesson during their final encounter by the lake, his methodology is similar. Having asked her to give him ten minutes of her time before she goes off to kill herself, "he knelt down and started to sift through the dirt and gravel at his feet" (196). After a while he finds an arrowhead and gives it to Tiffany so she "could feel the sharp flint texture of the arrowhead between her

fingers" (196). Eventually, Tiffany is interested enough to herself get down on her knees and dig through the ground for finds: "Copying what Pierre was doing, Tiffany analyzed what her hands could tell her in the dark" (199). They find a spearhead and Tiffany is fascinated. Pierre also asks her questions about the surrounding area as a whole, challenging Tiffany to think about it and to deduct what is so special about it. When she has initial difficulties answering his questions, similar to Granny Ruth, Pierre insists: "You just can't see it. You have to feel it" (197). He explains to her how the specificities of the landscape make it a beneficial place for a settlement:

> Think for a moment. There's lake over there, and over there on that side is a small ridge. And over here is the drumlin to its back. The only way here is the way we came. What does it tell you? Think like your ancestors . . . There is a reason these arrowheads are here. (198)

Finally, Tiffany realizes that they discovered the site of the old village, "the one the old people used to talk about" (198).

Throughout this pivotal scene Pierre enacts Leanne Simpson's notion of "land as pedagogy" ("Land as Pedagogy" 1). He urges Tiffany to use her Anishinaabe intelligence to read the landscape and encourages her to feel the land, touch it, dig into it, to feel its artifacts with her hands. He directs her search with questions and clues, tells her to do what he does, and otherwise behaves like a teacher. And as the scene progresses, initially skeptical Tiffany begins to find more and more pleasure in the impromptu archaeological session. Unlike her school lessons, even though she does not know where exactly Pierre is going with all his questions, she senses that it all has meaning:

> It was late at night, Tiffany was still hungry, cold, miserable, and definitely was not expecting a pop quiz by the lake. But something about this line of discussion intrigued her. She knew there was a point to this, that is was important, and Pierre was leading her someplace. So she played along. She started to put all the pieces together in her mind. (198)

The readers now witness Tiffany as she "forgot her discomfort and let her curiosity take over" (198), an image strikingly different from all the times she was shown

struggling with her history book, annoyed and bored. Pierre's land-based pedagogy, his culturally relevant subject matter, and the feeling that he "was leading her someplace" (198) have made a huge difference when it comes to Tiffany's learning enthusiasm. Even though she does not immediately grasp it intellectually, this time she has no "trouble understanding the relevance of the material" (8) since, far from researching carburetors, she is busy unraveling her own people's ancestral mystery.

As mentioned before, Tiffany in a way serves as a reincarnation of Owl, Pierre's former human self, in the novel. For that reason as well Pierre does everything in his power to not let her go astray and repeat his mistakes. Preventing Tiffany from committing suicide, he prevents the promises of the white world and their perceived unattainability for an Indigenous girl from driving her to her death as they did with him. During their lake encounter, he points out the similarities between Tiffany and the young Owl and how their hot-headedness and inability to appreciate what they already have sidetracked them onto a path of self-destruction:

> When I was young, much like you I was restless, wanted to see and do more than normally a boy in my environment was able. So I decided to seize the initiative and see the world, so to speak. I threw my fate to the winds. A lot of things happened when I did that, some fabulous, some tragic. After much time, it all eventually led me here. To Otter Lake. To your house. To right here. (196)

It seems as if the reason for Pierre's whole existence as a vampire were so that he could one day come back home and help another young Anishinaabe person to overcome despair and to learn to appreciate her own heritage and not repeat his mistakes.

Thus, Pierre's teaching originates from personal experience and mistakes just as much as it does from cultural knowledge and historical continuity. All of this reinforces his self-identification as an Elder. In reconnecting Tiffany to her heritage through an almost archaeological land exploration, invocation of ancestral Indigenous practices (making fire with flint and steel; explaining the use of arrowheads and spearheads) and storytelling, Pierre acts like an Elder, which, as he himself recognizes, he is, even though of an uncommon variety: "Elders are often called upon to teach those younger than themselves a lesson. And there were no

elders older than him" (215). The knowledge-accumulating aspect of vampirism, the historical awareness grounded in longevity and excessive experience arguably becomes the most important vampire trait in the novel. Combined with the Indigenous understanding of the importance of passing on of knowledge and story in a meaningful way, it creates an exceptionally interesting and, to my knowledge, unprecedented, personage—an Indigenous vampire Elder and educator. Leanne Simpson writes:

> Our ancestors' primary concern in 'educating' our young people was to nurture a new generation of Elders—of land based intellectuals, philosophers, theorists, medicine people, and historians who embodied Nishnaabeg intelligence in whatever time they were living in because they had lived their lives through Nishnaabeg intelligence. ("Land as Pedagogy" 13)

This is the seed that Pierre sows as he teaches Tiffany that night on the shore of the lake: in probably saving her life and training her to use her ancestral intelligence, to think like her ancestors, he puts her on a path which would eventually lead her to becoming an Elder for her times.

Though right after their lake encounter Pierre dies the true death by facing the sun, there is a feeling in the novel that Granny Ruth will continue what he had started as far as Tiffany's Indigenous education is concerned. Before he leaves for the last time, Pierre gives sleeping Granny Ruth a message: "It was a private message, meant only for her ears, and he spoke it in Anishinabe. In her sleep, she smiled and responded, talking in a language she thought she'd never hear again" (213). We never learn the content of the message, but there is a certain feeling of comradery between Pierre and Granny Ruth which establishes a continuity of Pierre's presence and his instructions even after his ultimate death. The last time we see Tiffany in the novel is as she is gently waking her grandmother, wondering "what secret dream she must be having" (241).

Judging from Tiffany's reaction to Pierre's teachings and his story, the seed he had planted has taken to a good start:

> Tiffany had listened to every word Pierre had told her, amazed. His vivid descriptions and passionate delivery almost made it seem like he

had been there. This was better than any book they had made her study at school. 'A Native vampire! That is so cool!'" (206)

Tiffany's Indigenous cultural knowledge as well as her relationship with contemporary popular culture influence the way she makes meaning of Pierre's story. Part of her jubilant reaction is certainly due to her being glad to see an Indigenous person as part of a popular mythology (in this case, vampire mythology), images of which are so common in her twenty-first century teenage world, but which usually excludes Indigenous people from their cosmology.

As Pierre puts his experiences and vampire adventures into a story and tells it to a youngling with the purpose to instruct, the novel comes full circle back to its opening scene in the Prologue and the story of two wolves. And since the story he tells to Tiffany in the end is the one he told to the readers throughout the novel, Pierre's story also bends the novel's internal narrative structure into a circle. All of this is part of the instruction which turns *The Night Wanderer* itself into a peculiar kind of a textbook.

Chapter 3. Reaching for Hope: Indigenous Futurisms in the Twenty-First Century

> Speculative fiction appeals to me in the free-for-all tumble of ides you get to mash together. Sometimes it's incoherent and messy, but it's always fun.
>
> Eden Robinson (Haisla/Heiltsuk)[34]

> More than mere escapism, science fiction can prompt us to recognize and rethink the status quo by depicting an alternative world, be it parallel universe, distant future, or revised past. Good science fiction re-presents the present or past, albeit with a twist. It tweaks what we take to be reality or history and in doing so exposes its constructedness. For this reason, the genre has proven fertile ground for a number of black and feminist writers, artists, and musicians […]. These innovative cultural workers have transformed what was once considered the domain of geeky white boys into a rich, exciting, and politically charged medium for the interrogation of ideology, identity, historiography, and epistemology.
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> Catherine S. Ramírez[35]

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[34] Qtd. in Dillon, "Terminal Avenue" 205.
[35] Ramírez 185-86.

3.1 "An Evening Redness in the West": Indigenous Futurist Speculations

The year 2015 has seen the openings of two notable exhibitions of contemporary Indigenous art: *An Evening Redness in the West* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts in Santa Fe, curated by Candice Hopkins (Tlingit), and *Revolt 1680/2180: Virgil Ortiz* at the Denver Art Museum, curated by John Lukavic. While the first one presents works by a number of contemporary Indigenous artists united under the theme of post-apocalypse, the second exhibition concentrates on the art of Virgil Ortiz, a Cochiti Pueblo artist whose work is characterized by a blending of historical and futuristic elements. Though both exhibits are quite different in focus, execution, and setup, they both participate in a lively artistic discourse which has become increasingly prolific in the last few years and which may be summarized under the term Indigenous futurisms.

With their themes and narrative and aesthetic designs both shows are representative of some of the central concerns of Indigenous futuristic discourses: While Virgil Ortiz blends a historical narrative of the 1680 Pueblo Revolt with a speculatively imagined "futuristic revolt in 2180" (Clark n. pag.), thus revisioning history through futuristic speculation, *An Evening Redness in the West* draws the same interpretative arc between Indigenous history and speculative futurity by way of imagining the future through the theme of apocalypse. Though depicting times of crisis and breakdown (or at least a threat thereof), both exhibitions place the emphasis squarely on futurity: "In […] *An Evening Redness in the West*, chief curator Candice Hopkins […] creates an environment that explores the landscape of an apocalyptic world, investigating the doom of end times, but also their promise of a new beginning" (Joyce n. pag.). Futurity is thus not merely a speculation about future, but an active affirmation of a possibility of a better one against all odds. The short timespan within which these two exhibitions appeared on the art scene testifies to the rapid growth this kind of creative exploration of Indigenous futures is currently experiencing.

Of course, material visual art is not the only cultural arena where Indigenous futurisms are taking root. Digital art projects like *TimeTraveller™* by Montréal-based Mohawk artist Skawennati as well as the rapidly increasing number of

science fiction films created by Indigenous filmmakers like Jeff Barnaby (Mi'kMaq)[36] are but two examples of the vast mediascape upon which various forms of Indigenous futurisms operate. In their intermediality, Indigenous futurisms are similar to Afrofuturism, the concept from which the term "Indigenous futurisms" takes its cue; as Kilgore notes, Afrofuturism is "not only […] a growingly significant minority voice within SF [science fiction]," but is also prominently present "in fine and street art, art-house and documentary, and most especially music" (562). In the same vein, Indigenous futurisms are far from being confined to a single medium. In the wide range of media in which Indigenous futurisms create innovation and unfold their "transgeneric cultural force" (Kilgore 562), literature is no exception.

As William Lempert explains, the term "futurism," "as well as 'futuring,' has been operationalized in contemporary scholarship to connote a creative reimagining of the future in relation to marginalization, social critique, and the subversion of dominant ideologies" (174, n. 2). While the first consistently theorized artistic phenomenon of this nature was Afrofuturism, "an overarching mode of thought and creative expression that *includes* science fiction alongside other technocultural forms, such as hip-hop and experimental jazz, that make 'self-conscious use of a speculative-fictional style' in order to muse of the collective fate of the descendant of the African diaspora" (Latham 16-17), the futurist artistic productions of other marginalized groups has been increasingly gaining creative and critical momentum in the past few years, exemplified, for example, in "the recent advent of Chicano/a and indigenous Futurisms" (Latham 17). For De Witt Douglas Kilgore, this development points towards a certain exemplary standing of Afrofuturism as an artistic field and mode of expression, with it becoming "a model of how other peoples of color might view the futuristic art they create, allowing them to become conscious of their own imbrication in a technoscientific culture and to resist erasure from the narratives it sponsors" (569).

However, though a certain role-modeling function of Afrofuturist artistic output in relation to Indigenous futurisms appears plausible, as a critical framework for analysis of Indigenous artistic production it is inadequate. As Lempert argues, this

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[36] For an in-depth discussion of a number of such film productions, see Lempert.

is due to its inability—similar to feminist futurisms—to accommodate the specificity of historical experiences, political concerns, and cultural structures and developments of Indigenous peoples:

> [S]uch frameworks do not take into account the priority of many Native peoples for material and cultural sovereignty *from*, rather than equal and equitable inclusion *within*, dominant systems [...]. Therefore, it is vital that any attempts to develop indigenous futurisms acknowledge the need for a flexible framework that is amenable to the diversity of Native community priorities, histories, and concerns. Furthermore, it is imperative that such analytical projects are grounded in material, social, and psychological community realities. (165-66)

Thus, if as a mode of artistic expression Indigenous futurisms have a longer history than is often supposed—Grace L Dillon argues in relation to science fiction, for example, that "Indigenous sf is not so new – just overlooked" (Introduction 2)—as a field of critical inquiry it is still young and in the process of being consolidated. As this process is underway, much work has been invested into the exploration of cultural texts which move within the genre of science fiction, with the groundbreaking work by scholars like William Lempert, and especially Grace L. Dillon. Indeed, the current archive of texts which could be classified as Indigenous futurisms consists mostly of narratives which in one way or another identify with the sf genre (though many of them are transgeneric or genre-bending); examples include Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart*, Sherman Alexie's *Flight*, Eden Robinson's "Terminal Avenue," Joseph Bruchac's *Killer of Enemies*, Catherine Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars*, and all of Zainab Amadahy's fiction published to date, to name but a few. Of course, as a framework, science fiction easily lends itself to the creation of futuristic narratives of different kinds, since, "clearly, science fiction at its core *is* concerned with the future" (Butler 518).

However, futurist speculation is not limited to only one genre, however well-suited this genre may be to express futurist concerns. This is what Grace Dillon also points to in the introduction to her anthology of Indigenous science fiction, *Walking the Clouds*, when she states the following, in relation to both Afrofuturism and Indigenous futurisms: "As Mark Bould's introduction to a recent special edition of *Science Fiction Studies* frames the matter, what's intended is not

relegating Afrofuturisms to a purely sf field, but rather recognizing that sf theory and Afrofuturisms may have much to gain by exchange. The same is true of the approach here" (2). Thus, though the majority of Indigenous futurist texts to date do turn to science fiction as their genre of choice, in my understanding Indigenous futurisms and Indigenous science fiction are not synonymous; rather, like Latham asserts is the case for Afrofuturism (16), the latter is an example of the former. Indigenous texts which, strictly speaking, do not engage science fictional frameworks to any degree worth mentioning can be fruitfully analyzed through a futurist lens. For example, Richard van Camp's short story "On the Wings of this Prayer" which, in terms of genre, is more related to horror than science fiction, playing as it does with the notion of a mythologically (rather than scientifically) constituted zombie apocalypse triggered by ecocidal practices of oil industry corporations, participates in the futurity discourse in a way which allows it to be read as an Indigenous futurist text. In fact, Indigenous futurist framework makes it easy to incorporate texts of different genres concerned with speculative Indigenous futurities since, generally speaking, futurism is less a genre and more "an overarching mode of thought and creative expression" (Latham 16)[37], a particular sensibility, a critical interpretative angle from which to view reality. All of this renders Indigenous futurisms "a transgeneric cultural force" (Kilgore 562) which manifests itself across genres and media.

The inherent strong and explicit emphasis on the future characteristic for futurist frameworks has a special significance for Indigenous peoples whom dominant colonial culture has long and systematically attempted to mythologize as dead or inevitably dying. Large part of the cultural work Indigenous futurisms perform consists in affirming Indigenous futurities where they were denied and Indigenous presence where absence was propagated. As Elaine Coburn shows, this work is

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[37] Here I interpret "mode" in Veronica Hollinger's sense, who, in her essay "Genre vs. Mode," states that "mode implies not a kind but a method, a way of getting something done" (140). Though futurism is sometimes conceived of as a (sub-)genre (see, for example, Jackson and Moody-Freeman 2), for the purposes of this study, I understand futurism not in terms of a genre but rather as a mode which is able to penetrate, shape, and be manifest in different genres. As such, in literature it is most commonly found in works of speculative fiction, a generic categorization which "broadly includes science fiction, science fiction mystery and suspense, horror, superhero fiction, utopian and dystopian, apocalyptic and postapocalyptic, and alternative history" (Jackson and Moody-Freeman 2). All of the case studies included in this chapter are, in one way or another, examples of speculative fiction.

important not only for the cultural but also political self-understanding and determination of Indigenous peoples:

> By definition, Indigenous liberation means transcending what Maori scholar Brendan Hokowhitu (2013) calls the "necropolitical" relationship of colonialism, a concept he borrows from Camerounais political philosopher Achille Mbembe (2006). This reminds us that if liberation means anything, it means moving beyond colonial politics, a politics premised on death, to self-determining Indigenous futures. (31-32)

While speculating about the future is an integral part of human cognitive activity and culture, and thus world literature (not least meaning the structured speculation of science fictional texts), because of the aforementioned colonial "necropolitics" which seek physical and cultural extermination of Indigenous populations, and of popular representation resulting from such politics, for Indigenous people emphasizing Indigenous futurity (cultural and otherwise) has become a distinct act of defiance and self-assertion. Catherine S. Ramírez writes: "All too often, we are linked to savagery, carnality, intuition, and passion, and we are fixed in a primitive and racialized past. The future, in contrast, is generally imagined as white, as many of the science fiction movies and TV shows of my childhood made evident" (188). Against this grid, Indigenous futurist cultural productions imagine Indigenous people back into the future, as it were, a future which they actively live and shape rather than letting it slide by ineffectively as mainstream representation would often have it. Through their affirmative narrative future-orientedness, to use Isiah Lavender III's words, "alternative racial futurisms, such as Afrofuturism and indigenous futurism, reconfigure our sense of viable political futures in which people of color determine human destiny" (8).

As part of this context, Indigenous futurisms serve to effectively counter the doctrine of extinction which colonial state propagated through the representation of Indigenous peoples as a vanishing race. As Pauline Turner Strong shows in her book *American Indians and the American Imaginary: Cultural Representations Across the Centuries*, the colonial state strategically employed the discourse of evolutional doom and "the notion of outmoded savagery" as "a popular ideological justification for conquest" (28): "By the beginning of the twentieth century […],

Native Americans were viewed within the dominant society as a 'vanishing race' doomed to demographic and cultural extinction in their lost Darwinian struggle with the White race […]" (Strong 28). Also in popular culture and popular imaginary, "[t]he trope of the *vanishing Indian*" (Strong 6, emphasis in original), or, as Andrea Hairston calls it, "the Disappearing Native Narrative (DNN)" ("Disappearing Natives" 7), has established itself as perhaps the most prominent point of reference pertaining to Indigenous peoples, backed by the invention of mythological narratives surrounding famous Indigenous historical figures like Squanto or Pocahontas,[38] who, in Strong's words, "are all the more appropriate as legendary figures in the national imaginary because they are tragic heroes, early personifications of the noble, but vanishing, Indian […]. Neither Squanto nor Pocahontas lived long after ensuring the survival of the fledgling English colonies […]" (67). Seeing that these stories have become a prominent part of its foundational mythology, at least in the United States the extinction of the land's Indigenous peoples is literally written into the national narrative. In Hairston's words, "The DNN is classic empire mythology, and mythology is powerful technology. While vociferously denying the validity, ubiquity, and might of mythology, Empire uses its dominant mythology to define what is realistic and ignore, repress, defuse, denature, destroy alternative stories/realities" ("Disappearing Natives" 7-8).

Thus, it is evident that much of the colonial ideology of conquest justification rested, and arguably to a large extent still rests, on a systematic and elaborate denial of Indigenous future, the very possibility thereof. The colonial discursive invention of the vanishing Indian which served "the pervasive practice" of "'allochronism,' that is, the representation of contemporary peoples as mere 'survivals' or 'remnants' of a more authentic past" (Strong 6) was constructed very much to that end. In the words of Thomas King, the colonial discourse in its various manifestations

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[38] In his book *The Return of the Vanishing American*, Leslie Fiedler famously explores various types of mythological narratives constructed around the American discursive invention of an "Indian." He shows in particular how such mythologies were perpetuated through both literature and popular culture. He lists four basic mythological constructs which come to bear on the "image of the Far West" (Fiedler 50): *The Myth of Love in the Woods*," "*The Myth of the White Woman with a Tomahawk*," "*The Myth of the Good Companions in the Wilderness*," and "*The Myth of the Runaway Male*" (Fiedler 50-51, italics in original). At least three of these "myths" are predicated upon the presence of "Indians" as a meaning-generating element, but in all of them this presence is not only largely discursively invented but also ultimately doomed.

"insisted that our past was all we had. No present. No future" (*Truth About Stories* 106). This fatalistic colonial narrative of domination is an ideological baggage which Indigenous peoples are still fighting against today. Read against this grid, the future-affirmative work that Indigenous futurisms perform becomes all the more important and the necessity of "alternative futuring" (Lempert 164) which actively writes Indigenous peoples back into the future from which they have falsely and forcibly been extracted by colonial discursive practices all the more urgent.

As mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of Indigenous futurist cultural texts currently in existence fall into the general category of science fiction. This is unlikely a coincidence since science fiction does not only provide a perfect framework for experimentation with and exploration of speculative futurities, but also has a pronounced relationship to both colonial discourse and decolonial project. As John Rieder asserts, colonialism and science fiction to a large extent developed parallel to each other: "Scholars largely (though not universally) agree that the period of the most fervid imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century is also the crucial period for the emergence of the genre" (2-3). Colonialism, thus, has to be seen as "a significant historical context for early science fiction" (Rieder 2), one which remains molded into its generic patterns to this day. In the context of the specifically American imaginary, science fiction often serves as a prime projection surface for the ideological mythology of what Gregory M. Pfitzer calls "the high frontier" (52), a mythology which walks hand in hand with an American "'metaphysics of Indian-hating' (Melville's phrase)" (Pfitzer 52): "Science fiction writers took the lead in this matter, focusing on outer space travel as a new milieu for the renewal of frontier mentalities and on aliens as metaphoric Indians victimized by an ethic of conquest extended into new areas of discovery and suspense" (Pfitzer 55).

However, while often indulging in narratives of conquest and exoticization as well as "the colonial gaze" (Rieder 7) in general, Rieder shows that early science fiction was already cautiously discovering and pointing towards its own (socio-) critical potential, also in regard to the colonial enterprise. As an example Rieder names H.G. Wells' 1898 novel *The War of the Worlds*, in which "Wells asks his

English readers to compare the Martian invasion of Earth with the European' genocidal invasion of the Tasmanians, thus demanding that the colonizers imagine themselves as the colonized, or the about-to-be colonized" (Rieder 5). Though this "reversal of positions […] stays entirely within the framework of the colonial gaze and the anachronism of anthropological difference," it "also highlights their critical potential. […] Thus the science fiction novel, while staying within the ideological and epistemological framework of the colonial discourse, exaggerates and exploits its internal divisions" (Rieder 10).

These critical seeds and ruptures as well as the prominence of colonial themes and discourses in science fiction make the genre a productive field for the colonized to enter and reinterpret from the standpoint of those on the receiving end of these supposedly "thrilling adventure stor[ies]" (Hopkinson 7). When this happens, the result is, as Nalo Hopkinson puts it in her introduction to her co-edited volume *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*,

> stories that take the [common for mainstream science fiction] meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humor, and also with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things. (9)

In other words, claiming the genre of science fiction for their own allows colonized peoples to resist the colonial order not only by critiquing it but also by plotting alternative scenarios and solutions, by engaging in "alternative futuring" (Lempert 164), as well as by deriving pleasure from re-imagining its narrative frameworks and traditions. In the process of thus revisiting foundational colonial narratives and re-inscribing them from within the Indigenous worldviews and historical experiences, Indigenous science fiction revises "official" historiographies which marginalize or completely ignore these viewpoints. Sierra S. Adare even goes so far as to assert that "science fiction is the only genre that suggests that First Nations peoples and their cultures have a future that has not been assimilated into the dominant society. This feature of science fiction is significant to First Nations individuals" (6-7).

