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**Indigenizing Cyberspace: The Possibilities of New Media Technologies  
for Indigenous Peoples**

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**Indigenizing Cyberspace: The Possibilities of New Media Technologies  
for Indigenous Peoples**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

To my family for your unending support and love over the years, especially these last four.

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There are so few words that truly convey my appreciation and gratitude for everyone involved with this project. As I write these acknowledgements, I feel speechless in a way that I am not often used to. Considering this, I will try to keep it as brief as possible, which, if you actually read this thesis, is something I struggle to do.

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but you never doubted or discouraged me. Because of you two, all of this has been possible. I love you. Thank you.

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## **Abstract**

# **Indigenizing Cyberspace: The Possibilities of New Media Technologies for Indigenous Peoples**

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The information superhighway. The global village. Cyberspace. These are only a few of the metaphors used to describe the Internet, a vast global interconnected computer network which has dominated life in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. While online media spaces are often described as an open limitless frontiers by scholars and users alike, recent scholarship has shown that racism, sexism, and other discriminatory forces shape user experiences. While this emerging literature on the issues surrounding cyberspace has uncovered important aspects of identity making in this space, this thesis project takes a different approach and considers the potential possibilities of new media technologies. By focusing specifically on the possibilities for indigenous users, an identity often ignored in new media scholarship, I argue that cyberspace is a critical landscape for indigenous peoples to work toward decolonization, carve out indigenous spaces online, and foster indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. By positing two new frameworks to analyze cyberspace, cyborg-intimacy and the virtual third space, I demonstrate new ways of thinking about how indigenous bodies matter in this space and how cyberspace can function as a zone outside of traditional political and cultural boundaries. Through this

work, this thesis project not only asserts the presence of indigenous peoples in these spaces, countering stereotypes of these peoples as outside modernity, but also showcases the innovative ways that indigenous peoples are contributing and shaping cyberspace.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Elaine Yellow Horse, member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, lives in Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. She attends Oglala Lakota College and is studying Lakota Studies with an emphasis on Tribal Law. She is co-captain of the school's national champion archery team. To pay for college, she works as an EMT and runs a mail order coffee company. However, in February 2014, the multinational technology company Google decided that Yellow Horse was not a human being.<sup>1</sup> Yellow Horse's Google+ account, which she used not only for personal but also professional reasons, was suspended due to Google's 2011 Real Names policy, which requires, "a real, verifiable first and last name."<sup>2</sup> The name construction outlined in this policy greatly differs from the "adjective + noun" tradition surname constructions common among the Oglala Sioux Tribe and other indigenous<sup>3</sup> peoples in the United States and Canada. Even though Yellow Horse filed two lengthy appeals that provided legal documents demonstrating the authenticity of her last name, it was only when this story was published on the popular news and popular culture aggregate site BuzzFeed that Google reinstated her account. By July 2014, Google had dropped its three-year-old Real Names policy, stating it was sorry for causing, "unnecessarily difficult experiences for some of [their] users."<sup>4</sup> Yellow Horse, without missing a beat, continued attending college and running her coffee business online following the incident. Today, she serves as Native Youth Leadership Alliance Leader and continues to strive to be, "a role model for youth in [her] community."<sup>5</sup> While Yellow Horse's story ends in success, the "nymwars" in cyberspace still rage on.<sup>6</sup> In her piece, "'Real Names' Policies Are an Abuse of Power," danah boyd discusses these 'nymwars' and their effects on those who desire pseudonymity online, such as abuse survivors, activists, LGBT people, women, and

young people.<sup>7</sup> She states, “the people who most heavily rely on pseudonyms in online spaces are those who are most marginalized by systems of power. Real Names policies aren’t empowering; they’re an authoritarian assertion of power over vulnerable people.”<sup>8</sup> Today, Facebook, widely regarded as the most popular social media platform, still enforces a Real Names policy, which continues to discriminate against indigenous peoples and others with different naming structures or those wanting to use a pseudonym online. Published by *The Washington Post*, “Online ‘authenticity’ and how Facebook’s ‘real name’ policy hurts Native Americans” states that:

for many Native Americans, being forced to ‘prove’ their identities is more than an inconvenience; it is a form of silencing...There’s been a long history of Native erasure and while Facebook might not be enacting it with that intention, it’s still a part of that long history of people erasing native names. It’s part of the violence against native people in general.<sup>9</sup>

These accounts point to a growing recognition of the immeasurable role that the Internet and social media play in 21<sup>st</sup> century lives, but also the ways that particular bodies and identities are marginalized in this space.

These issues seem a far cry from the mythos that has surrounded cyberspace<sup>10</sup> since its conception. After the Internet was developed and popularized in the 1990s, new media<sup>11</sup> and other scholars were quick to frame cyberspace as utopic, post-race, and post-gender.<sup>12</sup> In fact, John Parry Barrow stated, in his 1996 “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace, that “we (through the Internet) are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth.”<sup>13</sup> While there were early attempts to ‘map’ and understand this space geographically,<sup>14</sup> early concepts of cyberspace as a limitless and virtual territory remained prevalent in some academic disciplines and in popular culture<sup>15</sup>. This theorization is closely connected to the idea that cyberspace lacked embodiment, as the

virtual aspects of this space allowed users to be anonymous and practice “identity tourism.”<sup>16</sup>

However, more recent scholarship has shown that experiences in cyberspace cannot be disconnected from the identities of the bodies interacting in this space. Specifically, new media scholars have been utilizing critical race theory to identify and discuss how the logics of race manifest in cyberspace.<sup>17</sup> As Jessie Daniels writes, “the Internet has not provided an escape route from either race or racism, nor has the study of race or racism proven to be central to the field of Internet studies. Instead, race and racism persist online in ways that are both new and unique to the Internet, alongside vestiges of centuries-old forms that reverberate both offline and on.”<sup>18</sup>

However, while these constructions of cyberspace are problematic, can the landscape of cyberspace be a productive one? How can new media technologies function as critical tools and vital spaces, particularly for marginalized peoples? What does cyberspace offer its users outside of Facebook notifications on an acquaintance’s birthday? To consider the idea of cyberspace a potentially productive, this thesis projects centers on one main research question: (1) What possibilities does cyberspace offer indigenous peoples interacting in these new media spaces?

## **THESIS STATEMENT**

In this work, I argue that cyberspace is an essential emerging landscape for indigenous peoples, a landscape which does hold possibilities for decolonization, community building, and cultural promotion and preservation. Most importantly, I will also show the many ways that indigenous peoples equally shape, manipulate, and program cyberspace. Additionally, while many researchers continue to focus solely on the intangible effects of this type of discrimination on minority users, I will discuss the

embodied ways in which indigenous users are affected by their experiences in cyberspace through a collapsing of the virtual/real binary in order to argue that online experiences can never be disconnected from physical bodies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To answer this research question, my work involves close readings of specific moments and spaces in cyberspace. These close readings allowed me to identify and investigate the opportunities available in this space. Utilizing a qualitative analytical software named NVivo,<sup>19</sup> I captured, recorded, and analyzed important indigenous websites, projects, movements, and conversations in cyberspace. However, given that cyberspace is enormous and growing everyday, it is impossible to capture all of the ways that it has been or could be utilized by indigenous peoples. However, by narrowing on specific snapshots and themes, I can begin to unearth the complexities of cyberspace and its possibilities for indigenous users.

Before moving forward with this project, it is vital to bring into conversation my position as a white, nonindigenous outsider studying a historically and currently marginalized community as it calls into question my ethics around the project. Even more specifically, I acknowledge that I am a white, American feminist, anti-colonial, anti-racist scholar and this positionality impacts my methodology, my aims, and my research. I recognize that as a white American, I greatly benefit from the living in a settler society, which is built on the suffering and discrimination of indigenous peoples and other people of color. Furthermore, I recognize that:

without centering Indigenous peoples' articulations, without deploying a relational approach to settler colonial power, and without paying attention to the conditions and contingencies of settler colonialism, studies of settler colonialism and practices of solidarity run the risk of reifying (and possibly replicating) settler colonial, as well as other, modes of domination.<sup>20</sup>

In order to move challenge Western paradigms of knowledge and colonization and to prioritize the benefits of this research for indigenous peoples, I look to Linda Tuhiwai Smith as a methodological guide, specifically the “Indigenous Research Agenda” she outlines therein. In this agenda, Tuhiwai Smith’s centers self-determination at the center of this agenda. She states, “self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice, which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural, and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the processes of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples.”<sup>21</sup> Additionally, I aim to foster an unnatural discourse, as posited by Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake in their work, “Unnatural Discourse: Race and Gender in Geography.” Here, the authors problematize the naturalized, biological essentialism that is at the foundation of understandings of race and gender. By outlining the histories of the congruent modern conceptualization of these terms following Enlightenment, the authors call for a greater focus on the ways that these concepts are socially constructed.<sup>22</sup> The authors then urge others to employ an unnatural discourse as a political strategy, “which provides for a dismantling of naturalized categories and the imposition of disorder upon the orderly and normative worlds of sexism and racism.”<sup>23</sup> This strategy, for Kobayashi and Peake, involves, “seeing (how) the embodiment of people and their construction as different within landscapes that are not only ‘real’, but constructed to justify vision and ideology. The unnaturalization of vision involves a replacement, a rearrangement of what falls naturally ‘into place’, a shedding of new light.”<sup>24</sup> This movement toward an unnatural discourse is important not only for my attempts to collapse the virtual/real and other binaries in this paper and in my other academic works, but also to move against Western epistemologies which have historically abused, marginalized, and othered indigenous peoples and indigenous



knowledge frameworks both in and outside academia. As such, under the guidance of Tuhiwai Smith, Kobayashi, and Peake, I hope to create scholarship, as a settler and indigenous ally, that works against negative stereotypical representations of indigenous peoples and works toward social justice through decolonization and indigenous sovereignty.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This work has major implications for four main reasons. First, this work counters the stereotypical narrative of indigenous peoples as not being modern or even present in modernity. Phillip J. Deloria dissects this narrative in his work, *Indians in Unexpected Places*. In this text, Deloria uses the themes of violence, representation, athletics, technology, and music to, “put the making of non-Indian expectations into a dialogue with the lived experience of certain Native people” in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> Deloria argues that, “in the moment, according to most American narratives, Indian people, corralled into isolation and impoverished reservations, missed out on modernity – indeed, almost dropped out of history itself.”<sup>26</sup> However, as Deloria shows in *Indians in Unexpected Places*, these stereotypes could not be further from the truth and that indigenous peoples equally engaged in and contributed to modernity. Deloria challenges readers to consider a, “secret history of the unexpected, of the complex lineaments of personal and cultural identity that can never be captured by dichotomies built around crude notions of difference and assimilation, white and Indian, primitive and advanced.”<sup>27</sup> While this work focuses on the turn of the century, I acknowledge that these same stereotypes continue to thrive and affect the lives of indigenous peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – even though they are grounded in falsities.

What is most important about recognizing these stereotypes is considering how settler colonial forces have used this narrative as the means to discriminate against indigenous peoples and to deny their agency and sovereignty. Settler colonialism describes a specific kind of colonialism enacted against indigenous peoples. Patrick Wolfe's in his article, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," links settler colonialism with the genocidal violence enacted against indigenous peoples around the world. He sees the two as having converged around a "logic of elimination" in which settler colonialism "destroys to replace" as "settlers come to stay."<sup>28</sup> Wolfe defines settler colonialism, which is distinct from other scholars, as "an invasion (which) is a structure not an event" which is motivated "not by race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory."<sup>29</sup> For Wolfe, much of this struggle between settler colonialism and indigenous sovereignty is land. He states that, "even where native sovereignty was recognized, ultimate dominion over the territory in question was held to inhere in the European sovereign in whose name it had been 'discovered'" meaning that the success of the settler colonial project relied upon the elimination, either through genocide or assimilation, of indigenous peoples.<sup>30</sup> Through this connection to land, Wolfe ties settler colonialism to modernity and agriculture, both of which works to stitch the new colonizers to the land in permanent ways. This created the symbolism of the "native...as unsettled, nomadic, rootless in settler-colonial discourse" as a way to justifying their elimination for these specific land grabbing purposes.<sup>31</sup> Wolfe's analysis of settler colonialism as a structure and a process, not an event, is very powerful and essential to understanding the forces which are still working against indigenous peoples today – even in cyberspace. I include this review of settler colonialism because these processes cannot be separated from any conversation with or about indigenous peoples. Settler colonialism is an ongoing event that shapes the everyday lives of these

individuals. As such, by showcasing that there are indigenous peoples online who are actively engaging with new medias, I work against this settler colonial narrative.

This thesis project is also significant because there is little to no literature on indigeneity in new media scholarship. While few scholars have begun to do work on this topic,<sup>32</sup> there is still a major gap in this literature that needs to be expounded. Furthermore, indigenous voices and experiences are often marginalized in discussions of race in cyberspace. One of the aims of this thesis project is to work to fill this gap and bring indigeneity to the forefront in new media scholarship. Because, as Judy Iseke-Barnes and Deborah Danard state in their work, “Indigenous knowledges and worldview: Representations and the Internet:”

information represented on the Internet is distanced from its context. Perhaps this lack of context makes it appear neutral. This supposed neutrality may make the information seem more acceptable. But for indigenous peoples, who are represented and defined by non-indigenous peoples on the Internet, the information is not neutral or acceptable when it is filtered through perspectives which promote bias and reinforce stereotypes.<sup>33</sup>

As such, I employ a decolonial new media studies approach<sup>34</sup> that centers the ways that indigenous peoples are using cyberspace as a tool and a space to reassert positive indigenous stereotypes, work toward decolonization and indigenous sovereignty, and connect with other indigenous peoples.

