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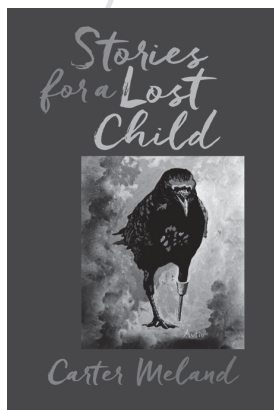
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FROM THE EDITOR

This special issue, which is focused on digital Indigenous studies, examines the increasing importance of digital media on multiple forms of Indigenous self-representation and the increasing impact of digital media on multiple forms of Indigenous activism. Expertly guest edited by film and media scholar Joanna Hearne and produced in the era of the Idle No More and #NODAPL movements, the special issue places specific emphasis on the gendered uses and gendered effects of digital technologies and platforms in Indigenous contexts. Hearne's thoughtful introduction is followed by an interview with Native media artist Elizabeth LaPensée, whose evocative *The Women, They Hold the Ground* serves as a special cover for this special issue, and innovative essays that cover a wide range of digital production by Indigenous women authors, artists, and filmmakers by Susan Bernardin, Channette Romero, Margaret Noodin and Stacie Sheldon, Angelica Lawson, Kristin Dowell, and Danika Medak-Saltzman. The issue closes with an afterword by Native film scholar Michelle Raheja.

Chadwick Allen

INTRODUCTION

Native to the Device

Thoughts on Digital Indigenous Studies

JOANNA HEARNE

In studies of Indigenous film and video, the camera has been a powerful metaphor for Indigenous struggles over control of the image. This is articulated most vividly in Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay's invocation of the camera's contrapuntal position, embedded in the mechanics of shot / reverse shot, to characterize Indigenous and settler filmmaking in his seminal essay "Celebrating Fourth Cinema." He imagines the settler perspective—"First Cinema"—represented by "the camera of the ship's deck," while an Indigenous perspective—"Fourth Cinema"—arises from the "camera ashore" (8–9). Barclay visualizes this staged encounter, from ship to shore, in terms of lines of sight—the eyeline match edit—and the politics of conquest. It is a metaphor with geographic specificity (in Aotearoa) that is also global, connecting lands, peoples, and representation through the articulated positionalities of encounter. Barclay applies it broadly, asserting that Fourth Cinema exists "outside the national orthodoxy" altogether while tracing the transnational heritage of dominant film storytelling to the originary scene of settler colonialism (9). He illustrates the camera of the ship's deck with examples from the film *Mutiny on the Bounty*. To show the global relevance of his vision of the camera ashore, we might take up the example of Abenaki director Alanis Obomsawin's 2002 documentary *Is the Crown at War with Us?*, in which we see home videos of Mi'gmaq tribal members' confrontation with the Canadian federal fishery office over fishing rights in Miramichi Bay. From the shore, Mi'gmaq cameras capture evidence of Department of Fisheries and Oceans' boats violently running over the much smaller boats of the Mi'gmaq fishers of Burnt Church, New Brunswick.



Fig. 1. The camera on the ship. *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Frank Lloyd, dir. Starring Clark Gable. MGM, 1935.



Fig. 2. The camera on the ship. *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Lewis Milestone, dir. Starring Marlon Brando. MGM, 1962.

In these examples, while the camera of the ship's deck activates pre-circulating settler colonial origin stories—in this case, the hoary tropes of available land and women (see Marubbio)—that continue to shape the legal and social structures affecting Indigenous lives, in Obomsawin's film the camera ashore reveals evidence of the ongoing, state-sponsored violence of territorial and oceanic domination. My point is



Fig. 3. The camera ashore. *Is the Crown at War with Us?*, Alanis Obomsawin, dir. NFB, 2002.



Fig. 4. The camera ashore. *Is the Crown at War with Us?*, Alanis Obomsawin, dir. NFB, 2002.

not that Indigenous cameras unmask First Cinema's colonial fantasies (although they do that here also) but rather that politically oppositional locations are embedded in the *function* of the camera, its mimicry of a gendered, colonial gaze, its formal grammar, and its imbrication in systems of dominant cinema production.

But the metaphor of the camera—and the sovereignty of the camera that has been the focus of Indigenous media studies—works less well as a descriptor of *digital* Indigenous studies. The singular directionality of the camera doesn't represent such elements of the digital as 360-degree virtual reality and gamic space; interactivity; mobile computing; spatial tagging and locative media; asynchronous and networked communication; the archival, sonic, and visual collage aesthetics of sampling, mash-ups, and remixes; big data and data surveillance; data visualization; changing software, platforms, and interfaces; hypermedia documents in Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML); textual and linguistic codes developed for brevity (e.g., NDN); GIS and digital mapping; ecomedia and the planned obsolescence of hardware; or digital media's privileging of animation and graphic design. As this list suggests, the digital is not without its own symbolic (and actual) apparatus, but in place of the metaphor of the camera, with its powerfully directional prosthetic eye, we find new sites of coercion, resistance, intervention, and expression in the multidirectional uptake of hardware, software, and code. Digital media upends the indexicality of the photographic image, as live action footage becomes just another kind of pixel (see Manovich). And with that loss of photographic indexicality as the centering, dominant mode of visual media, there is no feeling of an antecedent "real" taking credit for how things look. We are thrown back onto authorship, attribution, and artifice, reminded always that we are experiencing something that someone has made. The craft and the personhood behind digital media production call to us more urgently, even as identities become yet more effectively masked by avatars, software interfaces, and global corporate production pipelines.

This issue of *SAIL* seeks to better "understand how difference matters in the digital era," to quote new media theorist Tara McPherson, by considering how Indigenous women's artistic productions in the digital sphere model ethical relationships of the material to the virtual. I begin with the premise that digital spaces—the space of the screen, as well as the less visible spaces of the cloud and the database—are Indigenous territories. These spaces, akin to what Seneca scholar Michelle Raheja terms cinematic "virtual reservations," are sites of conflict, of resistance against exclusion and exploitation (9). David Gaertner aligns the virtual with what he calls "landless" urban space, defining cyberspace as "the notional environment generated through computer networks" and

asserting that it “is one of the cities that indigenous peoples now populate” (56). Chickasaw scholar and game theorist Jodi Byrd describes digital games as iterations of late colonial proceduralism, dependent upon conventions such as enclosure and capture (2016:1). Yet digital realms remain simultaneously more open than traditional cinema to those who are marginalized within dominant image systems. While the structures of traditional film production are notoriously discriminatory—overwhelmingly organizing men into positions of creative control, lead roles, and key functions such as director of photography—digital platforms for aesthetic production and activism, such as social media networking, low-cost independent short-form film and animation production, and web-based distribution systems, are far more available to Indigenous women and have a pronounced youth orientation. (For statistics on women in the film industry, see documents available through the website of the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at <http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research.html>.) Adrienne Shaw draws our attention further to the critical overdetermination of player identification in gaming studies, which tend to posit stable, market-defined identities to players, as well as unexamined assumptions that players always wish to identify with characters that “match” their identity. She argues that studies of representation should take into account “the fluidity, performativity, and contextuality of identity categories” (15), as well as their instability, multiplicity, intersectionality, and sometimes negotiated visibility. Examining the way short digital formats create opportunities for women in positions of creative control and story focalization reveals major shifts within Native digital media’s current moment: digital profiles allow options for flexible gender identification; new kinds of performativity are inclusive of amateur aesthetics, parody, and genre appropriation; digital production can enable adaptable, less hierarchical systems of media production; and computers and handheld devices are more accessible in domestic contexts. A recent *Toronto Film Scene* article on the sharp increase in First Nations short film production notes that short films are not tied to complex funding structures or narrative formats as feature-length films generally are: “The volume of shorts is not only tied to the inherent popularity and ease of production associated with the format, but also the desire within the indigenous filmmaking community to express a personal and political identity via a medium that allows for such displays to thrive” (Birk).

Indigenous women bring these dynamics to bear on intergenerational projects of language revitalization and cultural continuity, Indigenous futures, reconciliation, relationships with the nonhuman world, activist movements, domestic arts, youth media production, and imaginative engagement with the past and future through experimentalism and genre play. From short films and animations to gallery installations to networked communication, Indigenous women's digital productions retrieve stories from media-saturated memoryscapes and Indigenize settler colonial representational strategies. Using digital means of transmission expands the audiovisual reach of Indigenous languages and supports the appropriation of established genres, including science fiction, fantasy, and animation. As Channette Romero argues in her article in this volume, Indigenous women artists actively situate "themselves and their viewers within arts traditions that historically helped humans negotiate their interdependent place within the natural world."