However, apart from such resistance, the science fiction genre also possesses a considerable resurgent potential. Through its inherent close affiliation with scientific and cosmological discourses, science fiction offers a suitable space for the integration of Indigenous epistemological frameworks. Indigenous participation in science fictional narrative fabrics, among other things, serves to redefine and expand Eurowestern concepts of science while simultaneously countering the idea that Indigenous people are somehow a- or pre-scientific (a notion which travels hand-in-hand with the vanishing Indian discourse). Grace Dillon's anthology of Indigenous science fiction, in the editor's own assessment, "weds sf theory and Native intellectualism, Indigenous scientific literacy, and western techno-cultural science, scientific possibilities enmeshed with Skin thinking" (Introduction 2). The resulting narratives weave different epistemological and scientific traditions and discourses together in a way which allows them "to reenlist the science of indigeneity in a discourse that invites discerning readers to realize that Indigenous science is not just complementary to a perceived western enlightenment but is indeed integral to a refined twenty-first century sensibility" (Dillon, Introduction 3).

This means that Western science is not restlessly rejected in Indigenous science fiction; rather, it is dethroned from its absolutist position in favor of a more holistic, well-rounded concept of science, "one that *includes* both a scientific and a spiritual worldview" (Langer 130, emphasis in original) and places them on equal footing in the hierarchy of value and benefit as well as considers more carefully the impact it has on the environment and its different lifeforms. The critical stance of Indigenous science fiction towards Western science becomes especially pronounced "where the West has married scientific progress to global economic domination, as in the international biotech industry, where large conglomerate companies encourage and sometimes force the production of agricultural monocultures to replace indigenous biodiversity" (Langer 131). These considerations are often manifest in Indigenous science fictional texts through the theme of ethical inaccessibility of Western science for Indigenous characters: it is not that Indigenous characters lack interest in or ability for Western scientific method and institutions; it is that Western institutionalized science and its practices

tend to pose an ethical dilemma for Indigenous characters. This state of affairs often leads to internal and external conflicts, as in much of Zainab Amadahy's science fiction, or makes it impossible for Indigenous characters to join Western scientific establishment altogether, which is the case with Wil in Eden Robinson's "Terminal Avenue."

Finally, another important function which Indigenous futurisms perform is providing one platform from which Indigenous artists and writers can engage in philosophical, ethical, and (socio)critical debates over notable current events and developments. For instance, with the recent discovery of traces of water on Mars and the announcement of the NASA Mars mission to be realized in a not too distant future, the discovery-as-colonization theme has perceivably acquired a renewed relevance and urgency in Indigenous science fiction. Especially comic book artists have been quick to engage the topic, with both Elizabeth LaPensée's *They Come for Water* (forthcoming) and Greg Simay, Michael White and R.J. Johnson's *Red Eden: A Vision of Mars* announced or appearing in close succession in 2015. Both these narratives are critical of the impending imperialist mission to Mars and both imagine Indigenous Earthlings and their worldviews as a counterforce to the colonization of what, speculatively speaking, could be someone else's home planet.

However, these two recent texts are not the first ones to contemplate the role of Indigenous people in the space exploration project. In his piece "Indians in Space!" Drew Hayden Taylor speculated about Native astronauts' participation in space exploration and what it would mean for a possible future colonizing mission in outer space even before a concrete Mars mission was envisaged and became tangible:

> What about this whole concept of colonization? Imagine our Native astronauts landing on some far-off land, and saying, "We claim this land in the name of… Turtle Island…?!?" Will our ancestors be spinning in their graves if we end up suckling on the colonial teat too? Heaven forbid there's an indigenous species living on that planet. That would scald the bottom of the corn soup pot for sure. Is there a traditional teaching or an Assembly of First Nations policy to address this potential situation? (28)

Starting from these premises, Taylor goes on to launch his very own set of humorous futuristic speculations, which chart, albeit by way of comedy, the Indigenous cultures-centered ideas and issues pertaining to space travel which Indigenous philosophical thought might want to explore, perhaps in the form of science fiction. In a way, Taylor is urging Indigenous thinkers and artists to do so by pointing out the scarcity not only of Indigenous representation in science fiction but also of the real-life Indigenous astronauts: "Other than Commander [John] Herrington, the skies and stars are a little lean on Native influences" (27). Taylor sees this state of affairs as likely a result of both general public's perception of Indigenous peoples "as being more historical in reference" (27) and of internalization of this perception by Indigenous peoples themselves.

While Taylor in "Indians in Space!" provocatively asks how Indigenous nations would deal with the prospect of themselves becoming interstellar colonizers, the two comic books mentioned above take a different route and mostly explore past colonial projects and their aftermath through possible prospective ones, placing resource extraction square in the middle of the colonial motivation in general: it is the discovery of water that provided an impetus for envisaging a Mars vision. This theme links the futurist speculation back to the historical reality where resource exploitation, be it beaver pelt, oil, land, or water, lies at the heart of any colonial project. Not only does it result in dispossession of the land's Indigenous populations, it is also responsible for a large-scale environmental catastrophe around which many Indigenous futurist texts, especially those that engage (post)apocalyptic themes, are centered.

But, however bleak these texts might sometimes appear on the surface, the overwhelming majority of them are decidedly hopeful and affirmative of the future. All the past-oriented introspection and interrogation which characterizes them ultimately serves to ensure an unburdened futurity. As Grace Dillon notes,

> all forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of 'returning to ourselves,' which involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world. (Introduction 10)

In the last analysis, the apocalypse-centered exhibition *An Evening Redness in the West* too communicates hopeful futurity rather than doom: "The overall feeling of *An Evening Redness in the West*, while it does include those ideas and narratives of apocalypse, is really more about newness, a newness that is placing Native American and First Nations artists in a setting that allows for free and cutting-edge expression" (Joyce n. pag.). Given the theme of the exhibition, this is hardly surprising: post-apocalypse always carries a potential for hope. A post-apocalyptic world is a world that had known disaster, pain and darkness, but it is also a world that had survived and is looking into the future. A post-apocalyptic world is a world poised on the verge of resurgence.

3.2 Event Horizon of the City of Vancouver: Confronting Dystopia in Eden Robinson's "Terminal Avenue"

Eden Robinson (Haisla/Heiltsuk) is by now one of the most prolific Indigenous writers of experimental popular fiction who travels back and forth across genre boundaries. Citing Stephen King and Edgar Allan Poe as important artistic influences (Interview, n. pag.), in her work Robinson often ventures into the realm of horror and gothic-like terror, of the macabre and phantasmagoric; among her to date oeuvre, especially her first novel *Monkey Beach* may be described as exhibiting a Weird Fiction[39] slant, or even as an example of "the emergent New Weird" (Dillon, "*Miindiwag*" 222). Her short story "Terminal Avenue," on the other hand, stands out for its futuristic setting and its dystopian, in a science fictional sense of the word, makeup. The story is set in near-future Vancouver and centers around Wil, a Haisla protagonist from Kitamaat, who experiences the city as a dystopic space with a post-apocalyptic flavor.

The publication history of "Terminal Avenue" has been somewhat adventurous. Originally meant to be included in *Traplines*, the first collection of Robinson's fiction published in 1996, it never made it into the final version of the book, a circumstance which Robinson herself, in a recent interview with Stephanie McKenzie, explains primarily with the piece's unconventional mix of elements, genres and discourses:

> The strangest story in the collection was "Terminal Avenue," which was quickly excised. It was my spec fic, bondage, aboriginal response to Oka and the Frazer River salmon wars. After *50 Shades*, I think it probably would have been the title piece, but back in the mid-90s, bondage porn didn't belong in a serious fiction collection and we replaced it with "Queen of the North." (Interview, n. pag.)

The story was eventually anthologized twice, first in the 2004 collection *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*, edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan, and more recently in *Walking the Clouds: An*

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[39] For an overview discussion of classic Weird Fiction, see Miéville.

Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction, edited by Grace L. Dillon and published in 2012.

In their short introductory blurb to "Terminal Avenue" Hopkinson and Mehan write:

> Eden Robinson wrote "Terminal Avenue" in Vancouver, Canada on the number 9 Broadway bus between Commercial and the University of British Columbia. It was the third anniversary of the Oka Uprising, the salmon wars had just heated up, and the B.C. television helicopters were scanning the Fraser River looking to catch native fishermen "illegally" fishing. (62)

The image of television helicopters that Hopkinson and Mehan conjure up invokes the same panoptic feeling of surveillance and a sense of omnipresent influence of state machinery that characterizes the atmosphere of Robinson's short story. The speculative future in which it is set had seen a time when "the last Canadian reserve was Adjusted" (Robinson, "Terminal Avenue" 211) and, from the point of view of the story's Indigenous protagonist, has a distinctly dystopian feel. However, locating the moment when that Adjustment happened "at Oka on August 16 when the bombs rained" (Robinson, "Terminal Avenue" 211), Robinson's story rejects simple conceptions of time, preferring instead to move freely between history, story and speculative future.

In his book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Tom Moylan asserts that "in the hard times of 1980s and 1990s" (182) a specific type of dystopian fiction—what he, following Raffaella Baccolini, calls "the new, critical dystopias" (182)—became prominent, producing texts which "interrogate both society and their generic predecessors" (Moylan 188). With "Terminal Avenue" Robinson achieves exactly that, combining as she does the genre space and conventions of dystopian science fiction with Indigenous historical and cultural frameworks which in the mainstream are usually invisible within this generic space. Themes referencing the potlatch ban which affected all the Indigenous nations of the Canadian Northwest Coast from 1884 to the 1950s (Dickason and Newbigging 199, 249; White 21) and the occupation of Kanesatake in Quebec in 1990, which came to be known as the Oka Crisis, are central to Robinson's text, which pushes

these historical events and their socio-cultural and political implications to their speculative extreme. In her tightly plotted text, this tactic, typical of the majority of socio-critical science fiction, serves to both expose and critique real-life oppressive state policies and practices directed against Indigenous populations. Thus, "Terminal Avenue" can be fruitfully read as an example of what Tom Moylan calls "the dystopian maps of social hells" (112), an example focused on the "divisiveness of brutal treatment   for different and specifically targeted communities" (Dillon, "*Miindiwag*" 222). Bringing together various historical events which affected Indigenous peoples under the governance of the colonial state and a futuristic setting which defies linear temporality, with "Terminal Avenue" Robinson creates a text which functions as "historical science fiction" (Baccolini 18).

However, to speak of history and futurity as clear-cut concepts in Robinson's story would be a simplification. Grace L. Dillon writes:

> Beyond the imaginary glint of sf-futuristic worlds, the story explores the literariness of metaphor, a typical sf device, to implode this future tale with the traditional Heiltsuk sense of parallel worlds appearing on the horizon, so that the historically forbidden potlatches of the 1880s, the severe government crackdown on Native practices in the 1920s, and the military-peace-keeping restrictions at Oka of the early 1990s literally "reappear" at Surreystation in genuine cosmological opposition to the robin's egg blue uniform world. ("Terminal Avenue" 206)

Like within a black hole, time in Robinson's text does not behave in a way it is conventionally supposed to behave, just like history is not equated with chronology in the story. Deborah Doxtator argues that "Native concepts of history find no gulf between different segments of time. Each time is different, but it does not mean that there is an impenetrable wall because of that difference" (37). Following this argument in addition to the culturally specific Heiltsuk idea of the parallel universes of which Dillon speaks, it is clear that such treatment of time and history are nothing unusual for Indigenous epistemological frameworks and only seems alienating viewed from within the discourse of Eurowestern historiographic linearity.

However, Doxtator also argues that Indigenous and Eurowesten ideas and knowledge systems cross-pollinated from the early contact on, and points out "Centuries of syncretic adaptation of European-based ideologies and structures to Native knowledge systems by Native peoples […]" (35). In her short story, Robinson also brings such different systems together, using, alongside Indigenous timespace and historiographic conceptualizations, astrophysics of black holes in order to disrupt the flow of time, creating a complex narrative time warp which allows her to bring history into the future and the speculative dystopic future into the present:

> A rocket has entered the event horizon of a black hole. To an observer who is watching this from a safe distance, the rocket trapped here, in the black hole's inescapable halo of gravity, will appear to stop. To an astronaut in the rocket, however, gravity is a rack that stretches his body like a taffy, thinner and thinner, until there is nothing left but x-rays. (Robinson, "Terminal Avenue" 208)

On the surface, this passage, encountered early in the story, seems to have little to do with its events—none of its characters actually travels to the outer space. However, on closer inspection, the metaphor of the event horizon and the pull of a black hole reveals itself as central to the story on several levels (Dillon, "*Miindiwag*" 224).

The storytime of "Terminal Avenue" comprises merely a few minutes, maybe even seconds, from the moment Peace Officers start advancing on the protagonist till the first blow falls. During this ostensibly short period of time, "we are privy to the memories and musings of Wil, a Native Canadian who suffers a beating because he transgressed the physical boundaries imposed on Indians, in order to visit a nightclub called Terminal Avenue" (Dillon, "Terminal Avenue" 206). Wil's flashbacks to various times and places, to events personal as well as political, as he is poised on the brink of a point of no return (there is a real chance he, or at least his sense of Indigenous personhood, will not survive the beating; in fact, it is implied in Wil's thought that "he is about to become an example" (212) fold the time in on itself in a way similar to a black hole, turning the moment of the telling of the story into Wil's confrontation with his personal event horizon.

According to astrophysical science, a black hole forms when "a massive star shrinks at the end of its life" (Dasch 37). As Kitty Ferguson explains, the "'boundary' where the black hole begins, is the 'event horizon.' The area inside it is a black hole. The area outside it is not" (40). In relation to the gravitational pull of a black hole, event horizon denotes the "instant in time just *between* […] the instant-of-last-escape and the instant-of-having-to-get pulled in […]" (Ferguson 40). "For anything attempting to get away from the event horizon of a black hole, escape velocity is just a little greater than the speed of light. […] According to Einstein's theories nothing moves faster than lightspeed. So nothing can outrun the gravity of a black hole. Cross the event horizon and we will not be seeing you again" (Ferguson 43).

In "Terminal Avenue," several metaphorical event horizons seem to exist, demonstrating the grave precariousness of the balancing act that the surrounding colonial state demands of Indigenous cultures and individuals. Radically shoving aside rhetorical lip service which is often all Indigenous communities receive from state politicians, Robinson portrays the ultimate goal of the colonial state in relation to its Indigenous populations to be annihilation. Awaiting the beating which possibly will spell out his death, "Wil realizes that he always believed this moment would come. That he has been preparing himself for it. The smiling-faced lies from the TV haven't fooled him, or anyone else. After the Uprising, it was only a matter of time before someone decided to solve the Indian problem once and for all" (213). Thus, it is not only Wil himself who is being pulled into the black hole of state control and violence at that moment, "[i]n the silence that stretches" (213) as he is stretched "thinner and thinner like a taffy" (208), the colonial state machinery exemplified by the Peace Officers threatens to suck him restlessly in. In this dystopian reality which only gives its Indigenous subjects the choice between Adjustment and physical extinction, it seems that Indigenous cultures in general are rapidly approaching an event horizon, about to be forever swallowed by the black hole of the colonial state.

In a way, Robinson's short story itself seems to behave like a black hole, conflating historical events (Oka crisis, the ban of ceremonies etc.) with futuristic speculation (the resulted complete Adjustment and the introduction of Purity Laws)

so that, like at the center of a black hole, they become "squeezed to infinite density" (Dasch 37), concentrating all the "matter" of the issue in one tiny point, one 8-pages text carrying unimaginable weight, and thus making its critique of colonialism and its exposure of colonial impact on Indigenous people all the more striking. When read in such a way, Robinson's text becomes critical in Tom Moylan's understanding of the word, where

> "'critical' means—in the Enlightenment sense of *critique*—the expression of oppositional thought with regard to the genre and the historical situation and—in the nuclear sense—the 'critical mass required to make the necessary explosive reaction'" (Baccolini 16).

By employing this strategy, one of the effects that "Terminal Avenue" has is to show that, just as an astronaut passing an event horizon of a black hole appears to stand still to an outside observer while actually being pulled at by the greatest force of gravity known to humankind, so, to the unaffected public, Indigenous people and issues seem to just be there, stationary and at rest, while they are actually being constantly, unceasingly stretched "like taffy, thinner and thinner" (208) by the ongoing colonial oppression.

Wil's nemesis, the Peace Officers, play an important symbolic role in the story; in a way, the story is structured by their appearances. In science fiction, especially dystopic sf, such units of order keepers who physically enact the violent rule of an oppressive state and embody "the military-state outlook" (Dillon, "*Miindiwag*" 223) are a staple trope (one only needs to think of *Star Wars* or, more recently, *The Hunger Games*). They are usually depicted as an impersonal, automated force which, though there may be human beings beneath the uniform, barely possesses any humanity. This is also the case in "Terminal Avenue": "In full body-armor, the five Peace Officers are sexless ad anonymous. With their visors down, they look like old-fashioned astronauts. The landscape they move across is the rapid transit line, the Surreycentral Skytrain station, but if they remove their body-armor, it may as well be the moon" (208). As in other, similar sf examples, Peace Officers in Robinson's story belong to what David Seed calls a "[s]tate iconography" which "plays its part in supporting [an] ideology which, as so often in these dystopias, suppresses history" (81). In "Terminal Avenue," this suppression of history

happens on the level of extensive colonization of body, mind, and lifestyle of Indigenous characters. This particular aspect is encoded and explored in the story through three of Wil's close relationships: to his father, to his elder brother Kevin and to his unnamed professional dominatrix lover from the club Terminal Avenue, eponymous to the story.

For Wil, apart from its significance as the symbol of the colonial state oppression, the "robin's egg blue" (207) Peace Officer uniform has a very personal and traumatic connotation: the sight of it evokes both the tragic death of Wil's father and the loss of his brother to the colonial state. For the crime of holding a secret potlatch before leaving for Vancouver and thus defying the potlatch ban, Wil's father suffered a severe beating at the hands of Peace Officers, an event which not only physically affected him but also traumatized him to the point of committing suicide. Wil remembers the buoyant joy with which his father showcased his Indigenous culture on the potlatch day:

> His father begins to sing. Wil doesn't understand the words, couldn't pronounce them if he tried. He can see that his father is happy. […] His father puts on his button blanket, rest it solemnly on his shoulders. He balances on the boat with the ease of someone who's spent all his life on the water. He does a twirl, when he reaches the bow of the speedboat and the button blanket open, a navy lotus. The abalone buttons sparkle when they catch the light. She's laughing as he poses. He dances, suddenly inspired, exuberant. (214)

In the eyes of the colonial state, however, such display of prohibited practices—Indigenous language, attire, dance, and the breaking of the potlatch ban—constitute an act of defiance punishable by law. In this context, the cheerful image of sparkling buttons as Wil's father dances takes on a sinister aspect, communicating a feeling of surveillance, of a panoptic eye triggered by this gleam "as government sponsored surveillance planes trace their course, recording their action" (Dillion, "*Miindiwag*" 222). This brings us back to the image of "the B.C. television helicopters […] scanning the Fraser River looking to catch native fishermen 'illegally' fishing" which Hopkinson and Mehan conjured in their introductory remarks to Robinson's short story (62).

By outlawing Indigenous cultural practices and lifestyles, the dystopian state of "Terminal Avenue" not only represses history, but effectively sets in motion a machinery of cultural genocide. Under these circumstances, Indigenous subjects only have two options: assimilate or be destroyed. As Wil's father performs "[t]hese overt gestures asserting Native sovereignty" (Dillian, "*Miindiwag*" 222), he not only defies genocidal state policies, but also passes this spirit of resistance on to the next generation in a striking image which, years later, Wil remembers clearly, even if it takes him a while to fully grasp the entirety of what was happening: "Later he will understand what his father is doing, the rules he is breaking, the risks he is taking, and the price he will pay on a deserted road, when the siren goes off and the lights flash and they are pulled over" (241). Witnessing his father being beaten for practicing his Indigenous culture is Wil's first traumatizing encounter with Peace Officers.

The significance of this encounter for Wil is taken to the next level when his elder brother Kevin himself becomes a Peace Officer as a reaction to the failed Uprising at Oka and the following Adjustment. Despite the ambiguity which surrounds the motivation of Kevin's recruitment into the Piece Officers squad and which Grace Dillon points out ("*Miindiwag*" 226-27), his transformation generally seems to carry a negative connotation in the story. It results in Kevin's banishment from the family, prompting Wil's blatant statement: "Kevin is dead" (Robinson, "Terminal Avenue" 208). This statement is ironic in the face of Wil's realization that Kevin's true motivation is survival: "Kevin would survive the Adjustment. Kevin has found a way to come through it and be better for it. He instinctively felt the changes coming and adapted" (211). Kevin's survival in the colonial state, however, comes at a cost of a complete break with his Indigenous community and family; for them, his way of survival is death. As Wil is beaten down by faceless Officers, he has no way of knowing whether Kevin is perhaps among them: "Wil wonders if his brother knows what is happening. If, in fact, he isn't one of the Peace Officers, filled himself with secret joy" (209). If in their father's case Peace Officers uniform signifies punishment and physical destruction, in Kevin's theme it stands for the Adjustment and the break of Indigenous communal and familiar ties.

With its "industrial black doors" (Robinson, "Terminal Avenue" 212), Wil's lover's sadomasochistic club Terminal Avenue (together with the implied bleakness of Urban Reserves) exemplifies and embodies the "visions of dark urbanization" which are typical of dystopian and post-apocalyptic narratives (Voigts 2). What happens to Wil behind these black doors "elides the impression of strictly internal colonization" (Dillon, "*Miindiwag*" 228):

> When he walks through the door, she likes to have her bouncers, also dressed as Peace Officers, hurl him against the wall. They let him struggle before they handcuff him. […] They will drag him into the back and strip-search him in front of clients who pay for the privilege of watching. He stands under a spotlight that shines an impersonal cone of light from the ceiling. The rest of the room is darkened. He can see reflections of glasses, red-eyed cigarettes, the glint of ice clinking against glass, shadows shifting. He can hear zippers coming undone, low moans; he can smell the cum when he's beaten into passivity. (209)

Here white public literally derives erotic pleasure from the physical and psychological subjugation of Indigenous body. While he is displayed for their objectifying gaze, Wil himself cannot see the audience—he is rendered completely powerless and exposed, his Indigeneity an exotic item to be put on display and consumed: "He knows that he is a novelty item, a real living Indian: that is why his prices are so inflated. He knows there will come a time when he is yesterday's condom" (212). In Grace Dillon's words, "Wil's real job is to play the part of the postcolonial exotic, a postindian, an elevated, reified Cigar Store Indian, required to keep his long hair to better maintain the 'folk culture' persona" ("*Miindiwag*" 228): "Once, he wanted to cut his hair, but she wouldn't let him, said she'd never speak to him again if he did. She likes it when the bouncers grab him by his hair and drag him to the exploratory table in the center of the room. She says she likes the way it veils his face when he's kneeling" (Robinson, "Terminal Avenue" 209). In his lover's club, Wil's body is thoroughly colonized.