## **CHAPTER PREVIEW**

In the following chapters, I will expand on this line of reasoning and outlining my new theoretical frameworks. Chapter two, titled “Cyborg-intimacy: A Global Intimate Intervention in Cyberspace,” considers how intimacy looks in cyberspace. I argue for the need to collapse the real/virtual binary, which dismisses the co-construction of the real and the virtual in cyberspace. Instead, I put forth a new perspective, the virtu-real, which

reconnects the Internet to the bodies interacting on/around/through these spaces. Using Dr. Adrienne Keene's popular blog, *Native Appropriations*, as an important forum to discuss these issues, I analyze how indigenous participants tie their experiences online to their offline bodies. Chapter three, titled "Virtual Spaces as Third Space: Indigenous Community Building in Cyberspace," contends that cyberspace serves as an important space for indigenous peoples to enact political change and create indigenous subjectivities. Combining Bhabha's concept of third space, Bruyneel's work on the third space of sovereignty, and Ramirez's work on native hubs, I discuss how indigenous peoples are shaping and indigenizing cyberspace to come together, collaborate, create community, and fight against settler colonial forces. This thesis project concludes with a return to the original research question, a discussion of the larger contribution of this work in relation to issues of access for indigenous peoples, and a consideration for future work.

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Flood, "What Happens When Google Doesn't Think You're A Human," *Buzzfeed*, March, 6, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/joeflood/what-happens-when-google-doesnt-think-youre-a-human#.hhvDlrrD1>.

<sup>2</sup> A.R. Lange, "How Online Real Name Policies Can Exclude," *EqualFuture*, June 4, 2014, <https://www.equalfuture.us/2014/06/04/real-name-policies-can-exclude/>.

<sup>3</sup> Given my positionality in the U.S., this work is contextualized through this specific location and histories. Because of this, I use the term "indigenous" to describe the descendants of those who occupied the territory now known as the United States before the arrival of European settlers. Even more generally, I use these terms in an international context to refer to non-Western societies that have suffered under European colonialism. Whenever possible, I defer to what indigenous peoples call themselves, which is generally forced around familial or tribal affiliations, for example the Muskogee Nation.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca MacKinnon and Hae-in Lim, "Google Plus Finally Gives Up on Its Ineffective, Dangerous Real-name Policy," *Slate*, July 17, 2014,

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[http://www.slate.com/blogs/future\\_tense/2014/07/17/google\\_plus\\_finally\\_ditches\\_its\\_ineffective\\_dangerous\\_real\\_name\\_policy.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2014/07/17/google_plus_finally_ditches_its_ineffective_dangerous_real_name_policy.html).

<sup>5</sup> “Elaine Yellow Horse,” *Native Youth Leadership Alliance*, 2014, <http://nativeyouthleadership.org/elaine-yellow-horse/>.

<sup>6</sup> Nymwars is the phrase given to the debates surrounding Google+’s Real Names policy. To learn more about these nymwars, see: Jemina Kiss, “Google+ pseudonym wars escalate – is it the new being ‘banned from the ranch’?” *The Guardian*, August 4, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/pda/2011/aug/04/google-plus-pseudonym-wars>.

<sup>7</sup> danah boyd, “‘Real Names’ Policies Are an Abuse of Power,” *Apophenia*, August 4, 2011, <http://www.zephorias.org/thoughts/archives/2011/08/04/real-names.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Abby Phillip, “Online ‘authenticity’ and how Facebook’s ‘real name’ policy hurts Native Americans,” *The Washington Post*, February 10, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/02/10/online-authenticity-and-how-facebooks-real-name-policy-hurts-native-americans/>.

<sup>10</sup> Most often, I use the term cyberspace to describe the space of the Internet, but other new media scholars have used this term to discuss ideas like virtual reality and video games. However, more broadly, it is defined as a, “virtual computer world...an electronic medium used to form a global computer network to facilitate online communication...made up of many worldwide computer networks that employ TCP/IP protocol to aid in communication and data exchange activities...which core feature is an interactive and virtual environment for a broad range of participants.” See: “Definition – what does Cyberspace mean?” *Technopia*, <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/2493/cyberspace>

<sup>11</sup> New media is defined as, “all that is related to the Internet and the interplay between technology, images, and sound. In fact, the definition of new media changes daily, and will continue to do so. New media evolves and morphs continuously.” For a larger conversation about new media and new media studies see: Bailey Socha and Barbara Eber-Schmid, “Defining New Media Isn’t Easy,” *New Media Institute*, 2014, <http://www.newmedia.org/what-is-new-media.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Later Twentieth Century” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991); Fereshteh Nouraei-Simone, *On Shifting Ground: Middle Eastern Women in the Global Era* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2005); Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993); Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> John Perry Barrow, “A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace,” <https://projects.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Batty, “Virtual geography,” *Futures* 29(4), 1997; Stanley D. Brunn, “The Internet as ‘the new world’ of and for geography: speed, structures, volumes, humility and

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Adams, *Geographies of media and communication*, (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2009); Eric Arnum and Sergio Conti, "Internet deployment worldwide: The new superhighway follows the old wires, rails, and roads," *INET* 98, 1998; Henry Bakis and Philippe Vidal, "Geography of the Information Society," *Digital Cognitive Technologies: Epistemology and the Knowledge Economy* (2010); Michael Batty and Bob Barr, "The electronic frontier: exploring and mapping cyberspace," *Futures* 26(7), 1994; Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin, *Mapping cyberspace*, (London: Routledge, 2001); Jesper Falkheimer and André Jansson, *Geographies of communication: The spatial turn in media studies*, (Nordicom, 2006); David J. Gunkel and Ann Hetzel Gunkel, "Virtual geographies: The new worlds of cyberspace," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 14(2), 1997); Alexander Halavais, "National borders on the world wide web," *New Media & Society* 2(1), 2000; Bin Jiang and Ferjan Ormeling, "Mapping cyberspace: Visualizing, analyzing and exploring virtual worlds," *The Cartographic Journal* 37(2), 2000; Susan P. Mains, Julie Cupples, and Chris Lukinbeal, *Mediated Geographies and Geographies of Media*, (New York: Springer, 2015); Rob Kitchin, *Cyberspace: the world in the wires*, (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1998a); Rob Kitchin, "Towards geographies of cyberspace," *Progress in Human Geography* 22, 1998b; Matthew Zook, Martin Dodge, Yuko Aoyama, and Anthony Townsend, "New digital geographies: Information, communication, and place," in *Geography and technology*, (New York: Springer, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Yehuda E. Kalay and John Marx, "Architecture and the Internet: Designing places in cyberspace," *First Monday*, October 6, 2005, <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1563>; Lisa Nakamura, "Race For/in Cyberspace: Identity Tourism" in *CyberReader*, edited by Victor J. Vitanza (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Andre Brock, "Who do you think you are?": Race, Representation, and Cultural Rhetorics in Online Spaces," *Poroi* 6(1), 2009; André Brock, Lynette Kvasny, and Kayla Hales, "Cultural appropriations of technical capital: Black women, weblogs, and the digital divide," *Information, Communication & Society* 13(7), 2010; Dara Byrne, "The Future of (the) Race: Identity and the Rise of Computer-Mediated Public Spheres" in *Learning Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Anna Everett. MacArthur Series, Digital Media and Learning, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008); Jessie Daniels, "Race and racism in Internet studies: A review and critique," *New Media and Society*, 2013; Jessie Daniels, "Rethinking cyberfeminism(s): Race, gender, and embodiment," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 37(1), 2009; Henry Jenkins, "The color-blind Web: a techno-utopia, or a

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<sup>18</sup> Jessie Daniels, "Race and racism in Internet studies: A review and critique," 696.

<sup>19</sup> As part of my methodology, I used the software, NVivo. This software allowed me to store, organize, and analyze the data I collected in meaningful and efficient ways. To learn more about this tool see: "NVivo Products," *QSR International*, <http://www.qsrinternational.com/product>.

<sup>20</sup> Corey Snelgrove, Rita Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, "Unsettling settler colonialism: The discourse and politics of settlers, and solidarity with Indigenous nations," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3(2), 2014, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (London: Zed Books, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake, "Unnatural Discourse: Race and Gender in Geography," *Gender, Place and Culture* 1(2), 1994, 223.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>25</sup> Phillip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS, University Press of Kansas), 7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4), 388.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 391.

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<sup>32</sup> Kristy Belton, "From cyberspace to offline communities: Indigenous peoples and global connectivity", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35(3), July 2010; Irfan Chaudhry, "#Hashtagging hate: Using Twitter to track racism," *First Monday* 20(2), February 2, 2015; Judy Iseke-Barnes and Deborah Danard, "Indigenous knowledges and worldview: Representations and the Internet," in *Information technology and indigenous people*, 2007; Kyra Landzelius, "Mapping the unfathomable frontiers of indigenous cyberspace: a survey of the expanding/contracting boundaries of going native on the net," *IT Users and Producers in an Evolving Sociocultural Context*, 2002; Kyra Landzelius, *Native on the Net: Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples in the Virtual Age* (London: Routledge, 2006); Bronwyn Lumby, "Cyber-indigeneity: Urban indigenous identity on Facebook," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 39, 2010; Lisa Nakamura, "Indigenous Circuits: Navajo Women and the Racialization of Early Electronic Manufacture," *American Quarterly* 66(4), 2014; Jesse Steinfeldt, Brad Foltz, Jennifer Kaladow, Tracy Carlson, Louis Pagano, and Emily Benton, "Racism in the electronic age: Role of online forums in expressing racial attitudes about American Indians," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 16(3), 2010; Larry Zimmerman, Karen Zimmerman, and Lenoard Bruguier, "Cyberspace smoke signals: new technologies and Native American ethnicity," in *Indigenous cultures in an interconnected world* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Judy Iseke-Barnes and Deborah Danard, "Indigenous knowledges and worldview: Representations and the Internet," *Information technology and indigenous people* (2007), 33.

<sup>34</sup> David Gaertner defines decolonial new media studies as: "a heretofore unrepresented analytic approach to new media and cyberspace that looks at the ways in which Indigenous communities contributed, and continue to contribute, to the material and ideological *development* of cyberspace." See: David Gaertner, "Traditional Innovation: The Turn to a Decolonial New Media Studies," *Novel Alliances*, November 25, 2014, <http://novelalliances.com/2014/11/25/traditional-innovation-the-turn-to-a-decolonial-new-media-studies/>.



## Chapter 2: Cyborg-intimacy – A Global Intimate Intervention in Cyberspace

After the publication of her 2014 interview with NPR, Dr. Adrienne Keene, a post-doctoral researcher at Brown University and a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, published a new post on her popular blog, *Native Appropriations*. Titled, “‘She’s so pale’: The good and bad of national exposure,” the post was a biting response to those who criticize her skin tone, as seen through a small thumbnail size headshot of Keene included in the NPR article. Her subsequent blog post called out these critics for questioning her identity as an indigenous person and her ‘authority’ to discuss indigenous issues. However, Keene, through this controversy, reasserted the need to study and challenge stereotypical and racist representations of indigenous peoples. Keene proclaims:

but instead of feeling ashamed, I’m trying now to turn the tables and think that I, instead, am the colonizer’s worst nightmare. Because history has tried to eradicate my people by violence and force, enacted every assimilating and acculturating policy against my ancestors, let me grow up in white suburbia, and erased all the visual vestiges of heritage from my face—but still *tsi tsalagi* (I am Cherokee). My ancestors gave their “x-marks”—assents to the new—so that I could be here, fighting back against misrepresentations, through a keyboard and the Internet.<sup>1</sup>

In this moment, Keene grounds her identity as an indigenous person and her resistance to racial politics through the intimacies of her racialized body, of her hands on the keyboard, of her feelings of shame, of the Internet. But what does intimacy look like in cyberspace? In what ways are technologies personal, material, and intimate?

I explore these questions by drawing on feminist geography<sup>2</sup> literature and new media studies. I do so to put forward a new understanding of intimacy, which I call cyborg-intimacy. This concept emerges from an entanglement of the theories of the global intimate and of the spatiality, materiality, and experience of cyberspace. This

entanglement results in a specific type of intimacy that breaks the virtual/real binary and speaks to the embodied experiences of those in cyberspace. I focus on intimacy as outlined by Shaka McGlotten and other affect scholars and the concept of cyborg as theorized by Donna Haraway to push against essentialized notions of intimacy, of the global, of the local, and of cyberspace.

Specifically, this chapter is centered on three research questions: 1) What does intimacy look like in cyberspace? 2) What can a feminist geography lens bring to our understandings of experiences in cyberspace in terms of indigeneity and power? 3) Similarly, how can conceptualizations of the cyberspace compliment and extend understandings of the global intimate? To answer these questions, I begin by reviewing the scholarship on the materiality of cyberspace. Through this literature review, I demonstrate the need for new approaches that incorporate discussions of race and affect in cyberspace. One approach is the global intimate, a concept from feminist geography that argues that the global and the intimate cannot be separated. By connecting these bodies of literature, I put forth a new concept, cyborg-intimacy, to speak to the co-constitution of the virtual through the real and vice versa, which collapses the binary between the two. I put cyborg-intimacy to work through a case study of Dr. Adrienne Keene's NPR article and the responses to it, including Keene's own reaction as discussed above. In this case study, I analyze Keene's and others' discussions of racialized bodies, indigeneity, and cyberspace to confront scholars who argue that cyberspace is a disconnected, impersonal, and immaterial space.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that theories of cyberspace and the global intimate can productively be put in conversation with one another and showcase how cyborg-intimacy manifests and effects individuals/communities both on and offline. Using these bodies of literature, I discuss the embodied practices of the Internet to

counteract those who might rebuff cyberspace as disembodied. Specifically, this chapter aims to make three critical interventions: 1) The feminist geography framing of the global intimate can help scholars in new media think through the spatiality of cyberspace and consider how this is an embodied space in which identities, bodies, and subjectivities matter, 2) Feminist geographers would benefit from a more in-depth examination of the Internet as a site of investigation given that cyberspace is rarely discussed in the literature, and 3) The concept of cyborg-intimacy is important in acknowledging the ways that the virtual and real are co-constituted as the virtu-real and are linked through technology but also through human bodies, touch, and feelings.

