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## Indigenous Impositions in Contemporary Culture: Knotting Ontologies, Beading Aesthetics, and Braiding Temporalities

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**Indigenous Impositions in Contemporary Culture:  
Knotting Ontologies, Beading Aesthetics, and Braiding Temporalities**

A Dissertation Presented

by

DARREN EDWARD LONE FIGHT

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2021

Department of English  
American Studies Concentration

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## **DEDICATION**

To, for, and by the People.

All my relations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work would not have been possible without the People, my family, and my friends. I want to thank my wife, Sara Lone Fight, for her faith in me, for her unending encouragement over these many years, and for the unflinching and myriad ways she has supported me, inspired me, and loved me over the last two decades. I especially owe her a debt of gratitude for her singular strength as a mother to our two children during the summer of 2021 in my final sprint to completion. I also thank my children, Amaria Maybelle Lone Fight and Elias Wesley Lone Fight, who have been my ideal audience for this project. I look forward to them reading this some day, as well as the yet-to-be-written works that populate my own Indigenous future. I especially thank Sara, Elias, and Amaria for their smiles, hugs, and snugs.

To my broader family, a profound thanks to you all. My grandmother, Dorreen Yellow Bird, from whom I learned strength, writing, and Sahnish traditions. My grandfather, Edward Lone Fight, from whom I learned courage, vision, and Hidatsa/Mandan traditions. My Auntie Karen Lone Fight and Uncle Tony Lone Fight, from whom I learned the art of a joke, a love for geeky culture, and the importance of getting out there and staying after it.

Thank you, Mama. Lisa Dorothy Lone Fight has taught me nearly everything I know—but not everything she knows. She taught me how to be a father, a son, a scholar, and a communicator. Her wisdom continues to spring forth unbounded, and I am always in awe of her ability to be a courageous role model, a scientific leader in our community, an integral part of our tribal leadership more broadly, and a loving and caring mother—

all, somehow, at the same time. She amazes me every day, and I am so fortunate and proud to be her son.

Thank you, Micco (Mekko). Dr. William Harjo Lone Fight continues to deepen my knowledge about anything I am interested in, lends me courage and bravery when I am in short supply, and shows me how to keep my eyes on what is important. He has taught me about the beauty and intricacy of Mvskoke traditions, and he is a leader, protector, father, and scholar—all of which, when done well, he has shown me are not so different from one another.

To my siblings: Dr. Eliza Yellow Bird, for beating me to the Ph.D. finish line and thereby lighting the path that helped me get there myself. Spencer Lone Fight, for showing me how to be a kind, loving, and supportive brother. Reed Lone Fight, for always reminding me to smile even in the tough times. Aleeya Yellow Bird, for reminding me that first comes creativity, *then* comes the world.

My family deserves more than this—it would easily be a dissertation all its own—but I hope they each know how much they mean to me and how deeply I love them despite this pitiful offering. *Maadigudá maacagíraac agihdíawa!*

To my committee, Drs. Laura M. Furlan (my chair and ardent, patient supporter), Asha Nadkarni, and Kimberlee Perez. Thank you all for your unwavering support, your patience, and your thoughtful guidance. You each believed in this project despite the dramatic shifts in trajectory, and my frustrating habit of jettisoning entire chapters—indeed entire, nearly-completed projects—never to see/speak of them again. You fielded with aplomb the weird and sometimes fragmented ideas that I would send out, and, through it all, you trusted in me for so long that I finally came to trust in myself too.

To my editor, Diane Cady: thank you! I could not have finished this without your careful assistance, your positivity, your patient willingness to help me untangle my poorly notated citations, and your thoughtful insight. I assure my reader that any errors retained throughout this project are exclusively derived from my own stubbornness.

To Dickinson College and the American Studies Department, Cotten, Amy, Jerry, and Jed. New friends and colleagues each, thank you for welcoming me with open arms, believing as you did and do in the Indigenous futurity of my work and academic career.

To all my friends—Casey, Lisha, Emma, Adam, Ron, Dave, Lorenzo, Carl, Jake, Jason, Kim, Matt, and all those I am surely forgetting: for the conversations, for listening to my ideas, for helping me organize them, and for giving me strength, cheer, and grounding when I needed it. Thank you.

And, finally, as I write this at 3A.M.—a time of night to which I have come to a comfortable, intimate, and loving relationship—thanks to The Mandaree Singers, Crimpshrine, Sturgill Simpson, The Mountain Goats, A Tribe Called Red (now Halluci-Nation), and Margaret Glaspy for the music that helped sustain me during the all-nighters, the all-dayers, and the I’ll-sleep-when-I’m-doners.

Especially Sturgill, who has been on repeat these last few weeks and continued to remind me to be true to my own voice: “I don’t need to change my strings / ’cause the dirt don’t hurt the way I sing.”

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Indigenous Impositions in Contemporary Culture: Knotting Ontologies, Beading Aesthetics, and Braiding Temporalities**

September 2021

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M.A., University of Massachusetts Amherst

Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Amherst

Directed by: Laura M. Furlan

This work covers Indigenous philosophy, history, aesthetics, ethics, axiology, pedagogy, temporality, and language. This is the necessary result of a central but implicit claim made throughout the project, which is that any exploration of Indigenous culture that does not work within such a multi- and inter-disciplinary approach and instead parses and isolates these elements from each other runs the risk of attenuating the complex-systems features of the Indigenous culture it examines. Indigenous cultures are a processual holism. I offer here a piece of cultural analysis/synthesis that is Indigenous from the inside and, as such, does not neglect philosophical foundations. Rather, I endeavor to show how interconnected and interrelated these various elements are to *any* exploration of Indigenous culture.

By describing a shared Indigenous orientation toward what I call “universal sacrality” and “universal relationality,” this project builds from these assumptions described in Chapter One by tracking them across aesthetic modalities (Chapter Two), temporal and narrative constructions (Chapter Three), and performative epistemologies

and pedagogies (Chapter Four). In so doing, I explore the ways in which this universal sacrality/relationality serve as a blockaded awareness of Indigenous interiority: the sacrality that inheres in all things even while it remains on the move in its ineffable transit across time and space. Centrally, this project is about Indigenous temporalities: expressions of Indigenous futurism, the near proximity of our Indigenous past, and the milieu of both that compose our enduring present, and why these conceptualizations remain different from broader American culture and important for us. What makes Indigenous culture different and important is that Indigenous *peoples* are different and important. It is the self-determination that inheres in tribal collectivity—that is, within the particularities of tribal community *as such*—that generates the difference and importance. What binds together Indigenous culture is orientation toward sacrality and our intimate relationship to the experiential particularities of place, which necessarily includes an orientation toward complex systems since, unless the abstractive/extractive project of settler-colonial capitalism is completed, lived place is always necessarily imbricated within the complex-system dynamics of experiential, concrete reality itself—in all its beauty, ugliness, pain, and pleasure.

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### **Introduction: Weaving Epistemologies**

#### **Circles of Ceremony, Woven Juxtapositions, and Writing as Conversational Prelude**

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen. (Tofoya qtd Wilson 6)

My name is Céesha-Áahdu, Wolf's Head. The name was a profound and sacred gift from Charlie Goodbird, who was also Céesha-Áahdu, and our collective identity moves through time even after his passing decades ago. Collectively we exemplify different forms, or interpretations, of that identity—an identity we share with all the other Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation Céesha-Áahdus past, present, and future, even as we perform it within the bounds of our own particularity. The name was bestowed upon me by Edwin Benson, a fluent Mandan speaker and cherished elder who has also passed onto to his next journey with our people in the sacred beyond. I am from Fort Berthold, the now-attenuated homelands of my people, the Nueta, Hidatsa, and Sahnish people—the federally designated name for our tribes is the Three Affiliated Tribes of North Dakota. I am Awaxe, Dripping Dirt Clan, and child of Apúhga-Wigáa—the Low-Cap Clan. I am descended from Maxidiwia (Buffalo Bird Woman), Mato-Tope (Four Bears), Sheheke-Shote (Big White), and so many others; such is the nature of ancestral descent. And that is my first apology: that I don't have the space, time, and, in some cases, knowledge to recount all my ancestors on this side all the way back to when we arose from the good

earth through the waters. My living precedents are my grandmother, Dorreen Yellow Bird; my grandfather, Edward Lone Fight; my mother Lisa Lone Fight; my father, William Harjo-Lone Fight. My uncle is Anthony Lone Fight; my auntie is Karen Lone Fight. My contemporaries are my brothers Spencer Lone Fight and Reed Lone Fight; my sisters are Aleeya Yellow Bird and Eliza Yellow Bird. My partner is Aboogha-Wia (Butterfly Woman; Sara Lone Fight), Prairie Chicken Clan. My children are Náagciiri (Buffalo Calf; Elias Wesley Lone Fight) and Garíihga-Idáhu Mia (Thunder and Lightning Woman; Amaria Maybelle Lone Fight)—both of whom are also Prairie Chickens given our matriarchal and matrilineal traditions. My extended family would be a book all unto itself, so I also must apologize for not mentioning them here. For those listed, I do not name everyone by their Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish names—their public usage is somewhat determined based on preference—it can be rude to use someone’s MHA-National name publicly without permission—and as I do not want to refer to anyone here by their Indigenous name without their explicit permission, this will have to suffice.

My most heart-felt apologies to the phenomenon of Xubáa<sup>1</sup> itself for how pitiful I am before it and how little I have been able to do in this work for our people. I will continue to work hard and do my best, which is all I can do, and I hope that this necessarily incomplete expression still serves to bring more good into the world than bad. My second biggest apology is to my people for how girasháaci my language is and for not doing better justice to our ways here. This is partially a limitation of the written form, partially a limitation of academic convention, and partially a limitation all my own. In

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<sup>1</sup> I utilize a starker translation of sacrality here and throughout the dissertation rather than the more intimate, full address to the great sacrality used in prayer and ceremony for reasons elaborated on in Chapter One.

this, I also did my best with what I have. I also offer sincere apologies to other Indigenous nations to whom I refer here. There is no way to do justice to the multiplicative particularity of any Indigenous culture in this form, let alone from the outside, so this project serves as an invitation to correct and converse—for all my people and for other Indigenous peoples who share interests here. I cover Indigenous philosophy, history, aesthetics, ethics, axiology, pedagogy, temporality, and language during this project, because I firmly believe that any exploration of Indigenous culture that doesn't at least make the attempt does an injustice by parsing and isolating these elements from each other. Indigenous cultures are a processual holism, and without attempting to provide substance to each of these components, I feared I would do more damage than by not offering something that touched on each of these components, even poorly.

Which is to say, I attempted to offer here a piece of cultural analysis and, at times, cultural theory that is Indigenous from the inside, which does not neglect the foundations; that doesn't start and end with an art-object, or with a historical moment, or a spiritual or philosophical belief system. Rather, I endeavored to show, through various means, how interconnected and interrelated these various elements are to *any* exploration of Indigenous culture—arguably, I believe, any culture at all; however, other cultures have perhaps less emphasis placed on and are less concerned with the interrelated nature of their worldviews and standpoints. As such, I invite dialogue and conversation from other Indigenous artists, academics, and thinkers, and I hope they see this for the pitiful attempt it is while still finding within it something done in a good way, with good intentions, meaningfully attempted, and as a prelude to the real work of knowledge that is found in

conversation, experience, and inter-tribal exchange—through “yarning,” as Tyson Yunkaporta terms it within his own standpoint and worldview. Similarly, I invite non-Indigenous scholars, thinkers, and artists to engage in their own braiding instincts here. To think more expansively and comprehensively about Indigenous cultures and find meaningful places for respectful curiosity and conversation of their own.

Due to the limitations of my own standpoint, I would like to call attention to some features of my epistemological background and worldview that have continued to crop up in my time as an academic and have continued to be called into question or come under criticism. These are facets of our traditional ways of seeing and knowing that I was never able to fully extinguish during my formal education—a fact for which I remain eternally grateful to my family, my people, and our ways for simply and steadfastly refusing to allow me to lose myself and my grounding despite those challenges. The woven juxtapositions one will find in this project are just that: attempts to tie together sometimes seemingly disparate elements not to provide *the*, or even always *an* interpretation of how or why they relate, but to invite others to find relations between them with me—to co-create and come to an understanding together but differently. While I know it can often be very frustrating for my readers, I firmly stand behind those choices despite the expectations they sometimes trouble. You will also find a form of non-replacement revisional repetition in this project. This is akin to how my relatives will often tell the same story, however, each time it will have subtly (or not-so-subtly) changed. Prior details, plots, and actions will disappear with new details surfacing, new contexts providing different emphasis for the listener during each transmission. In this sense, these repetitional revisions serve to limn or circle around *something* ineffable that itself cannot

be stabilized and communicated—the “story” as such, I suppose. There is no “correcting” these variations because one or the other version isn’t any more or less right as compared to an objective, normative master narrative: sometimes the same trickster story is just completely different than previous versions even though it is the same story. But then, coyote can be like that. Additionally, there is a constant sense that all things are related, which continuously pervades my writing and thought. I often tell people that being Indigenous means playing “six degrees of separation” with literally everything and anything ever, always. And, of course, this is attended by the abiding sense that, somehow, all things have their place—even if we have not realized yet how or why. This serves as a description of the universal relationality that I discuss in Chapter One, which is intimately related to the idea of adaptability.

Institutional education is a difficult process for most people, though it seems obvious that the degree of difficulty varies dramatically from student to student. For Indigenous peoples, the legacy of the uses of mission, military, and boarding “schools” in the project of settler-colonial erasure continues to present a direct challenge to the organization of settler educational curricula into an easy relation with tribal communities. This challenge does not present itself only at the K-12 level. Institutions of higher education typically stand on illegally occupied grounds and often built their financial solvency on the backs of further, more widely dispersed land theft. I currently stand between two institutions of higher education: the University of Massachusetts—Amherst, from where I am seeking my terminal degree, and Dickinson College, for which I currently serve as tenure-track faculty. While I wrote this project first and foremost for my people, I must nevertheless submit it to and defend it from a university that partially

built its endowment off Indigenous land grabs in the town of Amherst, MA, and beyond—the town itself of course named for Jeffrey Amherst, who clearly articulated a desire to “exterminate” Indigenous peoples during his participation in Pontiac’s War and who, at the Siege of Fort Pitt, advocated for the use of biological warfare against the Indigenous population through the application of smallpox—the same virulent phenomenon that nearly destroyed my own tribe (twice). I attend to these demands at UMass to fulfill the demands at Dickinson College, which is itself an institution directly complicit in a different form of attempted genocide by way of its assistance in funding and staffing the emblematic school of assimilation in Carlisle, PA.

To be clear, I am not speaking only of the land upon which UMass rests. Adjusted for inflation and with no compounding interest applied, the direct theft and sale of Indigenous lands to fund the university’s endowment amounts to nearly five million dollars that capitalized the growth of UMass<sup>2</sup> through pain not dissimilar from that which my own people suffered—a portion of which I briefly share and discuss at the end of this work. With compounding interest matching what the university has found for its endowment holdings, a payback for this egregious act would nearly empty the university’s current endowment and render it financially insolvent, let alone were the university to similarly pay compensation for the land that the university currently and illegally occupies. Indeed, UMass even named a building after the chief land thief of higher education: the Morrill Science Center. And yet, no building has been named for any of the peoples who call the land underneath the university’s feet home, nor any of the hundreds of tribal nations whose land was stolen and sold to fund its

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<sup>2</sup> *High Country News* has compiled the data for so-called “land-grant universities,” further information for which can be found at: <https://www.landgrabu.org/>

endowment. Dickinson College, on the other hand, was not a land-grant college. Nevertheless, it worked hand in glove with the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (CIIS) in numerous ways, the sum of which is still coming to light. At the least, it is now known that alumni from Dickinson advocated in letters for the siting of Pratt's "school" proximal to the college, presidents of the college sat on boards of trustees to help acquire additional land for the reprogramming camp, faculty taught at the CIIS as well as transported students to the college itself to offer instruction, gave sermons at the assimilationist school, and attended its commencements—and these are only the relationships I and others researching the topic have found so far.

As one might imagine, the complicity of Dickinson College to the project of erasure embodied by the CIIS and its archives has been understudied. The college also still retains two honorary degrees on the books for superintendents of the CIIS—one a master's degree for Moses Friedman, who led the CIIS in its final years before being terminated after congressional investigation into his poor administration of the 'school's' finances and the poor conditions and treatment of the students; and the other, Richard Henry Pratt himself, who was gifted an honorary PhD from the college. (Interestingly, we do not offer any PhD programs here at Dickinson College, so this seems to be quite a peculiar and unlikely honor.) A testament, no doubt, to the high regard the college held for Pratt and his work to, as he himself put it, to kill the Indian but save the man. Perhaps Pratt rests easy in his grave knowing he is one of the few "doctors" of Dickinson College to this day. Further, Dickinson College has never had a university-wide Indigenous land acknowledgement until I wrote one for them—which still currently sits in committee under review. And, to my knowledge, I am also the first Indigenous scholar given a

tenure-track position at the school. I return to some of these broad themes in Chapter Three; however, I mention these insights into the contexts of the educational institutions of which I am a part to make clear that the educational apparatus in the United States is uniquely and particularly antagonistic to Indigenous students for more reasons than those superficial challenges that attend any student's exposure to the forces of conformity and assimilation that characterize the educational enterprise—indeed, from the ground up, both of these schools have been tools of massively destructive erasure against our Indigenous lands, histories, cultures, and peoplehood.

As such, by my lights, the settler academy—despite occasional mouth service and posturing to the contrary—has never been able to adequately hide its continuing legacy of Indigenous destruction and the continuing urgent demand for epistemological domination. I am called to reflect on the distances to which I have been removed in pursuit of my education—intellectually, culturally, and physically. There was no small amount of ambivalence when my relatives heard that I would be going “out east” for graduate school to a place called Amherst, let alone when I let them know that I would be taking a position at a school in the town of Carlisle. These words are short-hand for the viciousness of settler-colonialism for most Indigenous peoples in the Americas, and I have moved directly through them fully aware of those histories and the significance they play in our peoples' own struggle. The diaspora of education for Indigenous peoples is ongoing, as is the continuing demand that we suitably amputate parts of ourselves to comport to the demands of institutional education even as we aspire to use that self-mutilation to find commensurability within the very institutions and forms of knowledge

that have been used as a means of oppression, control, and genocide—both cultural and physical—against us.

Since settlers arrived on these lands and declared us unimportant details easily erased to make way for the progress of the settler-colonial project, the United States has been at war with Indigenous people. While hostilities have shifted their modalities and forms—from abject violent warfare to dispossession and the slow violence of educational assimilation—the continued attempt to erase the “Indian problem” remains. The foundational documents of this country still characterize us as “merciless Indian savages,” a fact noted by Alison Owings in her article for *The Huffington Post* titled “The Damaging Three Words of the Declaration of Independence (Owings, “Damaging”). Indeed, the line is found directly in the heart of the ever-noble Declaration of Independence itself, and Owings’ article was received with the expected settler moves to innocence and opprobrium one might expect. Discussing this reaction in a follow-up article for *Indian Country Today*, Owings discusses the *thousands* of messages she received regarding her initial article—nearly 4,000 by the time she sent her response article to print (Owings, “Flamed”). The responses were a crash course in settler moves to innocence: that was a long time ago, but what about the slavery issue, it was rhetorical, it doesn’t even mean what it says, some Indigenous peoples are evil and its talking about “those” ones, Indigenous people can now go to college for free, Indigenous people didn’t believe in land ownership, so it could not be stolen—on and on, a long litany of false assumptions designed to preserve the innocence of her contemporary settler readership. For Owings, this came as a bit of a shock; for an Indigenous person, this is such a common occurrence and typical recourse that I’m confident we could have listed what

the responses would be before she even finished her initial article. Some of even now might be silently formulating a further settler move to innocence: well, those people are bigoted idiots, and they don't represent educated, thoughtful, NPR-tote-bag-having, #LandBack supporting, dream-catcher-having, "good" Americans—which is also false insofar as it's the type of educated liberal mouth service that often voices support for something called decolonization up to and no further than the point at which it threatens their own jobs, homes, and security.

Further, even as gun violence continues to rage across our country every day, these same founding documents are mobilized in defense of the tools—guns and related weaponry—of that ongoing violence. As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz reminds us in her historical examination, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*, the creation of this piece of the U.S. Constitution had much more to do with killing Indigenous peoples and occupying the then-empty site of their murder through "fee simple" land acquisition than it did putting a check on the creation of a tyrannical government. As she writes:

Although the U.S. Constitution formally instituted "militias" as state-controlled bodies that were subsequently deployed to wage wars against Native Americans, the voluntary militias described in the Second Amendment entitled settlers, as individuals and families, with the right to combat Native Americans on their own. (53)

She notes earlier, "settler-militias and armed households were institutionalized for the destruction and control of Native peoples, communities, and nations" (36). As such, I would ask my reader to keep these varied contexts in mind. Perhaps the above seems like

an only loosely related series of vignettes about traumatic Indigenous history—and I suppose it is, which is why I implore you to keep the anti-Indigenous orientation of this nation-state and the educational apparatus it created in mind as you continue reading.

I also think if the reader keeps the opening quote of this introduction in mind, taken from an essay by Terry Tafoya about balancing the demands of western science and Indigenous worldview in a therapeutic context, they will find it expresses a sentiment that is ably echoed by Roxy Gordon in the *Naagshibi*, the final chapter of this work, as well as in all that lies between and beyond. Despite, or perhaps because of, the challenges we have faced, I am happy to report that this entire project nevertheless endeavors to preserve something critical and sacred about Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching. I stay true to the circles within circles, repetitions that serve as non-replacing revisional expressions, the use of juxtaposition, the relationality of all things, and an underlying sentiment that everything, *everything* has its place; in some cases, I/we/you just have not found it yet. This is what makes my people adaptable, flexible, and able to embody the idea of survivance: we do not simply “throw away” people, ideas, or things because they have no use at a given moment even were that actually possible, which it isn’t: there is no “away” into which to throw something in a fundamental sense; even western science understands this. Nevertheless, this conservational relationality is how we have come through these various attempts at genocide of both material and cultural forms, the epidemics, forced relocations, ecological damages, reprogramming camps, programs of violent assimilation and all the other seemingly world-ending events through which we have come and despite which: *we remain*. As a rule, my people try not to functionalize things in a way that would lead to their dismissal or normative extinction—

as the elders say, and as I note in the first chapter, you can say/think/do it “that way”; be/are/become “that way”— meaning there is a vast and unknowable variety of different ways of Indigenous expression and becoming. This means that the tools our people have at our disposal in any given moment or context are diverse, myriad, and surprisingly adaptive to a wide variety of circumstance. This relates to the idea of “collective cognition” that I briefly discuss in Chapter One as well, i.e., the idea that maintaining a diversity of cognitive modalities—even those that might seem without use or even counter-productive within a given context—provides us with the means to adapt to circumstances that no one could predict. That is not because we predicted them; it’s because, by my reading, Indigenous cultures, or at least MHA Nation, are complex systems theorists, and we have been for over 1,000 years. When one’s thinking tends toward the indeterminacy of complex systems, there is an awareness of the radical *unpredictability* of reality; that no one knows what we will need in the future, how things will be, so we keep all our peoples, thoughts, histories, and experiences with us by placing inherent value in all things; hence, also, the universal sacrality I discuss in Chapter One.

I note that one often lays out their research question(s) in an introductory work of this sort, so here it is: what makes Indigenous modes of being, ways of thinking, historical experience, and forms of expression—which is to say, Indigenous cultures *as such*—different and important? Not just from the settler culture(s) that impinge upon and attempt to erase them, but also from each other? And what binds the term “Indigenous cultures” together as something meaningful itself? And finally, why does it matter? The answer to those questions, as it turns out, are quite simple, though I fear my readers might

find them unsatisfying: What makes Indigenous culture different and important is that Indigenous *peoples* are different and important. It is the self-determination that inheres in tribal collectivity—that is, within the particularities of tribal community *as such*—that generates the difference and importance. What binds together Indigenous culture is, as I argue in Chapter One, our orientation toward sacrality and our intimate relationship to the experiential particularities of place, which necessarily includes an orientation toward complex systems since, unless the abstractive/extractive project of settler-colonial capitalism is completed, lived place is always necessarily imbricated within the complex-system dynamics of experiential, concrete reality itself—in all its beauty, ugliness, pain and pleasure. And finally, why does it matter? Academically speaking, it doesn't. As a complex system of its own that agitates with yearning toward the reduction of complexity into extractive paraphrase and abstractive conceptualization—that is, settler-knowledge production—the above description moves firmly against such inclinations and, as such, lacks traditional academic value. You might even be feeling right now that my research questions are overly broad, and their answers are in some sense facile. However, there are spaces within the academy, and I believe they are growing, wherein the value of the above is understood as self-evident, even necessary for not only Indigenous peoples, but for all peoples, broadly writ. Which is to say, not just humans, or animals, or plants. *All* animate beings—even mosquitos, though the jury is still out on that one if you ask my dad.

If one is seeking a compact abstract of this project, I suppose the above will suffice, and there will be little reason to continue reading. Nevertheless, there is of course more going on through the pages of this work than those broader and more fundamental

questions. I also engage with spaces of Indigenous disappearance: in philosophy, in the academy, in the city, and in the present and future. For those of you determined to forge ahead, I would like to offer a few thoughts that might help provide some framing for the coming chapters. First, this project is not articulated within a “view from nowhere.” This project is offered as a view from *somewhere*, from my own standpoint as an Indigenous person, as an American citizen, a member of MHA Nation, as a father, partner, grandson, nephew, brother, student, teacher, and, yes, scholar. I seek to move across, though, and beyond those various identifications in the pages that follow. I take various positions throughout: academic theorist, Indigenous worldview-haver, MHA cultural emissary, and so on. They are not always synthetic, though; sometimes they are, but not always in ways that are easily visible—even to me. In some meaningful sense, I do hew towards my own and related regional tribal collectivities in my work, however, I also seek a comparative approach among, between, and beyond a much wider range and definition of Indigenous. One that is inclusive of numerous first-people contexts across the world, if only as an offering and invitation—a sign of respectful curiosity that I hope will be taken up and used to further the conversations I begin here. We are, after all, all related, and the relations I track here are often more intimate than I might have imagined before I began this project.

Second, I’m also a pop-culture fan and an “Indigenerd,” as the term has, against my strenuous objection, been coined. I don’t make the attempt in this project to define Indigenous popular culture, but I do note that it seems to be an understudied element of Indigenous studies more broadly, and one that I think should be taken up as an important part of what binds us together across the globe. When I was back home this last summer

(2021), my father and I were playing a game of back-and-forth by introducing each other to new Indigenous music that we enjoy. During our friendly exchange, we covered innumerable genres—ranging through hip-hop, traditional styles, EDM, indie rock, singer-songwriter acoustic, classical compositions, and country to name only a few—as well as dozens of Indigenous cultures that included Maori, Hidatsa, Crow, Sámi, Mongolian, Lakota, Ponca, Mvskoke, and Inuktitut—again, to name only a few. People of diverse coloration, tradition, region, and musical styling, all vectoring their musical expression through different interpretations of their ways and standpoints. It was an incredibly heart-warming experience, and one that I think any Indigenous person would have thoroughly enjoyed. Importantly, I am also of the opinion that Indigenous popular culture must necessarily include non-Indigenous artistic and cultural expression within its purview. As will become apparent in the project, I do not advocate for an exclusionary vision of tribal-nationalist aesthetic interpretation. “By us” does not encompass all works that are “for us,” let alone those works that are *meaningfully part of us*. Hence my interest in *Star Wars* in Chapter Two, and my distinction between the Indigenously fluorescent *Star Wars IV-VI* versus episodes *I-III*—for the reasons elaborated therein. And, lest I forget, the fascinating adoption of Baby Yoda into Indigenous (popular) culture. I offer here no strict definition for Indigenous popular culture; these are just observations I make from my own standpoint and within the identifications I note above.

In some sense this work might be organized under the term “Indigenous Futurism;” however, that is perhaps a bit of a head fake. As I will discuss in the chapter summaries, you will find that the future is not quite where it seems to be in this project. Nevertheless, despite a wide-ranging approach, what often sticks out to the many readers

I've given versions of drafts to solicit feedback is the emphasis on futurism/futurity. Certainly, I discuss it in earnest in Chapter Two, but I think the reason the Indigenous futurities of the project tend to stand out is because they are unexpected. As a place we're not supposed to be—hell, we're not even supposed to be in the present let alone the future—the idea of Indigenous futurism seems to stand out as a contradiction in terms. It is, of course, neither unusual nor particularly surprising to the Indigenous readers who have offered feedback that I discuss the future, futurism, and the temporalities that underlie such conceptualizations here; however, surrounded by a culture that has been on a 400-year mission to extinguish anything resembling a future for Indigenous people—an actual Indigenous future, not an ~~Indian future~~, i.e. a white-settler futurity in a hollowed out red body—the very notion itself seems to have a tremendous amount of purchase within American culture. Nevertheless, this turns out to be a very good thing, since the artistic expressions that attend conceptualizations of the future happen to be a place wherein Indigenous people are severely underrepresented just as we are in fantastical artistic expressions. That latter phenomenon is perhaps the most mind-boggling to me. My culture at the very least is basically built from the ground up around what we might call fantastical and speculative artistic expression; indeed, it serves as a loose characterization of our creation stories, our traditional stories and worldview, and our contemporary understandings of how the world in all its mystery seems to work.

Nevertheless, let me also add that by incorporating such broadly popular aesthetic expressions of fantasy and science fiction into Indigenous popular culture—of both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous forms—there is the exciting promise of being able to use these cultural productions as meaningful adjuncts to the work of creating political

solidarity across disparate groups of Indigenous peoples; touchstones and a well-circulated form of reference and mutual admiration. It is a dim and facile view to think that the primary means of mutual identification Indigenous people have are the traumatic experiences under the heavy hammer and gnashing teeth of settler-colonialism—and, as I show in Chapter Three, such defensive solidarities can nevertheless easily co-exist within these speculative genres that offer more than a simple reconstitution of that historical trauma. To that end, I find that the established genres of fantasy and science fiction to be particularly appealing to Indigenous peoples because they seem most able to reflect and maintain a flexible coherence in relation to the demands of particularity and *difference* within Indigenous worldviews and cultures. In that sense, I’ve always found that SF/F serve for Indigenous people as something more akin to those of artistic realism in settler culture. They more competently reflect and articulate the metaphysical, spiritual, epistemological, and technological experiences and understandings of Indigenous peoples than can, for instance, literary realism—most artistic expression that endeavors toward a mimetic relationship to dead-material reality is not in accordance with most traditional Indigenous worldviews.

Further complicating such artistic genres is the fact that the reality to which such realism appeals is *de facto* settler-reality and/or its distorting effects on our culture, i.e., the status quo reality that is manufactured and imposed upon us by settler-colonial nation-states. Given that such genres are unreflective of Indigenous structures of belief and understanding and the pernicious knock-on effect of reproducing settler-colonial reality even within the Indigenous artistic imaginary, realism often has little to offer us. Nevertheless, Indigenous expressions in such modes tend to have a much wider

circulation and readership among settler-citizens. Certainly, more than they do within the Indigenous communities from which they draw their inspiration. Most educated settlers I know fawn in a self-flagellating fashion over trauma-porn works by Indigenous artists such as Tommy Orange (Cheyenne/Arapaho) and Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa)—both of whom are artists I also enjoy—but they seem to collect literary rewards precisely due to this settler fascination with Indigenous traumatic expression.

Therese Mailhot, whose stunning debut poetic memoir, *Heart Berries*, wrote an article for *Mother Jones* discussing this phenomenon. Titled “Native American Lives are Tragic, but Probably Not in the Way You Think,” Mailhot describes the familiarity Indigenous people have with their own brutal histories and “bear witness firsthand [to] how bad we have it” (Mailhot). Nevertheless, while we recognize the tragic facets of our history, experience, and life experiences, she notes that settler readers very often experience these elements as voyeurs to the spectacles of violence and brutality<sup>3</sup>. For Mailhot, this is unavoidable, and the settler habit of taking up these representations of violence as voyeurs cannot be the extent or even a major consideration an Indigenous writer takes up in a work that is for us, by us, and to us. In the penultimate paragraph of the article, Mailhot quotes from a conversation she had with her close friend Tommy Orange. Orange notes the risk of letting those considerations become too central to the

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<sup>3</sup> An excellent article that covers some of these aspects of violent history is “Venus in Two Acts” by Saidiya Hartman. In beautiful prose, Hartman offers a meditation on the considerations of engaging with archives of settler-colonial violence, asking the question: “Why risk the contamination involved in restating the maledictions, obscenities, columns of losses and gains, and measures of value by which captive lives were inscribed and extinguished? Why subject the dead to new dangers and to a second order of violence?” (5) While, like Mailhot, Hartman offers no clear evaluative criteria for such work, she nevertheless emphasizes that works that plumb these depths focus the “incommensurability between the prevailing discourses and the event, amplif[y] the instability and discrepancy of the archive” and move against the “realist illusion” found in the writing of history to write counter-historical narrative that attends to the limitation of the archival endeavor itself (12).

artistic endeavor, saying we run the risk of becoming “what we most don’t want to become, and sometimes that is tragic” (Tommy Orange qtd in Mailhot), however, he continues:

I think we should resist pity, and monolithic, static thinking regarding who we are and what we’re about. Tragedy is unavoidable for humanity. I just always hope it’s balanced with humor. I think of life as a tragicomedy.”

Nevertheless, it is a truism that this settler readership typically has less familiarity and interest in Indigenous authors and artists creating fantasy, science fiction, and/or comedy. Which is to say, every Indigenous person I know has watched the 1491s, but few have much interest in watching/reading *Rez Life* by David Treuer (Ojibwe) let alone *The Round House*. To be sure, this has to do with prevailing settler snobbery over what counts as art or literature, but it also relates to the lack of regard within settler society for Indigenous works that don’t explicitly orient around the production and indulgence of the kabuki theatricality of performative white guilt. Nevertheless, I take to heart Mailhot and Orange’s kind wisdom in recognizing that hewing firmly away from the tragedy, violence, and brutality in our lives and histories exclusively because we are anticipating the voyeurism of settler readers/beholders gives over control of the narrative to that readership even before the words hit the page. However, it seems important to recognize that the demand that Indigenous peoples produce works that plumb the depths of our traumatic experiences seems to be ever renewing and creates an influence on the circulation and popularity of Indigenous artistic expression—the literary expression of tragedy, the contemporary creations of new ledger art, and the historical works that center

violent conflict to name only a few examples. The same is true, I would argue, within the field of American Studies.

Finally, the question of American Studies. American Studies has always been a curious idea to me. Discipline? Inter-discipline? Anti-discipline? I tend towards the last description myself, in line with anarchic leanings of what I refer to as the “Wesleyan School” of American Studies—following along with the characterizations of the discipline offered by scholars such as J. Kehaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli) <sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, I’ve always found it quite curious that, despite the unquestionable and, as far as I and my people are concerned, unimpeachable central status of Indigenous peoples *of the Americas to the Americas*—our cultures, nations, histories, and people—as a “discipline” (such as it is) that ostensibly takes as its object of analysis something called “America,” Indigenous peoples find ourselves at the margins in the overwhelming majority of scholarship produced under the name. We represent 99% of the national forms of this land, 99% of the history of this land, and 99% of the cultural formations of this land, yet we comprise 1%—at best—of American Studies scholarship. Very often we are hustled off to history, arts, or literature departments, or dropped into underfunded NAIS departments or programs—not to say that American Studies departments are themselves very well-established these days. Nevertheless, if American Studies is a cultural studies field, which I believe it is, and if Indigenous peoples are the center of the

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<sup>4</sup> Phillip Deloria’s 2008 ASA Presidential Address emphasizes the “anything” approach to the discipline here—Deloria, however, is much more wedded to the idea of American Studies as a disciplinary formation than I am, whether inter-, cross-, trans-, or multi- (Deloria, “Crossroads” 4), largely dismissing the *anti*-disciplinary tendencies in the field as “always-tempting” before quickly moving past further consideration. While I enjoy Deloria’s scholarship as well as him as a person, I find this address to be a lukewarm, milquetoast reiteration of the typical discussions around the disciplinarity of American Studies than any clarion call for radical change to its organization—or disorganization, as I would be advocate for myself. One need not confuse the organization of an assemblage of scholars with the organization of disciplinary constraint, a fact that seems largely lost on Deloria here.

Americas, which I believe they are, then I think our rightful place is at the center of the discipline of American Studies—not simply as subjects, but as thinkers, artists, and scholars expressing ourselves forcefully from within<sup>5</sup>.

Given I can already hear the familiar sound of American Studies scholars sharpening their knives and refilling their barrels of ink, I will end here by saying that I think of this work as firmly and fully within my conceptualization of (Indigenous) American Studies. This project is intentionally designed not to fit easily into an English department, a history department, a NAIS program, an arts/drama department, a philosophy department, or any other isolated discipline. Elements of it might—perhaps even entire chapters. But taken as a whole, this project is uniquely and specifically intended to represent what I view as the sort of wide-ranging, necessarily philosophical, theoretical, aesthetic, and ethical work that should be undertaken by more Indigenous scholars. Indeed, reading through it many times during writing it, I’ve come to realize that an excellent model of the type of American Studies scholarship that I am envisioning would be Vine Deloria, Jr.’s work taken as a whole. Not just the two books that people like to trot out to signal they’re down with #LandBack and that hazy word called decolonization. No, I mean all of it, including the crazy (awesome) stuff late in his career,

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<sup>5</sup> In a more recent ASA Presidential Address from 2016, Robert Allen Warrior takes inspiration from Mary Helen Washington’s 1997 address, wherein she asks the question, “what happens when we put African American studies at the center [of American Studies] (Washington qtd in Warrior, 195). Discussing the sense of home and not home within the ASA, Warrior critically calls attention to one like what I here describe. Centering the vectored space of the ASA through the lens of Indigenous/Native American scholarship does not dismiss or destruct all non-Indigenous scholars and non-Indigenously oriented scholarship. Rather, what it does is reshape the ways in which we understand the articulated scholarship that the “discipline” produces through an Indigenous *orientation*, a methodological and organizational strategy that takes as its premise a relationality to the politics of invisibility that attend Indigenous peoples, cultures, and history. Rather than simply saying Indigenous people, history, and culture should be at the center of American Studies scholarship, Warrior also advocates for something beyond inclusivity, instead asking us to ground American Studies in the lands and histories *of* that land, which necessarily encounters and renders more visible Indigenous presence and perspective (209-215).

and the legal scholarship in his early career, his contemplation of the metaphysics of modern existence, of the truth and reality of the Indigenous supernatural, the defiance of evolutionary theory, and so on. Vine Deloria, Jr. still represents perhaps the most prodigious and able scholar *of* and *from* Indigenous culture that we've seen in the academy for precisely this reason. While I would be firmly justified in scoffing at any comparison of my work to his brilliance, courage, lucidity, fluidity, and ability to cover (inter)disciplinary ground, I nevertheless take to heart what seems to be the foundation of his scholarship which is, as he noted to Studs Terkel in an interview, his fundamental role as an Indigenous metaphysician. As someone grounding his work first in Indigenous metaphysics, he shifts the terrain of cultural analysis by altering the field that derives from those first principles and redefining both "culture" and "analysis" through an Indigenous lens—perhaps most importantly the epistemological and ontological elements of (Indigenous) American cultural analysis. Indeed, how can we possibly talk about Indigenous culture without talking about the four directions as Tyson Yunkaporta describes them, our axiology, ontology, epistemology, methodology—the spirit, the heart, the brain, and the hands (3). As such, I have here heeded the call for Indigenous scholars to return to the moccasins of our elders and our traditional worldviews—as metaphysicians and complex systems theorists, as broad thinkers that weave together sometimes wildly disparate elements to form something sometimes confusing and sometimes illuminating, because, after all, that is the status of reality, and these things are necessarily, fundamentally related within the complex of Indigenous cultural knowledge.

This talk of metaphysics seems a ripe time to introduce some brief chapter summaries. In Chapter One, I discuss Indigenous metaphysics. Starting with my own

tribes, the Nueta, Hidatsa, and Sahnish, I isolate two critical features of our worldview that I describe as an orientation toward universal sacrality and an attendant understanding that all things are related—a universal relationality that is entailed by the universality of sacrality. If all things are sacred, then, at the least, all things are related to and through the universal sacredness that inheres in all things. Starting with our own understanding of universal sacrality, I then knot together our understandings with those of other tribal collectivities that seem to share a similar orientation that nevertheless is expressed and understood quite differently within the localized manifestations within different Indigenous nations. Turning to a settler work of anthropology, I build upon these similarities further by contrasting them with the dominant ontological orientation of settler society within Western materialism. Describing the dead-matter materialism of capitalistic and settler societies, I claim that settler-colonial nations are oriented toward capital like Indigenous peoples are oriented toward sacrality, a result of the tight-knit relationship between scientific empiricist materialism and capitalist modes of production. Turning from this establishing section, I turn to Barry Barclay to discuss the idea of Indigenous interiority, wherein I locate a type of sacred blockade: an interiority that defies full comprehension and that goes beyond the accidentals of exteriority and signification to something deeper that, nevertheless, remains ineffable. As a part of this exploration, I introduce the idea of the sacred knot, a creative articulation that binds things together while nevertheless keeping them separate in their particularity—in their interiority.

The blockade returns as a recurring theme throughout the work in various forms, however, in this initial chapter I build on the ideas presented to move into the

complexities of Indigenous storying, itself a sacred creative endeavor intimately related to sacrality *as such* through its ability to bring about newness into the world. Relying primarily on LeeAnne Howe's concept of tribalogy, I begin to discuss the idea of the Indigenous milieu—something that can be mapped onto the idea of the knot itself—and the ways in which Indigenous storying tends to both compress and extend conceptualizations of temporality, sometimes attenuating and other times lengthening the distances between the temporal categories of past, present, and future. In so doing, I limn the interiority of the creative enterprise itself—the story-ness of storying—by discussing something I call the Fourth Peoples' Perspective, a form of deep-temporal collective-singular narration that registers in ways like testimony or experience. This derives from Howe's own descriptions of the traditional stories of her grandmother as well as Vizenor's concept of survivance, which I use as a closing tie to the knotting of the first chapter. By centering the ineffability and incommunicability of survivance *as such*, I return in these closing moments once again to the centrality of the experiential reality in epistemological understanding and reasoning—what Vizenor calls natural reason—before closing with a long quote by Daniel Heath Justice, which does the work of closely aligning storying with being-ness itself. The reader might note that this chapter is quite invested in futurity, although it goes by different names through the chapter, even though it begins in the ostensible past of MHA traditions.

In Chapter Two, I double down and more clearly articulate the idea of Indigenous futurism, turning from a metaphysical examination to an aesthetic analysis. One might note that, while *this* chapter is ostensibly about the future, it is, in fact, about the present. Describing the critical function of representation with the space of the presently

articulated future tense for Indigenous people, I gloss a history of the field of Indigenous studies, describing it as an assemblage, a moving constellation of articulating elements that shift, wax, and wane under the same banner much in the way a continuing articulation of stories within a collective identity similarly has no stable center, but nevertheless maintains the contours of something definable yet premised on something indefinable by virtue of its processual nature and ineffable interiority. Offering a short genealogy of ethnic futurism more generally, I introduce Phillip J. Deloria's idea of unexpected Indigenous appearance, theorizing it beyond its somewhat simplistic usage in his work of history as well as Coll Thrush's similarly historically oriented concept of imbrication. Combining these two features, I introduce an additional term, beading or adornment, to describe aesthetic techniques that create an adornment on an already present aesthetic object to produce something that fluoresces indigenous.

These adornments communicate something of the object's sacred interiority through the application of an additional weaving to the exteriority of the aesthetic object. Differing from imbrication insofar as it is not an *insertion* of unexpected Indigenous appearance into the form of the art-object itself, adornment retains the original form of the object while nevertheless creating new aesthetic weaves that produce Indigenous aesthetic signification while maintaining the original symbol within its now-adorned form. I connect the effects of this revisional aesthetic to a variety of Marxist scholars of drama, science fiction, and post-modernity who have theorized about the use of unsettling aesthetic techniques—estrangement and denaturalization—and connect these conceptualizations to the prior exploration of Deloria's unexpected Indigenous appearances. Selecting the non-Indigenous movie franchise of *Star Wars*, I close the

chapter by examining various Indigenous visual artists' use of the techniques described in the chapter as they go about revising through unexpected adornment the world, characters, and iconography of the franchise in ways that serve to incorporate it into Indigenous popular culture while simultaneously mobilizing these familiar facets for the purpose of settler-colonial critique.

Chapter three discusses Indigenous and settler temporalities through the genre of what I call Indigenous post-post-apocalyptic literature/art. Exploring the Judeo-Christian modalities of time—settler time—in what I find to be an exemplary space of their expression, post-apocalyptic narratives, I work through critiques of modernist temporality offered by Vine Deloria, Jr., William Spanos, V.F. Cordova, and Mark Rifkin in order to describe the paradoxical form of linearity that inheres in teleological conceptualizations of time. Interrelating the divine-providential temporality of early Christian settlers, I emphasize the linkage to Modernist conceptualizations that replace providence with progress while retaining the same linear progression toward a predetermined future. Through this examination I link the extractive-abstractive tendencies of settler society and the induced blindness caused by this temporal ideological commitment by describing the flight away from concrete reality that continues to be a defining feature of modern America. I then turn to the differences in Indigenous temporalities, returning once again to the idea of the Indigenous milieu, this time vectored explicitly through temporal understandings, and describe the attenuation of distance between the past, present, and future within MHA and other Indigenous worldviews. This sets the stage for my work with the futuristic settings of three Indigenous authors of the post-post apocalypse: Louise Edrich, Claire C. Coleman, and Cheri Dimaline. In exploring the future-fallen

worlds described in their novels, I turn most explicitly to the historical mode, drawing from the traumatic experiences of the establishment of boarding schools and the kidnapping of Indigenous children and their forced relocation into reprogramming camps. I do this by tracking the clear resonance to this historical apocalyptic event with the events described in the three novels I explore in this chapter.