However, the sadistic games to which Wil is exposed in the club are not only physical, but also psychological. It is no coincidence that their dominance-submission play involves the Peace Officer uniform: its use is a psychological strategy on Wil's lover's part, employed in order to make him satisfy her

masochistic tendencies after it turns out that Wil "can't hurt her the way she wants him to" and "whips her half-heartedly" (209). Realizing that the Peace Officer uniforms trigger a traumatic reaction in Wil, she dresses up in one in order to get Wil to become violent enough for her masochistic games. What is merely a fetish to her is imbued with sinister meaning and memories of past tragedy for Wil. Knowingly exploiting this fact, she effectively uses his trauma for her sexual pleasure, demonstrating to him that "it wasn't just easy to do terrible things to another person: it could give pleasure. It could give power" (210), and making him wonder: "Is it […] one of those whiteguilt things?" (210). As a result, where before he couldn't hurt her enough, after the introduction of the uniform into the play Wil becomes "addicted to her pain" (210). Thus, colonization of Wil's body and mind in the club continue even in his lover's private playroom.

Yet, if Wil succumbs to colonizing objectification in his lover's club, where "he enters her temple of discipline and submits" (212), elsewhere he shows resistance to internal colonization. Introducing the image of the Peace Officers squad advancing on him at the beginning of the story, Wil compares them to "old-fashioned astronauts" (208). Later in the narrative he tells the readers of his youthful dream of becoming an astronaut, of all the effort he invested into it: "He bought the books, he watched the movies and he dreamed. He did well in Physics, Math, and Sciences" (210). However, with the death of his father this dream is shattered, as Wil realizes when he receives the gift of his father's button blanket at the latter's funeral: "The dark wool held his smell. Wil knew then that he would never be an astronaut" (211).

Though it is never explained in the text, it seems as if Wil's realization stemmed from his unwillingness to enter into cooperation with the colonial state whose policies killed his father. By refusing to become part of the government-sponsored program of space exploration even though it means to give up his great life ambition, Wil rejects assimilation into the colonial state and perhaps the possibility of himself becoming a colonizer of different life forms that might one day be found on other planets. With the death of his father, all the excitement of outer space cannot justify the compromise such a career would require of him. This theme and meaning is reinforced by the analogy Wil draws between astronaut's spacesuit and

the Peace Officer uniform, the uniform his brother, whom his family considers a sell-out, now wears. By refusing to pursue a career of an astronaut, Wil by extension refuses to become part of the state machinery, which espouses Peace Officers and sanctions them to carry out institutionalized abuse, and thus refuses to internalize colonization.

But perhaps the most significant act of defiance on Wil's part happens during his own confrontation with the Peace Officers and the beating, which is the focal point of the story. When the first blow is delivered, Wil mentally teleports himself back to his home village of Kitamaat, to the last time that his family was happily joined together on their ancestral land, in the context of their own cultural practices and rituals:

> This is the moment he chooses to be in, the place he goes to when the club flattens him to the Surreycentral tiles. He holds himself there, in the boat with his brother, his father, his mother. The sun on the water makes pale northern lights flicker against everyone's faces, and the smell of the water is clean and salty, and the boat's spray is cool against his skin. (214)

This last paragraph of the story combines in itself both the power of the feeling of belonging—cultural and interpersonal—and the horror of what is happening to Wil as he thus muses: one cannot help but wonder whether the salty smell and the feeling of spray on his skin is not triggered by blood spurting from under the club's impact upon Wil's body. His hallucinations of home amid the pain remind of his experiences in his lover's club where he uses the same coping strategy "[w]hen the pain becomes too much" (212); this link, as well as the Peace Officer uniform and the very word "club" which refers both to Wil's lover's establishment and the instrument with which the real Peace Officers administer their beatings, suggest that Wil's participation in the Terminal Avenue games was a premonition of sorts, an event horizon-like confluence of spacetime. At the same time, this link points towards the fact that, in Grace Dillon's words, Wil's "participation in the violent playground of Terminal Avenue has the effect of stifling genuine discussion or action regarding street beatings that occur in 'real life'" ("*Miindiwag*" 228). In this

light, Dillon suggests that Wil's final encounter with Peace Officers may be read as

> Wil's way of seeking restauration, in the Heiltsuk spirit of *hailikila*, "healing." Wil's choice not to back down from the beating suggests the possibility of overcoming the psychological denial of the brutality and violence facing urban Aboriginals on Terminal Avenue in Vancouver. His further choice to be transported to a parallel world of ceremonial tradition (fat outweighing any pretenses of other-government-specified "sovereignty") suggests this intrinsic Heiltsuk/Haisla healing, a way of transcending mere bodily existence to seek a life of self-respect and awareness. ("Terminal Avenue" 207)

Such reading gives the seemingly tragic and grim ending of Robinson's story a positive twist, a glimmer of hope.

But perhaps there is more hope implied in the story than meets the eye. The ending of "Terminal Avenue," though bleak, is not quite fatalistic. The outcome of Wil's confrontation with Peace Officers is unclear and open to speculation. Will Wil survive the beating? Is Kevin among the attackers? Perhaps there is a chance that the incident will serve to reunite both brothers. By a stretch of imagination, it is possible to conjure up an ending where Kevin finally lives up to the potential of the words he said to his mother when he tried to explain to her his becoming a Peace Officer—"I can stop it, Mom. I have the power to change things now" (208)—and saves his brother. From there, the possibilities are limitless. Defining critical dystopia, Raffaella Baccolini writes: "Critical or open-ended dystopias are texts that maintain a utopian core at their center, a locus of hope that contributes to deconstructing tradition and reconstructing alternatives" (13). It seems as if Eden Robinson's text made ample use of this enabling genre in order to both demonstrate the gravity of injustice and abuse Indigenous people suffer at the hands of the colonial system and to keep hope, agency, and futurity alive, thus refusing to participate in the victimization discourse.

3.3 "Now Wake Up": Dimensions of (Post-)Apocalypse in Richard van Camp's "On the Wings of This Prayer"

> The end of the world reveals the conditions under which we live.
>
> Claire P. Curtis[40]

> I love writing about Pop Culture and modern day living laced with the magic that Northerners bring to the world. I love being able to celebrate all that life has to offer while exploring the darkness of our times.
>
> Richard Van Camp[41]

> Look up! Look way up—
> nothing but haze and holes.
> Look down!
> bitumen bite in the
> neck arms thighs of Earth
> a boreal blistering,
> boiling soil and smoke-slathered sky.
>
> Mari-Lou Rowley[42]

In his essay "The Comic Vision of Anishinaabe Culture and Religion," Lawrence W. Gross writes: "In effect, the old world of our ancestors has come to an end. Thus, American Indians are living in a postapocalyptic environment" (449). He argues that the impact of colonialism and the political, cultural and social changes it facilitated has been such that, from the point of view of Indigenous nations of the American continent, the contact aftermath can be considered an end-time event, an apocalyptic experience: "[T]he coming of the Europeans completely changed the face of our existence. We have endured the end of our world, and we continue to suffer from the effects of Post Apocalypse Stress Syndrome. While we will never be able to return to the old world, that does not mean we cannot bring that world with us into the new" (Gross 458).

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[40] Curtis 12.
[41] "'I'm Counting on Myself to Tell the Truth'" n. pag.
[42] Rowley 64.

Perhaps the phenomenon Gross describes at least in part accounts for the recent upsurge of Indigenous post-apocalyptic literature and film.[43] Examples of texts which play with the theme of post-apocalypse in different and creative ways include novels like Catherine Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars* and Joseph Bruchac's *Killer of Enemies*, short films like Jeff Barnaby's *File under Miscellaneous* and short stories like Richard van Camp's "On the Wings of This Prayer," to name but a few. All of these texts fulfill Gross's objective of bringing the old world into the new in that they combine Indigenous mythologies, epistemologies and experiences with elements of popular cultural disaster narratives. While Knutsson's, Bruchac's and Barnaby's stories all center in one way or another around technology and social crisis, Richard van Camp's short story, though also invoking these elements, is situated within both zombie apocalypse and eco-apocalypse generic models.

In her Introduction to *Dead North: Canadian Zombie Fiction*, the anthology in which "On the Wings of This Prayer" was published, Sylvia Moreno-Garcia argues in favor of a multiplicity of forms in which zombie narratives can be created, insisting that "zombies have no rules. Just like vampires, we have crafted, forged and re-forged horrors that reflect the fears of our time" (xi). She further lists possible manifestations of these horrors which surface in various popular zombie narratives, including "fears of technology (medical experiments turning people into monsters), an economic collapse (the zombie apocalypse scenario), a runaway consumerist society (zombie consumption generates more consumption) or simply our fear of death and the corruption of our bodies" (xii). In their own way, colonialism and colonial experience feature several of these aspects and thus also lend themselves to an exploration through the zombie sub-genre: the themes of a constant reemergence in different guises, of rampant consumption that is never sated, of a tendency towards sweeping destruction all create a dialogic relationship between colonialism and the zombie figure. In fact, Elaine Coburn describes the

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[43] Though they also have to be considered in a larger context of the recent general resurgence of post-apocalyptic narratives, especially for young adults: examples include blockbuster productions *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent* and *Maze Runner*. Significantly, many of the Indigenous post-apocalyptic narratives are also targeted towards young adult audiences, as examples like Joseph Bruchac's *Killer of Enemies* and Catherine Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars* demonstrate.

colonial enterprise and the effect it had and continues to have on Indigenous peoples as "zombie colonialism" (35):

> Colonialism is thus first and foremost, if not exclusively, dispossession and the associated pressures on traditional Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing rooted in place-based practices. But this material loss is legitimated through elaborate, shape-shifting "zombie colonial" ideologies that, if they have been defeated a thousand times, nonetheless arise again and again. One manifestation of zombie colonialism is the identification of history's point of origin with colonial conquest. (35)

Richard Van Camp's short story "On the Wings of This Prayer" arguably challenges such "zombie colonialism" with its "hegemonic tendency to conflate European history with world history" (Coburn 35) by reframing both conventional zombie figurations and the Alberta Tar Sands resource extraction project in terms of Indigenous mythologies, memory archives and interpretations. In Van Camp's text, the idea of a zombie[44] apocalypse becomes reinterpreted as "the *Wheetago* […] return"" (Van Camp, "On the Wings" 168) and the Alberta Tar Sands region becomes a site of an Indigenous mytho-historical event of a past *Weetago* awakening and desolation. The story draws on a prominent figure of Algonquian storytelling traditions, windigo (or Weetago), in order to explore the impact colonial-capital projects like the Tar Sands have not only on Indigenous communities but on the world in general. The mythological makeup of windigo (at least in certain versions of its storied archive) lends itself to such an exploration particularly well, since "typically the windigo is a malevolent manitou whose insatiable appetite for human flesh can never be satisfied, and the windigo also has the power to turn humans into cannibals who suffer the same voracity. […] The windigo is a metaphor for excess, and by extrapolation it encourages moderation" (Dillon, Foreword 18). As Richard Van Camp himself explains, windigo stories, concerns about the negative effects of the Tar Sands as well as recent ecological

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[44] In Richard van Camp's story, the *Wheetago*'s hoards are variously called zombies, Shark Throats, Boiled Faces and Hair Eaters. There is a hint in the text that mythologies cross into each other, perhaps being reinterpreted generationally: "The Boiled Faces, we call them – *zombies*, our son said – and they remember faces" ("On the Wings" 165).

observations of Indigenous people, are in fact the narrative archives on which he drew as he crafted the story:

> I'm horrified and so worried about this time in our history: we really do live in a time of ecocide. I wrote "On the Wings of This Prayer" in Pangnirtung after seeing how much the world has warmed and by listening to the elders talk. There is a new walrus now who hunts seals; there are hummingbirds in Fort Smith; we have coyotes in Yellowknife. The world is changing and I was so worried after hearing that there was a Wheetago buried near the Tar Sands of Alberta and that if we are not careful, it will return and all the bullets in the world won't stop it as it starts to feed. ("'I'm Counting on Myself" n. pag.)

The apocalypse in the story begins with an old man living in the Tar Sands area who, "no matter how much money the oil companies offered him, would not budge, so they built and dug around him" ("On the Wings" 165) until he became possessed by the Wheetago evil so that "the devil was in him now" (165). Thus the oil companies, in their ill-advised abuse of the land and their greed for profit, awaken an ancient greed buried in the land which settler colonialists, ignorant of the land's mytho-landscape, do not know not to disturb. By digging deep into the land without regard for old warnings and ancient stories, colonial greed personified by the oil companies effectively brings about the end of the world, a Wheetago apocalypse.

The large-scale extraction of bitumen in the Alberta Tar Sands in Canada is "the largest oil extraction project on earth" (Rebick 199). The environmental cost of this industrial enterprise is high especially for First Nations communities situated in the Tar Sands' vicinity. As Jon Gordon explains, "Not only is their *way of life* being sacrificed for capital, but, given the high rates of unusual cancers that are appearing in the community, *lives* are being sacrificed" (218, emphasis in original). Images of Alberta Tar Sands after the inception of bitumen extraction present a desolate industrialized landscape. Gordon's discussion of "the deaths of sixteen hundred ducks on Syncrude's Aurora tailings ponds in April 2008" (212) as a result of bitumen industry's activities invokes one of the classic texts dealing with man-made environmental disasters, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* of 1962 (Buell 14). All of this creates an apocalyptic aura around the by now infamous site.

"On the Wings of This Prayer" ceases upon this apocalyptic imagery to push the horrors to their extreme limits as a gesture of warning. The brutal and bloody post-apocalyptic world it imagines is a direct result of the Tar Sand's bitumen extraction project. "Stop the Tar Sands" (168, 171, 173) becomes a sort of mantra the short story keeps chanting at its readers, the repetition generating a sense of urgency and foreboding. In these passages, the text for a moment leaves the enclosure of the story and addresses the readers directly, urging them into action in the real world: "If you are reading this, please know that I tell you these things because I love you and wish for the world a better way. I have sent this back to tell you this, my ancestor: the Tar Sands are ecocide. They will bring Her back. In both stories, it is the Tar Sands to blame. This is how the *Wheetago* will return" (168). The apocalyptic thrust of the story challenges a narrative which, according to Jon Gordon, is often used as a rationalizing justification for the losses and sacrifices the oil extraction industry claims, a narrative which Gordon calls "the promise of modernity—the future will be better—any deaths endured today will have been worthwhile because of the kind of society that we will inhabit in the future" (213). The gruesome post-apocalyptic reality Richard Van Camp's story is set in exposes this promise as false, showing, as post-apocalyptic narratives often do, that if we continue this way, it can only lead to a disaster and the end of the world.

Though the narrative begins with an illusion of a conventional storyline— "There are two stories my grandfather told me" (164)—the discursive time of the story is non-linear; it goes around in circles. In time it becomes clear that what the story actually represents is a warning from the future, a prophecy, delivered in a dream:

> This message comes from the future. Form our Dream Thrower. Remember: there is a hard way and an easy way: stop the Tar Sands and that old man's body from waking up. He – not she – is the beginning of the end. May your children – our ancestors – not know a time of thing born hunted as we are all hunted now" (171).

By being at the same time a prophecy and a dream, the narrative is simultaneously situated both in the future and in the now, and has a bearing on them both. And every now and then, there is a sudden hint that all this may be happening in a video

game: "Thinksawhile looked up from his computer. 'This will cost us one of our lives. We have to choose carefully'" (170).

To a certain extent, such temporal structure has an effect of combining different meanings of apocalypse. As Claire P. Curtis explains,

> [t]he apocalypse is a term with both a popular and a technical meaning. […] Popularly "apocalypse" simply refers to a disastrous, violent and catastrophic end event. Technically "apocalypse," meaning revelation, refers within the Jewish and Christian context to divine prophecy concerning the end times and the final battle of good and evil. (5)

With its story of the *Wheetago*'s return referencing the popular figure of a zombie and its detailed description of the resulting horrific state of the world, "On the Wings of This Prayer" functions both as an account of the apocalyptic end event and a prophetic revelation about things to come if the world continues to walk down its current path. The narrative recounts both extreme changes to the natural world and human social life. Addressing the reader and the receiver of the dream at the same time, the narrative voice refers to them as "you who live in the time before the sun twins, when fish only had one mouth, when moose knew who they were" (173), thus implying that in the post-apocalyptic reality of the story these things had changed for the worse. In this world, the Tar Sands excavations facilitated cataclysmic cosmic events as well as abnormal mutations in both humans and other-than-human animals: "Women gave birth to things that were killed immediately (except redheads), and there was a low growl from the cancered earth that trembled us. […] What the last hunter brought was a hand that could be bear with an eye sewn backwards into the palm. Could be human, could be them" (171).

On the social side of things, the consequences are equally chilling. People turn on each other to survive and even make profit, in this perhaps illustrating the worst consequences of a *Wheetigo* possession—the breaking of kinship ties and social structures (Smallman 74): "They say some humans are farming other humans and making deals with the Hair Eaters" ("On the Wings" 172). Zombies themselves also seem to have established human farms of their own, the descriptions of which rival even the most disturbing biblical passages:

> They also spoke of lakes now, filled with humans swimming in their own blood. Hundreds of women, men, children, elders, harpooned and buoyed by jerry cans to keep them floating. "It's the adrenaline," a sharpshooter who got away said. "It sweetens our blood. They keep us terrified and once we die, they tear into us. They just keep adding more and more people to these lakes. There were lines of peoples for miles, as far as we could see." (172)

This certainly sounds like some of the worst depictions of Hell.

But the revelation of Richard Van Camp's story is not a biblical one; instead, it is evocative of and can be read against a different kind of prophecy. Judy Rebick quotes Faith Gemmil, an Indigenous activist, who explains: "Our people have a prophecy that there will come a time in the history of humanity when people are in danger of destroying ourselves. When this time comes, a voice will rise from the North to warn us. This time is now" (qtd. in Rebick 199). Jeff Denis also talks of this prophecy, which is becoming more and more prominent in Indigenous conceptualizations of the challenges and dynamics of the current historical moment:

> Many Indigenous nations have a prophecy. The Anishinaabe call it the 8th Fire; other nations have other names for it. After seven generations of colonization and its devastating consequences, the people will begin to wake up and revive traditions. They will come to a fork in the road where they must choose between the current path of greed, competition and destruction; where some individuals get very wealthy at the expense of widespread poverty and polluted air, water and soil; or an alternative path of working together to find new ways of living that will restore balance to both social relations and the ecosystems on which we depend […]. (214)

"On the Wings of This Prayer" seems to echo this prophecy, not least in pointing out that "there is a hard way and an easy way" (171), but also in general by showing that the point of no return has not yet been reached and that the imminent apocalypse may still be averted through the application of Indigenous knowledges and a shift in mindset. Indigenous knowledges and worldviews are a key to that, starting with the very prophecy at hand. As Denis further explains,

> [i]t has been about seven generations since Confederation, and leading up to INM [Idle No More], many signs suggested that the prophecy was being fulfilled: climate change, natural disasters, human-made disasters. Alternatives for future generations, centred on Indigenous vitality, were becoming visible through a range of initiatives, including efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages and cultures, and protect the environment and even growing numbers of non-Indigenous people seeking guidance from Indigenous Elders. Thus, many wondered, "Is now the time? Is this the 8th Fire?" (214-15)

All of these signs and issues are touched upon in Van Camp's story, and there is a strong emphasis on the idea that Indigenous knowledges and cultural archives will ultimately be the ones most instrumental in saving the world. The warning of the prophecy which the story embodies—getting people to listen—is the first step, but it is not enough and there is more work to be done. To that end, the desperate world of the story is shown as actively reviving Indigenous knowledges, ceremonies and traditions: "I saw that most youths' faces were tattooed in the way of *Kakiniit*, ghost marks in memory of the One Sun. The Known People were greedy to learn our songs for the slowing" (168). People want to know these songs because "[f]or some reason, when the Hair Eaters come, it slows them when you sing or talk to them or chant in the first tongue" (166). A new Indigenous leader also emerges with Four Blankets Woman, who is the Dream Thrower who sends the prophecy into the present and who uses Indigenous knowledge to ensure survival of the people and the world:

> Four Blankets knew the way of the four winds. I had seen her part the clouds. She knew which root and moss to braid to make wick for cooking and heat. Her medicine was rabbit medicine. When she was thirteen, she saved the life of a doe. In turn, she was given *Gah* medicine. Four Blankets Woman had tattooed our tongues, so the Hair Eaters could not hear us speak. Not even in this dream. (170)

Thus, Four Blankets Woman's power comes from an act of kindness towards the natural world, which stands in stark contrast to the oil companies who sacrifice living things for profit. Significantly, not only does Four Blanket Woman use her knowledge to survive in the world of horror, but she also works on adapting it to the demands of the current situation. "We need new medicine" (169), she says, and

finds a way to develop one which would allow her to send the message from the future into the past without zombies noticing. Therefore, the story's prophecy not only shows its recipients what will transpire if the Tar Sands and similar project continue unchecked: it also offers guidance and advice for action that could change the prevailing attitudes responsible for the ongoing distraction of the natural world. But the prophecy also makes it clear that prevention is the best medicine, in this case really the only hope; once the situation spins out of control, not much can be done:

> We wish you luck. The future is a curse. There are no human trails left. I was born running from them as they are born starving and hunting for us. Now, we carry on in fever. We carry on for you and what you do next. […] I pray you remember this when you wake up. You must remember this. You must stop the Tar Sands. Do not bring cancer to our Mother. Do not unleash them. On the wings of this atomized prayer, we reach to you with all we have left. […] You *can* change the future. Now wake up. (173)

"Now wake up" is a call resounding through the entire story: not only is it meant to shake up the receivers of the prophecy into physical wakefulness on the textual level so that they may start working towards implementing the changes that are needed in order to prevent the apocalypse from happening; it is also a call directed towards the story's readership so that they would take on the same responsibility in the real world.

And real-world action is desperately needed. If we read the *Wheetago* as not only the result of oil company's intervention into the natural and storied landscape but in fact as a metaphor for the capitalist greed these companies represent, it speaks of an endlessly perpetuated cycle of gluttonous hunger, in this case for profit. As Sarah Henzi points out, "Metaphorically speaking, the more the *Windigo* 'eats' the more he searches for food, or calls for 'lost souls'; thus the greater the cycles of violence gets" (475). Considered through a *Wheetago* lens, the oil companies' push for profit becomes the personification of this ceaseless hunger, a self-perpetuating need that feeds itself and cannot end unless it is stopped; the system will continue repowering itself *ad infinitum* unless there is a conscious effort to "stop the Tar Sands." At the moment, such effort in its most assertive comes from

Indigenous communities and their allies. Regarded from this point of view, "On the Wings of This Prayer" is not only a work of fiction, but clearly also a future-oriented activist text.