### **THE GLOBAL INTIMATE IN FEMINIST GEOGRAPHIES**

In this chapter, I use the concept of the global intimate from feminist geographies to argue against new media scholars who support the belief that the Internet is an open, infinite space where any individual with access can be anyone and say/do anything. While there have been emerging critiques on this perspective, this discourse about cyberspace is still prominent and problematic, particularly for indigenous users. Furthermore, while there is a growing body of literature on race and identity formation in cyberspace, there are important gaps in this field. Some of these gaps include: understanding how this space is shaped by computer architecture/programmers and designers/institutions, analyzing the spatial politics of cyberspace, outlining how other identities (aside from race) are articulated online, and, most importantly, dissecting the connections between material embodiment, feelings, and cyberspace.

Using a global intimate framework, as outlined by feminist geographers, can speak to some of these gaps, specifically the connection between materiality, emotions, and cyberspace. I use the global intimate, defined by authors Alison Mountz and Jennifer

Hyndman as “embodied social relations”, to describe the ways that scales<sup>3</sup> are collapsed in cyberspace and to consider how using/being a part of cyberspace is a very intimate, embodied practice.<sup>4</sup> Thus, using this framework extends new media scholarship by emphasizing the co-constitution of the global and local, here also read as the virtual and real. Additionally, reading the global intimate through cyberspace demonstrates the close connections between the two bodies of literatures and urges feminist geographers to consider digital technologies and the Internet, sites that are currently understudied in this literature, as critical for investigation.

One of the major journals that outlines this body of literature is *Women’s Studies Quarterly* Fall 2006 special edition titled, “The Global and the Intimate.” Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner in their introduction state that their goal is to show, “how the intimate and global intertwine, to try and disrupt grand narratives of global relations by focusing on the specific, the quotidian, and the eccentric.”<sup>5</sup> Motivated by the desire to dispel the false binary in feminist geography of “the personal is the political,” the authors argue that the personal was already political and the political was always personal.<sup>6</sup> Through a discussion of the importance of the tactile and the affective elements of intimacy, Pratt and Rosner argue that feminists, “have the responsibility to approach the world in intimate ways” and the articles included in the special edition journal do just that.<sup>7</sup>

One of the articles from this journal is Mountz and Hyndman’s “Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate.” In this work, the authors review recent literature on the global and globalization to show how feminist scholars have, “reclaimed the global through the *intimate*,” where the intimate is classified as, “embodied social relations that include mobility, emotion, materiality, belonging, alienation.”<sup>8</sup> Mountz and Hyndman further assert that while other feminist scholars may see the global and local as two very

separate and distinct frameworks, “these discrete categories are best understood as constitutive of one another.”<sup>9</sup> By focusing their work around the border, home, and body, the authors posit that, “each site blurs the global and the intimate into the fold of quotidian life.”<sup>10</sup> In this work, Mountz and Hyndman also argue for the inability to disconnect the global from the intimate, as, “they are neither separate spheres nor bounded subjects.”<sup>11</sup> Their positioning of the body as fundamental to the conceptualization of the global intimate is crucial here, because it centers the body as the most intimate scale to experience the global and as a key site for analysis.

Another important article from this special edition is Gill Valentine’s “The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Maintaining and Creating Relationships.” Valentine challenges the notion that intimacy requires physical proximity by examining intimacy and globalization on the Internet.<sup>12</sup> As one of the few articles that uses the global intimate framework to interrogate the Internet, Valentine makes this argument using empirical data gathered from Internet studies conducted in the UK with families, teachers, and LGBTQ youth. The author begins by discussing the ways that, “the Internet provides a new space for maintaining intimacy...for both families living together apart and those living apart together.”<sup>13</sup> By dissecting the dynamics of intimacy that are mediated through cyberspace, Valentine argues that the Internet is used to develop familial intimacy by, “facilitating information and knowledge to be exchanged between family members online; enabling obligations to care for or support each other...and allowing emotion, trust, and response to flow among the family regardless of individual’s geographical locations.”<sup>14</sup> The author then explores other types of intimacies that occur in/on/through cyberspace, focusing specifically on LGBTQ youth and how they develop and access supportive communities and find sexual partners. Through this example, Valentine highlights, “the complex ways in which the Internet co-constitutes

the local/global as sites of lesbian and gay sexuality, while also reconfiguring divisions between what is considered ‘public’ and ‘private,’ creating complex geometries of intimacy.”<sup>15</sup> Valentine’s work is critical to my own theorizations of the global intimate because it quantitatively argues that intimacy is not bounded by proximity – it can occur across and through cyberspace.

Beyond this special edition, Patricia Price explores the global intimate in her work, “Race and Ethnicity II: Skin and Other Intimacies.” Price argues that skin serves as a contact point between the global and the local, and these “intimate spatialities of race and ethnicity” are connected not only to conceptions of place but also to the viscosity and malleability of racialized embodiment.<sup>16</sup> However, not many geographers have considered skin and its connections to legacies of racialized power because of the challenges of studying and discussing racial phenotypes without reifying those same categories.<sup>17</sup> Price pushes her readers to consider sensory engagements (smell, taste, sound, etc.) as another contact point of the global intimate. Here, the author focuses specifically on the possibilities for understanding racialized global intimacies by analyzing touch, approximation, distancing, and bordering.<sup>18</sup> Price ends this piece by discussing the benefits to geographers who engage with the material global intimate, which include: new perspectives on criticality (what counts as a political subject and geographers’ engagement with activism), thinking through the transformative possibilities of place opened by the stickiness of race, and a renewed focus on the visceral materiality of racial geographies.

These works outline some of the major theorizations of the global intimate in feminist geography. Through the global intimate, these authors argue for the collapsing of the global/local binary and the recognition of the co-construction of these sites. Furthermore, these authors strongly advocate for an embodied and material approach to

understanding the global intimate, particularly as it relates to the forces of globalization. However, this framework allows me to posit a new concept that brings these two bodies of literature together and accounts for the virtu-real body and its material interactions with technologies.

### **CYBORG-INTIMACY**

Although the global intimate perspective does help to fill the gaps of new media scholarship on the virtu-real, there is still no framework for think through intimacy in cyberspace. While scholars of affect, race, and cyberspace – like McGlotten – are beginning to consider these intersections, I want to posit a new term, cyborg-intimacy, to consider the ways that intimacy happens in/on/through cyberspace. I define cyborg-intimacy as the embodied closeness a user feels/creates/presses against/moves through when interacting with technologies. Given the terms dual-word origins, it is important to consider the genealogy of this new term and what it means for scholars of new media and feminist geographies.

### **Cyborg**

Cyborg is defined as a theoretical and fictional being that is both organic (human) and biomechanical (machine). Cyborg, as a word, originally debuted in a journal article from *Astronautics* titled “Cyborgs and Space,” written by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in 1960. Clynes coined the word to “describe an emerging hybrid of man’s machines and man himself.”<sup>19</sup> Although the term now has many different meanings, for the authors, “the interface between the organism and the technology was just a means, a way of enlarging the human experience...The cyborg was not less human, but more.”<sup>20</sup> For Clynes and Kline, there was a very intimate relationship between humans and technology needed in order to achieve space travel.

One of the most prominent and well-known theorizations of the cyborg is Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," from her text *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. In this article, Haraway anchors her work in the image of the cyborg, which she defines in four distinct ways: "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction."<sup>21</sup> Through the image of the cyborg, Haraway argues that we are all cyborgs, and that "it gives us our politics," because the cyborg, "is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation."<sup>22</sup> Haraway sees the cyborg as post-human, surpassing identities like gender and race, which she believes is made possible by specific border crossings, or the breaking of specific binaries (animal/human, human/machine, real/virtual).<sup>23</sup> Taking the concept of the cyborg, Haraway then applies it to feminist politics and the need for affinity, rather than identity politics.<sup>24</sup> As she continues, Haraway analyzes the feminization of poverty through the emerging homework economy, a term borrowed from Richard Gordon to refer to the growing trend of women working in manufacturing and other laboring positions outside of the home. By understanding this new economy, Haraway then dissects its effects on the lives of women, and specifically on the breakdown of the public/private dichotomy. Through the metaphor of an integrated circuit, Haraway argues women today live in a world, "intimately restructured through the social relations of science and technology," that blurs the distinctions between the home, the market, and the state.<sup>25</sup> As Haraway moves to conclude this article, she thanks the work of women of color scholars, like Audre Lorde and Cherrie Moraga, and positions women of color, specifically those working in electronic factories, as cyborgs.<sup>26</sup> Haraway ends "A Cyborg Manifesto" by claiming, "the machine is not an 'it' to be animated, worshipped, and dominated. The



machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us.”<sup>27</sup> For Haraway, the imagery of the cyborg is, “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.”<sup>28</sup> While some have embraced Haraway’s theorization of the cyborg, others are more critical this work, specifically her depictions of laboring women of color as non-human cyborgs, her utopian vision of cyberspace that is free of gender, and her dismissal of identity politics.<sup>29</sup> While I agree with many of the criticisms lodged against Haraway, there is great value in considering her theorization of cyborg and its challenge of dualisms. In my theorization of cyborg-intimacy, I am more concerned with the ways that intimacy is expressed and how this speaks to the virtu-real body rather than calling humans or other beings cyborgs.

### **Intimacy**

The second major component of my concept is intimacy. Although intimacy has been utilized most frequently to discuss sexual relationships<sup>30</sup>, I define intimacy more broadly as a feeling of closeness. This closeness can be with anyone or anything, both tangible and intangible. Intimacy is generally established through physical touch or emotions, but I do not limit intimacy to only be achieved through these two methods. I purposefully leave open the possibility of establishing intimacy through a myriad of different relationships and mechanisms.

While the definition of intimacy is hard to pin down, two bodies of literature that have strongly contended with intimacy are postcolonial theory and affect theory. Ann Stoler’s postcolonial work in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*<sup>31</sup> and *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*<sup>32</sup> showcases the centrality of intimacy through its dictation of sexual and

racial politics in imperial and colonial discourses and policies. Other scholars have taken her work and expanded this relationship to understanding mobility<sup>33</sup>, queerness<sup>34</sup>, space<sup>35</sup>, and neoliberalism<sup>36</sup>. Another important body of literature that utilizes intimacy is affect theory. Affect scholars, like Ahmed,<sup>37</sup> Bennett,<sup>38</sup> Cvetkovich,<sup>39</sup> and McGlotten<sup>40</sup> use intimacy to consider the unnamed affects that shape peoples' identities and experiences. From a queer and feminist perspective, McGlotten states that:

Intimacy describes: a feeling of connection or a sense of belonging; embodied and carnal sensuality, that is, sex; and that which is most inward or inmost to one's personhood. Intimacy is also a vast assemblage of ideologies, institutional sites, and diverse sets of material and semiotic practices that exert normative pressures on larger and small bodies, lives, and world. In contemporary U.S. culture, intimacy names the affective encounters with other that often matter most, while also functioning as a juridical form, an aspirational narrative, and therapeutic culture's *raison d'être*. All of this is to say that intimacy refers to things we feel and do, and it is a force.<sup>41</sup>

I include all of McGlotten's definitions of intimacy to show the multiplicity of this term and the possibilities connected to it through an affective lens.

Given the genealogy of these two terms, I define cyborg-intimacy as the embodied closeness a user feels/creates/presses against/moves through when interacting with technologies. This intimacy collapses the virtual/real binary, rendering the user's body as virtu-real – simultaneously in, outside, through, and of cyberspace. Breaking this binary is vital in theorizing the formation of identities and relationships in cyberspace and also for working against the disembodied discourses that undergird conceptualizations of cyberspace. The remainder of this chapter will put my concept of cyborg-intimacy to work through a specific case study from my research on indigenous experiences in cyberspace, which focuses specifically on skin and racialized bodies, touch and sense, and affect as sites of cyborg-intimacy.

## **METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS**

The case study presented below comes predominantly from an NPR story on Dr. Adrienne Keene and from Keene's blog *Native Appropriations*. These interactions were documented and coded through NVivo for language and their generated network of interaction (who else commented and why). Aside from Keene's comments, all of the other online respondents have been made anonymous in this analysis. I employed this measure because of the potential for participants to be harassed or harmed because of their identity and/or participation in this study. These interactions were then analyzed using a critical discursive analysis. Identifying and analyzing the discourse produced by indigenous peoples and by others in cyberspace will allow me to see what forces frames this space and the ways it effects indigenous users' experiences online. However, I recognize that this work is limited in two areas. First, my case study approach provides an imperfect perspective into these online discussions. I cannot capture all interactions and in many ways do not wish to take on such an endeavor. However, I contend that this small snapshot has as much to tell us as a longer study. Additionally, the analysis is limited by my narrowed platform approach. Here, I focus only on blogs, rather than delving into other forms of social media that are attached to this story, such as Twitter responses or Facebook posts about Keene's blog.