One of the central arguments of this chapter—building on Chapter Two’s exploration of the unexpected Indigenous appearance and Chapter One’s description of sacred interiority—is that it is not the future as such that describes the placement of Indigenous appearance in these novels. Rather, it is the impossible historical repetition of that which can have no temporal afterwards, i.e., the familiarity found in a *return* to apocalypse and, indeed, the survivance beyond the temporal constraints implied by the finality of Judeo-Christian apocalypse itself. This repetition takes me through an exploration of some of the historical elements of the boarding school system, its creation within a state of exception, and the ultimate purpose of the boarding school system, which is to produce the Indian *sous rature*. As such, part of the argument regarding the boarding schools, and, indeed, the depiction in the novels, is that they function primarily as a means of foreclosing on Indigenous futures, hollowing out the red body by “killing the Indian and saving the man,” as Pratt, the founder of the centralized boarding school system put it. With the production of ~~The Indian~~, the attempt is then made to laminate a settler onto this now hollowed-out object, replacing Indigenous futurity with settler futurity—the process of dispossession and occupation that attends the land theft and relocations of Indigenous territory mapped onto the body and mind of Indigenous people themselves. To close this chapter, I provide a short anecdote from my personal

experience with such lamination, tracking how the recognition of the deep temporality of Indigenous nationhood, peoplehood, and culture places an unsettling imposition onto settler-laminated place names as a means of concrete exemplification of the ideas discussed to that point.

The final chapter is a form of processual coda, a non-terminal ending that explores a multimedia exhibition by one of my relatives, Cannupa Hanska Luger, my personal experience on the homelands of Fort Berthold, and the exploits of two boarding school survivors, Angel De Cora and, another of my relatives, Anna Dawson. In this section I describe some of the pedagogical and epistemological practices of my people, weaving together my peoples' history, Angel and Anna's history, the contemporary artistic expression of Cannupa, and the futurity of our people more broadly. Moving between and among a braided assemblage of quotes, narrative interpretation of Cannupa's exhibit, as well as personal anecdote and memory, I use this chapter to remind the reader that a braid is a form of woven separations. A synthesized braid is called a ponytail, and so I keep to a formal decision to keep these elements both apart and a part, separate but together, in ways that I hope help demonstrate the ways non-traditional pedagogical approaches and epistemological blockades serve in the creation of different, important, and perhaps emancipatory forms of knowledge that are often displaced, erased, or encased by settler institutions of higher education.

## Chapter One: Knotting Ontologies

“there beneath all and through all and in all an all-compelling something unexplained”: The Blockade of Sacrality, Indigenous Interiority, and the Ontology of Animate Worlds

Aru-xubaa adee-taa-ruush maa?eeca gacacaara, awa-hee maa-xubaaheewa

ii-diiria mahkuuc.<sup>6</sup> (Alex Gwin, MHA Elder)

**The Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation)**<sup>7</sup> are an agglomeration of the Sahnish (or Arikara), Mandan, and Hidatsa peoples. What small linguistic fidelity I have with our languages only extends to Hidatsa for the moment, so that will tend to be most of my references to Indigenous language throughout the chapter. The linguistic and ontological orientation of what I will discuss here is shared across our three Tribal cultures with minor variation, though it should be noted that the linguistic forms of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish are quite different given they come from distinct linguistic groups. Mandan and Hidatsa are more closely related linguistically than the Caddoan language group of Sahnish, however, they are each quite different languages. The *Híraaca*<sup>8</sup> word for Indigenous people is, in a somewhat colloquial form, áwa?nuxbáaga, which means “people of the earth” or earth people. An address to people

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<sup>6</sup> The sense of this statement was interpreted and translated by me with assistance from my grandfather, Edward Lone Fight, Mandan/Hidatsa elder and fluent speaker of Hidatsa: Even though all things that are sacred are not always visible and revealed to us, respect all things—our traditional ways tell us that the world and everything in it moves, runs, and is alive due to the universal sacrality that inheres in all things.

<sup>7</sup> Bolded because I can.

<sup>8</sup> There is a habit for some to not italicize Indigenous words to prevent othering non-European languages in these contexts. I agree with the sentiment, but I typically use it here not to otherize but to *emphasize*. The words are important, and, frankly, I like seeing them in print; I think they shoulder the burden of attention quite well. Nevertheless, I have chosen to simply *not* uniformly standardize my usage here. I generally italicize when it feels worth emphasizing, and when it’s used less emphatically, I do not, though I do not follow any hard rule in that regard.

generally is simply nuxbáaga, “people,” and for specifically non-Native people, mashíi, typically used as a default for “white person,” though it would perhaps be more properly rendered “settler” given that an African American settler would be termed mashíishibísha. If we were to follow that mashíi means “white,” this would translate to “white-black person,” so the word is used not used primarily as an identification of race. As one might surmise, Hidatsa is an agglutinative language, so complex words and sometimes entire thoughts/sentences are achieved through the addition, or agglutination, of morphemes. As such, your family is áwaʔadíʔnuxbáaga, people that live in your home, where áwaʔadí (colloquially áwaʔdí), is literally “home (adí) of earth (áwa)” or more commonly, “earthlodge.” The uses of the morpheme áwa (earth) are myriad. It has orientation and locative uses—awáhda means down, but more literally translates as “towards the earth” or “earthwards”—as well as in the construction of stative verbs, which stand in for adjectives as there are no proper adjectives in Hidatsa. All seemingly adjectival forms in Híraaca are stative verbs, and Hidatsa, like many other Indigenous languages of the Americas, are heavily verbal.

This verbal inclination reflects and reinforces a broader philosophical commitment away from abstraction and staticization of any given thing. Things *are* what they *do* within a network of their *relations*—they are in a state of animation. Given the fact of this linguistic habit, one might see why Indigenous philosophies and worldviews might be productively situated within the school of “process philosophy,” wherein processes rather than objects have ontological primacy. Further, the characteristics of an object are similarly in motion and emplaced. Mirishibísha, or “coffee,” is typically translated as “black” (shibísha) “water” (miri), however, that is not entirely accurate. Due

to the nature of adjectival construction in Hidatsa, it would be more accurately translated into a process, an active form, i.e., “water that is blacking (performing blackness),” same for the earlier example of the word. This deep linguistic animation of the world is mirrored in a radically different ontology of objects that would be considered inanimate in anglophone traditions—water, for instance, is also animate. An *ígibixubaa*, or sacred pipe, is syntactically rendered in usage within sentence structures that indicate animacy. Additionally, even without linguistic clues, the animacy of things is assumed and taken as a given within an MHA context. This animation of things of the earth in Hidatsa and worldview is reflected in our capacious and inclusive use of “people”—which can include a radical diversity of objects, both living and “non-living,” from the sun to stones, trees, and animals—speaks to a broader ontological orientation that recognizes a primacy of animation and interrelation. The animate earth and her languages speak actively of time, people, and place. And this animated ontology goes to a broader conceptual framework that indexes a lack of fixity, a prejudicial linguistic habit that moves against abstraction and generalization.

In 2017, I attended the MHA Language Institute at Fort Berthold. This was my second year attending, and when some of the above questions were being discussed among the elders and linguists that had gathered for the institute, the elders kept resisting the way the linguists abstracted the language. “You would never say it that way” was a common refrain, and this response typically came from linguists pulling a word out of an emplacement, out of the time/space of a sentence structure, and saying it “in the nude,” as it were. Traditionally our language is not taught, learned, or used in linguistic isolation, it is learned as a full thought or idea. So, in the case of *mirishibísha* in isolation, it sounds

odd to our fluent Hidatsa speakers. What *about* this “coffee” thing? Where is the coffee? How is it in relation to you? Are you pointing it out (Mirishibíshac; “that is coffee”)? Asking about it (Mirishibísha; “Is that coffee?”)? Part of the elders’ criticisms of the linguists made me think of something I had once heard an elder say. Traditionally, I was told, Hidatsa children didn’t learn language one word at a time like the linguists were attempting to drill during the language institute, they would speak in full sentences immediately. I never really thought much about it, or thought perhaps it was an exaggeration, but considering how rare it would be to divorce words from their sentence-contextual usage, it makes quite a bit of sense. A child would be more likely to say “mirishibíshac,” a full linguistic sentence, than “mirishibísha,” as they would be unlikely to hear an abstract noun of that sort. They would not learn, for instance, a bare áarudaahga (grandpa). Instead, they would be more likely to say máarudaahgac (“that is my grandpa”) or a similar full linguistic construction.

Máarudaahgash (my grandpa, speaking of him instead of to him [-sh]), Edward Lone Fight, will often bark out mirishibísha when he wants some coffee, however, the emplacement of its usage in that case is non-linguistic and contextual: he often says it while pointing with his lips at the coffee maker, indicating that he *wants* some coffee. He also sometimes performs this linguistic shearing of words from context to try to help us learn the language in ways that match the textbooks that the linguists have created. Nevertheless, the point the elders were making is that fragmenting the language in that way—pulling it out in abstract pieces to study its linguistic components—is unreflective of a critical part of the language. My father, Will Harjo Lone Fight (Mvskoke Nation) has said, “our indigenous languages are living beings with rights responsibilities and feelings.

Many of them have withdrawn for their own protection, but, if we create an environment for them that is nurturing, protective and respectful, they will return” (Harjo). Hidatsa, like many other Indigenous languages, mirrors our worldview insofar as they are *animate, sacred, and relational*. Our languages themselves do not appreciate or enjoy the extraction process that linguistic analysis performs upon them; the result of such an analytic work is to save the pieces but sever the relations that give those pieces meaning: it creates an inanimate language divorced from its animating context.

There are two interrelated and fundamental philosophical orientations within MHA Nation that are critical in much of our cosmology, axiology, and aesthetics and which many of these linguistic phenomena index. These orientations are both reflected within and generated/reinforced by our histories, traditions, languages, and ways of being in the world. *WaaRUxtii* (Sahnish) or *Maxuubáa* (Hiraacá) are both words that gesture toward and limn a similar ontological sacrality interior to all things. These words have been translated into English in various ways: an ineffable and mysterious “holiness,” a “sacredness,” or more generally a supernatural “power.” In this chapter I will trend towards “sacred” with the ineffability of sacrality assumed. Lillian Brave and Mary Gillette (Sahnish [Arikara]) defined *WaaRUxtii* to an interpreter, glossing it as the fundamental elements and elemental power of the universe. Lillian Brave extends this definition of the concept, saying “the universe [is itself an] amorphous, expansive power” that is beyond or above (Brave qtd in Parks 86). The interpreter notes that this idea is:

Fundamental to Arikara oral traditions—indeed permeating almost all of them...it signifies an awe-inspiring inexplicable power or quality resident

in the forces of the universe...perceived to be animate... [and to which people] generally refer to and address in kinship terms.

This includes celestial phenomenon, natural features, or “anything in the world that is remarkable or unusual” (Parks 86), which indexes the universal application of this ontological understanding as well the intimate kinship methods of relating to *WaaRUxtii* as it manifests in the world.

*Maxuubáa* is the related concept in Hiraacá that shares the same features of ineffability, mysterious power, and universality. This has often brought confusion to the mind of interpreters, one of whom writes of the Hiraacá:

If we limit the word to its strictest meaning, I should say these Indians worship but one Deity; but if we speak of it in its most extended sense, I should say that they worship everything...everything which has an independent being or can be individualized possesses [sacrality],  
(Matthews 288)

Seems about right. I would correct our interpreter here in saying that anything “possesses” sacrality, however. *Maxuubáa* is not a quality or quantity of exteriority that can be “possessed,” rather it might be more accurate to say sacrality is universally manifest as interiority for all things. Earlier in the interpreter’s text, struggling for language, they shift to the word “shade,” instances of which here I have revised to “sacrality” or “sacred,” to indicate the ineffable oneness that is all and everywhere. The interpreter notes with some perplexity that the Hiraacá “seem to have a dim faith in [the sacrality] of [sacrality] and in [sacred]-lands of [sacred]-lands; belief in a [sacred] immortality being the basis of their creed” (Matthews 287). This clumsy sketch even with

revision fails to adequately paraphrase the complex, interdependent, and interrelated web of ineffable, life of life that both *enervates and articulates all things* and is the foundational is-ness—the creativity of creation—of which reality is composed and by which it is made manifest in the expression of all that is: universal sacrality.

The second orientation I want to call attention to is interrelated and inseparable from the first. Assuming interiority *as such* is sacred and common to all things, it follows that all things are necessarily and fundamentally interrelated at and by the point of their creation: a universal relationality. I understand this as a multiplicative singularity preceding and informing the particularized relational expression *of* its multiplicity in an individualized object—object here used in a broad, ontologically inclusive sense to mean *any individualizable or individualized thing*, regardless of its specific ontological qualities (physical, non-physical, abstract, etc.). Following along with my use of “sacred” and “object” here, we might simplify the above statement to read: the relationality of universal sacrality precedes and is the articulative signature of any singularized object—be that a nation, corporation, person, chair, story, memory, or idea. As a relational articulation of elements that are embodied by any act of creation, non-physical phenomena are potentiated with the same ontological heft accorded any individualized object. The act of bringing into relation elements of a multiplicity into a coherent form creates a new object imbued with the same sacrality that all things possess. From nations to train stations, the work of creation renders independent being derived from the articulation and expression of sacrality itself.

Creations exist by virtue of the same sacrality inherent in the creative act they exemplify. As such, all of creation is organized differentially by a shifting network of

relational instantiations. This holistic, relational worldview renders particularization through the articulation of that multiplicity within an active web of interrelations. At the level of identity, this strongly orients one away from the assumption of the prevailing “ontological individualism” of Western discourse—the idea that an aggregate of the elements of individuals comprehensively determined the social character of the collectivity of which they are a part. Alternatively, Indigenous ontological collectivism operates not as strict inversion of the absolutism found above, i.e., defining individuals exclusively by the social structures in which they reside; rather, following Indigenous philosopher Anne Waters (Seminole, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee descent), I interpret Indigenous ontological collectivism to be a relational, flexible, and process-oriented form of communal identity formation that functions and fluctuates on a continuum between the non-discrete, non-binary dualisms<sup>9</sup> represented in settler ontologies as the absolutized relationship between part and whole. Given the interdependence and interrelated sacrality that inheres in all things, individuals appear as co-creators and co-operators within and of the structure of relations that co-determine their identity. This mutuality of influence and relation encounters the self-sovereign identity but is neither fully determinative nor exhaustively constitutive of the collective.

The textual and co-creative nature and the relational sacrality of natality is emblemized succinctly and powerfully in Richard Van Camp’s (Tłıchǫ Nation) children’s book, *We Sang You Home*, which begins “We sang you from a wish / We sang you from a prayer / We sang you home / and you sang back” (1). This elegantly describes

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<sup>9</sup> “A nonbinary, complementary dualist construct would distinguish two things: (1) a dualism (e.g., male/female) that may appear (in a binary ontology) as opposites or things different from one another in some important respect; and (2) a nonbinary (complementary) syntax that puts together such constructs without maintaining sharp and clear boundary distinctions (unlike a binary system)” (Waters 98).

the process of natality as both creative expression and of mutual co-constitution, and during pregnancy, this co-constitution continues as the embodied multitude of multitudes, different but together in a collective we. The idea that we are a part before apart is well emblemized and literalized by the creation of human life itself insofar as we all begin as multiplicity: as the stories of two people who are themselves the iterative result of prior stories as they enter an interpretive relationship with a third, the child, who articulates and interprets from this textual multiplicity the constitution of their own unique narrative. From this shared, sensuous singularity, we are moved? from a physical and metaphysical interiority into exteriority in a new shared and sensuous reality, still intimately knotted together with our mothers by the *idaréhba*, a Hiraacá word that refers both to the umbilical cord as well as its trace, the umbilicus or belly button. Through this plural, mutual co-constitution of our very fundamental physical embodiment, we begin and continue to be in a profound, deep-time relation with the individualized multiplicativities as they manifest within the long, broad, intricate, and complex web of ancestors and relations. We never encounter the world alone; we are always a part before we are ever apart.

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This orientation toward sacrality and relationality stretches beyond MHA nation—I suspect permutations of this and the relationality it implies extends to peoples across the universe but certainly across peoples on this planet. As such, it should come as no surprise that the closer relative-nations to MHA in the region share a similar orientation. In an essay entitled “If You Think About It, You Will See That It Is True,” Vine Deloria,

Jr. (Lakota Nation) quotes from a 1919 missionary sent to the Standing Rock Sioux reservation. This interpreter notes:

The Western Sioux believed that each being, a rock for instance, is an actual community of persons with ample locomotion among themselves, and such locomotion not regarded as circumscribed or restricted, save as the maker (oicage) of the whole gives to each species his own sphere. And, they reasoned, this limitation is merely in body (tancan), the mind, intelligence, and spirit of each is privileged to range, through and blend with totality by gaining a right attitude toward Woniya (Spirit)...there beneath all and through all and in all an all-compelling something unexplained... [a] “force and energy,” which the Western Sioux thought of, sincerely claimed to know of, as Woniya (Spirit). (Deloria V., “If You Think About It” 43)

This missionary report expresses consternation about not only the stubborn insistence of this ontological orientation but also its prevalence, noting concordance among the “old Chippewa and Cree Indians” in such understandings before indicating that there is no difficulty with the Indigenous peoples being surveilled in learning and understanding a “‘scientific’ attitude,” but that such a view was found simply insufficient. An elder speaking with the interpreter notes that settler ontology is “Not bad or untrue, but inadequate” to the task of understanding and revering the fullness of reality (Deloria V., “If You Think About It” 44).

In *How It Is*, a collection of VF Cordova’s (Jicarilla Apache Nation) philosophical essays, writes, “We are given ‘reality’; we do not discover it...there are no individual

*realities, only communal ones*” (Cordova *How It Is*, 49, emphasis original). Cordova derives her view of this fundamental interrelation between the individual and the collective from a similar ontological orientation to the one sketched above. Indigenous worldviews, or Cordova’s preferred term, matrices<sup>10</sup>, are often grounded in a basic understanding of oneself as part of varying collectivities (tribe, place, clan, family, etc.). These overlapping collectivities co-operate in localizing and layering particularity and providing focalization for the topography of interrelationships that organize reality, social structures, and responsibilities. Nevertheless, the fundamental respect for the sacrality of all things means these particularities ground the articulation of knowledge formation within the axiology of relationality. These systems of relations also reinforce the complexity that itself derives from the co-creative capacity fundamental to our particularized expressions of sacrality within webs of relations—that is, recognition of our own co-creative capacities within the distributed network of effectuation that occur across “all our relations” as we move in the world. Cordova explains, “Everything *that is* becomes a part of a whole that we deem ‘sacred.’ We live, in other words, in a *Sacred Universe* [therefore] we believe that ‘all things are related’” (*How It Is* 230, emphasis mine).

I sometimes hear “all my relations” given a flat interpretation in non-Indigenous contexts, wherein “relations” is simply figured to mean one’s family and extended familial relationships—cousins, aunts, etc. This seems to index a quite limited sense of what things in the world rise to the level of meaningful regard and reciprocity, i.e., what objects in the world have a perspective that demands or deserves recognition and respect.

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<sup>10</sup> The conceptual framework that shapes our worldview through a “web of related concepts” (61).

Tyson Yunkaporta (Apalech Clan) and Doris Shillingsworth (Murrawarri Republic) describe this succinctly in an essay they recently co-wrote entitled “Relationally Responsive Standpoint.” In describing the relational process, they write:

Creation is sparked by the separation and overlap of opposite forces, a turnaround of spirit and material, skycamp and earth. This delicate but turbulent process is constantly in motion, and responds to our ways of relating to it. Our way of knowing and expressing this web of connectedness actually co-creates it – existence only continues to exist because we do this. This is our reason for being, our purpose as a custodial species...We maintain reality through culture – through story, ceremony, song and social systems or relationships (Cajete, 2000). There is a pattern to life and we have to see it, know it, live it, be it, increase it, correct damage done to it. But we do more than simply maintaining creation – we also have an obligation to increase complexity and connectedness. (5)

This describes the ontological primacy of relationality and, by extension, a more capacious version of peoplehood. Peoplehood goes well beyond human beings and the broader use of the term follows directly from the ontological orientation being sketched.

“Peoples” in this sense also extends beyond what we might think of as “animate” or living things due to the ontological density granted to any individualizable object, i.e., any individual object or set of objects that can be storied, recognized, and related to can be considered a person or peoples. In that sense, storying commingles with the process of identification and relation, however, it is best to think of these processes as being both mutually constituting and constitutive: as a non-binary, non-discrete dualistic processes.

Storying as the phenomenon of articulation as such drives and is itself constructed in concert with the process of recognition and affiliation. This is predicated on a fundamental ontological difference that Anne Waters notes “create[s] an experience of the world distinct from...Western European ontology,” one derived from traditional Indigenous worldviews around an “ontological site [that] reflects a nondiscrete, inclusive, living nonbinary dualism, inclusively celebrated in articulations of ‘all my relations’” (*American Indian Thought* 107). Storying cannot be thought of in isolation from these processes; indeed, storying *is* these processes; it is the fluid, concerted movement from sacrality to relationality and back again in the co-composition of experiential reality.

An illustration from one of our earlier interpreters of Hiraacá in describing the rights of certain trees illustrates this interrelationality and more expansive and agent-filled world:

When the Missouri, in its spring-time freshets, cuts down its banks and sweeps some tall tree into its current, it is said that the spirit of the tree cries while the roots yet cling to the land and until it falls into the water...it was considered wrong to cut down these great trees and, when large logs were needed, only such as were found fallen were used...some of the [elders] declare that many misfortunes...are the result of [the] modern disregard for the *rights of the living cottonwood* (Matthews 288, emphasis mine).

Here, the “rights of the living cottonwood” reflects a different system of ethical consideration and understanding of rights<sup>11</sup> deriving from the orientation toward the universality of sacrality and the modes of relationality that obtain from that understanding. As such, there is a fundamental recognition of the perspective or standpoint of the cottonwood trees, an identification with and of their agency given in the sacrality that is interior to all things, but also the particularized duties and obligations that the localization of that relationality, within a concrete and place, generates relative to an instantiation and individuation of the sacred.

This more animate world is therefore a more agent-filled world as well. In the opening chapter of *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, a book co-authored by Vine Deloria, Jr. and Daniel Wildcat (Mvskoke Nation), the authors undertake a metaphysical exploration of Indigenous worldview to situate the educational experience for Indigenous peoples in America. Deloria’s opening chapter, “American Indian Metaphysics” clearly draws from and extends his earlier book-length treatment on the subject, *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence*. While this earlier work largely hews towards finding metaphysical commonality between settler and Indigenous worldviews, this opening chapter reflects a shift away from an overt attempt to find commonality and instead inaugurates a conversation within and among Indigenous cultures/nations rather than explicitly towards the wider philosophies of modernity that govern settler societies. Deloria makes clear his intentions from the outset, indicating that Indigenous people should focus their philosophical analysis on commonalities among tribal nations and the

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<sup>11</sup> The notion of non-human peoples having rights has been reified in various Indigenous nations. For instance, the White Earth Band of Ojibwe has formally and legally recognized the rights of *Manoomin* (wild rice). This understanding has even begun to trickle into mainstream environmental and ecological discourse.

perspectives and knowledge that are derived from it. Deloria thus begins with a similar assumption to Cordova's regarding "matrices," writing:

The best description of Indian metaphysics was the realization that the world, and all its possible experiences, constituted a social reality, a fabric of life in which everything had the possibility of intimate knowing relationships because, ultimately, everything was related. This world was a unified world, a far cry from the disjointed sterile and emotionless world painted by Western science. (Deloria V., "American Indian Metaphysics" 2)

This familiar refrain and fundamental ontological orientation from Deloria derive from what he calls the "two basic experiential dimensions" of Indigenous worldviews: "place and power" (2).

In elaborating on these concepts, Vine Deloria clarifies that "power" might be better rendered as "the intangible, spiritual quality of matter," and "the mysterious power that almost all tribes accepted as the primary constituent of the universe," ("American Indian Metaphysics 3-4) and later in another chapter, "the living energy that inhabits and/or composes the universe" ("Power and Place Equal Personality" 22-23). His work in this chapter often makes recourse to a critique of settler modernity as a means of characterizing the hurdles Indigenous students face in settler school systems insofar as these two dimensions of Indigenous worldview are discounted as uncategorizable within Western epistemologies and are therefore disregarded as illegible anomalies, or, worse, eviscerated through explanatory narratives of Indigenous worldview through Western modes of scientific discourse. As such, Deloria implores Indigenous students to remain

true to the teachings and modalities of knowledge of their elders and ancestors, to “stand...in the shoes of their grandparents as metaphysicians...[and] maintain themselves as practical and competent metaphysicians” (“American Indian Metaphysics” 6). This advisement serves as an important recognition that Indigenous worldview is predicated on different metaphysical understandings than that of Western science, settler-colonial institutions of educations, and the broader settler cultures of the world. Indeed, I tend toward the idea that “Indigenous studies,” such as it is, is first and foremost a metaphysical enterprise and philosophical endeavor, and, therefore, nearly any analytic or interpretive object necessarily encounters a reflection and meditation on something deeper than reading of the exteriority or surface and instead must hold an orientation towards something deeper—not simply deeper in terms of ideology through critique, but the fundamentally mysterious and ineffable sacrality and relationality that enervates and articulates everything.

“Place,” Vine Deloria’s other fundamental dimension of experience, is summed as “the relationship of things to each other,” and these two dimensions combine into a “simple equation: Power and place produce personality” (“Power and Place Equal Personality” 23). Which is to say, universal sacrality, the ineffable power that inheres in all things, and universal relationality, the field of affiliation generated with/in universal sacrality, are the combinatory elements of an animate universe and of person/peoplehood more generally. Epistemology therefore necessarily takes on the character of relational intimacy within a more personalized world. Scott Pratt, in a short essay on Deloria’s metaphysics in the *American Philosophy Association Newsletter* in 2006, organizes this

structure of power and place in Indigenous worldview under the term “agent ontology,” noting:

the universe has an agent ontology where its entities are persons whose particular character will be a matter of their interactions and where knowledge will be a matter of knowing their personalities. This view can be called an “indigenous philosophy...” (Pratt 5)

Pratt distinguishes this “Indigenous philosophy” from “Native American” philosophy in reminding the reader that Wildcat, the co-author of *Power and Place* with Deloria defines “Indigenous” as “to be of a place,” which I read as akin to my own recognition of the widely spread *orientation* towards sacrality and relationality as one that moves away from categorizations such as “Native American” or “First Nations” and toward a more broadly and globally conceived Indigenous philosophical posture.

This radically capacious extension of personhood and agency is, of course, not new, nor is it exclusive to Indigenous worldviews or epistemological systems. As Pratt also notes, the recent popularity of philosophical movements in panpsychism, reductionist anthropological descriptions of animism, as well as neo-vitalist strands of thought all share similarities with these orientations—not to mention the similarities that underlie Spinoza’s philosophy, who I often jokingly assert is best read in the original Hidatsa. Resonance is also found in process ontologies such as those in Alfred Whitehead’s work, a philosopher whom Deloria quotes from at the beginning of the earlier chapter referenced, and the recent strands in ethics of biocentrism and ecocentrism, each of which extends ontological “value” beyond humans—to all living

species and to the whole of nature, respectively<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, as Pratt emphasizes, such correlative European philosophies/beliefs are often not taken seriously in the academy let alone the Indigenous philosophies that intersect with them given the typical, long-standing, and obviously inaccurate caricature of Indigenous peoples as inherently primitive.

Cordova's thought aligns with this more extensive understanding of personhood and the possibility for interrelationships that extend beyond multiple forms of othering (149). This similarity relies on her description of the "Sacred Universe," the sacrality of which she conceptualizes around the Jicarilla Apache concept *Usen*:

*Usen* signifies a concept that may be 'pan-Indian'; that is, it may be widespread...it signifies something 'of a substance character, nature, essence, quiddity beyond comprehension and therefore beyond explanation, a mystery; supernatural potency, potential' in the words of Basil Johnston, Anishinaube. The concept of this mysterious 'force' also shares the notion of its being all pervasive, that is, it is everywhere and in all things, perhaps *is* all things. *Usen* may or may not contain all the features that the individual tribal groups [express]...it does, however, share in the notion of something that simply *is*, that remains unidentifiable, mysterious, supernatural...this mysterious *something* precedes everything else; it serves at the same time as the *ground* of things

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<sup>12</sup> See Whitehead, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World*. Free Press, 1995.; and Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics: With the treatise on the emendation of the intellect and selected letters*. Hackett Publishing, 1992.

and the manifestation of itself. (Cordova *How It Is*, 107, emphasis original)

*Usen*, *Wakhán*, *WaaRUxtii*, and *Maxuubáa* operate in a relational network that is not separated in culture but equal in content; instead, they operate in a differentiating relational posture that recognizes the particularity of each concept as fundamental to its contextual expression. All peoples derive and express localized, contextual, and therefore unique meaning within and among networks of interrelations that articulate within a particular place. As such, they can be thought here as rendered in an articulating constellation of “together and different” rather than “separate but equal.”

My insistence on recognizing a distinction between orientation and content derives from a concern that by identifying a similarity in ontological orientation, I am implying that the particularized content and identity of these concepts is similar or even identical. Dennis H. McPherson (Couchiching First Nation) and J. Douglass Rabb in *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal* attend to this in their fifth chapter on language and metaphysics. In a section entitled, “A Philosophical Question,” the authors discuss whether these terms “mean the same thing” by first attending to an important idea that often arises in Indigenous scholarship, namely “the possibility of the incommensurability of worldviews” (147). Rabb and McPherson explain that they have previously argued that Indigenous concepts need to be understood within the tribal contexts from which they arise and the inferences and linkages that accompany such contextual analysis. Building on Cordova’s discussions of Indigenous exogamy and the extensive, trans-national networks of cultural, material, and conceptual trade and interaction across and among Indigenous nations, they reach an understanding

of a deep complexity of affiliation within these traditional interrelations that serves as a meaningful exception to their earlier position (146-148). Summarizing this understanding in relation to Pratt's discussion of Deloria's notion of "power and place," they use a musical metaphor:

Voices and songs are metaphors for persons, including, always, other-than-human persons. We are who we are, we are the individuals we are because our voices resonate with those of others in our wider community, the ecosystems in which we live, or rather through which we interrelate. Such interrelations should be thought of as *place*. (McPherson and Rabb 152-153, emphasis original)

The point here is that between and among Indigenous worldviews there is not the same sort of incommensurability that exists between those Indigenous worldviews and Western modernity's philosophical frameworks. This describes the similar orientation, ontological schematization, or, as Rabb and McPherson use, "modes of reasoning" between Indigenous worldviews that does not exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ontologies (157). This incommensurability also creates a type of differential similarity that indexes a common disjunctive modality within and among Indigenous ontological orientations apart from settler-materialist modes of thought.

This does not mean I read these concepts to be necessarily "pan-Indian," at least not in the sense of being a particularized universal cosmology for all Indigenous peoples, and neither am I assuming any direct correspondence or influence beyond the ones I make here for myself and this chapter. I also do not interpret Cordova as absolutizing the concept into stark "pan-Indian" dimensions, evident by her use of similarly conditional

language in the passage. Instead, this is a type of knotting, a means of bringing together relational elements into a conceptual network of Indigenous relations that help give voice and song to her own. In Cordova's work, *Wakan* (Lakota), *Natoji* (Blackfeet), *Nilchi'i* (Diné), and *Manitou* (Anishinaabe) are productively tied together around a similarity in ontological schematization. And in a textual-relational recursion, Waters, who was a close friend of Cordova and fellow pioneer of Indigenous women doing philosophy within the academy, notes in her review of James Maffie's *Aztec Philosophy* the numerous other contemporary scholars, including Jace Weaver, Vine Deloria, Jr., Brian Burkhardt, and numerous others who share a similar orientation to the one I am here outlining, including, of course, Waters herself (Waters, "Ontology Matters" 6). The definition that Waters affirms is a "like-minded constitutional monism according to which reality consists of a single, uniform, homogenous energy or power—*usen, natoji, waken tanka, yowa, orenda, or nil'ch'i*—that is neutral between spirit and matter, mind and body, and so on'" (Maffie 49). This definition re-renders the prior definitions in a different texture, characterizing a central "constitutional monism" as well as a neutrality to the notion of sacrality, nevertheless, for our purposes, it still maintains the steady ontological orientation that I have been here sketching.

Settler-colonial orientations within capitalistic systems differ in the horizon of their orientation. Insofar as we understand an orientation as the ways in which the architecture of cosmology and ontology—the frame of reference that constructs a worldview—influence the structure of a society, we can interpret capital itself as the primary abstraction to which settler society orients. Indeed, modernist worldviews do not even orient towards their own described materialist metaphysics. The role of materialist

reduction in settler philosophical frames of reference is followed only insofar as it voids interiority as such—very few people take their materialist interpretations to the edges of scientific understanding and operate in the world from that position. Which is to say, modernist America orients towards money like Indigenous people orient toward sacrality, and, indeed, each orientation holds that which it orients toward in tremendously high esteem. Few capitalists seem moved by the bizarre scientific reality of quantum harmonic oscillation and the fundamental indeterminacy of quantitative elementals. Rather, the consideration of physical reality ceases precisely at the point where it is determined that all non-human materiality is an inanimate composition of material elements that can then be functionalized within the capitalist market.

Such commonalities among Indigenous ontological orientations and their distinction with modernist interpretations have of course not gone unnoticed outside of Indigenous communities. Anthropologists have long surveilled and documented examples of Indigenous ontologies, however, typically these have been dismissively characterized as magical or primitive rather than engaged in as a critical index of an underlying ontological commitment. In more recent anthropological scholarship, the “ontological turn” has led to a renewed interest in these cultural features of Indigenous worldview. In 2005, the anthropologist Philippe Descola published his opus, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, which is an exploration and attempted categorization of mainly Indigenous (and other non-Western) ontologies as a means of schematizing these orientations. Building partially on his prior work with the Achuar peoples of the Amazon, Descola here wants to rid anthropology of its “epistemological regime,” i.e., as the title suggests, the oppositional organization of the domains of nature and culture. This

common division creates a dramatic ontological asymmetry, wherein humans and their creations and behaviors reside on one side of this great divide and *everything else in existence* is relegated to “an ontological niche defined by the absence of human beings” (30). Terming this ontological schema “naturalism,” Descola glosses its formative moment as:

when nature ceased to be a unifying arrangement of things, however disparate, and became a domain of objects that were subject to autonomous laws that formed a background against which the arbitrariness of human activities could exert its many-faceted fascination. (xv)

By redescribing this ontological division in comparison to other ontological systems, Descola situates naturalism among three other schemas—totemism, animism, and analogism. Divorced from its simplistic application in anthropological description and refashioned in orientation toward its metaphysical underpinning, “animism” comes to be formulated as a type of ontological inverse of naturalism. Early in the text, Descola describes how such an orientation fosters the “treat[ment of] certain elements in the environment as persons endowed with cognitive, moral, and social qualities analogous to those of humans” (31), but seeks rather to understand the ontological implications and, thereby, derivations of this animate world in terms of ontological structure.

Central to Descola’s endeavor is a dualism he sketches between what he terms “interiority” and “physicality” and the organization of these phenomenon within categories of similarity and dissimilarity vis-à-vis human and non-human relations. The appearance of the dualism in turn relies on two underlying or “pre-predicative” elements that create and organize the field of appearance for interiority/physicality. These two pre-

orientation modalities he terms “identification” and “relations,” defining identification as a:

general schema by means of which I can establish difference and resemblances between myself and other existing entities by inferring analogies and contrasts between the appearance, behavior, and properties that I ascribe to myself and those that I ascribe to them. (113)

Relations, then, are “external links between beings and things that are detectable in typical behavior patterns and may be partially translatable into concrete social norms” (Descola 113). For Descola, while identification organizes ontological domains, relations describe the character of the association and interrelations themselves. While he takes pains to differentiate “self/nonself” of identification and the “I/you” relationship of relations—noting the distinction as one between *alter* and *aliud*—he nevertheless maintains that this “indexical consciousness” imputed by the *aliud* as well as its reinforcement through the “intersubjective differentiation” of the *alter* “to precede and be external to the existence of an established relationship with something other...something the content of which can be specified by its modalities of interaction” (118, 112). Since identification serves along a more analytic and terminological line, relation, as one might assume, adds an interdependent dimensionality to a given ontological structuration manifested by the process of identification.

This prevailing self-centric organization within Descola’s work flounders a bit on the idea of something prior to the indexical consciousness. For Descola, the indexical consciousness, intentionality as such, precedes (and is deepened by) the process of intersubjective identification. But even in Descola’s own formulation, *relationality as*

*such* precedes and attends the modality of identification. There is no “indexical consciousness,” no standpoint, without relationality itself as the functional modality for identification to render the indexical self. The coherence of an individualized standpoint relies on relationality insofar as there cannot be only a singular standpoint, its coherence is predicated on a non-totalizing perspectival position. As Cordova notes, “A dialogue with an alien other requires, first of all, an acceptance that there is the possibility of an other as *other* (and not simply as a distortion of oneself)...and [a] willing[ness] to accept the other as *equal*; that is, both parties have something to say” (*How it is* 75). Thus, identification and individuation rely not only on these principles of “identification” and “relation,” but, in line with a sacred and animate world, a central importance on relationality itself as a universal coming into relation with knowledge through the ontological equality of perspective and testimony—through relational metaphors and stories. This self-expressive capacity of all individualizable objects (sacrality) structures and organizes the web of relations within the particularity of place (relationality). Or, as Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth put it, “your way of being is your way of relating, because all things only exist in relationship to other things” (11). Thus, the relationships between ‘I’ and ‘them’ come along within categories of relations—they index the orienting vectors within the topography of differentiation.

The correlationist bind—the idea that one can only speculate about the correlation between subject and object and not either phenomenon considered on its own terms—is itself the result of this dead-materialist orientation. One understands consciousness to presuppose cognition, however, cognition *as such* does not presuppose consciousness. Nevertheless, we can limn these cognitive forms

because consciousness is itself derived from the same conditions of reality in the universe as everything else. From a systems perspective, consciousness is an emergent phenomenon—a pattern—that arises from the complex dynamics of interrelated elements that are compositional to all that exists. As such, neither cognition nor consciousness is something special that humans invented and only humans possess. Indeed, they are phenomenon that arise naturally within nature, *inclusive of humanity*, and is evidenced by the very virtue of our having consciousness and being participants in the same complex system that informs all reality. Assuming the sacred and innate shared structure of cognition and its presence in all things, the self-reflective awareness of our own cognition in forms beyond rational knowledge reflects on this shared sacred interiority—i.e., we can speculate about the in-itself because we share in the sacrality from which it is composed. Indeed, we derive our consciousness from the same fundamental form of cognition that marks the interiority of any individualizable thing.

My observation here, however, does not shift the capacity for manifesting ontological orientations that are particular to context, and the difference among these pre-predicative structures of experience inform Descola's four-fold model of ontology. The ontological model that Descola proposes is thus organized not by these modalities of differentiation, but rather by how these modalities organize what he terms "interiority" and "physicality" across different social and cultural systems (116). In defining these two terms, Descola expands the definition of interiority away from a vague similarity with mind-body dualism while nevertheless leaving it inclusive of such a dichotomy. This mind-body dualism and the philosophical apparatus from which it derives serves as an

example of an ontological organization that emanates from within his schematization of naturalism. In its more expansive description, Descola notes that “interiority consists in the universal belief that a being possesses characteristics that are internal to it or that take it as their source”; in contrast, physicality “concerns external form,” though:

not simply the material aspect of organic and abiotic bodies; it is the whole set of visible and tangible expressions of the dispositions peculiar to a particular entity when those dispositions are reputed to result from morphological and physiological characteristics that are intrinsic to it.

(116)

It is from the play of differentiation and the associative relationships across these two critical ontological categories of physicality and interiority that generates the Descolian ontologies. This is described by simply examining the ways in which interiority and physicality can be organized by the modalities of identification and relationship, either similar or dissimilar to one another, thereby producing four distinct ontological schemas.

By analyzing and organizing these modalities of interiority and exteriority, Descola comes to the four ontologies that form the central ontological descriptions in the work: 1) “Animism” is the identification of the universal similarity of interiority and the universal dissimilarity of exteriority/physicality. 2) “Naturalism” identifies a universal *dissimilarity* of interiority and radical similarity of exteriority. 3) “Totemism” recognizes universal similarity of *both* interiority and exteriority. 4) “Analogism” serves as a radicalization of the differentials, organizing both interiority and exteriority as dissimilar. I have no intention to cover each of his four ontologies in detail here. Rather, I am highlighting the correspondences between his model of animacy as they intersect with my

prior examination of Indigenous ontological orientations. As is bound to be the case with any discrete structuralist schematization, there are limitations to Descola's model, which he himself notes, especially insofar as it fails to offer a robust engagement with the liminalities that inhere across the four ontologies. That said, he does emphasize that such schematizations are intended to provide something more akin to an anchoring viewpoint or, in my own terminology, modes of ontological orientation. For instance, one could reasonably argue that within many animist traditions, there are also components of totemism and analogism—not to mention the prevailing materialist substance ontology of naturalism. Nevertheless, as another broad correspondence and interrelation with MHA ontology within the more broadly positioned interrelationality of general Indigenous philosophical orientation as glossed by Cordova, Waters, et al., we might recognize that our (MHA) identification of universal sacrality positions humans and non-humans as in possession of a similar, sacred interiority that engenders a more open system of relations between and among human and non-human peoples.

This is partially how I come to understand the fascination and wide-spread interest within Indigenous communities as well as Indigenous artists with the Hollywood franchise *Star Wars*. I attend to artists working with the world and iconography of the film in the next chapter, however, the evolution of an element of the franchise over the many decades and permutations of the film franchise serves as a simple exploration of this difference between Descola's animism and naturalism. Elements of *Star Wars*, I would argue, have entered Indigenous pop-culture, and so the movie franchise offers an example of a non-Indigenous text that nevertheless resonates within Indigenous communities for reasons related to my exploration heretofore. A more recent example of

this is the wide-spread love for “baby Yoda”—a much younger version of the ancient character from the first three films—within Indigenous communities. Baby Yoda has been “adopted” by the Indigenous community, a fact that has been noted in several major news outlets and continues to be a popular meme on Indigenous Twitter. The reasons for this have to do with the valence of the character: he is both a sacred elder, respected for his wisdom, and carries with him, in his new formulation, the additional sacrality of natality as a baby. Tara Houska (Ojibwe), Indigenous activist, attorney, and organizer, said in an interview with NBC News, “When I see Baby Yoda, I see an indigenous baby at ceremony learning the wisdom of our ancestors, wisdom that has been passed down for thousands of years” (Houska, qtd in Moya-Smith). Houska is not alone in her view. Indigenous artists have proliferated various revisional works of art related to this new Yoda character over the last couple of years since he was introduced in the *Star Wars* TV show *The Mandalorian*. This show has also begun engaging with extra-terrestrial Indigeneity and settler-colonialism by focusing more on backstory for the Sand People (“Tusken Raider”), who had been previously depicted as simply “savages” that raided and killed settlers.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, this sacrality that baby Yoda embodies is also more than any specific character description; there is just “something” Indigenous about him, a fact that helps explain the numerous Indigenous artists that have been revising and Indigenizing Yoda for decades. This unexplainable “something” helps us orient towards the ineffability of sacrality; that is, because Yoda is seen as sacred for the previously noted

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<sup>13</sup> “A New Hope” depicts Luke Skywalker’s Uncle and Aunt being murdered by Tusken Raiders and they set their camp on fire. This scene is directly inspired by a similar frame, focus, and plot device in John Ford’s *The Searchers*.

reasons, there is necessarily something that exceeds those reasons in their particularity. He is simply oriented towards an “all-compelling something unexplained.” The ineffability of sacrality that is exhibited in the films is also, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> why Indigenous people have seemingly adopted the three original films as well. That said, there is significantly *less* enthusiasm within the Indigenous community about the later films, and this is related to the same orientation towards sacrality. My auntie, Twyla Baker, president of the Nueta, Hidatsa, and Sahnish Tribal College back home at Fort Berthold, commented on this fact for the BBC last year. Baker noted, “There’s this huge allegory between the Force and Indigenous belief systems... We kind of have this affinity for the Force because there’s a lot of relationships or ties between Indigenous mindsets and that whole storytelling arc” (Baker qtd in Johnson). Indeed, this is not unexpected. George Lucas took much inspiration from Joseph Campbell’s work, especially *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and Campbell, in turn, derived much of the substance of his arguments regarding the deep structures of narrative from the many global Indigenous cultures he studied. Campbell had an intense fascination with Indigenous cultures from a young age, and some of this is reflected within the construction of the *Star Wars* world.

Additionally, the concept of the Force itself was coined not by George Lucas, but by Roman Kroitor, a cinematographer and experimental filmmaker who took his MA in philosophy from the University of Winnipeg. Kroitor says in the film *21-87* that “many people feel that in the contemplation of nature and in communication with other living things, they become aware of some kind of force, or something behind this apparent mask

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<sup>14</sup> See “Colonialism and a Hopi princess: Why Star Wars resonates with Indigenous audiences” by Stephanie Cram. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/in-a-galaxy-far-far-away-exploring-star-wars-through-an-indigenous-lens-1.5420783/colonialism-and-a-hopi-princess-why-star-wars-resonates-with-indigenous-audiences-1.5422156>

which we see in front of us” (Wagner) This is a clear inspiration for the films, wherein Obi-Wan Kenobi defines the force as “an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us; it binds the galaxy together” (*Star Wars*). This clearly orients the Force in ways resonant with my explorations here of sacrality, and positions the film as fundamentally animated by a conceptual phenomenon that defies full explanation. In that sense, the animism present in the film serves as a central conceit: it is the fundamental, well, force that governs the entire worlding experience. Nevertheless, and as should come as no surprise, many critics have panned this aspect of the films, frustrated by having such a central element of the film shrouded in metaphysical mystery. As such, as the second trilogy from the film franchise was released, George Lucas made a dramatic shift into the modality of naturalism.

In *The Phantom Menace*, the first of the new trilogy of films, this formerly mysterious metaphysical phenomenon suffers the attenuation of materialist explanation. The Force is now the result of “midichlorians,” microscopic creatures that can be tested for in the bloodstream. This reduces a metaphysical mystery to a scientifically quantifiable substance and moves these later *Star Wars* films firmly out of the realm of Indigenous popular culture by re-orienting and revising the world within a naturalist ontological orientation. These later films are widely considered inferior to the first films for reasons that extend beyond this element, but it does seem emblematic of the shift to a more widely marketable *American* pop-culture tone in the films. Nevertheless, the loss of this animating metaphysic at the heart of the franchise has been criticized for the lame explanation. The problem is, however, that no materialist explanation for the Force would have been sufficient to replace the greater storying power on the prior orientation toward

sacrality in a more intimate world; any explanation of something so fundamental would necessarily have to disengage from an animist orientation and substitute a naturalist conceit. By describing and explaining more, the Force becomes less. Nevertheless, with the franchise now no longer administered by George Lucas, a return to a more meaningful, animate universe has appeared in many of the more recent manifestations of the *Star Wars* universe.