3.4 "Decolonizing Together": Indigenist Vision of Zainab Amadahy's *Resistance*

> Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive.
>
> Ursula K. Le Guin[45]

> Stories, titles and names are just as much tools of liberation as any weapon. Maybe more so.
>
> Zainab Amadahy[46]

> As I sit down to write about selfhood and distant techno-information replacing local wisdom, about the mono-cultural imperatives of colonialism and global colonialism, I am bored with despair.
>
> Andrea Hairston[47]

In a recent interview with *Feral Feminisms* magazine, Zainab Amadahy described herself as "mixed race and the mix is far too vast to explain here" (38). An artist and educator of African American and Cherokee heritage, Amadahy has been outspoken about the constant self- and cultural exploration which her various cultural ties as well as her extensive activist experience facilitated and nurtured. Due to the North American history of colonial exploitation, the slave trade, and the troubled "Native-Black relations" (Amadahy and Lawrence 105) it produced, historically speaking, hers is not the easiest heritage to reconcile: as a slave-holding nation, Cherokees participated both in the exploitative institution of slavery[48] and some exclusionary practices after its abolition,[49] while, as Amadahy and Lawrence argue, though "Black people have not been quintessential 'settlers' in the White supremacist usage of the word […] nevertheless, they have, as free people, been involved in some form of settlement process" (107). On the present-day social and

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[45] Le Guin, "Introduction" n.pag.
[46] Amadahy, *Resistance* 103.
[47] Hairston, "Disappearing Natives" 2.
[48] Though in the case of Zainab Amadahy's particular family history, both her African and her Cherokee ancestors were enslaved (Amadahy, *Wielding* 46).
[49] For a detailed discussion on Cherokee freedmen, see Naylor-Ojurongbe.

cultural landscape, all of this has impact not only on mixed-heritage individuals but also on the activist landscape of the struggle for social justice. Reflecting on her own personal struggle to come to terms with the multiplicity of heritages of which she partakes and the complex historical layers of dispossession inscribed into these heritages, Amadahy writes:

> Today, though more experienced and, theoretically, wiser I struggle as much with identity, personal and political issues as I did when I was 15. My Indigenous worldview sometimes makes it difficult for me to interact as an intimate in urban Black communities. My lack of connection to a landed Indigenous community sometimes makes it difficult for me to find a complete sense of belonging in Indigenous circles. I constantly grapple with the implicit responsibilities of having Indigenous ancestry from both Turtle Island (North America) and Africa, as well as coming to an understanding of Indigenism through intellectual processes, oral teachings and occasional ceremony rather than lived experience on the land in community. (*Wielding* 51-52)

In her interviews and non-fiction writing, Zainab Amadahy argues that artificial historical divides between marginalized communities as well as the fractured sense of belonging a mixed heritage like hers can illicit may be healed, or at least meaningfully addressed, by "relational paradigms," one of them being "Indigenism" (Amadahy, *Wielding* 27). Speaking of her own struggle to find a working "political framework of analysis" (Amadahy and Lawrence 109), Amadahy explains:

> […] I share the concerns of many in Black, Indigenous, and Black Indian communities and am personally invested in seeing those communities come to terms with their own indigeneity as we struggle against colonialism, genocide, racism, and other aspects of globalization as it manifests in the twenty-first century. If there is one truth I have come to with age, it is that Indigenism has great potential to heal ourselves, our communities, and the land. (Amadahy and Lawrence 109-10)

For Amadahy, one of the great gifts Indigenist framework can present to Black diasporic communities is to return to them the sense of their own Indigeneity which has been stolen from them through the mass displacement of slavery, to the extent that it hardly features at all in contemporary Black activist discourses:

> Diasporic Black struggles, with some exceptions, do not tend to lament the loss of Indigeneity and the trauma of being ripped away from the land that defines their very identities. From Indigenous perspectives, the true horror of slavery was that it has created generations of 'de-culturalized' Africans, denied knowledge of language, clan, family, and land base, denied even knowledge of who their nations are. (Amadahy and Lawrence 127)

Amadahy asserts that Indigenist framework could be able to return the sense of the land and ancestral structures to contemporary descendants of Black diaspora and at the same time build a necessary bridge between different activist group struggles, providing them with a common language and frame of reference which utilizes similarities as well as acknowledges differences.[50] In general, Amadahy sees "decolonization as indigenization" (Interview 39), where everyone can develop Indigenist ties to the land because "land is core to the question of indigenization— not bloodlines, skin colour, or cultural heritage. To be indigenous is to take direction on how to live from a specific place (a bio-region) where all of the life-forms model sustainability, interdependence, and 'good mind' in relation to how to live well in that area" (Interview 39). This means that "anyone can become indigenous to a place. In our context of Turtle Island, taking directions from the First Peoples who have the longes standing relationship with these lands is a first step" (Interview 39).

The main thrust of Indigenism as Amadahy understands it is towards a positive relationality, not only between activist groups (this would be more a result than the goal), but between all life forms: land, humans, other-than-human animals and plants, etc. As she explains in *Wielding the Force: The Science of Social Justice*, her non-fiction volume in which Amadahy explores the Indigenist paradigm from the point of view of philosophy/ethics and science, "Relational worldviews […] stress the inter-connectedness and interdependence of all life" (35). Taking her cue from this basic assumption, throughout the book Amadahy looks at how such inter-connectedness manifests in interhuman relations, healing practices, as well as interactions between humans, the anthroposphere, and the environment. She

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[50] Robert Lovelace implicitly emphasizes the importance of such conceptual synthesis when, in his Foreword to Amadahy's *Wielding the Force: The Science of Social Justice*, he writes: "That which holds humanity together is not our sameness but our willingness and ability to accept our differences" (5).

examines recent scientific research pertaining to relation phenomena and its implication for the basic community building:

> New and emerging science is further demonstrating that the wellbeing of communities is also enhanced in measurable ways when compassion, cooperation and social justice characterize our relationships. This is contrary to many contemporary worldviews that uphold individualism, competition and the profit motive as the driving forces behind economic progress, social evolution and community building. (*Wielding* 13)

All of these concerns feature prominently in Amadahy's second novel, *Resistance*. It was published in 2013, the same year as *Wielding the Force*, and both books can be considered to engage in a dialogue with each other. Though in different ways, both *Wielding the Force* and *Resistance* are framed through futuristic, science fictional imagery: while the novel is an explicit example of literary science fiction, *Wielding the Force*, though a non-fictional text, structures its argument through direct references to the mythology of the *Star Wars* saga (with chapter titles like "Sith versus Jedi," "My Adventures in the Jedi Academy of Life," "Jedi Heart Tricks" and "Jedi Brain Tricks"), in a way using story as theory and a conceptualizing lens. Such usage of one of the most widely known storyworlds of Eurowestern popular culture, and one which inspired multiple revisions, reiterations and adaptations through contemporary Indigenous artists[51] at that, echoes, among others, Lindsay Keegitah Borrows' notion of the practical role of stories in Anishinaabeg context: "[Stories] have great power, as they can help us learn how to live ethically and sustainably with all our relations. […] This is why stories can focus our attention and provide a methodology for Anishinaabeg Studies—we are stories" (398). At the same time, Borrows emphasizes the importance of cultivating stories' vitality and "adaptability in the face of change" (Borrows 398): stories "must be given room to live and grow" lest they become stifling for their own bearers (Borrows 398). In adapting and reframing *Star Wars* mythology to support her Indigenist lens, Amadahy arguably enacts such understanding of stories in the context of popular culture.

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[51] Examples include artwork by Jeffery Veregge and Andy Everson, to name just two. It is also noteworthy that *Star War: Episode IV – A New Hope* is, to my knowledge, the only major movie production to date to be dubbed in an Indigenous language, in this case specifically Navajo.

Set in Toronto in the year 2036, a place described as "one of those burned out, empty cities" (*Resistance* 16), *Resistance* is a futuristic speculation which explores some of Amadahy's Indigenist ideas, their implications for the dominant scientific establishment, as well as complex questions of community and belonging in the messy environment of a largely dystopian city. This Toronto has suffered, and continues to suffer, from global warming, human-caused epidemics, corporate greed, and neglect in the wake of a global "economic crash of 2023" (*Resistance* 52) which rapidly deteriorated large urban centers. Descriptions of the crisis in the novel sound apocalyptic:

> Rural areas were filling up with squatters and unemployed folks looking for work, food or land on which to settle. Roving urban gangs were forming and terrorizing people out of increasingly scares food and supplies. The poorest of the poor didn't have access to land or gas for transportation out of the city. Whole families hid in condemned buildings, trying to survive the decay around them. (27)

However, while government officials fail to adequately address the situation and large corporations begin to assess what profit can be made of it, activist leaders emerge who begin to reestablish communal structures using alternative means of community building based on environmental sustainability and economic self-sustainability.

One of the main characters in the novel, Vicente "Chente" Montoya, is at the center of one such effort, as were his parents who foresaw the crisis: "No on listened way back then when my parents predicted that the economy would collapse and cities would soon lie in ruin. They were always trying to organize community gardens and renewable energy co-ops, doing workshops where people could skills to survive after the shit hit" (26). Significantly, when Chente's parents eventually needed to go underground in order to escape persecution, they found refuge in an unnamed "Anishinabe First Nations community" (27). When "the shit hit" (26), Chente started to actively implement his parents' knowledge and vision by "organizing folks, helping them develop community gardens and build their own solar powered water pumps—for irrigation" (27). Eventually, he joined forces with Tamaya "Tam" Wilson, a doctor trying to save the hospital about to be closed in

the middle of the epidemic for lack of funds. Together they create a clinic-community which is basically a self-sustaining system and which becomes a model for other similar communities sprouting in the city.

Tam and Chente's community represents a fusion of modern (techno-)science and Indigenist ethics and knowledges. While equipped with whatever technological appliances could be salvaged from the decaying city and employing doctors trained in high-tech medicine, its communal structure is built upon principles of cooperation and reciprocity rather than competition. When Tam needs to explain what the community is all about, she says:

> A whole new way of being in this world. Cooperation, compassion, they've been ridiculed and denigrated for centuries in favor of competition, individualism and the profit motive. But we human beings are actually wired for cooperation. We benefit physically, mentally and emotionally from caring and sharing. (68)

Similar to Amadahy in *Wielding the Force*, Tam argues in favor of a relational worldview, a cooperation paradigm using insights gained through scientific research. In *Resistance*, Amadahy essentially attempts to implement in a practical way all that is discussed on a theoretical level in *Wielding the Force*.

Thus, any contribution an individual has to offer the community at Marketplace is considered useful and received with gratitude. Traditional Indigenous healing practices are carried out alongside high-tech cures; group psychotherapy and yoga classes complement each other. An Indigenous Elder provides ceremonial and spiritual guidance and life advice for the community members. The community grows and gathers its own food and healing herbs and produces its own energy by environmentally friendly and sustainable means. In essence, the Marketplace hospital is striving to create a functioning communal and ecological utopia in the middle of dystopian urbanity, a utopia based on Indigenist relational worldviews implemented into action under the guidance of Indigenous people. In this respect, *Resistance* stands in contrast, for instance, to the canonical ecological utopia by Ernest Callenbach titled *Ecotopia* (1975), a text which subtly glorifies "Indians" for their ecological knowledge and celebrates them as an example of sustainable living, but does so in complete and total absence of Indigenous peoples themselves.

The protagonist of the novel, an outsider journalist who has come to Ecotopia to observe its people's ways, writes down in his notes, in his customary telegraphic style:

> *Many Ecotopians sentimental about Indians, and there's some sense in which they envy the Indians their lost natural place in the American wilderness. Indeed this probably a major Ecotopian myth; keep hearing references to what Indians would or wouldn't do in a given situation.* (29, italics in original)

Though admired almost to the point of worship by the citizens of Ecotopia, Indigenous knowledge in Callenbach's novel is a memory, not a lived practice, and the white society is the only heir to whatever is left of it. Ecotopians use the myth of the "Indian" in part to legitimize their own ecofriendly social enterprise; however, to use Mita Banerjee's words, "this ecocritical awareness of the vulnerability of our blue planet" is "literally built on the vestiges of Native civilizations" (206). The reporter's notes in *Ecotopia* emphasize nostalgia and disappearance on which Ecotopian discourse of the "Indian" is predicated: for Ecotopians as well as for the outside observer, Indigenous people are a "*myth*" and a "*reference*" (29). Thus, for all their well-meaning admiration, Callenbach's Ecotopians, and ultimately his novel as such, perpetuate necropolitical rhetoric in relation to United States' Indigenous populations: "The Indian […] is said to be an automatic ecocritic, an 'ecoNative'; but as such, he is also said to be a dead ecocritic" (Banerjee 216).

In contrast to such necropolitical representation, Amadahy's novel does not separate Indigenous knowledges as a concept from Indigenous people as a physical presence, as active keepers and developers of these knowledges. Where *Marketplace*'s communal vision is inspired by Indigenous philosophical thought and social practice, it is inseparable from living and practicing Indigenous individuals and communities. By placing the very diverse Toronto hospital community under the supervision of Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers, *Resistance* effectively reverses narratives of absence produced within the utopian genre in texts like *Ecotopia* and organically integrates Indigenous knowledges into the existing epistemological landscape, diversifying it in the process. Amadahy

frames the communal vision of *Resistance*'s Marketplace community through a "Cherokee teaching" (*Wielding* 35) of the way corn, squash and beans support each other's growth, relayed in the novel by Zulie, Tam's partner who is "half Cayuga" (*Resistance* 46):

> One of our Elders came up here and gave us a teaching on how to plant and tend these crops. We put the three seeds in the same mound together because they help each other grow. See how the bean stems wind their way around cornstalks? That stabilizes the beans, while they enrich the soil with nitrogen. These squash vines grow close to the ground and shade emerging weeds, preventing their growth, while tapping moisture in the soil. After we harvest we leave the residue because it enhances the soil for the next crop. It's kind of a really nice teaching about how the plant world cooperates and how their cooperation contributes to our wellbeing. Something we try to role model in this community. (47)

Thus, the Marketplace community is essentially modeled on a traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge from North America which stresses cooperation over competition as the driving force in the natural world. The same aspect of the productive interdependence is emphasized by the symbol of the community painted at its entrance. Significantly, this symbol is borrowed from an African epistemological and symbolic archive, as Chente explains: "Siamese Crocodiles. […] The Adinkra symbol for democracy and unity. […] Artistic, cultural and spiritual symbols from the Akan people, of what used to be Ghana in West Africa. […] The crocodiles share a stomach, reminding us that, in a way, we all do and it doesn't serve anyone to compete and fight" (36). These two cornerstone symbolic tales of the community use and bring together Indigenous knowledges from different parts of the world in order to conceptualize and unite the community. Since these different knowledge and symbol systems exist side-by-side in a non-hierarchical way and are equally valued for the teachings they offer, the Indigenist Marketplace community is almost effortlessly able to incorporate individuals of all backgrounds, mixed and otherwise. In so far as they are used generously and responsibly for the common good (not only with regards to humans but also the environment and other-than-human lifeforms), it is also able to incorporate modern techno-scientific advances and machinery.

Implicit in this vision of cooperation over competition and equality of knowledge systems is a critique of "colonial-capitalism" (Coburn 33) of the mainstream society, which is responsible for the surrounding dystopia in the first place. By privileging purely cerebral mind processes and the competition over cooperation paradigm of social and economic relations, it created an unsustainable system which finally collapsed in on itself when the economic crisis hit. Driven by profit and exclusionary practices, this system is unable and unwilling to accommodate epistemologies and worldviews which diverge from its master narrative – it has to, in Andrea Hairston's terms, discursively (and often materially) "*disappear* them" ("Disappearing Natives" 1), and with them groups who advocate or practice them, often Indigenous groups:

> In the Disappearing Native Narrative (DNN), so-called body knowledge (intuition, passion, compassion, experience, non-linear metaphor) is pitted against reasoning (linear, lineal deduction, dispassionate objectivity, logical reflection). Reasoning processes are not conceived as body knowledge. Calculating truth is superior to dancing truth, and certainly they are mutually exclusive. (Hairston, "Disappearing Natives 7)

Colonial master narratives created an artificial divide between what Andrea Hairston calls "the literal mind" and "the metaphorical mind" ("Disappearing Natives" 7), arranging them into a destructive hierarchy which privileges one over the other to the detriment of wholeness and diversity:

> In postmodern empire, the metaphorical mind is neglected, disparaged but still operating. The literal mind garners full cultural support. The metaphorical mind is childish, playful, primitive, and feminine. The metaphorical mind is to be colonized and dominated by the superior, rational, literal mind. Thus the "Native" in all of us can be indulged, but never allowed free reign, never allowed to define reality, our society. We mourn this regrettable loss, but liberating "Native" impulses threatens empire. (Hairston, "Disappearing Natives" 7)

This tension of worldviews is exemplified in *Resistance* by the narrative arc of its protagonist, Dr. Inez Xicay, whose heritage includes "African-descended, Indigenous and Hispanic" (*Resistance* 26), and her hesitant oscillation between

allegiance to Marketplace's "communitist" (Weaver xiii) lifestyle and vision and mainstream scientific establishment which spans most of the novel. Despite the fact that she has been effectively ousted from the scientific community because of an accusation of an ethical and sexual misconduct fabricated by her former boss and supervisor, Felipe Gonzales, and despite the discriminatory confirmation bias which made the community believe Gonzales' lies without asking for much proof, Inez desperately wants to return to her research and prove her personal worth in terms of scientific achievement and accolades. Even when she travels to the Marketplace community and is suddenly offered a real alternative to the world of scientific establishment, for most of the novel Inez wants to return to research.

In fact, the Marketplace offers her an opportunity to return to emergency medicine practice which she describes as her "first love" (*Resistance* 85) but which she had to leave because Felipe first forced her to have sex with him by threatening her position at the hospital and then systematically harassed her into losing her self-confidence as a practicing doctor. However, Inez had come to define herself by the standards and lifestyle of the scientific establishment to an extent that even this opportunity seems not worth leaving the relative comfort and safety and the promise of fame and profit of mainstream research for. In fact, for most of the novel she sees Marketplace as nothing more than "this little anarchist community, full of irascible characters clinging to false hopes of sustainability and 'social justice'" (*Resistance* 162). At the same time, people of Marketplace do not understand the appeal Inez's old environment holds for her. As Inez tells Chente: "I am a bit disgraced. A rival scientist kind of spread some lies about me. Raised questions about my character. I can't prove him wrong" (90), it only makes him wonder aloud: "And this is the world you want to return to?" (90).

Inez's training in Eurowestern medicine and science implanted in her a deep mistrust for other epistemological systems and healing practices, especially those which utilize emotional states and spiritual ceremonies as part of the healing process: in Hairston's terms, she has been taught to privilege "the literal mind" over the "metaphorical mind" ("Disappearing Natives" 7). This becomes obvious in frequent clashes between Inez and Tam and her partner Zulie about the topic. Inez ridicules both Zulie when she tells her about her training and methods as a

"Longhouse-trained healer" (*Resistance* 47) and "a certified natural medicine practitioner" (48) and Tam's research into spiritual and natural healing mechanisms using Eurowestern scientific method: "Your research? Peer reviewed by any chance?" (69). Inez's reaction indicates that she cannot accept the results of Tam's independent research because it does not adhere to scientific establishment's standards and protocols and therefore its results are not valid.

Similarly, when she asks Zulie what being "a Longhouse-trained healer" entails and Zulie, who describes herself as "half Cayuga" (46), explains that she is "trained in the traditions to use ceremony, prayer, drumming, whatever helps people heal themselves" (48), Inez reacts with contempt: "Ceremony and prayer. Placebos" (48). As a response, Zulie tried to makes Inez see that there may be more than one truth to the matter: "My people have relied on what you call the placebo effect for millennia. My own mother broke her back in a car crash and was told she's never walk again. She left the hospital, wheeled herself into a healing ceremony and walked out" (48). Inez, however, dismisses Zulie's story as "[a]necdotal evidence" (48), prompting Zulie to point out Inez's arrogance and arbitrariness of judgement: "Your science is equally nothing more than anecdote. Your stories say one thing, our stories say something else" (*Resistance* 48-49).

The novel uses such debates between Inez and Zulie and Inez and Tam in order to discuss the way Eurowestern mainstream science strives to acquire and inforce an exclusive monopoly on knowledge and truth which Inez is shown to have internalized. In the process, it tends to ignore or actively devalue epistemological and symbolic systems that are not in direct agreement with it. Importantly, the plot of *Resistance* does not restlessly reject Eurowestern science and its discoveries and methods: Inez's skills with nanomedicine and -technology and the knowledge she acquired throughout her years of training in the scientific establishment prove very useful, and even vital, to the community on more than one occasion. However, while she can help heal physical bodies of other people with her technological knowledge, Inez is unable to heal her own deep traumas and obsessive feelings of inadequacy—many of which stem from her experiences in the competitive mainstream research environment—until she realizes and accepts the validity of other epistemologies and frameworks. As an effective and successful healing team

as well as a tender romantic couple, Tam and Zulie symbolize the benefits of the cooperative framework which considers and fuses the best of different systems rather than insist on enforcing just one. Also the intent behind such cooperative partnership is radically different from what Inez is used to from her years of mainstream research: rather than to uphold the status quo and keep the power in the hands of the powerful, its goal is finding and enacting that which is beneficial for the community.

Thus, though critiquing mainstream scientific establishment, the novels does not see science as purely evil or a lost cause; rather, it strives to open up a different perspective from which to approach it. In his Foreword to *Wielding the Force*, Robert Lovelace laments: "Even science, a powerful source of inquiry [sic] is prisoner to unnatural and unsustainable selfishness" (4). *Resistance* recognizes science for its power and seeks to liberate it from selfishness. So Inez, too, needs to conquer her own selfish motivations in order to heal her life:

> Suddenly I was overwhelmed with shame. My reasons for heading out to meet with Scaithwaite had been selfish and egotistical. Yes, I had been determined to see the prisoners go free but I'd also been hopeful about finding myself a temporary home at S & M, a step in my ambitious, if not completely insane, plan to rule the world with remote controlled in vivo nanotech. I laughed aloud at myself. Perhaps self-mocking laughter was the first step in my journey towards self-forgiveness. (*Resistance* 159)

After this incident, Inez confesses to Chente: "I think I have a lot to learn […]. About becoming a human being" (161). By embracing Marketview's communitist vision and by opening up to different points of view and sources of knowledge Inez eventually not only manages to heal, but also learns more about her heritage and ancestors and about her own psychokinetic abilities. In a way, all that is summarized in Inez's realization which proved to be a turning point: "I would forever regard tobacco ties as symbolic of catalyzing change in power dynamics" (159).

That Amadahy chose a modern metropolis as the setting for her novel is unlikely a coincidence. In *Wielding the Force*, she writes of her affiliation to the urban

Indigenous communities in Toronto where she is currently based and of the challenges they face:

> The Indigenous communities in Toronto, like most urban Aboriginal communities, is comprised of many alienated, traumatized and disconnected mixed-race people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, all of which have left them struggling to come to terms with their cultural identities. It is a community in which I fit quite nicely. (50)

Amadahy knows from personal experience the impact the feeling of lost roots can have on individual self-understanding and sense of belonging. She writes:

> Today I really wonder how Indigenous I can claim to be given that I am clanless, my Indigenous family history—African and Cherokee—has been lost in the colonization process and I do not have a familial relationship with any land. I've come to understand that this self-doubt is common to urban mixed-race Indigenous people whether mixed with white or African ancestry. It is a consequence of genocide. (*Wielding* 47)

Read against such a backdrop, the literary thought experiment of bringing diverse people of often mixed backgrounds together in an urban community in which the differences are bridged and imbued with value through an Indigenist vision acquires a renewed urgency. Making use of science fictional speculative space, in *Resistance* Amadahy strives to imagine alternatives to the currently often disenfranchised state of communities like the one with which she herself identifies. Pitting utopia against dystopia—an Indigenist community against corporate interest—in a single text as she does, Amadahy essentially deconstructs and weighs against each other different models of being-together-in-the-world, speculatively exploring their implications for communal and individual well-being as well as for ways of conceptualizing Indigeneity in a neocolonial society that is still dealing with its history of genocide and slavery. Significantly, in the end, her utopia holds.