## **CASE STUDY**

This case study centers on the publication by NPR of an interview with Dr. Adrienne Keene on the challenges indigenous students face getting into and being in college. Following the publication of this interview on July 27, 2014, Internet users, both indigenous and nonindigenous, began commenting on one small aspect of this online publication: Keene's headshot. Through the comments left on the NPR forum and those left on the article's Facebook posting, Keene was attacked because "she looks white and

grew up far from the reservation.”<sup>42</sup> In response to this, Keene published a blog post on her popular blog *Native Appropriations* to comment on her work and her indigenous identity. Titled, “‘She’s so pale’: The good and bad of national exposure,” the post challenges those who base her indigeneity in her skin tone and reaffirms the importance of the work she does on cultural appropriations and misrepresentations of indigenous identity. The publication of this blog post garnered a slew of support for Keene as seen in the blog’s comment forum and its publication on Facebook on the *Native Appropriations* Facebook. By investigating the backlash against Keene, her reply, and the response by others on her blog post, I argue that there are three sites through which Keene and other commenters depict cyborg-intimacy: through skin and the racialized body, through touch and sense, and through feelings and affect. After outlining the major events of this case study, I will explore these three sites using a global intimate framework to show the co-constitution of the real and virtual in cyberspace, what I call cyborg-intimacy.

### **NPR’s “Q&A How is the Native College Experience Different?”**

Published on July 17, 2014, NPR’s “Q&A How is the Native College Experience Different?” focused on an interview with Dr. Adrienne Keene, a post-doctoral researcher at Brown University, author of the prevalent blog on cultural appropriation of indigenous identity *Native Appropriations*, and a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. In this interview, Keene discusses her PhD research on indigenous students’ college admissions process and her work with College Horizon, a nonprofit that helps indigenous students navigate higher education. While much of the discussion centered on the sense of native pride that Keene and College Horizon tries to instill in indigenous students, Keene does comment on the historical tensions between indigenous peoples and the U.S.

education system, particularly the centuries of removal of indigenous children from their homes for “(re)education” in boarding schools. Keene states:

Historically in Native communities, formalized Western education was used as a tool of cultural genocide, a tool of assimilation...For so many decades and generations, this idea of going off to school meant losing your Native culture. It meant that part of you was forcibly erased. You weren't allowed to speak your language. You weren't allowed to practice your culture. That is a legacy that occurred up until the 1960s and '70s, so this isn't ancient history.<sup>43</sup>

At the end of this interview, the author, Juana Summers, asks Keene about her own journey through higher education, having recently graduated with a PhD in Culture, Communities, and Education from the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. Keene says, “my friends in high school didn't really know about the Native side of me because I grew up in San Diego with them. I looked like them. I had my California accent. I did everything that they did.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, Keene confesses that, “there was a lot of resentment that I had somehow 'cheated the system' or I had faked this or it wasn't real.”<sup>45</sup> Summer then asks what makes an indigenous students’ experience different from that of a student of color. Keene responds and states, “there's this piece of our identity that is different in that we are citizens of sovereign nations...to me, I see college and Native students going off to college as a fulfillment of those treaty rights.”<sup>46</sup>

I include the context and main points of this article to show how few of the comments Keene received because of this article relate to her arguments about the collegiate experiences indigenous students. The comments focus almost entirely on Keene’s appearance as documented in the small headshot included in the NPR article. Many commenters connect her appearance, specifically her light skin tone, to their perceptions of her (non)identity as an indigenous woman and her authority to speak on indigenous issues.

After its publication, the article quickly circulated online and garnered attention both on the comment forum included on NPR's website (which gained 75 comments, even under NPR's strict posting guidelines) and the Facebook posting of the article on NPR's website (which got 1,054 likes and over 450 shares through Facebook).<sup>47</sup> While many commenters praised Keene and her work, others attacked. In NPR's blog forum, one commenter wrote, "she looks white and grew up far from the reservation in San Diego. It seems to me that she has appropriated a culture that doesn't really belong to her. Speaking as someone with enough of a native background that people regularly ask me if I am Indian."<sup>48</sup> This comment received 26 positive votes from other commenters in the forum space. Another commented on the blog forum stating:

Wow! Quite impressive educational background! I can only imagine this gal "working hard" to get where she's at now. First of all...I think you found yourself in college. Put on some turquoise earrings, some beads, hung out with the "Native" crowd and maybe learned how to introduce yourself in your Native language will legitimize yourself to your non-native colleges. I'm sick of urban Natives defining Native identity. Why don't you get over yourself and actually research real issues from the "reservations" and be humble about it! Instead of playing the game of getting published & the recognition! I attended a Native Feminist conference and was sad to see most of them looked like you! Yes! Pale skinned, urban chic, beautiful jewelry but didn't have a clue about issues beyond their academic knowledge. So keep catering to your white audiences that legitimizes you but us real Native women from Native communities see right through you! #privilegewhitegirl #StayinCali #Donthaveaclue #harvarddontmeanshit! #andreamsmith #isrelatedtoyou.<sup>49</sup>

These are only a few of the many comments made against Keene in NPR's forum and the Facebook post. As these comments indicate, both self-identified indigenous and nonindigenous users pick through the 'authenticity' of Keene's indigenous identity and question her position within these educational institutions.

### **“She’s so pale’: The good and bad of national exposure”: Keene’s Response**

Given the exposure Keene received because of this article, she published a blog post titled, “‘She’s so pale’: The good and bad of national exposure,” to speak out about her personal identity and her commitment to indigenous education. In this piece, she states that she has been overwhelmed by the amount of support she received because of this article, particularly given that much of her media presence is associated with her indigenous cultural appropriations blog and not with her doctoral research project. However, “they (NPR) included a headshot on the post. One that is the thumbnail every time the article gets shared. I didn’t even think twice about it—most people who know me and the blog know who I am and where I come from, and yes, what I look like. But I forgot, this is the internet.”<sup>50</sup> Keene is quick to state, however, that these are criticisms she frequently faces and that, “this article isn’t anything new.”<sup>51</sup> Through the remainder of this article, Keene discusses her identity and motivations to do work on indigenous cultural appropriation, asserting that, “the underlying motivation behind this blog is not only to critique and deconstruct representations of Natives, but also to be able to openly explore what it means to be a contemporary Native person. And more specifically for me, what does it mean to be a millennial, nerdy, doctorate-holding, mixed-race, Cherokee woman?”<sup>52</sup> In this blog post, like many of the others featured on *Native Appropriations*, Keene grounds her rebuttal to commenters in an incredibly personal, relationable way.

In response to this blog post, readers of Keene’s blog and others equally showered support on Keene and her work. The blog received 46 comments and the Facebook post on *Native Appropriations* page received 1,850 likes (including one like from myself) and over 1,090 shares through Facebook.<sup>53</sup> A self-identified Duwamish commenter wrote, “thank you so much for writing this article; I’ve been following Native appropriations for a few years now but haven’t felt compelled to comment until now. As a mixed-

race/white-passing indigenous woman, I've lived with this kind of ignorance for far too long.”<sup>54</sup> Another commented that, “I had a very similar experience when an image of me at a protest went viral earlier this year...It sucks that colonialists still want to be the arbiters of OUR identities and that we are often sought to JUSTIFY our existence as Indigenous peoples.”<sup>55</sup> The majority of commenters related Keene’s experience to their own, like one commenter who stated:

I am Native, but to many of the kids I went to school with, I was just another "white girl" with a card. It was not rare to be asked "How much are you?" and then scoffed at because I ‘should be darker for being a quarter Creek’...I am regularly condemned for the physical characteristics I received in the genetic lottery twenty years ago.<sup>56</sup>

Surprisingly, most of the commentary on this blog post was overwhelming positive, which I assume happened because of its smaller circulation through the blog and the blog’s Facebook page. These comments serve as an important counterpoint to earlier condemnations of Keene’s indigenous identity.

Looking to Keene’s NPR interview, her rebuttal, and the commentary swirling around the two serves as a vital case study in understanding indigenous experiences online. Keene, specifically given her prominence as an online indigenous voice, garners a large amount of very public backlash against herself and her work. Furthermore, this case study was chosen because it encapsulates a conversation. Rather than just discussing the overt racism that happens against indigenous Internet users, as seen in the NPR article’s comment forum, Keene’s blog post allowed her the (cyber)space to speak back to her commenters and more personally express her positionality. Additionally, her blog also fostered a new round of conversation, which Keene states in her blog post, “this NPR article has shown us that there is power in getting our stories out there, but that we still



have a ways to go. And that's ok...because learning about the ways we relate to one another, Native to Native and Native to non-Native, is at the heart of all of this work."<sup>57</sup>

### **FINDINGS: THREE SITES OF CYBORG-INTIMACY**

Through this case study, I have identified three sites through which Keene and other commenters depict cyborg-intimacy: through skin and the racialized body, through touch and sense, and through feelings and affect. Although I would argue any interaction with technology and the Internet demonstrates cyborg-intimacy, it is challenging to identity in cyberspace. Thus, using a global intimate framework and the scholarship from feminist geographers, these textual moments speak to the co-construction of the virtual in/on/through the real (the virtu-real) and the inseparability of these scales, all of which points to the cyborg-intimacy that occurs therein.

#### **Skin, Racialized Bodies, and Cyborg-Intimacy**

One of the central themes debates in this case study is Keene's skin, and, more specifically, the color of it. Although only a small part of the article, it seems that the photograph of her included in the NPR article was central to the backlash she received and her move against these racialized politics. As Keene states:

I am 98% positive that if this NPR article wasn't accompanied by a photo, we wouldn't be having this conversation. There is very little commentary challenging my ideas, or what I had to say about Native students transitioning to college—it's all focused on how I look. You wonder why I care so deeply about representations? *This* is why I care. Because all those people think that Native identity is tied to looking like something off the side of a football helmet.<sup>58</sup>

Keene's assertion demonstrates how users through a computer or phone screen can see and racialize Keene's body in very particular ways even without having ever interacted materially with it. Lisa Nakamura in her 2008 text, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*, contends with these issues of visual culture on the Internet and states that

“users of the Internet collaboratively produce digital images of the body – very particular things for very particular uses – in the context of racial and gender identity formation.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, she also recognizes that, “being permitted to exist is not the same as equal representation. Digital visual capital is a commodity that is not freely given to all; as has always been the case with capital of any kind, it must be negotiated and at times actively seized by those to whom it would otherwise not be given.”<sup>60</sup> This logic, which Nakamura terms racio-visual logic, allows race to be seen. However, this process happens in a complex and complicated context in which people of color and women are asserting their visualizations in a system built to cover them up. A visual culture framework shows the ways that users can see and racialize Keene’s body, through a computer or phone screen, even without having ever interacted with it.

However, Price’s “Race and ethnicity II: Skin and other intimacies” extends this notion of the racio-visual logic by focusing specifically on the intimacy of skin. In this case study, Keene’s visible skin becomes a “contact zone,” which “provides traction for the emergence of race and ethnicity.”<sup>61</sup> Recognizing skin as a contact zone, in fact one of the first major contact zones given it is the body’s largest organism and the one most associated with race, is particularly important given the viscosity of race. As Price states, “race involves blood and guts, both metaphorically and literally: the one drop of ‘colored’ blood it takes to make one black and the laws stemming from blood-based hypo-descent formulas policing touch, visibility, and movements of all sorts; the forceful histories of race played out on and through human bodies.”<sup>62</sup> Even though Keene’s skin is materially untouchable by other users, her phenotype, equitable by many to her race, is still visible through sight, and thus her virtu-real body is mapped with racialized histories and privileges as seen in the users’ comments. Cyborg-intimacy exhibits how through her

picture, Keene's skin is the center point of an international World Wide Web discussion about race and indigeneity.

### **Touch and Sense as Cyborg-Intimacy**

Another important way that cyborg-intimacy is seen in this analysis, which is closely related to skin, is seeing cyborg-intimacy through touch. Touch is one of the hardest manifestations of cyborg-intimacy to gauge because of the discourse built around cyberspace as a disembodied space. For many, the Internet is devoid of touch. One cannot simply reach through their computer screen and touch those with whom they are interacting. While critical race and feminist media scholars have challenged these notions, specifically Sassen's concept of embeddedness<sup>63</sup> that states that each user has different relations to digital technologies that are embedded in the present-tense, material, embodied lives, few have gone so far to consider the relationship between the user's hand and their digital technologies. For instance, does the movement of a mouse guided by the users hand display cyborg-intimacy? I say yes. Hyndman and Mountz conceptualization of the intimate as "embodied social relations that include mobility, emotion, materiality, belonging, alienation" is critical in making the argument for touch as cyborg-intimacy.<sup>64</sup> They argue that, "the intimate encompasses not only those entanglements rooted in the everyday, but also the subtlety of their interconnectedness to everyday intimacies in other places and times: the rough hands of the woman who labors, the shortness of breath of the child without medication, the softness of the bed on which one sleeps."<sup>65</sup> Through their investigation of the sites of the border, home, and body, I argue that touch, as mediated through the body and through technology, is a crucial example of cyborg-intimacy.

Keene's rebuttal from her blog demonstrates this manifestation of cyborg-intimacy in a very subtle way. Keene, when articulating her resistance against accusations about her race and skin tone states, as cited in the introduction:

But instead of feeling ashamed, I'm trying now to turn the tables and think that I, instead, am the colonizer's worst nightmare. Because history has tried to eradicate my people by violence and force, enacted every assimilating and acculturating policy against my ancestors, let me grow up in white suburbia, and erased all the visual vestiges of heritage from my face—but still *tsi tsalagi* (I am Cherokee). My ancestors gave their "x-marks"—assents to the new—so that I could be here, fighting back against misrepresentations, through a keyboard and the internet.<sup>66</sup>

Specifically here, the emphasis she places on the "fight back against misrepresentations through a *keyboard* and the *internet*" indicates that she uses her hands, her body, and her touches on a keyboard to fight for indigenous sovereignty through the Internet. The collapsing of the virtual/real binary results in this cyborg-intimacy that demonstrates how keystrokes are political actions.