Insofar as Western modernity observes a given unique interiority in a very limited sense—extending only to conscious humans—it also elides the differences in physicality through recourse to a materialist interpretation of all that exists, i.e., everything is fundamentally the same insofar as all things are composed of matter, and so *Star Wars* needed to find a materialist cause. Conversely, within an orientation toward universal sacrality and relation, it is precisely the fundamental differentiation and *individuation* generated by this ontological orientation—the modes of exteriority that inform being as such—that creates difference at all given the seemingly flat ontology of universal sacrality. Thinking back to our earlier interpreters’ description of Hidatsa ontology, he notes that “everything which has an independent being or *can be individualized* possesses [sacrality]” (Mathews 288), i.e., all individuated things are (or can be) sacred, and, as such, what differentiates individuated objects is not their interiority but the manifestation of that interiority into what Maori experimental filmmaker Barry Barclay (Ngāti Apa) calls “the accidents” of their exteriority (Barclay 1-2). These “accidents” and their relatively unrelated relationship to interiority serves to partially explain how something like *Star Wars*, hardly an “Indigenous film,” can nevertheless exhibit and fluoresce Indigenous.

These overlaps, of course, are not unexpected given the scope of Descola's intervention into modernity's peculiar exclusivity of the binary schism between nature and culture, human and non-human in Western thought—made even less surprising by dint of the varied Indigenous cultures that are put to work as examples outside of the universalizing horizon of modern-materialist naturalism.<sup>15</sup> In the same way that a simple recitation of compositional elements is insufficient for the full apprehension of any identity, Barclay orients us toward similarly inherent difficulties in the identity and expression of any given textual form. There is an excess in the interiority which articulates and shapes exteriority, but what those elements are is not necessarily isomorphic or even indexical of interiority as such. This is crucial because Barclay is interested in moving our attention toward this interiority, toward the non-physical, non-representational ways in which this interiority nevertheless is made manifest in Indigenous art. Interiority differs in kind from what he calls the “accidents” that form the content of its exteriority, the “the rituals, the language, the posturing, the décor, the use of elders, the presence of children, attitudes to land, the rituals of the spirit world” (Barclay 1-2). Barclay notes the common inclination to analyze Indigenous film in terms of accidentals instead of interiority—a temptation echoed across many interpretive approaches to Indigenous artistic production. Rather, by focalizing interiority “something else is being asserted which is not easy to access” (Barclay 15), something more akin to the modulations and articulations of the spatiotemporal vector itself, the ontological

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<sup>15</sup> I note with no small amount of chagrin that Descola follows in a long line of settler and/or European scholars making “profound” interventions into their fields by simply describing facets or elements of Indigenous cultures and/or worldviews in a perverse intellectual version of the discovery doctrine. Descola, as an anthropologist, at least has the humility to make clear this is his endeavor, unlike, for instance, the many early and contemporary political theorists of anarchism.

conditions within which the compositional elements are then placed into interrelationship in the text.

Barclay is thus “interested in philosophical elementals,” the Indigenous interiority, rather than the exteriorities and dynamic of Indigenous surface-signification, regardless, to some extent, of their content. Barclay is not here interested in drawing distinctions between the mobilization of elements that orient toward a more regional, hemispheric, or global Indigeneity from those that hail a particular Indigenous peoples or tribal nation. Arguably he is moving toward a less differentiated categorization of the form and content of a given text and how those elements are arranged; he is interested instead in the ontological conditions are generated by Indigenous interiority that distinguish the genus of what he terms “Fourth Cinema”<sup>16</sup> from those other cinemas of the nation-state and “third world”. This places interpretive emphasis on the relational character and activity of interiority as the ontological orientation of the articulative function within Indigenous textual production; the *isness* that sources the moment of creation in a world with its own spatiotemporal vectors. Within Fourth Cinema emerges what I think of as an Indigenous deep national-temporal sublime, and, for the modern nation-state, an unsettling temporal estrangement from this dramatically deeper perspective/standpoint. While the “accidentals” of Fourth Cinema may change, the temporal vectors of its interiority as indexed by its obtrusion into and movement beyond nation-state ontologies remain as: “the ancient roots, the ancient outlook persist[s], an

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<sup>16</sup> This terminology derives from Barclay’s movement away from cinemas and “films of colonization” embodied by the “third cinemas” described by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas and the more obvious second (European arthouse cinema) first (Hollywood) cinemas.

outlook with roots far back in time, an outlook...outside the national outlook” (Barclay 7).

Indeed, Indigenous artistic production is outside the national outlook if for no other reason than Indigenous peoples are exterior to the interiority of the modern nation-state:

Indigenous cultures are outside the national orthodoxy. They are outside the national outlook. They are outside spiritually, for sure...[and] outside materially also. They are outside the national outlook by definition, for Indigenous cultures are ancient remnant cultures persisting within the modern nation state. (Barclay 6-7)

This nation-state outlook/orthodoxy and their ideological landscapes are considered proximal to interiority because they condition the field of expectation relative to the role and character of the textual apparatus and what it creates: the perspectival horizons of the textual field, the articulation and relation of its elements, and the spatiotemporal dynamics of the text itself. This generated textual field therefore necessarily intersects and is conditioned by the philosophical predicates that bring it into being and continue to condition and circulate expressions within it. Which is to say, settler ontologies and worldviews disappear into the background of expectation and generate legibility insofar as the expressions that intersect with the cultural milieu of Western, modernist ontology also are captured within its presuppositions and interpreted within the confines of the outlook.

Barclay describes visiting a museum in Athens in the 1970s where a display of chronologically arranged tombstones of soldiers showed a shift over a couple of centuries

from a soldier depicted walking boldly forward, to the same soldier now attended from behind by another, grieving, figure, then of the soldier turned toward the figure, before, on the final stones, the figure is reaching back to almost grasp the grieving figure. This is interpreted for him by the curator, who explains that:

the series coincided with a passage in Greek history during which the populace moved from a confident religious vision of what is right for man in this life and what awaits him beyond it to a humanistic vision, in which feelings of loss and fear and uncertainty are allowed. (Barclay)

Barclay uses the story as a metaphor to emphasize the importance of interiority to the narration of meaning by explaining that to focus on accidentals in isolation, on the tombstones and their images divorced from the locality of their expression, would be like coming upon them jumbled and assembling them in whatever order seemed a best fit for the individual doing the arranging, which itself will be reflective of the ontological and broader philosophical worldview they inhabit rather than the contextual meaning derived from the original modality of expression. Having ascribed no meaningful relations to the interiority as a principle of articulation, it then becomes sequenced and rearticulated in relation to the outlook and cultural expectations of the interpreter(s), either as a reflection of self or a projection of other.

As a projection-reflection, the accidentals are shorn from the meaningful contextual relations that inform its production and outlook and reformulated by the outlook of the interpreter—the text now operates in near-complete isolation from the localized Indigenous interiority from which it emanates. A reflection-projection is just a motivated extension of the same process; what was an arbitrary articulation of the text is

now naturalized into a vantage with an utterly transparent view of this self-reflecting and artificially manufactured interiority. What were once unmoored accidentals utterly opaque as to their interiority are transmuted into accidentals accessibly and transparently isomorphic with a projected interiority. If the former is a deterritorialization and dispossession of the exteriority, the latter is the process of using the transparency of these dispossessed accidentals to perform the same process on the interiority. This is quite like Vine Deloria's own observations on the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, noting:

Our foremost plight is our transparency. People can tell just by looking at us what we want, what should be done to help us, how we feel, and what a "real" Indian is really like...Because people can see right through us, it becomes impossible to tell truth from fiction or fact from mythology. Experts paint us as they would like us to be. Often we paint ourselves as we wish we were or as we might have been. The more we try to be ourselves the more we are forced to defend what we have never been.

(Deloria, *Custer* 1-2)

The settler-colonial field of expectation is then laminated and naturalized onto this transparency. It is this field of expectation that Indigenous expression oriented toward universal relationality/sacrality impedes, blockades, transits, or otherwise imposes upon.

I will later discuss a mode of narration I call 4<sup>th</sup>-Peoples' Perspective (4PP); however, it is useful to note here that we can meaningfully situate 4PP in the same way we might Fourth Cinema through this preoccupation with interiority and an orientation toward a similar intimation of universal sacrality and relationality. This metaphysical

ontological orientation—Barclay’s “interest in philosophical elementals”—is critical both to the form and content of Fourth Cinema as well as 4PP more generally, and I interpret Barclay here making the claim that it is not the accidentals, the specific elements as such, that ought to define Indigenous art, but rather a meta-formal orientation toward Indigenous interiority, i.e., it is the very interest and assumption of an ontological orientation toward universal sacrality and relationality that forms and informs the focalizing principle and actuating force of articulation—and, as noted, *is* the creative capacity of such articulation. I focus above on these philosophical orientations as a means of outlining a type of fundamental mystery or unknowability working in the idea of Indigenous ontology that inheres within many Indigenous worldviews. In that sense, it is not the definition and categorization of the localized features, character, and particularized content/meaning of Indigenous expression that I note here<sup>17</sup>; rather it is this fundamental difference in ontological *orientation* and the overlapping and different expressions that limn the features of its structuration and in/form modes of Indigenous expression and their reception within varied Indigenous communities that I am exploring. Importantly, in terms of epistemology and methodology, the sacrality of Indigenous interiority operates at the limit point of settler-colonial rationality and legibility—an epistemological blockade in the form of sacrality itself.

The relationship between categorization, attenuation, particularity, and identity are critical nodal points in the articulation of the field of cultural expectation that I will argue Indigenous artists revise, *maaʔibcaa*, and *yiḡ* into new constellations in the next

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<sup>17</sup> I have intentionally not represented, described, or shared the content and particularized meaning of our stories or ceremonies in this chapter. Rather I sketch the ontological outlines of the textual field that serves as the ground for their appearance and the organizing principle of that grounding within an Indigenous worldview.

chapter. Nevertheless, both verbs relate to the figuration, weaving, or latticing in their localized, concrete occurrences— *maaʔibcaa* manufactures a self-sustaining relational structure by stitching the string upon which the beads are arranged, and *yiq* manufactures a supportive relational weave through the already extant weaving of the basket. I here interpret those terms as descriptions of “knotting” a categorical weave or constellation to interrogate the field of expectation. Once a category colonizes and settles over the particularity of an object, this particularity is rendered transparent or an illegible and meaningless excess. The illegibility of particularized excess is crucial in the distinction between the unexpected and the “anomaly,” a term used in Vine Deloria’s, work as well as his son’s, Philip Deloria. Whereas anomaly manifests as a legible abnormality that is translated proximally within the norming parameters of expectation, the unexpected renders stubbornly opaque this illegible excess and unties from and reknits itself (or not) unexpectedly within new constellations in transiting the limit point of cultural expectation: both among and beyond.<sup>18</sup>

Refusal and denial are important strategic tools within Indigenous thought and action, and these concepts and their material action constitute a means of negotiating the consumptive posture of Western modernity in relation to Indigenous peoples, lands, and

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<sup>18</sup> I sometimes use a simple (and therefore limited) short-hand illustration of the difference. If you are driving a car and you are expected to take a right at a four-way intersection, taking a left would be anomalous: it is an aberration that nevertheless is encoded within the field of expectation through its deviation from the expected action. Stopping the car at the intersection, getting out, and walking away, however, would be unexpected: it is a behavioral excess particular to the localization of context. The attenuation of likely behaviors by the categorizing force of expectation encounters a limit point embodied in the contingency of human agency.

our ways. In the work of Audra Simpson, Leeanne Simpson, and Glen Coulthard<sup>19</sup>, the relationship between resurgence and refusal is made tacit and utilized as an important means of corralling this consumptive logic, shielding off spaces of sovereignty from the roving force of acquisition. Dylan Robinson (Stó:lō Nation, Sqwa), in his excellent book *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, builds on many of these scholars' work in constructing his theoretical apparatus, particularly Coulthard's important book *Red Skin, White Masks*. Coulthard there describes the blockade as a "crucial act of negation insofar as they seek to impede or block the flow of resources...located on the dispossessed lands of Indigenous nations" (Coulthard 50, qtd in Robinson). Robinson deepens this exploration using the "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality" described in David Garneau's (Métis) work, wherein the blockade fosters sovereign Indigenous spaces that recede from settler apprehension. These spaces necessarily exclude non-Indigenous peoples of whatever stripe, Garneau notes, "Whether the onlookers are conscious agents of colonization or not, their shaping gaze can trigger a Reserve-response, an inhibition or a conformation to settler expectations (Garneau 27, qtd in Robinson). As such, techniques of refusal serve as critical operational procedures for sovereignty as well as within Indigenous worldview through the ineffability of sacrality itself.

Robinson here offers a distinction between two forms of refusal: "content refusal" and "structural refusal." Content refusal refers to how Indigenous scholars deny the

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<sup>19</sup> See Coulthard, Glen. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* Langara College, 2017; Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press, 2014; and Simpson, LeAnne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. Univ of Minnesota Press, 2020.

settler academy's imperative for cultural knowledge extraction as well as the demand that all valid knowledge production necessarily contribute to "universal" conceptualization of knowledge. Instead, the content blockade serves in "acknowledging that Indigenous epistemologies uphold context-specific practices of knowledge sharing," and therefore not all knowledge is meant (or able) to be abstracted, extracted, and disseminated (14). Structural refusal, on the other hand, is:

formal and aesthetic strategies that impede Indigenous knowledge extraction and instrumentalization. Forms of structural refusal counteract the epistemic violence of normative writing by exercising a range of interventions including forms of Indigenous resurgence...and non-Indigenous aesthetic strategies (Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*, the *détournements* of the Situationist International). If Indigenous knowledge and culture is mined and extracted, then it would follow that another key intervention for disrupting the flow of extraction and consumption would be the blockade. (16)

I will join Robinson in examining Brechtian conceptualizations in the next chapter. Here Robinson's work orients around this second form of blockading, and he examines the ways in which the blockade manifests what he terms "sensate sovereignty" that "acts as a limit of knowledge that is felt viscerally...and affectively beyond the page" (16). I knot together my exploration of the blockade of sacrality with and within these distinctions. Sacrality as such appears as a type of refusal born of its recognition in expression; a structural refusal that is also, by necessity, a refusal of content. This differs insofar as this type of refusal emanates from the phenomenon of sacrality itself; however, it also

generates types of structural refusal insofar the ontological orientation informs and structures epistemological claims and aesthetic expressions in an Indigenous worldview and cosmology.

This creates an aesthetic form beyond the totalizing forms of settler-colonial knowledge by orienting toward and limning the sacred ineffability of Indigenous interiority. This metaphysical blockade necessarily precludes full understanding *of* that which the ontology nevertheless orients *toward*. Expressions operating within this modality thus query the articulating logic of the dominant field of expectation by limning and focalizing the blockade created by this ineffability. Within this orientation, Indigeneity itself serves as a relational framework for the exploration of a difference together, for the knotting of Indigenous particularities to new rhizomatic formations of the Indigenous “we,” each a necessary but insufficient element of the definition itself. This relational knotting is a self-determined means of coming into relation with the assemblage while nevertheless maintaining a continuity exterior to its classification. I interpret these nodal knottings as *oorútixubaa*<sup>20</sup> (sacred knotting) to call attention to the ineffable sacrality they both represent and create through the articulation and bringing

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<sup>20</sup> Because we have been traveling around in the elementals of Indigenous worldview, I want to be very clear that this as well as the other concepts used in my work are technical terms to conceptualize ways of understanding that help me think within, among, and beyond the ideas I here interrelate. *Oorútixubaa* is not a collective concept reified and used by my people and, therefore, should not be assumed and/or imputed to describe the tribal particularity of my or any other tribe—as I hope I have made clear in the preceding sections. The long history of emblemizing a singular Indigenous person to articulate entire tribes within settler-colonial discursive regimes finds parallel in some academic research that similarly reconstitutes Indigenous scholarship as isomorphic with the underlying tribal worldview. This is also directly related to the previously noted ontological individualism as applied to epistemological practices as well the “transparency” of Indigenous peoples that Vine Deloria called attention to earlier. Put simply: I speak *from* my collectively particularized Indigeneity, but I do not speak *for* it.

together of a diversity of elements into a relational constellation through narrative or artistic expression.

*Oorútixubaa*, this articulated imbricative attachment, I derive from a *Hiraacá* illustration of the relationship between social and ceremonial organization and time. When attempting to explain to his consternated interpreter the relationship of space, time, ceremony, and stories, Bears Arm (MHA Nation) offers an analogy of the relationship between ceremony and space-time:

[Bears Arm] compares the ceremonies to knots on a string; all are independent ceremonies just as each knot is independent of the other knots, but, at the same time, they are connected and related in the same way that knots are related to each other by their order on the string...Bears Arm provided a unique design, an inverted 'Y,' to illustrate the pattern both in respect to time and space...The continuation of the base of the 'Y' as a single line represented...a new series of ceremonies developed. He then proceeded to make "knots" on the string to represent the points in the traditional history of the tribe when the various ceremonies originated.

(Bowers 304)

Ceremonies serve as moments of profound intensifications of sacrality through this renewal and regular reknitting practice through which things are continually brought into deep and meaningful relation. I tie onto Bears Arm's metaphor here to think about not only the physical knot on the string being indicated, but the interwoven, recursive, turning-in, turning-out, combinatory topography of the knots themselves as an index of the complexity relational multiplicity within ceremonial and social rhythms. Such an

interrelated narrative-network structure is nevertheless incorporative, it “was ‘open at the top’ ...to provide for the occasional introduction of new bundle rites” (Bear Arms qtd in Bowers 287). The *oorútixubaa* as a *process*, as a verb, is this articulation of knotting, tying together strings and strings of strings, the individualization relational-sacrality unspooling and tensioning through time, variously taught and slack, all within its own durative, animate, and relational articulation to the other dynamic knottings. The strings may bisect or parallel in three dimensions with other lines creating various levels of relation, perhaps knotting, unknotting, reknitting, or simply in transit across each other’s presence. And this complex interrelated web of relational articulations can then be clothed in various constellational formations or classifications and other means of relating and “coming to” it.

As such, the articulative force of narrative as well as its interpretive processes are a central means by which those relations are made manifest in the world. As Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth put it:

Cultural metaphors are the tools we have been given to know and therefore sustain creation. The structured manipulation of words, images, actions and objects that carry additional layers of meaning is the way we co-create systems and events within the spiritual fabric of existence which is Dreaming (Yunkaporta, 2019). For example, a person working within the rainbow Dreaming metaphor described previously might manipulate light with a crystal or a shell to produce a rain event. Many cultural metaphors would be in play here to allow the rainmaker to navigate

multiple interactive systems of sky, water, land and more. (Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth 9)

The iterative process of storying and meaning making is fundamentally ontological in nature. Recursive, relational, and non-discrete, storying is itself meaning- and being-making, and meaning- and being-making is a form of storying, both of which are a process of bringing elements into meaningful relation through revisitation to prior articulations. A painting draws from the experience of the world of the artist, organizing and bringing into relation the form and content around those prior meanings, and so too the interpreter, who draws from *their* own experience of the world in organizing and bringing the form and content of the painting in relation to themselves—either through relation to their own direct experiential reality or through recourse to other semiotic experience: visual similarities to other mediums, other paintings, prior interpretations, genre conceptions, expectations about proper art, and so forth. All these various elements interrelate both within the aesthetic experience but are also mediated through the environment within which all the above are translated and produce meaning.

In an essay written for a collection of Indigenous philosophical essays titled *American Indian Thought*, Cordova sketches some of these differences in artistic understanding. In her essay, Cordova compares the harmonious intentionality of an Indigenous artists versus the “disruptive” role of the Modernist artistic endeavor. The disruptive modality of Modernity, to “make it new!” as Ezra Pound exhorted, has of course found continuous purchase within capitalist economic systems, often centered in the technology sectors wherein every new “bootstrap start-up” intends to “disrupt” the industry it enters. This language is often mirrored in scholarly work of the neo-liberal

education, wherein academics “deconstruct,” “intervene,” or otherwise communicate epistemological claims in terms of their disruptive capacity much like the artists Cordova describes. Opposed to this, Cordova interprets the Indigenous artist as a metaphysical scientist, noting that there is “a background...embedded in metaphysics: a specific way of defining the world” (“Ethics” 251). In this sense Cordova grounds Indigenous *aesthetics* within Indigenous *ethics*, glossing it here as a responsibility to render harmony in what is essentially a universe of order. The artist’s role then becomes “to find the underlying stability in chaos to help viewers understand chaos as well as order” (“Ethics” 252). Like a scientist, the Indigenous artist is a seeker of knowledge, *showing* their discovery rather than abstracting and *telling* it to the beholder.

The Indigenous artist brings forth new creations with an orientation toward sacrality, so there is a natural revisional approach to expression, “creativity implies working something into a new fashion” (Cordova, “Ethics,” 254), and in so doing effects and assists in the creation of that same sacred world and its reality. To create chaos and disruption in a universe that tends towards a more harmonious expression would be irresponsible and unethical unless it’s grounded in particularized contexts and justification that consider this ethical dimension in the creative act. She writes:

In the Native American view imagination is also subject to discipline. What I imagine may bring harm into the world—if I not only hold the thought or the image but also give it substance, I am responsible for adding to the world a new thing...there is not, nor can there be, a distinction between esthetics and ethics. The universe is a good thing—the goodness is inherent in the fact that the moving, living universe operates

on the principles of balance and harmony. In art and in life the role of the human being is to maintain balance. But balance, again, is not stillness; it cannot connote anything static...In Native America, the artist is a scientist showing what other have not previously seen. The artist is a healer—bringing us into harmony when we might have fallen away...the principle of the artist is responsibility. As co-creator, as healer, as scientist.

(Cordova, “Ethics,” 254-255)

Because of this complexity of relational ties, the textuality of expression itself is an important form of identity formation/creation within an Indigenous worldview. Indeed, bringing into relation different elements together to produce compositionally interrelated meaning serves a critical ontological function insofar as the narrative or compositional act itself expresses the creative activity of sacrality. If the sacred is all, then everything is in everything and the process of sequencing and articulating these sacred elements into meaningful patterns of relations is the activity of not just artistic production but the articulative signature of non-physical and physical reality itself. In such a textual reading of life, it would be accurate within both Indigenous metaphysical discourse and scientific discourse to describe life as a process of textual recombination, propagation, and further recombination of that differential textuality through time. Indigenous peoples just know, as A Tribe Called Red put it on their musical collective’s patch/logo, “our DNA is earth and sky.” Textual articulation, thus, is not simply a description of idea formation, but is also applicable to the formation of ethically grounded world-building.

In *Choctalking on Other Realities*, LeeAnne Howe (Choctaw) explores this sacred power of Indigenous storying. In the foreword to the book, Dean Rader opines that the

central concept that Howe articulates here, “tribalography,” “is the most significant theory of American Indigenous writing to emerge in the last 20 years—maybe ever” (“Foreword”10). He continues:

It is a theory of how everything comes to be...localized through Indigenous points of origin...I predict that as the field of American Indian studies grows, more and more scholars will start to use LeAnne’s theory of tribalography as a point of departure for Native fiction, poetry, criticism, drama, and film. (“Foreword” 10)

Howe’s description of tribalographic textual production orients toward the same universal relationality and sacrality in situating her conceptual framework; she defines tribalographies<sup>21</sup> by describing both what they *are* and terms of what they *do*— “[They] are power. They create people” (“Foreword”10). The distinction here might be better thought of as simply sacrality (power) and relationality (peoplehood). The power of sacrality that inheres in Indigenous storying “author[s] tribes...creation stories gave birth to our people” (Howe, Choctalking 18), and these narratives are enervate the ontological processes of individuation and transformation, which is then “revealed as a living character who continues to influence our culture” (Howe, “Tribalography”123). This animate power of relational compositionality is what tribalography both *is* and *does*: it is an instantiation of *oorútixubaa*, a braiding and embodiment of the universal sacrality and relationality inherent in all creation.

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<sup>21</sup> I have assembled Howe’s definition here from the book being discussed as well as an earlier draft of the chapter that was published in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* indicated parenthetically as “Tribalography”.

Howe makes three interrelated moves to orient and exemplify this posture that nevertheless hold in abeyance any strict definition. This moves tribalography against forms of categorization in terms of genre, form, theme, and/or content and instead toward focalizations of particularity. Howe emphatically elide this differentiation of medium, form, type, and genre within the textual field to focus, instead, on the orientation of its articulative function—the relational-compositional activity of organizing elements and knotting them into constellations from a localized-collectivized context. Second, she extends this categorical elision by radically enlarging the field of textuality itself deriving from an emphasis on the sacred transformative power of these knotted constellations to author, actuate, and organize material reality—i.e., “America” and “Manifest destiny” are both stories, however, the first authors a people, and second organizes the material reality *of* that people. Third, building on these elisions and expansions, she positions tribalographies as ontologically salient and fundamentally real phenomenon. They are particularized, animate, embodied relationalities that bring things together into a meaningful, localized, and individualized constellations; ideas, stories, and all forms of the creative-articulative function are real in the same way anything else is—and by virtue of the same function.

Textual formations—here writ inclusively of nations, people, stories, and ideas and their meaningful organization within a localized shared reality—are interchangeable because Howe’s Indigenous worldview sees them as an “integrated whole rather than individual parts...in Choctaw, an Anoli is a teller, someone who does all of the above [diverse forms of storying], relating all living things” (“Tribalography” 118). This process of knotting together stems from an obligation to localize, to “learn more about

my ancestors and myself...[and] render all our collective experiences into a meaningful form” (*Choctalking* 11). This rendering of *collective* experience is an important element of tribalogy insofar as the perspective of tribalogy is both collective and singular, a type of inclusively focalized plural first-person perspective that translates perspective into the same discursive space and regard that is given to first-person testimony. This perspectival construction does not fit easily into the categorical distinctions and ontological valence that are typically assumed within narrative perspective, which tends to both valorize and center the individualistic first-person perspective even within its plural form. That is, there is a distinction between the “we” of a collectively *focalized* plural first person and the “we” of an individually focalized perspective. This polyvocalized, inclusively focalized plural first person point of view I term Fourth Peoples’ Perspective (4PP). (4PP) is made narratological metaphor in the liminal space between the zero-person, obviative third-person, plural-inclusive first-person points of view. As a perspectival orientation rather than strictly a grammaticalized prescription for point of view, 4PP is not simply a mode of writing indicated by specific pronouns or verbal conjugations; rather, it is a means of gesturing to the localized and contextualized perspectival dynamics of Indigenous storying, which are embedded within the ontological orientation toward constellations of universal sacrality and relationality.

The 4PP is an Indigenous form of cognition and expression that is also related to what is called “complimentary cognition,” an understanding of collective or group cognition that has been interpreted as critical to the adaptability of a given collectivity or society. In a publication proposing a “new theory of human cognitive evolution,” the authors Helen Taylor, Brice Fernandes, and Sarah Wraight define complimentary

cognition as the “theory that our species cooperatively adapts and evolves through a system of collective cognitive search” (1). The result of this understanding is to understand neurotypicality (and its enforcement) as evolutionary troubling for social formations. Because complimentary cognition relies on a diverse range of neurocognitive capabilities—not all of which will be necessarily directly “valuable” within a given society—the attenuation of cognitive differences through systems of interior regimentation through socialization and medical interventions tends towards a less adaptive society (Taylor, Fernandes and Wraight 2-4). Insofar as different modes of being and ways of thinking are not obviously beneficial to society, and with no commitment to the fundamental sacrality of all ways of being, capitalist societies flatten the diversity of cognitive forms. Rather than creating ways to integrate deviant modes of cognition within social structure—for instance by not norming types of cognition by which to define deviant alternative mental modalities—cognitive forms that might otherwise have been useful in a new environment or context or have led more circuitously to influence the collective in ways beneficial for its processual becoming are erased within the social structure. The 4PP, instead, is the expressive form of complimentary cognition that interrelates cognitive modalities and understandings across both the diachronic and synchronic registers—speaking from and with both deep-time collective cognition as well as the plurality of cognitive differences among contemporaneous collectivities.

There is a familiar identifier of the 4PP for me that Howe derives from the storying traditions of her grandmother; a type of signifier that often indicates a story emphatically grounded within this ontological orientation. As she notes:

Grandmother was a storyteller and she taught me the power of story.

When I was growing up she was the one who told stories late into the night. Sometimes she'd say, "Do you hear what I hear? Listen! Ygiea-e-e." Then she would begin a story... When Grandmother ended a story, she'd squeal in her high-pitched old-lady voice: "Whee-ee that's enough, I can tell you no more today." (*Choctalking* 19-20)

Howe here notes that she tells us her grandmother's stories "because [they are] a good example of what I am trying to address: the power of Native stories," and critical to the identification of the power of these stories is this formal indicator, "Whee-ee that's enough, I can tell you no more today," which serves as the final line of Howe's own essay, thereby indicating the essay is a powerful story of creation and transformation: a tribalogy (21, 32).

Her grandmother's opening, her call to storying, is "Do you hear what I hear? Listen! Ygiea-e-e." It is an invitation to bear witness to 4PP, a localization and situating of the vectors and dynamics through and by which the story will be made manifest. As a linguistic corollary, in an examination of switch-reference<sup>22</sup> (SR) in Hidatsa language, the linguist John P. Boyle describes two separate types of switch-reference systems in our language, one of which is reserved specifically for storying our *maásii*, our sacred

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<sup>22</sup> There is no space here to dive into this elegant and very cool grammatical system of Hidatsa. Broadly, William Jacobsen, who coined the term "switch reference," notes "It consists simply in the fact that a switch in subject or agent...is obligatorily indicated in certain situations by a morpheme" (240). An example I use is the sentence, "He saw his work and liked it." There is ambiguity here as to who is seeing whose work—is it one individual assessing their own work? Or are there two agents involved here? —and there is unnecessary clarity as to the gender of the agents involved. In a switch reference system, it might look like "(the subject) saw (not the subject)'s work and (the subject) liked it." These subject/not subject indicators would typically be set off by the addition of a morpheme that performs this act of differentiation. If we use a/e to indicate subject/not subject, we might write it: "saw<sub>a</sub> worke and liked<sub>a</sub> it." See Jacobsen's "Switch-reference in Hoka-Coahuiltecan" in *Studies in Southwestern Ethnolinguistics*.

narratives (413-414). This separate system of switch reference serves as the indicator of the textual space of 4PP, the syntactical form vectoring the content through this separate linguistic register. The conclusion of *maásii* is marked through a sentence-final indicator: *-wareec*, translated loosely, Boyle notes, as “‘they say,’ indicating knowledge has been handed down through the generation” (414). In Sahnish, a simple *nawáh*, (“now”) might serve the same purpose, but more often something similar to *wareec* is said, “that’s how the story goes” or similar formulations. Sahnish stories often begin with a phrase to indicate the introduction of 4PP textual space as well. Lilian Brave gives one formulation that serves to illustrate the general features of this indicator “*kuwiteetuunú ‘a*” or “the village was coming in a long procession” (Parks and Morsette 80), a way of referencing the continued movement and coming together of the tribe as well as the inclusivity of that collectivity within the narrative space.

I am not marking here a direct equivalency between these markers and Howe’s use of her grandmother’s ways of marking storying, I am observing a relation. The relational localization that inheres in both practices derive their particularized meaning from the process itself. Nevertheless, I am not making claim about the content and specific relational organization of these registers of compositional intensification and what they manifest; rather, I trace a relational story of the orientation of their expression within the textual field. It relationally individuates and organizes the story within an intensely sacralized onto-textual field: the perspectival horizon dramatically pluralizes together into a collective-singular polyphonic constellation, the tensioned lines of which turn-in-on and turn-out-of their knotting as they articulate across the flattened temporality of sacred time and organize a diversity of difference into a storied unity. Within this

textual space, Howe notes things are brought together in a spatial, temporal, ontological milieu by “symbiotically connecting one thing to another,” the prevalence of this habit being what she calls a “cultural bias” or inclination to orientation within Indigenous storying (Howe, *Choctalking* 28). In this sense, Indigenous storying is a form of articulating parts into a whole, however, what constitutes “parts” is universalized and the “whole” is given ontological equivalency to any other individuated, relational whole.

In a tribalogy, the textual space is characterized by 4PP, within which what is storied is both true and real, and the perspectival position that might be characterized in Western discourse as “second-hand” is rendered in the first-person collective and received as a form of collective testimony that is both renewed and affirmed in the telling. Howe comes closest to a formal definition of tribalogy in noting that:

Native stories, no matter what form they take (novel, poem, drama, memoir, film, history) seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations, and connect these in past, present, and future milieu. (*Choctalking* 28)

Tribalogy thus has a dual motion as a decategorization of form and a reorganization of textuality within a relational milieu at the level of content. It is in this sense that tribalogy is an expression of universal sacrality—an orientation toward the interiority and actuating force of the articulative function. And this sacrality is simultaneously universal in presence, localized in expression, plural in composition, and relational in action. As such, tribalogy for Indigenous peoples is simply pondering the mysteries their experiences, telling their stories, and creating a new discourse...what Ojibwe author

Gerald Vizenor describes as, "creat[ing] discourse with imagination" (*Survivance* 31).

Howe here ties tribalogy explicitly to scholar/theorist Gerald Vizenor's

(Anishinaabe) elusive concept of "survivance."

Indeed, the concept of survivance has enjoyed a robust and varied life within Indigenous scholarship, so much so that its use in contemporary scholarship often does not have an attending explanation, such as in the book by Robinson mentioned above. Arguably this stems not only from the wide and common circulation of the term but also from a certain ineffability of what the term designates. The term itself is generally interpreted as a portmanteau of some variation of survival and endurance (Weaver) and/or survival and resistance (Madsen) as noted in their contributions to the essay collection. Diane Glancy (*Cherokee Descent*) takes a more etymo-poetic approach in aligning survivance with poesis:

Poetry is dreaming while awake. Poetry is wake-dreaming. It is a derangement of self in an accentuated landscape. It establishes the boundaries of its range. Poetry is rebound. A turn of writing. (Sur)vivance: Sur—a survival outside survival. Vivance—the vitality of it. It takes something outside survival to define it. It is a stepping away from it to look back at the surrounding vibrance (51).

Glancy's description toys with a non-identity configuration that limns survivance by gesturing to the interplay of exteriority and interiority in the context of definitional categorization. It also plays with the same fundamentality of that both is and *is beyond*—as Glancy calls our attention to, sur- derives from super-: over, beyond—tied elegantly together and shot through with *vivance*, its animated/ing force. Which is to say,

survivance and sacrality are close kin, and survivance certainly presumes perhaps *is*, an ontological orientation toward the sacred and relational.

The term first comes to popular usage in Vizenor's *Manifest Manners* and *Fugitive Poses* but has nevertheless continued to reappear and rearticulate across numerous contexts in a process of ongoing interpretive revisions and reinstantiations. And, while survivance is conceptually slippery and amorphous by design, it continues to proliferate and circulate in academic and non-academic contexts alike. The most sustained, published engagement with the concept is the collection of scholarly essays published in 2008 entitled *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Vizenor opens the collection with an essay that reads much like any other bewildered scholar exploring the possible relational constellations between the concept, its varied uses, and its seeming ineffability. In glossing various dictionary definitions, usages by scholars such as Geertz, Derrida, and his own previous work, Vizenor continues to limn, weave, and tie things together *around* rather than *within* survivance, blockading attempts at a singular or definitive mono-interpretation/definition for the term. Rather, he reiterates that "theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and company" ("Aesthetics of Survivance," Vizenor 10); i.e., the phenomena of survivance *as such* evades apprehension at the very point of abstraction, paraphrase, and categorization, that is, at the site of cultural expectation. It is akin to sacrality insofar as it is an ineffability that nevertheless remains "true" in Indigenous "practice and company," i.e., within a relational framework.

Vizenor also makes a familiar distinction here between the expression of experiential particularity on the one hand and its paraphrase into categorized forms of knowledge on the other, which then fail to encounter the ineffability of its particularized expression—a failure contrary to survivance. As such, and following on Glancy’s elegantly oblique description, survivance, like art, is not simply its paraphrase, no matter how well executed. Survivance defies abstraction and categorization through orienting within and towards sacrality—the 4<sup>th</sup>-Peoples’ Perspective—modeling instead cognition of experiential truth and ways of knowing that limn and orient toward the fullness of such expression. As such, Glancy’s previous poetic parallel and Vizenor’s emphasis that “the nature of survivance is unmistakable in native stories, natural reason...and is clearly observable in narrative resistance” (“Aesthetics of Survivance” 10) place us in productive relationship with Howe’s own ontological centering of aesthetics. Vizenor emphasizes storying, writ wide and welcoming, and the embodiment of *successive* performance of forms of survivance storying; indeed, that the practice of storying itself is “an active resistance and repudiation of dominance . . . an *active presence*, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence” (“Aesthetics of Survivance” 18). Emphasizing this revisional performativity inherent in storying, both in its creation and its successive interrelationships as an individuated entity itself, serves to give animate particularity to the textual field that necessarily exceeds abstraction and paraphrase.

Vizenor’s descriptions of the interrelations and interactions of survivance encounters the perspectival construction and particularized focalization I described earlier in relation to 4PP, and he elaborates on survivance storying as:

a third person other than the apparent reference, the figurative presence of a fourth person, a sui generis native discourse in the oral language of the Anishinaabe. That native practice of survivance, the storied presence of a fourth person, a visual reminiscence. (“Aesthetics of Survivance” 2)

4<sup>th</sup>-person narration is the flattening of the ontological position and disarticulation of the binary of material and non-material. Read literally we might think of 4<sup>th</sup>-person narration in the strict linguistic-textual terms deriving from its function within the “language of the Anishinaabe”; however, as an Indigenous practice of survivance through “storied presence” and “visual reminiscence,” Vizenor moves us into broader forms and manifestations that intersect more directly with 4PP by similarly centering the emergent becoming of universal sacrality and relational forms of storying. As an aesthetic form, then, it relies on types of cognition less like abstraction and paraphrase and more like poetic interpretation and artistic performances of relationality in the aesthetic form. This reconfigures the expression and reception of Indigenous storying in ways that strain against the limits of artistic form as it co-creates and limns an orientation toward the particularity of becoming.

In addition to emphasizing the relationality of becoming as, with, and through storying, Vizenor also makes curious use of the term “natural,” for instance in “the nature of survivance,” a seemingly paradoxical phrase if “nature” is read as simply “essence.” In a later passage he notes:

Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of *natural reason*, tragic wisdom, and the provenance of new literary studies. Native storiers of survivance are prompted by *natural*

*reason*, by a consciousness and sense of incontestable presence that arises from experiences in the *natural world* ... survivance is character by *natural reason*, not by monotheistic creation stories and dominance of nature. (“Aesthetics of Survivance” 11 emphases added)

Here the word comes to be affixed to “reason” as well as “world,” locations wherein Vizenor sees survivance as unmistakable. I read this recourse to “natural reason” as related to Vizenor’s earlier epistemological moves against the effacing tools of paraphrased forms of knowledge—abstraction, definition, and categorization—and the field of expectation they generate. The centrality of particularity, experientiality, and storying are prompted by “natural reason,” by which Vizenor means both the “consciousness...that arises from experiences in the natural world” as well as the “sense of incontestable presence” that manifests in the same (8-9). As such Vizenor here is reiterating the Indigenous ontological orientation of the epistemological grounds of survivance within the vectors of universal sacrality, of which both “consciousness” and the “sense of presence” are expressions, and that the “natural reason” coming from universal relationality is the “place,” in Vine Deloria’s use, or localized grounding for the individuation of cognition as such. The “comprehension and empathies of natural reason,” then, might be restated as the orientation toward universal sacrality and relationality and the particularized forms of cognition that derive from it. “Natural” in this sense, then, is not simply equivalent to the “natural world,” as no such division is meaningful in the context of universal sacrality. Instead, it is the emergent creative potentiality that always-already inheres in any creation itself—sacrality as such.

Vizenor also carefully points out that survivance is not simply the “dominance of nature.” While this is clearly a refutation of the Judeo-Christian view of “nature” explicated in Genesis, it also likely staves off “Eco-Indian” interpretations of the elevated potentiality for relationality among disparate elements including the non-physical and extended peoplehood in the “natural word”—i.e., survivance stories are not simply or necessarily stories dominated by or primarily about plants and animals or, really, any set of elements. They are, as Barclay would say, accidentals of the exterior (2-4). But, as noted, I see Vizenor here also pushes us to think about the role and relationship of the predominance of the *physicality* and materiality of the natural and empirical world. The state of becoming-called-survivance is both polysemous and polyphonic and, as such, strikes an ambivalent posture towards *both* physical and non-physical phenomenon. This orients the epistemological grounds of “natural knowledge” within the concrete (i.e., located in a time and place) *experiential* reality of storying, both in narration and reception, thereby rearticulating and centering the ontological shape of the non-physical but concrete worlds of Indigenous narratives. Survivance stories are concrete, but they are not *physical*, though their instantiations may very well be. Nevertheless, for instance, a physical book is not a story, however, it can be one aspect of a storying. Rather, it is an envelope, much like the body, within which the sacrality of creation in both its noun and verb can be articulated and sequenced. The story *as such* exists somewhere within the relational compositional articulation and the meanings derived and actuated from and within them.

Interpretation by “natural reasoning,” then, is itself form of relational storying, the storied interpretation, the revisional aesthetic of its form, is it itself a tribalogy that is,

as Cordova puts it, “working something into a new fashion” (“Ethics” 254). The rearticulation of a story in a meaningful relation to one’s own particularity and becoming thus becomes a survivance practice of its own. These responsive creations might be overt interpretations, clever rearticulations, powerful re-visions, or other forms of textual-relational ways of knowing that inform a different expression entirely—directly and/or indirectly, intentionally and/or unintentionally. Certainly, the distinctive lines of categorization between modes and classification of the textual apparatus begin to become quite hazy and fluid from this perspective. Survivance as theory, then, is not a systematized abstraction but rather a type of methodological emphasis on the particularity of process; this process is actively recursive, reiterative, and revisionary, “earned by interpretations, by the critical construal of survivance in creative literature, and by narratives of cause and natural reason” (Vizenor, “Aesthetics of Survivance” 11). As such, survivance conceptually calls attention to this recursive process and practice of articulation and sequencing, not sparing its own conceptualization in the process.

Stories are a central operator of relationality as they serve as how we come into relation with forms of natural reason about the world—what it is, how we fit into it, and how we should act within it. In that sense, stories are quite “real,” albeit non-physical, not only as expressions of the human imagination but as thick descriptions of modes of becoming that inform, represent, and *are* sacred, self-sufficient forms of being. The ontological positioning here derives most directly from the natural cognition and recognition that the same intimate caress of experiential particularity animating the face of the symbolic register is reflected in all forms of world-building. In that sense, stories stand on their own, and we come to know them much in the same way we come to know

any world and its people. Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) eloquently puts it in his excellent book, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*:

With books and other stories, whether experienced in solitude or lived community, we abide in human presence beyond the flesh and blood of personal experience. It's a remarkable alchemy, this storied transformation of self to other, and back again. (36)

As pure mediation and representation, stories are reduced to a type of conveyance towards a controlling interpretive narrative; this eschews Vizenor's natural reasoning, the vectors of tribalogy, and the orientation toward sacrality that articulate and emanate from within the sacred-relational particularity that inheres in act of expressive creation itself.

To allow for the "dominance of nature" in artistic interpretation would be to fall victim to a type of restrictive realism wherein the ontological and aesthetic significance of artistic expression is dictated by its proximity to "actual" reality. Storying is then evaluated, for better or worse, by proximity to the concrete and abstract relations and categorizations that compose the field of expectation. This is problematic for reasons Justice highlights in an essay titled, "Indigenous Wonderworks and the Settler-Colonial Imagination." In discussing Indigenous speculative modalities in relation to settler realism, he notes:

"Realistic fiction," when framed by social presumptions that naturalize colonialism and its effects and presume the inevitability of Indigenous deficit, is as much a compromised perspective as that of imaginative

fiction, if not more so, as it reinforces oppressive presumptions through its assumptions of benign, authorized authenticity. (Apex)

Rather than the particularity of the world made manifest, stories become an ontic collection of mimetic objects that index their articulation and relations exclusively in terms of alignment or deviation from settler-colonial discourse about reality. Expression in this mode is thus only ever able to truly represent the failure of its signification, and this failure to *reflect* reality blots out its function in *creating* one—as though imagination might exhaust itself in an act of mimesis. This is often understood as an asymmetry between the signifier and its intended signification; the instability of the signifying relationship itself in an unending deferral over the horizon of meaning. The sign is thus inadequate to the task of capturing the ineffability of the exteriority of the settler-colonial real rather than productively orienting toward interiority and sketching oblique relational tracings that make no attempt to “capture” sacrality. That is, as Ann Waters succinctly puts it, we might instead form an “interpretive framework of non-discrete non-binary dualism, [wherein] song poems could be interpreted as an ontological reaction to, rather than an evaluative assessment of, the cosmos” (Waters “Language Matters” 9).

In a similar sense, the stories we weave and knot into the fabric of our lives becomes a partial expression of them. Justice discusses this complex and fundamental role that stories have in our lives by noting:

Our lives are incarnations of the stories we tell, the stories told about us, and the stories we inherit. They’re both the process and the consequence of the transformations into the fullness of our humanity. Indeed, without those stories, without the teachings about the *who*, *how*, and *why* of us,

something is profoundly, almost existentially amiss. (Justice, *Why Indigenous Literature Matters* 34)

I encounter Indigenous artistic expression and narrative as one does the sharing of a life's story, a narrative of the becoming of a people, or the testimonial: the expression of a reality that *is* also a reality, a site of rich ontological complexity. As such, this wording of worlds within an Indigenous ontological orientation often lounges across the threshold of the metaphorical and metaphysical. The ineffability that describes the central role of sacrality functions both as an orienting beyond to the perspectival horizon as well as a form of blockade that necessarily evades the descriptive categorization and analytic abstractions that might be performed upon it, and as a motif and signature of *vivance*, of the expression of life, and life as an expression. This serves as the philosophical architecture for Daniel Heath Justice's summative statement in answer to the title of his book, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, insofar as they transform lives and are lived transformations: "Indigenous literatures matter because Indigenous peoples matter" (211).

## Chapter Two: Beading Aesthetics

### Settling Expectation, Unsettling Revision, and the Politics of Playing with Familiarity

#### 1

The artist Steven Paul Judd's (Kiowa/Choctaw) short claymation film entitled *Neil Discovers the Moon* opens on a black screen, and, as we hear the line "Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed," the film cuts to an astronaut figurine slowly raising the American flag and plunging it into the moon's rocky soil. The famous line "a giant leap for mankind" plays in the background as the astronaut firmly digs the flag into the moonscape. The careful listener will notice the astronaut "breathing" during this scene, but the sound of the astronaut's respiration is the familiar, ominous, and mechanical sound of Darth Vader's breathing apparatus from the movie *Star Wars*. As this iconic breathing continues in the background, the astronaut releases his grip on the flag when suddenly a hand lightly taps him on the leg. The camera swings out and pans to reveal a young, dark-skinned Native American girl sitting on the ground next to where the flag has been planted. She looks up at the astronaut, and then asks in her indigenous language, subtitled in English, "Does this mean we have to move again?" The screen swallows to black with only a circular spotlight preserved on the mask of the astronaut. As he looks directly at the camera, the video once again reverts to audio from the space mission, intoning, "Uhh... Houston, we have a problem."