In order to broadly frame the essays that follow, I want to consider the specificity of Indigenous digital studies in light of an array of land-based metaphors for digital media—the web, the rhizome, and the river. The way we talk about the digital—our figurative language—suggests our imaginative engagement with intangible elements of place (web "sites") and time (the digital "age") (see Ginsburg). Following Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday's field-defining assertion that "we are what we imagine" (167), Cherokee/Hawaiian/Samoan digital media poet, artist, and software designer Jason Edward Lewis reminds us that "technology designers and developers design much more than mere functionality. Rather, they design the epistemological protocols through which culture operates" and ultimately "choose what counts as knowledge" (61). He points further to "the necessity of metaphor" rather than instrumental or literal thought to help us wrap our minds around the scale and complexity of our digital media environment, to "find a way to traverse a terrain stretching from the spirit to the human to the machine worlds" (67).

While there are many other ways to understand the digital—software studies, platform histories, media archaeology, new materialist approaches, among others—I introduce this issue with a meditation on some of the ways that Indigenous women artists have initiated an "Indigenization" of digital media through imaginative forms of claiming, a symbolic appropriation that accompanies tactical repurposing. Indigenizing—what Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes as

centering “a politics of Indigenous identity and Indigenous cultural action”—turns priority toward Indigenous purpose and privileges Indigenous voices (146–47). I focus especially on Indigenous women artists’ productive negotiations of the digital mediascape—their counterstories to settler colonial media, as well as their vital agency in reimagining the digital as a site of possibility, or a space for what Danika Medak-Saltzman aptly terms, in her article in this issue, “the art of the possible.” The essays in this issue also take up the ways that digital Indigenous studies engage with the literary, the metaphorical, and the lyrical, including poem-films, short narrative media, songs, and languages. In addition to asserting the fundamental importance of Indigenous women to digital Indigenous studies as a whole, this issue reflects on ways that Indigenous women have used digital media to produce artistic, cultural, and political interventions in systems—including digital systems—of material and symbolic domination and settler colonialism. Originating with Indigenous women artists, scholars, and activists, these conceptualizations reterritorialize the digital as Indigenous space, engaging the ethics and politics of occupation across physical and virtual lands and reconnecting our world and our screens.

With an eye toward the well-developed critical discourse around the medium specificity of cinema, we can ask how the medium specificity of the digital intersects with specificities of Indigeneity. By “specificities of Indigeneity” I engage what Lenape scholar Joanne Barker calls “the polity of the Indigenous,” which she defines as “the unique governance, territory and culture of an Indigenous people in a system of (non) human relationships and responsibilities to one another” (2). Her articulation of Indigenous feminisms affirms an “Indigenous polity,” a model that includes political sovereignty and encompasses the anti-imperialist potentialities of the digital, as well as the relational elements that I want to privilege in this essay.

How might such an intersection of digital and Indigenous specificities take place in a way that is “native to the device”; that is, how might Indigenous specificity be embedded in shared platforms that are central to all of our digital lives? My title comes from the language that app developers use to describe software that powers the basic functionalities of mobile devices. Unlike web-based programs or downloadable apps (PayPal, LinkedIn, Evernote, eBay, Facebook), “native” applications are integral to mobile technology, written into its platforms to enhance the

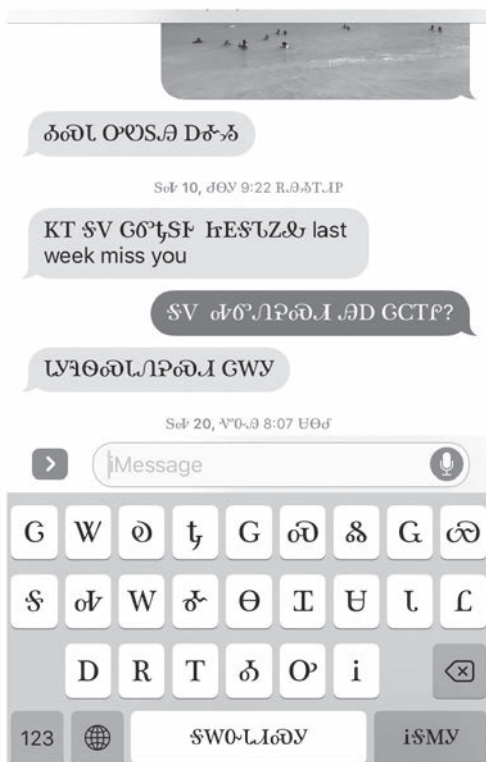


Fig. 5. Cherokee on the iPhone. Image courtesy Joseph Erb.

basic functions of the device (e.g., capturing images or sounds through camera or recorder; sensing environment, light, temperature, orientation, or movement; languages; geolocation; interaction with other devices; offline work; real-time notifications). For example, the Cherokee syllabary, which Cherokee artist Joseph Erb worked to build into the interface of Apple's iPhone and iPad (as well as Microsoft, Google, and Facebook), is not a web-based or downloadable app but rather embedded in the platform itself, what companies term native to the device (Evans; see also Erb, Hearne, and Palmer).

We can begin to address questions of a specifically Indigenous approach to digital studies by considering a series of metaphors already in circulation and already entwined with activist movements. The camera, as a discrete machine, is easy to imagine as a symbol for the

language of the visual, but digital media and networks have also been imagined by Indigenous artists, activists, and intellectuals in ways that foreground relationships with land, water, and the nonhuman world. In a 1996 post, Tuscarora scholar Jolene Rickard (the mind who brought us “Sovereignty: A Line in the Sand”) introduced the CyberPowWow website with the question “Wasn’t it the Hopi who warned of a time when the world would be circled by a spider’s web of power lines?” The CyberPowWow site (1996–2004) was created by the artist collective Nation to Nation and consisted of what Steven Loft describes as “a series of interconnected, graphical chatrooms” (179). The metaphor of the spiderweb is part of the origin story of the Internet itself, Indigenized by Rickard and others and now in general common use (see Thomas 136–37; Ginsburg 287–88). Gabriel Estrada likens “Spider Woman’s World Wide Web” to Leslie Marmon Silko’s description of “Tse’itsi’nako, Thought Woman,” describing Internet-based creative pedagogy as “an electronic extension of Spider Woman’s knowledge on the World Wide Web, where all perception is interrelated and rapidly evolving” (48–49).

Contrary to lingering popular assumptions about traditionalism as a form of stasis, one of the most important Indigenous traditions “guarded by Indian communities,” as Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham asserts, “is dynamism” (qtd. in Loft 182). The survival of traditional stories, histories, and contracts has long depended upon shared responsibility for generational transfer through both oral transmission and mnemonic systems. Angela Haas, in her article “Wampum as Hypertext,” points out that “wampum belts have extended human memories of inherited knowledges through interconnected, nonlinear designs and associative storage and retrieval methods—long before the ‘discovery’ of Western hypertext” (77). Haas and Mohawk curator Steven Loft argue further that sign technologies—not only wampum but also masks, winter counts, petroglyphs, birch bark scrolls, Aztec codices, star quilts, drums, songs, and earthworks—come with “their own set of ‘literacies’” and can function in ways resembling hypertext, “Web sites, blogs and instant messages” (Haas 94). Transmission and dissemination of knowledge across shared spaces privilege interactivity, simultaneity, and transformation, values that are also highlighted in certain kinds of traditional stories. In his essay “Mediacosmology,” Loft describes the digital as a kind of space Indigenous peoples have always had:



Fig. 6. Spider. *Injunuity*: “Tongues.” Adrian Baker, dir. Vision Maker Media, 2013.

“[C]yberspace” is a networked territory, a shared space defined and articulated through the connections we have with it. Thus, it has always existed for Aboriginal people as the repository of our collected and shared memory. That hardware technology has made it accessible through a tactile regime in no way diminishes its power as a spiritual, cosmological, and mythical “realm.” The mere fact that it also holds an overabundance of porn, gimmicky, advertisements, and even hateful propaganda takes nothing from its place as a mystical space (it is, after all, a shared territory, with all the attendant colonial baggage that brings along). (175)

(In addition to the well-established image of the web, I would add that these exaggerated deleterious qualities also signal the resemblance of digital space to a certain creative/destructive Indigenous story genre that many of us are familiar with, featuring a four-legged central character with fur and a tail.) Tracking the convergence of the web and the Web—from the spider’s web described in intertribal prophecies, to the symbols of reclaimed relational and ecological knowledge in the mid- and late twentieth-century work of Indigenous writers and artists, to the earliest days of Internet chat rooms—reveals not only the ongoing relevance of traditional epistemologies but also the recognition, through premonition and experience, of the powers, dangers, and possibilities of networked space.