### **Cyborg-Intimacy and Affect**

The final major example of cyborg-intimacy as displayed through this case study is affect and emotions. An emerging theme in feminist geography, "affect is the how of emotion."<sup>67</sup> While feminist geographers have tackled affect within their work<sup>68</sup>, new media studies have been slow to adopt affect as an important lens of analysis.<sup>69</sup> As such, employing a global intimate framework when analyzing this case study helps me to understand the ways that emotions are closely tied to intimacy, even cyborg-intimacy as it happens in cyberspace.<sup>70</sup> As Deborah Thein argues by, "turning away from a technocratic and distancing perspective on affect, a revisioning of emotion as part of an intersubjective process, as emphasized by some feminist and cultural scholars, acknowledges that distances between 'us' are always relational, and indeed that we are intimately subjected by emotion."<sup>71</sup>

Emotions and feelings are prominent throughout Keene's blog post and the comments in the forum. Keene states in her post that she has, "deep, deep anxieties about my new post-graduation life as 'Dr. K'— of entering academia with the weight and privilege of Native Approps behind me. I have actual nightmares of folks finding academic articles I write and lambasting my scholarship all over the internet."<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, Keene does not state that she is worried about this same kind of backlash in her material life; she believes that it is through cyberspace that her emotional fears could manifest and have an impact on her virtu-real body. Relatedly, her commenters rely heavily on emotions to convey their approval or disapproval with Keene's work. Commenters were "horrified," "reaffirmed," "sad," "frustrated," "disheartened," and "upset" over the criticism lodged at Keene.<sup>73</sup> One interesting example from the commenters was one who states, "Oh man. This post hit me deep...Your words resonate with me very much – I can't count the many many conversations where I have had to account for or justify my Native heritage to some very ignorant people because I 'look white...'"<sup>74</sup> This commenter's expression of how the "post hit me deep" does not land on a singular emotion or a singular language of emotion (fear, rage, anxiety, etc.); it speaks to the unrepresentable, the unknowable. It speaks to the affective character of Keene's blog. Because affect, all of these feelings, are mediated through cyberspace, cyborg-intimacy is an important framework to see the virtu-real sphere that is intimately shared and co-created by affect, the materiality of these bodies, the materiality of technology, histories of racism and settler colonialism, the discourse of globalization in new media, and many other elements.

These three sites – skin and the racialized body, touch and sense, and affect and feelings – showcase three distinct and different ways of reading cyborg-intimacy in cyberspace. By focusing on this specific case study of the publication, rebuttal, and

commentary around Adrienne Keene's work on indigenous education and her positionality as an indigenous researcher, I demonstrated the subtle and nuanced ways that the Internet, through online publications, blog posts, and Facebook comments, speaks to a new understanding of intimacy, what I call cyborg-intimacy. Using the concept of the global intimate from feminist geographies, I extended new media scholarship to account for the creation of the virtu-real, or the collapsing of the virtual/real binary in recognition of their co-constitution.

#### **AN EMBODIED ANALYSIS: A CALL FOR A CYBORG-INTIMATE PERSPECTIVE**

This chapter "Cyborg-intimacy: A Global Intimate Intervention in Cyberspace" bridged the gap between feminist geography and new media literature to argue for a new perspective to analyze cyberspace: a cyborg-intimate perspective. While new media scholars have begun to consider identity in cyberspace, few have elucidated on the relations between technology and the body. By focusing on conceptualizations of indigeneity seen on the Internet through Dr. Adrienne Keene's work and her blog *Native Appropriations*, I argued that the raced body, here specifically the indigenous body, cannot be disconnected from user experience in cyborg. They are co-constituted as the virtu-real through skin, touch, emotions – through material bodies. By recognizing cyborg-intimacy as an important framework, this thesis project reifies the importance of an embodiment analysis of cyberspace and showcases the ways that indigenous users are utilizing these new media technologies to discuss important issues, like race, and speak back to settler colonial forces that would silence their voices and erase their bodies from conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> Adrienne Keene, "'She's so Pale:' The good and bad of national exposure," *Native Appropriations*, November 29, 2014, <http://nativeappropriations.com/2014/07/shes-so-pale-the-good-and-bad-of-national-exposure.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Feminist geography is a subset of geography literature that focuses on bringing feminist theories, methods, and critiques into conversation with geography scholarship and themes, such as the environment, space, and society. Some of the major feminist geographers are: Gillian Rose, Doreen Massey, Linda McDowell, and Katherine McKittrick. I will further discuss feminist geography later in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Scale is an important measure in the discipline of geography. For many geographers, scale is about size, but this can be spatial, temporal or thematic size. Most geographers view scale in three basic ways: cartographic scale, like the relation between things on a map; analytic scale, like the units that a geographer uses to measure and understand their work; and phenomenon scale, like the larger sizes of the structures that shape our world and experiences. In this work, I use scale the mean the phenomenon scale as I work to collapse conceptualizations of the real and virtual. To learn more about scale see: Daniel Montello, "Scale in Geography," in *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes, eds., (Oxford, Pergamon Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Allison Mountz and Jennifer Hyndman, "Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 34(1-2), 447.

<sup>5</sup> Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner, "Introduction: The Global & the intimate," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 34(1-2), 2006, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Allison Mountz and Jennifer Hyndman, "Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate", 447.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 448.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Gill Valentine, "Globalizing Intimacy: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Maintaining and Creating Relationships," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 34(1-2), 2006, 368.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 370.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 377.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 388.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Price, "Race and ethnicity II: Skin and other intimacies," *Progress in Human Geography*, 37(4), 2012, 584.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 580.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 581 – 583.

<sup>19</sup> Alexis Madrigal, "The Man Who First Said 'Cyborg,' 50 Years Later," *The Atlantic*, September 3, 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2010/09/the-man-who-first-said-cyborg-50-years-later/63821/>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>21</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991), 291.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 292.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 292- 295.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 295.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 309.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 313.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 315.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 316.

<sup>29</sup> Stacy Alaimo, "Cyborg and ecofeminist interventions: challenges for an environmental feminism," *Feminist Studies*, 1994; Jessie Daniels, Rethinking cyberfeminism (s): Race, gender, and embodiment, *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37(1), 2009; Zillah Eisenstein, *Global Obscenities: Patriarchy, Capitalism, and the Lure of Cyberfantasy*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth, *Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); Radhika Gajjala, "South Asian Digital Diasporas and Cyberfeminist Webs: Negotiating Globalization, Nation, Gender, and Information Technology Design," *Contemporary South Asia* 12(1), 2003; Jasbir Puar, "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess": Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory," *PhiloSOPHIA* 2(1), 2012; Malini Schueller, "Analogy and (White) Feminist Theory: Thinking Race and the Color of the Cyborg Body," *Signs* 31(1), 2004; Matthew Wilson, "Cyborg geographies: towards hybrid epistemologies," *Gender, Place and Culture* 16(5), 2009.

<sup>30</sup> David Eng, *The feeling of kinship: Queer liberalism and the racialization of intimacy*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Elaine Hatfield and Richard Rapson, *Love, sex, and intimacy: Their psychology, biology, and history*, (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1993); Phil Hubbard, "Sex zones: Intimacy, citizenship and public space," *Sexualities* 4(1), 2001; Lynn Jamieson, "Personal Relationships, Intimacy, and the Self in a Mediated and Global Digital Age" in *Digital Sociology: Critical Perspective*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Haunted by empire: Geographies of intimacy in North American history*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal knowledge and imperial power: Race and the intimate in colonial rule*, (Lost Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Antonette Ballantyne and Tony Burton, *Moving subjects: gender, mobility, and intimacy in an age of global empire*, (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of age in Second Life: An anthropologist explores the virtually human*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Alison Blunt, *Domicile and diaspora: Anglo-Indian women and the spatial politics of home*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2011); Stephen Legg, "An intimate and imperial



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feminism: Meliscent Shephard and the regulation of prostitution in colonial India,” *Environment and planning. D, Society and space* 28(1), 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” *Social Text* 22(2), 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Jill Bennett, *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and contemporary art*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *An archive of feelings: Trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Shaka McGlotten, *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Juana Summer, “Q&A: How Is The Native College Experience Different?” *nprEd*, National Public Radio, July 27, 2014, [http://www.npr.org/blogs/ed/2014/07/27/334495350/q-a-how-is-the-native-college-experience-different?utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=npr&utm\\_term=nprnews&utm\\_content=20140727](http://www.npr.org/blogs/ed/2014/07/27/334495350/q-a-how-is-the-native-college-experience-different?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=20140727).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Keene in Juana Summer, “Q&A: How Is The Native College Experience Different?”.

<sup>45</sup> Juana Summer, “Q&A: How Is The Native College Experience Different?”.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> NPR, “Q&A: How is the Native College Experience Different?” Facebook status update, <https://www.facebook.com/NPR/posts/10152709585181756>; Juana Summer, “Q&A: How Is The Native College Experience Different?”.

<sup>48</sup> Juana Summer, “Q&A: How Is The Native College Experience Different?”.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Adrienne Keene, “‘She’s so Pale:’ The good and bad of national exposure,” *Native Appropriations*, July 29, 2014, <http://nativeappropriations.com/2014/07/shes-so-pale-the-good-and-bad-of-national-exposure.html>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Native Appropriations*, “‘She’s so Pale:’ The good and bad of national exposure,” Facebook status update, July 29, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/nativeappropriations?fref=ts>.

<sup>54</sup> Adrienne Keene, “‘She’s so Pale:’ The good and bad of national exposure.”

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 5.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 206 – 207.

<sup>61</sup> Patricia Price, “Race and ethnicity II: Skin and other intimacies, 584.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Saskisa Sassen, “Towards a sociology of information technology,” *Current Sociology*, 50(3), 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Allison Mountz and Jennifer Hyndman, “Feminist Approaches to the Global Intimate”, *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 447.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Adrienne Keene, “‘She’s so Pale:’ The good and bad of national exposure.”

<sup>67</sup> Deborah Thein, “After or beyond feeling?: a consideration of affect and emotion in geography,” *Area* 37(4), 2005, 451).

<sup>68</sup> Mike Crang and Divya Tolia-Kelly, “Nation, race and affect: senses and sensibilities at National Heritage sites,” *Environment and planning A.*, 42(10), 2010; Deborah Thein, “After or beyond feeling?: a consideration of affect and emotion in geography,”; Divya Tolia-Kelly, “Affect - an ethnocentric encounter?: Exploring the 'universalist' imperative of emotional/affectual geographies,” *Area* 38, 2006; Nigel Thrift, “Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect,” *Geografiska Annaler B* 86, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Marco Abel, *Violent affect: Literature, cinema, and critique after representation*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Jill Bennett, *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and contemporary art*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Patricia Clough, “Affect and control: rethinking the body ‘beyond sex and gender,” *Feminist Theory*, 4(3), 2000; Mark Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media*, (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>70</sup> Gill Valentine, “Globalizing Intimacy: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Maintaining and Creating Relationships,” 365.

<sup>71</sup> Deborah Thein, “After or beyond feeling?: a consideration of affect and emotion in geography,” 453.

<sup>72</sup> Adrienne Keene, “‘She’s so Pale:’ The good and bad of national exposure.”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

### **Chapter 3: Virtual Space as Third Space – Indigenizing Cyberspace**

On October 4, 2012, Facebook, the world's largest social networking website, reached 1 billion daily active users.<sup>1</sup> 1/7<sup>th</sup> of the world's population is now plugged into the social network, “connect(ing) with friends and family, discover(ing) what's going on in the world, and shar(ing) and express(ing) what matters to them” as the mission statement outlines.<sup>2</sup> One of the more exciting features of this social media platform is the Groups function. This option allows users to create, “dedicated spaces where you can share updates, photos or documents and message other group members...like family, teammates, or coworkers.”<sup>3</sup> With three distinct privacy options (open, closed, and secret), Groups has become one of the most popular features on Facebook. In fact, in 2010, the number of groups jumped from 52 million to over 620 million.<sup>4</sup> Considering this data is now over five years old, it is likely this number has only continued to grow. For indigenous Facebook users, there is a plethora of indigenous only Facebook Groups to join – groups for indigenous only singles, groups to share indigenous recipes, tribe specific groups, groups for indigenous actors, indigenous commerce groups, even groups to share educational literature for indigenous homeschoolers. While there is no specific count, it is likely, considering the hundreds of millions of Facebook Groups in existence, that there are thousands of indigenous centered Facebook Groups. But, what does it mean to participate in an indigenous centered Facebook Group? How are indigenous spaces built online? Can cyberspace be a tool to assist indigenous peoples in building communities, maintaining cultural identity, and enacting political change?

This chapter will tackle these questions in order to consider the ways that indigenous peoples are using these new media technologies to carve out indigenous spaces in cyberspace. Combining Bhabha's concept of third space, Bruyneel's work on

the third space of sovereignty, Ramirez’s work on native hubs, and other emerging work on community building online, I argue that cyberspace is an important landscape where indigenous peoples can come together in substantial and dynamic ways. Using three examples, I will outline how indigenous peoples have used cyberspace as a place to work toward the political goals of self-determination and sovereignty (the Idle No More social movement), to assert indigenous subjectivity (the space of CyberPowWow), and to foster and promote their history and epistemologies (the video game *Never Alone*, which was developed by the first indigenous-owned video game company in the U.S. and the Iñupiat peoples of Alaska). By employing a decolonial new media studies perspective, I argue that indigenous peoples are continually shaping this space and new media technologies as much as these technologies shape their daily lives. In no way are they passively moving through cyberspace. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith states in her work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, “we [Indigenous people] don’t need anyone else developing the tools which will help us to come to terms with who we are. We can and will do this work. Real power lies with those who design the tools – it always has. This power is ours.”<sup>5</sup> Tuhiwai Smith’s assertion and this chapter’s discussion on cyberspace as a virtual third space reaffirm that indigenous peoples have built and continue to build and indigenize new spaces and sites within cyberspace.