This film does a lot with its 30 seconds of on-screen action through its invocation of the science fiction (SF) cultural touchstone of *Star Wars*, the technologies of space exploration, and an emplacement of what I term an "Indigenous imposition" of the Native girl in a futuristic context. The aural blending of NASA transmissions and Vader's

breathing is not particularly surprising here as there has always been a connection between the SF genre and technologies of space exploration. A concise but exemplary piece of Indigenous Futurist art, Judd's film is deceptively complex in its deployment of a revisional aesthetic, here accomplished through the juxtaposition of Indigenous and pop-culture symbolism, historical allusion, and a chiastic temporality which slips back and forth across settler-colonial and Indigenous frames of historical reference.

The initial sense of futurity is here accomplished using an other-wordly lunar setting, the implied travel between solar bodies, and the figure of the astronaut—presumably Neil Armstrong per the title of the film. The space race and lunar landing still manage to evoke a futurist framework within the American cultural imaginary, however, given that the audio transmission used in the closing seconds of Judd's film is from a different lunar mission, one which never actually landed on the moon (Apollo 13), it is reasonable to assume that the scene and space-race references here are intended rather to call to mind a vague type of nationalism and futurity rather than a precise mimetic construction of any single mission. "Armstrong," visage concealed behind the faceless reflective glass of his helmet, is generalized through this anonymity and therefore similarly non-specific: as one of the best-known astronauts other than Buzz Aldrin, the title of the film, while specifying Armstrong's name, seems to operate more as a metonymy for NASA and "American greatness" during the fullest flourish of the race for space rather than any individual astronaut. Seen in this context, the lunar scene and the NASA figure serve as generalized, somewhat non-specific representations of space exploration. In that sense, the film toys with the representational force that outer space plays in the U.S. cultural imaginary—a place of the radically foreign, heretofore

unknown, and ripe for discovery. And, of course, despite the futurist-orientation of space exploration, these referenced NASA events (Apollo 11 and 13) transpired about 50 years ago. Here Judd has chosen signifiers of a “future,” which nonetheless have their material reality in the past. As an inter-textual compliment to this future-historical frame, Judd has inserted the additional aural texture of Vader’s breathing, pregnant with its own pop-cultural symbolism, which acts as an auditory cue connecting another future-historical space context: *Star Wars*. Which is, after all, “*A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.*”

The opening frames of the claymation film also indicate that the film is “classified footage” that has “never been seen by the public.” Here there is an invocation of both the alienness of what is to come—this classified footage verbiage frames the context of the video with fringe theories about NASA’s encounter with aliens during the mission<sup>23</sup>—as well as characterizing the coming narrative as an uncomfortable truth which has been classified and repressed by the federal government. This is drawn to a finer point as the Indigenous girl is revealed sitting innocently on the lunar surface. The girl in this context generates what Bertolt Brecht called an “alienation effect,” where we “recognize [the] subject, but at the same time...it seem[s] unfamiliar” (189). The girl is rendered on the lunar surface as both alien and Indigenous,

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<sup>23</sup> As absurd as it may sound, the conspiracy theories on this point abound. Some of this is further engendered by Buzz Aldrin mentioning he had seen a “light” from an object outside the shuttle enroute to the moon. He has later clarified that he assumed this was a reflection from one of the rockets they had separated from. Nevertheless, such theories continue to this day.

“foreign” but “in a domestic sense,”<sup>24</sup> as she sits leisurely on the celestial soil *sans* spacesuit. In this scene, the sudden and unexpected appearance is *unsettling*<sup>25</sup> both formally within the world of the film and temporally for reasons having to do with the cathected and contradictory tensions inherent in settler-colonial history. While I will cover this aesthetic of unsettlement more robustly later in this chapter, we can nevertheless see here the difficulties Native presence creates in this rehearsal of the “discovery doctrine.” Despite the alien context, this is a hauntingly familiar yet diametric narrative for both the settler-colonial state and Indigenous people. As such, the young girl stands in for the partially overwritten palimpsest of the U.S. historical imaginary, the attempted repression and erasure of the dark side of U.S. imperial expansion, and the devastating toll wrought on the Indigenous people in that pursuit. To emphasize this repressive impulse within the state imaginary and the historical narratives of progress that typically obviate such inconvenient details, the entire film itself is therefore framed as a repressed document.

This fictionalized representation clearly echoes non-fictional histories of settler-Indigenous relations in U.S. history, and, in that sense, it becomes clear the Native girl’s presence operates multiply at the level of the symbol. Even in the choice of construction

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<sup>24</sup> This quote is from Supreme Court Justice Edward White who wrote the majority decision in *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, which marks a profound point of criminal departure by the settler-state in the abrogation of treaty obligations with Tribal nations. In this quote, Justice White’s expression of a juridical estrangement is characterizing Puerto Rico’s relationship to the United States. His ideological commitment to providing constitutional support for annexation and colonization of Puerto Rico in these decisions, known as the Insular Cases, is an extension of his earlier morally bereft constitutional interpretation. See Joseph William Singer, “Lone Wolf, or How to Take Property by Calling It a Mere Change in the Form of Investment,” 38 *Tulsa Law Review*, 2013. <https://digitalcommons.law.utulsa.edu/tlr/vol38/iss1/3>

<sup>25</sup> This is my preferred term of art for this estranging phenomenon that echoes an emphatic terminological choice by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in their article “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” As such, it has the added effect of tying the revisional-aesthetic startlement effect of Indigenous Futurism to the broader decolonization project.

material, this dichotomy is emphasized by Judd: as an Indigenous earthen embodiment of the historical nexus between sovereign Tribal nations and the founding and history of the U.S. government, the Indigenous girl is rendered in clay and nestled in the sandy lunar soil; this in contrast to the faceless astronaut and American flag, both composed in hard plastic. This Indigenous imposition in an unexpected context highlights and places pressure on the settler-colonial imaginary: a clay reminder of the ongoing failure to fully overwrite and replace Indigenous presence, foregrounding the repressed and unsettling originary violence inherent in the founding of the U.S. settler-state. This point is driven home when the young girl, speaking in her Native language, asks if this means “we” will have to move “again.” This short interrogative sentence continues to work back across the grain of the broader futuristic temporal orientation, simultaneously situating a present and material “we”—an extant and undigested people and culture in the lunar setting—and the pointed qualifier “again,” which throws the viewer backwards towards the repressed history of violence and usurpation between the state and tribal nations/people. Neatly braiding the history of imperial conquest and the space race through a temporal and perspectival reorientation, we find a familiar historical narrative: an agent of U.S. state power, motivated by the mission of discovery, powered by an ideology of progress, propelled by military technology, wielding the American flag to justify a declaration of ownership, encounters an Indigenous population that complicates the mission. This final encounter with the Indigenous alternative future’s past causes a disruption in the imperial sequence, compelling the astronaut to radio “home” to Houston that they “have a problem.” An Indian problem.

The power of Judd's film is precisely in how it starkly and deftly illustrates the rhetorical and cultural potential that Indigenous Futurist projects find in the nexus of identity, technology, spatiality, temporality, and power. Certainly, there is a strong association with the Science Fiction genre that threads through most contemporary futurist projects, and Indigenous Futurism is no different, but Judd's film illustrates how not only SF but the broader cultural assemblage out of which it articulates and emanates are critical tools for Native artists in the construction of compelling and exemplary Indigenous Futurist counternarratives. As such, Judd's work here serves as an example for this article's object of analysis, so I begin with this film and my brief analytic interpretation of its composition and effect because in it we can locate some of the structure, orientation, and content of the analysis that follows.

To that end, I will begin with a brief examination of the historically contingent character and features of the genre of Science Fiction, specifically the racialized tenor of much of its textual production, before turning to a brief history of Afrofuturism as a means of grounding and articulating the connection between broader futurist projects and my own exploration of the definition(s) and conceptual framework of Indigenous Futurism, arguing it is most effective as a particular approach or orientation rather than as an exclusively formal category. Critically, this is a classificatory intervention, as all such work of this type necessarily is, but I move as much as possible away from rigidly bound definitions, instead attempting to move my interpretive work towards an Indigenous-Futurist *methodology*, which articulates within the distributed and shifting networks that bridge varying commonalities in theme, approach, and definition. By connecting the revisional effect of Indigenous Futurist art to Bertolt Brecht and Viktor Shklovsky's

concept of “alienation,” I will salvage and repurpose this term by freeing it from its primacy as a formal characteristic of SF, as has been previously argued, instead mobilizing and constellating it into orbit around decolonial aesthetic practice.

Because such forms of alienating aesthetic rely on a naturalized backdrop of expectation to provide revisional force, I employ Philip Deloria’s exploration of the ways dominant cultural *expectations* of Indigenous peoples functions as disciplinary cultural formation, and I show how and why Indigenous Futurism offers a critical advantage in speaking back to this conditioning discourse. Against this cultural expectation, revision as an aesthetic approach creates a startling manifestation of the *unexpected* in the form of an Indigenous imposition: the purposeful and startling obtrusion of Indigenous representation into textual fields where such appearance is typically restricted. To do this, I break down the revisional aesthetic into two broad “unsettling” forms: from Coll Thrush’s work *Native Seattle*, a utilization of the Whulshootseed word *yiq* as a form of imbricative revision operating largely at the level of the narrative, and the second, inspired by the previous, the *Híraaca* word “*maaʔibcaa*” or “to bead,” as a way of tracking a revisional adornment that operates at the level of the symbol.

Explaining how the process of imbrication and adornment function in related but distinct ways, I isolate the SF pop-culture franchise *Star Wars* and briefly examine three examples of Indigenous visual art that engage with the iconography of the movie franchise to show how these pieces deploy *maaʔibcaa* and *yiq* approaches in their revision of the franchise. In the end, the purpose of this essay is not to offer a sustained textual interpretation, but to examine the ways a more adaptive definition of IF offers avenues for response to the forces of colonization and non- or misrepresentations of

Indigenous people by offering examples of Indigenous aesthetic revision and imposition. More specifically, I seek to examine *how* a revisional aesthetic approach plays with, adorns, and indigenizes previously white-washed fields, and *why* this method of constructing an Indigenous imposition is valuable within Indigenous artistic production.

## 2

Many of the artists and thinkers involved in the burgeoning field of Indigenous Futurism are heavily invested in the genre of Science Fiction; therefore, as a starting point for a broader consideration of Indigenous Futurism, it becomes important to examine the nature and features of SF as a means of examining where Indigenous Futurism intersects with, uses, or critically revises popular tropes and ideas. There is, of course, historical academic debate about where the beginning of the SF genre ought to be traced — or, indeed, if such a search for origin is productive or accurate. In the 1970s, Brian Aldiss in his work *Billion Year Spree* is definitive in saying that SF “was born...when the wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*” (3), thereby tracing the origin of the genre to this ur-text. More recently, Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint discuss the features of “proto SF” in terms of eutopian/dystopian works in the 2008 *Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* (2011), arguing that work such as Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward, 2000-1887*, published in 1888, as well as other early stories of technology, travel, and exploration share certain features of the genre (20-39). To be sure, such shifts in the articulation of the genre’s form and genealogy indicate not the progression towards a more accurate description of the genre, but in fact the fundamentally mutable character of such genre classifications. These formalist-rooting

tendencies occlude this mutable characteristic in the attempt to stabilize and render legible a field of knowledge. As such, there is arguably more insight to be gained in thinking through the ways such characterizations reflect the ideological and cultural assumptions and influences at work in these arborescent articulations rather than simply emphasizing one genealogy.

An approach for this sort of analysis can be found in John Rieder's essay, "On Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History," which clarifies the shifting sands of genre production through five propositions. He notes:

SF is historical and mutable;

SF has no essence, no single unifying characteristic, and no point of origin; SF is not a set of texts, but rather a way of using texts and of drawing relationships among them;

SF's identity is a differentially articulated position in an historical and mutable field of genres; attribution of the identity of SF to a text constitutes an active intervention in its distribution and reception. (Reider 193)

These five propositions form a foundational approach to genre that relies on the flexible, historical nature of the classificatory impulse. This is emblematic of broader contemporary commitments within genre theory and provides important nuance to SF, i.e., it highlights the constructed and constructive nature of textual classification. While Rieder sifts through terminology to describe this concept—ranging from Brian Attiebery's mathematical "fuzzy sets" to Paul Kincaid's utilization of Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea of "family resemblance"—he settles on a rhizomatic-assemblage model, which he lifts from

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's work in *A Thousand Plateaus*. This approach holds that "the movement of texts and motifs into and through SF does not confer a pedigree on them...but instead merely connects one itinerary to another... [and these itineraries] must be constructed by writers, publishers, and readers out of the conjunctures they occupy and the materials at hand" (Reider 196). In this light, SF, and genre more broadly, are seen as a heterogeneous collection of interdependent parts, which inform these mutable historical formations. Critically, an assemblage is fundamentally unstable and portable, which is to say, the constitutive elements and structure are under continuous revision: excised, moved, added to, reinterpreted, and/or substituted in multiple ways across the diachronic and synchronic registers. As such, new connections can be drawn, and old ones severed as the assemblage amoebically shifts. The assemblage or genre classification might be best thought of, then, as a loose draping over a constantly shifting multiplicity of fragmentary constituents that articulate and re-articulate across space and time.

An assemblage description of SF and Indigenous Futurism intervenes in the process Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe as genealogical or "arborescent," here applied to genre formation, by opening the parameters and seeking the context of lines of encapture, disruption, and articulation. Within a rhizomatic model, the character and intervening force of the categorization process itself is given clarity and context. This movement away from the genealogical approach comes from a recognition on the part of Deleuze and Guattari that such arborescent formations do not reflect thought itself, which is rhizomatic in nature. As such, they note they've become "tired of trees" which have "made us suffer too much" by entrenching and centering artificial stability in the form of

origin and telos within the structure (15). This arborescent approach “inspire[s] a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centered or segmented higher unity” (16), which is to say, it attempts to force the distributed multiplicity of thought into a centralized and rooted structure that is both artificial and unreflective of the actual workings of such conceptualizations. This arborescent model is also prone to create problematic occlusions and erasures by virtue of the vertical structural pressure of its modeling. Through a process of “structural pruning,”<sup>26</sup> vying articulations and other nonconforming alternative discourse is trimmed from the constituencies of the articulation to bind and stabilize the arborescent formation. Therefore, by reworking the description of genre formation through an assemblage approach and applying it to SF, Rieder’s analysis clears space for parallel and intervening articulations. This approach also has compelling applications to the wider field of Indigenous Futurism as a similarly process-oriented structure by dilating the methods of examining the multiple and sometimes discontinuous aesthetic and methodological commitments that wax and wane under the respective banners.

Nevertheless, while genre theory and academic discourse around genre formation have pushed back against prior, formalist approaches to SF, there is still a persistent impulse in popular culture to paraphrase Supreme Court Justice Stewart’s statement regarding the definition pornography: I know it when I see it. This sentiment speaks with

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<sup>26</sup> I take this term from the field of landscape management. Edward F. Gilman, environmental horticulturalist at the University of Florida, notes regarding the application of the technique: “Structural pruning helps the tree develop one main leader and one trunk...Structural pruning in the landscape aims to develop [a] strong tree structure...[s]tructural pruning selectively favors a single, dominant leader by suppressing competing leaders using reduction cuts.” See “Structural Pruning: The Essence of Tree Care,” Landscape Plants, University of Florida, 27 Feb 2015, <https://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/structural-pruning-flash.shtml>.

the voice of cultural expectation, the generated matrix of the common tropes and assumptions one takes for granted within a given context. What this typically means in practice for SF is an emphasis on space travel, technology, and planetary exploration/expansion/colonization. This rubric is simply one of many persistent characterizations upon the rhizomatic assemblage under the guise of a totalizing discourse of genre-definition. Pushing against such totalizing discourses around definitional categories is, therefore, a critical task of Indigenous Futurism. As such, these nodal linkages provide illumination as to where Indigenous Futurism might place effective pressure on the arborescent instincts of dominant discourse.

To be sure, such thematic and narrative expectations within the genre of SF are also often overtly racially and/or ethnically bounded because of the relationship of the genre to the imperially inflected matrix of scientific, explorative, and conquest-oriented discursive practices. To wit, part of the value of Steven Paul Judd's claymation film is the engagement with certain racial assumptions about technology, exploration, and the future, i.e., what race is normalized within the narratives of space exploration. By drawing a clear connection between the governing nationalist ideology of NASA and other space projects and the colonial-imperial ideologies of exploration and conquest, Judd clearly frames, both aurally and visually, the unsettling imposition of an Indigenous girl on the moon as a "problem" for NASA.

Mark Bould, in his essay "The Ships Landed Long Ago: Afrofuturism and Black SF," has briefly noted the racial assumptions of these space exploration programs. Motivated by a national technological brinkmanship and the future they projected; he notes that "the space race showed us which race space was for" (177). Aside from being a

delightful turn of phrase, this also gestures towards the unstated but clear construction within the U.S. imaginary of technology, space, and by extension, the future, as de facto white and male. As the genre most closely connected to the techno-speculative future envisioned by contemporary Western culture, SF is guilty of consistently constructing race as a future non-concern, at best acknowledging that racial/ethnic difference might still be meaningful in the future in the form of an off-hand macguffin which simply notes that society has moved past such issues, that “racism...[is] an insanity that burned itself out” as Bould puts it (180), or, more typically and more obtuse, constructing a raceless (read: white) future without any acknowledgement that race and cultural difference ever existed at all.

This minimization of ethnic and racial difference in the imaginative future is, of course, a bit of a sleight-of-hand: while we may think of recent SF/futurist projects as “ethnic futurisms,” the first “ethnic futurism” ought to be considered white futurism, as this is, by and large, a fairly accurate description of SF and broader futurist projects up until at least the 1960s—and is arguably still the predominant model to the present day. Science Fiction has historically constructed speculative futures that underwrite and are symptomatic of settler-colonial ideology by instantiating a camouflaged, white-racialized future, hidden by the transparent nature of whiteness. This forms a rhetorically broad ethnic erasure, and, in a related register, the genre is typically rife with themes of exploration and conquest, which resonate with western imperial ideologies of technological progress. This is troubling because one of the common features of SF is its engagement with futurity, and such speculative projects serve as important cultural operators that reflect how we envision ourselves not only in the future but in the present.

As such, it has never been simply a fantastical future that is at stake in the SF genre, but in fact a very real and concrete present. Nevertheless, many of these racial and gender assumptions seem well entrenched within the SF genre writ large. Until Samuel Delany in the 1960s, and shortly thereafter Octavia Butler, examples of works by ethnic minorities were extremely rare and all but invisible, and the earliest women who made inroads into the field typically wrote under ambiguous or outright masculine pen names (C.L. Moore, James Tiptree, Jr., et al.)<sup>27</sup>.

This racially problematic history in the authorship of the SF genre and the clear discursive leaning towards western ideals of technological imperialism and progress are deeply entrenched within broader settler-colonial ideologies. When the genre is rendered within these registers, with its genealogical roots stretching only through European historical culture and its contemporary and future-oriented manifestations, Indigenous Futurism, like other ethnic futurisms, should be seen as a revisional force on the genre, a re-articulation of the assemblage. If one thinks of the field of Indigenous Futurism in this light, the differentiated and mutable character comes to the fore and highlight a loose but constantly changing structure that offers a vantage point to look at the ways the operational force of Indigenous Futurism modifies, both diachronically and synchronically, not only SF, but the broader ideological formations within which the genre does its cultural work. As a means of exploring possibilities within Indigenous cultural production, this revisional force plays with the distillation of these ideological

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<sup>27</sup> See: C.L. Moore's (Catherine Lucille Moore) collections *Judgment Night* (1952), a collection of her short stories from *Astounding SF* and *Northwest of Earth* (1954), a similar short-story collection of her publications in *Weird Tales*. For a wonderful compilation of the works of James Tiptree, Jr. (Alice Bradley Sheldon), see the relatively new omnibus collection of her short stories, essays, and other writings, *Meet Me at Infinity* (2000).

formations of expectation within the structure of not just SF, but the broader discursive field of which it is a part.

That is, even in its most genre-facing application, Indigenous Futurism does not need to relate directly to the SF genre as such, at least not exclusively; SF simply offers an already articulated structure that has deep, tentacled influences within the broader ideological systems that Indigenous Futurism revises. When and where Indigenous Futurism engages with the settler-colonial project, those structures can be mapped out and exploited aesthetically to imagine new ways of articulating these naturalized arborescent structures and histories. By highlighting their artificial nature and thereby potentiating them for rhizomatic articulation, Indigenous Futurism willfully destabilizes these structures by de-pruning, playing with, and/or revising the nature of the interface and lines of connection. Nevertheless, and with good reason, numerous scholars including Lou Cornum in their piece for *The New Inquiry* titled “The Space NDN’s Star Map,” center definitions of Indigenous Futurism as a method for “speaking back to the SF genre, which has long used indigenous subjects as the foils to stories of white space explorers hungry to conquer new worlds.” Grace Dillon, who popularized the term “Indigenous Futurism” in the introduction to her edited collection *Walking the Clouds* largely hews towards what is generally categorized as SF in her selections, indicating a similar value in interacting with the genre. While this is not the limit of Dillon’s or Cornum’s characterization of the field, it does serve as an emblem for one mobilization of IF that works intimately with SF and its tropes of frontiers, imperial expansion, and western-inflected narrative/stylistic representations, and these tropes are pregnant with

reference to the racial and historical underside of their activation in the past, present, and future.

Due to the inertia of the previously sketched wedding of the SF genre and colonial and imperial discourse, the genre suffers from a significant problem of coherence in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. Because its thematic orientation also necessarily produces discourse deeply rooted in imperial ideology, representational diversity is often a challenge within the genre. In fact, even after a small shift in the genre during the 1960s to encompass more diverse authorship and address the paucity of non-white and male worldviews, SF still had a significant race/gender problem. The Hugo Awards, created in 1953 and one of the most important literary awards in SF, has been absolutely dominated by white men. A woman, Anne McCaffrey, won a Hugo award for Best Novella in 1968<sup>28</sup>, but from 1959 to 2014 women have been nominated a mere 22% of the time; the percent of female winners is considerably lower. In terms of ethnicity/race, the magazine *Vocativ* compiled disturbing statistics about the Hugo Awards to 2015. In that span, within all professional categories, three of the 100 nominees were non-white; adding up all the nominees for the critical category of Best Novel since 1953 to present, there have been 300 total nominations. Of these, five of the nominations were non-white. Until the Chinese writer Liu Cixin won the award in 2015, a non-white nominee had never won this valorized category in the Hugo's entire history (Brown). While the Hugo award is certainly not the only metric for determining how the genre deals with race, it is nevertheless a telling marker and emblematic of a wider issue, and a cursory examination

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<sup>28</sup> McCaffrey, Anne. *Weyr Search*. Ballantine Books, 1967.

of the other major SF awards and popular SF works in film, TV, and literature over the last 60 years seems to rehearse the same trend.

As noted, one effect of this exclusionary trend in popular SF has been the relatively recent emergence of a variety of futurist projects that operate as critical responses to this tendency. The single most recurrent articulation within these varied fields is an engagement with power asymmetries through an intervention at the pressure point where technology, power, futurity, and identity converge. The most well-recognized of these movements, Afrofuturism, was coined by Mark Dery in the early 1990s in a published interview with wellknown African American SF authors titled “Black to Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose” (187). The term seemed to have a durability to it, and as such was taken up in the late 1990s and more robustly theorized by the sociologist Alondra Nelson among others. Nelson notes that much of the discussion around this field was done through a listserv community called “Afrofuturism,” and those relationships continued to develop along with the larger movement of Afrofuturism. This expansion of the term and work which it evokes eventually resulted in a special issue of *Social Text* for which Nelson wrote the introduction. This edition showcases contributions from artists and thinkers within the field, and in her introduction, Nelson offers a provisional definition by way of Sămi Ludwig’s work, *Concrete Language*, describing Afrofuturism as “‘African American voices’ with ‘other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come’” (9). This broad and flexible definition evokes the irrealis mode as a critical orientation that has a particular strength through its ambiguity, one which I encourage for Indigenous Futurism’s own self-descriptions. The fluidity of the description primes it with

potentiality and orients the field towards radical revision as a means of fostering nodal offshoots. Certainly, this has been one critical result of such a definition as other related movements such as Latinx Futurism, Queer Futurism, etc., continue to manifest and leave their mark.

Nevertheless, shortly after *Social Text* published their special issue, Kodwo Eshun elaborated on the definition and theoretical and methodological implications of the movement in his article, “Further Considerations of Afrofuturism” in *CR: The New Centennial Review*. Eshun frames Afrofuturism as an assemblage of “countermemories that contest the colonial archive,” noting that “Afrofuturism does not seek to deny the tradition of countermemory. Rather, it aims to extend that tradition by reorienting the intercultural vectors of Black Atlantic temporality towards the proleptic as much as the retrospective” (288-289). Here again a direct invocation of the irrealis mode, the proleptic, and we also begin to see the emphasis on the theoretical considerations of temporality as a broader cultural orientation within the field. Eshun further notes that one critical feature of Afrofuturism’s project is the analysis of the “appeals that black artists, musicians, critics, and writers have made to the future, in moments where any future was made difficult for them to imagine” (294). More, Eshun concretely grounds futurity within a decolonizing context, noting:

In the colonial era of the early to middle twentieth century, avant-gardists from Walter Benjamin to Frantz Fanon revolted in the name of the future against a power structure that relied on control and representation of the historical archive. Today, the situation is reversed. The powerful employ futurists and draw power from the futures they endorse, thereby

condemning the disempowered to live in the past. The present moment is stretching, slipping for some into yesterday, reaching for others into tomorrow. (289)

This emphasis on the centrality of futurity specifically when and where it finds itself most difficult to imagine, as well as the critical emphasis on temporality as a means of colonial domination, resonates and maps neatly onto an Indigenous context as well. Indeed, this is an important feature of the necessity and force of futurist projects when considered within discourses of Indigeneity<sup>29</sup>.

Author Nalo Hopkinson also evokes a similar emphasis and an omni-directional temporality in her characterization. For Hopkinson, the positionality and relationship between colonizer/colonizee comes to the fore. In her opening comments of an edited collection on postcolonial SF entitled *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy*, Hopkinson notes that Afrofuturism “take[s] the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique[s] it, pervert[s] it, fuck[s] with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things” (9). This emphasis on the love for the genre of SF points to the obvious but often neglected ambivalent relationship artists have with the genre. While criticism of the underlying ideologies and their manifestations form a critical role for futurist projects, very often at the core is a deep appreciation for the SF genre, a geeky love for pop-culture products and the genre itself that manifests often as an attempt to fix a broken and hurtful object of

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<sup>29</sup> In more recent work, Ytasha Womack’s well-received book, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, continues to push into the analysis of Afrofuturism as a part of the project of black liberation as well as offering a wide-ranging exploration of genre’s varied mediums—from visual and multimedia artists to the brilliant musical explorations of Afrofuturist musicians.

affection. Additionally, Hopkinson, who is Afro-Caribbean and Taino/Arawak, serves as an explicit bridge between Afro- and Indigenous Futurisms and calls attention to the productive and sometimes shared themes, character, and approaches between the fields. And, further, she finds herself migrating into Grace Dillon's edited collection by way of an excerpt from *Midnight Robber*.

This connection between Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism is not simply founded on an overlapping author, however. As I have noted above, there is an important shared sentiment between these varied definitions of Afrofuturism and Grace Dillon's own definition that recognizes a critical and central de-colonial theme and an orientation towards the nexus of technology, identity, and temporality. And much like some of the early formative work in Afrofuturism, *Walking the Clouds* has come to serve as an important text in defining the field of Indigenous Futurism as such. In her introduction, Dillon offers an oft quoted and succinct definition with important ramifications:

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

This definition has been used largely whole cloth in much scholarship on the topic ranging from film studies, where William Lempert uses it to frame an enlightening analysis on the power of Indigenous Futurist film production, to Conrad Scott and Kelsey Amos, who mobilize the definition to pursue an analysis of formal engagements with

time/space in dystopian Indigenous fictions (Scott), and to track how these concerns are reflected in Hawaiian Futurist writings by author Matthew Kaopio (Amos).

Various strands of Dillon's definition are also given different emphasis or come under partial criticism and revision in work by scholars such as Danika Medak-Saltzman, who doesn't rework Dillon's description so much as narrow the focus by examining the gendered character of Indigenous Futurist production, and Miriam C. Brown Spiers, who calls attention to the classificatory impulses of Dillon's text by questioning the value and effects of that categorization. Spiers uses the example of the sub-genre of "Native slipstream," which Dillon calls the "cultural experience[s] of reality" as SF (52), as a point of departure in her essay "Reimagining Resistance: Achieving Sovereignty in Indigenous Science Fiction." Offering a reading of what Dean Rader's calls the "Indian invention novel" (Rader, *Engaged Resistance*, 86), Spiers argues that this attempt to collect and emplace Native textual production into what might loosely be called SF runs the risk of defanging the critical and political work done in such texts by "collapsing definitions" and "trivializing Native voices and communities," thereby authorizing a dismissal of the political orientation of such work (53).

While Dillon voices opposition to this effect in her work, which Spiers notes, Spiers places emphasis on assumptions of fictionality that might be assumed at the level of the story itself, and she implies a need to map the differential between what is intended and what is born by such definitions. Nevertheless, despite this tantalizing interpretive intervention in the opening pages of her essay, Spiers here does not distinguish between Indigenous SF and Indigenous Futurism, utilizing only the former term to limit the scope of her intervention. This does seem to resonate largely from Dillon's own heavy

orientation towards SF as the defining engagement for Indigenous Futurism; however, a cursory examination of the broader field showcases the potential for a much more flexible conceptual framework as I've illustrated above. As a result of this SF-specific characterization, Spiers largely operates within the established genre architecture, deploying Rader's intervention to articulate Indigenous SF as a "related but distinct category" within his conceptualization of the Indian invention novel (53). Spiers then begins working with the traditional definition of SF as defined by scholar Darko Suvin, focusing on the estranging "novum" as a formal defining feature of the SF genre before offering a sustained reading of the role of virtuality of Blake Hausman's novel *Riding the Trail of Tears* to this effect (53-73).

While her interpretive work here offers important insights into the use of virtuality as a space of flexible spatial and temporal representation, Spiers's initial critique also serves to highlight the distinction between the assemblage of Indigenous Futurism and a stabilized genre formation. Brown Spiers largely works within Darko Suvin's definition of SF, but the emblem for Indigenous Futurism might rather be found in her analysis of the nature of the "Little People" in Hausman's novel—small spirits within Cherokee ontology, which Spiers characterizes as representing "adaption and innovation" and the refusal of "absolute definitions and... strict separation" (59-60). Spiers expresses concern, in alignment with Rader, over definitional collapse, however, this problem is only manifest in rigidly separated, stratified, and static genre definitions. If instead we consider the ways Indigenous Futurism continuously revises and articulates its own project between and amongst spheres of influence, and indeed relies on certain expectations that fluoresce around and within the genre, we might then orient

interpretations towards an operationalized rhizomatic formation. This generates genre as a function of the field rather than vice versa, thereby keeping definition itself fluid and under revision. And while concern over the classificatory influence on popular regard for Indigenous artistic production is merited, it is largely a function of the very fields of expectation within which Indigenous Futurism so deftly navigates and does its work. Nevertheless, I do share Spiers's interest in how we might engage with Suvin's concept of estrangement, or at least the Brechtian concept upon which it is built. However, it becomes critical to offer a certain amount of salvage-analysis that stays in the descriptive rather than prescriptive mode, mapping its effects as one expression of engagement within Indigenous Futurism rather than as a defining character of SF by Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers alike.

### 3

Rader's sustained book-length work, *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film*, offers an important framing for the ways Indigenous art functions within broader dominant culture. While the use of futurism as an aesthetic and philosophical framework offers a particular advantage for Native people, the very articulation of Indigenous voices into an assemblage so ordered by settler-colonial ideology is itself a critical strategy for representation, a startling and unsettling appearance of the unexpected. Indeed, as Rader notes, Indigenous aesthetic expression is fundamentally related to sovereignty, and such aesthetic engagement "means the ability of artists, writers, and filmmakers to tell their own stories in their own words, in their own language—whether that language is verbal or visual" (50). As such, aesthetic

engagement at the level of cultural expectation works against discourses of erasure and usurpation embedded within settler-colonial ideology. This revision of expectation similarly works against stereotype partially by exposing how dominant “culture thinks about itself” (Jane Tompkins qtd in Rader 5), thereby potentiating the reworked/revised cultural products for a changed reception. The Indigenous imposition within a technological *mise-en-scene*, for example, creates a peculiar form of *unfamiliarity* within popular culture production. Indeed, something as simple as the appearance of a Native person within a techno-future framework creates an estranging juxtaposition of the familiar and unfamiliar within dominant readings, a fact shown and effectively utilized in Judd’s short film. This characteristic of unfamiliarity obviously intersects in critical ways with Darko Suvin’s thesis that “SF [is] the *literature of cognitive estrangement*,” which he elaborates as a “genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (4, 7-8, emphasis original).

This oft-cited formal definition has been worked over throughout the decades following Suvin’s early project by numerous scholars, many of whom have refined but generally worked within this definition to varying degrees.<sup>30</sup> In recent years, the idea has come under more careful criticism as a raft of literary scholars interested in the genre of

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<sup>30</sup> Key examples of this work leading up the twenty-first century include: Freedman, Carl. “Science Fiction and Critical Theory” in the journal *Science Fiction Studies* (1987), later developed into a book-length version called *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000); Broderick, Damien. *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction* (1995); Westfahl, Gary. *The Mechanics of Wonder: The Creation of the Idea of Science Fiction* (1998); Parrinder, Patrick. *Learning from Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition, and the Politics of Science Fiction and Utopia* (2000) among numerous others including those by Brown Spiers, discussed above.

SF have entered the conversation, including Rieder and his important intervention into the formally centered definition quoted earlier. While my interests here are to varying degrees involved with SF, the intent is not to rework and/or speak to Suvin's body of scholarship and interpreters as such. The central interest here lies in briefly isolating and examining Brecht's use of "*Verfremdung*" in its broader context as a means of understanding the relationship of this effect to the cultural expectations which govern its visibility. I do not find this alienation effect a necessary or definitional formal feature of Indigenous Futurism per se. Instead, my interests lie at the nodal intersection of aesthetic expression, methodological approach, and theoretical application, therefore I am mapping a particular expressional structure in this discussion, not tracing a definitional form. Suvin's scholarship therefore operates primarily as a convenient conveyance to Brecht and then back to Indigenous Futurism, rather than as an extended stop along the line. Nevertheless, Suvin's analysis of estrangement, even as a differential diagnostic, provides a meaningful glimpse into one formally bounded articulation of the SF genre.

Certainly, Suvin's definitional work in characterizing the genre has held merit for many scholars beyond Suvin himself, among them Fredric Jameson. Jameson, a committed Marxist critic like Suvin, specifically aligns his sense of the features of utopian writing with Suvin's declarations, noting that he generally follows Darko Suvin's reasoning that the notion of "cognitive estrangement" "characterizes SF in terms of an essentially epistemological function (thereby excluding the more oneiric flights of generic fantasy)—thus posit[ing] one specific subset of this generic category of [speculative fiction]" (*Archeologies of the Future* xii). That said, Jameson notes the complexities and limitations of such a description when seeking to isolate and map what

he calls a “utopian impulse” which both inheres in and transcends the limits of the indicated textual forms (*Archeologies of the Future* 80). Jameson also highlights a critical consideration in passing on the same page, characterizing Suvin’s aborescent formulation as insistent that SF be committed to “continu[ing] a long tradition of critical emphasis on verisimilitude from Aristotle on...The role of cognition in SF thus initially deploys the certainties and speculations of a rational and secular scientific age” (*Archeologies of the Future* 80).

Here we are presented with a brief-but-deep genealogy and more direct expression of the western ideological commitments embedded within such a structure. In this formulation, what constitutes rational, scientific discourse—and by extension what futures are possible—is produced and defined by the same ideological structures that attempt to erase and replace Indigenous presence.<sup>31</sup> As such, non-Western ontologies are minimized or silenced, Indigenous technologies and futures are deauthorized, and access to future imagining by Native people is hidden. Nevertheless, within a liberated definition of this estrangement/alienation effect, Indigenous artists have found utility in the production of startlement precisely by utilizing this oppressive backdrop, articulating an aesthetic that works to speak back to this structural orientation. By producing an “unsettlement” within settler-colonial cognition, the use and effect seem to share a more illuminating connection to Brecht’s *Verfremdung* and Shklovsky’s *Ostranenie* over Suvin’s formally bound definition. There is also an indeterminacy in Suvin’s

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<sup>31</sup> Jean O’Brien’s work *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (2010) is an excellent book on this subject in a different context. She lays out several terms for this rhetorical process of erasure that illuminate the ways settler communities in New England created the conditions and did the cultural work that enables and enacts erasure and replacement.

terminological usage that has been noted by the scholar Simon Spiegel, who shares a similar interest in a recourse to Brecht and Shklovsky to clarify Suvin's description of SF.

In "Things Made Strange: On the Concept of 'Estrangement' in Science Fiction Theory," appearing in *Science Fiction Studies* in 2008, the German-fluent Spiegel does much legwork in interpreting Suvin's usage of the term estrangement by delineating first the usage of *Ostranenie* and the *Verfremdungseffekt* in their own context before revising Suvin's usage. Shklovsky saw *ostranenie* as a process by which alienation reveals (or re-reveals) the intractable, eternal character of an object through a startling newness. To wit, in his work *Theory of Prose*, Shklovsky notes that art in this mode "returns sensation" and "make[s] us feel objects" through the process of "'estranging' [those] objects and complicating form" (6). This definition characterizes much of Shklovsky's wide-ranging formalist literary interpretation even as he turns to the visual field to elaborate the point:

The purpose of the image is not to draw our understanding closer to that which the image stands for, but rather to allow us to perceive the object in a special way, "to lead us to a 'vision' of this object rather than mere 'recognition.'" (10) Nevertheless, for Shklovsky this tracks exclusively at the formal level and is intended to revitalize the ability to experience the timeless form of art. As Jameson notes in *The PrisonHouse of Language*, it therefore fails to consider "anything about the nature of the perceptions which have grown habitual, the perceptions to be renewed" (51); that is, it provides no avenue of analysis for the field of stultifying expectation against which *Ostranenie* operates. Jameson further notes that, while this characterizes the literary tradition as one of rupture and break with the previous and now familiar, it nevertheless attempts to

formalize and universalize literary quality as such, orienting the creation and interpretation towards this Platonic form (53).

Brecht, on the other hand, was interested in using the *Verfremdungseffekt* (V-Effekt) to show the fundamental malleability of reality, “that things do not have to be the way they are, that any current state of things is not a natural given but a product of historical processes” as Spiegel summarizes (370); here there is clear resonance in the emphasis on malleability and *denaturalization* of ideological processes for Indigenous Futurism. This extension beyond the level of form by Brecht is critical, as his didactic approach is heavily invested in the reception and perception by the audience. Instead, the V-Effekt calls attention to the naturalizing discourse of the social order, which produces the expectations embedded within the art-object, and, by so doing, highlights the constructed and *constructable* nature of these structures. The critical thrust of Spiegel’s piece is to note these terms are undifferentiated within Suvin’s scholarship, and, further, Suvin takes what is essentially a stylistic device across genre and attempts to use estrangement as a definitional category for SF (371). On that point, Spiegel notes that while alienation for Shklovsky renders (re-)visible the timeless and genuine character of reality, for Brecht the value of alienation is in the revelation of the artifice and mutability of the social order. Suvin, however, re-functions this definitional device in an inverted form, whereas “Brecht’s plays estrange the normal,” Suvin’s characterization actually “naturalizes the strange” (373). In this sketch of the *orientation* in the relationship between the context and effect between Shklovsky/Brecht and Suvin, Spiegel clarifies an important distinction in the directionality of these poles of naturalization and estrangement, expectation and unsettlement.

The darkened background against which this unsettlement is illuminated in relief is “expectation.” This term, theorized by Philip Deloria in his work *Indians in Unexpected Places*, engages with the structure and representational valence of the figure of the Indian in American culture. Deloria reworks the dominant historical narrative, highlighting Indigenous presence in “unexpected” places: those moments that break with dominant culture’s signifying relationship between Indian-as-symbol and the actual lived experience and narratives of Indigenous people.

“Expectation” is glossed by Deloria as:

[A] shorthand for the dense economies of meaning, representation, and acts that have inflected...American culture writ large... [through the] colonial and imperial relations of power and domination existing between Indian people and the United States. You might see in *expectation* the ways in which popular culture works to produce -- and sometimes to compromise -- racism and misogyny...the unexpected...resists categorization and, thereby, questions expectation itself. (11) When the visual art that I will later be briefly examining creates *unexpectation*, it creates *unsettlement*, and this phenomenon is only operational against the backdrop of the dense cultural matrix of settled expectation. That is, the “naturalization” of the strange in this context is in the cultural work by dominant discourse to yoke the contradictory narratives of settler-colonial ideology into a legible form. Unsettlement occurs in this context by Indigenous imposition, the obtrusive presencing and resultant awareness of a counter-operational Indigenous revision and re-articulation of this structure of expectation that generates a type of anxiety—this largely

emanating from the tensions and contradictions within the dominant master narrative that the Indigenous imposition draws in stark color.

Native revisional thinkers and artists therefore presence the Indigenous *unexpected* to unsettle not just the violence in the material history of Tribal/settler-colonial relations and the contemporary presence of Indigenous America, but also the ideological commitments that support and produce these structures of violence. In this sense, we can see a clear parallel to the orientation of Brechtian estrangement in this doubled emphasis on both exposing the ideological structures that create expectation itself and their rearticulation within and among those formulations. Nevertheless, this peculiar aesthetic form relies on a familiarized historical as well as *aesthetic* and symbolic shared context. As such, a critical battleground wherein such symbolic distribution is at its most voluminous is the familiar world of popular culture. As the textual flow with the most circulation and influence within dominant ideological formations, the site of popular culture is a critical conduit for intervention within the exploitative representational projects which have so often done the “work” of erasure through manipulation of the figure of the Indian in popular culture since at least the end

of the nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Which is to say, since the beginning of modern mass U.S. popular culture.

As such, popular culture is often part of the medium for unsettling Indigenous Futurist artists. Steven Paul Judd's engagement with the symbolic register of *Star Wars* in his claymation film is echoed in numerous other works by Indigenous artists utilizing the same franchise for representational purposes. Indeed, many Native artists have been hard at (re)work on *Star Wars* iconography,<sup>33</sup> demonstrating the striking importance of this revisional act within the aesthetic field of SF. Additionally, *Star Wars* also has the honor of being the only pop-culture SF film translated into an Indigenous language (Diné). To be sure, there is a particular resonance in Native communities and with Native pop-artists around the franchise; certainly, Indigenous artists interacting with the *Star Wars* universe also interact widely with other American pop culture icons, but the *Star*

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<sup>32</sup> This is not specific to popular culture *as such*, since obviously the exploitative construction of Native peoples in literary projects goes much further back. Two helpful collections about pop-cultural representations of Native people are *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* (1996), edited by Elizabeth S. Bird, and *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations* (2001), edited by Gretchen M. Bataille, each offering a varied collection of Native and non-Native scholars approaching the subject from varied perspectives. Robert Berkhofer's now-classic treatment in *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (1978) has been followed up by innumerable scholars from varying perspectives including Philip Deloria's *Playing Indian* (1998) and Shari M. Huhndorf's *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (2001). For film/TV-specific treatments, Peter Rollins's edited collection *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film* (2011) offers several interesting perspectives on the subject, and the Cree filmmaker Neil Diamond's documentary *Reel Injun: On the Trail of the Hollywood Indian* (2009) gives a loving-but-critical exploration of Native representation in cinema in the 20th century.

<sup>33</sup> The interest in this combination of Native aesthetics and *Star Wars* iconography is unique in its broad interest. I discuss Ryan Singer, Steven Paul Judd, and Jeffrey Veregge, but Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit, Aleut), Bunky Echo-Hawk (Yakama/Pawnee), Andy Everson (K'ómoks) and a few non-Native visual artists including Gary Carter, John Brosio, and Scott Ericson, and even Pendleton Wool Mills are producing similar works.

*Wars* universe as constructed seems to offer something unique that is worth examining.<sup>34</sup> It is of some note that, like Judd's film, *Star Wars* offers a unique temporal construction. The films are a type of fictional historical archive despite the future orientation and regard, and this is reflected in the aesthetics of the films. As an example, the iconographic "lightsaber," literally a laser sword, is a combination of two temporally oriented emblems: one of the future and one of the past. What *Star Wars* does in its world-building operation is construct a world that is at once historical ("A long time ago"), futuristic ("in a galaxy"), and distant ("far, far away"), and this temporality and archival framing offers a unique platform for representational tactics by Native artists.

The revisional aesthetic expressed by Native artists against this backdrop also consciously relies on familiar cultural expectations within U.S. culture, playing not only with the iconography of the films but with the discourse of Indigenous expectation. While the temporality of the *Star Wars* universe offers a way to represent Indigeneity in a way that still contains the presence within the "historical/vanishing Indian" trope, because the world of the films is simultaneously futuristic, these representations offer a chronological juxtaposition which revises the massively popular iconography, reconstructing indigeneity firmly in the pop-cultural present. Indeed, as Olena McLaughlin notes in her essay "Native Pop: Bunky Echo-Hawk and Steven Paul Judd Subvert *Star Wars*," such works "subvert iconic images of *Star Wars* as a means to address dominant American

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<sup>34</sup> As my father, Dr. Will Harjo Lone Fight, has noted, it perhaps should not be surprising that a narrative franchise that constructs a scrappy rebel force characterized by "Hokey religions and ancient weapons" and set against the expansion and destruction imposed by an imperial power finds resonance in Indigenous communities. Beyond this, characters from Luke Skywalker to Princess Leia wear tunics and hairstyles that are reflective of, if not outright derived from, Indigenous aesthetic traditions. This is from a personal conversation with my father.

culture's understanding of Indigenous identities and histories, thus engaging in contemporary art and political conversation" (31). These types of involuntary collaborations between the *Star Wars* universe and Native artists create a collision of seemingly incongruous representations at the aesthetic level and play with the expectation generated by this familiar symbolic repository. By revising *Star Wars* iconography and imbricating or adorning the textual field with unexpected Indigeneity, it forces the viewer to also consider the conflict between the historical narrative of erasure and Indigenous presence in futurist contexts, and, through the force of the creation of the art-object itself, the clear-but-unexpected presence of Native voices in the pop-cultural present. Much of Indigenous futurism and, arguably, alternative futurisms in general, engage to varying degrees with the use of this revisional approach or aesthetic as a mechanism to create unsettlement in the beholder.