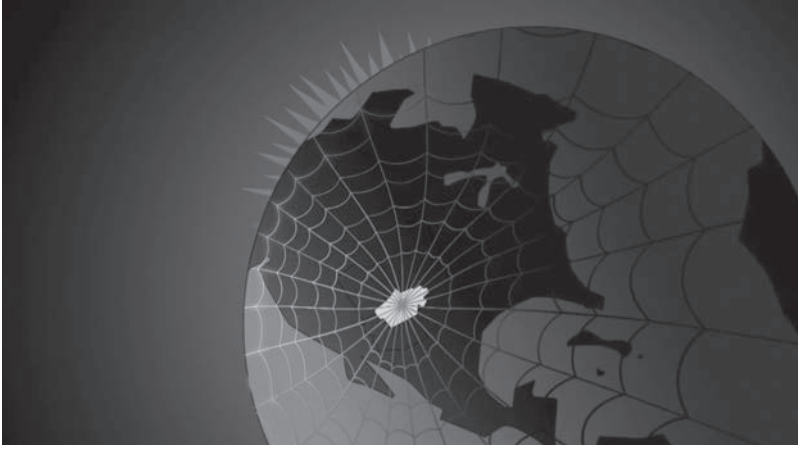


Fig. 7. World Wide Web. *Injunuity: "Tongues."* Adrian Baker, dir. Vision Maker Media, 2013.

More recently, the social media networks enabled by the internet have been characterized as resembling the "rhizome" that some Idle No More activists have said is emblematic of their grassroots work. Begun in 2012 by a small group of Indigenous and allied women, Idle No More's peaceful revolutionary movement seeks to "honour Indigenous sovereignty and to protect the land & water," especially through public protests against environmentally destructive legislation in Canada (www.idlenomore.ca). Cree scholar and activist Alex Wilson describes Idle No More's participatory model using this analogy of a rhizomatic plant, *weegess* or wild ginger, which indicates spiritual connection and relationality. Like rhizomatic growth, Idle No More's movement is regenerating continually in service of revolutionary education, Indigenous sovereignty, body sovereignty, and protection of land and waters. It is underpinned by the Cree concept of *sakihiwawin*, or "love in our actions." Wilson likens Idle No More's model of *weegess* to theories put forward by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on "rhizomatic growth":

I like to use the example of *weegess*. *Weegess* is a plant, known in English as muskrat root or wild ginger. It grows in the swamps and is used by Cree people as a medicine with spiritual significance. It links us to our origin story and embodies and elicits a special energy. The root grows laterally, in a non-hierarchical way. When



Fig. 8. River. *Injunuity*: “Tongues.” Adrian Baker, dir. Vision Maker Media, 2013.

you break off one piece, new tendrils grow, and so it is continually regenerating. This is how Idle No More is. Lately some of us have been using the term “bushroots” rather than grassroots, since it makes sense for those of us from the bush. I also think this is why social media has played such an important role in Idle No More as well. The internet is increasingly accessible and has been a way to quickly share information.

Wilson’s vision of the proliferant nature of Idle No More’s digital activism is consonant with some broader recent theorizing of the digital medium itself. Alexander Galloway, for example, returns us to the source of the word “digital” in the digits of fingers and toes, arguing that “digitization at the level of the aesthetic regime itself” is best understood not with stories of historical transition from analog to digital in a developmental model but instead, fundamentally, as a process of “the division of one into two.” Idle No More has been especially successful using Twitter, Facebook, and other social media to turn a few into many, translating digital communication into powerful collective action through flash mobs and demonstrations in malls and other public spaces. (For a critical take on the way platforms like Facebook emphasize such numbers, see Grosser.) The way in which digital replication can become ethical action is also gendered, according to Wilson:

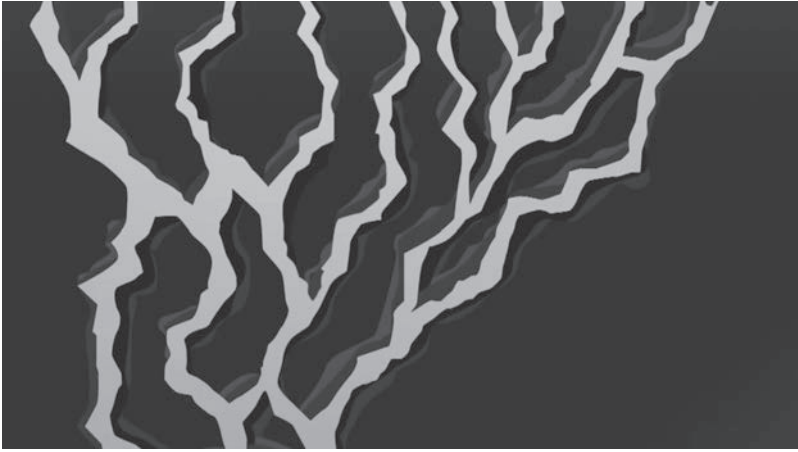


Fig. 9. River delta. *Injunuity: "Tongues."* Adrian Baker, dir. Vision Maker Media, 2013.

Social media has given us the opportunity to provide some analysis around gender. Since body sovereignty and gender self-determination have been principal to the movement from the beginning, I think it is important to reflect on trends and the use of social media. An interesting point made in a one-year analysis . . . was that the movement was unlike other recent movements, in that social media was predominantly used by women. (Roewan and Wilson)

Indigenous theories of mimesis return us to questions of replication at the heart of media theory. In the context of critical and commercial anxieties over a mediascape dominated by rampant copying, Idle No More's rhizomatic model allows us to see the *generative* digitality of "one into two" as a relational approach to issues of mechanical reproduction and to the work of story survival across oral, print, and electronic modes of transmission. The principle of "one into two" also suggests translation and the way that digital replication can catalyze ethical action. In contrast to much extant theorization of the copy as "subversive" of the power of the original, to which it is opposed, Carcross/Tagish curator Candace Hopkins writes of Native oral expression, which prominently features repetition: "Reading across the contradictions in storytelling is

generative, as it reveals a worldview: one in which . . . originality exists within the copy, where change is an inherent part of tradition” (qtd. in Hearne 198).

Expanding the land-based vocabulary for describing the Indigenous digital to include waterways, Susan Bernardin, in her analysis of Heid E. Erdrich’s short poem-film *Pre-Occupied* in this issue, argues that images of rivers and their deltas express the flow, trade connectivity, and networked structure of the digital and the Internet. Referring to both a specific river—the Mississippi—and the importance of rivers to Indigenous tribes more generally, she adds “rivers” to “spiderwebs” and “rhizomes” as ways that Indigenous women activists have explicitly connected spiritual and tribal frameworks to the fundamental forms and structures of digital media.

Rivers carry water from which all life is made, and at the same time they are among the most ancient paths of human travel. Thus rivers—and the deltas and watersheds formed from them—are at once life-giving entities and interstitial spaces of transit. They are relationship-building, boundary-making, and boundary-busting manifestations of human, nonhuman, ecological, and territorial interdependence. Rivers call us to care for the needs of others by protecting the water of those downstream. The water protectors of #NODAPL (No to the Dakota Access Pipeline) and the Standing Rock and intertribal camps at the confluence of the Missouri and Cannonball Rivers articulate with their presence that waterways are shared and participatory. The camps on the riverbanks have become what Cree scholar Karyn Recollet might call “the interstice, that space of in-betweenness, where practices of solidarity and significant pedagogies of resistance, such as the notion of radical decolonial love, can emerge” (130).

An Indigenous-led movement of liberation, #NODAPL honors Indigenous peoples as first-line protectors of land and water and connects material, on-the-ground activism with communities upstream and downstream, as well as digital followers globally who show support and solidarity by witnessing images and testimonies of prayer, protest, courage, risk, harm, and trauma; by their Facebook “check-ins”; by making monetary and material donations; by sharing consciousness-raising posts and documents; by creating, reading, and forwarding online syllabi and protocols for teach-ins and self-teaching; by their shared graphics and animations; and by making statements of solidarity—Mni

Wiconi, “water is life.” On-site, a new generation of youth activists learn “creative solidarities” that acknowledge, incorporate, and “rely on rupture as a generative practice” (Recollet 141). Like other contemporary decolonial Indigenous rights movements—the urban flash mobs of #IdleNoMore and the geolocated media campaigns of #MMIW (missing and murdered Indigenous women)—#NODAPL creates physical and digital “Indigenous hub spaces” where “youth develop a critical consciousness through the creation of new media and the use of technology to mobilize” (142), resulting in “new spatial geographies of resistance” (131). Many of these mobilizations and ceremonies are led by women, including the powerful ceremonial women’s Jingle Dress dance that was allowed to be recorded and shared on digital media in late October 2016 because the dancers wanted “the healing power to be shared with the world” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkvsKGAJyI>).