### **VIRTUAL SPACE AS THIRD SPACE**

In order to make an argument about virtual space as third space, it is critical to start by defining third space. Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha, in his text *The Location of Culture*, first theorized the concept of third space. Before discussing the third space, Bhabha outlines his thoughts on hybridity. Considering the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, Bhabha is interested in understanding how culture is

effected and changed through this relationship. When these two cultures meet, rather than the two coexisting separately or the colonizer's translating the colonized into a singular conquerable identity, something new, hybridity, is born. Hybridity is the meshing of the two cultures together, resulting in a new culture that both the colonizer and the colonized are mutually responsible in constructing. This mixing counters previous arguments that culture is somehow pure or static. Rather, culture is flimsy and needs to be seen from within its specific context. Hybridity is a significant concept because it can, "offer the opportunity for a counter-narrative, a means by which the dominated can reclaim shared ownership of a culture that relies upon them for meaning."<sup>6</sup>

Building off this theory of hybridity, Bhabha argues that in the moment hybridity emerges, "the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences."<sup>7</sup> This third space, as Bhabha theorizes, is where these cultures interact and the new hybrid culture develops. Furthermore, Bhabha claims that third space is a landscape where colonial authority is challenged, as it contains "restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity."<sup>8</sup> The newly constructed third space, which sits outside these normalized patterns, "allows for unanticipated forms of agency and resistance. It is a space where authority is negotiated, translated, and re-inscribed."<sup>9</sup> Third spaces, "subvert and transgress dominant meanings, negotiating new ones through their everyday life experiences."<sup>10</sup> In all, Bhabha's believes that third spaces can, "initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation," where the uneasiness can lead to cultural growth and ultimately permanent change.<sup>11</sup>

Although I take issue with the concept of postcoloniality, given the structure of settler colonialism all indigenous peoples currently live under, cyberspace exemplifies

Bhabha's metaphor of a third space. The characteristics of the virtual world meet many of Bhabha's criteria for a third space. This space functions outside the colonizer/colonized binary and creates a hybrid culture and space. However, this new space through hybridity does not erase the past and its injustices, but rather creates a space for new interpretations and perspectives. Virtual third space exists in the space between, pushing it outside the traditional dichotomy of the oppressor and the oppressed.

Other researchers have also begun examining the possibility of cyberspace as third space. Chamari Edirisinghe, Ryohei Nakatsu, Adrian David Cheok, and Johannes Widodo in their work, "Exploring the Spatiality of the Networked Social Media as the Third Space," indicate several ways that social media and third space theory interact. These include, how "third space (and social media) accommodates both tangibility and intangibility with no preferences, is counter hegemonic, is both imaginative and real, and is a space of negotiation, contestation, and re-articulating."<sup>12</sup> Considering these elements, the authors argue that:

social networking spaces have produced a space that operates with hegemonic parameters, yet accumulates different values in a form of being a collective social force, thus emerging beyond the binary division towards the Third space. The possibility of social networking spaces emerging as illusions that serve the state benevolence rather than producing the 'Other' space need to be argued separately with the fundamental changes those spaces are bringing in.<sup>13</sup>

While this work focuses primarily on social networking spaces, I would argue that these conceptualizations can be expanded to discuss and describe all of cyberspace.

Bhabha's postcolonial work in hybridity and third space is a compelling argument for thinking about the ways that colonized peoples, for this work specifically indigenous peoples, can affect changes against colonial systems and discourses. Considering that the processes of settler colonialism are still ongoing, finding these openings and occupying

these third spaces is critical in working toward self-determination and indigenous sovereignty.

### **‘IMAGINED’ COMMUNITIES IN THIS THIRD SPACE**

In connection to the concept of cyberspace as a virtual third space, one of the major ways this process occurs is through community building. One piece that speaks to Bhabha’s theories of hybridity and third space is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, published in 1999. This text, although not focused on virtual communities, does examine how new nations build identity around small, seemingly separated peoples. Identities are built, Anderson argues, around an imagined community where, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>14</sup> In relation to Bhabha, Anderson’s notions of imagined speaks the to in-between-ness of third spaces, spaces where new cultures and communities manifest. Although I am not sure about Anderson’s use of the word ‘imagined,’ which for me connotes that these could never be ‘real’ communities, Anderson’s descriptions of these types of communities without a doubt can be seen in cyberspace as individuals who are physically very separated and have no prior contact make friends, share ideas, and build communities.

Taking up Anderson’s work, many communication and media researchers have turned to his theories on imagined communities to examine how community is happening, being maintained, and being monitored in cyberspace. Some theorize about how communities are created and fostered through these medias.<sup>15</sup> Many argue that these online social medias and networks, like Twitter and YouTube, far surpass their initial simple purposes and are innovative and exciting spaces where virtual communities are

being built.<sup>16</sup> Utilizing Anderson's theory of imagined communities, "Imagining Twitter as an Imagined Community" by Anatoliy Gruzd, Barry Wellman and Yuri Takhteyev considers how Twitter, a microblogging social platform, can be used to form community. The authors describe various criteria for building community and then demonstrate how this functions through their research on one individual's Twitter feed. Some of these criteria include: common language, temporality, a creation of a virtual settlement through interactivity, a variety of communicators, a common public place where members can meet and interact, sustained membership, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.<sup>17</sup> Their work is groundbreaking in thinking through and confirming how real communities are being formed online regardless of physical interaction and spatial differences. Although "Imagining Twitter" only focuses on one form of social media, I argue that these factors are working in one shape or another across all of cyberspace. This is based on the growing interconnectedness of cyberspace. Tweets are posted on Facebook, YouTube videos shared through Tumblr, blog posts distributed over Google+. For indigenous peoples, this interconnectedness means that decolonization and other indigenous-led projects can be crafted and shared throughout cyberspace, potentially leading to changes offline.

Another text that explores Anderson's theory in cyberspace is "Imagined communities in cyberspace," by Kathryn Pentecost. In this work, the author asserts that recent media technologies have allowed new communities to form, particularly through the use of the Internet. Pentecost explores what these communities might mean by looking to her family's mixed-raced past and her identity as a Dutch-Indonesian living in Australia.<sup>18</sup> While not often recognized for mixed ancestry because of her pale complexion, Pentecost has recently discovered, "a community of people who immediately understood my situation...my 'hybrid ancestry,' but...(also) shared stories



and information about Indonesia's history under Dutch colonialism, WWII, and life under Japanese occupation."<sup>19</sup> On Facebook, Pentecost encountered groups like the *Dutch-Indonesian discussion group* and *The Indo Project* where people share their experiences and their family histories through stories and photographs. Pentecost describes both sites as "locations where cultural transmission and interaction regularly take place" in which the style of the community is "imagined as pluralistic, fluid, inclusive, and empathetic."<sup>20</sup> Through the author's discussion of this place, it appears that these sites are multi-lingual and used by individuals for a number of different purposes. Pentecost ends this work by stating, "the Internet – through email social networking sites, personal blogs, online publications, podcasts, and other forms – offers myriad opportunities for people all over the world to reconceptualize themselves as both individuals and communities."<sup>21</sup> When specifically thinking about the Dutch-Indo diaspora, the author posits that, "cyberspace is a realm where people can ease some of their persistent *heimwee* (homesickness) and where younger generations can uncover the background to the more traumatic parts of the family stories that their parents and grandparents have been reluctant to share," but also, "it serves as an avenue for young 'Indos' to discuss social expectations, consider how to shaped their own destiny, and perhaps even influence the evolution of their nation's identity."<sup>22</sup>

Pairing Bhabha's work on third space with Anderson's concept of imagined communities builds a framework for discussing a virtual third space where indigenous peoples can form their own spaces and communities. As such, cyberspace becomes a landscape where third space politics and communities can manifest, grow, and create change.

## INDIGENEITY AND VIRTUAL THIRD SPACES

Having sketched the theoretical foundations for the virtual third space framework, it is crucial to partner these concepts with indigenous theories of third space and community. One text that discusses indigenous third space is Kevin Bruyneel's 2007 work *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S. Indigenous Relations*. Bruyneel takes on the task of exposing a history of third space occupation by indigenous peoples in the United States. He demonstrates the multiple ways that the U.S. government and other settler forces have worked to limit the power and capabilities of indigenous peoples. In resistance, indigenous political actors work against these forces by utilizing a third space of sovereignty where they can voice their political needs. Using Bhabha's analytic of the third space, Bruyneel argues this third space is "neither simply insider nor outside the American political system but rather exists on the very boundaries, exposing both the practices and contingencies of American colonial rule."<sup>23</sup> One important feature of Bruyneel's theorization, however, is that these borders are fluid and permeable. As such, these borders, as third spaces, become the "sites of co-constitutive interaction" that shape relationships between indigenous peoples and the American settler colonial state.<sup>24</sup> To depict this third space in action, Bruyneel utilizes an interdisciplinary model to examine relations and policies between indigenous peoples and the U.S. government, predominantly focusing on these relations after the American Civil War. In all, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S. Indigenous Relations* complicates assumptions about the political relationship between indigenous peoples and settler governments. By looking to borders, Bruyneel argues that, "boundary-crossing allows us to see these indigenous historical and spatial boundaries as legitimate, supplemental ways to mark out and map a people's place in North America, in the third space."<sup>25</sup> As he suggests, because indigenous peoples are situated inside and outside of

the political sphere, the third space of sovereignty is vital for working toward politics of decolonization. While Bruyneel does not specifically relate his theory to cyberspace, I assert that cyberspace manifests as one possible iteration or site of the third space of sovereignty. The analysis in this chapter will demonstrate, using the three examples, how this is possible.

One significant component of these virtual third spaces, as discussed above, is community. While Bruyneel focuses solely on the political, other indigenous scholars have considered indigenous ways of community building. An essential work that outlines this is Renya Ramirez's *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*. In this vivid ethnography, Ramirez discusses the ways that indigenous peoples in California's Santa Clara Valley negotiate transnational identities and communities, specifically speaking on, "how urban Native Americans who travel back and forth from city to reservation can strengthen and reinvigorate their culture and identity."<sup>26</sup> Building from indigenous activist Laverne Robert's notion of hub, Ramirez argues that the concept of 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."<sup>27</sup> Most importantly, Ramirez acknowledges that some hubs, "are not based in space but include virtual activities, such as reading the tribal newsletter on the Internet and emailing."<sup>28</sup> Using example such as the Muwekma Ohlone's struggle to maintain identity with federal recognition, the incredible women at the center of indigenous hubs in these communities, and the transnational hub created through a coming together of indigenous peoples in the U.S. and Mexico, Ramirez challenges conceptions of citizenship, of indigeneity, and of community. In the chapter on young indigenous peoples in Silicon Valley, Ramirez centers their narratives and experiences with race, identity, and transnationalism. At the end of *Native Hubs*, she

states, “these urban hubs, literal and virtual, reinvigorate and redefine what it means to be Native American and living in the city. Indeed, these urban Indian teenagers and young adults embody how the next generation of urban Native Americans can continue to reinvigorate indigenous culture and tradition.”<sup>29</sup> Ramirez’s theory of native hubs demonstrates an essential aspect of indigenous community that is present in cyberspace: the lack of a need to be grounded in a physical space. Because Ramirez’s participants, and many other indigenous peoples, move from urban to rural to virtual spaces, community building needs to be flexible and account for these different indigenous formations. Furthermore, the concept of native hubs challenges Western colonial understandings of community and reasserts a need to consider culturally specific community constructions.

In addition to Ramirez’s work on native hubs, other indigenous scholars have considered how indigenous communities manifest and are sustained in cyberspace. Kristy Belton, in her work “From cyberspace to offline communities: Indigenous peoples and global connectivity,” analyzed two places, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and cyberspace, where indigenous peoples “make their claims, foment alliances, and assert their right of self-determination, among other aims.”<sup>30</sup> Belton argues that cyberspace, “is less regulated than other environments and is not bound to a given physical territory or owned by a particular ethnic group or state.”<sup>31</sup> For Belton, “cyberspace thus allows those who are marginalized to speak more easily in their own voices without having to go through approved representatives or channels.”<sup>32</sup> While I do not completely disagree, I would also state that while marginalized peoples have unique ways to speak out and participate in activism online, there are still many institutional and individual forces working against them. While the author does later discuss how the Internet can have negative consequences on indigenous peoples and indigenous ways of

life, Belton focuses on the positive possibilities of the Internet. The author states that most indigenous websites now focus on two major functions: information sharing and solidarity building.<sup>33</sup> Although Belton acknowledges that most of the literature comes from the global North, the author asserts that cyberspace is where, “myths and stereotypes can be challenged, human-rights violations reported, consensual knowledge shared, and claims asserted.”<sup>34</sup>

Taken together, Bruyneel’s, Ramirez’s, and Belton’s texts show that cyberspace functions as an important virtual third space – for political activity, for asserting indigenous identity, and for community building. While none of the authors explicitly make this argument, putting their theories in conversations with one another demonstrates the need to consider cyberspace as a virtual third space where indigenous peoples can speak back to the settler colonial forces shaping their lives on and offline. Using the virtual third space framework, I will discuss three examples that exhibit the potential possibilities of cyberspace to function as a virtual third space. These examples, which center on politics, identity, and community, show not only how cyberspace has been a significant third space for these peoples, but also the ways that indigenous peoples are shaping and indigenizing cyberspace to meet their own needs.

## **METHODS AND LIMITATIONS**

In order to showcase indigenous community building in cyberspace, I employed a different approach than the other chapter of this thesis project. Where as the previous chapter centered on close readings of specific conversation, this chapter takes a wider stance to sketch a few different ways that indigenous peoples and communities are using and contributing to cyberspace. As part of this methodological process, I will discuss the indigenous moment, space, or tool and then further scrutinize these examples through the

virtual third space framework that I have outlined above. This method is exploratory and aimed at surveying some of these third spaces in order to make larger claims about indigenous peoples and communities in, on, and around cyberspace.