Such work, however, also creates a different type of identification within reception in Indigenous contexts: an effect of the layered revision is the creation of additional signification within and/or around the pop-culture symbol. Where the pop-culture piece in the nude may have previously spoken with the stentorian univocality of dominant white America, the revisive act creates an alternative sign system, which functions to interrogate that univocality while simultaneously incorporating corrective impositions of Indigenous representation. This produces an Indigenous reflection, a symbol of presence and familiarity where it's not typically expected. The act of seeing and enjoying the Indigenous self in popular culture already requires significant contortion to align affective response with an ontology and axiology designed to obliterate that very possibility, so the presence of Indigenous-derived and directed representational work in

the pop-culture field creates a joyful startlement and identification for the Indigenous viewer. As such, this work of (re-)representation serves the critical function of not only interrogating ideological structures of dominance, but also indigenizing pop-cultural textual formation, revisionally carving out and reclaiming Indigenous territory within dominant cultural spaces. This orientation highlights Indigenous Futurism as a revisive laboratory to explore alternative futures and counternarratives which bear on the present, a decolonizing assertion of aesthetic sovereignty within the cultural-symbolic field.

Nevertheless, this unsettling revisional aesthetic is fundamentally a method of symbolic restructuring. I examine here two forms of this revisional method, *Yiq* and *Maaʔibcaa*, as a means of framing methodological and aesthetic approaches which emphasize the idea of revision itself as a narrative or aesthetic choice. To re-vise (*visio*) is to re-see or re-visit a prior expression. A revisional approach emphasizes the modification of the prior to mobilize it in the present and potentiate it for use in the future. Both of my approaches here can be characterized by their interaction with, and configuration of, prior expressions. By linking to previous iterations while distinguishing the revised form, it becomes a differentiating vision that nevertheless creates a connective structure. To have a revisional aesthetic connects past iterations as a means of establishing a meaningful articulation in the present through the trafficking or visitation back and forth between multiple nodal points of signification; that is, there is still a clear, communicable resonance and connection with prior or parallel constructions, a revisive link to an established symbolic repository.

“Imbrication” is a term used by the historian Coll Thrush in his work *Native Seattle* defined thus:

In Whulshootseed there is a word, *yiq*, that describes the process of working designs of bear grass, maidenhair fern, or wild-cherry bark onto the stunning woven baskets [of the] Duwamish. [...] Imbrication, as anthropologists have named this process in English, is by nature forceful, with deer-bone awls pressing into watertight cedar bark or spruce root...[b]ut the word has a second meaning as well; *yiq* can also describe the process of working something into a tight place or, as one elder described it, ‘worrying’ something into place. (XX)

This “worrying” into place relies here on integration into an already existent weave in Thrush’s application the historical narrative. This imbrication of histories operates at the level of contextual integration: we might think of it as a revision of the background, which then manipulates the foreground. In Thrush’s work the term is applied to the historical situation of Native people and Europeans in the early and contemporary history of Seattle which he endeavors to trace, focusing on the revisional insertion of the erased histories and contemporary presence of Native people in that context.

My second term to describe this aesthetic practice draws inspiration from Thrush’s method, deriving from a need to describe an inversion of the angle of effect of the *yiq*, i.e., a focus on foreground and its effects on background. Conceptually framed through the *Híraaca* word for the work of beading, “*maaʔibcaa*,” this term differs from “*yiq*” in angle and orientation: while beadwork can manifest varying intensities of imbrication regarding the object, in all cases the mechanism necessarily relies on the creation and structuring of a latticed thread formation around, over, or on the object rather than worked into an extant weave as in the case of *yiq*. This creates a poly-

vocalizing juxtapositional revision at the level of the sign, adorning the relational signification itself as opposed to imbricating an integrational restructuring. A simple way to think about this is in the game of Bingo, popular on my reservation: the “dobbers”—the tool used to mark your Bingo sheet—on the rez are often beaded [fig 1]. These dobbers create additional signification through the beadwork itself, and there is no “weave” per se that it is integrated into; rather, it is pure, structured addition. Nevertheless, it maintains a clear connection to the previous usage. Indeed, in beading the function of the object is typically retained. Nevertheless, it creates an Indigenous connective aesthetic form and symbolic valence that simultaneously modifies the object without diminishing its function.

There is overlap between these two terms certainly, and much like the ways semiotic analysis finds itself moving back and forth among categories symbol, icon, and index based on vantage or level of analysis, so too does adornment and imbrication run both parallel and convergent, flowing into one another at the level of comprehension. Nevertheless, while *yiq* might modify or re-contextualize the background or narrative of the photo [fig. 1] thereby modifying the valence of the dobbers, *maaʔibcaa* operates in the foreground, revising the dobber itself by impregnating it with additional symbolic meaning and opening reinterpretation of the context. And because both forms of revision structure critical linkages to and within prior expressions, its application in the field of Indigenous Futurism should be clear. Therefore, in the case of much Indigenous Futurist work, the revisional act places extant cultural productions into an assemblage model that both links and distinguishes itself from arborescent forms. This revisional work is a vital Indigenous expression. Kristina Baudemann notes echoes this sentiment in a piece titled

“Indigenous Futurisms in North American Indigenous Art.” In examining similar visual artwork to the ones presented here, she writes that “[Indigenous Futurist] art inscribes a sense of the ‘open, future, possible’ into this experimentation with visual structure” (148). Indeed, Baudemann, like the scholars Suzanne Fricke and Olena McLaughlin, shares an interest in the ways Indigenous visual artists utilize SF iconography within their work to revise the cultural constraints upon Indigenous culture and expression.

An example of this sort of revisional work is Ryan Singer’s (Navajo) painting, *To’ (Water): It Binds Our Universe Together* from 2015 [fig. 2]. This revision demonstrates the imbractive form neatly, in this case integrating the Storm Troopers and world of *Star Wars* into the world of Singer’s Southwest. We notice the windmill in the background, and, with careful observation, we also will see that “Vader” has been spray-painted on the cement outcropping in the middle of the scene. Even further in the background is a figure, perhaps a woman, tending to what appear to be sheep. There is here an integration of worlds through the commonality of water: that is, the sheep, the figure in the background, the stormtroopers, and their Dewback mounts, an indigenous Tatooine species from the *Star Wars* universe, all need water to survive, and are bound together by this oasis in the desert. Dewbacks, in fact, are so-called because they are a desert species: they lick dew off their own backs in the morning to help survive in the desert. So, then, one might wonder, are we on Tatooine, or are we in the American Southwest? The white-on-white Tatooine-based graffiti on the cement seems to ask this question more directly, as does the other, more stark reference: “TK 421,” the name of the Storm Trooper who was ambushed by Han Solo and Luke Skywalker who then used TK 421’s armor to infiltrate the Death Star.

It's important to notice in this work that, due to Singer's specific medium of acrylic on canvas, all the figures and landscapes are quite literally painted with the same brush; they are integrated, drawn together, and this differs from some of the more photo-oriented works of someone like Steven Paul Judd or even the graphic design work of Jeffrey Veregge discussed below. In Singer's case, the work emanates from the same creative application, and this is a distinguishing aesthetic choice. This revision of the *Star Wars* iconography integrates itself within the world of the Southwest; it becomes an imbricated whole that blends the two worlds together. Fricke picks up on this compositional choice as well in her analysis of similar works by Singer in the article "The Force Will Be With You...Always: Science Fiction Imagery in Native American Art," wherein she notes that "Singer invites the viewer to spend more time with familiar figures. Singer's paintings overlay the foreign with the familiar, combining the fictional locations over his homeland" (34). Certainly, for Singer, the viewer is not intended to recognize a formal jarring difference between the SF franchise and the lived experience of the Southwest. In that sense, this works more like Suvin's conceptualization of the formal character of estrangement: the strange is naturalized, the SF symbols are enveloped within a familiar sense of place.

This also has the effect of naturalizing the foreign universe and its signifiers (Vader, TK 421, the Stormtroopers, Dewbacks, etc.) within the Southwestern landscape, in effect indigenizing the future by forcefully enjoining it to Singer's own sense of the present. The revisional act in this case emphasizes relation rather than difference by embedding the Indigenous symbolic register within the landscape itself. This is a less accessible signifier and is therefore not as immediately jarring for a casual viewer.

Indeed, Fricke's article largely hews towards characterizing his work as the expression of a cultural co-existence (34-35). Nevertheless, while the piece creates a familiarity that inheres in the Southwestern-styled representation through a characterization of it as U.S.-National space, there is an oblique unsettlement at work here once we center the landscape as Indigenous land. This shift in recognition operates outside the frame of the work, instead found in the Diné title and the artist himself. These small cues are enough to engender a slow shift in realization that the signifiers are polysemous, and this begins to render the figures and other indicators within the visual field operational and supportive of this reorientation. This realization dawns and functions to revise and unsettle the setting itself, rendering it legible now in stark opposition to the initial settlercolonial identification. The setting is speaking a naturalizing *Indigenous* discourse, the familiarity is not directly hailing a mainstream viewer and the land represented is not "American" but Indigenous. This fact renders the geography alien once more to the settled viewing as the familiar becomes unsettlingly strange. This revision and attendant instability of the spatial category comes to the fore, then, and takes the form of the Indigenous imposition, the appearance of the symbolic (or symbolically) Indian in an unexpected cultural articulation working at the level of the setting.

Unlike Ryan Singer, Steven Paul Judd's work often emphasizes layers and adornment, creating additional signification at the level of the pop-cultural symbol. There is still play at the level of the spatial setting, but it is done through juxtapositional insertion of different worlds from separate forms. While Singer paints with the same brush, in Judd's work [fig.3] we have filmic revision: photographs coming from two different origins, which are then carefully blended to comment on one another. While

Judd has some examples more geographically or spatially oriented that share more broad similarities with Singer's work, he often tends towards a more contrastive approach. In the untitled example [fig.3], we are presented with an image of Han Solo in an iconic pose; however, he has been revised, adorned with an Indigenous-signifying shirt and necklace, blaster still in hand. This *maa?ibcaa* adds to the symbol "Han Solo," impregnating it with additional signification.

There is a parallax generated here: to the Indigenous viewer this does some of the reflective work that I mentioned earlier by emplacing an Indigenous sign system that produces a familiarity and identification within the piece. However, this adornment also produces a *disidentification* within dominant discourse. The appearance of Indigenous markers in a futuristic context once again places pressure on the "vanished Indian," obviating the historical entrapment of Native representation. This does similar work of unsettling to Judd's film insofar as it once again presences an Indigenous imposition within the familiar world and symbolic register of *Star Wars*. This Indigenous adornment of Han Solo—here standing in for the array of "rebels" who are the protagonists of the film franchise—functions to revise the orientation of identification within the plot structure for a dominant-culture viewer. By calling attention to and then undermining the common positionality of the viewer to identify with those rebel forces, Judd's piece estranges Han Solo, playing with and revising the obvious familiarity with the strange and unsettling adornment.

The construction of Indigeneity in this context troubles the signifying relationship between the rebels and the settler, forcing an inversion of the common association of U.S. settlercolonial sentiment as aligned with the rebel forces, often as a pop-cultural parallel

to the American revolution. Instead, the viewer is forced into the position of the empire, the Indigenous adornment here creating a startlement that overturns this positional expectation. If the Indigenous imposition revises the symbolism of the rebel forces, by extension it revises the symbolic representation of the empire: the evil forces of expansion, violence, and colonization are suddenly mapped onto U.S. history, a through-the-looking-glass moment that unsettles colonial history by inverting the relationship of the viewer with regard to the world of *Star Wars*. Indeed, as another Indigenous visual artist, Bunky Echo-Hawk (Pawnee/Yakama), shows in his painting “Darth Custer,” which depicts Custer wearing Vader’s full outfit, this inversion of the representational force of *Star Wars* iconography has numerous other examples. In that more direct engagement with Vader’s symbolic valence, the association with King George is instead mapped onto Custer and by extension the larger structure of settler-colonialism. This effect, as Olena McLaughlin notes in her essay “Native Pop: Bucky Echo-Hawk and Steven Paul Judd Subvert *Star Wars*, ” encourages Judd’s “audiences to reconsider Native American history and position indigenous peoples as active participants in the present” (31). This exigency in some sense derives not just from the historical narrative but also the appropriation of Indigenous culture by settler-colonial society, which poses a threat to aesthetic and cultural sovereignty (29-30). As such, this type of involuntary collaboration finds precedent in the historical and ongoing work of cultural appropriation, here inverted and weaponized for Indigenous representational purposes.

Certainly, Darth Vader’s clear symbolism within the cultural imaginary is ripe for usage in such artistic endeavors. Jeffrey Veregee’s (Port Gamble S’klallum, Suquamish/Duwamish) work shares much of this revisional positioning within the

cultural milieu. While Singer's medium is primarily acrylic and canvas, and Judd's is photography, Veregge typically overlays Indigenous computer-graphic design and adornment on pop-culture iconography to embellish and add symbolic registers to the already pregnant images. There is a similar effect and approach to Judd's piece here in terms of aesthetic operation. In his piece "Dark Father," [fig. 4] a digital image of Darth Vader is constructed with formline technique recognizable as Northwest Coast tribal design. In it, Vader is standing straight up, centered on a white background, with his red lightsaber pointed downwards between his feet. Under the figure is the title of the piece in both S'Klallam, Veregge's Indigenous language, as well as English, both of which might call attention to the fact that "Darth Vader" is itself a Dutch-inspired kluge intended to mean "Dark Father." Veregge calls this form-line adornment "Salish Expressionism," and like Singer and Judd, Veregge uses this technique to revise and indigenize pop-cultural iconography.

Unlike Singer and Judd, however, Veregge does not integrate the iconography into contemporary Native geography or place, and neither does he juxtapose the images with contrasting Indigenous photos or symbolism. Instead, Veregge interprets the iconic figures through a recognizable Indigenous aesthetic style. Fricke notes that "by depicting figures in formline design, Veregge found a way to make these public images personal, reflecting his own life and the history of his region" (38). This once again agitates within the same symbolic registers previously laid out, and Veregge's *maaʔibcaa* functions to fluoresce Indigenous aesthetic through this revision of Vader. The effect is striking: the viewer once again is encouraged to revise their sense of the famous iconography through the lens of contemporary Indigenous artistic styling. The (re-)naming of Vader into an

Indigenous language also performs the function of overlaying a type of claim on critical figures within the franchise in ways like Judd's piece. There is a tacit potentiation of the *Star Wars* universe as translatable in some meaningful sense into Native communities and Native discourses, and this foregrounds the contestation around which cultures and traditions have the privilege to envision themselves within that imaginary universe.

This inclusion of Indigenous language in both Singer's and Veregge's pieces also bring into focus the entire Indigenous linguistic apparatus. Yet another instance of working back against the "Vanished Indian," the entrance and utilization of Indigenous vocabulary further throws relief on the alienation of settler discourse in these art productions. By engaging with the entire living world of Indigenous language, policies of termination, relocation, and assimilation are brought to the fore, retroactively lighting up the constellation of linguistic and religious repression within the history of the settler-colonial project. The imposition of Indigenous language in these instances takes to task the histories of linguistic repression, the words haunt the settler-colonial imaginary as a stark reminder of the failure of the state to overwrite Indigenous knowledge and culture. Veregge's work is then both an aesthetic adornment at the level of the symbol, and a *yi q* in its imbrication of Indigenous nomenclature and by extension, Indigenous worldviews, into the world of the franchise. This translatability of dominant narratives to revise them is centered here, formalizing the process by translating the image into an Indigenous art form, and the label into S'Klallam language. This primacy on the Indigenous language at its most basic level itself engenders a disidentification and startlement: while the symbol is familiar, the language is not, and this alienness triangulates and places emphasis on the Indigeneity of the piece and its unexpected and unsettling subtext.

What is central here for these pieces is that they are re-workings of things that are already emplaced within popular culture. This allows for a connective disjuncture, a rupture or break in the expectation formation that works to reroute and revise those ideological networks. Here I examined Native visual art and the pop-cultural tradition of *Star Wars*; however, much contemporary music, television, film, and literature engage with similar aesthetic approaches. This compulsion towards revisional technique is certainly not isolated to Native artists, though Indigenous art of this nature offers aesthetic and political advantages for Native people. Nevertheless, the revision of culture is often incremental work, and in that sense, it shares much in common with the process of revising writing. The author George Saunders discusses this incrementality in an article for *The Guardian*, noting that revisional change is infinitely iterative, but nevertheless, like a cruise ship turning, “the story will start to alter course via...thousands of incremental adjustments” (Saunders).

Saunders here brings emphatic attention to the nature of revision as a continuous process rather than a singular operation. This demand implied by the revision process for a steady and repeated inclination towards re-seeing the text positions “the artist...like the optometrist, always asking: Is it better like this? Or like this?” (Saunders). That is, through a posture of constant revisitation to prior and simultaneous manifestations, Indigenous artists continue to revise the cultural field, assessing and improving it incrementally at each point of contact. And to be sure, in the case of the visual artists examined here, revisionality is also a force for the creation of affective linkages within the pop-cultural edifice. There is deep love for popular culture in these and other similar pieces of Indigenous art. There is, then, also the sound of a salvage operation at work in

this revisional approach: while the aesthetic keeps a clear and often intimate connection to the pop-culture object, there is the attempt to not simply destruct the revised art, but to improve it. To save it from itself.

Finally, these three pieces of art are obviously a limited selection and extremely focused example of two forms of expectational revision that engender an Indigenous imposition within the cultural field. And one can track this usage across an extremely diverse range of artistic forms and content. Just an extended exploration of specifically *Star Wars*-inflected Indigenous visual art will yield dozens of artists and many, many dozens of pieces. As such, maintaining a fundamental stance of meta-orientation—an orientation towards constant revision of orientation—is a critical methodology in Indigenous Futurism. The ability to reorient not just one's own thought but also the rooted articulation of colonial discourse is part of the critical work of both aesthetic and intellectual sovereignty. Constant reorientation is also a means of generating new re-articulations within, among, and around these dominant cultural forms: cutting up and salvaging what can be used, re-de-constructing, re-articulating, and finding our own Indigenous use for things. This requires mental flexibility to think obliquely within the rooted structures and master narratives, finding places to *de-prune* the structure; to bring forth multiple Indigenous-nodal offshoots in unexpected places, reaching out with new articulations, which intersect and interact with different cultural and historical nodes to dissolve or reroute the connecting apparatus within structures of domination. As we continue our headlong plunge towards the middle of the twenty-first century and (re-)imagine the past(s), present(s), and future(s), Indigenous Futurists and other Space

NDNs might be well served to keep close the method of the Warriors of Orange from Gerald Vizenor's classic film *Harold of Orange*:

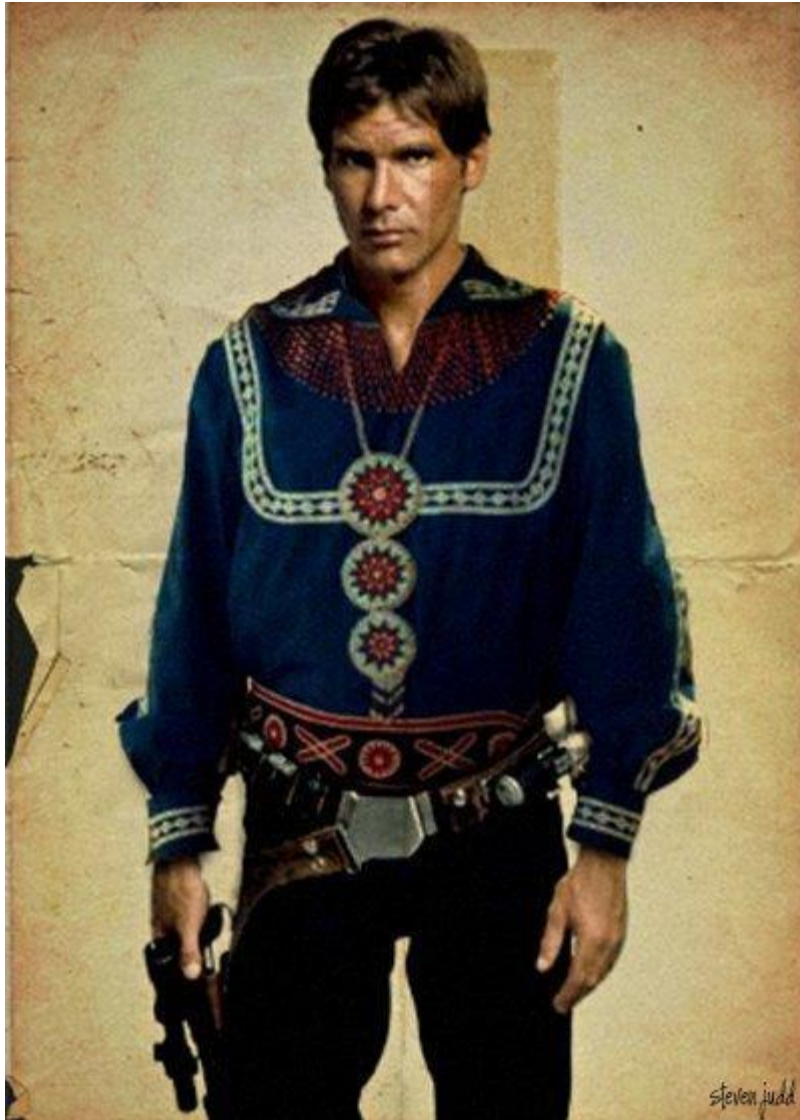
The Warriors of Orange are trained in the art of socio-accupuncture. We imagine the world and cut our words from the centerfolds of histories. We are wild word hunters, tricksters on the run. (55)



*Figure 1 Beaded Bingo "Dobbers"*



*Figure 2 Ryan Singer's milieu of his homelands and the Star Wars universe*



*Figure 3 An adorned/beaded Han Solo by Steven Paul Judd*



nəx˥sɿák˥əŋ cət  
(Dark Father)

*Figure 4 An adorned/inflected Darth Vader by Jeffrey Veregge*

### Chapter Three: Braiding Temporalities

#### Living in the Indigenous Post-Post-Apocalyptic Present: Settler Time, Indigenous Imagination, and the Centrality of Storying

##### 1

In the closing lines of an article written for the *Australian Broadcasting Company*, Noongar author Claire G. Coleman emphatically declares, “[Indigenous people] don't have to imagine an apocalypse, we survived one. We don't have to imagine a dystopia, we live in one — day after day after day” (Claire Coleman, “First Nations Australians”). This sentiment comes on the heels of the publication of Coleman’s apocalyptic-themed novel, *Terra Nullius*; meanwhile, a hemisphere away, fellow authors of Indigenous post-post-apocalyptic art (IPPAA) Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) and Cherie Dimaline (Georgian Bay Métis) were separately singing a similar refrain. In interviews about their dystopian novels, *Future Home of the Living God* and *The Marrow Thieves*, Erdrich and Dimaline evinced a similar past and present orientation regarding their novels’ theme despite the genre’s nominal future tense. In an interview with the *School Library Journal*, Dimaline notes, “who better to write a story about people surviving an apocalypse than a people who already had?” (Diaz). Indeed, in a conversation with *Lightspeed Magazine*, Erdrich echoes the same sentiment by emphasizing that “Indigenous people . . . are descended of relatives who survived the dystopia of genocide. To us, dystopia is recent history” (Erdrich qtd in Christian Coleman). In each of these moments, the authors call attention to a peculiar form of *post-post-apocalypse* as a central conceit of the novels thereby inviting an interpretive dilation of the temporal register of the text.

This interpretive dilation of the temporal register in the text resonates with my earlier exploration in the first chapter of LeeAnne Howe's description of an Indigenous "bias" in narrative construction, what she terms "tribalography." Howe describes this bias within Indigenous storying as an inclination to bring compositional elements together in a "past, present and future milieu" (118). I interpreted this concept to be intimately related to Vizenor's slippery concept, "survivance," by grounding them both within an experiential Indigenous ontological orientation toward universal sacrality and relationality in Chapter One. I underline in this chapter that this Indigenous "bias" that Howe describes is more than simply a narrative tendency. Rather, it serves as a description of the effectuation and instantiation of Indigenous ontology vectored through tribal temporalities that operate beyond the conditioning horizon of settler-colonial temporal discourse. As a genre overtly framed within Judeo-Christian teleology and the irreconcilable "to come"—survivance within an impossible temporality—post-apocalyptic fiction serves as a stark emblem of the ways Indigenous conceptualizations of temporal flow, distance, and relation are deployed within a popular settler-colonial sub-genre. By reframing the genre with a non-linear temporal (re-)orientation, these novels work against interpretive strategies of the apocalyptic genre that center settler anxieties about Western decline by dis-estranging apocalypse and recharacterizing it as historical familiarity. I examine the ways Indigenous worldviews about time function beyond the constraints of modern temporalities before turning to the above Indigenous authors who use alternative-apocalyptic temporal constructions in their work.

Each of these novels contends with the familiar features of apocalypse by mobilizing diverse Indigenous histories across three different settler-colonial contexts

(Canada, United States, and Australia). Within these storied worlds, Erdrich, Coleman, and Dimaline contend with the future-familiar manifestations of settler-colonial institutional operations of effacement, dispossession, and seizure of the Indigenous mind, body, heart, and soul: the interrelated settler-colonial institutions of education, medicine, psychology, and religion. In sketching the familiar contours of violence enacted by institutions of colonization across both temporal and spatial registers—through time as well as across hemispheres—collectively these authors of the post-post apocalypse call our attention to the familiarity within the processes of erasure as they overlap across these dramatically different settler-colonial contexts. These forms of dispossession index comprehensive attempts to dominate and obliterate Indigenous ways of being and modes of existence through a similar process of abstraction of concrete particularity and extraction of material substrate—land to "property," Indigenous to "human"—in ways that substitute the complexity of experiential reality with the manageable simplicity of abstract conceptualization; to wit, as the architect of the residential and boarding school system puts it, to “Kill the Indian, and save the man.”<sup>35</sup>

Within that framework, these Indigenous authors engage with an interpretive mode that constellates trans-Indigenous narratives of survivance across far-flung places and times and gravitates them into orbit around a shared ontological primacy given to the narrative function and storying more broadly. By collapsing the temporal registers of the text and juxtaposing a future setting with historical contexts, the novels take advantage of

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<sup>35</sup> Richard H. Pratt, from a speech given in 1892 at George Mason University describing the mission and mandate of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Richard H. Pratt, "'Kill the Indian, and Save the Man': Captain Richard Pratt on the Education of Native Americans," quoted in *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892), Online by George Mason University, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929>.

a temporal liminality that continuously moves between and among past/future and *realis/irrealis* modes utilizing non-linear modalities of temporality and causality. These survivance stories engender a narrative agency and temporal circularity that creates a teleological leakage: the escape and continuation of stories into the impossible future beyond the temporal universality of the colonial encounter. This places a dramatic imposition not only on the modernist-progressivist model of Western culture but on the Judeo-Christian temporal logic upon which it relies. In this sense, these novels of the post-post-apocalyptic future deny even the pyrrhic teleological comfort found in the coincidence of the end of Western society and the end of narrative—i.e., they refuse the assumed isomorphism between the decline of settler society and the dénouement of history itself.<sup>36</sup>

Each of these novels engage with the temporality of history by constructing both fictional and non-fictional archives and archival framings within the worlds of the novels, and, in each case, the novels are resonant with the circular voice of the past, echoing concrete historical particularities to which the novels serve as an analytic of the non-linear causalities, feedback loops, and types of braided temporalities that give voice to the archive and resituate history within an Indigenous worldview—wherein “ago” is not equivalent to “away.” That is, they transit the distancing effects of modernist settler-colonial temporal structuration that isolates and organizes the past and future apart from the present. In artistic works of this stripe, the future and historical registers are

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<sup>36</sup> In a different work of fiction, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama famously declared an “end of history” resulting from the triumph of “the common ideological heritage of mankind,” namely Western liberalism, over other competing ideologies. Whether in the expression of indulgent anxiety or a bellicose triumphalism, what retains across these sentiments is the forceful enjoinder of the story of Western society to the shape and structure of time itself.

dramatically attenuated in relation to the present, placing historical traumas as not only still with us, but their ripple-like effects and looping causalities echoing out across the horizon of both future and fantastical temporalities. Within these nearer and nuanced timescapes, the broad, network effect of the institutions and historical events of settler-colonialism are drawn in stark detail. These novels mobilize the imaginative, creative capacities of storying the past, present, and future in ways that describe the violence of systems of enclosure/erasure and the predatory violence and missionary zeal of the Christian church.

In this way they both stray from voicing *for* the archive, but instead *nagcúdi*—to braid or *to whip*—additional forms of discourse that engage with specific (fictional and non-fictional) archives and the practices that surround them. Gerald Vizenor’s concept of survivance, explored in Chapter One, serves as a useful short-hand description for the genre as narratives about the futurity of survivance. Indeed, Vizenor himself is no stranger to the apocalyptic narrative,<sup>37</sup> both in historical and futuristic forms. Vizenor’s concept is useful as a countervailing description of agency under the duress of apocalyptic contexts, the “active sense of presence,” and “continuance of native stories” as they continue their transit through the wastelands of settler-colonialism (Vizenor, *Survivance* vii). This description is interdigitated with Howe’s earlier temporal description of the temporal milieu as a formal pronouncement about the temporal and

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<sup>37</sup> Among many novels that share similar themes and concerns, *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (1991), a revision of an earlier work by Vizenor titled *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*, is perhaps the most obvious and widely read example of Vizenor’s engagement with the genre, though much of his literary production engages with similar apocalyptic themes. Critically, *Darkness* is also the work wherein the trickster figures as an engine of survivance in the post-post-apocalypse is made most salient. More recently, Vizenor’s *Treaty Shirts: October 2034—A Familiar Treatise on the White Earth Nation* takes up a direct engagement with futurism and apocalypse through an exploration of dystopia/utopia community building, broken treaties, the discourse of archive/documentation, and tribal sovereignty.

spatial organizational structure of the narratives found in these novels (*Choctalking* 31).

A critical direction and an affective horizon for my interpretive work here is an emphasis on narrative as the modality of becoming within Indigenous ontological orientations; that is, to engage with narrative as both a process of what Dimaline uses as a refrain in the chapter titles of her “coming to,” as well as relating to the world and characters of the novel in a way that assumes a more salient and complex ontological being that derives from the creative act itself of “coming to”—of the power and compositional force of creation *as such*.

To engage with some of the settler-colonial ideological temporal elements, I nagcúdi together strands of thought by Philip Deloria (Lakota), Vine Deloria, Jr. (Lakota), Mark Rifkin (settler), V.F. Cordova (Jicarilla Apache), and William V. Spanos (settler) to explore and critique the spatio-temporal practices of settler-colonial modernity. By isolating the socio-temporal architecture of the apocalyptic narratives and the genre itself and connecting it firmly to the logic of modernity and American exceptionalism, I show how Vine Deloria connects American settler-colonial exceptionalism to Judeo-Christian conceptualizations of time; Spanos then echoes this temporal connection and examines the set of articulated expectations that interpellate the modern American subject in ways resonant with Vine Deloria's succinct earlier analysis and in alignment with Philip Deloria's methodological orientation towards the unexpected within the organizing apparatus of categorization. By focusing on scenes of expectation and anomaly, Deloria charts obtrusion of Indigenous presence that signify beyond the colonial dyad of expectation/anomaly and marks moments of temporal transit across the teleological timescape of settler-colonial temporality. I then take up Rifkin's critique of

Deloria's methodological approach and nāgcuđi them together through lines of analytic concordance and an elaboration on Rifkin's engagement with Cordova.

Cordova and Rifkin's examination of Indigenous temporality as well as Phillip Deloria's examination of scenes of expectation within modernity are deepened by Vine Deloria and Spanos's Judeo-Christian temporal contextualization, while it nevertheless points us starkly towards Indigenous narrative beyond settler-colonial temporal constraint; i.e., towards the sovereign expression of temporalities that exist otherwise or other ways and thereby exceed the fiction of temporal domination and the ideological project of modernity—what Rifkin terms “temporal sovereignty” (#). This articulation highlights how the temporal action within the text engages with historical and ongoing colonial violence through tracking forms of feedback loops, braiding together circular, interdependent causes and effects that create circuits across the time-space horizon as thick storied beings that enter the field of Indigenous popular culture. These speculative narratives also circulate representations of resistance under conditions of apocalypse across and through multiple Indigenous global communities, worldviews, and traditions. Through recourse to the histories of apocalyptic experiences, the novels work through the most invisible aspects of the colonial archive by speculating into becoming Indigenous experience, intimacy, and community across the temporal confluence and into the silent spaces and yawning gaps of colonial archive—evoking vision and voice, word and world so often obliterated by the multifarious systems of settler-colonialism. Indeed, each of these novels utilizes temporal literary techniques to both emphasize the parallel to historical and contemporary colonial practices as well as to engage formally with the discursive practices of the archive—e.g., *Future Home of the Living God* is written

through a form of archival prolepsis by framing the narrative as a mother's diary written to an unborn child at some point in the future's past.

Along the way, these novels spatialize tribal networks of cultural interaction and exchange, constructing a complex and interrelated vision of trans-Indigenous culture and resistance within these post-post-apocalyptic worlds. This trans-Indigenous circulation *within* the text anticipates the complex, global flows that connect and complicate the variously positioned trans-Indigenous readership of the texts within the Indigenous popular-cultural field. I note that each of these novels assumes an ontological complexity within the process of storying itself as a fundamental mechanism of peoplehood writ widely and inclusively. While they each manifest different emphases within the broader ontological structure of narrative as such, they nevertheless share a commitment to the centrality of storying as a modality of Indigenous being and becoming. While these novels forcefully emphasize the transnational features and historical consistency within the violent structure of settler-colonial institutions, they also constellate and circulate Indigenous memory, resistance, and agency among and beyond trans-tribal Indigenous pop-cultural networks. In so doing, they give voice and ontological density to stories of a shared apocalyptic past, rendered in the future-tense, all while speaking a trans-Indigenous truth in the present.

## 2

The apocalyptic narrative of American colonization and the hydraulics of the exceptionalism that drives it are sustained by innumerable streams crossing vast historical and cultural geography. However, the emblematic metaphor found in the final section of Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity," seems to flow from eternally renewing

headwaters—from Kennedy to Biden, corporate CEOs to non-profit organizations, the “City Upon a Hill” continues to be evoked and woven tightly to the character of American nationalism. Therein the essential mission and mandate that serves as the super-cessionary force of American exceptionalism: the progress towards, and establishment of, the revealed shining society, the divine ends to which settler-colonialism itself orients and by which it measures deviation. To be sure, the broader incorporation of Christian ideology within American national discourse forms a critical repository for the shape and substance of that futurity insofar as it becomes caught within the teleological register: Christian eschatological discourse continues to heavily condition imagery around Western decline, with Revelations typically a short-hand for a tragic, spectacular, and/or cataclysmic ending and related terms—“apocalypse” is the Greek-inflected synonym for revelation, and “Armageddon” is the location of the final battle depicted in Revelations—all similarly gesture towards this same universal and utter temporal finality. Textual production within this temporal framing thus becomes overdetermined precisely at the point of interpellation of the Western subject and the integration of this teleological temporality within Western modernity as the ground for its appearance.

Vine Deloria discusses this Judeo-Christian temporality contrasted with Indigenous views of time—a distinction that he calls the “division of domestic ideologies”—in his classic book, *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*. There, Deloria articulates the critical distinction in spatio-temporal dynamics between Indigenous and settler-colonial worldviews, characterizing the former as interested in “the philosophical

problem of space,” and the latter in the “philosophical problem of time” (66). Deloria notes:

The very essence of Western European identity involves the assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion; further it assumes that at a particular point in the unraveling of this sequence, the peoples of Western Europe became the guardians of the world. The same ideology that sparked the Crusades, the Age of Exploration, the Age of Imperialism, and the recent crusade against Communism all involve the affirmation that time is peculiarly related to the destiny of the people of Western Europe. And later, of course, the United States. (*God is Red* 61-62)

Vine Deloria critiques this universalization of religious experience by playing with the valence of religious revelation, separating it from its apocalyptic context by disarticulating it from the universal register. Within settler-colonial religious frameworks, the universalization of particularized Christian modes of revelation creates an abstracted framework that imposes an ethical and ontological perspective upon peoples with “no connection to the event or cultural complex in which it originally made sense” (V. Deloria, *God is Red* 65). Querying whether revelation in any form can become an abstract principle that can be universally imposed upon all peoples, he argues that the widely variant and vociferous multiplicity of religious formations tend towards the conclusion that all forms of revelation necessarily move along the metaphorical axis,<sup>38</sup> “that cultural context, time, and place are the major elements of revelation and the content is illusory” (V. Deloria, *God is Red* 65); or, at the least, so fully imbricated within the cultural-

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<sup>38</sup> This calls to mind Heidegger, Derrida, and Wittgenstein’s variously expressed sentiments that, indeed, metaphysics is metaphoric.

contextual particularity that produces it, it is not suitable for universal application at scale without doing harm both to the revelation itself and the society receiving it.

In distinction to the violent missionizing impulse embedded within universalized forms of revelation, Vine Deloria describes Indigenous encounters with sacrality as necessarily operating within a concrete locality:

The places where revelations were experienced were remembered and set aside as locations where, through rituals and ceremonials, the people could once again communicate with the spirits. Thousands of years of occupancy on their lands taught tribal peoples the sacred landscapes for which they were responsible and gradually the structure of ceremonial reality became clear. It was not what people believed to be true that was important but what they experienced as true. Hence revelation was seen as a continuous process of adjustment to the natural surroundings and not as a specific message valid for all times and places. (*God is Red* 65-66)

The collective-personal (FPP) and exclusively contextual nature of such experiences with sacrality do not lend themselves to universal application. As such, principles derived from such forms of revelation “involve present community realities and not a reliance on part of future golden ages toward which the community is moving or from which the community has veered” (V. Deloria, *God is Red* 67)—it would make little sense to attempt to disarticulate the sacrality and spatial emphasis of ceremony from the concrete peoples and locations that enervate their meaning. With such an understanding of sacrality, it becomes impossible to envision a temporal figuration that structures the

spatial and experiential horizon rather than the other way around, i.e., as Deloria notes, “space generates time, but time has little relationship to space” (*God is Red* 70).<sup>39</sup>

The teleological norming within settler-colonial temporal constructions derived from the imposition of Judeo-Christian worldview and its attendant temporal structuration undergoes a discursive translation, a secularization of the divine that keeps intact and operational the fundamental features of the Christian telos:

Instead of working toward the Kingdom of God on Earth, history becomes the story of a particular race fulfilling its manifest destiny. Thus, Western history is written as if the torch of enlightenment was fated to march from the Mediterranean to the San Francisco Bay. (V. Deloria, *God is Red* 68)

This bit of settler slight-of-hand creates the circumstances for Christian religious dogmas and historical interpretive frameworks to be recommunicated, shorn of their Christian language. As such, all deviant forms of spatial and temporal understanding to the categorical parameters established by this modernist secular religiosity are invalidated “because the categories of explanation on which they were judged to be false...were those derived primarily from temporal considerations of how the world ought to be” rather than spatial understandings of how the world, within a contextual particularity, is (V. Deloria, *God is Red* 74). This categorical norming thus serves as a continuation of the temporal violence of missionizing history. Through the exclusion and/or extirpation of incommensurate temporalities—those that do not center a Western, Judeo-Christian conceptualization of time, and by extension, space, and history—settler nations enforce a

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<sup>39</sup> A simple act of imagination drives this point home well. Can you imagine a space without time? One simply envisions a concrete locale “frozen,” i.e., non-processual and transformational. Now, can you imagine time without space or any spatial reference? The imagination flounders.

temporal enclosure that attempts to stabilize not only the content and boundaries of historical narrative *as such*, but also the very trajectory and ontological positioning of temporality vis-à-vis material space.

The Heideggerian critical theorist William Spanos echoes Vine Deloria's analysis of settler-colonial temporality several decades later, first in an essay titled "Redeemer Nation and Apocalypse" and later in the book-length work *Redeemer Nation in the Interregnum*. In his work, Spanos describes how this enforced Judeo-Christian temporality comes to be inaugurated within the project of American nationalism and translated into the secular discourse of modernity—a translation that, as Deloria already succinctly observed, serves to simply reclothe the same missionizing violence of the Christian temporal worldview into the sartorial tastes of modernist America. By describing this Judeo-Christian temporality as "the ontological site of the continuum of being . . . the be-*ing* of being (its radical temporality)," Spanos similarly characterizes the centralization and universalization of teleological history and its underlying temporal structure as the central ontological operator within American exceptionalism (107). Spanos tracks the retention of temporal orientation through the concordant analyses of temporal continuities before and after modernism found in the thought of Agamben, Weber, and Althusser—three thinkers whose work overlaps precisely on the point of critical continuity of discursive practices between the temporal traditions of Christianity and modernity.

Spanos's analysis describes this translation process as the "naturalization of the supernatural" and "secularization of this theological interpretation of being" through a divine ordainment of the settler-colonial historical narrative—i.e., the discursive shift that

indexes the conversion of “divine” providence into “historical” manifest destiny (107-108). Nevertheless, the central teleological operator, the aforementioned “city upon hill” still conditions the articulation and organization of both histories across the secular divide. This teleological imposition generates something like a gravitational distortion, weighting apprehension of the spatio-temporal field itself like a bowling ball on a trampoline. This providential architecture continues to bend historical narrative towards the dutiful pursuit and attainment of its own teleological negation while the providential sequencing itself structures temporality as the means toward that end. Building on Weber’s thought, this introduces an instrumentality into the movement of history itself and installs what Spanos describes as the “vocational ethic [of]. . . the American Protestant capitalist exceptionalist ethos” as the driving force and definitional posture of historical “development” (119).

The conditioning pressure of this articulation on the phenomenological and affective dimensions are demonstrated neatly by Spanos in his interpretation of Melville’s *Benito Cereno*, wherein he reads symptomatically the induced blindness within the perceptual field of American ship captain Amasa Delano. Interpellated by his American “higher” duty to aid a seemingly distressed Spanish ship, Delano boards the ship and is greeted by its captain, the titular Benito Cereno, but is unable to recognize the abundant evidence that the slaves on board have in fact rebelled, killed the slave-owner, and have assumed control of both the ship and Cereno. Delano maps the ideological modulation of ontic sensibility and ontological density here in the material appearance and visibility of the black body and its manipulations and distortions within the perceptual field. Reality thus bound to the teleological structure of American

exceptionalism attenuates phenomena incommensurate with the abstracted divine architecture: the black body is structurally unable to signify the ontological condition of humanity necessary to render legible an agential human motivation such as rebellion—to do so would manifest the particularity of humanity within the abstraction of the black body and jeopardize the stability of white exceptionality. As such, the abstract logic of white exceptionality modulates the ontological grounds of appearance and organizes the cognition of material reality through a frame of reference in which abstraction holds ontological priority in an asymmetrical relation of influence with concrete reality, i.e., conceptualizations that efface and categorize the complexity of material reality are granted primacy, and the complexity of reality is *expected* to comport to the conceptual simplification while not afforded the same magnitude of reciprocating influence on the conceptualizations themselves.

This relates to what Alfred North Whitehead refers to as the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness,” a defining feature of settler-colonial worldview (Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 52). Whitehead writes that this derives from the “acceptance of the scientific cosmology at its face value, [in the form of a] scientific materialism” (*Minds, Brains and Science*, 17). Indeed, Whitehead notes in his lectures that this structure of belief:

presupposes the ultimate fact of an irreducible brute matter, or material, spread throughout space in a flux of configurations...senseless, valueless, purposeless...following a fixed routine imposed by external relations which do not spring from the nature of its being (*Science and the Modern World*, 17).

This is a peculiar inversion of ontological position wherein experiential reality and abstract reality are substituted for one another, i.e., “mistaking the abstract for the concrete” (*Minds, Brains and Science*). What I often refer to in my work as the “effacement of abstraction” is part of the operational effect of such an error. Abstraction relies on the paraphrase of an object to definable, isolated parts, and conceptualization itself, built from abstraction, necessarily occludes, or otherwise renders illegible any excess to the abstraction.

As such, abstractions and the concepts built upon them are necessarily isolated simplifications of experiential reality shorn of their particularity. This “misplaced concreteness” effects a more manageable and more ably objectified and abstractable reality by dramatically attenuating the grounds of appearance and locating it exclusively within the conceptual apparatus. These abstractions then are positioned in the driver’s seat, so to speak, leading the organization of lived reality by enforcing a conformity to the abstraction—that is, experiential reality itself becomes abstracted and saturated with the conditioning force of these conceptual schemas. Indigenous worldviews, according to Vine Deloria, operate quite differently:

The Indian confronts the reality of the experience, and while he or she may not make immediate sense of it, it is not rejected as an invalid experience. In the Indian world, experience is not limited by mental considerations and assumptions regarding the universe. (V. Deloria, *Metaphysics*, vii)

Moving from locality, from contextualized experiential reality to conceptualization and cognition thus does not position abstraction as a normative force on reality but, rather, the other way around.

Concrete examples abound in the development of any major city in the United States, which serve as locations of dramatic intensification and proliferation of settler-colonial abstraction's dispossession of concrete reality. The complex dynamics of the urban landscape is not necessary for such misplaced concreteness, however. Simpler phenomenon such as any road blasted/paved through rather than around a natural feature is a material consequence of the reification of conceptual primacy. The pavement itself similarly attempts to paper over and attenuate those elements of concrete place, the peculiarities of the lived earth in an area, which do not comport with the effacement of abstractive mappings. Even the simple fact of being able to see where your neighbors' lawn begins because of the different lengths of grass or where the woods "begin" (now) at the edge of your yard, highlight the primacy of the concept in its manipulations of physical reality and the reified, material consequences of its categorizing force. This is also, I suspect, part of the reason for the numerous cases around the world of people driving their cars into very large, obvious sinkholes that appear unexpectedly in a road with increasing regularity. The concept "road" does not contain "sinkhole" in its field of categorical expectation even as an anomaly, so, in the case of the concrete reality of a sinkhole—assuming this unexpected obtrusion into the roadway has not yet been festooned with symbolization to literally spell out the hazard within the abstract symbolic field—it is instead mistaken for an aberrative rather than an unexpected phenomenon that

coheres more easily within the categorical expectation: a shadow, a puddle of water, or, as it is in many cases, it simply is not seen at all.