Whether we take up the metaphor of the web, the rhizome, or the river, the camera’s complex visual language is not lost but rather held within that larger matrix of relationships. I believe it’s worth attending to this concatenation of metaphors for networked digital space and its attendant possibilities, values, and forms, thinking through how discourses of camera and computation work together, as well as how they are gendered. The conceptual frameworks for media connectivity I’ve touched on here, including its spiritual connotations, suggest not the extinction of the camera’s work but rather expanded possibilities for its deployment in service of Indigenous action and the amplification of Indigenous women’s voices in the public sphere (as the cases of Idle No More and #NODAPL so clearly illustrate). Each instance—the web, the rhizome, the river—demonstrates the power of Indigenous women artists and activists to draw on Indigenous knowledges of connection, replication, and transit to sustain their ecologies and communities.

Of course, the digital has also been identified as a place of symbolic violence, not visual sovereignty; a space where artifacts of settler imagination are simply rehearsed and (re)distributed in newly monetized ways using powerfully intensified infrastructures. We can ask, with Métis filmmaker Loretta Todd, “What ideology will have agency in cyberspace?” Is it “a clever guise for neocolonialism,” or can it “rupture the power relations of colonizer and the colonized” (180)? Tara McPherson describes the ways that modular forms of digital media, dispersed across many parts of culture, encourage the partitioning aspect

of the rhizomatic networking equation: “Certain aspects of modularity, fragmentation, and dispersion that are endemic to digital media also structure the more covert forms of racism and racial representation that categorize post–Civil Rights discourse.” Examples abound: the cultural replication of bureaucratic colonialist power structures through the communicative system of computer “office” interfaces (modeled on the interoffice memo), with its emphasis on English-language text and utilitarian individual authorship (see Manovich); the general use of GIS for mapping Indigenous lands with extractive purpose (see Palmer), as well as the converse, the omission of tribal land boundaries altogether in Google Maps; the centralized, studio-dominated and -financed gaming industry, normalizing dehumanizing violence through the cut scenes, false historical scenarios, white supremacist focalization, and kill counts in games like *Red Dead Redemption*; the vicious doxxing of women and others who critique such games and generate alternative gaming structures and systems; the settler arrogation of the idea of the tribe in online discourses to indicate the parsing of population for marketing segmentation, a fantasized erasure of the Indigenous and appropriation of the tribal (Byrd). Mohawk artist Jackson 2Bears, in an essay about remix theory and creating a remix of “Ten Little Indians,” describes this bleaker side of the digital as a form of ghosting: “If we consider technology as something alive and filled with spirit (as something that for us has a ‘psychic significance,’ and something with which we are interconnected in a ‘circle of relations’), then these technologies can equally possess spirits that manifest themselves in the form of ghosts and phantasms—*spectral apparitions whose will, it seems, is to haunt the lives of the living*” (19, emphasis in the original).

And the digital is also a site of more-than-symbolic violence. The interdependencies and tensions of the material and the virtual, and the demands of one upon the other, are pervasive but especially apparent in processes of manufacture and distribution—how machines are bought, sold, produced, and dispensed with. Despite my opening differentiation of cinematic metaphors from digital ones, computational hardware is as much a physical instrument as the apparatus of the camera. Can digital media exist “outside of national orthodoxies,” as Barry Barclay argues that Fourth Cinema does? While Indigenization might be possible—indeed, this special issue explores the many ways that it is possible—settler systems dominate the machine market. Lisa Nakamura, describ-

ing gendered and racialized rhetorics around material cultures of computer manufacturing and Diné women's work with the early electronics company Fairchild Semiconductor, reminds us to pay attention to the relationship between creative digital expression and the enabling platforms that are often "taken for granted" (937). Noting that "software is always a response to hardware" (936), she offers a history of the way digital devices depend upon the cheap, invisible labor of Indigenous women and women of color, which "is not creative labor, nor is it free" (938). In particular, she critiques Fairchild's assertion of the "inherent dexterity" of Indigenous women's fingers, revealing a capitalist appropriation of Indigenous traditional handwork as a resource for digital manufacture, a framework within which Diné women were "cited as evidence that digital work—the work of the hand and its digits—could be painlessly transferred from the indigenous cultural context into the world of technological commercial innovation" (932).

Connecting this historical and materialist critique with twenty-first-century video games, Jodi Byrd argues that frontier violence is built into mainstream games (*Custer's Revenge*, *Bioshock Infinite*, *Red Dead Redemption*, *Demon's Souls*, and *Dark Souls*, among many others) not only as narrative but also in the way that stories are connected with space through mechanisms of territorial acquisition, player participation, and procedures within game platforms. As part of the technology, Indigeneity functions as a "method" for "bundling" or "consolidating" narratives and "normative discourses of racism, colonialism, capitalism and imperialism together to understand their concomitant ends" (Byrd 4). Videogames, she argues, "temporalize" and "rehearse" invasion, requiring a latent Indigeneity that "continues to both inflect and haunt video games in their narrative and ideological similarities to new world travelogues" (12–13). "Within the contest of signs distracting us from apprehending the system that has captured us all, relinquishment of a sovereign indigeneity is impossible precisely because it remains the platform through which the encounter with the other becomes intelligible within the terrains of new worlds" (13–14). The authors in this special issue address and respond to these oppressive elements of the digital by describing the personal impacts of such hauntings, as well as Indigenous women's artistic new media productions. It is not in spite of but precisely because of the settler colonialism pervading the digital environment that the scholars in this special issue turn our attention to

the activist interventions of Indigenous women who use media art to Indigenize the digital realm.

“Digital Indigenous studies” is far too capacious a category to address in a single collection of essays, and a growing number of scholars and artists have approached the subject from a range of perspectives in their publications and creative work. My interest in this introduction has been to attend to the way that we talk about a specifically Indigenous digital world and the ways that already-circulating figurative language suggests our imaginative and computational engagements with what Danika Medak-Saltzman calls the “remaking” of “ethical relationships in this world.” Returning to my earlier question about the articulation of digital with Indigenous specificities—and attendant questions about gender, genre, and ecology, among others—we can ask how and when digital production might restore gender balance and body sovereignty to visual media’s representational field. How have women’s roles in visual media production changed in the new digital landscape, with its altered structures of production, exhibition, and distribution? How have processes and representations of artistic and activist collaboration come into new configurations in this environment? How have activist movements and youth training programs acknowledged and engaged inter-generational ramifications of the imagined, contested spaces of the web, the rhizome, and the river?

The generative spaces imagined through metaphors of webs, rhizomes, and rivers are manifest in current vibrant Indigenous digital production. It is a history being made now by activist and youth media organizations; experimental artists; independent game designers and developers; graphic artists working in comics, product design, and other venues; hip-hop artists and DJs who work with remix aesthetics, as well as other musicians and music video producers, performers, and comedians; language activists; independent filmmakers; animators; and others who, sometimes against huge odds, accomplish high-impact feats of digital art and activism. It is an important moment to document an unfolding genealogy: the origin stories of twenty-first-century media communications and resurgent Indigeneity in the digital realm.

* * *

Each essay in this issue explores Indigenous women’s production of short-form media and, in various ways, demonstrates the Indigeneity

at the heart of the digital. Connecting with a broad continuum of digital productions and technologies, the authors reflect upon issues of Indigenous performativities, histories, presences, futurisms, feminisms, activisms, re/conciliations, language revitalizations, and media production practices and training programs. Several essays begin with the personal—what it feels like to watch, love, and be troubled by Joss Whedon's *Firefly*; what it feels like to “break down” and cry in the midst of teaching residential school history; what it feels like when Anishinaabe words “enter our lives as part of a song” that is also part of the Internet; what it feels like when a group of Indigenous women filmmakers collectively dissent from a career arc that would culminate in mainstream film industry jobs. The six essays are organized in pairs: Susan Bernardin's meditation on experimentalism with Channette Romero's discussion of formal innovations and genre reclamation in animation; Angelica Lawson, Margaret Noodin, and Stacie Sheldon's profiles of media makers and websites; and Kristin Dowell and Danika Medak-Saltzman's complex explorations of reconciliation and Indigenous futurism.