This methodology is limited in two ways. First, while this review does hope to capture some of the innovative ways that indigenous peoples are using and contributing to cyberspace, by no means does it capture all the ways. In fact, these three examples are likely on a drop in the bucket, considering the size of cyberspace. Second, while the other chapter took a more nuanced approach in studying indigeneity in cyberspace, this chapter functions more as a survey than an in-depth analysis on one moment or moments. As such, some might have issues with the generalizability of this research. However, in this work, these specific examples are exciting, significant, and critical perspectives needed to analyze indigenous cyberspace.

#### **CYBERSPACE AS A POLITICAL TOOL: IDLE NO MORE**

One way that cyberspace functions as a virtual third space is as a tool to form communities and fight for political change. There are no better examples of this than the Idle No More social movement that began in Canada in December 2012.<sup>35</sup> What is so significant about this movement as it relates to cyberspace is that much of this social movement has been coordinated through social media. In fact, the first time the phrase “idle no more” was used comes from a tweet dated October 30, 2012, from one of the founders, Jessica Gordon.



Figure 1: The first Idle No More Tweet. Available from: “Idle No More – A Living History,” [http://www.idlenomore.ca/living\\_history](http://www.idlenomore.ca/living_history).

Idle No More began as a response to Canada’s Bill C-45, which removed protections for waters that run through First Nations’ land from the Navigable Waters Protection Act.<sup>36</sup> The changes in this act threatened the health and sustainability of this water and waterways for indigenous peoples. In order to protest this bill and protect these waterways, three indigenous women and one nonindigenous woman (Nina Wilson, Sheelah Mclean, Sylvia McAdam and Jessica Gordon) came together to begin the Idle No More Movement.<sup>37</sup> The women started a Facebook Group on November 29, 2012, to collaborate and plan for action, deciding to name the page Idle No More “as a reminder ‘to get off the couch and start working.’”<sup>38</sup> However, authors Terry Wotherspoon and John Hansen state that it is imperative to remember that the movement has, “longstanding historical roots located within struggles to define and maintain Indigenous identity and foster effective Indigenous nationhood.”<sup>39</sup> These women organized the first protest, a

teach-in at Station 20 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and quickly the movement gained traction among indigenous and First Nations peoples in Canada. Using social media, specifically the #idlenomore hashtag, organizers planned and held grassroots rallies, flash mobs, marches, blockades and a National Day of Action on December 10, 2012.



Figure 2: Idle No More Poster. Available: “Idle No More – A Living History,” [http://www.idlenomore.ca/living\\_history](http://www.idlenomore.ca/living_history).

One of the most infamous protests during the early days of the Idle No More Movement was Chief Theresa Spence’s (Attawapiskat) 44-day liquid hunger strike. She stated that, “I am in this resistance because the pain became too heavy. I just could not take it anymore.”<sup>40</sup> The protests became more public and stories about the Idle No More movement spread across cyberspace, especially when Bill C-45 passed on December 14, 2012. As Chief Spence continued her hunger strike, a national day of protest was organized for December 21, 2012, and more than 1,000 protestors marched on Parliament Hall in Canada.<sup>41</sup> While indigenous leaders attempted to have meetings with then Prime Minister Harper and other governmental officials, protests continued in Canada and



spread globally. On January 10, 2013, the founders of the Idle No More movement outlined their vision and goals on their website, stating:

The Vision [...] revolves around Indigenous Ways of Knowing rooted in Indigenous Sovereignty to protect water, air, land and all creation for future generations. The Conservative government bills beginning with Bill C-45 threaten Treaties and this Indigenous Vision of Sovereignty. The movement promotes environmental protection and indigenous sovereignty. It plans to accomplish these goals by: (A) Implementing leadership structure and councils (Such as the Council of Women) (B) Taking training in coordinating rallies, media, messaging and safety issues as well as in identifying provocateurs, misinformation skills, and propaganda. (C) Placing key spokespeople and connecting with experienced experts in different areas; i.e. treaty research, indigenous rights and governance, environmental activism, writers, international spokesperson, national etc. (D) Creating chapters across Turtle Island under the umbrella of the main INM. (E) Requesting regular meetings with First Nations leadership to have ongoing discussions regarding third party agreements between the Government of Canada and industry corporations.<sup>42</sup>

On January 11, 2013, Prime Minister Harper met with a delegation of First Nation leaders, including Chief Spence. The small grassroots movement had ballooned to a full-blown defense of indigenous sovereignty and lands. However, the only commitment founders and protesters received came from Canada's Governor General, which entailed "a commitment by government leaders to hold further talks to recognize and modernize the terms of historical treaties signed between First Nations and the crown."<sup>43</sup> But, as time has shown, not much changed following this interface. As such, the movement continues on. Niigan Sinclair, following the two year anniversary of the beginning of the movement states, "while the round dances in malls and marches have subsided, the hunger fasts on Victoria Island have ended and the calls for resistance to fast-tracked omnibus legislation has quieted, there is more collective action led by indigenous grassroots peoples throughout Canada than ever before."<sup>44</sup> Authors Terry Wotherspoon and John Hansen echo this statement asserting:

it is in fact very much alive and vital in and beyond Indigenous communities. Idle No More has not disappeared but has demonstrated its deep roots as part of an established system of cultural teachings and values that advocate respect for the environment that has been continuously reproduced to the present time. Idle No more speaks of modern Indigenous interpretations of development that are rooted in the ideology of future wellbeing of succeeding generations.<sup>45</sup>

One of the key elements of the Idle No More movement, which is made obvious through its history, is social media and cyberspace. Facebook, Twitter, and other sites were and are used by this movement to communicate information, voice outrage, build community, and show solidarity. In fact, Makook, an online application, has been tracking the use of the #idlenomore hashtag since its very first use.<sup>46</sup> On December 1, 2012, the hashtag was used 10 times. By the first National Day of Action, only ten days later, this number had jumped to over 11,000. On December 21, the National Day of Protest, the hashtag was used almost 40,000 times.<sup>47</sup> The growth of this social movement is directly correlated to its social media presence. Jennifer Tupper in her work, “Social Media and Idle No More Movement: Citizenship, Activism, and Dissent in Canada,” claims, “Idle No More could not have had the immediate and pervasive impact it has without social media. Young people could not have engaged as extensively as they have and continue to within this movement if not for social media.”<sup>48</sup> Erica Lee, in an interview with *The Toronto Star*, said, “Traditionally, it’s the chiefs and the people in power that have the ability to speak to the media, whereas now, people like me — university students who have been involved in this kind of stuff — are getting interviewed...social media allows the people who are actually directly involved and impacted by these kinds of movements . . . to have their voices heard.”<sup>49</sup>

These accounts demonstrate the ways that indigenous peoples used cyberspace, specifically social media, as an integral part of the Idle No More movement. As such, cyberspace functioned as a virtual third space where indigenous peoples used this space

as a tool to come together and demand political change. Many felt, as their opinions above express, cyberspace was a place outside of the mainstream media and political discourse where their voices could be heard and recognized. Furthermore, while the movement began locally, cyberspace also allowed indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world to form communities to promote global indigenous sovereignty. Through these processes, indigenous users in the Idle No More Movement created new decolonized sites in cyberspace, such as the Idle No More blog and website, and worked against the forces of settler colonialism.

### **MAKING INDIGENOUS SPACE ONLINE: CYBERPOWWOW**

The second example in this chapter centers on the website CyberPowWow.net. Using this site, this section examines how indigenous spaces are created and maintained in cyberspace. I chose CyberPowWow because it is one of the earliest examples of indigenous Internet users claiming space in cyberspace. Additionally, it represents a principal site, but also a vibrant community of early cyberspace users and programmers. CyberPowWow signifies that not only are indigenous users utilizing cyberspace, they are also shaping and claiming it for their own – swiftly countering settler colonial forces and depicting a virtual third space.

CyberPowWow was conceived in 1996 as “part website and part ‘palace’ – a series of interconnected, graphical chat rooms that allow visitors to interact with one another in real time. Together, the website and palace form a virtual gallery with digital (and digitized) artworks and a library of texts.”<sup>50</sup> Additionally, CyberPowWow was also an event, an art gallery opening of sorts, which occurred every two years, where “visitors were invited to log on from the comfort of their own computers, or, if they were feeling social (or did not have a computer of their own) they could attend via a Gathering Site.”<sup>51</sup>

Begun by a collective of indigenous artists in Canada (Skawennati Tricia Fragnito, Ryan Rice and Eric Robertson), the goals of the site were to, “overcome stereotypes about Aboriginal people; to help shape the World Wide Web; and to generate critical discourse—both in person and online—about First Nations art, technology, and community.”<sup>52</sup> Using Palace software, CyberPowWow online events allowed users to enter interactive chat rooms where they would assume an avatar and use it to wander from tipi to tipi, much as one would at a regular powwow, viewing the works of the artists and meeting people.<sup>53</sup>



Figure 3: Image of the CyberPowWow Palace space. Available: <http://www.cyberpowwow.net/palace.html>.

The site would host four major CyberPowWow developments, starting in 1997 until 2004. A second version, CyberPowWow 2, presented its own Palace software, allowing them to function free of outside authority. To create this new software, eight Aboriginal artists intervened in the design of avatars and the customizing of the forum

space.<sup>54</sup> CPW 2K: CyberPowWow, the third major development, centered on issues of Aboriginal digital aesthetics and sought the participation of Aboriginal artists from Australia and the U.S., as well as nonindigenous artists. The final iteration, CyberPowWow 04, “focuses on the protection and study of the on-line Native territory and cyberspace in general. To this end, the founders asked Native artists to explore the “unnatural resources” (data, pixels, bandwidth, access) found in this new on-line territory.”<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, technical issues and lack of funding shut the site down following its final CyberPowWow.<sup>56</sup> However, the creators would go on to start other initiatives such as: Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC), a network working on defining and sharing tools to foster indigenous-determined territories in cyberspace,<sup>57</sup> and Skins, which partners indigenous youths and elders to capture indigenous knowledge and stories through digital games and spaces.<sup>58</sup>

From its conception, the founders and users “saw the Internet not just as a new technology but a new territory, one that we could help shape from its inception.”<sup>59</sup> This belief helped to form and dictate the spatial politics of the CyberPowWow space. Jolene Rickard in her piece for the CPW 2K: CyberPowWow, writes:

The use of the term “pow wow” automatically shifts the mental gears into overdrive. What do pow-wows have to do with cyberspace? “CyberPowWow 2” does not represent a shift in the intellectual paradigm of the west. It is a very direct application of the palace software but somehow *when you exit this site you definitely know you were in Indian territory* (emphasis added).<sup>60</sup>

Jason Lewis restates these ideas in his piece for CyberPowWow 4, asserting,

By involving itself with fundamental questions about the nature and direction of cyberspace as a whole, the exhibition places itself – and Natives – into direct exchange with the wider virtual world. By reflecting on the past and seeking to understand how that history shares similar dynamics with the new New World, the exhibition helps ensure that there are no reservations in cyberspace.<sup>61</sup>

These two pieces indicate that the issue of settler colonial forces in cyberspace has been on the minds of indigenous cyberspace users since the early inception of the Internet. Indigenous users have always been aware of the settler colonial underpinnings of cyberspace and have labored to overcome these politics and processes. In fact, Skawennati Tricia Fragnito, Mohawk artist and one of the founders of CyberPowWow, states in an article titled, “Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace,” that “if Aboriginal peoples learned one thing from contact, it is the danger of seeing any place as *terra nullius*, even cyberspace. Its foundations were designed with a specific logic, built on a specific form of technology, and first used for specific purposes (allowing military units to remain in contact after a nuclear attack).”<sup>62</sup> This assertion is key in recognizing how CyberPowWow is functioning as a virtual third space. The aims of all those involved concentrated on using cyberspace and online technologies to build a space outside of settler colonialism, to regain lost territory, to establish indigenous communities, and to craft a virtual third space. While the founders might not have expressed overt political goals for CyberPowWow, the implications for considering indigenous self-determination and sovereignty are clear in this space. These writers, artists, and visitors all embraced the idea that “cyberspace—the websites, chat rooms, bulletin boards, virtual environments, and games that make up the internet—offers Aboriginal communities an unprecedented opportunity to assert control over how we represent ourselves to each other and to non-Aboriginals.”<sup>63</sup>

#### ***NEVER ALONE: PROMOTING INDIGENOUS HISTORY AND CULTURE ONLINE***

The final example in this survey into cyberspace as virtual third space for indigenous peoples considers the innovative ways that these peoples are using cyberspace to promote indigenous histories, cultures, and epistemologies. This section will focus on

the new video game *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)*, which recently won “Best Debut Game” at the prestigious BAFTA Game Awards.<sup>64</sup> *Never Alone* is a pioneering and significant game because it is crafted through a partnership between Upper One Games, the first indigenous-owned video game company in the U.S., and leaders from the Iñupiat peoples of Alaska. Built around Iñupiat histories, inspired by indigenous artists, and programmed by indigenous developers, *Never Alone* embodies all of the elements of a virtual third space in cyberspace. Like the Idle No More social media movement and CyberPowWow, this video game shows how indigenous peoples are utilizing cyberspace for indigenous purposes, specifically in supporting and preserving indigenous cultures and histories.

*Never Alone* tells the story Nuna, a young Iñupiat girl, who sets out to find the source of an eternal blizzard that threatens her family, her community, and her very way of life.<sup>65</sup> Along the way, she meets a magical arctic fox and a cast of other creatures and beings that help and hinder her in her journey. The story itself is based on the Iñupiat oral history of Kunuuksaayuka, who took a similar journey through a blizzard.<sup>66</sup> Oral traditions are a cornerstone of life for many indigenous peoples, including the Iñupiat. However, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain and preserve these traditions. Amy Fredeen, the CFO of E-Line Media, a publisher of educational video games, and of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council (C.I.T.C.), a nonprofit group that serves the Iñupiat and other Alaska Natives, states, “our people have passed down knowledge and wisdom through stories for thousands of years – almost all of this orally – and storytellers are incredibly respected members of society. But as our society modernizes it’s become harder to keep these traditions alive.”<sup>67</sup> To overcome these challenges, C.I.T.C. launched Upper One Games in 2012.<sup>68</sup> Although now a subsidiary of E-Line Media, Upper One Games maintains its indigenous heritage and promotes positive cultural representation.