Similarly, in the case of poor Delano, a blindness is induced by the categorizing modulations of white supremacy, which conforms his cognition of perceptual reality to the abstraction and renders excess and illegible the humanity of the black body. Rather than granting ontological primacy to concrete, experiential reality, the effacement of abstraction serves to blind Delano insofar as the ideological abstraction of white-American exceptionalism and its generated category of “slave” operate with ontological primacy over and above the obvious and contradictory elements of experiential reality. The abstractions are in the driver’s seat, so to speak, wherein experiential reality is being forcefully organized and articulated by the domain of abstraction. Thus, in a very real sense, the plane of abstraction determines the horizon of possibility for material reality through the modulation of expectation and anomaly. This has a pernicious epistemological feedback effect of reinforcing the descriptive and predictive power of abstraction insofar as it serves as the model to which physical reality is conditioned and conformed—as physical reality undergoes revision to approximate the abstraction, the abstraction necessarily becomes a more accurate, and therefore more powerful, description of physical reality. In that sense, the telos toward which modern science and technology appears to be oriented continues to norm and conform physical reality to the predictively mimetic abstractions of its own creation, the aspirational teleological

fulfillment in that case seems to be the complete substitution of the concrete world for the abstraction model.<sup>40</sup>

In this classic example of the appearance of the *unexpected* in Melville's text, the humanity of the slave in *Benito Cereno* is necessarily rendered transparent and beyond the frame of ideological cognition within the American ideological apparatus. Which is to say, Delano quite literally cannot see what is right in front of him because the abstract concept of "slave" and the field of expectation from which it is generated forces a conformity of cognition within the perceptual field. As I have noted previously, Philip Deloria terms the norming force of this apparatus of abstraction and categorization in *Indians in Unexpected Places* as "expectation," describing it as "a shorthand for the dense economies of meaning, representation, and acts that have inflected...American culture writ large" and the related disciplinary processes such "economies of meaning" produce (11). Philip Deloria also introduces the category of the "anomalous," which he notes "reinforces expectation" by serving as the complimentary categorical field of exteriority against which its dyadic binary, expectation, reinscribes its normative force; finally, as discussed in Chapter One and two, the "unexpected," which resists categorization and, thereby, questions expectation itself" (*Indians in Unexpected Places* 11), I align here with the illegible excess that results from the paraphrase of experiential reality into the ideological schematization of settler-colonial discourse. Philip Deloria deftly maps an assemblage of Indigenous cultural history in this work that operates within scenes of modernity where networked "social relations in dialogue with economic,

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<sup>40</sup>During a seminar, one of my students made an off-hand comment that what someone needs to do is invent a technology that is solar powered, reduces CO<sub>2</sub> in the air, and is easy to manufacture from renewable resources. "A tree," I replied. "What you want invented is called a tree."

political, and legal structures” create “ideological/discursive frames that [are used] to generalize . . . expectations of Indian people” (*Indians in Unexpected Places* 225, 12). In Philip Deloria’s work, much like in Spanos, the textual field is interrogated to analyze and parse when, how, and to what effect the ground of appearance is distorted by the ideological apparatus. However, while Spanos’s genealogical exploration of the American vocational ethic notes the ways in which this ideology constitutes the Western subject, indeed it “*constitutes his reality*—and the expectations it implies,” his broader interests are rather with the teleological temporality and apocalyptic staging of subjectivity in Western modernity (*Indians in Unexpected Places* 129, emphasis original). Deloria’s interest in modernity dovetails from Spanos’s more overt theological and temporal concern, instead hewing toward analytic exposition of the scene of expectation as he traces the appearance of Indigenous presence *within* the American project of modernity.

In response, Mark Rifkin observes that Philip Deloria’s temporal synchronization of modernity and Indigenous histories does not recognize and theorize the temporal rupture itself. In the opening chapter of *Beyond Settler Time*, Rifkin does not deny that mapping the “co-implication of unfolding events works against the denial of Native persistence,” i.e., that imbricating Indigenous presence within settler-colonial history moves against erasure (7); however, Rifkin insists that Philip Deloria’s work risks minimizing the *ontological* and *epistemological* forms of erasure that the disrupting and distorting effects Western modernity’s dispossessionist ontological and epistemological universality indexes:

[While such historical synchrony] appears as mutual participation in modernity, given that some Native people “leapt” into it [as Deloria notes], modernity also indicates something that exists separately from the temporal experience of Natives prior to that point. The shift from that earlier experience of time to modernity is explained through Native subjection to enduring kinds of expropriation and exploitation. (7)

As such, the precipitation of modernity within the supervening structure of settler-colonialism operates as a secular site of maintenance for Judeo-Christian teleological temporal structuration. Problematically, the spectrality of disavowal that American exception requires is the very structure of invasion itself and its broad discursive effects—i.e., the histories of settler-colonial violence create the very conditions of domination that call for the assumption of modern subjectivity.

Rifkin’s criticism here productively reorients us back towards the epistemological and ontological concerns that must necessarily arise not only within historical works that engage in settler time, but also the effect of settler-colonial scholarly norms that continue to operate as the abstracted extension of the concrete forms of discipline and erasure of the Indian boarding school within contemporary epistemological practices of the neoliberal academy. Rifkin takes issue with what he perceives as the universalized background of “settler time” that inheres in such combinatory works. Rifkin describes this as the “notions, narratives, and experiences of temporality that de facto normalize non-native presence, influence, and occupation” (17). As the teleological-temporal dimensionality of the field of settler-colonial expectation, work that simply reiterates the field of expectation would merely shift the focus of temporal consideration to include

Indigenous histories while nevertheless reinforcing temporalities of domination by inserting them into the extant temporal orientation of settler-colonialism—within the violent teleological temporality that Vine Deloria and Spanos describe and that the settler-colonial educational apparatus works to maintain. Rifkin rightly points out how, while valuable, works of presencing and imbrication that give over the temporal frame of Indigenous and non-Indigenous “experiences, trajectories, and orientations” and organize them “within a singular shared modernity” (17) run the risk of conforming those expressions within this temporal structuration that is premised on the violent assault on and dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

In that sense, Vine Deloria’s historical examination does indeed cede many of the coordinates and much of the temporal orientation to settler-colonial temporal framing of history/time/present. However, I disagree with Rifkin’s hyperbolic suggestion that:

asserting the shared modernity or presentness of Natives and non-natives implicitly casts Indigenous peoples as inhabiting the current moment and moving toward the future. (viii)

By arguing that observed contemporaneity, “presentness” *as such*, must be understood as necessarily backgrounding “non-native geographies, intellectual and political categories, periodizations, and conceptions of causality” (viii), Rifkin runs the risk here of singularizing and radicalizing settler time to a degree that seems to be in tension with the more malleable interpretation of temporality he explores. Insofar as Indigenous intellectual and creative work indexes modes of Indigenous becoming, there is value to exploring the purposeful and incidental *obtrusions* and forms of unexpected Indigenous *impositions* that mark the transit of Indigenous modes of becoming within the post-

apocalypse of settler-colonial contemporaneity. Perhaps most especially in tracking a broadly conceived Indigenous popular culture,<sup>41</sup> examining moments where expressions of Indigenous particularity exceed beyond the framing of settler-colonialism that nevertheless encounter expectation within their trajectory. That is the broader purpose of Rifkin's work as well, so I do not disagree with the substance of his criticism; I just do not discount the ways Indigenous particularity exceeds the frame even when found in the historical temporal staging of settler-colonialism.

Which is to say, it is critical that unexpected obtrusions not be mistaken for the whole of the obtruding phenomenon during analysis. Analysis that moves toward synthetic readings salvages and helps explore the multiplicity of Indigenous temporal expression a part, apart, and beyond scenes of temporal domination. This simply recursively reiterates Rifkin's own sentiment when he describes his intent to:

theorize and engage the presence of Native experiences of becoming that shift in relation to new circumstances while remaining irreducible to non-native spatial and temporal formations. (ix)

Intellectual and artistic works of imbrication should not be understood as exhausting Indigenous presence within an obtrusion into settler-colonial expectation. This would be an error for the same reason that a glacier should not understood only and exclusively in terms of its obtrusion into the open air—to do so would be to blind oneself to the

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<sup>41</sup> As noted in the introduction, defining "Indigenous popular culture" is not something I seek to do with this project. While there is scholarly work on the topic, I observe it to be an understudied field—partially, I might suggest, because of the implicit contaminative characterization of modernity and the mono-narrative treatment it receives. Modernity and settler-colonialism are typically seen as isomorphic—indeed, I gesture to that assumption in my own writing. However, given modernity's wildly and notoriously opaque definition, its relationship to settler-colonialism can only be approximated in terms of probability; they are not the same phenomenon, they are interrelated phenomena.

substantive whole that lies outside of such a delimited arena of analysis and artificially separates its related elements, of which the obtrusion is one, from the whole. Rifkin's work seems to align with this recharacterization. Insofar as he highlights those works of overt settler-colonial imbrications that intentionally work within settler-colonial temporal frames, such as *Indians in Unexpected Place*, calling attention to the limitations of interpreting such work only in terms of its successful entrance into the staging of history within a violent temporal configuration is a point well taken. Indeed, this is a motivating factor to deepen the complexity and importance of temporal analysis in a way that opens space for the multiplicity of temporal experiential particularity.

In seeking to find a theoretical lens more adaptive to alternative temporalities, Rifkin elaborates on the discoveries of Einsteinian relativity by highlighting the observation in physics that temporality must necessarily be understood in terms of a “frame of reference” or particularized context—there is no absolute time. With no frame-independent temporality, there are only frames of temporality relative to their relational stance to other elements within a given context. Nevertheless, within scientific models and descriptions of temporality, temporal frames interact and are made intelligible through acts of mathematical quantification and relational reference to a mutual but separate element (Rifkin 26-29)—to the speed of light, for instance. Here Rifkin dovetails his temporal interest to that of examining forms of translation that do not rely on the absolutization of mathematical translation as a pseudo-independent frame of reference (i.e., “clock time”). Building on Bergson's conceptualization of duration and simultaneities—“the transition among qualitatively differentiable sensations such that they permeate each other in ways that defy enumeration” (Rifkin 26)—and VF Cordova's

reflections on Indigenous temporalities, Rifkin observes that moving away from the homogenizing and absolutizing reference to the succession of clock time means frames of reference:

would refer to qualitatively differentiable processes of becoming that have no inherent, neutral means of being articulated to each other, instead requiring complex processes of translation in order to be made mutually intelligible. (29)

These complex translation processes form what Cordova describes as the active process of our “communal sense of reality” and that is reinforced and revised by our actions on and within it (qtd in Rifkin 29).

Rifkin’s analytic thus seeks to highlight and examine those dimensions of temporality that are not simply perceptual or experiential but are inclusive of the myriad “socially mediated formations of becoming that develop and inculcate...ways of experiencing time” (32). By describing temporality in terms of frames of reference, Rifkin centers the multiplicity of temporal experience—individual temporal frames of reference—while retaining temporal collectivities not backgrounded by a universalized, monolithic temporality. This elaboration of Cordova’s “communal sense[s] of reality” he terms “temporal formations” (Rifkin 27-29): the interdependently co-created assemblages of reciprocating relational elements that constitute coherent Indigenous collective temporalities in transit beyond dominant settler-colonial frames of reference. This contextual and relational concept gestures toward the dynamic process of ongoing coagulation, circulation, and relation within and among an ontologically attenuated set of differentiated elements—the “cohesion...[of] backgrounds, orientations, and

trajectories...including the influence of nonhuman entities and forces” within a given collectivity (29).

For Cordova, time “is an abstraction derived from the fact that there is motion and change in the world” (qtd. in Rifkin, 13), a sentiment that echoes Vine Deloria ’s observations about the generative position of space vis-à-vis time and their fundamental interdependence within an Indigenous standpoint (or frame of reference). Cordova observes that all that exists is in dynamic, relational motion—there are no static objects, only static abstractions that distort, quantify, and paraphrase elements of the dynamic motion of universal sacrality. As such, time is rendered in a descriptive mode that is coeval with the dynamics of social and physical formation and trans-formation. Thus, the experiential posture and orientation toward temporality is a creative one insofar as the abstraction of temporality itself is co-constitutive of, by, and through the locomotion of our actions. Time is rendered within concrete, localized frames of reference that measure the reality of dynamic motion instead of imposing time as “a thing that serves as the stage upon which the drama of the universe is played” and against which all "motion is measured” (Cordova *How It Is?*, 117-118, 174). This descriptive mode necessarily incorporates context and identity as elements of temporal analysis by foregrounding the dynamic relationship of aesthetic/ethical dimensions of temporal formations.

To wit, Cordova recognizes temporality as a participatory, co-created phenomenon, an abstraction of concrete, experiential reality that is centrally related to both metaphysics and identity. She writes:

Time...[has] everything to do with expectations of what it is to be a human being...the [teleological] future does not exist. 'I' have not yet made it, contributed to it. My present actions are making it. (175)

Here, Cordova forcefully contrasts the non-absolutized Indigenous temporality with the Judeo-Christian “sense of waiting for...[teleological] fulfillment” and its equivalent, “secular, post-Christian Westerner...theory of time: the idea of Progress [as] a product of the Enlightenment” (175). Like Vine Deloria and Spanos, Cordova is underlining the relations of concordance, continuance, and operational equivalence between Judeo-Christian and secular-settler temporalities. By reifying the abstraction of time into a “real,” measurable phenomenon rather than deriving it “from the fact that there is motion and change in the world” (*How It Is* 108), time functions within settler-colonial culture and history as a violent disciplinary category that marks deviations within a teleological orientation toward an “‘end time’...when everything will work out”; time is “is *out there*, waiting” (172, emphasis original). The regimentation of temporality thus becomes a force of domination insofar as Indigenous peoples represent “living fossil[s] portraying earlier stages of Western man’s singular climb to complexity on a teleological evolutionary path of the Universe” (172). This discourse of primitivity and the temporal violence it represents has been and continues to be used, explicitly and implicitly, as a rationale for innumerable atrocities committed in the name of progress.

Like the wake from a boat moving quickly across a still body of water, violence and dispossession attends the exteriority of the articulated force of teleological exceptionalism. With the exclusive, exceptional universality of settler time understood in terms of its structural relationship to a foregone conclusion, history is reified as a

universal frame of reference and violently exerted as an objective force incidentally in alignment with settler culture and history and to which it in turn aligns. In the same way that abstractions increase their predictive power the more they modulate reality to conform to the expectations of the abstraction, teleological temporality similarly increases its validity through the continued violent modification of concrete physical and non-physical worlds. These normative modifications flatten the interiority of all other forms of temporality through the universalizing application of settler time—there is only one history, evidenced by the clear trajectory towards the implicit conclusion. All others are erased and/or rendered invisible in the exteriority or dispossessed and rearticulated within the interiority of settler time. This continued progress toward apocalypse brings Cordova to query:

What price is paid in the name of Progress, and who pays the price? Who are the sacrificial hostages of the superior beings who make the acme of a teleological process? (175)

### 3

Mr. Hayt, the [Indian Affairs] Commissioner, was insistent that I must go to Spotted Tail and Red Cloud [and recruit students], because the children would be hostages for the good behavior of their people. (R. Pratt 219-220)

I paraphrase and revoice in the following two paragraphs a scene from the archival papers of Richard Henry Pratt—the founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (CIIS) and,

by extension, the architect of the transnational system of reprogramming camps embodied in the Indian Boarding/Residential School System (IBRSS). These vast and varied systems encompass the settler nation-states of the U.S.A. and Canada most directly and inform the practices of child removal in other settler nations including Australia. Pratt describes the transportation of these Indigenous “sacrificial hostages” to Fort Marion, Florida, in 1875. Pratt’s so-called educational experiment began with these Indigenous prisoners at Fort Marion, continues briefly at the Hampton Institute in Virginia, and settles at its more commonly associated space in Carlisle, PA. For a variety of reasons, one of which we will see in a moment, not all these original hostages would find themselves in Carlisle after Fort Marion, however many did, and those retained prisoners became part of the first official “class” of the reprogramming camp in Carlisle:

Onboard the train, Indian object #3 had somehow managed to acquire a small, quite sharp pocketknife and had surreptitiously stabbed itself several times in the neck and stomach. Furtively covering itself with a blanket to evade notice, it attempted to bleed to death under concealment. As it lay dying, a sudden disturbance by one of our recruiters coming around to check on the prisoners startled the Indian object. Discovered before the unauthorized intrusions into Indian object #3’s biological processes could terminate its life, it immediately jumped up and attempted to overcome the fine recruiters who discovered this egregious violation of protocol. Eventually Indian object #3 was restrained. Its eyes closed as it continued to bleed onto the floor of the train, the profusion exacerbated by the sudden action of the fight. Richard Henry Pratt called for a doctor, who arrived and checked Indian object #3’s pulse, flipped its eyelids over onto themselves, and declared it dead. Indian object #3 was then dropped to the ground at the

next train station, where, suddenly, it awoke, and attempted to run away. Inhibited by the shackles the recruiters had smartly placed on all 72 of our Indian objects, it was then tackled and once again restrained.

A more thorough biological examination was performed by the same doctor, who declared, “Well he is dead now anyhow” and it was conveyed onto a nearby wagon. Inexplicably the dead Indian object once again began moving, which itself formed a violation of biological protocols and an uninvited, uncited, and unappreciated refutation of our medical specialist’s twice confirmed determination. The Indian object began making incidental and largely meaningless vocalizations indicating its desire to be shot or for someone to slit its throat. These vocalizations were documented, and Indian Object #3 was then transmitted to a medical facility until it was once again fit to be shipped to join Pratt’s other sacrificial hostages at the Fort Marion educational experiment. Upon arriving, Indian object #3 was placed by into confinement along with the rest of the Indian objects at the school. Pratt received Indian Object #3 and placed it into into a “damp foul casement” that, in Pratt’s opinion will “aid... [Indian object #3] in reaching...death.” Upon arrival to these foul confines, Indian Object #3 immediately and steadfastly refused all food. It died of natural causes (Lookingbill 51-56).

Contrast this historical encounter from the archives with a scene from Cherie Dimaline’s IPPAA novel, *Marrow Thieves*:

I saw both of the Recruiters now... The logo on the left side was unreadable from this distance, but I knew what it said: “Government of Canada: Department of Oneirology.” Around their necks, on white cords, hung those silver whistles.

Mitch was carrying on like a madman in the tree house. Yelling while they dragged him down the ladder and onto the grass. I heard a bone snap like a young branch. He yelled when they each grabbed an arm and began pulling. He yelled around the house, into the front yard, and into the van, covering all sounds of a small escape in the trees. (4)

Later in the novel, as a different group of recruiters violently drag off an Indigenous elder named Minerva. Minerva, who will make a return in this chapter, is fluent in her Indigenous language and a powerful dreamer, and as she is being violently restrained and dragged off by these militarized “recruiters,” one of them intones a move to settler innocence, “This is for the good of the nation,” and another notes, “The world needs you. And, of course, you want to do your part for such a great world” (Dimaline 150). They are not doing this because they want to; it just needs to happen for the good of “the world,” a common settler recourse that conceals the subjective violence and pushes it into the objective position.

Another elder in the world of *Marrow Thieves*, Miigwans—part of the Indigenous community that includes the above Minerva and serves as the central collective protagonist of the novel—offers an expositional summary to the younger Indigenous of the community as to how these apocalyptic circumstances arose, which have led to Indigenous peoples once again being hunted by violent agents of the state:

The earth was broken. Too much taking for too damn long, so she finally broke. But she went out like a wild horse, bucking off as much as she could before lying down. A melting North meant the water levels rose and the weather changed. It changed to violence in some cases, building

tsunamis, spinning tornados, crumbling earthquakes, and the shapes of countries were changed forever, whole coasts breaking off like crust. (87)

This environmental catastrophe led to pipelines and other technologies of extractive distribution being destroyed thereby contaminating the environment further, a feedback loop of self-induced destruction. This apocalypse of the exteriority is attended by an apocalypse of the interior: settlers lost the ability to dream, causing people to “lose their minds, killing themselves and others and, even worse for the new order, refusing to work at all” (88). Eventually it is discovered that Indigenous peoples have not lost the ability to dream, and the “Church and the scientists...came up with their solution and everything went to hell [for Indigenous peoples]” (89): Indigenous dreams are encoded within the materiality of the body, a resource itself that can be extracted. As Miigwans puts it, “Dreams get caught in the webs woven in your bones...You are born with them. Your DNA weaves them into the marrow like spinners...That’s where [the schools] pluck them from” (19).

The “new order” that runs the schools of the novel and controls the violent recruiters is a relatively faceless quasi-theocratic settler-military state not so different from in our own world that has established what are euphemistically called schools (hence the “recruiters”), wherein the marrow of Indigenous peoples can be extracted and then used as treatment for the plague of madness— “the dreamlessness” (54)—of the settler population. Within the constructed futurescape of *Marrow Thieves*, this scene of apocalyptic encounter occurs later in history (in the nominal future) than my paraphrase of Pratt’s extra-judicial “recruitment” of Indigenous prisoners for his school experiment, however, they are intimately connected. While Pratt’s “experiment” and creation of the

Indian boarding school system was conducted with the full endorsement of the United States government, the architect of the residential boarding school system in Canada—to which these apocalyptic scenes are a clear reference—modeled them directly after Richard Pratt’s “school” in Carlisle, PA. Nicholas Flood Davin wrote the *Report on the Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds* in 1879, a document that served as the foundation for Canada’s own centralized residential school system. He completed this report after visiting the still-forming Indian Boarding School system in the United States, specifically Pratt’s “experiment” in Carlisle. After his visitation to Carlisle and other related U.S. boarding schools, he implored the Canadian Prime Minister John A. Macdonald to institute a similar system to seize and erase the interiority of Indigenous peoples, noting in his report “I should recommend, at once, an extensive application of the principle of industrial boarding schools [found in the U.S. system]” (Davin). This report’s recommendations were taken up by the Canadian government and serves as a foundational document for the establishment of a similarly centralized system of reprogramming camps (under the guise of education) for the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the Canadian body politic.

The language of the “recruiters” and “schools” and the literalized extraction of the sacred interiority of Indigenous peoples in the form of marrow/dreams, and the consumption of the red body to feed the settler state all operate in the novel as forms of repetition of the apocalyptic scene of hostage-taking and metaphysical domination enacted by the establishment of the IBRSS. Like their futuristic correlates in these three novels, the IBRSS and the broader federal policies of allotment and assimilation find their genesis in a state of exception. Of the Marshall Trilogy decisions, it was Cherokee

Nation v. Georgia that characterized the Cherokees as a “domestic-dependent” nation with a relationship of a “ward to its guardian,” and this logic was promulgated and extended to encompass the absolute stance of the settler-colonial state regarding all tribal nations. 40 years later, the 1871 Indian Appropriations Act end-capped the erasure of tribal sovereignty begun in Cherokee Nation v Georgia by no longer recognizing Indigenous nations as independent nations subject to treaty agreement:

hereafter no Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty. (“Indian Appropriations Act of 1871”)

This piece of legislation unilaterally terminated the recognition of the *independent* sovereignty of all tribal-national spaces within the borders of the United States, rendering most Indigenous peoples in the US functionally stateless: neither citizens of the United States—the unilateral conscription of Indigenous peoples into the American body politic embodied by the Indian Citizenship Act would not occur until over 50 years later in 1924—nor citizens of legally recognized sovereign national entities, the Indian disappeared into an exceptionality within the settler-colonial legal structure.

Taking charge of the investigation of several Caddo, Arapaho, Southern Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Comanche prisoners at the end of the U.S. Army’s “Red River War,” Richard Henry Pratt was sent to investigate the actions of these individuals as preparation for a trial, however, the specific chain of command and jurisdiction had become somewhat unclear after the passage of the 1871 Act. President Ulysses S. Grant received the inquiry as to the dispensation of the prisoners and deferred to the Attorney

General, who rendered a decision in the language of Marshall and the Act, writing to Pratt that “a state of war could not exist between a nation and its wards” (qtd in Pratt, 105). Because a military trial requires a state of war, appointed commissioners could not convict Indian prisoners. However, as a purely civilian matter, the limited jurisdiction and application to noncombatants was insufficient to the desired outcome of punishment. As such, on March 13, Grant directed “ringleaders and such as have been guilty of crimes” (Grant qtd in Lookingbill, 39) be selected from the larger group and moved to Fort Marion in Florida. This job was sent down the chain of command from the Commander-in-Chief through multiple hands/departments until it reached all the way down to Pratt, making him a *de facto* one-person, extra-judicial military commission with nearly absolute authority to dictate to whom the State would apply, in his words, “this banishment” to Fort Marion.

This sovereign authorization of extra-judiciality is characteristic of what the prominent jurist and Nazi political theorist Carl Schmitt calls a state of exception. Indeed, Schmitt sees the exertion of this legal status as a central criterion of sovereignty itself; that is, “the power to proclaim a state of siege [emergency]” (Schmitt qtd in Agamben, 126) is the defining quality of sovereignty *as such*. This ability of the sovereign to exempt itself from its own dictates dramatically expands sovereign power during or in a space of exception or emergency—an apocalyptic event—as all laws or rights are potentiated for sudden withdrawal. Giorgio Agamben sharpens this definition in his book *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, characterizing the exception as the power to suspend or limit the application of the civil constitution and “extend the military authority’s wartime powers into the civil sphere” (171). This state of exception hobbled the application of the

traditional forms of military violence that had characterized Pratt's war campaigns against Indigenous peoples to that point, additionally making punishment by military tribunal impossible—instead, the condition of interior-exteriority characterizing the state of exception rendered the materiality of the red body under seizure, exerting total dominance over the cessation and *continuance* of the biological processes itself. Pratt selected 72 Indigenous people to whom he would apply his extra-judicial banishment; many were chosen randomly by an officer under Pratt's command who, while apparently quite drunk, lined up a random assortment of two dozen mixed tribal-nationals and arbitrarily selected one half for imprisonment. Others were selected for no other reason than being labeled “insubordinate and stirrers up of bad feeling,” as Pratt records in his journal at the time (Pratt 92). What is obvious in the application of such capacious criteria for the application of banishment is that the legal justification for the imprisonment needed follow no actual law or rationale to justify the action; indeed, Pratt himself seemed upset that the spectacular modes of settler-colonial violence that are usually deployed within the military justice system were not being followed. In his notes, Pratt indicates that some of the Indigenous people “ought to be tried and executed here in the presence of their people,” despite noting that “most were not as culpable as it first seemed”—nevertheless, it was the symbol—the Indian—and its material manifestation—the red body—that demanded punishment.

This control over the material body and biological operations of the red body under the sovereign ban is emphasized in the revoicing of Pratt's diary in the opening scene of this section. These conditions are neatly mirrored in *Marrow Thieves*; indeed, apocalypse would seem to be the “state of emergency” *par excellence* that indexes the

most radical application of the extra-judicial operations of the state. In each of these novels, the exceptional exigency found in the post-post-apocalypse underlines who are “the superior beings” and “sacrificial hostages” queried earlier by Cordova. By echoing historical exertions of settler-state exceptionality in the construction of the post-post-apocalyptic future, these novels do not simply reconstitute the concrete details of historical encounter. Rather, they reconstruct the familiar shape of settler exceptionality within new worlds and new encounters that, to paraphrase Twain, rhyme with rather than repeat the violent biopolitical structure of exceptionalism within the settler-colonial state. This exertion of power over the biological processes of the body in a space of exception is not simply a matter of having the power to kill, but the power to *shape the future* of the biological process itself. As such, the central operator of biopower is largely technological, and the futurescape of the Indigenous post-post apocalypse is thus able to extend the development of technology in near isomorphism with the extension of the biopolitical operations of domination by the state. This radicalizes the already familiar manipulation of the Indigenous body-as-object that found in the treatment of the prisoners and hostages of the IRBSS. These schools, like the forces of domination in the books, are similarly oriented around the demolition of the Indigenous futurity insofar as it is the domination of the biological *process*, its trajectory as it unfolds through time, which is dominated through the seizure and manipulation of the body.

The Marshall decision reflects a broader discursive shift from militaristic to paternalistic approaches of settler domination at the end of the nineteenth century and prior to the settler-maternalism of governmentality that characterizes the last half of the twentieth century. With the spectacle of traditional military violence no longer authorized

by the state, the IRBSS serves as the continuation of the “Indian Wars” by other means. The locus of settler-state violence thus moves from the obliteration of the physical exteriority of the red body to its manipulation as a means of obliterating its non-physical interiority. Hair can be cut, clothes changed, biological processes regimented, behaviors disciplined, and vocalizations conditioned as a means of enacting epistemological and ontological obliteration and the genocide of Indigenous worlds—the attempted erasure of Indigenous epistemology, ontology, axiology, and aesthetics/ethics—but retaining the hollowed out red body and replacing the now-absent interiority with a settler-American past, present, and future, i.e., kill the Indian, save the man: erase and replace the interiority while preserving the accidentals of exteriority. The Indigenous prisoners chained together and packed onto trains at Fort Sill and bound for the Fort Marion prison before becoming the first “class” of the CIIS and are emblematic of this exertion of biopolitical power across all settler-colonial nations. This first class and the subsequent thousands of “recruited” Indigenous children brought to the CIIS also served as a direct model for the settler nations of Canada and Australia to establish their own biopolitical institutions of erasure and biopolitical domination under the euphemism of education.

Agamben traces the power to suspend the rights insofar as they become imprinted *by* the expression of sovereign power and are thereby captured within the created legalistic framework. This revector the qualities of human life itself through the discursive structures of sovereign power, externalizing those formally intrinsic or self-emanating qualities and rearticulating them through the sovereign structure, i.e., natural rights are re-coded as settler-citizenship rights, thereby shifting the emanation and features of these rights from the particularities of human becoming to the abstraction of

the settler nation-state. This shift in emanation means those rights that are putatively inalienable from personhood *intrinsically* become instead structured in relation to the legal apparatus of the sovereign *extrinsically*. This shifts the emanation of these qualities of life from humans themselves to the power of the sovereign in the form of an authorizing legalistic and juridical apparatus thereby fully exposed to the sovereign “ban.” This exteriorization of the interiority of human existence alienates these fundamental features and removes them to the regime of sovereign power, where, through their suspension, a type of *manque* figure is created in the negative space of citizenship: a body with no meaning, no qualities beyond its material functioning as biological life. “[T]he production of [this] bio-political body is the original activity,” Agamben notes, “the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power” (9).

The similarity within scenes of violent seizure and bio-political manipulation in *Marrow Thieves* is unmistakable even while the context and medium of those applications might differ dramatically. To be sure, the futurescape of Indigenous art of the post-post-apocalypse certainly shares much in common with the tropes of traditional post-apocalyptic settler art. Because post-apocalyptic art is often a dystopian vision of possible futures, *Marrow Thieves* shares in this pessimistic critique insofar as there is a similar actualization of the dire potentialities that inhere within settler society such as the environmental catastrophe that has already transpired as well as the ongoing exceptionality of violence against Indigenous peoples. An Indigenous readership, however, knows that these are not theoretical possible futures, though they are also that, but a very real and concrete present and past. As such, *Marrow Thieves* simply reconstitutes these broad genre conventions while imbricating Indigenous temporalities

and presence into the fallen future worlds of the West. Nevertheless, the *familiarity* of apocalypse in the story offers an unexpected revision within the conceit of the genre; by explicitly tying a vision of future apocalypse to the machinations of historic and ongoing settler-coloniality, Dimaline mobilizes Patrick Wolfe's now well-worn description of settler-colonialism as structure rather than event by braiding the apocalyptic narrative flow with additional temporal valences, feeding the manque future back into both historical and, through teleological extension, contemporary registers.

Other scholars have similarly noted the biopolitical thematic of Dimaline's novel. Shital Pravinchandra notes in an essay on Dimaline's work that it is against these biopolitical operations and the genetic/materialist underpinnings that enervate them that *Marrow Thieves* pushes against in what she calls "countergenetic fiction." Pravinchandra notes:

Indigenous belonging exceeds any superficial sense of connection that a DNA test may produce and that, contrary to population geneticists' claims, Indigenous Peoples are not vanishing but instead are actively engaged in everyday practices of survival. (135)

These antagonism with the materialist foundations of genetics and DNA that the novel expresses are further emphasized by the way the novel positions identity vis-à-vis language and sacrality, a theme to which I will return momentarily. Diana Brydon's essay on the novel builds on Achille Mbembe's concept of "necropower" and the creation of "death worlds," wherein vast populations of humanity are organized into a category he refers to as "the living dead" (Mbembe qtd in Brydon, 101) as an analytic lens to interpret the novel. The disposability and exertion of control over the life processes itself gives

clarity in Brydon's reading of the text's agitation against forms of settler-colonial power exertion. Meanwhile, Chiara Xausa writes of the novel's depiction of global climate catastrophe, aligning the environmental destruction that serves as the background of the novel with the biopolitical operations of the settler-state, i.e., it serves as a representational form of the "necropower" and biopolitics of settler-colonialism written onto the body of the planet as a whole, indicating an interpretive move that orients the action of the novel on the red body with the action of settler-coloniality on the body of mother earth (88-91).

Critically, despite the post-apocalyptic framing of the novel, Dimaline's text is shot through and suffused by a multiplicity of new creation stories. Each central Indigenous character in the novel at some point offers their narrative of creation—their "coming to story." Each of these narratives of creation is unique to the person telling it, and everyone tells it as a part of coming into relation within the Indigenous collectivity that forms the assemblage of individuals around whom the main action turns. As Miigwins tells the group, "Everyone tells their coming-to story...[and] everyone's creation story is their own" (Dimaline 79). These coming-to stories can be interpreted as the braided aggregates that compose the whole of the novel, with the addition of the interstitial scenes of contemporaneous action in the novel organizing the collective "coming-to" story of this Indigenous post-post-apocalyptic community itself. The denouement of the novel finds resurgent Indigenous language and tradition, the establishment of new community, and, as such, a "coming-to" story of new forms of Indigenous collectivity in the post-post-apocalypse. In this sense, the futurity of the novel is predicated on various *trajectories* and looping relations between and among the past,

present, and future of the narratives of creation that embody the temporality of the novel. This is contrasted with the linear singularity of settler time's decline and dissipation—though never completed in the novel—as an inverse correlation with the rise and renewal of temporal formations of Indigenous community.

Indeed, it is the deep-time temporality of Indigenous languages themselves that are the literal “weapon” against this future biopolitical violence of the settler state. Minerva, the elder earlier thanked for her “service” by the recruiters, is hooked up to the technologies of extraction, “the wires were fastened to her neural connectors, and the probes reached into her heartbeat and instinct,” and, in the climax of the novel as the recruiters at the school attempt to extract the Indigenous interiority—the Indigenous futurity—from Minerva, she transmits that interiority to the exterior by opening her mouth and singing:

That's when she called on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors.  
That's when she brought the whole thing down. She sang. She sang with volume and pitch and a heartbreaking wail that echoed through her relatives' bones, rattling them to the ground under the school itself. Wave after wave, changing her heartbeat to a drum, morphing her singular voice to many, pulling every dream from her own marrow and into her song.  
And there were words: words in the language that the conductor couldn't process, words the Cardinals couldn't bear, words the wires couldn't transfer. (Dimaline 172)

Minerva's dreams were all dreamed in her Indigenous language. She had “collected the dreams like bright beads on a string of nights that wound around each day” (172-173).

The FPP is asserted here in the form of the plurality of voicing, the “single voice to many,” and the manifestation of the ceremonial, sacred relationality between the language, the people, and the creative capacity to dream, to envision, to imagine in ways consonant with and manifested through the people—*her* people, past, present, and future— and language—*her* language, older than the state, the recruiters, the apocalypse, pulling from the relational power between the language, the land, and the deep-time relation between the two. This is, as the novel notes, “the key” (: it is the sacred blockade antagonistic to the abstractive-extractive technologies of the biopolitical extractive impulses of the settler-state (177).

The ways in which Indigenous sacred interiority itself destroys the machine and feeds back into settler coloniality is not explained. Indeed, it does not have to be because the power of the relational deep-time sacrality within Indigenous tradition is a given, and its blockade thus short circuits not only the machines in the novel, but also the settler demand for explanatory knowledge from its readership. It is precisely the illegible features of “her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors” that the “conductor couldn’t process...the cardinals couldn’t bear...the wires wouldn’t transfer” (172)—Minerva orients toward sacrality and becomes a conduit for its relational application to technologies of extraction *without* becoming a medium of *translation* for it. It is the ineffability and fundamental *unexplainability* that serves as the sacred blockade both within the world of the text and our own. The future of Indigenous community is here secured by a futurity relationally rooted deeply within and *through* our ancestral past. A futurity from within an Indigenous orientation made manifest by an Indigenous ontological and epistemological worldview that the language itself carries in the marrow

of *its* bones. Indeed, as the character Rose realizes at the end of the novel, one does not “have to be old” to dream Indigenously: “the language already is” (Dimaline 227). “The language,” the textuality of Indigenous becoming, is understood both literally and metaphysically as an ontological being within the experiential reality of the text.

#### 4

Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God* shares a similar orientation toward the ineffability of sacrality. Cedar Hawk Songmaker, the pregnant central character of the novel who has penned the “diary” that composes the novel, takes special interest in the Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard of Bingen and her visionary theology make numerous appearances in the text. The novel, and by extension Cedar’s diary opens with a quote from Hildegard of Bingen interpreting the sacrality of textuality and *viriditas*, the sacred creativity of the greening of the natural world:

The Word is living, being spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity.

This word manifests itself in every creature. (Hildegard of Bingen qtd in Erdrich 1)

Hildegard’s writing on sacrality seems to be a type of Indigenous sacrality-in-translation for Cedar, a relational frame of reference and nodal knot that ties European, even Judeo-Christian traditions into comportment with an Indigenous ancestral orientation toward sacrality—in the same way, Cedar might well have found similar ancestral resonance-in-translation with the work of Baruch Spinoza or Alfred North Whitehead as other non-Indigenous but relational frames of reference in her own conceptual *nagcúdi*. As such, there is implicit Indigenization of Hildegard of Bingen here through the emphasis and

amplification of elements of her holistic philosophical and scientific approach,<sup>42</sup> her orientation toward the ineffability and omnipresent sacrality of the natural world, her habit of circular representation of divinity, and her focus on patterns of inter-relational fours: “the four elements (fire, air, water, and earth), the four seasons, the four humors, the four zones of the earth, and the four major winds” (Glaze 135). This positioning of the Indigenous relation points of Hildegard’s thought arises because there is a need for an Indigeneity-in-Translation for Cedar, who, growing up assuming she’s adopted, serves as a gesture to the erasure of child removal and the survivance of finding Indigenous resonance where one can.

The “adopted child of Minneapolis liberals” and Ojibwe through her absent mother, Cedar leads the reader to consider the somewhat suspect circumstances of her adoption. Given the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), which Cedar notes “should have, even had to, apply to me” (Erdrich 4), it would seem unlikely that her “adoption” is as straightforward as is implied. Given this context, Cedar assumes she is a product<sup>43</sup> of the shift during the mid-twentieth century from the use of boarding schools to adoption for assimilative erasure. In some sense, this phenomenon begins at CIIS in the form of what are called “outing programs,” wherein the students at the school would be sent to board

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<sup>42</sup> Among other notable contemporary and posthumous recognitions, Hildegard of Bingen is seen as one of the founders of scientific natural history in Germany. On Hildegard of Bingen’s life and accomplishments, see Sabina Flanagan’s *Hildegard of Bingen: A Visionary Life* (1098-1179) 2nd ed. (New York; London: Routledge, 1998); Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World, ed. Barbara Newman (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: U of California P, 1998); Margaret Berger, *On Natural Philosophy and Medicine: Selections from Causa and Cure* (Library of Medieval Women. Cambridge. D.S. Brewer, 1999) and Mark Atherton, trans. *Hildegard of Bingen: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> We discover by the end of the novel that she was not adopted—her white “adoptive” father, Glen, is her biological father. Glen and her Ojibwe biological mother, Mary, agreed to the deception that she was fully adopted so that Sera, her white adopted mother, would not be perceived as a less real parent in comparison to Glen.

with white families and provide extremely cheap (or free) labor for the family with whom they stayed. This was done with the intention of preventing students from “going back to the blanket,” or returning home and not coming back to the school. By continuing to keep the children isolated, their use as captive hostages and bargaining chips in the attempted pacification of their parents’ tribes was maintained. ICWA was made federal law in recognition that throughout the middle of the twentieth century, as the boarding school system was reformed and maternal settler-state governmentality took hold, forced adoptions—often at the cavalier dispensation of religiously motivated social workers—took over as the primary means of saving the child while killing the Indian. Despite the convoluted truth of the situation of her adoption, Cedar’s understanding of her Indigenous identity is, as it is for so many of us, necessarily vectored through the history of child removal in Indian Country—the constant and continuing extraction of Indigenous children from their families and their processing through a system of erasure—now manifested in K-12 and “higher” educational systems. Growing up a Native without Indigenous context, Cedar briefly describes her childhood as the experience of being exoticized and seeing herself as “special” because she was, at the least, a “one-braided, even theoretical Native,” and then attending college, meeting other Indigenous people, and, thereby, becoming “ordinary” because she realized she has “no clan, no culture, no language, no relatives” (Erdrich 5).

As such, Hildegard of Bingen operates as a type of survivance figure, a reflective inspiration toward sacrality for Cedar. Nevertheless, Cedar, like Hildegard herself, never stabilizes either the referent or the reference about sacrality in her ruminations. Thus, Cedar often uses various forms of reference throughout the text that

limn that central ineffability: “*Animus Mundi*, the Soul of the World” (62), “the word” (64), and the transcendent “narrative...the story” out there beyond human comprehension (67)—all sentiments in the novel that resonant with *Marrow Thieves* in their articulation of the sacrality of language/textuality/creation. Hildegard of Bingen writes a passage describing sacrality, a part of which is quoted by Cedar in the final pages of the novel. I quote a fuller sense of the passage here due to its resonance with my own work:

[Xubáa] is the life of the life of all creatures; the way in which *everything is penetrated with connectedness and relatedness*...[Xubáa] is life, movement, color, radiance, restorative stillness in the din... [Xubáa] plays music in the soul; awakens mighty hope, blowing everywhere the winds of renewal in creation. (Hildegard qtd in Frankenberg, “Feminist Approaches” 10, emphasis added to indicate Cedar’s quotation)

The italicized section is what Cedar paraphrases in the final pages of the novel. The word I have translated as “Xubáa” finds various translations—as “spirit” in the passage used here. Elsewhere the word is rendered “her,” “it,” or “*viriditas*”—this last being a term Hildegard used in many different contexts in her writing, so its definition in Hildegard’s thought is not well-defined. I interpret *viriditas* as a closely related but separate phenomenon to sacrality in her work, an indexical word that limns the particularity of sacred animation, creativity, and its comportment towards adaptive, transformational continuation, toward “greening”—which is to say, I interpret it as another term for the phenomena of survivance. I have thus translated the indeterminacy of the divine in Hildegard into the ineffability of Xubáa, the Hidatsa verb for expressed sacrality, to

indicate my interpretive standpoint, which itself serves as a process of braiding Cedar's own interpretive Indigenization of Hildegard with my own.

Cedar, Erdrich, and I are not alone in our braiding instincts regarding Hildegard's thought. In exploring feminist approaches to religion, Nancy Frankenberry, the now-emeritus John Phillips Professor in Religion at Dartmouth College, notes the similarity of Hildegard's concepts to many Indigenous philosophical understandings of sacrality. She quotes from Paula Gunn Allen's classic book, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* to emphasize this fact:

There is a spirit that pervades everything, that is capable of powerful song and radiant movement, and that moves in and out of the mind. The colors of this spirit are multitudinous, a glowing, pulsing rainbow. Old Spider Woman is one name for this quintessential spirit, and Serpent Woman is another...and what they together have made is called Creation, Earth, creatures, plants and light. (Gunn Allen, qtd in Frankenberry)

And a return to my own description from the first chapter:

[Universal sacrality is] the complex, interdependent, and interrelated web of the ineffable, universal life of life that both *enervates and articulates all things* and is the foundational is-ness—the creativity of creation—of which reality is composed and by which it is made manifest in the expression of all that is. (Lone Fight)

Frankenberry goes on to observe that in many feminist interpretations of the divine—coming from a matriarchal culture, that description would include my own peoples' worldview—sacrality “is continuous with the world rather than radically transcendent

ontologically or metaphysically” (Frankenberry). This similarity in conceptualization serves for Cedar as a means of reflecting both on her own circumstances as well as the ineffability of the sacred something that remains despite the spatial and temporal coordinates of the world having dramatically changed. That is, there is still room for an Indigenous orientation towards sacrality in the apocalyptic world of *Future Home*; indeed, within modernist temporal and transformational logics in a world in ceaseless change, the movement of sacrality’s creative process—the life of life—is perhaps the most stable and present phenomenon in the text. The Indigenous view of time as a description of motion thus still maintains its adaptive functionality within the text.

This ineffable sacrality of language, creation, the eminent divinity of the world is closely associated with memory and dreams throughout the text as a source of generative, relational creation between the physical and non-physical world. Indeed, memory, dreaming, are closely interrelated in the novel, so much so that they are often conflated with or nested within one another—memories of dreams of remembering, dreaming of memories, and so on. The novel is itself a bit dream-like in the reading, stemming from this emphasis on the hazy terrain of memory and dreamscapes. The gauzy recollections that compose much of the diary—a genre itself a type of reflective memorandum—serve as a temporal topography for the novel. The atmospherics created in the text by the tightly woven *irrealis* modes of dream and memory reflects the timeless feeling of a dreamscape, which itself reflects the apocalyptic timelessness of the novel’s setting. This braiding and blurring of the temporal modalities of dreaming and memory highlights the ambivalent directionality of time within the apocalyptic setting of the novel by complicating their relationship to its orientation. Dreams and memory work both

inside and outside of “real” time and space insofar as they are both concrete acts of mental representation in time and space representing an *irrealis* mode that transcends the temporal and spatial restrictions of localization—they are non-physical, but they are *not abstract* realities insofar as they exist within, indeed generate their own, place and duration.