Chapter 4. Contemporary Indigenous Screen Cultures and New Media

4.1 Visuality Quests: Indigenous Screen Cultures and Visual Sovereignty

> Stories are primal technology, simple machines, fundamental to all other technology as we mold our world and ourselves. Stories are conjurations, calling forth reality.
>
> Andrea Hairston[52]

> The denial of Indigenous peoples as human beings and the denial of our existence as coherent, collective, and self-determining peoples is a direct result of visual imperialism.
>
> Jennifer Adese (Oitpemisiwak/Métis)[53]

Indigenous people of North America and elsewhere have a long and entangled history with image-producing divisions of colonial cultural industries. Whether in film, animation, music videos, fashion designs, to name a few examples, Indigenous people have been systematically misrepresented and reduced to tokens and fetishes by colonial cultural machines for centuries. Tied as they most of the time are to corporate big money and cultural gatekeepers, image-making cultural industries are hard to penetrate, so that for a long time Indigenous artists did not have much, if any, influence on the way their people were being portrayed outwards. The result was what Beverly Singer (Santa Clara Pueblo/Diné), in her book *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens: Native American Film and Video*, calls "the visual genocide" (62). It manifests itself in both absent representation and false representation, as well as in an impeded accessibility to the means of image production and distribution. Thus, visual genocide impairs both the relatability and accessibility of images.

The consequences of this type of visual erasure and misrepresentation are, as Singer shows, far-reaching and dire: "This replication of popular images of Indians

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[52] Hairston, "Guest of Honor Speech" 329.
[53] Adese 131.

for commercial purposes—whether in film or other forms of culture—contributes to a loss of respect for culture, confused identity, and weakened beliefs about what it means to be a Native American" (7). In his novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, Thomas King provides an example of how this may play out on a personal level through the character of Lionel:

> By the time Lionel was six, he knew what he wanted to be. John Wayne. Not the actor, but the character. Not the man, but the hero. The John Wayne who cleaned up cattle towns and made them safe for decent folk. The John Wayne who shot guns out of the hands of outlaws. The John Wayne who saved stagecoaches and wagon trains from Indian attacks. (265)

Here, King demonstrates the corrosive effects of visual genocide which Singer describes, showing an Indigenous character disconnected from his culture and investing his aspirations into a popular icon whose fame was acquired through exploitation of Indigenous cultures and whose cultural output propagates and glorifies their demise and defeat.

Another of King's characters, Portland, who has made a short term career as an Indigenous actor playing in Hollywood Westerns, illuminates the way in which the entertainment industry treats Indigenous cultures as props: "But before the year was out, Portland was playing chiefs. […] He was a Sioux eighteen times, a Cheyenne ten times, a Kiowa six times, an Apache five times, and a Navajo once" (*Green Grass, Running Water* 166). The novel also shows how demeaning an environment Hollywood was for Indigenous actors when Portland is made to wear a rubber nose to look more Indian (168) or participates in an erotic show whose script has him being defeated by a cowboy over a semi-naked woman dressed like Pocahontas (238-39). Against this background, Beverly Singer's statement rings particularly true: "The prominence of stereotypes of American Indians in early Hollywood westerns sacrificed the humanity of Native people" (14).

The tradition of a Western is an especially prominent example of the damage popular culture can and does do to Indigenous people, in terms of representation but also, as Singer's argument and King's novel suggest, in terms of self-image. Western, however, is not the only arena where these processes take place: music

industry, for example, is also notorious for its penchant for "playing Indian," often producing oversexualized and caricaturist images in the process; the fashion world promotes both the romantization of Indigenous spiritual traditions and the vanishing Indian discourse, particularly through clothing prints and accessories, but also through staged fashion shows; and sports industry infamously reduces Indigenous people and cultures to racist mascots as a way of "honoring" them. All of these discourses and phenomena contribute to the dehumanization of which Singer speaks. It is therefore of paramount importance for the entire project of decolonization that Indigenous people regain control over their own images and visual representations. It is also what is increasingly happening in all of these cultural areas, from film to music to fashion and beyond: Indigenous artists of all walks of life are challenging the tradition of colonial misrepresentation by putting forth a new vibrant archive of images and developing a new visuality which is expressive of who they are as peoples and individuals and supportive of their aim of cultural and political sovereignty.

Much has been said and written about the centrality of the visual to the present cultural moment. Dierdra Reber, for one, boldly states: "ours is the age of the image, not the word" (65). As the technological means of image production and dispersion grow and develop, the significance of visual cultures across mediascapes cannot help but increase. It is thus not surprising that, as Denise K. Cummings notes, "the visual has become a primary means of mediating identities" (xiii) as "individual and collective identities are constructed through systems of knowledge production embodied in visual forms—pictures and images" (xiii). The term visuality, then, describes complex processes of encoding and decoding, meaning-making and identity-formation which various sites and practices of the visual trigger. Cummings defines visuality as both "practices of seeing the world and seeing other people" (xiii) and, more specifically, as "concern[ing] the field of vision as a site of power and social control" (xiv).

It follows that, in a colonial context, visuality becomes integrated into the power dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized, and the question of the control over images becomes that much more crucial. This fits into Nicholas Mirzoeff's understanding of visuality in an imperialist discourse as "both a mode of

representing imperial culture and a means of resisting it by means of reverse appropriation" (54). This dynamic interplay is part of what makes visuality such a productive discourse for contemporary Indigenous resistance and resurgence. Given the troubled history of visual genocide pertaining to North America's Indigenous peoples outlined above, it is also a cultural site which it is imperative to decolonize in order to both undo the destructive discursive legacies of visual genocide and to confront the ongoing perpetuation of what Jennifer Adese calls "visual imperialism":

> Visual imperialism is the construction and exportation of visual representations of Indianness that facilitate the oppression of Indigenous peoples, thus advancing colonization and Canadian nation-building. At its origins, visual imperialism has been preoccupied with rendering visual the dichotomy between those figured as "civilized" and those figured as "savage," between the "superior" and the "inferior." (131-32)

Against the idea of "visual imperialism" Adese sets the concept of "visual sovereignty"[54] (Raheja 13; Adese 133), a practice which serves to purge imperialist images of Indigenous people from public and artistic discourses and replace them with images expressive of contemporary and historical Indigenous reality. This is one of the major aspects which make the work of Indigenous artist active in all kinds of visual media so important. As Adese asserts, "Along with legal-political, intellectual, cultural and other forms of sovereignty, visual sovereignty is a necessary strategy of resistance against the powerful representational work of colonization" (145-46). Thus, artistic practices that reinforce visual sovereignty become one of the most prominent tools of decolonization and resurgence.

One of the central visuality sites where Indigenous visual sovereignty is being actively developed and negotiated is the film.[55] In the words of Denise Cummings, "film has become the technology of the self through which Native Americans [and other Indigenous groups in North America] themselves have structured their lived identities" (xvii). Beverly Singer, herself a filmmaker, states that "film and video

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[54] For a discussion of the specific problematic of the term "sovereignty" when applied in Indigenous context, see Adese 134-137.

[55] For a comprehensive discussion of Indigenous film including many case studies, see: Singer; Knopf; Wood, Houston; as well as the edited collection by Pearson and Knabe.

visualize the healing from the ruptures of our history related to colonialism, disease, and cultural loss" (9). The medium of film allows the full power of Indigenous visuality to unfold, confronting colonial misrepresentations and providing a stark contrast to caricaturist depictions of Indigenous people in mainstream media, but more importantly, centering around Indigenous lives, experiences and ways of being in the world. All of this makes Indigenous film a distinctly resurgent practice which contributes to the goal of providing a continuity of Indigenous frameworks into the contemporary world with its cultural sites and practices:

> The comprehension of culture as it relates to Native filmmaking comes from the storytelling approach that always pays homage to the past but is not suspended there. The currency of our experience is energized by self-expression that validates and comforts our desire to participate in the world of ideas. The process also works to detox our own ingrained stereotypes of Indians that block our creativity. (Singer 9)

After all, film is storytelling by other means.

In order to achieve this effect, Singer argues, it is paramount that Indigenous individuals not only serve as actors, but have control of the camera and the filmmaking process, since "However marvelous American Indian performers have been and are, […] control of the images coming out of films rests with writers, directors, and producers" (Warrior ix). Control of the camera, the writing and editing process, therefore, ensures control over the resultant images and thus sovereign visuality. The effects of such visuality are especially of consequence for Indigenous youth. Reminiscing about the screening of Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998), one of the first ever entirely Indigenously produced feature films which garnered national and international attention, Robert Warrior (Osage) recalls how many young people were present at the screening and how deeply affected they were by what they saw: "The young people I saw the film with were enthralled, seeing reasonable facsimiles of themselves and their lives on the big screen—most of them, for the first time" (vii). Warrior's memory is a powerful visual demonstrating the difference that "American Indian actors playing American Indian characters, saying words written by American Indian screenwriters, and following direction from an American Indian director" (Warrior vii) make. Of

course, this process also opens creative career doors to a multitude of Indigenous artists whose work in turn inspires and gives hope to younger generations of visually inclined Indigenous creative minds.

Presently, Indigenous productions in every cinematic genre and format available—from documentary to short film to feature film—are being released at what feels like an unprecedented rate. This may be a misleading impression, however, and the problem may be located in the realm of distribution rather than production. Prior to the establishment of Indigenous-centered distribution and broadcasting channels, it was not easy for Indigenous filmmakers to find an outlet for their artistic work, as Singer explains:

> Of the thousands or so professional films and videos made by Native Americans, only a select few have been seen on public television or cable TV because of limited distribution and narrowly defined programming interests. Native films and videos do not fit neatly into program categories of drama, sitcom, environmental, or native programs because our films and videos integrate such themes and reflect out political identities. (31-32)

Since Singer's book appeared in 2001, the distribution possibilities for Indigenous filmic productions greatly increased, due not only to the ever expanding programming of Indigenous television networks, but also, and perhaps with greater overall impact, due to the development of digital technologies and the advent of online streaming services. Speaking specifically about the Canadian context (and, as Singer also points out (56), when it comes to creating and supporting Indigenous media outlets, Canada is more advanced than the United States), Lorna Roth argues that

> Canadian aboriginal media are now well immersed in a process of cultural and social networking transformations that have opened up global venues of public access and participation. Independent film production and digital aboriginal arts and culture have taken hold of the imaginaries of actual and potential audiences for **First Peoples'** media output. (237, emphasis in original)

The introduction of streaming networks like Native Flix (subscription) and SkinsPlex (free) that carry exclusively Indigenous content may yet prove to be

another major turning point in terms of public exposure of Indigenous filmmakers and visual productions. The effects of the steadily increasing number of distribution outlets for Indigenous film, video and TV content, be it through broadcasting channels, digital streaming services, Indigenous film festivals and public screenings, or even YouTube are already felt. It is safe to say that Indigenous film is increasingly gaining spotlight in the eye of the public: Indigenous film festivals like imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts festival garner growing publicity and prestige; celebrity filmmakers like Chris Eyre, Jeff Barnaby and Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers emerge in the field of Indigenous cinema, breaking ground for more to come. Symptomatic of this growing exposure is the fact that both Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* and Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* at one time or another were included into the programming by Netflix, currently the most popular global provider of streaming media.

One particular art of content which the emergence of steady Indigenous broadcasting and online streaming services pushed is serialized productions. APTN has proven especially instrumental in that respect, featuring wide range of serialized content situated in different genres, from drama *Blackstone* to chick flick *Mohawk Girls* to animated productions like *Animism: The God's Lake* and *Kagagi*. As is evident from this list of shows, when it comes to Indigenous screen cultures, it is especially serialized productions that are most closely engaged with popular culture, both in terms of form and content. Thus, public broadcasting and streaming services (APTN, for example, can be considered both, since many of its shows are offered for streaming on its website) contributed much to the development of Indigenous popular culture on screen, a development which can only be expected to progress ever further over the coming years.

One of the media genres which currently seem on the rise in Indigenous media is animation. Given its history of misrepresentation and caricaturing of Indigenous peoples, particularly by the Disney Studio, this field also calls for a healthy dose of decolonization and is another site of struggle for visual sovereignty. When it comes to Indigenous representation, Disney is to animation what Westerns are to live-action cinema. This is true not only pertaining to the studio's well-known misuses of Indigenous imagery and characters in full-length animated features

Peter Pan (1953) and *Pocahontas* (1995), but also to a host of its animated shorts which frequently feature caricature "Indians" dancing in circles or brandishing bows and tomahawks. The consequences of such representation are rendered particularly dire by Disney's omnipresent fame and large-scale global distribution. As Paul Wells shows, Disney's groundbreaking technological advances in animation eventually "established Disney as synonymous with 'animation'" (24).

At the same time, animation as a medium holds great potential for disadvantaged groups for creating subversive content. Wells argues that "animation as a film language and film art is a more sophisticated and flexible medium than live-action film, and thus offers a greater opportunity for film-makers to be more imaginative and less conservative" (6); he contends that "The animated film enables the film-maker(s) to be more expressive and thus more subversive than is readily acknowledged" (6). Animation's inherent flexibility is the key point here— it allows for a creation of anything at all, whatever the mind of the creator can conceive.[56] Despite all that potential, however, Wells laments that, historically, animation as a creative medium has been largely juvenilized and marginalized in contemporary cultural hierarchy:

> Clearly, in the contemporary era, the animated film has a much higher profile, chiefly through the continuing domination of the Disney Studios, the proliferation of cartoons on mainstream television, and the popularity of the Japanese manga films […]. In many senses, however, this creates as many problems as it apparently resolves. This scenario still consigns the animated film to its traditional children's audience, defines the animated film as a 'cartoon,' and suggests a view of animation as something which merely fills time in the schedules, or appeals to marginalized tastes. (3)

Perhaps it is due to this overall still marginalized position of animation as an art form that, though the related medium of Indigenous comic books thrives, Indigenous animation is somewhat slow to develop. This, however, does not mean that Indigenous artists do not engage with it on multiple levels. In fact, as Lorna Roth explains, one of the very first media training projects with Inuit people

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[56] I would argue, though, that with the continuous development of computer graphics and other digital technologies, in terms of the limits to "reality" it can create, or, more precisely, in terms of the lack of such limits, the live-action cinema is coming very close to animation.

facilitated by the National Film Board in Canada in 1972 was a workshop which eventually produced some of the earliest examples of Indigenous animation:

> A collection of short fascinating films highlighting Inuit heritage, cultural patterns, and indigenous subjects […] were assembled into a reel entitled Animation from Cape Dorset. This was awarded first prize at the Zagreb International Animation Film Festival (1974). Innovative techniques such as sand animation and double-exposure pixilation of a human were created for the first time ever. (241)

Today, many of the Indigenous animated productions are targeted at children, but there are also more "artsy" uses of animation. One example of this is Jackson 2Bears' music video "Ten Little Indians [Remix]"; another is the use of an animated sequence in Jeff Barnaby's otherwise live-action film *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*, where Barnaby utilizes animation in order to convey visually a traditional story an Elder tells to the protagonist.[57] Such use of animation on Barnaby's part not only creates visually intriguing internal transmediality[58] within the film, but also, in accordance with Wells' argument of animation's potential for subversive expression (6), through the use of this medium Barnaby is able to generate and communicate horrors which it would have been difficult and costly to create in the life-action mode only.

Serialized animated productions like *Animism: The God's Lake*, on the other hand, attempt to capitalize on the global success of the Japanese anime with young adult and adult audiences, creating a story more complex and politically charged than cartoons targeted at children usually do and using an aesthetically complex animation style. And Jay Odjick's animated series *Kagagi* represents an example of an animated superhero narrative, a genre which has few examples within Eurowestern mainstream media, but is, again, quite common for Japanese anime (as is the fact that the series is based on a comic book). These examples serve to show that, though animation is not yet as prominent with Indigenous artists as, for

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[57] Perhaps the most prominent recent example of such use of animation within a feature film in mainstream cinema is the animated sequence telling "The Story of Three Brothers" in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 1*. This strategy of incorporating animated sequences is very suitable for visualizing a story-within-a-story, particularly if the story told through animation has a supernatural, magical and/or horrific quality.

[58] I use the term internal transmediation to refer to the phenomenon of prominently referencing other media (to the point that it affects the narrative) within an otherwise single-medium production.

instance, film and video are, experimentation with the medium and its various aspects does take place. Just as with other new media, it is likely that in the future interested audiences will see more of Indigenous animation finding its way into the mediascape, also in the field of experimental animation, with artists like Elizabeth LaPensée (Anishinaabe/Métis) and Christopher Auchter (Haida) becoming ever more prominent.

One of the most intriguing aspects of contemporary mediascapes is, of course, the fact that content nowadays rarely stays within a single medium. In the age of what Henry Jenkins famously called "convergence culture," media content ceaselessly travels from platform to platform, from community to community, and, more importantly, so do its consumers. As Jenkins repeatedly stresses, convergence is in the first place not about technology, but about people:

> Convergence does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others. Each of us constructs out own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives. (*Convergence Culture* 3-4)

This argument echoes in a more general manner Sonny Assu's Indigenous-oriented idea of "personal totems" (139): markers of personal identification gleaned from the archives of popular culture, media and discourses, and—in Indigenous context— combined with pre-existing as well as newly developed cultural and discursive archives of Indigenous nations. It is also in tune with Candice Hopkins' (Métis/Tlingit) assertion that "Stories are at once individualized and communal, original and replicated, authored and authorless" (128).

To explain and describe this phenomenon of close engagement of audiences with media content Jenkins uses the term "participatory culture." He explains: "The term, participatory culture, contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" (3). Such model of multidirectional communication in media and high connectivity

between producers and consumers is ripe with opportunities for not only multilayered entertainment but also for political engagement. In accordance with Drew Hayden Taylor's assertion that "being born Native in Canada is a political statement in itself" (Interview 193), Indigenous media and its relationship to its audiences, be they Indigenous or non-Indigenous, is always colored by politics: "The politics of communication and the communication of politics were seen to be integrally tied together in the development of First Peoples' media" (Roth 245). As Roth illustrates, APTN (and other broadcasting and streaming services which since came into being) plays a role in forging alliances and sustaining dialogue internationally, not only between Indigenous peoples across the 49th parallel, but also globally: "The fact that APTN is already integrating international programming and is considering expanding its service to become an international First Peoples' television network comparable to TV5 or the BBC World Service indicates clearly its global intention of international constituency group-building across national borders" (247).

Such group-building endeavors are especially promising and fruitful in the climate of interconnectivity which convergence culture and participatory culture espouse and foster. Ultimately, it is the tight links between media content and audience participation that makes it possible in this form at all. Thus, the opening up of media plays a crucial role not only in contemporary Indigenous cultural, but also political, engagement. This is especially true for the media-savvy youth who have the tools and the knowledge of how to exploit these linkages the best and most effective: "It is within their *minds* that unique intercultural and media convergence and divergence patterns are etched into their personal mediascape. It's on their websites that these perceptions and interpretive views of the world add to the collective intelligence of their affinity communities" (Roth 250). In relation to popular culture, Bronwyn T. Williams and Amy A. Zenger write: "Technologies that allow an individual to not only access popular culture texts from around the world in an instant, but also share, comment on, appropriate, and remix those same texts alter the way the individual perceives popular culture, and alter his or her sense of agency in regard to the texts" (2-3). These processes carry a great potential

for expressions of visual sovereignty to trickle down from official media outlets to the user-generated level where they can spread like fire.

4.2 "Native Chicks, Kicking Butt"[59]: Indigenous Urban Female Action Hero in Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers' *A Red Girl's Reasoning*

> It is kindness for kindness, bullet for billet, blood for blood. Remember, what you are, she will be.
>
> Pauline Johnson Tekahionwake (Mohawk)[60]

> Racism/sexism is a package experience and it is virtually impossible to untangle one from the other.
>
> Emma LaRocque (Métis)[61]

A Red Girl's Reasoning, a short film written and directed by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers (Blackfoot/Sami), a young Indigenous Canadian filmmaker, is a fascinating mix of indie aesthetics and cinematography, a grave and heavily politically charged subject matter, as well as references to urban action heroines and female superheroes of popular culture and comic books. The film, unfolding in a dark urban setting, tells the story of Delia, an Indigenous rape victim turned vigilante who executes revenge upon "the privileged men who perpetuate violence against indigenous women with impunity" (Verstraten n. pag.). As the plot picks up speed, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* raises some of the toughest questions pertaining to the situation of women in an on-going colonial context. Sexual violence against Indigenous women and the system's overwhelmingly inadequate response to it are at the very center of Tailfeathers' narrative and its critical exploration of contemporary neocolonial society. All of this is compressed into Delia's opening voiceover narration with which she introduces herself and contextualizes the events that follow:

> I've been on this war path for six long, lonely years. The white boys have been having their way with Indian girls since contact. Forget what

[59] Verstraten n. pag.
[60] Johnson 189.
[61] La Rocque, "Métis and Feminist" 67.

> Disney tells you—Pocahontas was twelve when she met John Smith. It's pretty little lies like this that hide the ugly truth. My clients come to me with their requests for justice when justice system fails them. This business of revenge is both a calling and a curse. (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 01:15-01:53)

As the voiceover tells the story, Delia is shown first pursuing a male hoodlum through labyrinthine backstreets of the city and then fighting him while the dynamic rhythms of "Electronic Pow Wow Drum," A Tribe Called Red's most famous song's, underscore the scene. Quick cuts and action combined with a forceful score and voiceover narration create a scene full of urgency, underlining the severity of the crisis Indigenous women face and the desperation it fosters.

In the voiceover narration Delia explicitly links sexual violence against Indigenous women to the history of colonialism not only by directly mentioning the contact but also by invoking the sugary, romanticized version of the Pocahontas and John Smith story, a made-up romance which became mythologized in the colonial narrative and which, more than any other colonial fantasy, launched the Indian princess stereotype in popular culture and imagination. The image of Disney's Pocahontas is so familiar that a simple mentioning is enough to achieve a striking contrast by juxtaposing it with the visual representation of *A Red Girl's Reasoning* protagonist Delia: leather jacket, low-rise pants and boots instead of buckskin dress; urban jungle instead of pristine forest; and instead of romance with a blond colonialist, Delia is shown smashing her boot into the crotch of a white guy who attacked her with a knife earlier. It becomes clear early on that the film is not only addressing the topic of violence against Indigenous women but is also bent on confronting and dismantling persistent stereotypical representations of Indigenous women in popular culture.

Thus, with this scene and all that will follow, the protagonist of *A Red Girl's Reasoning* challenges both the stereotype of the "Indian princess" and the stereotype of the "easy squaw" (Acoose 40)—the two most prominent colonial discursive contractions which, to this day, plague and seek to undermine Indigenous womanhood. As Janice Acoose argues, both these stereotypes, created in the course of North American colonial history, continue to operate today with far-reaching social and personal consequences for Indigenous women:

> [Indigenous women] were generally represented in canadian (sic)[62] literature somewhere between the polemical stereotypical images of the Indian princess, an extension of the noble savage, and the easy squaw drudge. Such representations create very powerful images that perpetuate stereotypes, and perhaps more importantly, foster dangerous cultural attitudes that affect human relations and inform institutional ideology. (39-40)

As it portrays the very tangible consequences of such popularized misrepresentations, the main critical thrust of *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is precisely against the "dangerous cultural attitudes." The film takes on the "easy squaw" in particular, spelling out for the viewers how this stereotype perpetuates and implicitly legitimizes violence against Indigenous women.