We begin with a conversation with Anishinaabe digital media artist and game designer Elizabeth LaPensée about the cover artwork, *The Women, They Hold the Ground*, and its relationship to the game *Honour Water*, as well as issues of awareness and access in Indigenous digital media arts and game design more broadly. Susan Bernardin's essay, “‘There's a River to Consider’: Heid E. Erdrich's ‘Pre-Occupied,’” connects the metaphor of the river delta to signify the work of the digital with the current #NODAPL movement, the re-occupation of traditional Standing Rock Sioux territories, and the Indigenous-led protection of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers and their systems from pipeline contamination. She tackles the “hyperdemands” of digital media by bringing together the multiple pre-occupations in Heid E. Erdrich's print poem, “Pre-Occupied,” and six-minute digital short animated film, *Pre-Occupied*. Through collaborative production practice, collage and remix aesthetics, and intertextual poetic voice, Erdrich's 2013 poem-film takes up the river as a “structuring metaphor and mnemonic device” that extends to signify “digital and Indigenous communication strategy.” The movement of rivers over land and their function as fast-moving transportation for Indigenous peoples politicize this communicative metaphor with an expansive environmental consciousness and a reframing of the concept of “occupations,” Bernardin argues, ultimately

imagining a “direct link between the representational and environmental health of Native women and their territories.”

In “Toward an Indigenous Feminine Animation Aesthetic,” Channette Romero explores the connections between formal innovation and political motivation in new animation from Indigenous women artists. Focusing on aesthetic qualities of flat design, cutout collage, domestic arts and crafts, privileging of spatial relations, connective aurality, and hybrid cinematic-literary films, she contends that Indigenous women’s experimentalism within animation as a genre “acts as a critical intervention in the animation tradition” while demonstrating a set of consciousness-raising strategies in support of a broad array of Indigenous rights.

Romero’s survey of contemporary productions is followed by two “architectural autobiographies,” to quote Meg Noodin and Stacie Sheldon. Angelica Lawson’s essay offers a genealogy of Indigenous women’s production of new media through profiles of media artist / activist / Makah filmmaker Sandra Osawa and Ojibwe filmmaker Missy Whiteman in order to unpack the way their grassroots methods of media production and storytelling take up “traditional, pedagogical, and community-oriented” commitments. Lawson explores the larger issues of production and aesthetics around youth media training, hip-hop style, Indigenous urban landscapes, and language preservation exemplified by Whiteman’s new media productions and her Independent Indigenous Film and Media (IIFM) organization: “In creating infrastructures for Indigenous creative control over the videos she produces and in her efforts to mentor, train, and reach Native youth, Whiteman’s work embodies many of the goals outlined by Osawa that are grounded in an ethical approach to Indigenous media.”

Noodin and Sheldon’s essay profiles a single website in order to articulate how Anishinaabe songs “are part of the Internet on a website designed to protect the spirit of what is sensuous and sentimental using wire, code, creativity, and a language that still sparkles.” Performing and describing an Anishinaabe digital poetics, Noodin and Sheldon’s essay tells the story of the ojibwe.net website. The site began as a resource for an urban community of language learners and grew to become “a celebration of women’s voices” through the contributed songs of a women’s hand-drum group. Engaging the “multimodal, relational, and open-

ended” elements of digital structure, the site represents “one endless invitation to interpret and engage with Anishinaabemowin.”

Kristin Dowell’s “Residential Schools and ‘Reconciliation’ in the Media Art of Skeena Reece and Lisa Jackson” describes interrelational scenes of witnessing and what it means to deeply engage in the politics of speaking and listening to narratives of Indigenous residential school experience. Reading two short digital media works by artists who are children of residential school survivors, Dowell considers the way these works were embedded in a 2013 gallery exhibit organized in conjunction with the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Vancouver National Event. Focusing closely on female, especially mother-daughter, relationships and the role of media in mediating intergenerational rupture, Dowell broadens her discussion to address “the complex category of reconciliation” and the work of “mediating reconciliation through art.” The films—and the “social event” that arises so strongly from their gallery context—depict intimate bodily expressions of emotion (crying, dancing, caretaking) to visualize the ways that we navigate conciliation in digital and physical worlds.

Danika Medak-Saltzman’s dynamic essay, “Coming to You from the Indigenous Future: Native Women, Speculative Film Shorts, and the Art of the Possible,” maps the ways that Indigenous women’s short productions use the genre of speculation (science fiction, fantasy) to reach beyond genre’s boundaries. She outlines an Indigenous reclamation of science fiction and fantasy genre forms as a “creative arm of the Indigenous Futurist movement, which joins the more overtly political arm of the movement evident in the protest, legal, and advocacy work, all of which are vital to seeing our way toward, fighting for, and calling forth better futures.” Her readings of film shorts by Diné filmmakers Melissa Henry, Sydney Freeland, and Nanobah Becker connect the representational work of genre with activist movements such as Idle No More, foregrounding the way these works elicit “the possible, the importance of fun, and the role of women, animals, and plants” in order to envision Indigenous futures.

We close the special issue with an afterword by Seneca scholar of Indigenous film history and new media Michelle Raheja entitled “Imagining Indigenous Digital Futures.” In it she brings us to the heart of the matter of digital Indigenous studies—that digital solidarities can save

lives, can change the ways we live, love and hope, and can teach us and help us to teach others what we have learned. Virtual Indigenous territories—and their actualization on the ground—are necessary to the future we imagine.

JOANNA HEARNE is the director of the Digital Storytelling Program and an associate professor of film studies in the English Department at the University of Missouri. She has published a number of articles on Indigenous film and media, westerns, documentary, animation, and digital media. In 2012 she published two books about Indigenous film history: *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western* (SUNY Press) and *Smoke Signals: Native Cinema Rising* (University of Nebraska Press).

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“We All Stand Side by Side”

An Interview with Elizabeth LaPensée

JOANNA HEARNE

Excerpts from a Skype interview, September 6, 2016.

JOANNA HEARNE (JH): Thank you for providing the cover art for the special issue that we’re doing on digital Indigenous studies. Everyone loved this piece, *The Women, They Hold the Ground*. How did you come to make that piece, and how, physically, did you make it? How does it have meaning for you as an artwork?

ELIZABETH LAPENSÉE (EL): So there are two aspects to this. One is the origin piece, and then one is the newer inspiration. I think this is the only piece that I’ve actually done this with, where there’s a re-creation of an older piece. So the original concept was from some years ago, a painting titled *The Women, They Hold the Ground*, and the *Windigo Lies Within*, with women dancing on the curve of the earth in jingle dresses. Then within the earth there were rocks that were cracking, and then below that were dinosaur spirits, but one was really voracious. The piece was about the tapping of the land—the splitting of the land happening for oil. It was intended to show people coming together, them holding hands and dancing these healing dances. Then, of course, there was the moon as well, looking over them all.

I ended up trading that painting for gardening and plants—that’s how these things go—with Shawna Zierdt, who’s a friend of mine. She’s actually the only person who has one of my paintings other than my own family. Because to paint to me is much different from the digital media work that I do, and no one really actually sees that work unless they’re in my house or in a family member’s house. But I thought that the story was vital to share, and as I moved to Minnesota and met with

the Oshkii Giizhik Singers, I saw that these women lived in this way. They all gathered together and they sang together. In *The Women, They Hold the Ground*, there are six that are visible to us, but there are actually seven. There's one with Grandmother Moon, and so these go to the teachings that there are seven grandmothers. One of them is in the moon, the others are on the land. They are actually not holding hands, because what they are doing with their backs turned to us is that they are holding drums.

When I made this, I had just moved from the West Coast, where men actively removed hand drums, like physically took them from women at a gathering, and so it was still not safe there for women to even hold hand drums. Then I come around Fond du Lac in Duluth, Minnesota, and there was a gathering of women who had worked through issues like that, and there were also so many elders who were women who were just saying, this is ridiculous, this has never been an issue, and nowhere was it ever said that women cannot drum. That was really inspiring to me, but I was not at a point where I could really just be like "here are the women standing in front of you drumming." So that's what they're doing there. Otherwise they would be holding hands and more in a round dance kind of position.

Then the materials are silver, and there's copper, and there's water. There's water in there that has actually been sung water songs to so the texture of the water is, in effect, a reflection of what the appearance of water becomes when it has been sung these water songs. That was the first art there that was created, and it led to the game *Honour Water* in a lot of ways. The art predated the fruition of the game, but it was one and the same motion. What I typically write as an artist statement for this one is that it's intended to pass on the teaching that we all stand side by side. I was given this teaching by Woodrow Morrison Jr., who is a Haida elder and storyteller. He talks about how competition, like the physical motion of it, is not side to side against one another but is actually aimed towards our own selves. As we compete in this way, we're pushing ourselves higher. As we lift, all those in parallel with us rise together. That's really what these women represent—this idea that as women stand together, as women uplift one another instead of competing with one another, [they] are really looking at their own selves, and lifting themselves. Then everyone else will rise too, simultaneously.