Erdrich complicates these two *irrealis* modes by modifying their usage and bringing them forcefully into the reality of the text. Memory, rather than backwards looking, is positioned in the future: the entire novel itself is a memory of the future’s past, a look back at the “to come” of Modernist teleological architecture in revolt. And memory, heavily interwoven into the dreamscapes of the novel, are themselves rotated out of their common position safely blockaded from reality by the imaginary, non-physical nature of their content. Instead, dreams move fluidly between the real and the unreal here in ways that resonate with the apocalyptic structure of temporality insofar as, like time itself in the novel, the directionality of influence is not simply reversed (though it is also that), it is unmoored from its asymmetrical relationship wherein dreams only receive input from reality but do not output as realities themselves. Rather, here dreams traffic back and forth between dreamscape and the reality of world in the novel, and the difference between the two is heavily blurred and conflated. Non-physical elements of dreams are transitioned into reality from the whole cloth of the dreamscape, their tendril-like articulation in the world further undermining the binary between real and unreal; memory, like the dreams they are often woven into (and vice-versa), are not simply inverted but are temporally destabilized: their trajectory moves from past to future, future to past, and beyond, presenting an amorphous and indefinable relationship to temporality

and reality as it transits past, present, and future simultaneously—a temporal and spatial milieu of the real and unreal.

In *Future Home* the non-linearity of apocalypse is hyperbolized through the dissolution of both secular and Judeo-Christian forms of teleological negation within not simply humanity but the world itself—biological change through time, evolutionary transformation as such, has changed. The animate beings of the world are now rapidly changing in ways unpredictable based on the categorical abstraction of species. The apocalyptic teleological structure is thus dissolved, which itself registers as a form of apocalypse for both Judeo-Christian and modern-secular temporalities. This unmooring of the predictable measures of motion and change exposes the artificiality of the poles of progress—the false equivocation of primitivity with that which is prior and civilization with what is to come. The world is "devolving," or simply revolving, and the linear path called progress turns into a circular spirality. This revector the locus of concern for the settler state insofar as the fear of regression to primitivity and the spectral presence of enacted violence in the rear-view mirror is no longer temporally encoded exclusively within a progressive temporality. The future, now unmoored from its teleological trajectory, harbors the threat of the same catastrophe that the past once did, i.e., as Cedar writes, "instead of the past, it is the future that haunts us" (63)—a future that now *is* (also) the past.

This causes the faceless state authority—a conglomeration of state governmental power and religious zealotry melded together in ways resonant with the depiction of state power in *Marrow Thieves*—to begin seizing pregnant and birthing-age women and placing them into institutions of extraction. The rationale for these actions is

the pursuit of unborn children who retain expected species characteristics despite the ongoing evolutionary apocalypse—an attempt to seize and maintain settler futurity in the face of the radical shift in temporality through, quite literally, child removal. There is a maternal characterization to this theocratic state power, a hyperbolized characterization of the Western liberal welfare state that runs through the text. Throughout the novel an ever-present, ever-watching “mother” appears on screens and gives feminine voice to the dictates of the theocratic state power. Indeed, the final third of the novel takes place in theocratic medical institutions, wherein we find Cedar in the final stage of her pregnancy—and the final stage of her journal. Within the walls of the institutions, the biopolitical seizure of natality is fully realized as pregnant women and those capable of being made pregnant are brought in against their will to be inseminated with the hope that these women will reproduce the settler future that is in danger of being lost—the literal emplacement of settler seminal-futurity and the physical removal of the interiority of the women under seizure. These women, once they have fulfilled the biopolitical purpose of reproduction—doing their “part for such a great world,” as the recruiters from *Marrow Thieves* would intone—then become martyrs in ways not detailed.

In one of the final scenes of the novel, before Cedar has given birth, she walks up to the wall of martyrs in the institution, taking note of the many women’s faces, well made-up, with two dates under each picture: “Birth. Death. And below that a line that says: *She served the future*” (253-254). In this stark portrayal we can see how, at each biopolitical institution of extraction—here in *Future Home*, in the marrow-extraction “schools” of *Marrow Thieves*, in the “schools” and “camps” in *Terra Nullius*, which I will discuss momentarily, and the historical systems of ontological destruction embodied

by the IBRSS across all three settler-colonial nations—what is always under seizure are *Indigenous futures*—the ontological and cosmological substance from which futures are potentiated for possibility by context and culture within Indigenous temporal formations. It is the ability to dream, to envision the world other ways, the agency to trajectorize the future through and with our past, and the desire for that future to encircle and embrace and be enlivened by an orientation toward the sacrality that is itself the target of settler-colonial institutions in the production of the Indian *sous rature*—The Red Body and ~~The Indian~~. Within settler-colonial military, medical, and/or educational institutions of erasure, the forms of violence may differ, but the purpose of each system is the same: the demolition of Indigenous futurity through biological extermination and metaphysical erasure to secure the teleological future home of the settler-God.

The uses and abuses of the archive is centered in this work as it is in the next novel, *Terra Nullius*, in ways that both call attention to its use within settler-colonial power regimes as well as its value for the survivance of Indigeneity. The novel itself is structured as an archive (a diary) that makes reference to various archival texts—from those of Hildegard of Bingen’s writing to materials from other novels and scientific journals—Kaylee Jangula Mootz, in a short, torsional essay on the novel, focuses on this archival focus and framing in the novel, pushing us to think about the ways Erdrich mobilizes the archive as a form of survivance, but, more importantly, how the novel revector the form of the archive to include the body (Mootz 265-267). By emphasizing Cedar’s own:

archival tendencies and speculations on the body’s propensity to store data and memories to store data and memories from bygone eras of human

history, Future Home reorients our understandings of the importance of the archive and the importance of the body as a storehouse of knowledge and a living archive. (Mootz 263)

Indeed, it is the embodied archive from which the FPP derives its force and is the locus of its articulation. Silvia Martínez-Falquina also writes an incisive response to Erdrich's novel, noting how it "articulates a relational understanding of language and identity as our best hope for the future" (161) while simultaneously representing a form of "proleptic mourning" that encounters and anticipates the apocalyptic tendencies that inhere within settler-colonialism (165-166). I would emphasize that, while Martínez-Falquina's description of proleptic mourning certainly does encounter the futurity of apocalypse embedded within the settler-state, as I note in my reading of her novel, this is given its force and clarity precisely because the prolepsis is, itself, a bit of misdirection. Reflecting the omni-directional temporality within the novel, the proleptic dream of apocalypse is one empowered by the analeptic memory and contemporary experience of the same.

Offering a different point of emphasis in the novel, Svitlana Kot focuses on the spatialized representation of urbanity within the novel by highlighting the ambivalent portrayal of the city as one that does not characterize urban locales as compositionally antagonistic with Indigenous presence. While this represents much of the characterization of cities in Indigenous literary production until the 1990s, Kot reads the space portrayed here as one of belonging and containment in turns (5-7). While the city "enables all the possible instruments of repressive bio-power," it is also Cedar's home, her "belonging to the urban space [being] beyond doubt" throughout the novel (8). Kot's observation of this ambivalence is primarily understood in terms of the expectation that Indigenous people

are fundamentally contra urban environs; however, a further examination of the space of apocalypse within the urban environment in terms of its representational valence within settler-colonial logics of progress is underexamined. Caught up by the paradoxical scholarly allure of an Indigenous character feeling at home in the city, Kot here largely neglects that apocalyptic scene of the city in ways beyond this “surprising” fact of Indigenous home in the city and its apocalyptic potential to translate forms of disciplinary and biopolitical control into the spatial dynamics of urban places, i.e., she does not extend her analysis to the trope of city-as-apocalypse that Erdrich fashions in terms of its use as a form of feedback into the settler-colonial project itself. As a navigation point within settler-colonial teleological modalities, the cityscape, whether found on a hill or not, symbolically distills the progressive narrative of teleological trajectory. It serves as the material evidence of the ever-extending reach toward the settler-God’s divine perfection on earth.

The city in the settler-colonial imaginary serves as a scene of substitution-by-approximation for the perfection of the telos and the space where abstraction holds its most powerful sway over material conditions. Progress towards urban-teleological realization serves as a self-perpetuating rationalization for the violation and abject manipulation of the physical world in the quest for conformity with a teleological trajectory. The objective factuality of exceptionalism is thus evidenced through the subjective temporal organization of progressive settler-colonial history. And this carefully interpreted trajectory of American exceptionalism thus serves as further evidence of the chosen status of the nation and retroactively codes all historical actions within its temporal orientation—all acts of violence and dispossession become either

necessary for, or aberrant and temporary deviations from, proximity to teleological resolution. You must break eggs to make an omelet after all. Fears of western decline find resonant affective space in the darkened city streets of the post-apocalyptic world. While the fear of “falling into savagery” has often been mapped onto Indigenous nations, Erdrich picks up on this articulated relationship between temporality, cityscape, and civilization and inverts the polarity. The inversion of the “fallen civilization” as the pre- or post-state-of-being to divine time is precisely where Erdrich locates purchase for forceful critique. Whether prior to divine time or after—before the Judeo-Christian intervention into cosmic history or after its teleological resolution—any manifestation outside of divine time is necessarily dystopian insofar as it represents a temporality apart from Judeo-Christian or settler-modernist teleological constructions, and it is from these outside temporal constructions that Erdrich and other Indigenous artists of the post-post-apocalyptic *nagcúdi* together their alternative temporalities.

As such, IPPAA necessarily calls attention to the violence of founding in the universal register—both in the Judeo-Christian cosmic founding within the Book of Genesis or the historical-national founding of the United States, i.e., temporal, and spatial founding. In both cases there is the assumption of a prior absence upon which creation is fashioned—a null space and time, which for the sake of pragmatics I have here cleaved into the temporal/spatial categories of *tempus nullius* and *terra nullius*. By defining the exteriority to the teleological temporality that inheres in the apocalyptic genre and its Judeo-Christian inspiration, the post-post-apocalyptic serves the purpose engendering a circularity into the linear chronotopology implied by this genre conceit, adding the imposition of a “not again!” to that which seemingly has no after and no precedent. This

circular alignment of course derives from experiences with the apocalyptic program of genocide and its various manifestations within Indigenous histories in settler-colonial nations, which then concentrates the pressure of this alternative temporality and angles it more precisely on the ways in which the post-apocalyptic genre is so often not about the cessation of time *as such* but is rather the cessation of a type of temporal modernity and anxiety about the Western decline it must necessarily index. By calling attention to the prior, ongoing, and future potentialities of Indigenous peoples *vis-a-vis* apocalypse, such works also emphasize the ways in which the genesis of the American national project—the instantiation of divine-linearity and the progressive cultural apparatuses that attend it—were themselves an inaugurated apocalypse.

It is an unusual aspect of these two predominant American temporalizations—the universal-divine and universal-contractual—that they suffer a contradictory construction insofar as the former is bounded by a teleological “end” but the latter, inspired directly from scientific time, has no such implied end; contractual (clock/scientific) time is infinite, whereas universal-divine temporality is a finitude *created by* an infinitude. It is the case, however, that divine and national time become co-incidental within settler-colonial ideology, so even as the infinitude of contractual time would seem to eat into the ideology of this teleological temporality, the bounded space of divine time co-exists and is “worked out” through the orientation of origin/telos beyond the structured emplacement of the everyday divine. More specifically, “creation” and “apocalypse” both occur beyond a human temporal frame. As such, the “bounded” nature of Judeo-Christian temporality is only bounded in this way within the registers of the past or future; the present necessarily operates as an infinitely extensive, infinitely divisible, and

fundamentally measurable temporality suitable for a capitalist economy. I might argue that the temporality of Modernism is defined by the augering of these two temporal modalities into the form of settler-colonial national time as the background temporality that conditions all modes of appearance within the settler-colonial project.

Indigenous post-apocalyptic art tends to begin “outside” this temporal frame, in the “fallen” times that exist before and/or after the structured Judeo-Christian oriented, contractually operational “now.” This seems to work from within a broad alternative-interpretive movement that complicates these temporal constructions as it critiques them. We might think of this framing as a stringed tension across the spatio-temporal axis: at the level of temporal *frame*, Judeo-Christian Linear Divinity encounters the braided circularity of Indigenous Sacrality, and at the level of the temporal *interstices*, abstracted and measurable contractual time encounters the experiential and ceremonial dimension of Indigenous lived particularity. Within the spatial *frame*, settler-colonial abstractive-extractive spatial *terra nullius* confronts storied-intimated practices of place, and at the level of spatial *interstices* urbanity and the frontier antagonizes homelands and otherlands. Reconceived within these tensioned binaries, we might characterize the American tradition of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic art as expressions of therapeutic “work” that simultaneously envisions a possible future or alternative past within Judeo-Christian temporal frameworks. *Children of Men* and *The Road*, for example, are two works of the post-apocalypse that demonstrate the ways in which the imagined context—a fallen world and her survivors—nevertheless maintains a broader orientation towards a Judeo-Christian temporal *frame* (even if it is in the rear-view mirror). Critically what disappears in these stories and in many other pieces of American post-apocalyptic art, is

not the linear-divine frame rather it is the measurable-contractual interstitial temporalities, the daily practice of linear, contractual time that is thrown into disarray and stark relief. Indeed, it is the destruction of the temporality generated by the very systems that induce “the end” that stand as the most salient apocalyptic critique.

In such artistic expressions, the loss of contractual time is a central preoccupation that is worked out and represented within the spatial field. It is in fact the anxiety induced by the irregularity of the temporal flows and dis-regulation of the directed, measurable monotony of contractual time somewhere out beyond the breaking wave called apocalypse that creates the temporal fabric within which apocalyptic art does its work. Taken outside of this expected temporal regularity, contractual time becomes defined by an unpredictability that manifests in irruptions and unexpected and unwanted configurations of time and space. This is typically represented in the environment itself: the dis-regulation of time is often shown in apocalyptic art through recourse to environmental description. The “natural”<sup>44</sup> environment and its valence within this broader structure serves to represent the post- or fallen state of the world. In that sense, the “natural” environment is aligned with the linear-divine insofar as it typically serves to index and/or iconize the *manqué* status of the world; through a selective representation of expansion or contraction, appearance or disappearance, nature serves to highlight and underline the aberrant temporal status of the world. To be sure, this happens in different ways in different contexts: it might be the revitalization of the natural world in a context

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<sup>44</sup> As discussed in relation to Descola’s work *Beyond Nature and Culture* in the first chapter, the natural is a term with which I have a complicated and difficult relationship. The entire conceptual apparatus that is either created or appended to the term insofar as it rends the world into artificial or natural spheres is not one to which I ascribe. Our worldview is not one that draws such distinctions easily or often, and, even when mobilized within Indigenous (at least specifically MHA) worldviews, we often organize these categories in significantly different ways as noted in Chapter One.

of artifice, or, more recently the reflection of death/decay in the natural environment serves as an icon for the broader decline, which is a more recent phenomenon related, no doubt, to growing awareness of the impending “externality” of global climate apocalypse. And it is precisely this implicit stability of nature itself that Erdrich’s novel so deftly manipulates to create a sense of temporal and spatial instability within her novel

Whereas in much settler apocalyptic literature and art, the emblematic denouement of western civilization is the absence of humanity and survivance of the “natural world.” That is, so often in stories of nuclear apocalypse, for instance, the final evidence that humanity is gone forever is the representation of the natural environment continuing in the spaces of human artifice. The cockroach that skitters from the rubble, the lone weed rising from the concrete. Note that the “natural” thriving in rubble and concrete assumes an inducement towards anxiety insofar as those natural things are not contained in the field of expectation for human artifice, which, as discussed in Chapter One, is defined by its non-naturality. Nevertheless, while the natural environment often serves to help construct this broader *manqué*-temporal framework, it its freedom from the imposition of divine linearity—the organization of the natural world continuing beyond the teleological horizon—that serves to index western anxieties about decline. Unbound in a fallen world, “natural” time imposes itself in the implied temporality of spaces and places where its existence is typically circumscribed. Thus, the urban environment in particular serves as an exemplary space of modernity as well as a renewing representation of the spectacular and sublime complexities inherent in the organization and management of contractual temporal flows. It is in the figure of the city that we find a strong alignment between the divine-linear and measurable-contractual tempos. The city serves as a

distillate of the present, an emblem of teleological orientation towards the future, and evidence of progression from the past. In distilling the present, the city serves as an intensification of the quantification and regimentation of temporal flow by showcasing the possibilities of the capitalist temporal infinitude through contractual time that nevertheless remains safely vectored through a broader progressive, teleological frame—of which it is itself an emblem. This condensation of divine-linear and measurable-contractual into a self-reinforcing scene of progress's proof and promise into the cityscape makes the figure of the city, both in its presence and absence, a recurring preoccupation within the genre.

The imagined decline and obliteration of Western civilization shares a similar ambivalence insofar as one might imagine Genesis as the apocalyptic event for the (impossible) before, so too might one reconfigure apocalypse as a form of genesis for the “to come” of non-Judeo-Christian temporalities. This critique enlivens the possibility of apocalypse by potentiating it with historical resonance derived from actions of the society that is itself obliterated in the future's past. Which is to say, given historical apocalypse has happened in our worlds already— i.e., the attempted and sometimes successful purposeful obliteration of Indigenous worlds—the concretization of an apocalyptic, progressivist, and teleological structure is mobilized and given temporal shape by the inaugurated apocalypse. The possibility and salient features of such an event become concretized and literalized within the historical register insofar as apocalypse always inaugurates a separation of the “post-apocalypse,” which implies an “after” that does not exist for those *in* apocalyptic time. To be emplaced in the “after” indicates a world “still in time” after the teleological structure has reached its fulfillment. As such, to be “post-”

apocalypse is to be either anterior or posterior to divine time but not necessarily contractual time. More critically to my discussion here, the *organization* of such accounts relative to apocalyptic time (before, during, or after) nevertheless retains the central conceit of apocalyptic temporality itself even in the bounded infinitude of contractual temporal construction. In that sense American post-apocalyptic and apocalyptic art is, at least on the level of temporal construction, often addressing or detailing a sort of raw temporal infinitude, the emergence of contractual, clock time spatially unbounded and unwedded from the directionality and organizational amplitude provided by the teleological framing.

As such, where Marrow Thieves presents a post-post-apocalypse “after,” modernist temporality through the survivance of Indigenous temporal milieus and the resurgence of Indigenous community, *Future Home* presents a more ambivalent form of post-temporal apocalypse. If, as Cordova says, time “is an abstraction derived from the fact that there is motion and change in the world” (*How it Is* 118), it is the abstraction of temporality itself that is revised and reconceptualized within the world of the *Marrow Thieves*. In *Future Home*, however, it is the motion and nature of *change* in the world that has been revised and modernist temporality is retained in a perverse form as an unnerving and inadequate description of the now *unfamiliar* dynamics of transformation itself. Indeed, the book tracks and describes the reaction of the settler state to the manifestation of an Indigenous spatio-temporal milieu. In this novel like the others examined here, history does not repeat, but it does rhyme—however, the song is not a teleological linearity; rather, it is a circular and non-teleological composition.

To extend the metaphor, rather than following the structure of a typical song as it seeks the melodic resolution of its duration through a conclusionary telos, these novels' relation to history is more like the musical composition called a "round" or *canon perpetuus* (infinite canon). The infinite character of the round is derived from its non-teleological architecture: it is a circular musical composition that is not directed toward an end, so it can be repeated *ad infinitum*—some might say *ad nauseum*. Additional voices can then join the melody at non-synchronous intervals within the rhythm of the song structure. The well-known song "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," for instance, is a round. The song can go on forever, however, it is the moments of *rhyme* that give the song its structure through the amplification of the similar sonorous quality of the vowels in each word of the song. One could change any of the lyrical contributions to the round so long as they continue the rhyme, which allows the song to still function as a type of rhythmic cacophony from which emerges a tonal cluster of the resonant vowel sounds.<sup>45</sup> Thus, when sung together, the circular repetition and emergence of rhyme is an act of amplification to both the initial voice and each additional voicing, i.e., the central vowel features of the rhyme increase in volume with each additional layer of sound even as the consonants are, as it were, not consonant. Part of the strength of these three novels is that they use the futurescape to construct the scene of settler-state of emergency/exception *par excellence*—apocalypse—and use this future terrain to amplify the "resonant vowel sounds" of settler-coloniality. Similar to the round, this revisitation of historical events does not attenuate the force of atrocity in the imagined future by tempering it with a non-

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<sup>45</sup> This is made quite stark if you listen to multiple sections of an entire choir do this or other forms of *canon perpetuus*. The "oh" sound of the vowels begins to sustain and form the sonic center of the composition.

imagined past; rather, the past is simply re-rendered more clearly through the vectors of historical violence by virtue of how *little* of the character and intention of that nominally futuristic violence is actually fantastical vis-à-vis the historical archive, i.e., how strikingly loud the tonal clusters are in the song settler-coloniality sings—both diachronically through the historical archive and synchronically across these six settler-colonial contexts, three fictional and three non-fictional.

## 5

Unlike Erdrich's novel, Claire Coleman's alien-invasion novel, *Terra Nullius*, plays less with the specific features of temporality's relationship to materiality and instead uses the apocalyptic staging of extra-planetary invasion and colonization as a didactic parallel to the ongoing violent invasion and colonization of the Indigenous peoples of Australia. In that sense, the use of historical parallel shares a certain temporal shape with *Marrow Thieves* insofar as the historical parallels are made quite clear; however, rather than an overtly critiquing that settler-colonial violence through a clear construction of an apocalyptic future, *Terra Nullius* critiques the historical features of the settler state by toying with the expectation created by concealing this futuristic context of the novel, inducing a reading that presumes the historical terrain of historical fiction rather than the futurescape of an imagined future—though, as we have seen, the line between the two is intentionally quite permeable. Unlike in *Future Home* and *Marrow Thieves*, *Terra Nullius* defers the reveal of the broader futuristic context of the novel and the identity of the forces at play by providing only enough detail in the first half to generate a field of expectation that induces the reader to believe they are reading a piece of fictionalized

history dealing with the invasion and predation of Indigenous peoples and the attendant violence of settler-colonialism rather than an extra-planetary invasion of violently colonizing aliens—indeed, this resonant future-past phenomenological rhyming is the central plot device of the novel. Nevertheless, the story is specifically centered on Australia’s settler-colonial history rather than the United States or Canada, yet part of the power of its slowly revealed future setting is that the actions described, and experiences depicted, could easily be mistaken for the settler-colonial context of either of the previous two novels.

The novel describes the two main forces in the novel as the “Natives” and the “Settlers,” and the point of the view in the novel switches back and forth between these two groupings. As the reader is eventually led to discover, this is a discourse on Indigeneity and critique of settler-colonialism writ within wider parameters than one is led to believe in the first half of the novel. A poignant reminder of what Indigeneity means—to be co-authored by, and co-author of, a concrete place—it is all of humanity who are the “Natives” here, and the “Settlers” are an amphibious, humanoid extra-terrestrial alien species that have invaded the planet, enslaved much of humanity, and colonized the planet. The actions of the alien settlers will sing a familiar melody for many insofar as the novel operates in a future historical-realist mode in describing the slavery, imprisonment, land theft, language suppression, child abduction, and massacres on the frontiers of the novel’s futurescape. Jacky, one of the protagonists of the novel to whom we are introduced in the opening pages of the book and through whom the first half is focalized, has escaped from one of the many reprogramming internment camps run by the alien species. Jacky is being hunted by the settler-state—as are all the characters in these

novels of the post-post-apocalypse—and represents resistance and a desire to return to their ancestral homelands and reconstitute their own Indigenous history. The novel is interspersed with archival material that serves as interstitial framing at the outset of each chapter; the archival material is a conflation of actual archival texts and fictionalized future-past archives, and it is through these interstitial framings that we glean much about the motivation and rationalization of settler-coloniality and how we understand that, from the perspective of the aliens, as Jacky notes, “This is not an invasion...to them this is an empty planet ripe for their settlement” (Claire Coleman 122)—that is, earth as a whole is abstracted into *terra nullius* and potentiated for extractive settlement through that abstractive process.

This has the effect of braiding settlers in the contemporary world of readership with the category of “Native,” a simple but poignant reminder that earth is home for all of us, even those who seem desperate to slip the funky, earthbound concrete realities of our world into the glittering celestial forms of abstraction. Critically, this construction also attempts to meet the settler worldview where it lives by indulging the peculiar projective narcissism of Christian empathy—the “golden rule” and, its correlate, the categorical imperative. In that light, of these three novels, *Terra Nullius* is perhaps the most directly settler-facing: it directly confronts colonialism by doing the work of recommunicating the experience of violent invasion of Indigenous peoples as though the reader were in the moccasins, so to speak, of the peoples upon whom the violence is enacted. The ethical framework as described in Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount is rendered in the NKJV as “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12); it is this projective form of self-regard with which

Coleman's work attempts to engage. This form of empathy serves the purpose of centering its own universality insofar as, rather than treating someone as *they* want to be treated through an ethics of extension, the so-called golden rule emblemizes the obliterative logics of settler-colonialism through its erasure and replacement of the interiority of Other by the abstraction of the interiority space into something possessable—the assumed *terra nullius* of all non-settler interiority. This space is then colonized with the interiority of the “empathizer,” who then applies their own self-interested determination of regard for this me-other. This maintains a settler frame of reference even in the space of empathy by mobilizing that action as a colonizing force on the interiority of any considered exteriority.

The abstract convolutions done in the case of settler empathy is to preserve a self-centered frame of reference while nevertheless accounting for the existence of other beings and maintaining the covenantal teleological frame of reference. There is an implicit assumption that the individual doing this obliterative-replacement called settler empathy treats themselves, and thus everyone else, as within a universal trajectory toward teleological attainment. Thus, in treating others as you treat yourself, any interiority that does not comport with that alignment is simply an untranslated illegibility. Thus, it never even encounters the logic of ethical consideration insofar as the narcissistic force of the abstract mental maneuver encounters only that which is already within a settler-colonial field of expectation. The absurd artifice of this ethical move is quickly realized by simply reflecting on one's own acts of empathy, which for most people typically occurs systematically abstracted framework, or even in a child's love for their mother, which is founded on the bodily cognition and experiential relationship between the two, not

through the application of the mental gymnastics of erasing and replacing the interiority of their mother and then staring out the eyeholes and applying “self” interest—rather, empathy in that case is extensive, embodied, and processual. Rather, the golden rule serves as a critical means of propagating a universalized system of covenantal temporality and spatial domination and an egocentric ontological individualism as foundation of society. This modulates and reinforces the field of expectation by treating the interiority of the other as isomorphic with self in terms of ethical consideration. Thus, the being of interiority is only recognizable if it is already in comportment with the frame of reference from which this ethical act of imagination takes place—all non-compliant elements of interiority beyond the tight parameters of the settler worldview are rendered an untranslated illegibility within the erase-and-replace operation of the ethical framework itself.

This abstraction of the interiority of Other mirrors the settler-colonial structure of violent transformation of land from its interrelated particularity to an empty, and thereby colonizable, abstraction: *terra nullius*. Conceptualizations of home, especially within an Indigenous context, become heavily tensioned between the force of spatial abstraction and its attendant extractive processes and the intimate, interrelated, and experiential qualities of home as such. The material practices of colonial erasure depend on this inaugural abstraction from the fullness of land into the bare geography of empty space. This is the sequential spatial movement of the imperial imagination: the speculative abstraction—the effacement of the particularities of place by the purely material-descriptive category of space; and the speculative extraction—the valuation of the spatial-material composition and the appropriation of that value into a settler-colonial

frame of reference leveraged by the vast and varied technologies of capitalist translation, e.g., propertization, boarding schools, railroads, farming, oil drilling, urbanization, road development, and so on. As such, settler-colonialism here might be summed as the violent structure of domination premised on the conceptual and material violation and theft of Indigenous interiority in the name of settler futurity—be it place or people.

This speculative process is starkly exemplified in John Gast's infamous painting *American Progress*. Land here is shorn of all particularity, and the speculative-abstractive process can be seen as an absence that pours fluidly down the painting from the upper right, snaking around just in front of the sunny settlers, trains, and farms and just behind the plants, animals, Indigenous people under the darkening sky as they are pursued from right to left across the teleological scene. There, in the thin line of vaguely differentiated, sickly yellow between settler and Indigenous is the true center of the painting: *terra nullius* in represented form, the imperial-speculative abstraction caught *in situ*. That undulating absence, the negative space of colonization of interiority itself, is situated in an inflection gap: a liminal space in the painting that is both "no longer" and "not yet." Gast seems to have even taken pains to keep the green grass, the trees, and any animals not materially functionalized within the settler-colonial structure (beasts of burden) all to the left of that represented structuring absence. While one might view this painting as simply depicting Indigenous peoples driven west to extinction before the inevitable destiny of the American settler, the entire interaction of the composition is first and foremost between all forms of life and the settler-colonial speculative abstraction and colonization of interiority: that thin strip of imagination that moves across the face of the painting, attenuating, and emptying the land from right to left like a tube of toothpaste.

As if to punctuate this point, Gast here depicts the hidden violence by dotting the buffered zone with the rotting carcasses of Indigenous kinship animals as well as the trace of Indigenous threat in the form of strewn arrows—an index of life through death, the trace, a haunting, the materiality of absence. Life here is represented perpetually in flight from colonization just as the settler must always be in pursuit of it: the disappearance of the former into the material-spatial logic of settler-colonialism structurally secures the grounds for the appearance of the latter.

As such, Claire Coleman seems to write this book as an almost hand-holding historical parallel using extra-planetary alien invasion to try to penetrate the cloistered scene of settler morality and create a dawning awareness of the apocalyptic wastelands created by their own attempts to leave this planet in pursuit of their teleological, divine-celestial apocalypse<sup>46</sup>. Part of how she accomplishes this beyond the organization of the settler as Indigenous when seen at scale is also in the braiding together of the narrative around the interstitial archival materials, which are themselves composed of a braid-work of real, fictional, and historical-fictional pieces. Like *Future Home*, the novel opens with the lyrics from the song “Solid Rock” by Shane Howard, a settler-Australian musician:

They were standing on the shore one day,

saw the white sails in the sun.

Wasn’t long before they felt the sting,

white man, white law, white gun. (Howard qtd in Claire Coleman)

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<sup>46</sup> As I write these lines, two modern titans of the global settler-capitalist elite—Elon Musk and Richard Branson—are currently racing to see who can leave the planet first. It has always struck me that the history of white, Christian America has been the paranoid narrative of a people on a planet they clearly *do not want to be on*—starting at their creation in Genesis, where the earth itself is set against them, and ending in the divine kingdom “out there,” away from the ugly concrete realities of the people and places on this “fallen” earth. Ever may they rise above it.

In an interview with the magazine *Goldmine*, Howard explains that the inspiration for the song came from spending time at Uluru, a sacred place for the Pitjantjatjara peoples, and reevaluating his relationship to the settler-state of Australia. Howard notes:

I realised that this country that I grew up in, that I thought was my country, it wasn't. I had to reassess my whole relationship with the land and the landscape, and understand that we had come from somewhere else, and we had disempowered a whole race of people when we arrived.

(Howard, *"Interview with Shane Howard"*)

This realization on Howard's part serves to frame the whole of the novel insofar as, at its foundation, this realization seems to be what is attempting to be effectuated within a settler readership.

This disempowerment of the Indigenous peoples of Australia takes many forms, many of which resonate for Indigenous people within any settler-colonial context. Coleman takes time at the end of the novel in an explanatory section to discuss the Australia governmental policies that led to the stealing and attempted reprogramming of children, a story that will be sadly familiar to any Indigenous reader. This period when the extraction of Indigenous children was at its height covers a range roughly spanning the turn to the twentieth century until at least the mid-1960s, though non-government sanctioned actions that contributed to the same effect continued to be mobilized through the 1970s. Referred to as the "Stolen Generations," these children suffered a similar form of attempted erasure and replacement to those children forced through the IBRSS. The formal application of Australian governmental policies regarding the theft of children, as Coleman writes:

allowed police and welfare to take mixed-race, First Nations, children from their parents for no other reason than for being mixed-race First Nations Children. The cultural after-effects of these policies have not yet ended and maybe never will. (292)

It is the striking similarities in Coleman's texts to the other two novels here discussed that are part of the power of these novels when placed into conversation. Indeed, Coleman notes that she assumes similarities between her stories and experiences as an Indigenous person in Australia and those of Indigenous peoples in other settler nations, but, as she notes in a short interview section at the end of the book, she is not intimately familiar with Indigenous experiences with American settler-colonialism, however, she knows enough to know they are in relation. This unintentional resonance between systems of settler-coloniality makes the intimate familiarity of her depictions of settler-colonial violence even more disturbing.

There is also a deep irony in this interview located at the end of her novel. This book was published by Small Beer Press, a small book publisher located in Easthampton, Mass., a town in which I lived for several years. Jenny Terpsichore Abeles, the interviewer, is herself a settler and fiction writer. In discussing the novel with Coleman, she voices an irony in the form of a question:

For American readers, some plot-details and historical cues in *Terra Nullius* might not feel as local and present as they do to Australian audiences. What do you hope American readers take away from this novel? (Qtd in Claire Coleman 303)

As I have been arguing in this chapter, this novel is *strikingly familiar* for a reader Indigenous to the Americas. The irony here is found in the accidental exposure of the settler-ignorance about the ways in which, as Coleman responds, “problems from colonization are identical between our countries. Colonization is colonization. Slavery is slavery, there is no way to separate them” (305). Indeed, only someone who has not yet reflected on the experience of a settler in America and come to the same realization that Shane Howard expressed earlier would so ably and ignorantly express such a sentiment. Indeed, that the “local and present” violent reality of settler-colonialism is not readily apparent to Abeles demonstrates aptly the meaningless and performative gesture that the land acknowledgement found on the Small Beer Press’s website indicates. Abeles engages here in a settler move to innocence, lamenting the violence of settler-colonialism “over there,” while asking if an American reader might nevertheless still get something from Coleman’s novel. Meanwhile she stands blithely in the post-apocalyptic landscape created by settler violence with eyes steadfast on the blinding luminosity of the teleological horizon.

In the novel, the character “Sister Bagra” is an (alien) religious authority and clear stand-in for the religious disciplinarians never far away from the reprogramming institutions of settler-colonialism. Sister Bagra runs something akin to the institutionalized camps in which the children of the Lost Generation so often found themselves and quite similar in many respects to the institutions found in each of the novels. In a fictional-archival opening to chapter six, ostensibly from a missive to the government of the alien home planet, Sister Bagra writes the following:

We must continue to attempt to educate these savages. We must try although they will never truly be our equals. They will never be ready to take places among us as citizens. However, if trained and educated they can maybe, one day, find a place among us, as labourers and as servants. It is unlikely they will survive the situation in which they find themselves, a situation of our doing. Frankly, I am surprised they survived even before our arrival. If they survive we must find a place for them in our society. We must find for them a place befitting their limited capacities (Claire Coleman 69).

It is in these intimate archival glances that we see Coleman most forcefully revising and recommunicating settler ideology in the voice of an alien species. Having in this example not yet opened the aperture to encompass the extra-planetary nature of Sister Bagra, these moments of archival material loop back on themselves after the expansion of the novel's view. A dramatic shift in the significance of a passage such as this startles the settler ennui around reading the tragedies of the past through moves to innocence: it was a long time ago, people were not as progressed then as we are now, it was a necessary evil (sorry!), and, of course, it's not like we can fix it now. Instead, as these passages are revectorized through the shifted positionality of the readership, the spectral menace and hidden violence embedded within the scene suddenly becomes more salient when they are meant for the settler reader, and they are not chained safely in the past, but, indeed, are part of the apocalyptic future.

Part of the redemptive hope carried by this novel is found in its attempt to utilize settler ideological operations—the discourse of universal humanity, projective

self-interested empathy—as a means of critiquing those very ideological constraints in ways that remain optimistic about the possibility for an alliance of Indigenous peoples and settler allies to revise and reconstitute a better world. While the novel does not do anything strikingly new in terms of the plot structure of alien invasion—it follows the fairly tried and formula of invasion, gathering resistance, confrontation, and some form of hopeful resurgence—the revision of this trope to capture and fluoresce the institutional expressions of hard and *soft* forms of settler-colonial violence does the service of triangulating this exposure with the historical scenes of hard and soft violence that motivate the novel. This is also related to how the novel plays with the techniques of defamiliarization and estrangement insofar as the alien society in the novel, expected to be unfamiliar and estranged from human understanding, evinces a very normal, even familiar discourse for a settler readership that is not necessarily reliant on a settler-reader's knowledge of their own history. Rather, it is the modernist idiom of the bureaucratic missives, blurbs of scholarly essays, and letters from the (alien) director of the Louvre, as but a few examples, that form this estranged but oddly familiar characterization of the alien society and culture.

The formal twist of the novel plays in this ambivalence to create a targeted defamiliarization technique: in the first half of the novel, there is a false sense of familiarity for the settler-reader in both the temporality (the past) and positionality (the settlers) derived from the field of expectation generated by the genre of historical fiction. However, the act of estrangement in the middle of the novel only really bears the full force of the technique on a settler readership—the positionality of "Native" will be one an Indigenous reader is already likely to assume, so the twist of the novel merely adds

additional detail to who else is included in the category “Natives.” This would hardly qualify as defamiliarization for most Indigenous people, as there are, of course, already a wide diversity of Indigenous peoples, and, indeed, a prevailing understanding—at least within my own tribe—that peoplehood is not what people are, it is what people do, so the processual and transformational aspects of this perspective anticipate a malleable and radical diversity. It is only the settler-reader who is estranged from their former expectation of the position of dominance within the novel. Similarly, because the scenes of oppression, enslavement, violence, kidnapping, massacres, and the logic and rationale for their use are all so familiar to an Indigenous reader aware of their own history, this itself would not constitute anything unexpected. In many ways, an Indigenous reader (including myself) can nearly anticipate the scenes and shapes of violence in advance of the plot based purely on it being about “natives” and “settlers,” i.e., settler-colonialism. However, for a settler reader inculcated within their settler-colonial national ideology, the specifics and concrete detail of this violence, especially with the dawning realization that the settler violence is being enacted *on* not *by* their representative position in the novel, may shock and defamiliarize that readership in ways that it simply never could for an Indigenous readership. This book, then, serves two very different purposes for Indigenous and settler audiences.

For a settler audience, this book, as I have noted, is an attempt to concede the limitations of settler empathy and fashion an artistic expression that pierces the dismissive posture of settler innocence by attempting to provoke a visceral and directed realization through the reversed polarity of the settler-colonial encounter. However, and crucially, in this inversion, Claire Coleman does not “overwrite” Indigeneity and emplace

settler consciousness and recode it as Indigenous. Instead of the settler-colonial inclination to erase and replace, the novel revises and relates the pre-alien invasion native-settler binary transforming it into something more akin to the non-discrete, non-binary dualisms that Ann Waters describes in the previous chapter. Indigenous peoples, especially those in the Australian context of the world, are vitally important and, indeed, central characters in the plot—of the novel itself, and in the plot to rebel against the alien colonizers within the novel. Non-Indigenous "natives" in the novel also play starring roles, however, there isn't a conflation of *peoplehood* here; they are not "separate but equal," rather they are characterized together and different. And Indigenous place, the sacred places of Indigenous Australia that are visited by the characters, are of central importance as well. Their sacrality a given for an Indigenous readership, but a settler reading of the novel is given a materialist ontological basis for reverence for the land: the amphibious aliens do not live well in dry, hot environments. So, the land itself is the foundation and ongoing force of resistance, its animism and sacrality expressed through both its assumed spiritual and cultural power as well as its physical perturbations, character, and value as a hostile environment that mirror the hostile forces of resistance represented by the rebels.

Indeed, for the settler-allies depicted in the book, theirs is a sacrifice both cultural and physical. They are in a land not their own, inhospitable to them, and they are betraying their settler-colonial ideology, their frame of reference, in aiding the Natives: to be an ally, in Coleman's novel, is to replace the material dimension of home and species with *peoplehood*, full stop. They move into discomfort willingly and with adverse consequences because, as the novel reflects upon in the final scenes, there is the

recognition and common orientation toward the sacred interiority of all things between the natives and settler-allies. Rebellion and allyship in this case are both movements *away* from ease and comfort as the necessary result of an orientation *toward* sacred interiority. It is the recognition of this interior sacrality that serves to antagonize the technologies of its violent erasure and replacement by the technologies of settler-colonialism, and it is this interior-beyond, the Indigenous particularity that escapes extraction, which serves as the force of common cause for the disparate group. This orientation towards what is in common, what braids us together, is forcefully articulated in the final passage of the novel, voiced as a “translator’s note” to the tale of Jacky Jerramungup, i.e., the novel itself. The translator writes:

We think of the Settlers, who we call Toads, as inhuman. They are not—what they are is nonhuman. In all other ways they are more like us than we would like to admit. There is nothing in their behavior that humans are incapable of: we have invaded cultures more peaceful than us, we have murdered and enslaved. There is nothing in their hearts and minds that does not also exist in the hearts and minds of the human species. (Claire Coleman 290)

This final sentiment gives voice to the universal relationality and sacrality of all things, impressing upon the reader that a radical difference in exteriority, in the accidentals of identity, does not constitute the absence of a sacred interiority.

Just prior to this final translator’s note, there is a final reflective moment of inner contemplation by the character Esperance. Wandering the heated, rocky terrain, she thinks about the ways in which the invasion has created, by necessity, new forms of

kinship, “Friends, comrades became family—new aunties and uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins” (289). Nevertheless, what Esperance is wandering the terrain in search of are more free peoples, the Indigenous peoples of that land who:

were never oppressed even by the white men when they invaded hundreds of years before the settlers...somewhere out there were a people supremely adapted to this environment...the opposite of foreigner, the opposite of alien, they were the people who belonged. (289)

Indigenous people, the people who belong, thus serve a critical function within the ongoing rebellion. They represent thousands of years of adaptive history to the terrain that is the source and strength of the rebellion itself, and that strength is not only embodied in the materiality of the land and peoples. The final stages of attempted violence within structures of invasion and *settlement* are always cultural—the attempt to laminate the narrative of settler-colonialism over the ongoing process of Indigenous becoming. This shift in the terrain of the battlefield is summarized by the character Gigi Greyhair, who voices a sentiment as true in the novel as it is in our world:

You think you are smarter than us, you think your brains are bigger, you think we can't learn. We know more than you, we have stories and songs, we have art and culture. What do you have? You have guns and fury and hate. The war has so far been about guns and death. When you think we are defeated the war will change.

...

The next war will be about resilience and survival, culture and art. What that war begins you will discover you are not well armed. You have no art, your stories have no power (268).

Indeed, the power and centrality of culture and art—storying, the sacrality inherent in the articulation of expression—is front and center here as it is in each of our novels. Because the story of settler-colonialism is one of alien invasion, attempted erasure, and intended replacement, the song settler-colonialism sings, the story it tries to tell, must always be flat, gap-filled, and forward looking. To look behind, to look inside of the story of settler-colonialism is to find a story that few people would be proud to tell.

## 6

I was visiting Maagaga?áashish—sometimes called Minot, ND. I am generally white-appearing and was having a beer at a local pub. I ended up in a conversation with a man at the bar. During the typical bar chatter, I was mentioning that the Hidatsa name for the area, as noted above. The man laughed, and said “you’re in Minot, I don’t know what they told you.”

To this day, I am unsure if the “they” in his response was intended to mean “Indians,” or, perhaps, just the more general use such as in “so they say,” but I explained to the man that we call it by a different name. At this point, the man became quite emphatic and condescending:

“This is MI-NOT, NORTH DA-KO-TA, say it with me.”

I replied, “Minot, North Dakota. But we call it something else.”

“Well, it’s wrong, go look at the signs” he replied.

“I’ve seen them. The reason we call this area Maagagaʔáashish, which means plum creek/river, is because it indicates how prolific the plum trees were along the river here, and it served as a seasonal excursion for our people to collect and enjoy the bounty that the river and plum trees provided each season,” I told him, continuing, “In fact, we call the month of August ‘Máagada Aruʔóodi Mirísh,’ which means the time when the plums are ripe. This place earned that name before Minot existed. It earned it before the United States existed in fact. I have told you why we call this area Maagagaʔáashish, why don’t you explain to me why you call it ‘Minot’?”

“Because that’s its fucking name,” he said angrily. “You think you’re an Indian? Fuck off to the rez then, see how you like it there.”

In a turn of irony, I *was* on my way to Fort Berthold (the presumptive “rez” in question) to see my family, and I *do* like it there, but I could tell the conversation was over. The man finished his beer, made a flippant comment to the bartender to “watch out for this guy, he thinks he’s an Indian,” and walked out.

I share this anecdote because it speaks both to the power of our stories—we have them, they are meaningful and filled with context and history, and are in a deeper relation to time and place than any settler-laminated place name—but also to highlight the flat relationship to place and names that the man at the bar possessed. The simple fact of the prior status and robust context of our placename placed an unexpected pressure on his temporal sense of space. His anger seemed a direct result of the fact that not only did I call these lands by a different name, but I also called them by their older name. I called to them by their meaningful name—one that speaks to, of, and from the land itself and our

deep-time relationship to it: its meaningful features and intimate, cyclical relation to our people over long-history. “Because that’s its fucking name” neatly summarizes the flatness of the settler story of most places. Who cares why it is called Minot? I certainly do not, and neither, apparently, did he. The interiority of the name “minot” was insignificant. Seemingly the only thing that mattered to him was compliance with the laminated exteriority of “Minot” itself as “the” name on a settler map, in settler histories, and emblazoned on the settler signage that has been foisted upon it.

At the time, I had no idea how or why the town got the name “Minot,” like he, I simply understood it as a flat symbol devoid of content. I had not bothered to look it up at the time, and it was only now, writing this anecdote more than a decade later, that I briefly explored the provenance of its name. The town is named after a railroad executive, Henry D. Minot, who as far as I can tell never lived in Minot. For a period, Henry Minot, along with James Hill, were directors of the “Great Northern Railway” system. These trains served as the tip of the spear for settler expansion into the upper Midwest. Trains that served as the technology for expanding the “manifest destiny” of settler-farmers. Trains that serviced and coordinated the occupation of Indigenous land. Trains from which settlers shot and nearly exterminated our close kin the bison from the plains. Trains that took coerced and kidnapped children away to reprogramming camps far from their homelands and people. Trains not so different from those that brought Indigenous prisoners to Fort Marion.

The placename of “Minot” is a placeholder. It has no story because it is used as a move to settler innocence, a form of insulation from the alien invasion, settler violence, and world erasure that it represents. The flatness of this name facilitates settler ignorance

because to examine its interiority is to face the ongoing hypocrisy and violence of settler-colonialism. It is our MHA place names, our language, and what they represent—the apocalyptic impossibility of a prior status to settler-colonialism and the sacred relationality these lands hold for our people, for our history, within our worldview and cosmology, the beating heart of MHA Indigenous interiority—that settler-colonialism continues to attempt to erase and replace with a settler past, present, and future premised on these types of flat laminations.