In her recent book *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, Sarah Deer writes of "the statistical data that consistently show that Native women experience the highest per capita rate of rape in the nation […]" (ix). Like Delia and the entire plot of *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, Deer draws the connection between this alarming situation and the colonial history of exploitation, stating that "rape in the lives of Native women is not an epidemic of recent, mysterious origin. Instead, rape is a fundamental result of colonialism, a history of violence reaching back centuries" (x). Tailfeathers' film reinforces this link, not only by means of Delia's voiceover monologue, but also through the figure of Brian, a white man who seems to specifically target Indigenous women as victims who suffer rape and battery at his hands.

The way Tailfeathers portrays him, Brian exemplifies everything patriarchal white male privilege is about which comes to bear especially heavily on Indigenous women as one of the most vulnerable social groups in North America. As Tina Beads, a longtime Indigenous anti-rape activist puts it, "I do think Aboriginal women are vulnerable to assault from all men in society. I believe than men will rape or batter women in their own race/class or down. So therefore white men have access to every woman" (223). With his entitled attitude and unapologetic penchant for violence against women, Brian in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* embodies both

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[62] Acoose purposefully and consistently does not capitalize "canada" and "canadian" throughout her book.

colonial brutality and patriarchal male privilege. When Delia confronts him about the assault of her client Nelly, after initial denial and faking innocence, Brian finally says: "Look, she wanted it. All I did was loosen her up a little" (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 06:20-06:28).

At the same time, on the pictures of him Nelly handed to Delia as well as at the bar where they later meet, Brian is shown as a well-groomed, obviously wealthy man with much economic and social power. Realizing that he is in trouble after Delia kidnapped him, he tells her: "Sweety, if this is about money or anything, all you gotta do is ask" (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 06:06-06:13). Read in relation to the Indigenous women he is praying on, the contrast has clear political dimensions: the social and economic advantages he enjoys were given to him by a centuries-long history of colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the same dispossession which left Indigenous women economically and socially vulnerable to predators like him. Thus, violence breeds violence and dispossession—more dispossession, and it all started with the colonial conquest. Delia meets his offer of money with contempt: "I'm not looking for handouts, Brian" (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 06:14-06:16). With her answer, Delia alludes to and challenges another common misconception which the Canadian public holds against Indigenous people, namely the notion that they are unwilling to work and are always looking for and living off the state's handouts. Throughout their encounter, Delia makes clear to Brian that her revenge is about restoring justice and dignity, not about money. In that as also in its title, *A Red Girl's Reasoning* echoes Pauline E. Johnson's short story "A Red Girl's Reasoning," which centers around a young Indigenous woman's pride of the ways and customs of her Indigenous nation.

All of this makes clear that there exists a metaphorical link between colonialism and rape in Tailfeathers' film, as well as a causal link. This is not surprising since, as Sarah Der notes, "rape can be employed as a metaphor of the entire concept of colonialism. The damage to self and spirit that rapists cause has some of the same features that colonial governments perpetuate against entire nations" (xvii). The first half of the film especially allows for a metaphorical reading. Until well into the film, none of the characters' names are known to the viewers (except for Delia, who is introduced in the opening credits). To a certain extent, this narrative move

on Tailfeathers' part renders both the characters and the events of the film allegories which expose the current state of Canadian colonial society in relation to certain issues. When in the second part of the film the narratives moves into a more personal mode, disclosing not only all of the character's names but also the fact that, years before the events of the film, Delia was also brutally sexually assaulted by Brian, the metaphorical and the literal implications of rape come together in a disturbing picture of a complex, multilayered trauma with which so many Indigenous women have to live on a daily basis.

The excessive violence of the plot and its straightforward visual execution that is sometimes criticized or causes uneasiness[63] thus becomes a realistic staging of the brutality of this trauma; it is used to address the issue head-on without any reservations or sugarcoating rather than as a call to violence as a way of solving problems. In other words, violence in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is descriptive, not aspirational, mimicking the naked brutality of the experience of physical and sexual assault. As Tailfeather herself explains, "Some people ask how violence solves violence […]. But it's metaphorical violence. Indigenous women, particularly in Canada, particularly in Vancouver on the Downtown Eastside – these women live violence on a daily basis. It was interesting to flip that reality" (qtd. in Verstraten, n. pag.).

It is also important to note that, though not shying away from depicting violence, the film is careful with its visuality: there are no direct depictions of violence against women or women in a subjugated position, sexually or otherwise, except for the presumably forensic photograph of Nelly's facial injuries as a result of Brian's assault, an image which the viewers are barely able to glimpse. Rebecca Stringer's analysis, though referring to a different movie, when it comes to the depiction of women can also be applied to *A Red Girl's Reasoning*: "Even as this film's sustained inferences to violence are palpable and intense, absent are the spectacular scenes of rape, injury, sexual exploitation, and death that we expect to see in films in the cognate genres of thriller, horror, crime, and action" (275-76). According to Stringer, this shows an awareness of "the feminist complaint that

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[63] Katelyn Verstraten relates how for Eric Paulsson, "the executive director and producer of Crazy8s," the film contest where *A Red Girl's Reasoning* was first presented, "[h]is one point of contention is the violence in the film" (n. pag.).

graphic depictions of victimization objectifies the victim and can operate pornographically" (276).

A Red Girl's Reasoning also tactfully "refrain[s] from visually exploiting female suffering and victimization" (Stringer 276), never showing graphic scenes of assault on women, though making clear that grave violence has taken place. Instead, the film only shows women in the position of owning their power, standing up for themselves and one another. This not only includes Delia and Nelly, but also the female bartender in the bar scene who assists Delia in putting drugs into Brian's drink; thus, even in the bar scene where Brian is on the hunt and singles out Delia as his prey, the victim-perpetrator dichotomy role reversal—which is complete when Delia kidnaps Brian—is foreshadowed through the subversion of the drink-buying ritual of seduction when Delia first buys Brian a drink and then slips what has become known as rape-drugs into it. The only scene in which graphic visual language is employed in a depiction of disempowerment and humiliation has a tied-up Brian, the privileged and entitled white male assailant, at its center. In the last analysis, even this scene refrains from showing the actual killing of Brian, leaving the outcome open to interpretation when Delia dashes him in gasoline, puts a burning cigarette in his mouth, and walks away.

Tailfeathers' startling reality-flipping approach makes sense particularly considering the overall unwillingness of the general public in Canada (or anywhere else, for that matter), to acknowledge or even register the systemic violence and discrimination which colonialism inflicted, and continues to inflict, on Indigenous peoples' everyday lives and experiences (Episkenew 5-6). This willful blindness, as Jo-Ann Episkenew shows, is in itself the result of colonial history and "the myth of White superiority" (Episkenew 3) that it espoused: "One of the unearned privileges that White-skinned people enjoy is that of denying any evidence that calls into question their right to a guilt-free existence" (Episkenew 6). Whichever aspect of these experiences on the receiving end of colonization is case in point, Indigenous women are among the most vulnerable groups susceptible to be affected by them: "Ongoing colonial processes sustain a system of chronic poverty, social exclusion, and political and cultural disenfranchisement, with particularly dire effects on Indigenous women and girls" (de Finney and Saraceno 117).

Therein lays the effectiveness of Tailfeathers' "flipping" strategy, as Verstraten points out—it simultaneously challenges white privilege and patriarchal male privilege: "Flipping this reality is part of what had made this film so successful. Although violence against native women may not easily attract Canada's attention, when native women act violently towards white men – especially on the big screen – people begin to take notice" (n. pag.). Therefore, rather than actually propagating vigilante justice, violence in Tailfeather's film, insofar as it addresses non-Indigenous audiences, is meant to shock the system out of the lethargy of colonial denial by the sheer force of visibility the medium of film in general and Tailfeather's creative concept in particular provide.

However, if vigilante violence in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* is itself metaphorical, the perceived need for such desperate action in fact is not. Colonial oppression does not only manifest in free-floating racist exclusionist attitudes across the Canadian society, it also trickles down into the very system of justice and the way it treats its female subjects, particularly when they are Indigenous and viewed through the lens of the aforementioned white superiority myth. Jo-Ann Episkenew writes: "Legal scholar Brian Slattery adds that belief in the myth has permeated the Canadian judicial system […]" (6). *A Red Girl's Reasoning* thematizes this particular situation through the references to court proceedings which not only failed to serve justice in cases of sexual assault allegations, but in fact refused to even take them seriously. This seems to be the case for the film's protagonist, and this is most certainly the case for her client, Nelly, who recounts: "I took him to court but they let him walk. Said the damn kit was inconclusive. That my blood showed traces of this and that, that my lifestyle was high risk. Like I was fucking asking for it" (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 02:45-3:00). As Tina Beads shows, this is a frighteningly common response on the part of the judicial system to sexual assault allegations:

> In all my years working on the rape crisis line, seven years, I talked to hundreds of women. Through that time I was aware of thousands of women and their stories and never did any one woman manage to get her case through to conviction. I mean, despite overwhelming evidence. Even white, well-employed women who didn't have those other barriers—and not one single conviction, and many women went to court. (227-28)

Of course, here as well, the situation of Indigenous women is particularly dire, because not only are all the gendered, sexist stereotypes and rape apologetics projected onto them, but also all the additional racialized ones, making the act of taking a rape case to court a particularly daunting task for survivors. In *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, the failure of the court and the judicial system in general in adequately addressing the issue is clearly foregrounded as the reason why Delia decides to take the execution of justice into her own hands. This is evident not only in the opening voiceover narration but also when she tells Brian: "You see, me and Nelly have a few things in common. We both know the dirty things you're capable of and we've both been screwed over by this country's pathetic excuse for a justice system" (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 06:52-07:05). The fact that Delia's fight is both with the criminals assaulting women and the incompetent justice system that fails to convict them is also emphasized in the opening sequence when Delia is shown taking on both the hoodlum with the knife and the policeman who seems to be futilely chasing after him, or perhaps her (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 00:42-01:13).

The ending of the film is particularly significant for its metaphorical reading. *A Red Girl's Reasoning* ends on a high pitch, one last time giving it all in terms of urgency, visuality, sound and writing. The red gasoline canister stands out particularly sinister against the dark-tinted, almost colorless background. When Brian realizes Delia's intent of setting him on fire, he shouts: "You dirty fucking squaw! You'll never get away with this" (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 08:06-08:12). This is the first openly racialized insult referent in the film; being used in this way, it overtly confirms the colonial origins of rape culture as experienced by Indigenous women. Accordingly, Delia's answer as she sticks the potentially lethal cigarette into Brian's mouth is in an Indigenous language, subtitled as "Just watch me" (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 08:27-08:29). With this reply Delia symbolically reclaims Indigenous womanhood from the colonial abuse and dehumanization. The scene is underscored once again by A Tribe Called Red's "Electronic Pow Wow Drum," which rises and falls suggestively with the events on the screen, underlining their details acoustically and reinforcing the atmosphere of Indigenous power. Read metaphorically, the scene can be interpreted as an exceptionally strong decolonial gesture. The poignant use of an Indigenous language is a big part of this effect,

since, as Theodore C. van Alst Jr. argues, "Native filmmakers use language in a way that instantly propels their characters (we might say even projects them) into the future via their tribal languages" (446).

From the very beginning of the film, Delia is clearly set up as its heroine. As mentioned above, she is the only character whose name is known to the audience from the start because it is presented in the opening credits (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 01:51). Significantly, it is done in a visually startling manner: the shot shows a close-up of Delia's determined eyes and the credits spell Delia's name in dark red capital letters much larger that the name of the actress who plays her, Jessica Matten, spelled in smaller font and in plain white. In short, the visual is constructed in such a manner as to guide the viewer's attention to the significance of Delia's character, hereby establishing her as a hero visually even before the film does so narratively. As the film unfolds, it becomes more and more evident that Delia, though she does not have any superpowers in the strictest sense, can be read as not just an ass-kicking action heroine, a "non-super-powered everyday hero" (Ndalianis 1), but also as a superheroine to the extent that her character and her story display a certain mythic flair of a warrior woman. Roz Kaveney points towards the close link between superhero narratives and vigilantism, observing that "Almost all superheroes are to some degree vigilantes [..]" (6), while Angela Ndalianis stresses "the dual focus of these character types—the hero and the superhero—who have much in common" (2).

In the *Vancouver Sun* blog, Tailfeathers describes her then upcoming film in the following way:

> Our film is about a young First Nations woman who was failed by the justice system after surviving a brutal, racially-driven sexual assault. She decides to take justice into her own hands and becomes a motorcycle-riding, ass-kicking vigilante who takes on the attackers of other women who've suffered the same fate. Our film is neo-noir and graphic novel inspired and we just can't wait to see a Native sista kick ass on-screen (n. pag.)

Indeed, not only the makeup of Dalia's character, but also Tailfeathes' cinematographic strategies reflect comic book influences, particularly in the opening sequence which makes ample use of split screen sequences with images

arranged in a manner reminiscent of comic book panels. In terms of comic book content resemblance, Delia's character perhaps reminds most of Marvel's Jessica Jones character, accidentally converted to a popular TV series, also with distinctive noir flair and centered on the theme of sexual violence and power abuse, in 2015, two years after the release of *A Red Girl's Reasoning*.

Both Delia's and Jessica's stories are "shaped as a survivor story, a story about a woman's personal effort to survive violent victimization" (Stringer 272), and while Jessica also has superpowers and Delia does not, they are both presented as characters shrouded in legend. It is not a coincidence that during her meeting with Delia, Nelly tells her: "I used to think that you were just… a story. Like a… like a legend us urban Indians wished was true. But here you are, in a flash" (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* 03:21-03:40). When Nelly turns around after uttering those words, she finds Delia gone without a trace or sound, almost as if she simply vanished into thin air. Such fleeting instances introduce the element of the fantastic into the otherwise grimly realistic narrative. All of these elements combine into an indie production with a popular appeal that is *A Red Girl's Reasoning*.

This popular appeal is of great importance especially where younger audiences are concerned (*A Red Girl's Reasoning* is rated PG-13). As Sandrina de Finney and Johanne Saraceno's research with Indigenous girls and teenagers suggests, these groups still suffer from the lack of Indigenous female representation in the media and on screen, which stems from and translates into the lack of interest in the challenges they face and experiences they make: "Many girls noted that the absence of Indigenous women in the media leaves them with few role models with whom they can identify; they do not see their realities reflected in the dominant narratives to which they are exposed in their daily lives […]" (126-27). *A Red Girl's Reasoning* not only provides a heroine who is relatable for Indigenous young women and who addresses some bleak realities they are forced to navigate in the context of contemporary colonial society; it also actively deconstructs harmful stereotypes of Indigenous women which are circulated in mainstream media and popular culture and which young Indigenous girls find confusing and burdensome (de Finney and Saraceno 126). In a way, Tailfeathers' film can be seen as tapping into "a deeply rooted anticolonial 'Indian warrior' identity that provides a sense of

congruence, pride and belonging" for Indigenous girls many of whom choose to "anchor themselves" in this identity (de Finney and Saraceno 130).

Despite its darkness, metaphorical and literal (the film is shot almost entirely in slightly tinted black and white), in a way *A Red Girl's Reasoning* may be considered, in Emma LaRocque's words,

> to offer a more positive portrait of the way in which Aboriginal women live: as victims of colonization and patriarchy, yet as activists and agents in their lives; as oppressed, yet as fighters and survivors; and as among the most stereotyped, dehumanized and objectified of women, yet as the strong, gracious and determined women that they are. ("Métis and Feminist" 53)

Jo-Ann Episkenew writes: "Contemporary Indigenous literature [and it is safe to say, Indigenous film as well] serves two transformative functions—healing Indigenous people and advancing social justice in settler society—both components in the process of decolonization" (15). *A Red Girl's Reasoning* fulfills both of these functions by providing a relatable action heroine to Indigenous audiences, especially female audiences, on the one hand, and by exposing dysfunctionalities, failures and downright horrors of the colonial system and the experiences of its Indigenous populations, thus performing "a socio-pedagogical function" of "educating the settler readers [in this case, viewers] about the Indigenous perspective of Canadian society" (Episkenew 17), on the other.

4.3 Indigenous Superheroes: Jay Odjick's *Kagagi* Universe

> Native kids are searching for heroes who look like them … And here comes Captain Paiute, who screws up anyone who comes trying to hurt the rez – that's his job.
>
> Theo Tso (Paiute)[64]

If Delia in *A Red Girl's Reasoning* can be considered a superheroine by a stretch of imagination and interpretation, Indigenous popular culture also has more straightforward superhero narratives on offer. The overwhelming majority of such narratives are created in the interrelated media of comic books and animated productions. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the animated series *Kagagi*, recently adopted into the program by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), which Suzanne Keeptwo calls "perhaps the first ever Canadian superhero show" (n. pag.), created by an Anishinaabe comic book artist and writer Jay Odjick.

Similar to mainstream superhero tales, Indigenous superheroes were first developed through the medium of comic books before entering the screen. Comic book authors and artists like Arigon Starr (Kickapoo, Creek, Cherokee, Seneca), Jon Proudstar (Yaqui), Steve Sanderson (Cree) and many others are the trailblazers who introduced adventure stories featuring Indigenous superheroes into the still largely whitewashed genre of superhero narratives. When asked, most of them explain their motivation in creating Indigenous superheroes with the feeling of absence and distress they experienced growing up loving comic books but, as Indigenous kids, unable to find relatable representation in them. Says Jon Proudstar: "I thought it was really important that I create heroes that young Natives could relate to […]. I wanted to create heroes that taught these kids that they've got extra value because they suffered through that and survived" (qtd. in Jung n. pag.). Simultaneously, Indigenous comic books creators use the medium to show the contemporaneity of Indigenous people, as Arigon Starr explains:

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[64] Qtd. in Bernardin 489.

I want people to know that Native people exist and thrive in the contemporary world. Generally, Native folks are stuck in amber, always on horseback wearing leather and feathers. Often, we're depicted as magical shamans or hyper-alert scouts. Even comics like 'Scalped' have us looking like rejects from *The Sopranos*. We're more than that. (n. pag)

Generally speaking, the creators of Indigenous comic books are "[s]eeking to reframe a tenacious legacy of images of vanished and vanquished Natives and the continued absence of diverse, contemporary Native Americans [and First Nations] in mass media" (Bernardin 480). This work, just as the medium of comic books as such, is of particular importance for contemporary Indigenous youth; comic books in general and superhero stories in particular have a tremendous potential to help them navigate, negotiate and participate in both their respective Indigenous cultures and the hegemonic mass media culture that surrounds them. Many of the Indigenous comic books published to date specifically address the younger generations and their issues in order to empower them, emotionally and culturally. Superhero narratives play a large part in that.

It has been noted more than once that "superhero stories are American culture's expression of myth" (Stuller 3).[65] This is perceivably not only the case for the American culture: in one form or another, superhero narratives are currently thriving throughout the globe. It is safe to say that the majority of them display a certain mythological impulse as part of their driving force, simultaneously revising existing mythological archives and creating new ones. In her book *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology*, Jennifer K. Stuller argues that "Modern myth serves a function similar to that of ancient myth, namely, telling and hearing stories helps us make sense of our lives. Narratives reflect the world and comment on it as they document events and imagine them" (3).

When it comes to superhero narratives in North American popular culture, historically, this imaginary and commentary on the world has been delivered from a largely one-sided point of view—that of a white middle-class straight male. In the majority of cases, other groups have been marginalized, misrepresented, or

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[65] See also, for example, Reynolds.

altogether omitted from this particular artistic and cultural discourse. However, as Stuller points out, the resulting mythology is crippling and insufficient, and calls for an expansion:

> Now, not every audience will be able to identify with Star War's (sic) Luke Skywalker in his quest—even though he follows the archetypal hero's journey. But we *all* need to be able to imagine that we are capable of destroying the Empire and saving the galaxy from oppression. Certainly, many humans have at times felt powerless […]. We want to believe we are capable of phenomenal acts and we need stories to teach us that, indeed, no matter our gender, race, sexual preference, or physical challenges, we can be heroes. (4)

Hence, superhero narratives have the potential to be especially powerful for those who experience disempowerment in their daily lives. Stuller's argument resonates with the need for relatable superheroes which Indigenous comic books authors and artists express. In this, not only superhero's identity is important, but also the context; in other words, Indigenous superhero narratives are distinctive not only by virtue of the Indigenous heritage of their heroic protagonists, but also because the issues they address and the battles they fight resonate with Indigenous people's— especially Indigenous youth's—day-to-day experiences and challenges.

Here, the mythological dimension of superhero narratives proves of significance. On the one hand, the mythological linkages between Indigenous traditions and modern storytelling which Indigenous superhero narratives create contribute not only to culturally relatable entertainment, but also to cultural preservation, passing on of knowledge, history, mythology, and, increasingly, languages. On the other, in many cases they employ Indigenous mythological frameworks to the effect of counteracting the strategy of colonial narrativization of the "New World," a strategy which narrated Americas through the lens of European cosmologies. Paradoxically, such narrations engaged in a discursive othering of Indigenous populations even as they incorporated them into the European Christian cosmology and mythology, using the colonial narratives of encounter as part of "the rhetorical programs of colonial justification" (Fellner 44).

As the early explorer accounts show, Europeans engaged in the "discovery" of the "New World" tended to describe and conceptualized the new land and its

peoples in terms of their own knowledge and symbolical systems, specifically in terms of Christian mythology and ideology. This strategy enabled them to incorporate unfamiliar sights and from their point of view inexplicable events into their own cosmological vision. As Ouelett and Tremblay note, "Europeans developed diverse images of the Native peoples of the New World. These representations ran the full range from child of Eden to descendant of Cain" (160). For instance, in *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* John Smith repeatedly referred to the land's Indigenous inhabitants as "naked Divels" (280) or describes them as being "as grim as Divels" (281). Not having any real understanding of the rules of Indigenous societies with which he interacted, he explained their actions and reactions in terms of his Christian worldview: "But almightie God (by his divine providence) had mollified the hearts of those stern *Barbarians* with compassion" (277, emphasis in original).

As the history of the colonial conquest shows, this ignorance on the part of the newcomers has proven itself to be far from innocent. Christopher Columbus's rhetoric in his journals, for example, demonstrates how such cosmological incorporation, paired with Christian messianic vision, had been used in order to justify conquest, dispossession, violence and coercion. A letter of Columbus to the Spanish monarchs, recorded in one of his journals, illustrates this way of thinking:

> "I have no doubt, most serene Princes," says the Admiral, "that were proper devout and religious persons to come among them and learn their language, it would be an easy matter to convert them all to Christianity, and I hope in our Lord that your Highness will devout yourselves with much diligence to this object, and bring into the church so many multitudes, inasmuch as you have exterminated those who refused to confess the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, so that having ended your days (as we are all mortal) you may leave your dominions in a tranquil condition, free from heresy and wickedness, and meet with a favourable reception before the eternal Creator, whom may it please to grant you a long life and great increase of kingdoms and dominions, with the will and disposition to promote, as you always have done, the holy Christian religion, Amen. (144)

Such logic has been extended to and promoted not only through public discourse but also through the project of residential schools, a project which was "not merely additive – to add Settler knowledge to Native knowledge – but subtractive as well.

The overall policy was to eradicate Indigenous language and culture" (Watson 6). Thus, what began as mythological and cosmological incorporation, eventually became physically, psychologically and culturally destructive, engendering a history which "falls into the darkest political categories we have: ethnic cleansing and genocide" (Watson 6).