JH: That's really beautiful.

EL: All the work that I do is really just informed by the teachings that I am very grateful to have been gifted along the way and then just trying to listen. Just trying to do my best to listen all the time.

JH: This is a teaching that moved across different media. It's this sort of fundamental teaching that has been given to you and that you're also passing on. It's part of the expression in the painting, but then it's also a piece of digital art that circulates in a different way than paintings circulate. You can't trade it for gardening exactly, although having traded it for gardening has a beautiful symbolism in its own way. You talked about the painting being really different from the digital media, but there's clearly a connection too through the continuity of the teaching.

EL: I feel that when I'm painting it is not me. I am just there to help bring into form stories that are far beyond me. So, in this sense, the original painting was at once hopeful because it does represent women side by side and they're dancing together, but it's also a warning. It sent me on a journey to find ways in which we could address that all-consuming spirit, Windigo. What is it that we can actually actively do here and now? I saw that the women, the Oshkii Giizhik Singers, were bringing that into motion in their ceremonies and their gatherings and the way that they go to events very frequently. For anyone who asks and offers tobacco, they're very responsive and very much in service of the community. Sharon Day, who wrote some of the songs that are in *Honour Water*, coordinates the Nibi Walks. Her work is direct action. These are gatherings where they walk along waterways of many different forms—rivers and lakes and creeks. Some of the songs have [been] carried out to be sung at the oceans. That's how far spread they are, but while making the digital art, that's something that ended up being used for posters for gatherings and as cover art. It can be duplicated. So, to me, this is a key difference. In the paintings, that's the one. I personally don't make prints out of my paintings. I know that artists do, and that's absolutely fine. You can absolutely do that, but to me the painting is the painting, and that's it. If it is ever seen visually, it's because somebody took a photo of themselves in front of it or something. Then with the digital media, for me, it's about access and the frequency with which it can be shared. With the digital art it can be a Facebook cover photo. It goes up on sale on this website where

I get a few dollars per whatever this company is getting, but it's worth it to me to not have to deal with printing and mailing, because you end up losing money a lot of times when you're fronting mailing costs. Then people can choose what size they want within a spectrum; it's up to them. They become a part of that creation because they are determining what their needs are and how to have those needs met through that digital media if they want it printed.

For the transference to the game, really, the full story of what happened was that I had recorded water songs that I knew, that had been gifted to me with an elder there. She recorded me on her phone while I was singing. The community, when I left, they were using those recordings as references to sing along to. Well, eventually her phone, it either got lost or it broke. But either way, the point of it was when her phone went, so did the songs. She was very sad about this. I thought, well then this really shows the impermanence of digital media and how we're sharing this content, so I had to come up with another way other than SoundCloud. People don't access those hardly, really. It's not like you can access a recording and then if you're living out in the bush like I have, and even then, if you do access a recording, the way you see translations or the spelling out of the roman orthography of the language is really clunky—it's not fluid. It's not an experience in and of itself. I had simultaneously been working on a Anishinaabemowin add-on to *Singuistics*, a singing game for teaching language. I asked that development company Pinnguaq if they'd be kind enough to help me, and they did. Out of the goodness of their own hearts, for free, [they] helped me develop this water song game separately. That's part of their work as an ally game company. By ally I mean that primarily the developers are not Indigenous, and they do work like this from time to time to help out because they do a lot of Indigenous games, and they're getting funding from that. It was this whole process or journey from—and this is typically how it tends to happen in the work that I do—there's a warning of what can unfold. There is a response or answer of what can be done to either prevent that or to resolve it. Then there has to be that work that is put into action in some form. Really, that was the overall process of it. Now that particular piece has been printed on metal as well, which is beautiful. It's pretty awesome to see that work printed on metal, and I think that's how my work that's done digitally has to be done, because so often I'm actually working with metal. My actual process is to hand draw everything

and everything's inked. Then I scan all of that and those are layered in Photoshop. All of the textures I've either painted myself, or they're birch bark or other materials that have either been gathered or not gathered so that they stay on the land.

One of the attractions to me for digital media is that I can use materials over and over and over again. There are people who do art with birch bark, for example, and I feel that that work should be left to those people who were either raised to do that or have been taught those ways and that that's their work. So for them, I think, that it's very beautiful what they're doing. For me, I have to stop and ask myself, is this really the best use given the loss that's happening with birch trees right now? I can take one photo, and I can use it in many different ways and in many different pieces. It is there and it is present, and the spirit of that birch tree is there, but I did not necessarily have to harvest in any kind of way.

JH: It's a conservation strategy.

EL: Yeah. Very often there is plant life and there are Plant People in the work that I do and definitely Grandfather Rocks as well. I can leave that where it is and still help tell the stories in a way that reach people. That, to me, above all else, is the greatest gift in digital media.

JH: There's something really magical about that ability of digital media to share the materials that are fragile, including materials that need to stay in place.

EL: So when I say there is copper in this piece or there is silver in this piece, in my sense of things, the scientific properties of those materials are in there. I do think those medicines translate through those spaces.

JH: What are the possibilities of Indigenous expression in digital media, and how does power translate, essentially, through digital media? How can it be put to activist purposes? I'm wondering about your thoughts about what the possibilities are for decolonizing digital media in HTML. What are your strategies for it? Do you feel like you bump into limits in the structure and platform and the circuitry itself?

EL: Absolutely, because there is still binary code. For example, we're working in existing game engines where really what we're doing is we're working within the constraints of a system that is created around the

idea that there are objects. I always look to the structure of my language, Anishinaabemowin, as an indicator of what could be possible with other forms of code or with other forms of digital expression, because the language is such that everything is a phrase, not a singular word, and nothing is just an object on its own. Everything is in relation to something else, and that could be a very amazing way for technology to go. I think that it will. I think that there will be more liquid technology directions. There's going to be more biotech for sure. This is all unfolding. I remember Woodrow Morrison Jr. and Dr. Leroy Little Bear, who talks about Blackfoot physics. I had the opportunity to meet them, and Woody was making this joke about how they used to sit in Dairy Queen together, and they used to laugh about how technology is ridiculous. This hardware is so ridiculous when we already have, in our human forms, right here and now, the ability to communicate far distances. We have that intrinsically built into us. It needs to be understood again.

So, how do we improve access? I think that's the biggest concern for me, making games, because there's a point where I've gone back and forth between living in the bush, where there's very limited Internet access, and being in cities. I had to ask myself, why would I want to make games that I can't even play myself? This is pointless. I can't download these from here. I can't play online live. This isn't going to work. So I have approached the expression of Indigenous teachings through games in a different way in a sense that I'm going for mobile games and web games. I think that's what's most accessible. From my understanding, mobile devices are the most common technology access point across any platform, and so that's largely why the singing games are on iPads right now, leading up to iPhones and Androids. *Invaders* is iPhone, Android, and then iPads, and also web. Of those, iPhone was the most accessed.

The game I'm working on right now is called *Thunderbird Strike*, and it's a 2D side-scroller where you're playing as a Thunderbird and you're striking lightning down at mining company buildings and the big giant mining trucks in the first level. You can also revive the lives of buffalo, wolves, and caribou. In the second level you're destroying pipelines that are not yet in the ground, and you're protecting the Protecting People. Then in the third level you're returned to the Great Lakes to remove Enbridge Line 5 from under the Mackinac Bridge. You always win.

So I am aware that people will probably call it an activist game. I don't use that term myself. I think it would be like an awareness game. That game is giving people hope and projecting these images of dreams. Even though this isn't the kind of game where playing it will really actually actively do something, in the way that [in] the singing game, if you sing those songs, you really are having an influence on the water in you and around you. That's direct action. *Thunderbird Strike*, I don't know if I can say that that really is direct action, but it is for our hopes and our dreams.

JH: It sounds like a game that supports methods of approach that support consciousness raising, when you learn to destroy something and then you learn to be gentle with something. You can see that as activism, or you can see it as the underpinning of activism. How do we begin to understand approaches to the material world that underpin or support the people who are doing actions?

EL: And also entirely ironic because of the mining that's happening for the materials that are used to make the iPhone that we're playing the game on. I mean, at some point, unless there is such a shift that people really are genuinely looking at other ways of making technology, there will always be some way in which there is harm being done. We more and more need to look at alternatives, and we're clearly not quite there yet. I do believe that we will get there and that the kind of work that we're doing needs to take place.