It is this same interiority that is under siege in the novels of Coleman, Erdrich, and Dimaline, the same luminous and sacred Indigeneity that has been placed under various forms of attempted domination and obliteration by the ongoing project of American settler-colonialism. By simply articulating a deeper and more intimate history of place, I had incidentally obtruded and placed an imposition into the facile temporality of this man's settler history: its meaninglessness. Its violence. Its superficiality.

No wonder he got so damned angry.

#### Chapter Four: Nágshibi

##### “And Then They Went West”: The Ancestral Future Technologies of Indigenous Pedagogy

On taking up my work at Carlisle, I found one of the necessary things to do was to impress upon the minds of my pupils that they were Indians, possessing native abilities that had never been recognized in the curriculum of the government schools. -Angel De Cora (Winnebago)

In lieu of what might be more traditionally called a “coda,” I offer here something that moves away from the finality that such a term implies. Nágshibi, a term that means to go past, after, or beyond in Hiraacá, serves here to indicate the processual forms of epistemological pedagogy that our stories and ways of knowing are built around. If you recall from Chapter One, many stories from the 4<sup>th</sup>-Peoples’ Perspective (4PP) have a type of sign-off or terminal indicator when the narrative mode is complete. Wareec, for instance, “they say,” is the terminal marker for such stories in Hidatsa. In Mvskoke Nation, “and then they went west” often serves the same terminal function in closing a story. One of the difficulties I have found in communicating our ways of knowing is that these markers serve as the *denouement* and full resolution to the story. Contrasted with Western forms of knowledge, this can seem both abrupt and incomplete. I have often been told that a traditional story does not seem over, that many things have been left hanging, that there are difficulties and tensions left unresolved, there is action that seems to be still in process but suddenly halted, and instead the story is simply completed at a particular point—an unexpected halt to the motion of the narrative, an implicit structural blockade that serves to index a difference in epistemological convention as well as to

highlight the difference between a resolving conclusionary act and the pause of a continuing duration of animate knowledge.

Another common feature of our pedagogical practices has to do with juxtaposition of knowledge. It is quite common for seemingly unrelated stories, knowledge, or other elements of cultural transmission to be intersected without elaboration. Indeed, part of the construction of knowledge in those cases is derived from the ways these strands are tied together by each person in their own way, not to evaluate whether the synthesis has been applied in relation to a normative, master interpretation, but as an invitation to communicate one's own unique knotting instincts. This serves a processual act of knowledge creation: the ways people see seemingly disparate elements tied together from their unique standpoint is itself an important form of a reciprocating dialogical knowledge creation. How each understanding of the synthetic articulation of seemingly unrelated elements are brought together is understood as part of the creative act of collective cognition. Some of the difficulty I have encountered in navigating this project has involved these differences in epistemological convention. I have attempted to push back on those constraints through structural decisions throughout the project as well as through the content of my work to not completely cede the epistemological ground to the conventions of the settler academy. I here amplify my grandfather's suggestion to be "unashamed about standing within who we are," during a discussion about my research and this project in the summer of 2021. As such, and as best I am able, I push more deeply into juxtaposition and our epistemological braiding instincts in this chapter. I invite you to weave your own meaning in the interstitial spaces between the numbered sections as well as between each paragraph, sentence, word, letter, and space.

## 1

poetry is an ind'in / and journalism ain't  
and proper punctuation ain't ind'in  
and circles are ind'in / and random lines are ind'in  
but straight lines won't never, ever be ind'in<sup>47</sup>

## 2

*Everything exists and everything will happen*<sup>48</sup>...

I couldn't get a van, so five of my students at Tufts University and I hailed a ride-share service and hopped in. Destination: The Indigenous future. We pulled up to the Emerson College Media Art Gallery to find it located only steps away from Boston Common at a very busy intersection. Even before we got out of the car, I see it through the car window and windows of the gallery an unexpected presence: the interiority of the gallery is open to the street through the tall glass of its frontage, showcasing the inner space to the juncture of the intersection; and, there, neatly framed and centered in the windows, is a plainly visible and soaring adí-cuáhe (tipi) amidst a cacophony of bright, multi-colored lighting, indiscernible movements flickering along the walls behind its majestic height—the very dimensions of it seem to nearly burst out and extend beyond the material space of its confines.

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<sup>47</sup> Roxy Gordon, "Indians."

<sup>48</sup> This italicized segment and all following italicized segments that lead each numbered section (except for #10 as noted) are taken from a painting by Roxy Gordon from 1988, quoted in LeeAnne Howe's *Choctalking on Other Realities* in her opening essay titled "The Story of America: A Tribalography" (11). Howe notes that Gordon, "in a very Choctaw way," evokes the principles of Margulis' theory of symbiogenesis (12).

Making things work is the epitome of survivance...We have actively participated in “making it work” under the weight of many different circumstances [for a very long time], and I think that’s Indigenous survivance, I think that’s something embedded in our cosmology. I believe that art [as survivance] is an action; it is an active experience and not a passive experience. But the way we present work presently is through institutions and galleries [that] transform art into a noun so it can be a commodity. (Luger, *Interview*)

Ancestral Future Technologies is an ongoing constellation of projects by Cannupa Hanska Luger (MHA Nation & Lakota). This constellated expressional entity is called *Nágshibi*, a Hidatsa word meaning to be past, to be after, and/or to exceed and go beyond. Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that *Nágshibi* has already exceeded and gone beyond its own situated context by projecting into the Boston cityscape this unexpected futural Indigenous presence. Demonstrating its bearing even through the mediation of the glass of the frontage and windshields of the car we took, there is an inversion of the temporality the Indigenous artistic expression located behind the glass: instead of dispossession, preservation, and display of “artifacts” separated by the separative mediation of the protective glass of a museum, there is here the animating, present, and performative technologies of ancestral futurity beckoning through the permeable glass façade, an offering of entrance that both welcomes and distances passersby to/from the Indigenous futurism and the temporal imposition it places onto the city sidewalks and streets.

Over 120 years earlier, another Indigenous artist plied her trade in the city of Boston. Angel de Cora (Winnebago) studied at the Cowles Art School in Boston, a mere ten-minute walk from the site of Luger's exhibit. Anna Dawson (MHA Nation) similarly spent time in the city of Boston, studying at the School of Domestic Science of the Boston YWCA after her graduation from Framingham Normal School (now Framingham State University). Also studying at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, De Cora, like Dawson and Luger share more in common than simply being Indigenous peoples working in the city of Boston. All teachers of different stripe, they each also work with a blockade of the sacred in their lives and work, grounding their artistic and pedagogical expressions in something that goes beyond that which is presented in the simplicity of raw materiality. Art, of course, is fundamentally interested in the attempt to communicate something that exceeds its own formal constraints, as is the pedagogical art of teaching. However, it is the pedagogical, aesthetic, and ontological milieu that these individuals engage with that serves as a bridge to understanding the *mélange* of considerations within Indigenous epistemological approaches. And, perhaps most importantly for these three individuals here being discussed, it is the incorporation of blockades into the aesthetic modality of Indigenous pedagogical practices that defines that critical bridging between them. Indeed, it is the *animate mystery*—the blockade of sacrality—that inheres in the pedagogical endeavor as such that serves as a fundamental point of contact and translation.

### 3

*...and everything is a mystery and everything is alive...*

As we get out of the car, I feel a squeeze behind my breastbone and the blood coming to my cheeks. Anticipation. I'm excited. And, I realize, nervous. I feel as though I'm taking the stage myself, that our people have something on the line here. The smell of warm concrete and a mélange of foods, the din of honking cars and multi-lingual conversations—the milieu of the metropole, the atmospheric background of the city—extend and interrelate in a sensuous urban dance as I stand across the street gazing through the frontage waiting for my students to get out of the car. I realize it can't simply be anticipation of Cannupa's exhibition. Not really. We're already inside, I realize. It's already happening.

I'm always fascinated with where our stories come from and what our relationships are...I'm really fascinated by meeting other Indigenous people in just North America whose creation stories [are so different] ...and I love the variation of that because [it] builds complexity and it builds a narrative of diversity instead of homogeneity. And I think it's important for us to talk about our experiences in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context, because that was something that was missing from my childhood—having and seeing our contributions to the globe and to the society that oppresses us. (Luger, *Interview*)

De Cora's early illustrations, such as those in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in February 1899 and November 1899 are influenced by her formal studies in illustration, but their direct inspiration comes from elsewhere. After studying under the famous American illustrator Howard Pyle at Drexel, Pyle encouraged De Cora to travel to Fort Berthold in 1897 to reconnect with 'her' Indigenous culture. Fort Berthold, the home of

MHA Nation, also happened to be the homelands of one of De Cora's contemporaries, Anna Dawson (Sahnish) who was a field matron there. De Cora assisted Dawson in her duties on our homelands, and Cora Folsom, a teacher at Hampton Normal who helped facilitate De Cora's stay notes:

[De Cora] went about into the homes of the people and did a great deal of sketching and photographing as well [creating] several large canvasses.

Some of the portraits she made there of the old chiefs are of great value as well as beauty. (Folsom qtd in McAnulty, 151)

Dawson, like de Cora, had found herself "recruited" into the Hampton Normal School (now Hampton University)—a 'school' that was established just prior to the CIIS with Richard Pratt's help—his first prisoner-students moved from Fort Marion, discussed in the prior chapter, were first brought to Hampton, and they established the first 'class' there as well. Hampton Normal and its Indian program existed for roughly the same length of time as the CIIS and were closely related assimilationist programs. As similarly aged captives in Pratt's continuing efforts to steal Indigenous children and send them to his federally sponsored reprogramming camps, both De Cora and Dawson were exposed to Pratt's process of "immersing the Indians in our civilization and when we get them under holding them there until thoroughly soaked" (Pratt, *Proceedings*). De Cora and Dawson had a familiarity with one another having been at Hampton during an overlapping period from 1883 to 1891. De Cora graduated in 1891 and was a fellow student like Dawson until 1885—Folsom notes that they were friends. Dawson graduated and became a teacher at Hampton Normal while De Cora was still a student and likely served in that capacity for Dawson for some of her studies at Hampton.

*...and everything is planned...*

As we're waiting to be buzzed into the gallery space and looking through the door, I freeze. I recognize the glowing images displayed on the walls behind the adícuáhe. What at first appeared to be still images are in fact videos encompassing the walls of most of the gallery space, and they are unmistakably our homelands, the images moving and undulating, the grasses gently breathing, swaying. I sense this story's narration is from the Fourth Peoples' Perspective, and my anxiety and anticipation fade away like retreating fog on the waters as the sun announces its entrance into the morning. I am overcome by familiarity, resonance, memory; it's Fort Berthold, I know it like I know my grandfather's face, and suddenly I'm awash in the smells of home in the summer: the rich, pungent odor of the awagáadi, the real earth—the good land. All the different sages, our grasses, the cedar, and brush: our medicine, our sacred spaces, our relatives. I feel a peculiar sense of inner unfolding, an extension-by-relation to the comforting expanse of home there in the bustling center of Boston.

You have to submit to the will of the land, and that's what Indigenous survivance has been, you belong to it, it does not belong to you...I believe we belong to it, and there is no fence, no highway, there is no border that can separate you from that belonging. (Luger, *Interview*)

Both Dawson and De Cora became teachers and storiers. Carriers and sharers of knowledge and experience, albeit in very different contexts. Some of the inspiration for De Cora's pedagogy derived from her experience as a working artist. Indeed, De Cora writes, "Perhaps it is well that I had not over-studied the prescribed methods of European

decoration, for then my aboriginal qualities could never have asserted themselves” (De Cora). Despite this sentiment, her illustrations in Zitkala-Sa’s *Old Indian Legends* are commonly described as nothing more than a “popularly romanticized view of the Indian of the time” (Moyer). The paradox, then, is how such seemingly obviously European renderings could have been considered “aboriginal qualities” to De Cora. Formally trained in art at several different colleges—including the prestigious ‘cradle of American feminism,’ Smith College—and in multiple styles, we can assume this was not a simple case of being unable to recognize the influences one’s own artistic training from that of her culture. Rather, it would seem to be an indication of De Cora’s habit of characterizing art not in terms of its product, but rather as the processual activity of creating. The process itself, then, is the method by which and through which De Cora expresses her so-called “aboriginal qualities.” The mistake in this case would be to limit her characterization of her own work to any single aesthetic modality or piece. Rather, when the artistic process is mobilized and placed into relation to De Cora, the Indigenous features of her aesthetics, epistemology, and pedagogical practice come more sharply into focus.

This work itself, for instance, is rendered largely in structured English. I am not offering an interpretive dance or oral performance, however, certain elements and sentiments in my work would no doubt be better or more effective if thus composed. I also enjoy the French teacher Jacotot and quote the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben among other non-Indigenous thinkers and scholars, none of whom serve as the origination or extent of my thought or approach to the conversations within which I articulate them. Rather, they are rendered as a part of a translation of my ideas, of the

knowledge of my people, of De Cora's ideas, and so on. I select these frameworks to facilitate the product, this project, which itself follows a standard, top-down, univocal, and static format: an authoritative and inanimate epistemological model based on the continuing legacy of European educational systems. However, I am aware of some of these many mediating factors, and, as anyone does, I do my best to utilize the various methods to place myself and my work in partial translation, in relation to you, the reader—or at least that is my endeavor. I do this as a means of communication and expressing my own thought in ways that are legible within the academy; however, that does not mean that the product in anyway indicates a comprehensive structure or full description of the process of that work. Every act of sensuous interaction distorts and caricatures its object<sup>49</sup>, just as you are now doing as you read this; however, each does so in its own unique way—as you also do.

## 5

*...and everything is dangerous...*

Now inside the pedagogical space of Cannupa's Ancestral Future Technologies, I see the adí-cuáhe more closely. The smoke flaps have solar panels mounted on them, and inside the tipi—within the interiority-within-interiority—is a lightly glowing illumination: lighted strings are strung in a complex interrelated network, zigzagging

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<sup>49</sup> If you are talking to someone in front of you, you are caricaturing the visual and auditory features of their being, which no one would ever assume is the totality of the being of that person. If you are close enough, perhaps you include the olfactory elements, but in each case, you neither comprehend the fullness of even those elements, nor do those facets amount to a substantive set of the elemental composition of the person let alone anything approaching the processual comprehensive beingness of them in their totality. This is true of any textual object as well—this being the entire reason for the interpretive arts in the first place.

across the entirety of the inside of the space of the adí-cuáhe. The strung lights prevent any entrance into it, as they are similarly strung across the entrance from top to bottom. This sacral lighting scheme serves as a form of reification of the ineffability of *xubaa*, of the sacrality of Indigenous interiority that inheres in all things. This presents a type of present-but-transient interiority only able to be witnessed from an exterior standpoint, a place both a part and apart. As people of the earthlodge, such tipis typically serve as a temporary tenting for summer hunting excursions and other similar demands that take us away from our homelands and home—in that sense, they are much like any other camping tent for us. Nevertheless, Cannupa's decision to make the tipi the centerpiece of his exhibit capitalizes on the wide circulation of the representational significance of the tipi in settler culture as well as the temporary nature it implies for us specifically. As something exotic, Indigenous, and *different*, most especially when emplaced in the heart of the recently developed settler city of Boston, it triggers the multiplicative signification of the sort noted in Chapter Two, something that manages to both activate the settler-symbolic while nevertheless fluorescing a different type of meaning to its Indigenous beholders. In that sense, Cannupa cannily plays with the commercialization of the tipi, which, like the dreamcatcher and headdress, are indelibly linked to Indigenous cultures even though they are *not* necessarily linked in their *particularity* to many Indigenous cultures—all three of those iconographic items are related, to varying degrees, most explicitly to the tribes of the great plains, and have very little to do with most extant and historical tribal nations across the Americas. Nevertheless, even tribal peoples who have never donned a headdress in the present or past and have no intention to do so in the

future know that when someone urinates on an Indian-head logo in front of them, the offensive act is intended for them.

This is Mad Max Cannupa. We've already experienced the darkest apocalypse that's [equal to any] written in any religious tome. We had our Ragnarok, our culling... apocalypse [has] already happened to us, and we've somehow survived it. As the rest of the world is experiencing that, the[y look to] ...Indigenous communities globally who have been honed into incredibly hard-to-perish people. And our relationship to place is what grounds us in that effort and ability to survive... The surface of this planet flows, [and it] is spinning the whole time... [settler-colonialism] seems to be embedded within [nation-state] ideas...of dominating the land. Each border is a narrative of land dominance. (Luger, *Interview*)

It is unquestionable that what was produced by De Cora's students in her classes was heavily constrained by the consumer market given that pieces there created were sold to continue funding the enterprise of the CIIS. Similarly, Anna Dawson was constrained by the limited set of subjects she was allowed to study as both a woman and an Indigenous person, let alone the constraints that inhere in any curricular formation. Nevertheless, how De Cora's students *came to* their products, how Dawson *came to* her knowledge, and how all three of these teachers go about teaching *as such*, is left largely to their discretion, which is a critical facet of survivance pedagogy. In the case of De Cora, the blockade of the classroom space, much like the interiority of the interior pedagogic space of the adí-cuáhe, was a result of forceful agency. De Cora was adamant that she be free to run her courses as she deemed fit. In a letter outlining the condition for

her accepting the teaching position at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, De Cora was unequivocal:

*I shall not be expected to teach in the white man's way, but shall be given complete liberty to develop the art of my own race and to apply this as far as possible, to various forms of art, industries and crafts. (De Cora 285, emphasis added)*

Angel understood that removing the educational *process* itself from the curricular surveillance of the institution freed her from the oversight that would typically condition the classroom through Euro-centric, assimilationist epistemological and pedagogical models, many of which continue to be reproduced within both the K-12 and 'higher' educational systems even today. Hers was a move to secure a selective invisibility, an archival agency in the form of an intentional absence. In her clearance of the classroom space from the surveillance of the institution, De Cora's classroom created the possibility for a mode of sovereign and self-determined expression and education—both for De Cora's own art and education as well as for the emancipatory process of self-motivated and self-directed learning for her students. It is precisely this recognition and strategic maneuver around and within forms of institutional in/visibility that allowed De Cora's to create pedagogical acts of resistance in the very teeth of assimilationist project.

## 6

*...and everything is a mirage...*

I see more clearly the terrain on the video played all along the walls behind the adí-cuáhe, and I notice a figure crawling along the small butte that is centered in the film.

The figure, as it would turn out, is one of the future peoples of MHA Nation—traditional regalia vectored through a post-post-apocalyptic aesthetic. As the figure crawls along the buttes of the homelands, I glance around the gallery and notice that there are similar figures installed in positions around the room of the exhibition hall. All of them wear masks that cover their faces, their identities blockaded from acquisition by the probing eyes of the beholder. And how could they have faces? They have not yet been born. It is the very futurity of identity that the Luger's rendition of our traditional regalia blockades—one cannot gaze upon the face of Indigenous futurity and condition it through the application of expectation. Nevertheless, they call to me, these future-relatives of mine. I recognize them, and I stand in relation in ways none of my students can or should. This is partially because the regalia, the context, the entire scene of the installation is familiarity-under-revision. It is ancestral futurity in ways particular to our people's past, present, and future. We, MHA Nation, are not a static people; we, too, are an artistic process. And, as though to emphasize the point, the masks—refunctioned hardhats, set with goggles for eyes, festooned with a multitude of fabric strings of red and white—have abstract figurations, dashes of paint, and, written clearly in white paint: AwaXe. Hidatsa language meaning dirt that is dripping, a short-hand, familiar way of rendering the Dripping Dirt Clan. These ancestral future relatives of mine stand in relation in a more intimate way than I expected. They are not only members of my tribe, but they are also my clan relatives! Miic Awaxe! I, too, am Dripping Dirt Clan.

As I gaze upon the concealed visage of my future clan relative, I begin to wonder what obligations I have to them, and they me. The temporality of my people is more compressed, more of a milieu, as discussed in the previous chapter, than the settler

society that surrounds us. We don't traditionally say things like "great, great, great, great, grandpa." We say, "grandpa." So, this could very well be my future clan sister or brother, or perhaps my clan nephew or niece—in which case I need to be getting after them!

Helping to provide discipline in their own processual duration oriented toward the futurity of our sacred ways and traditions. This yet-to-be, already-is relation gazes back at me silently. I ask my student to take a picture so I can send it to my mother, who simply texts back that she is happy that I have a clan relative in Boston. It's always good to find your people, wherever, indeed *whenever* you are. And I've never questioned that my relatives are in the future, still here/there, resisting, dancing, creeping along the buttes, playing with their little ones—the video along the wall behind the figure shows a similarly adorned figure along the edge of Lake Sakakawea playing with their children, the little ones dressed in this same similar-but-different futuristic regalia. Things change, but our interiority persists in new forms that build upon and accrete around our ancestral ways.

My effort is to bypass all of that and move into an Indigenous future. The work that I've been creating is looking at customary designs and forms and purposes of regalia and reapplying them in a future context. [I] then embed our customary practices—these affirmations of land reverence—to the land and apologize for every human-shaped thing up until this moment. (Luger, *Interview*)

De Cora continued to use the technique of manipulating the product of her pedagogical and artistic "production" within the economic and cultural vectors of American society. Even as Carlisle was revising the view of their students as Indian

craftspeople, it was nevertheless emphasized that “every student at the Carlisle Indian School is a producer”—an emphatic reminder of the close relationship of the school to the racial capitalism that spawned it (Waggoner 140). After Pratt’s forced retirement in 1904, a certain amount of latitude had been created in what was produced by students at the school—indeed it was this additional latitude that led to De Cora being offered the position in the first place—but the wider “success” of the boarding schools is nevertheless clearly tied to the production of an assimilated ~~Indian~~, of which a marketable piece of “authentic art” was an emblem—such as the European inflected illustration by a stolen Winnebago child of ‘her’ people the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Sahnish. As de Cora seemed to grasp quite well, this authenticity was an ill-defined and shifting concept that was open to the forceful application of her own interpretation. Such art, then, needed to balance the demand for something ‘Indian’ enough to be exotic, however not so ‘Indian’ that it wasn’t translatable/marketable within the prevailing settler economic system. Many decades later, the Jicarilla Apache philosopher Viola Cordova would call our attention to the continuation of this type of pedagogical space, noting that “[t]he organization of the [settler] schoolroom is, to begin with, very alien . . . the organization is one of extreme regimentation. Children sit in rows of seats that all face in one direction, toward the teacher. The teacher, alone, has a right to speak. She . . . is the sole authority in the classroom. The student must not leave his assigned place without permission, and only the teacher grants permission. The Euro-American classroom is an exercise in authoritarianism” (Cordova 80).

*...and everything touches everything...*

Part of why Indigenous Futurism is so important is emblemized neatly by my recognition of my relative in Luger's installation insofar as it operates as a critical form of clapback to settler-colonial discourses about Indigeneity. Earlier that day within my own blockaded pedagogical space at Tufts, I had been discussing with my student the settler habit of rendering Indigeneity in the past—the ways Indigeneity is often represented as 'historical,' vanished, and therefore past tense by the connection of this practice to the ongoing trope of the 'vanishing Indian.' Intimately connected to forms of settler-colonial representational control, by historicizing 'the Indian,' it is not only the Indigenous present that is under erasure, but, more importantly, our Indigenous *futures*.

Without that relationship to place, there is a hole in us, a longing, and rather than belonging to the land, the hole is filled with belongings.

Belongings don't make you belong. I think about in relation to Native art. The creation of this narrative of 'traditional' is reinforced not necessarily by us, but the market, because it wants to have a historical object, so [when settlers] open up their table [for] a dinner party they can express how they belong to this place because they've purchased work that has this historical reference and a deep-time relationship to place.

In 1885, Anna Dawson was placed in a Longmeadow, MA home by virtue of the 'outing programs' at Hampton—a feature shared across the CIIS, Hampton, and numerous other boarding schools as a means of further enforcing assimilation through the double-move of subjecting children to the whims of settler families as well as preventing

them for returning home during ‘breaks.’ Dawson wrote a letter to her former teacher, Miss Richards, demonstrating her tendencies toward auto-didacticism despite the labor training inclinations of the outing program:

I have read my History and am now trying to study a little Botany. Oh Miss Richards how much there is to read and learn. They have good many nice books here which I would like very much to read but there is so little time. Miss Mattie has given me three other books to read after I finish ‘How the Plants Behave,’ the other is ‘Geology’ and the third is ‘Newman’s Rhetoric’ and others I wish I could read them all before going to Hampton” (Dawson qtd in Almeida, 113)<sup>50</sup>.

Leaving Hampton in 1887, Dawson enrolled at the Normal School at Framingham, Massachusetts (now Framingham State University). While at the Normal School, very little archival information is available about her day-to-day experiences or her schoolwork, however, when Hampton contacted her about her studies there, she replied:

In fuller answer to the fourth question I have been here a year and half. In that time, have studied, Geography, Logic, Geometry, Zoology, Botany, Arithmetic, Physiology, Psychology, English Grammar, Reading, Writing, Singing and Drawing; also United States History. (Dawson qtd in Almeida, 114)

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<sup>50</sup> I am thankful to Dierdre Ann Almeida, currently the Program Director of American Indian Studies at Eastern Washington University, whose dissertation at the University of Massachusetts, *The Role of Western Massachusetts in the Development of American Indian Education Reform through the Hampton Institute’s Summer Outing Program (1878-1912)*, served as a wonderful, centralized location for many of Dawson’s writing and letters, thereby sparing me the tedious task of itemizing them across their numerous locations. This includes the Hampton Archives for her letters, the newspaper of the boarding school, *The Southern Workman*, federal archives for her work as field matron, among numerous others.

Given the impressive scope and auto-didactic character of Dawson, one can assume that this was more of a cursory list of courses she was taking rather than a view of how she spent her time in Framingham; a means of satisfying Hampton's attempt to continue their surveillance of 'their' ~~Indians~~. In addition to her studies, during this time she also found time to write to Hampton regarding the ongoing controversy at the school around racial segregation and unequal treatment of the Black and Indigenous students at the school. She writes:

I heard that there has been a considerable and unfavorable talk concerning the Negroes and their influence over the Indians at Hampton. As I feel greatly interested and also thankful, for what Hampton has done and is doing for my race and me, I feel it my duty to say something in regard to that matter...Since my arrival at Hampton in the fall of 1879 till my departure from there last August, I found the Negroes friendly, and of great help to the Indians in many good ways, instead of an hindrance to us by our contact with them. (Dawson, qtd in Almeida, 115)

Indeed, we know that not all of Dawson's time at Framingham was devoted to her academic studies. During this time, she began her involvement with the burgeoning Indian Reform Movement. She along with, Walter Battice, another Hampton survivor who was attending the Normal School at Bridgewater, spoke before Indian associations in the Boston area. At one such event, mentioned in *The Southern Workman*, a short description is given of Dawson's involvement: "Annie Dawson and Walter Battice have been called upon to speak before the Indian Association of Jamaica Plains, Mass, and are reported as having done exceedingly well" (qtd in Almeida 114).

Anna completed her coursework and graduate from Framingham in only three years, leaving in 1890. That fall, she moved to Nebraska to work on the Santee Sioux reservation, finally returning home to Fort Berthold during a summer vacation in 1893. Having been ‘recruited’ at the disturbingly young age of six, this trip home, wherein she was joined by her friend De Cora as noted above, Dawson notes that this return home had the effect of “shattering the old ideals and revealing the real conditions of her people” (qtd in Almeida 115). This return trip home also solidified her commitment to move herself out of the formal classrooms of the institutional pedagogical spaces of schools that she had functionally grown up within and directly into the homes of the people. This critically shifts the terrain of her teaching to the more intimate spaces of the home and homelands. First returning to the Santee Sioux and saving money to enroll at the YWCA to study domestic science in Boston, Dawson moved one last time to Massachusetts. Spending two years in the city, Dawson dedicated herself not only to her studies, but to writing, speaking, organizing, and advocating for Indigenous peoples in every way she could. She became a well-known Indigenous figure in the city, interacting with numerous people of prominence in religious, political, and literary circles:

One of her closest friends in the East was Miss Alice Longfellow, daughter of the poet. She often visited Miss Alice at ‘Craigie House’ and a picture of her still (1968) hangs in the hall of the Longfellow home.

(Schall qtd in Almeida, 116)

Almeida further notes, based on an examination of letters to Hampton at the time, that Dawson became nearly overwhelmed from the combined forces of being a teacher, student, activist, organizer, speaker, and author simultaneously during her stay in Boston

(116-117), a combination of pressures and demands in the city that nearly broke her in ways the boarding schools were never able to accomplish.

## 8

*...and everything is everything...*

I remember walking in the sacred expanse depicted on the walls of Emerson College's art gallery with my grandfather, Edward Lone Fight, those same homelands to which Dawson was finally able to return—the very lands that changed her career trajectory, revectoring her desire, and shifted her pedagogy. I was just a little guy then, stumbling along beside my grandpa before telling him that I was hungry.

“OK grandson,” he said, walking a little further before stopping seemingly at random, taking out his pocketknife, and digging up a turnip.

“I used to eat these all the time as a little guy,” he says.

I munched happily on this gift from the land. Earthy, savory, crisp; a subtle sweetness and mild pepper that mingled with the smells of the warming land around us as it was heated by the brilliant sunlight of the day. The warming earth created natural and complimentary aromatics, a beautiful olfactory adjunct to the sensuous flavors of the turnip. Grandpa led us further along to a small spring among the undulating grassland, utterly invisible unless you are right on top of it.

“The water is good,” he says, looking out along the curvature of the earth that makes up the expansive horizon of home.

I wash off the turnip, take a bite, and a gulp down a few handfuls of the water from the spring. Sweet, refreshing, and mixed with the dust and dirt from my hands, the

water is a cool and satisfying herbaceous tea steeped in its nearby relatives, the medicines that grow there freely and to whom the spring helps give expression and life, and from whom it derives part of its own sensuous character and flavorful expression.

You are not separate from nature, you are not removed from it. [That] is an idea, and it's violent, and it's hurtful... [that idea] reinforce the idea of dominance and control...to experience one another as nature changes that whole dynamic. If we remove ourselves from the land, we remove ourselves from one another. And you create the idea of other out of that separation, that initial wound. But if you recognize yourself as an extension of the land, as an extension of nature, as extension of life, then where do I end and you begin?

One does not assume that a book translated into English from French by a German means the translator is now English, or that the original ideas were "English" in character; rather, we assume the translator/translation is attuned by a navigation *across* multiple linguistic forms to best approximate the ideas of the original: that through a process of intentional attunement one modulates and renders a distinct expression, a related but not identical configuration for the purpose of communicating an idea. Which is to say, the product of an intellectual endeavor does not represent the limits of the process that created it; rather, it represents the limits of the act of translation itself. Indeed, one need only ask a poet, who spend most of their time endeavoring to do just that. As such, in the case of Cannupa, Angel and Anna's art and pedagogy, it may be useful to think of how the product itself is vectored, translated, circulated, and what it does in that context, but I would submit that, if not sever, we at least heavily attenuate the tie between process and

product, such that it no longer hides from view the emancipatory potential of the processual pedagogical blockade as an educational and artistic endeavor itself.

There has been limited attention paid to Indigenous pedagogues themselves in scholarly work on the Indian Boarding Schools. Nevertheless, it strikes me that examinations of pedagogy that is practiced within and adjunct to the assimilation project are a vital part of understanding survivance pedagogy from within the teeth of the project of erasure, however, since the blockade itself serves as a vital part of the pedagogical practices within those contexts, it is difficult for the scholarly apparatus to penetrate the blockade. This is, of course, by design. Part of the reason for this is that those pedagogical approaches that most slip the bounds of the colonizing project do so largely by means of evading observation. There is scant evidence, for instance, of Angel's everyday classroom practice itself, of Anna's day-to-day interactions in the homes of her people. As Linda Wagonner points out in her biography of De Cora, De Cora's activities at the CIIS are noticeably absent from the usual school newspaper in the first two years of her teaching career. "Nevertheless," Wagonner notes, "Behind the doors of Angel's classroom, all sorts of newfound old ideas were finding expression" (135)—"newfound old ideas," that is, ancestral future technologies.

## 9

*...and everything is very, very strange.*

As I finish writing this, I'm sitting in the center of a reconstructed—or perhaps deconstructed is the better word—MHA earth-lodge at the MHA Interpretive Center at Fort Berthold on my homelands. A state-of-the-art archival facility as well as museum,

the soaring ceiling of the lobby rises to meet the smoke hole where, directly above where I now sit, a glassed geometric dome meets the sky above. Within this interiority-in-interiority—inside the building and further inside the positioned earthlodge reconstruction—I sit within sacred ancestral futural space. An important place for the contemporary expression of our past, present, and future, our interpretive center meets here in a milieu that characterizes our peoples' worldview. We move forward with our eyes on our presently living past as it conditions the future horizon of our people. The blockade of sacrality is made formal policy here: no cameras or other recording devices are allowed inside the doors of the interpretive center. What is inside can only be recorded in memory and by direct sensory apprehension of the experiential reality of the space. The settler inclination to document, record, and otherwise capture that experiential reality is explicitly blockaded.

Much of the location is off limits to non-tribal members, a means of further emphasizing that the location is a place for the people, by the people, and about the people. As I walk along the roof-top gardens in the restricted area above the main floor that offers a view of the nearby earth-lodge village, the beautiful outdoor amphitheater, and the sweeping expanse of Lake Sakakwea, I am simultaneously gazed upon by large metal statues of our former/present/future chiefs that are positioned along the buttes around the center, ever keeping a watchful eye over their people. Neither the futurity nor the blockaded character of the center is a hidden. One of the most striking elements of the design when you first walk in the doors is this wooden earth lodge design in which I sit, which also serves as the main lobby area as described where one can purchase our locally roasted miri?shibisha (water performing blackness; coffee) or a shot of nuusháb (hurry

up!; espresso) along with a bowl of “Old Mandan Soup,” made with our traditional sacred four foods: squash, what are now called “Great Northern White Beans—a gift from my grandma, maxidiwia (Buffalo-Bird Woman) from her garden that was then trademarked and sold across the world, a bean that, if you’re any good at making chili, you’ve likely enjoyed yourself—corn, and sunflower. Festooned with multicolored neon lights, this interior-interior earthlodge immediately called to mind my relative Cannupa’s exhibit, with its neon, solar-paneled construction, the sacred blockade of interiority—the ancestral future technologies, both in their material expression and those non-material technologies of our ways, worldview, and knowledge.

As noted above, the daily practice of De Cora’s pedagogy, the specific daily activities of her classrooms, is largely hidden from historical view, which, it would seem, is by design. Angel created a space for the recovery and discovery of Indigenous identity through the authorization of self-determination at the epistemological level of *process*, and she cleared the space for this emancipatory pedagogy by isolating it from the surveillance of the educational institution. After De Cora’s death, Natalie Curtis, her friend, wrote of Angel’s life and pedagogical practice. I include a large portion of an anecdote she wrote about De Cora’s pedagogical practices here:

First of all, her classes were told that they need not copy the teacher, nor anybody else. The children were to express *themselves*. ... Her manner of teaching was to set her scholars a given task and then leave the room, freeing her pupils from the restraint of the teacher’s presence.

To a group of professors who were visiting Hampton Institute, Angel told with a laugh how she had one day set her pupils at a certain

kind of weaving and had given them new knives with which to cut the ends of the threads. When she came back, the looms were untouched; not a pupil had done his work, but perfect order prevailed.

As Angel walked through the room one of the pupils held out to her his new knife, whose handle was beautifully incased in a woven hilt...[t]hey had invented both the idea and the stitch, and the result was so original that Angel De Cora, as she examined each child's work, praised heartily the skill expressed, all untaught and untrammelled.

'But,' objected one professor, solemnly, 'they hadn't done the work that you had told them to do. Did you not reprimand them for that?'

'Why? They were doing nothing intentionally wrong and they had invented a new bit of art craftsmanship. In my classes, we are all there simply to learn how to make beautiful things. So I said to them, 'I want to learn your stitch; now *you* must teach *me*! And I became their pupil. I believe that teachers and pupils should inter-change ideas.' (Natalie Curtis, "An American Indian Artist," 1920)

Both Dawson and De Cora disengage the value of the educational process from being exclusively determined by the product. This allows for the manipulation of the product within a type of processual agency. This process is left alone to be less conditioned. In this sense, they both use the ~~Indian~~, and, in Angel's case, ~~Indian Art~~ to seize the *process* of production—which is to say, the means of production, a sentiment expressed by other thinkers who, like so many Europeans, capitalized on already extant Indigenous governmental forms and tried to call it their own revolutionary idea. Not to

change its productive efficiency, or to exact discipline from the students, but to revector the trajectory by which it is attained into something more. To mobilize the excess that inheres in the educational process for other purposes. This is a form of survivance pedagogy. It is not ideal, but neither is it without agency. It is often inelegant. Capitulative. Compromising. It rarely appears in the same way twice; it is eminently particular. It is the active process that lounges across the threshold of survival, endurance, and resistance. Knowledge—contextual, iterative, extensive, and sacred—must come into relation on its own terms, it cannot be enforced and disciplined into submission and then forced to defend itself from an aggressor. By focusing on *process* and expression in pedagogical systems, Cannupa, Angel, and Anna utilize Indigenous epistemologies and traditional teaching in sometimes surreptitious ways that engage with complicity and compromise, agency, and Indigenous sovereignty. This is the broad spectrum that characterizes the Indigenous encounter with the Indian Boarding School system—indeed, with settler-educational systems to this day. It is a teaching style that responds to the institutional pressures of colonization by disengaging the knowledge acquisition process from its instrumental position within settler-colonialism and allows it to more freely orient based on the self-determined, relational, and mutually inter-changed determinations of a classroom community itself.

## 10

*My people are from Wisconsin. We used to be from New York.*

*We had a little real estate problem.* -Stand-up comedian Charlie Hill (Oneida Nation)

Captured by the Indian Boarding School System at the age of six, it took Anna a long time to come home. She is Sahnish—we are also variously called ‘Arikara,’ ‘Arickaree,” and ‘Ree.’ Her given name is Spahananadaka, a type of flower, likely the *rosa blanda*, or prairie rose. I like that she ended up taking a name that was contained within her Sahnish name, Anna. I like to think that either her mother or she herself chose “Anna” as her settler-name because the sounds are repeated twice in her Sahnish name: Spahananadaka. My grandmother, Dorreen Yellow Bird, remembers visiting the elderly Dawson, helping to take care of her in her dotage. Grandma remembers that she carried with her during her entire life a “strange Boston accent from out east.” While I know the pain and significant hurdles that were overcome—a life’s difficult journey that the accent represents—I also can’t help but smile at the thought of one of our elders with a thick Boston accent. Likely, the accent was less the familiar non-rhoticity, widened vowels, and clipped speech of an actual Boston accent. Rather, she probably possessed some sort of mélange between the regions of Virginia and Western Massachusetts where she spent most of her time “out east”—shorthand back home for basically anywhere east of Minnesota. Nevertheless, her speech marked her travails, her travels, and her incredible, circular journey to find herself there, home once again after all she went through and being helped by my grandmother and other relatives in the final years of her life.

MHA Nation has suffered numerous landgrabs as have so many tribes, however, the most recent in our collective memory is the betrayal of the bottomlands. We are river people and have always situated ourselves along the Missouri River. After continuous removals and relocations, we became concentrated around a smaller and smaller land base, eventually residing largely in our capitol city, which was called Elbowoods. Most

of this town and surrounding agricultural areas were located along the Missouri River bottomlands, between the current towns of Four Bears and New Town. These lands are made fertile by the regular mild flooding of the river. For our people, who have been agriculturalists and ‘farmers’ (large-scale gardeners; we don’t have a word for “farm”) for our entire history<sup>51</sup>, this was and is sacred ground, and the bottomlands located us also below the surrounding bluffs, which provided important protection from the wind during the brutally cold winters of the upper Midwest. In 1943, the settler government, in the interests of the settlers located proximal to other parts of the Missouri, decided it was time to control this regular, rhythmic, seasonal flooding to open more space for settler farmers and protect their inflexible farming practices. Referred to as the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program, a series of dams was proposed to pacify and attenuate these natural cycles of flooding as well as to provide hydroelectric power to numerous settler cities, easy irrigation for settler farms, and recreational opportunities for settlers more generally.

The Garrison Dam, one of the many dams proposed, began construction in 1947. In 1949, as a last-ditch effort to prevent the government from destroying our capitol and taking away our homes, farms, and towns—to prevent the relocation of our people from where we have happily lived and thrived for a millennium—a delegation to DC was assembled. Anna (Dawson) Wilde joined the delegation. She was 78, the eldest member of the delegation, and the only female selected to represent her people in this task.

Mobilizing her rhetorical skills, traditional knowledge, cultural history, and her

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<sup>51</sup> We presented a difficulty for the settler government because killing off the bison had less of an effect on our tribes than others in the area, such as the Oceti Sakowin. It was much harder to starve us out: we grew our food, for which we were renowned. All we needed was our good earth, our able bodies, and our traditional knowledge.

familiarity with settler institutions, she did her best to prevent the coming tragedy. She spoke to assembled governmental representations in DC:

I represent the Arickarees. My name is Anna D. Wilde. I am from Fort Berthold, and I am one of those living in the strip that is to be flooded...We are endeavoring to quiet agitations of fault and dealings in all forms. Although this change of living has produced serious discussions upon the subject, we feel that all has been accomplished that can be done.

The mothers of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation have suffered severe heartaches brought about in connection with the construction of the Garrison Dam project in our locality.

Our ancestors and forefathers gave us our land and homes, which our United States Government in peace treaties promised would be ours forever. Our forefathers were long-visioned and provided extensive areas for hunting grounds. In this abounded much buffalo, elk, deer, et cetera, for food.

The men want to hunt and war. The old-time mothers remained at home to keep house and to do farm work. The game, which the men brought home, the women tanned and converted into moccasins, shirts, leggings, and jackets. The meat was conserved by slicing thin, dried and stored away. This was for eating during gardening and harvesting the vegetable products for another year.

The mother tilled her garden with a shoulder blade of a buffalo tied to a stick. From her garden, the harvest was a large crop of corn, beans,

and squash. It was from such a supply that she furnished seeds to the pale-faced stranger, who had come into our midst.

Along the Missouri River bottom land grow different kinds of berries which are picked and preserved...The events of today are changing rapidly. We mothers are confronted with heart-rending problems for our children and youth of tomorrow. It is cutting the heart right out of life of our people in the thought of problems of the near future. What humane justification can be offered to suffice the sad plight into which our children have been thrown? What consideration for their best future welfare be granted? We mothers continue in prayer for humane justification.

So that again we may take heart and feel we may rightfully hold up our head to sing. My Country 'Tis of Thee. (Dawson qtd in "Providing for the Ratification by Congress" 75-77)

Despite the rhetorical positioning and attempt to pull on the settler-nationalism of the government, it was simply not enough.

This was not Anna's fault, nor any of our peoples.' Nothing would have been enough for the settler hunger for more land to house more immigrants and less Indigenous people. The forces aligned against our people and the dismissive attitude toward Indigenous rights and interests were too great. On June 11, 1953, the Garrison Dam was dedicated. This is not a day of celebration for my people. 156,000 acres were flooded. Hundreds and hundreds of families were forced to relocate—80% of our members, of my relatives, were forced to pick up from where we had been for so long and move to the new town created "for" us: "New Town."

No one has ever accused the federal government of being particularly creative or inventive in any capacity, and the naming of this new town simply adds to the characterization.

Threatened by loss of the land with no compensation given whatsoever through the exertion of eminent domain, the land was taken through coercive treaty by a government whose only interests were for those of the settlers and their desire to continue their encroachment onto and around our traditional territories. The final agreement eliminated 90% of our timber, 94% of our agricultural land, and 75% of traditional wildlife lands. Nearly all our farms, our homes, our traditional ways of life along the river's edge—all gone, lost to the waters of what is now called Lake Sakakawea, ironically named for one of our people, Cagaga-wia (Bird Woman), the famed Hidatsa who helped Lewis and Clark navigate and gain passage across the western half of the American continent during the explorative conquest that turned out to be a trial run for manifest destiny.

Decades later, my grandfather, Edward Lone Fight, took up this cause once again. Seeking just compensation for the land that was surrendered under coercive circumstances, he forcefully articulated the case as our Tribal Chairman that the tribe was due more agreeable compensation for the tremendous damage done by the federal government's decision. My grandfather was a grown man when the flood destroyed these large swaths of our homelands. This is not ancient history for him, for me, for our people, nor should it be for anyone else. These acts were and are still a part of living memory. Testifying before congress, meeting with then-President Ronald Reagan, and masterfully articulating the case that the tribe was owed for what was taken, he successfully

negotiated a partial compensation package for the actions of the federal government. However, monetary compensation is, of course, hardly equal to the tremendous damage done by these actions. Nevertheless, by successfully arguing that the actions were taken in a way that doesn't "pass the any-damn-fool-should-know test" given it was "negotiations under duress," my grandfather has also forcefully articulated that what occurred with the construction of the Garrison Dam was "not stealing, [it was] murder" (E Lone Fight qtd in "Potential Transfer of Garrison Project Lands" 45). To this day, MHA Nation does not have included within their sovereign territory the shoreline of the lake. This interpretive center in which I sit is on leased land from the Army Corps of Engineers, sitting on the edge of Lake Sakakwea as it does. The concern being, it seems, that if we were given control of the shoreline, we might interfere with the settlers that enjoy fishing and boating in the waters. That is, our sovereign jurisdiction over the shore is abrogated because it might get in the way of a local farmer launching his boat. I mention this to be crystal clear on this point: the *future recreational rights* of settlers in the area continue to take priority over the present and *future sovereign rights* of our tribe in the eyes of the settler state.

I have no clear landing spot here. I share the above because it's important—I share all this knowledge in my work because it's important. I also share this last bit of knowledge because it's one of the last public interactions with the settler government that Anna had, because my grandfather took up the cause decades later, and because I have been told all through my life to get an education because it's something they can't take from you. "All they can take is the paper," my grandfather would remind me. And, through it all, we continue to get up, dust ourselves off, dry our tears, give thanks for

what we have, and keep fighting, living, and learning. It's simply what we do and who we are. And we have no intention of stopping.

*And then they went west. That's what they say.*



*Figure 5 George Gillette, watching the final Garrison Dam agreement being signed. He notes, "Right now the future doesn't look too good for us."*



*Figure 6 Carrie Anderson, Anna Dawson, and Susie Walker. I am directly descended from the Walker sisters: Susie, shown here, Mary, and Sarah.*



*Figure 7 Mold of Anna Dawson's head taken when she was a child at Hampton. Clark Mills; plaster, c. 1879; Le Muséum national d'Histoire Naturelle, (it being so very natural) Paris. Our tribe was contacted to ask if we'd like to 'comment' on it.*

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