*Never Again* is the first video game produced by Upper One Games and the first to be developed in partnership with indigenous peoples. Developers depended on a team of sixteen Iñupiat peoples as cultural ambassadors, stating that each group, “met extensively to ensure that all creative and business decisions were appropriately considered and supported the goals of all stakeholders.”<sup>69</sup> Extensive profiles of cultural ambassadors are included on Upper One Games website. But for developers, the process was more than just depending on indigenous storytelling. The Iñupiat community was insistent that the video game accurately represents this story and their peoples.<sup>70</sup>



Figure 4: Cover Art of *Never Alone* video game, Available: “Never Alone,” <http://neveralonegame.com/>.

The game itself is an action-puzzle platformer that can be played singularly or in a team. Roy Boney, in “Inupiaq Culture Comes to the Fore in ‘Never Alone,’” describes the graphics as, “gorgeously rendered in 3D and look almost like lush watercolors. The graphics and sound effects effectively place the player in the cold, atmospheric environment.”<sup>71</sup> However, it is no just the landscape that places players into the world of



the Iñupiat. Players are introduced to Iñupiat language through the narration of the story and can also unlock “cultural insights” – video vignettes at the end of each chapter that “let the Inupiat tell their stories in their own words. They cover diverse topics such as scrimshaw art, hunting, storytelling, and much more.”<sup>72</sup> But the connections to indigenous peoples go much deeper than those in *Never Alone*. The central story of the blizzard speaks to a larger discourse on climate change, which is dramatically affecting the lives of the Iñupiat and other indigenous peoples around the world.

Since the game’s release in November 2014, the game has been downloaded over 2.5 millions times and is now available on five major gaming platforms (Microsoft Windows, Playstation 4, Xbox One, OS X, and WiiU). Additionally, the game has received a 72 rating on Metacritic, indicating that this game is well liked among critics and users.<sup>73</sup> However, the most important critics are Iñupiat peoples themselves. Ishmael Hope, a Tlingit and Iñupiat community member who was heavily involved in the project from its beginning, states that the community’s elders are highly supportive of the game. He claims that the elders:

see [Never Alone is] a healthy, respectful representation of themselves, and they know how the generational divide works. They know how colonialism works and how destructive it is. And one of those tools, and one of the things that have been isolating people, has been playing video games, mass media–type things, and what’s really neat is that you can subvert that, turn that around, and actually use it to bring people together.<sup>74</sup>

*Never Alone* is a critical example of virtual third space in the ways that indigenous Iñupiat are utilizing cyberspace and new media technologies to not only protect their oral traditions and history, but to engage indigenous youths and others in their culture and worldview. Through the video game, indigenous developers and programmers took hold of new technologies to tell their own story and combat racist stereotypes of indigenous peoples often found in video games. These actions turned the settler colonial narrative on

its head and created a virtual third space filled with Iñupiat language, Nuna’s brave story, and indigenous ways of knowing the world. Edwin Evans-Thirlwell, in his review of the game on PCGamer, posits that *Never Alone* “is a the wonderful living record, articulated and at times hindered by the mechanisms of the platforming genre. It teaches that the preservation of history is its own reward and proves that videogames have as much right to facilitate that process as any other art form.”<sup>75</sup>



Figure 4: Example of *Never Alone* gameplay graphics, Available: Ben Skipper, “Never Alone Review,” *International Business Times*, November 18, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/never-alone-review-dodgy-gameplay-hinders-heartfelt-alaskan-indie-1475238>.

## INDIGENIZING CYBERSPACE

This chapter, “Virtual Spaces as Third Space: Indigenous Community Building in Cyberspace,” explored sites of indigenous cyberspace. I turned to postcolonial, indigenous, and new media scholars to argue that cyberspace serves as a virtual third

space that is not only shaped by indigenous peoples, but can be utilized by these peoples to do essential work for indigenous communities on and offline. By looking at three examples, this chapter outlined how indigenous peoples can use cyberspace to come together and demand political change, as seen in the Idle No More movement which started online; can build indigenous spaces within cyberspace, as documented through CyberPowWow.net; and can promote indigenous histories and epistemologies through new and exciting tools and platforms in cyberspace, like the *Never Alone* video game. These examples demonstrate that indigenous users are working tirelessly to indigenize cyberspace and utilize these new media technologies to create virtual third spaces to support indigenous sovereignty projects, foster indigenous cultures, and build indigenous communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “Group Basics,” *Help Center*, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/help/162866443847527/>.

<sup>4</sup> Nick O’Neill, “Google Now Indexes 620 Million Facebook Groups,” *Social Times*, February 1, 2010, <http://www.adweek.com/socialtimes/google-now-indexes-620-million-facebook-groups/313744?red=af>.

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<sup>6</sup> Haj Yazdiha, “Conceptualizing Hybridity: Deconstructing Boundaries Through the Hybrid,” *Formations* 1(1), 2010, 32.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 312.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 205.

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- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, 46.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 47.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S. Indigenous Relations*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xvii.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, xix.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, 229.
- <sup>26</sup> Renya K. Ramirez, *Native hubs: Culture, community, and belonging in Silicon Valley and beyond*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 3.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 198.
- <sup>30</sup> Kristy A. Belton, "From cyberspace to offline communities: Indigenous peoples and global connectivity," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 35(3), 2010, 194.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid, 197.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, 199.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Glenn Coulthard, *Red skin, White masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 169.

<sup>36</sup> Gyasi Ross, "The Idle No More Movement for Dummies (or, 'What The Heck Are All These Indians Acting All Indian-Ey About?)" *Indian Country Today Media Network*, January 16, 2013, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/01/16/idle-no-more-movement-dummies-or-what-heck-are-all-these-indians-acting-all-indian-ey>.

<sup>37</sup> Feban Caven, "Being Idle No More: The Women Behind the Movement," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 37(1), March 2013, <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/being-idle-no-more-women-behind-movement>.

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## **Chapter 4: Conclusion – The Roots of One Within the Other**

This thesis project, “Indigenizing Cyberspace: The Possibilities of New Media Technologies for Indigenous Peoples,” was shaped by one major question, what possibilities does cyberspace offer indigenous peoples? As the research presented demonstrates, cyberspace is a significant and meaningful landscape for indigenous peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First, this project demonstrates that indigenous peoples are in cyberspace, countering stereotypes of indigenous peoples as never modern and outside of modernity. Furthermore, this research showcases how indigenous peoples are actively collaborating and programming their own spaces within this setting. Rather than simply utilizing cyberspace as a tool, indigenous peoples are taking charge and forming distinctly indigenous spaces online. To showcase some of the possibilities of cyberspace for indigenous peoples, I put forth two new frameworks for analyzing cyberspace: cyborg-intimacy and the virtual third space. These frameworks stress the interconnections between indigenous bodies and cyberspace and the position of cyberspace as outside of traditional settler colonial forces where indigenous peoples can work on decolonization projects, build communities, and support their histories and ways of knowing.

The second chapter, “Cyborg-intimacy: A Global Intimate Intervention in Cyberspace,” aimed to understand what intimacy looks like in cyberspace by arguing that a cyborg-intimacy occurs, grounded in Haraway’s concept of the cyborg and McGlotten’s definition(s) of intimacy. I define cyborg-intimacy as the embodied closeness a user feels/creates/presses against/moves through when interacting with technologies. By imposing a global intimate framework onto cyberspace, I argued for a virtu-real perspective, which recognizes the co-construction of the virtual and real, counteracting this strong and prevalent binary that undergirds much of new media scholarship on the



Internet. This new embodied framework demonstrates the inability to disconnect virtual identity from material bodies, giving indigenous users new ways of thinking about their bodies matter in cyberspace.

In the third chapter, “Virtual Spaces as Third Space: Indigenous Community Building in Cyberspace,” I contended that cyberspace serves as a critical space for indigenous peoples to enact political change, preserve indigenous culture, and foster indigenous subjectivities. Specifically, by combining Bhabha’s concept of third space, Bruyneel’s work on the third space of sovereignty, and Ramirez’s work on native hubs, I argue that the Internet can act as a virtual third space, where indigenous peoples can speak across, at, and against the boundaries of colonial forces and rule. In this liminal position, indigenous peoples can use these new media technologies to achieve specific goals and means. The virtual third space framework validates that cyberspace does have productive potential through three examples of online indigenous movements, communities, and cultures.

#### **ACCESSING CYBERSPACE**

However, while this work’s major contribution is identifying cyberspace as a key space, getting connected to this space is still a major issue for many indigenous peoples in the U.S. and Canada. Gerry Smith, of *Huffington Post*, in his article, “On Tribal Lands, Digital Divide Brings New Form of Isolation,” tells the story of Tsosie, a member of the Navajo Nation, who drives 30 miles from her home on the reservation to the nearest town to get access to free wi-fi in a hotel lobby. She makes this trip almost daily so that she can do her homework for her online college courses.<sup>1</sup> However, Tsosie’s story is not an unfamiliar one. She is only one of the many indigenous peoples that face challenges when trying to connect to the Internet. There are other stories about indigenous peoples,

particularly young people, driving to neighboring cities to get connectivity in the McDonald's parking lot.<sup>2</sup> Smith states in the article, "today, everything from applying to jobs, to doing research for school work, to paying bills is done online. Native advocates and community members recognize the unprecedented opportunity the Internet poses for entrepreneurship and economic growth, increased civic engagement, and better education and health care for their nations."<sup>3</sup>

As Tsosie's story elucidates, indigenous peoples, particularly on indigenous lands, still face major challenges in getting the cabling need for broadband Internet. This is greatly contrasted with the rest of the United States specifically, where setting up the infrastructure for broadband Internet was made a major priority in 1996 with the passing of the Telecommunications Act. This Act prompted "a major overhaul that spurred considerable innovation and an outpouring of new businesses, from fiber optics companies that buried the cable for high-speed Internet links beneath every major city, to wireless providers that delivered the web to mobile devices," however, "the law did not address phone or Internet service on Native American reservations, serving as a missed opportunity that has kept these communities disconnected."<sup>4</sup> Today, the Native Public Media and New America Foundation estimates that less than half of American Indians and Alaska Natives, 43%, have broadband access at home. The rate for the U.S. generally is 65%.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, this same study states there is a less than a 10% penetration rate among the 566 federally recognized tribes in the United States.<sup>6</sup> Doris Taylor, CEO of Native Public Media, a nonprofit focused on promoting indigenous communities through media access, control, and ownership, states, "regulatory hurdles also have dissuaded Internet companies from wiring reservations. Doing business in a reservation begins with a lengthy, multi-tiered bureaucratic process that starts with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and includes navigating each sovereign tribal nation's unique system of governance."<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these regulatory issues, there is not much quantitative research available on this technological disparity, further pointing to the lack of attention paid to this need. "We were not mentioned at all," Taylor, CEO of Native Public Media, states, "Native Americans are the most invisible, most underserved, and, as a result, most vulnerable group. We are the poster children of non-access to what drives the economy and the world today."<sup>8</sup> One of the few and largest to date is Native Public Media's 2009 *New Media, Technology, and Internet Use in Indian Country*. In this study, researchers conducted various surveys across the United States and Native American Reservations gauging access, interest, and ability with new technologies and social media. They found,

overall, participants...were extremely tech savvy, utilizing digital multimedia and communications technologies at rates that are much higher than national norms. The Survey's findings should, however, not be misconstrued to mean that broadband access is widely available on Indian lands, but rather that the selected participants have managed to find ways to access broadband resources and that there is a great demand for these resources among these segments of the Native American community. Severe limitations in new media and IT infrastructure on Indian lands were identified by respondents and respondents were also quite interested in seeing tribal self-provision of these services. The Survey results clearly demonstrate that there is a strong desire to see 21st Century communications infrastructures implemented throughout tribal lands and that when Native Americans have access to these resources, they utilize them in substantial numbers. Such an important finding should help catalyze interest in exploring solutions to the digital divide in Native American communities.<sup>9</sup>

As such, while this thesis project demonstrates the interest, the know-how, and the growing importance of cyberspace among indigenous peoples, access remains a major problem, particularly on indigenous lands. For many indigenous peoples, this lack of access not only affects their everyday lives, but also exposes one of the many ways that settler colonialism remains an ongoing struggle in their home, in their communities, and on their lands.

## NEXT STEPS

While this thesis project focused on the productive possibilities of cyberspace, I also acknowledge that this space is wrought with settler colonial politics and racism. Bringing these two pieces into conversation with one another is critical because, as Lisa Nakamura states that, “rather than seeing offline life and life in cyberspace as being two entirely separate spheres, cyberculture studies must examine the ‘roots’ of one within the other – the ways in which racial, gendered, and cultural histories and the identities conditioned by them shape the discourses that are audible in and about cyberspace.”<sup>10</sup>

Employing an embodied approach to cyberspace, I would like to consider two major questions as they relate to indigenous peoples and cyberspace: (1) How is cyberspace shaped by settler colonialism? and (2) How does an indigenous identity impact experiences in cyberspace? Future studies centering on new media scholarship and indigenous peoples should address the myriad and nuanced ways that institutions, programmers, and users have colonized cyberspace through wires and metaphors, and also how indigenous identity is identified, raced, and discriminated against in cyberspace. Given these issues and the growing influence of new media technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is imperative to know more about the territorial politics of cyberspace, politics that so dramatically shape life on and offline.

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