JH: The iPhone is evidence of extraction in its existence.

EL: Yeah, exactly. We are all responsible. So in what ways can we do the work that we're doing right now with hope for a better future and laying pathways for changes, because the ways that iPhones are made are deplorable. Eventually there has to be a transition to other ways.

JH: We're talking about the iPhone being an incredible device, but the process by which it's made is very problematic. I know that the way that games are made is sometimes as problematic as their content, and I know that you are paying attention to addressing that issue. Could you talk a little bit about your process, about indigenizing the process of making games and how you do that, and relationships with companies?

EL: Always collaboration is key. I am there to meet the needs of the community. I understand that this won't be able to be the case for everyone, but I only show up if I have been invited. I have never once gone into a community and said, "You know what you need to do? You need to make games instead of other things." No way! If someone comes to me and they ask for me to work on something with them, then absolutely yes. I am there and I'm present. I think that's a huge difference. It's not like I'm coming in and saying, "You know, I have this idea for a game, and now I've got to find a community partner to justify making it." However, I understand that game companies don't always have that ideal, so the second best option is to find consultants and directly involve them in the development process as much as possible. My hope, really, is to integrate collaborators beyond this consultant role. Beyond "I'm going to sit with you and talk to you about your stories or adapt them into games" rather than build capacity for communities. Involve Indigenous community members as artists and as designers, hopefully as programmers, more and more as youth workshops are run or game jams.

So *Techno Medicine Wheel*, which was developed with Cease Wyss—I essentially taught her how to develop and design around that game based on what her interests were. She's continued that work beyond me. We called it an "alternate reality game" at the time because the term "social impact game" wasn't really out there yet, but that's really more what it is. It's more of a real-world kind of game where you're moving around in physical spaces to learn about and to tend to traditional medicinal plants growing in and around the city limits of Vancouver, British Columbia. She went with it, and she has continued iterating the game to keep up with technology. At the time we first started there was just GPS. Later on she put out another version where she was using QR codes, just for example. In that way it's not about me being "I am an authority in this situation and this is my work and I control it." No, in fact it is for me to be in the service of community members and get them to a place where they can be self-sufficient in rating or continuing to develop games in whatever way they want to.

In my own games I just go for it. Like *Invaders* and *Thunderbird Strike*. With *Thunderbird Strike* I'm always listening, and I offer tobacco as I go along in this process, but it is a much more personal development process.

JH: You've also written that we need to bend technology. I remember seeing that phrase and feeling like that was shorthand for something bigger, a big idea. In theory and in practice, what does that mean, to bend technology?

EL: I think of it in the sense of looking towards liquid technology, looking at ways of understanding that this fixed state of the hardware that's being created right now has such form, but it's also delicate because it breaks very easily at times. There are other ways. My greatest hope on the software side is to start working on a game engine that is infused with Indigenous physics so that it's actually built from the ground up with Indigenous ways of knowing. I think that it'll happen eventually. I'm still focusing on these mobile games and trying to work within the constraints of what exists because that's what will reach the most people. But as we look at virtual reality and augmented reality I feel that we are getting closer to understanding what we have always had access to, which is the connections between us all. Being able to understand that we are able to do this on our own without needing this hardware. How can we magnify that communication process?

JH: The amplification of connection—it sounds like you're talking about finding ways outside of the hardware constraints and software platforms to engage the indigeneity of technology.

EL: Yeah, and understanding that this is so outmoded. What we're working with right here is just conceptually so clunky that it's laughable. I honestly do not know if we will get to that place in my lifetime, so I get to create digital art that expresses this and write science fiction comics and do this other work to suggest trends that I see happening in our understanding of what, really, technology is. So, for example, there are water purification devices that use sound frequencies. This is an aspect that we should be looking at more, and because it seems to be invisible to the majority of people. There's a lack of recognition for the intense meaningfulness that there is to sound. That is really what I'm getting at when I use the term "bend." That, in fact, there will be physical forms that are flexible, much more flexible, because they will not be made from hard materials that we're mining. They'll be made from what we are creating out of vibrations, frequencies, other forms.

JH: That's fascinating.

EL: Sure, yeah. As I hear others responding like, "Prove it!"

JH: Well, there's also the work of the imagination. There are other questions to ask, other demands to make.

EL: I want to get into virtual reality at some point, but the accessibility has been the wall for me.

JH: It's wildly expensive.

EL: Yeah! And people—it is hilarious to me when people are like, "Oh, it's getting more accessible. All you need to do is buy this device and then attach it to your phone" and I'm just like, "You don't get it! You don't get it! You have no clue, because communities that I'm making games for cannot get that device. I don't care how cheap you say it is, it is not!" I don't really want to create in spaces that will be stuck.

JH: I think there's something to be said for the balance between things that go with you and things you have to go and visit. You're talking about that in relation to painting.

EL: Yes, true. I think in the virtual reality space I will be able to convey teachings from the waters, stars, and space-time travel. Once I get *Thunderbird Strike* out there, more of this work will travel. There's another game that will be accessible like *Thunderbird Strike* where it's really about healing the earth and regrowth, but it'll be bead work that grows into real plants and florals, where you're beading the beauty of regrowth.

JH: That sounds beautiful.

EL: Thank you.

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“There’s a River to Consider”

Heid E. Erdrich’s “Pre-Occupied”

SUSAN BERNARDIN

PART 1: AS LONG AS THE RIVER FLOWS

Water is Life. This is the resounding refrain of the NODAPL movement centered at the Standing Rock Reservation. Beginning in April 2016 with the creation of Sacred Stone Camp, the small NODAPL encampment along the Cannon Ball River in North Dakota grew over several months into a community of many thousands. Supported by hundreds of Native nations, as well as international Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous allies, the NODAPL movement marks an extraordinary moment in a continuing history of Indigenous actions on behalf of land and water threatened by ruinous extractive industries. The aptly named Dakota Access Pipeline, the latest in a long pipeline of assaults on Indigenous territories, threatens the Missouri River and its vast watershed. The interconnected water systems imperiled by oil contamination underscore that rivers are, in the words of International Rivers Director Jason Day, “a ribbon of life” (Public Radio International).

NODAPL’s national and international visibility was made possible by the collaborative groundwork of Indigenous activists and non-Indigenous allies in recent movements such as Idle No More and Tar Sands blockades. The message and meaning of “water is life” also has deep roots in local Indigenous communities that have always recognized that rivers are veins and arteries connecting peoples and territories. For example, in 2010, Twin Cities-based poet, curator, and filmmaker Heid E. Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) curated *Original Green*, an exhibit featuring four Indigenous artists—Gwen Westerman, Carolyn Lee Anderson, Bobby Wilson, and Gordon Coons—who offered perspectives of St. Anthony’s Falls and the Mississippi River. This exhibit was

part of a series called Greening the Riverfront, which addressed "how the Minneapolis riverfront has transformed, beginning with the Dakota and Ojibwe people and their relationship to the land, their removal by Euro-Americans, the rise of industrialization in the area, and the recent steps to embrace sustainability as a goal, as well as a look toward future initiatives" (Regan). The Mississippi River, whose major tributary is the Missouri River, emerges from headwaters in Ojibwe territory and moves through Dakota and other Indigenous territories along its 2,350 miles. It is also one of the most polluted rivers in the United States.

Erdrich's curation of this exhibit fed a broader arterial network of Ojibwe and Indigenous women artists and activists who have worked to make visible the continuing claims of this and other threatened riverine systems. On March 1, 2013, Sharon Day, executive director of the Indigenous Peoples Task Force, led a small group of Ojibwe women, helpers, and allies from the headwaters of the Mississippi River at Lake Itasca in northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The Mississippi River Walk, according to Day, was a "ceremony. . . . [E]very step we took was a prayer for the water" ("Ojibwe Water Walker"). The River Walk served as a moving mnemonic that was intended to remind, reassert, and reactivate ongoing relationships and responsibilities toward the Mississippi River. Social media networking about the River Walk extended its geographical reach by connecting Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples across territories. In the fall of 2012, three First Nations women and one non-Native woman—Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, Jessica Gordon, and Sheelah McLean—turned to Facebook and Twitter to declare "#IdleNoMore" in the face of the proposed legislative assaults on Indigenous lands and waterways by Bill C-45, created by the government of Stephen Harper, prime minister of Canada.¹ Bill C-45 jettisoned environmental protections in order to streamline energy development in Canada. In launching teach-ins and making the threat of Bill C-45 more visible, these four women and the movement they inspired reaffirmed the potentiality of digital spaces for carrying words across territories, linking Indigenous peoples across geopolitical borders not of their own making. As Stephanie Fitzgerald quips about Idle No More's formation, "The power of four women and a hashtag cannot be underestimated" (122). The central role of Indigenous women in the formation of Idle No More and in related movements such as the NODAPL movement reaf-

firms their long-standing power as “backbones of indigenous communities” (Houska).