The legitimizing discourses and rhetoric which made brutal assimilationist practices like residential schools possible take their cue directly from the absorption of Indigenous populations into Eurowestern worldviews as well as Christian cosmology and mythology: arguments like those of Columbus and John Smith were direct forerunners of ideologies articulated in Rudyard Kipling's infamous poem "The White Man's Burden." Jim Sullivan points out that, as the written evidence of his journals demonstrates, Columbus conceptualized the "New World" in terms of Catholic religious mythology rather than simply as a physical space to explore. Sullivan writes:

> From giving each landfall and sighting a Catholic name to compiling religious texts in his 'Book of Prophecies,' Columbus frames his explorations not as the opening of the new world but as a Spanish Catholic fulfillment of Old Testament traditions. (138)

In the next step, the so-called explorers and the governments they represent use the messianic thrust of Christianity, its attitude of superiority towards other religious believes and cosmologies as well as its professed monopoly on truth and on access to the creator of all things to justify policies of extinction and forced assimilation. The explorers communicated the "New World" through systems of signs and symbols pre-loaded with meaning and projected them onto individuals and cultures they encountered in the Americas. Far from innocent attempts at understanding and articulation of unfamiliar sights, the narratives constructed in such a fashion were used as tools of domination which reinforce "the historical and cultural politics of exclusion" (Fellner 39) in which colonial governments routinely engage. More so, colonial mythological narratives also legitimize the very material politics of physical extinction which to this day variously target Indigenous populations of the Americas, albeit less overtly. Thus policy becomes legitimized through mythology, and these processes have long-lasting effects on the ideological makeup of

contemporary North America: "Like a palimpsest, 'America' is created by a process of performative layering that consists of erasure and superimposition" (Fellner 39).

All of this goes to show that mythology, and the ideas it perpetuates, matter. As Thomas King asserts in *The Truth about Stories*, stories have the power to affect lives in most profound and far-reaching ways: "I tell the stories not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories as long as I live. Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous" (9). Therefore, for Indigenous people to regain control over mythological and cosmological narrative constractions and to actively resist the demeaning colonial narratives which are still brought to bear on their lives is a vital part of the decolonial project. This work is being done on several levels and in different discursive spaces. Concepts like the Eight's Fire prophecy,[66] which move within Indigenous conceptual frameworks in order to explain and meet the challenges of our times, are one example of it. Indigenous superhero narratives are another.

Like many superhero narratives before it, Jay Odjick's (Anishinaabe) story of Kagagi has also started out as a comic book, first as a self-published three issue black-and-white comic series titled *The Raven*, and later as a colored single issue published by Arcana Comics as *Kagagi: The Raven*. The story was eventually picked up by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) and turned into a thirteen-episode animated series *Kagagi*, aired on APTN Sundays at 10 pm. Jay Odjick, the creator of the original comic books, served as executive producer, lead writer and designer of the show.[67] One of the most defining features of the show is its incorporation not only of Indigenous mythology, but also of an Indigenous language—*Kagagi* features 20 per cent Algonquin dialogue, subtitled in English.

The story of Kagagi centers around Matthew Carver, a sixteen-year-old boy from the Kitigan Zibi First Nation community (which is also Odjick's community of origin), who discovers that he is the newest reincarnation of Kagagi, a legendary Anishinaabe champion in the fight against the evil spirit called the Windigo. In the

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[66] For a discussion of the Eighth Fire prophecy, see chapter 3.3 of this study.
[67] All general information about the publication and development history of *Kagagi* is taken from Jay Odjick's official website, Odjick n. pag.

words of Carrie Jung, "the storyline [of *Kagagi*] springboards off of the Algonquin legend of Windigo, the story of an evil creature with the powers to possess humans and turn them into cannibals" (n. pag.). With *Kagagi*, Odjick reconfigures Anishinaabe legends and reimagines their mythological figures, channeling them through a modern popular superhero trope. Not only Kagagi and Windgo reappear in Odjick's story, but also Wisakedjak, the trickster figure of Algonquian mythologies. [68] These three figures build a constellation quite common for superhero narratives, especially if the superhero is a teenager: while Matthew's Kagagi persona is the superhero and the Windigo is clearly marked as the supervillain, Wisakedjak functions as Matthew's trainer, mentoring him in the practical use of his powers, their history, as well as the responsibilities that come with them.[69]

The Windigo as the big bad of a superhero narrative became quite popular with Indigenous artist and writers.[70] This is probably due to the mythological makeup of this particular traditional monster which makes it an especially suitable metaphor for many of contemporary ills which affect Indigenous people: the figure of the Windigo has been used to address youth suicide in Indigenous communities (Henzi 475), "to explore the intergenerational effects of residential schools and horizontal violence" (Henzi 476), to embody the effects of environmental destruction (Richard van Camp's short story "On the Wings of this Prayer" being one example), to name the most prominent.

On a more global scale, as a spirit of ultimate greed and insatiable appetite, the Windigo lends itself to a representation of the colonialist and capitalist, and colonial-capitalist, systems as a whole. Basil Johnston writes:

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[68] When it comes to spelling the names of the mythological figures like Windigo and Wisakedjak, I follow the example of Deanna Reder, who explains: "There are many ways to spell Wihtiko and Wesakecak. I have chosen to use the spelling as it is in the comic book, but when I quote other authors, I maintain the spelling they have chosen" (190, n. 1). I, too, use the spelling as it is used in the *Kagagi* animated series, except when I quote other authors whose spelling differs.

[69] This constellation as well as some further features of *Kagagi*, like Matthew's group of friends who themselves act as investigators of the paranormal, his descent from a long line of warriors, and his need to figure out a way to integrate both his superhero persona and his everyday teenage life into a coherent whole, is especially reminiscent of Joss Whedon's famous teenage superhero show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[70] For further examples and an in-depth discussion of the Windigo in contemporary Indigenous popular productions, see Henzi.

> Even though a Weendigo is a mythical figure, it represents real human cupidity. […] Actually, the Weendigoes did not die out or disappear; they have only been assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals. They've even taken on new names, acquired polished manners, and renounced their cravings for raw human flesh in return for more refined viands. But their cupidity is no less insatiable than that of their ancestors. (235)

He continues:

> These new Weendigoes are no different from their forebears. In fact, they are even more omnivorous than their old ancestors. The only difference is that the modern Weendigoes wear elegant clothes and comfort themselves with an air of cultured and dignified respectability. But still the Weendigoes bring disaster, fueled by the unquenchable greed inherent in human nature. Perhaps, as in the past, some champion, some manitou, will fell them, as Nana'b'oozoo did in the past. (237)

Another animated series aired on APTN, *Animism: The God's Lake*, produced in collaboration by non-Indigenous and Indigenous artists, makes this connection between corporate excess embodied through the figure of the Windigo and the need for a champion who could defeat it crystal clear. Significantly, in *Animism* such champion is an Indigenous teenage girl, Melody Ravensfall, who is a highly engaged environmental activist and, as she finds out later, the Trickster's emissary whose destiny it is to end the Windigo's rule. Here the link between corporately sanctioned environmental destruction as well as the whole project of capitalism, the figure of the Windigo, and the superhero's immediate task is drawn in a direct fashion.

In the case of *Kagagi* this connection is less obvious but nevertheless can be made. The superhero Kagagi is called, or activated, because the Windigo has returned. Kagagi seems to be the only thing that stands between the Windigo's thirst for destruction and the world, as the Windigo itself realizes: "Once we destroy Kagagi, the world belongs to Windigo" (*Kagagi* 1, 08:49-08:54). Throughout the series, the Windigo's purpose is never specified any further: his only objective seems to be to rule and feed on the world without obstruction. In the context of a colonialist society, this certainly can be read as an imperialist motivation. This reading is supported by the fact that, while Indigenous characters

in *Kagagi*, when they speak to each other, tend to do so in Algonquin, the Windigo almost never does (with a single exception, and that happens in Matthew's dream); his minions and his right hand Brute certainly never do. This strategy in a way places the Windigo outside of the intimate circle of the Indigenous characters on the show, portraying him as a foreign force rather than a cultural insider. Such reading shows that *Kagagi* can be considered an example of Indigenous narratives which reverse the mythological incorporation so commonly practiced by the colonial state and its entertainment industries. This kind of narratives deal with colonialism through a cosmological incorporation and absorption of colonial discourses (such as conceptualizing colonial-capitalism through the mythological figure of the Windigo), thus reversing the strategy of colonialist narrativization of the "New World" and its Indigenous peoples.

The way Kagagi is presented in the series, he both partakes of mainstream superhero conventions and questions and subverts them. Roz Kaveney defines a superhero as "a man or a woman with powers that are either massive extensions of human strengths and capabilities, or fundamentally different in kind, which she or he uses to fight for truth, justice and the protection of the innocent" (4). Kagagi, with his ability to fly, shoot charges of energy out of his hands, and general enhanced stamina as well as with his mission to protect the world against the Windigo certainly fits this definition. However, the way he came by his powers differs from the majority of conventional superhero scripts: while, as Kaveney points out, mainstream superheroes mostly acquire their powers as a "result either of anomalous personal situations or of accidents" (5)—he lists examples like having been "bitten by spiders, or altered by cosmic or gamma rays, or given powers by beneficent aliens" (5)—Kagagi's powers came to him through an ancestral lineage. Wisakedjak is the one who explains the origins of his Kagagi power to dumb-founded Matthew: "Long ago, your people, the Anishinabeg of Kitigan Zibi, needed a champion. The elders worked some powerful magic on the warrior who led them against the Windigo. […] It's a legacy. The first Kagagi was a direct ancestor of yours. It's come to you, now, through your father" (*Kagagi* 2, 07:26-07:52).

Therefore, rather than being a lone anomaly, Kagagi is a descendant of a long line of champions of his people, a link through which the past is transferred into the present and the future. As noted earlier, this feature of establishing continuity between tradition and contemporary life is very common for Indigenous popular culture as a whole and manifests itself in many contexts, including in Kagagi's superhero makeup. What is more, Kagagi is trained and instructed by a past champion, the one who fought the Windigo before him for centuries—Wisakedjak, or, as Kagagi, as a true contemporary teenager, likes to call him, his "own mythical old dude" (*Kagagi* 9, 08:56-08:58). Such language games—applying teen-speak to traditional mythology, modernizing the names of the characters (Wisakedjak is routinely called Jack in the series, not only by Matthew but also by Nigig, who is himself an Anishinaabe mythic character), or the comic instances such as Nigig calling Wisakedjak "Wisakedjerk" (*Kagagi* 10, 17:25) or Wisakedjak asking Matthew if he "Kagagied up" (*Kagagi* 3, 15:49)—all serve to organically and effectively integrate traditional elements into contemporaneity, give the series a fresh feel and harvest quite a few laughs.

In his study of superheroes, Kaveney also points out the "estrangement and liminal status which is another of the superhero's defining characteristics. Superheroes are uncanny and exist at the threshold between states—it is the threshold that is important rather than the states it lies between […]" (5). This superhero characteristic is also very prominently present in Kagagi, but not in any unproblematic way. In fact, coming to terms with his heroic alter ego and integrating it into his everyday life as Matthew Carver, a twenty-first century teenager, is arguably a fight which is more important for Kagagi than his actual battle with the Windigo. Throughout most of the plot, Kagagi makes Matthew feel estranged and cut off from his former life, his grandmother (who is the only immediate blood family he has left), his best friend Tommy and his love interest Cassie. In fact, as an Indigenous person, Matthew already feels estranged and out of place even before his first Kagagi transformation started; initially he feels that his newly emerging superpowers only aggravate the situation in that respect, as now he also has to hide from his few friends: "I am the only Native kid at school, now this?" (*Kagagi* 1, 07:45-07:48).

The secrecy that his dual nature requires is impressed upon Matthew with great urgency by Wisakedjak: "You have a secret to protect now, boy. If anyone find out that you're… you know who, you're putting them at risk, and that really will be your fault" (*Kagagi* 1, 05:42-05:53). However, in the end, Matthew rejects the secrecy and, with his friends knowing who he is and the Windigo defeated, he realizes that there is a way for him to be both. He communicates this realization to Wisakedjak in a poignant scene as he at the same time wears his Kagagi persona and hugs his friends: "But I know what I am now. […] This is who I am, Jack. I'm Kagagi. *And* I'm Matthew Carver" (*Kagagi* 13, 19:47-19:57). By extension, what Matthew is saying is that he can be both a traditional Anishinaabe hero *and* a contemporary teenager who has friends and dates: one does not stand in the way of the other, and participation in Indigenous ancestral ways, values and quests in no way needs to undermine his present-day way of life, and vice versa.

This theme is related to another important aspect of the *Kagagi* universe. Kaveney writes: "Many superheroes are either orphaned or otherwise estranged from their families of blood; many of them acquire families of heart in groups of co-workers or support systems, or work together as groups" (9). This feature of superhero narratives is of particular significance for the audiences:

> Those of us isolated by temperament or sexuality [or for other reasons] in our teens need a literature that consoles with the possibility of finding friends of the heart, and comics provide that, but not in any simple wish-fulfilment form; the relationship between team-mates or mentor and pupil are almost always shown as works in progress, as prickly soap operas in which things can go wrong. (Kaveney 9)

Matthew, too, is an orphan who does not appear to know much about his parents and who is being raised by his grandmother. Matthew's relationship with his "family of heart" is of central importance in the series, and there are two aspects to this particular "family" which are significant: first, Matthew's support group consists of a colorful mash-up including his grandmother as blood kin, two mythic creatures of traditional Anishinaabe legends, and two non-Indigenous teenagers; and second, none of them are mere sidekicks.

To embrace them all as a support group is one of the tasks Matthew has to accomplish throughout the series. After he meets and works with the Intrinsic, a superhero collective on a mission to fight off Appolyon, an evil creature from a different dimension plotting to take over the Earth, Kagagi begins to feel really lonely, wishing for a support group in earnest. He helps the Intrinsic to defeat Appolyon, and after they depart he tells Wesakidjak: "Nothing has changed. I had the chance to help, so I did, that's all. That doesn't make me a super hero. If the Windigo returns, I'll do what I need to if it means I could be me again. I just can't help but think… I wish I had a team of heroes to help me" (*Kagagi* 8, 20:03-20:25). By the end of the series, after the Windigo is defeated in a final stand off by a team effort rather than through the heroic action of Kagagi alone, Kagagi is finally able to see that he does in fact have a support group he so wished for. When The Keeper offers him to join the organization called Torch, stating that "there is certainly a place in my organization for a hero" (*Kagagi* 13, 20:20-20:23), Kagagi's reply is: "A hero? No. I am just one part of a team of heroes" (*Kagagi* 13, 20:25-20:30). This theme deflects the pronounced individualistic streak which conventional superhero narratives so often display, as does the consistent portrayal throughout the series of a superhero who is immature and flawed and in need of learning.

Indeed, not only are the mythical creatures Wisakedjak and Nigig superheroes in their own right, but Matthew's human friends, Tommy and Cassie, are shown as resourceful and decisive individuals whose role in the plot is much more than being sidekicks. Cassie is an off-the-charts smart science geek who stands up for herself and the others whenever the circumstances warrant it. Tommy is a technology nerd who likes computers, video games, and investigating paranormal occurrences. He is also the host of an interactive website called "Weird Files," a platform open to anyone with a similar interest in the paranormal. Despite being ruthlessly teased at school for his nerdiness and suffering from panic attacks that are probably related to this teasing, Tommy continues to maintain the website, which, as it turns out, does much good for the teenage population who fall into the category of weird. When on one occasion Tommy loses heart, Cassie tries to persuade him not to give up, saying:

> When was the last time you read the comments, Tommy? "Dear Weird Files, thanks so much for this site. I used to be scared of monsters, but you've helped me face my fears." […] Or this. Listen. "Weird Files, you showed me that it's okay—heck, cool— to be weird, that it's possible to be yourself and do what you love. Thank you. Signed: Cassie Shannon. (*Kagagi* 10, 14:49-15:20)

It is clear that Tommy contributes to the well-being of a community of his own, and the challenges he faces for doing that—bullying and social marginalization—are hardly less than what Kagagi has to deal with in his fight against the Windigo. Harnessing the potential of the new media in order to empower kids who feel marginalized and "weird" is Tommy's superpower and he uses it well. As becomes evident from Cassie's request—"Don't give up on us, Tommy" (*Kagagi* 10, 15:23)—for his own online community, Tommy has become something of a leader.

In fact, all of Kagagi's superhero antics notwithstanding, the real focus of the series is on teenage angst and the challenges marginalized adolescents, be they a girl, a nerd, or an Indigenous person, have to face growing up in contemporary North American society. Whichever mythological incorporation is there in the series, it does not serve to subdue, replace or deny; instead it seeks to unite. By doing so, *Kagagi*'s universe contributes to challenging what Deborah Doxtator calls "[t]he legacy of past definitions of difference as separate and exclusionary, instead of as interconnecting and inclusive, requiring incorporation into a whole" (34). Steven Loft points out that such inclusionary understanding of difference is one of the central features of "Indigenous thought" ("Mediacosmology" 171). The message Odjick's show sends out is not only that everyone can be a superhero in their own way, but also of the importance of having and trusting a support group, a "family of heart" (Kaveney 9), in facing external challenges. It is the same message that the short inspirational clips created by Odjick and his team and featuring *Kagagi* characters addressing the youth on their issues transmit: "Together, we can be heroes!"

Conclusion: "Things That Make Me Go 'Wow'"

> [P]opular culture, at its best, makes us think by making us feel.
>
> Henry Jenkins[71]

Closing this study, I would like to revisit Sonny Assu's concept of "personal totems" and bring it into a dialogue with some of Henry Jenkins' ideas about popular culture. In his book *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, Jenkins writes: "I start from the assumption that the emotions generated by popular culture are never personal; rather, to be popular, the text has to evoke broadly shared feelings. The most emotional moments are often the ones that hit on conflicts, anxieties, fantasies and fears that are central to the culture" (4). As already quoted elsewhere, Sonny Assu, speaking of mainstream popular culture and its images and objects in relation to North America's Indigenous people, asserts that "as the pop culture generation, we have the right to use these icons as our own personal totems: we are so inundated by items and imagery of pop culture, we also have the right to use it as a way to dictate our linage" (139).

Taken together, Jenkins' and Assu's arguments make visible the productive tension between the communal and the personal which exists in popular culture as a discursive and artistic field. They show the multidirectional complexity of the identificatory practices popular culture elicits, opening up a discursive space where the personal and the political can mingle and intersect. Given the ongoing fight against colonialism and its narratives, politics, and practices of domination which Indigenous people of North America are still engaged in, these characteristics of popular culture make it a potentially fertile ground for resurgence and decolonization. Combining as it does communal vision and personal participation and identification, popular culture represents one of the cultural arenas which allow Indigenous people to unfold both as political actors oriented towards a communal goal and individual consumers and shapers of contemporary culture. Speaking of

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[71] Jenkins, *The Wow Climax* 3.

the correlation between his own artistic work and the trickster figure of the Northwest Coast Indigenous cultures, the Raven, Assu illustrates with a personal example how this can work: "My work is the embodiment of Raven's transformation, his ability to adapt. […] It's all about survival: Raven as iPod, Raven as a can of Coke, and so on. But these objects of pop culture lack Raven's finesse and charm, which is why I put them in the context of 'Personal Totems'" (149-50).

The cultural texts examined in this study do the same: they combine the fascination and the political potential of mainstream North American popular culture with "Raven's finesse and charm" (Assu 149). In so doing, they not only join the conversation and the artistic and aesthetic space of the popular, but also make the formidable cultural force that is popular culture work for Indigenous political and social causes. Apart from being entertainment and fun, Indigenous popular culture contributes to the creation of an outreach for urgent political issues pertaining to decolonization, self-determination, sovereignty and resurgence. In the process, artists working in Indigenous popular culture re-appropriate a space from which their people have been systematically erased: up until comparatively recently, popular culture was a space which only accepted Indigenous people in the form of stereotypes playing into the colonial self-aggrandizing national narratives and never as complex living beings. Elaine Coburn writes:

> The colonial erasure of Indigenous peoples takes place through high and popular colonial cultures, as well as through official colonial state representations of the world. Ironically, this erasure is accomplished through what LaRocque (2010) refers to as colonial hate literature that makes Indigenous peoples highly *visible* as dehumanized 'savages,' so justifying their marginalization and even elimination, historically through genocide and now through various forms of assimilation. (35)

In the face of this history of erasure, Indigenous popular culture asserts presence and articulates a claim to cultural participation on equal terms, enacting Emma LaRocque's words: "we not only have dynamic cultural heritages but we also have a birthright to this contemporary world" (Foreword 15). Indigenous popular culture also reinforces Stacey Takacs' assertion that "The US cultural industries certainly do have a comparative advantage over others when it comes to flooding the global

market with commodities; they do not have a monopoly over the process of meaning-making, however" (202-203).

As I hope to have been able to demonstrate throughout this study, Indigenous popular culture artists and their audiences engage in a process of complex meaning-making through the dialogue they foster between mainstream popular culture and Indigenous political issues and cultural archives. In doing so, they not only challenge colonial media's self-proclaimed monopoly on image production but also actively advance their own unique artistic vision. Mixing together traditional stories and themes of their respective Indigenous nations and the tropes of mainstream popular culture, Indigenous popular artists effectively change both. Stacy Takacs observes that such a strategy of combination is quite common in cross-cultural artistic production: "Certain preferred meanings maybe encoded into cultural products, but there are always other possibilities available and users may actively de- and re-construct these products to suit their local needs and desires" (203). The very formulaic nature of many popular narratives allows for this process of reinterpretation and alternative meaning-making to be most effective: because of the ubiquity of the narrative patterns which are considered common to a given genre (e. g. vampire fiction, science fiction, etc.) any significant break with those patterns leaves a lasting impression and potentially facilitates closer interrogation of the text and its message.

The fact that works of Indigenous popular culture often operate within certain predetermined generic formulas, therefore, should not be interpreted as a hurdle to enacting and promoting a genuinely effective reinterpretation in line with Indigenous activist agendas. An Indigenous vampire text, for instance, may be in close dialogue with some aspects of the Gothic tradition and therefore operate in that conceptual and discursive space, but it is not confined to this space and can move freely in and out of it. Generic formulas as a rule do not constrain and stifle a text in a fatalistic way; they do inform the text, but they do not define it. Rather than being deterministically defined by the pre-loaded meanings that come with genre conventions, Indigenous popular texts commonly *play* with them, actively producing a host of alternative meanings and readings in the process. The very fact that conventions exist means that they can be bent or broken, more or less

spectacularly, and where conventions are broken, new meanings emerge. As Fiske points out, "Play, besides being a source of pleasure, is also a source of power" ("Popular Economy" 569). The effect can be particularly startling when produced within a visual medium: Sonny Assu's artistic pieces like *Coke Salish* or *Cereal Boxes* testify to that. As he himself explains: "By creating the personal and urban totemic representation imagery, laden with a sense of ironic wry humor and informed by social, economic, and environmental issues, I speak to the idealistic notion of conformity by *not conforming* to the notion of the 'Indian identity'" (147, emphasis in original).

The cultural products of Indigenous popular culture analyzed in the chapters of this study engage in just such a play with commonly recognized popular generic conventions. By doing so, they write and screen Indigenous people back into cultural spaces they previously have been written and screened out from by dominant colonial discursive practices. Engaging into and with contemporary popular culture from the standpoint of Indigenous worldviews, epistemologies, historical experiences and present-day struggles, they demonstrate multifaceted diversity and contemporaneity of modern Indigeneity. In the process, Indigenous popular artists contribute much to the contemporary activist causes and to challenging the colonial discourse of the "vanishing Indian." In the words of Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew: "Their works explore and bear witness to the contemporary relevance of the histories of Indigenous oral cultures and profound connections to their widely varying lands. They also reveal the creative drive that is at the heart of Indigenous survival" (191).

Due to their particular conventions and overall generic makeup, different narrative genres lend themselves to exploration of different issues. Because of the longevity of its fantastic protagonists, vampire fiction is particularly suitable for the interrogation of the past, of the role which past events play in the present and the effect they have on contemporary life. The vampire framework enables Indigenous authors working in the genre to reach back into North America's pre-colonial past to imaginatively unlock its cultural and social realities; it also allows to revisit and reframe the history of contact and conquest from an Indigenous perspective.

Science fiction, on the other hand, is a genre notoriously concerned with the future and futuristic speculation, and is therefore especially suitable for speculative explorations of what the future might be or is likely to hold. As the respective chapter in this study contends, the futuristic mode of such exploration is of particular importance in Indigenous context due to the necropolitics of the discourse of the "vanishing Indian" and the negative impact it continues to have on Indigenous representation and experience in North America. Besides being future-oriented, science fiction genre is commonly also science-immersed. Indigenous futurisms, therefore, not only present future Indigenous histories and thus counteract the idea of Indigenous populations as a vanishing race, but also use science fictional frameworks in order to explore Indigenous sciences and to alert the public to the existence of what Grace Dillon calls "Native intellectualism" and "Indigenous scientific literacy" (Introduction 2). A postapocalyptic narrative mode allows Indigenous futurisms to address both the current environmental crisis and the reality that "Native Apocalypse, if contemplated seriously, has already taken place" (Dillon, Introduction 8).

If vampire fiction tends strongly towards the past and science fiction looks towards the future, action hero and superhero narratives usually deal with the present moment, invoking in a literal sense the warrior for justice archetype battling the "evil" forces at work in contemporary society. For Indigenous action heroes and superheroes, these forces usually relate to the experience of being on the receiving end of hundreds of years of colonization. The vigilante trope addresses the fact that the colonial justice system often proves inadequate where Indigenous issues are concerned. A teenage superhero character, on the other hand, interrogates challenges of coming of age and of young adulthood, exacerbated for Indigenous youth by their marginalized status in the colonial society. Especially with regards to Indigenous superheroes, this list of examples is not complete: there exist many more instances of Indigenous re-imaginings of the superhero trope, especially in comic books, all constituted in different ways according to the author's fancy and message. The fact that superhero stories tend to be told through visual media of different kinds gives these narratives another important dimension since, through

their interference with colonial image-making practices they contribute to the attainment of visual sovereignty.

From this summary alone, it is aptly evident that, just as other modes of Indigenous cultural production, Indigenous popular culture is one of the fastest-growing cultural fields in North America. Its characteristics as a discursive space that is highly dynamic, constantly developing and increasingly vast present a host of challenges to a researcher attempting a comprehensive analysis of Indigenous popular culture. The chapters above can only be considered as a snapshot of a passing moment in time and as I am writing these concluding words, the field has already moved on. This snapshot is also imperfect, for much has been left out for reasons of space and scope.

Apart from film and animation, this study has only superficially touched on popular icons and themes in visual art, though I relied heavily on theoretical deliberations originating in this field (particularly on Sonny Assu's article). Popular-themed Indigenous painting, sculpture, installation, video and digital art are all currently flourishing as artists like Sonny Assu, Andy Everson, Jeffrey Veregge, Brian Jungen, Skawennati Fragnito and many others increase their artistic output. The intersection of popular culture and Indigenous visual art most certainly merits further discussion but clearly is beyond the scope of this study.

In terms of fiction, a very prominent popular genre, namely that of fantasy, is also missing from this study. This is certainly not for lack of material: Daniel Heath Justice's trilogy *The Way of Thorn and Thunder* and his short story "High Fashion and the Necromantic Arts," Aaron Paquette's *Lightfinder* as well as Sean A. Tinsley and Rachel A. Qitsualik's collection *Ajjiit: Dark Dreams of the Ancient Arctic* can all be considered fantasy texts, and Joseph Bruchac's *Killer of Enemies* and Catherine Knuttson's *Shadows Cast by Stars* contain prominent fantasy-like elements. As a genre concerned with mythology and complex world-building, fantasy offers a rich terrain for Indigenous writers who wish to explore and (re)interpret Indigenous mythological themes and stories. In their Introduction to *Ajjiit*, Tinsley and Qitsualik demonstrate how the merging of fantasy genre and Indigenous content can function, explaining:

> To a degree, our point, in crafting these fantasy stories, was to draw
> upon Inuit culture and lore, writing original fiction utilizing the unique
> creatures and concepts that Inuit once (and, in some cases, still do) fear
> and revere. Our main purpose, however, was to illustrate a sort of
> cosmological thinking particular to Inuit culture. (2)

The focus on a particular cosmological thinking made accessible by way of fantasy generic conventions is also characteristic of other Indigenous fantasy texts. As all of the authors named above demonstrate in their literary works, such merging results in unique and exciting tales layered with rich meaning.

There are other aspects of Indigenous popular culture that had to be excluded from this study and that are left to future scholarly attention. Examples include the intersection of Indigenous popular culture and chick culture, Indigenous fashion, Indigenous narrative TV and reality TV, Indigenous video games and tabletop games as well as Indigenous music and video cultures. Indigenous fandoms and the overall impact of Indigenous popular culture on Indigenous audiences also call for a systematic and thorough analysis in the future. In general, an analysis of the cultural field of Indigenous popular culture would profit from an even more interdisciplinary approach than is used in present study. With my work, I hope to have contributed to the goal of a more rigorous discussion of the cultural significance and artistic outlook of Indigenous popular culture. My choice of genres and texts for this study is completely subjective and arbitrary; mostly, I have simply selected (some of the) texts that, in the words of Henry Jenkins, "make me go 'wow'" (*The Wow Climax* 2).

So how does Indigenous popular culture relate to and what role does it play in the project of resurgence? One of the important points of contact between resurgence and Indigenous popular culture is resistance to erasure. Many of the tactics of Idle No More, perhaps most prominently the Round Dance, showcase the embodied presence of Indigenous peoples on the land and in the society against the discourse of disappearance and erasure:

> Challenging erasure and the idea of the Indigenous person as 'out of
> place' when off the reserve or outside of rural areas […], the evolving
> struggles of Idle No More (INM) reclaim places as Indigenous –
> including shopping centres – that are overwritten with state colonial,

capitalist and consumer presence. At the same time as they resist erasure, INM protests affirmed and reinvented Indigenous practices, including the Round Dance, which became an invitation for solidarity across Indigenous peoples and with non-Indigenous supporters. (Coburn, 37)

Thus, Idle Mo More tactics are characterized by what may be called politics of presence. In its political activism, Idle No More not only employs the usual protest strategies and blueprints, but also prominently makes use of resurgent practices in order to exercise agency and assert presence on Indigenous terms.

Similar processes are at work in Indigenous popular culture. Mainstream popular culture constitutes just such a space "overwritten with state colonial, capitalist and consumer presence" (37) of which Coburn speaks; in that space, Indigenous people as creative artists and engaged audiences are often considered an unexpected presence. It follows that popular culture, in terms of its hegemonically enforced power dynamic, represents a microcosm which mirrors the power dynamic in the colonial society at large. Inserting their stories grounded in Indigenous cultural archives into that space, Indigenous artists not only assert presence but claim the right to participation in contemporary culture on their own terms, and thus challenge the discourse of erasure. What is more, Indigenous popular culture serves to replace popular stereotypes with representation of living Indigenous people in a cultural space which is littered with caricaturist images of "Indians." From nation-specific histories and stories to urban experiences to transindigenous concerns and alliance-building, Indigenous artists of the popular create a resurgent archive fine-tuned to current cultural sensibilities and rooted in Indigenous cultural spaces. Indigenous popular culture thus becomes part of and a contributor to "joyful affirmations of individual and collective Indigenous self-determination" (Coburn 25) which are at the heart of resurgence. As Elaine Coburn puts it, "resistance and resurgence can be manifest in joyful, even exuberant Indigenous expression. Many Indigenous artists are challenging colonial visual imperialism while offering both highly personal and politicized new imaginaries" (38). This is exactly the vital cultural work Indigenous popular culture performs.

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German Summary

Zentrale Themen und Fragestellungen der Dissertation

Das kulturelle Feld der „Indigenous literature" ist eines der Kulturproduktionsfelder in Nordamerika, die sich am schnellsten entwickeln und ausbreiten. Dabei nimmt nicht nur die Anzahl der erscheinenden literarischen Texte rapide zu, sondern auch die der kritischen Auseinandersetzungen in der Forschung, zunehmend verfasst von indigenen Forscherinnen und Forschern. Einer der wichtigsten Tendenzen, die sich dabei abzeichnen, ist die enge Verbindung zwischen der literarischen Produktion und aktivistischen Zielen sowohl einzelner indigener Nationen als auch transindigener Organisationen (wie z. B. Idle No More in Kanada). Gleichzeitig lässt sich in den letzten ca. 5-10 Jahren, ganz besonders aber seit der Entstehung von Idle No More im Winter des Jahres 2013, ein Paradigmenwechsel in sowohl aktivistischen Bemühungen als auch in dem diskursiven Verständnis von Indigenität (Indigeneity) im Allgemeinen feststellen. Dieses neue Paradigma wird unter dem Begriff „resurgence" (Wiederaufleben oder Wiederaufflammen) zusammengefasst und theoretisiert. Forscher wie Leanne Simpson (Anishinaabe), Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk), Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee), und Elaine Coburn waren unter den ersten, die das resurgence Paradigma aufgegriffen und konzeptuell abgerundet haben. In Bereichen wie Politik und indigene Regierungsformen (indigenous governance), Aktivismus, soziale Gerechtigkeit, Bildung, und Kultur im Allgemeinen wird resurgence als kritischer Rahmen zunehmend wichtiger. Was literaturwissenschaftliche Studien angeht, wird das Konzept allerdings noch kaum angewandt oder berücksichtigt.

Als politisches Projekt, wendet sich resurgence ab von dem Diskurs der Anerkennung (politics of recognition) hin zu der Betonung der Selbstbestimmung der indigenen Nationen und die Wiederbelebung indigener Regierungsformen. Aus der kulturpolitischen Perspektive hat resurgence eine kulturelle Stärkung der indigenen Nationen, Gemeinschaften, und Individuen zum Ziel, die, statt sich reaktionär mit dem neokolonialen Staat und seinen Diskursen auseinander zu setzen, die Betonung kompromisslos auf indigene Ausdrucksformen und kulturellen Archive legt und diese mit Hinblick auf den zeitgenössischen

kulturellen Moment aktualisiert. Resurgence wird hier als positive und freudige kulturelle Selbstbestimmung und Selbstzentrierung aufgefasst, daher wird resurgence (Wiederaufleben) oft resistance (Wiederstand) gegenübergestellt. Obwohl man diese Verschiebung des Fokus eindeutig spürt, wie Métis Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaftlerin Emma LaRocque betont, dürfen resistance und resurgence nicht als Gegensätze verstanden werden, sondern als eine auf Kontinuität basierende Weiterentwicklung.

Etwa gleichzeitig mit dem kulturellen und politischen Diskurs von resurgence, begann sich im Bereich der indigenen Literatur und anderen narrativen Medien ein bestimmtes Kulturproduktionsfeld zu konsolidieren, das vor der Jahrhundertewende kaum vorhanden war. In meiner Dissertation, bezeichne ich dieses kulturelle Feld mit dem Begriff indigene Populärkultur (Indigenous popular culture). Unter diesem Begriff verstehe ich die von den indigenen Autoren erschaffene Geschichten, die aus der gegenwärtigen Populärkultur bekannte und durch sie verbreitete Figuren, narrative Strategien, und Tropen verwenden, und gleichzeitig moderne Diskurse um Indigenität und politische und soziale Themen, die den indigenen Aktivismus von heute beschäftigen, aufgreifen. Es ist meine Überzeugung, dass diese Art von Geschichten, die für gewöhnlich indigene Wissenssysteme und symbolische und mythologische Archive der indigenen Gesellschaften mit den Teilen der hegemonialen Populärkultur verschmelzen, sowohl an dem Diskurs von resurgence teilnehmen als auch, in ihrer Funktion als Kulturträger, ihn verkörpern. Der kulturelle Rahmen der Populärkultur, zu dem besonders jüngere Generationen einen fast intuitiven Bezug haben, ermöglicht es den Texten der indigenen Populärkultur eine gewisse Wissenstransferfunktion zu übernehmen, indem sie traditionelle Inhalte aller Art in eine Form verpacken, die eine strake Verbindung zur Kulturproduktion der Gegenwart aufweist. Dabei spielen einzelne kulturelle Texte der indigenen Populärkultur mit den Genrekonventionen, die für jedes Genre kennzeichnende Merkmale darstellen, so dass diese Konventionen in die Dienste der indigenen Diskurse gestellt werden. Das Spiel mit Genrekonventionen ist eines der zentralen sinnstiftenden Merkmale der indigenen Populärkultur und trägt maßgeblich zu der Konstruktion des semiotischen Feldes dieser Texte bei.

In meiner Dissertation, untersuche ich, wie genau dieses Zwischenspiel zwischen Form und Inhalt konstruiert ist und wie es funktioniert. Die einzelnen Fallbeispiel-Kapitel konzentrieren sich jeweils auf ein Genre und zeigen auf, wie Genrekonventionen benutzt werden, um indigene Thematiken und Diskurse auf eine komplexe Weise aufzuarbeiten und darzustellen. Drei verschiedene Genres werden dabei als Beispiele aufgeführt: Vampirgeschichten, Futurismus (aufgebrochen in kritische Dystopie mit Science Fiction Charakter und postapokalyptische Narrative), und Action Helden bzw. Superhelden Geschichten. Jedes Kapitel erklärt zunächst die Dynamiken des Zwischenspiels eines konkreten Genres (oder Genre Gruppe) mit den indigenen Inhalten, und zeigt danach anhand konkreten narrativen Beispielen (Romane, Kurzgeschichten, Film oder Animation) wie diese Dynamiken sich in jedem konkreten Fall abspielen können. Insgesamt ist die Dissertation in vier Kapitel unterteilt.

Kapitelübersicht

Kapitel 1 beschäftigt sich mit den theoretischen und kulturhistorischen Aspekten, die als Grundlage für die Analyse der narrativen Texte im weiteren Verlauf der Dissertation dienen. Als kulturhistorischen Hintergrund zeichnet es die Bedeutung der resurgence Paradigma und der dafür charakteristischen wechselseitigen Wirkung vom politischen und sozialen Aktivismus und Kulturproduktion auf. Des Weiteren unternimmt es einen Versuch, wichtige Aspekte der Poetik des Populären herauszuarbeiten und kritisch zu bewerten. Letztlich widmet sich das Kapitel der Bedeutung, die die Entwicklung der neuen Medien und der so-genannten „Nerd culture" für indigene Populärkultur haben. Dabei steht im Vordergrund die immer größer werdende Reichweite, die neue Medien und der zunehmende Zugang zu ihnen ermöglichen, sondern auch das gemeinschaftsbildende Potential, das in vielen Fällen der „Nerd culture" innerwohnt sowie die Frage, wie dieses Potential von vielen indigenen Populärautoren nicht nur instrumentalisiert, sondern auch aktiv gelebt wird.

Kapitel 2 beginnt mit den Genre Fallbeispielen und widmet sich der Vampirliteratur. Die indigenen Texte, die hier untersucht werden, sind zwei

Vampirromane: *The Eye Killers* von A.A. Carr (Navajo/Laguna Pueblo) und *The Night Wanderer: A Native Gothic Novel* von Drew Hayden Taylor (Anishinaabe). Diese literarischen Werke benutzen beide die Konventionen der westlichen Vampirliteratur und Aspekte der Zusammensetzung der narrativen Figur eines Vampirs und ihrer Symbolik, um das koloniale Trauma, die indigene Nationen der Nordamerika durch den Kontakt mit Europäern und seinen Folgen erlitten haben und dem sie weiterhin ausgesetzt sind. Als eine Figur, die traditionell eng mit der Vergangenheit verbunden ist, eignet sich ein Vampir besonders gut dafür, durch ihn oder sie die Vergangenheit zu untersuchen, kritisch zu analysieren oder zu hinterfragen, sie zu verarbeiten und sich von ihr zu verabschieden, oder aber sie in Erfahrung zu bringen, wiederzubeleben und von ihr zu lernen. Die Romane von A.A. Carr und Drew Hayden Taylor machen Gebrauch von diesem Aspekt der Vampirfigur um sich nicht nur mit der kolonialen Vergangenheit auseinander zu setzten, sondern auch um auf die pre-koloniale Vergangenheit zurückzugreifen und die (kulturellen) Schätze, die sie birgt, ans Licht und in die Gegenwart zu holen. Die Begegnung mit einem Vampir ermöglicht es den indigenen Charakteren in beiden Romanen, wenngleich auf eine sehr unterschiedliche Weise, ihren persönlichen und kulturellen Traumata entgegenzutreten und mit der Heilung zu beginnen.

Kapitel 3 fokussiert sich auf das Cluster von Genres, die sich des futuristischen Erzählmodus bedienen. Dazu gehören beispielsweise spekulative Erzählungen wie Science Fiction, die Dystopie und die Utopie sowie die Apokalypse und Postapokalypse. Wie der Name schon deutlich macht, beschäftigen sich futuristische Erzählungen maßgeblich mit der Zukunft. Dies kann auf verschiedenste Weise ausgeführt werden, in Form von Spekulationen, spekulativen Weiterentwicklungen der wissenschaftlichen und technologischen Tatsachen oder sozialen und ökologischen Zuständen, Warnungen und/oder Prophezeiungen. Trotz der oft festzustellenden Tendenz zur düsteren Kulissen und dytopischen Verhältnissen, bergen futuristische Erzählungen in den meisten Fällen nicht nur Hoffnung auf eine bessere Zukunft, sondern unterstreichen vielmehr auch die Zukunftigkeit als solche. Unter dem Begriff Zukunftigkeit verstehe ich das Vorhandensein einer Zukunft. Dies mag als selbstverständlich klingen, ist aber für

indigene Nationen in Nordamerika ein vielumkämpftes Terrain. Historisch, wurde ihnen jede Zukunftigkeit vom kolonialen Staat abgesprochen indem sie diskursiv als eine „aussterbende Rasse" (the vanishing race) konstruiert wurden. In der Literatur äußerte sich dieser Diskurs dadurch, dass indigene Charaktere meistens eine tragische oder selbstaufopfernde Rolle spielten. Im Umkehrschluss, stellte der Diskurs des Verschwindens und des Untergangs die indigene Nationen archaistisch dar, und somit unvereinbar mit Technologie und sogar mit der Moderne als solche. Wenn indigene Populärautoren kulturelle Texte verfassen, die Futurismus als Rahmen benutzen, wirken sie unmittelbar dem Diskurs des Verschwindens entgegen und postulieren mit Nachdruck indigene Zukunftigkeit. Die indigenen futuristischen Texte, die in diesem Kapitel näher untersucht werden, sind „Terminal Avenue", eine Kurzgeschichte von Eden Robinson (Heisla), *Resistance*, ein Roman von Zainab Amadahy, und „On the Wings of this Prayer," ebenfalls eine Kurzgeschichte, vom Dogrib Autoren Richard van Camp.

Das vierte und letzte Kapitel der Dissertation ist den Actionhelden- und Superheldengeschichten gewidmet, vertreten von zwei Beispielen: dem Kurzfilm *A Red Girl's Reasoning*, produziert von Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers (Blackfoot/Sami), und der animierten Serie *Kagagi*, kreiert von Jay Odjick (Anishinaabe). Somit findet in diesem Kapitel nicht nur ein Genrewechsel statt, sondern auch Medienwechsel, nämlich vom geruckten zum visuellen. Die Visualität, die für beide Medien—Film und Animation—zentral ist, spielt auch kulturpolitisch eine große Rolle. Die Darstellung von indigenen Nationen und Individuen in den Medien des Mainstreams ist seit jeher vom visuellen Missbrauch geprägt: von Appropriation kultureller Symbolen über karikaturistische Darstellungen bis hin zu rassistischen Maskottchen-Bildern. Wenn indigene Künstler und Geschichtenerzähler die Kontrolle über die Produktion und die Verbreitung der Bilder übernehmen, ermöglicht es ihnen visuelle Souveränität (visual sovereignty) auszuüben. Im Hinblick auf die Benutzung der Genrenarrativen utilisiert Tailfeathers in ihrem Film die Selbstjustiz Thematik, die sehr oft von Actionhelden Geschichten benutzt wird, um die Problematik der vermissten und ermordeten indigenen Frauen (Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women) zu thematisieren und das systematische Versagen der kanadischen Ordnungskräfte und Justiz zu

kritisieren. Jay Odjick, seinerseits, schafft mit seinem Superhelden Kagagi, dem Alter Ego vom indigenen Jugendlichen Matthew Carver, einen indigenen Superhelden, der nicht nur sich mit den Problemen auseinandersetzt, die indigene Jugendliche tagtäglich zu bewältigen haben, sondern auch, als der erste indigene Superheld im Fernsehprogramm, eine Identifikationsfigur für dieses Zielpublikum erschafft.

Zum Abschluss

Wie es aus der Zusammenfassung der einzelnen Kapitel hervorgeht, besitzt die Dissertation eine gewisse temporale Ebene, die sich durch die zentralen Tendenzen einzelner untersuchen Genres ergeben hat: Weil Vampirliteratur sich hervorragend zur Auseinandersetzung mit der Vergangenheit eignet und bei den futuristischen Erzählungen die Frage der Zukunft und der Zukunftigkeit dominiert, sind Actionhelden- und Superheldengeschichten fest im Hier und Jetzt verankert und setzen sich mit den Herausforderungen der Gegenwart auseinander. Gleichzeitig zeigt die Vielfalt der Thematiken, die von den Texten der indigenen Populärkultur aufgegriffen und behandelt werden sowie ihre kulturelle, politische, und soziale Bedeutung, wie wichtig diese kulturelle Erscheinung für die Weiterentwicklung der zeitgenössischen Diskursen um Indigenität ist, sowohl in ihrem Inhalt als auch in ihrer Fähigkeit, bestimmte Segmente des Publikums zu erreichen und zu bewegen.

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Eigenständigkeitserklärung

Gemäß **§ 5 Absatz 4b** der Promotionsordnung der Fakultät 3 und der Fakultät 4 der Universität des Saarlandes vom 11. Juli 2011 erkläre ich – Svetlana Seibel, geboren am 01.03.1982 in Strezhewoj, Russland – hiermit, dass ich die vorliegende Dissertation selbstständig verfasst und keine andren als die von mir angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittle benutz habe. Des Weiteren versichere ich, dass ich alle den benutzten Werken wörtlich und inhaltlich entnommene Stellen kenntlich gemacht habe.

Gemäß **§ 5 Absatz 4c** der Promotionsordnung erkläre ich darüber hinaus, dass ich bei der Anfertigung der Arbeit nicht die entgeltliche Hilfe von Vermittlungs- und Beratungsdiensten in Anspruch genommen habe.

Svetlana Seibel