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that when Dean Rader asked Heid E. Erdrich to contribute a poem for the blog *99 poems for the 99%* during the 2011–12 Occupy movement in the United States, she responded that “there was a river to consider.” Instead of simply taking aim at the 1 percent, her poem “Pre-Occupied” plays a different numbers game.² In an interview, Erdrich observed, “It struck me as ironic that Native Americans are just a bit more than 1% of the population. Deeply ironic is the idea of Native Americans, who might sense their territories as occupied, being part of a movement called ‘Occupy’” (Combs). As she wryly adds in her notes to the poem, “So, we are, more or less, the original 1% as well as the original 100%” (Erdrich, “Pre-Occupied” 192). The Occupy movement, best known for its month-long occupation of Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan in the fall of 2011, dramatized stark structural economic and social inequalities in the United States. Part rejoinder, “Pre-Occupied” uses as its unsettling impetus (and springboard) the ironies of a social, economic, and political resistance movement designating itself under the directive to “occupy.” The idea of occupying “Wall Street”—that meaningful metonym—becomes for fellow *99 Poems* contributor LeAnne Howe a wry history and geography lesson. In the notes to her piece, “Noble Savage Learns to Tweet,” Howe shares an origin story of Wall Street’s name: “Dutch settlers built the ‘wall path’ sometime around 1692 to keep out the Indians. In other words it was built for white settlers to keep out undesirables to protect developing commerce. According to Hermes-Press.com, the Wall path ‘joined the banks of the East River with those of the Hudson River on the west’” (172–73).

From its opening invocation, “River, river, river,” Erdrich’s poem similarly makes visible this understory of settler origins in the United States and its territorial occupations. The speaker has never

pitched a tent on cement
near your banks.

Banks of marble, stock still, all movement in the plaza,
river walking its message on an avenue. (“Pre-Occupied” 4–7)

The line’s reference to the 2011 Occupy encampment in Minneapolis’s Federal Plaza identifies the river near Erdrich’s home in the Twin Cities even if it is not specifically named until stanza 8: “River in the middle,

Mississippi." The complete line in this stanza further locates this river within a network of relationships that bridge time and space:

not the East Coast Hudson where this all started,
waterway Max Fleischer's team lushly rendered
via the wonder of Technicolor. (Erdrich, "Pre-Occupied" 30–32)

Locating herself in a specific territory but reminding us "where this all started," Erdrich remembers the long temporal and geographical reach of settler occupation. Wall Street indeed.

At the same time, the line's startling reference to Max Fleischer—the famed animator of early Superman cartoons—invites readers to traverse newer digital territories made possible by YouTube. A footnote in the first print version of "Pre-Occupied," published in the anthology *99 Poems for the 99 Percent*, elicits other kinds of connections prompted by the author's unexpected encounter with a 1942 Superman cartoon. Its Technicolor storyline occupies three stanzas of the poem. In the episode "Electric Earthquake," Superman defeats an Indigenous scientist intent on seizing back Manhattan from its occupiers. "Emerging from an underwater lair," he declares in the animated short (and in the poem), "I still say Manhattan rightfully belongs to my people." The poem's speaker emphasizes "he is not, / not your TV Indian" (Erdrich, "Pre-Occupied" 38–39). He "has lost his signifiers (no braids, no blanket) / but we recognize him" (35–36). In this scene, the speaker hears a surprising if fleeting recognition of Indigenous land claims voiced within this televisual artifact. Yet the superhero's refusal of responsibility to redress, let alone fully acknowledge, such claims (in Clark Kent guise he responds, "But what do you expect me to do about it?") marks the refrain against which the poem labors as it imagines the superhuman powers required of Indigenous peoples on a daily basis. In the poem's first appearance on the blog *99 poems for the 99%*, a hyperlink provided a direct connection to the Superman cartoon, as well as to the Crash Test Dummies song "Superman," offering an immediacy and interactivity absent from the published anthology, whose footnotes are located in the book's appendix. Described as "Digressions," these and other links forge startling linkages between US popular culture and Indigenous histories that make the poem jump its riverbanks.

Erdrich's efforts to embed such interactivity in her poems, coupled with her sense of poems as "little movies," gave shape to the mixed-

media genre she has alternately called “poem-film,” “poeméo,” and “video-poem.” In his 1984 essay, “The Poetry Film,” William Wees defines the poem-film as “the synthesis that generates associations, connotations and metaphors neither the verbal nor the visual text would produce on its own” (qtd. in Cook). Erdrich’s long-standing work in collaborative arts practices and curation informs the recent movement of her poems from the page onto time-based digital media platforms. Such moves also animate the possibilities of engaging wider audiences than is typical for poetry. With the 2015 release of *Undead Faerie Goes Great with India Pale Ale*, Erdrich now has four collaboratively created poem-films available on her website at HeidErdrich.com. The first of them, entitled *Pre-Occupied* like the print poem, is a six-minute digital short released in 2013. Like the poem, it proffers countermovements of Indigenous intergenerational memory, political awareness, gender commentary, and global environmental consciousness. Yet those movements, especially currents flowing between gender, indigeneity, and territory, are amplified by the poem-film’s visual and auditory layering. As Erdrich voices the poem’s lines, the film saturates viewers with soundings, visual images, and text. Its dense collaging of historical and contemporary photographs, animation, voices, soundings, and cartoons confronts us with embodied memory, autobiographical reflections, sacred territories, and continuing land-based Indigenous environmental activism. The poem-film, which she calls a “collaborative collage” at the level of form and format, was created by a cohort of Native artists: Erdrich, animator and art director Jonathan Thunder, codirector R. Vincent Moniz Jr., Carolyn Lee Anderson, Angela Erdrich, Andrea Carlson, Meg Noodin, and others.³ Through the poem-film’s collaborative design and production, *Pre-Occupied* extends the work’s riverine metaphor of Indigenous interconnectivity across time and space. Given that *99 poems* contributor LeAnne Howe also worked with Moniz Jr. and Thunder to produce the video-poem *Noble Savage Learns to Tweet*, we might also consider how this mixed-media form is proving generative for the moving practice of Native literary and visual arts.

PART 2: RIVER TRAFFIC

The film starts with surprise: as animation hurdles viewers through the heavens, the opening sonic riffs of *Superman*’s theme song sound like

stars and kryptonite superheroes. Erdrich has noted, "I couldn't get to the heart of what I was doing unless people could see the [*Superman*] film (email to the author, October 7, 2013). In her essay for this issue, Channette Romero addresses how Erdrich and collaborators "recontextualiz[e] the Superman short [*Electric Earthquake*] within an Indigenous perspective" and in doing so "calls attention to and resists the ways in which mainstream animation historically has been used to legitimize and help continue cultural and material imperialism." Jonathan Thunder's animation throughout *Pre-Occupied* repeatedly "calls attention to and resists" the medium beginning with the film's bait-and-switch opening: the song does *not* remain the same. Rather than replicate what Romero calls the "divisive racism" of that 1942 Superman cartoon, *Pre-Occupied* recontextualizes those opening moments of animation within an inclusive vision of "humans' mutual interdependence with each other and the earth." As Romero points out, the poem-film's inclusive animation aesthetics enacts its movement toward advocating a global, even planetary environmental consciousness. The *Superman* theme song, after all, segues into a recording of Langston Hughes's famed refrain, "I've known rivers." First serving as the film's visual and verbal epigraph, this refrain then cycles underneath Erdrich's narration for the duration of the film. This sonic layering, in concert with Erdrich's repetition of the word "river" fourteen times in the poem, installs the river's role as structuring metaphor and mnemonic device. A three-line stanza, "I've known rivers: / Ancient, dusky rivers / My soul has grown deep like the rivers," from his iconic poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" captions the opening frame of St. Anthony's Falls, a visual landmark of the Twin Cities. This pairing not only immediately localizes this scene, whose identification as the Mississippi River is deferred in the poem, but also gestures toward the deep racial and national histories invoked by that river's name.⁴ These waterfalls on the upper Mississippi River, part of storied Dakota memory, were repurposed for hydroelectric power to fuel Twin Cities industrial development.

Yet the animated stars floating up from the river counter that concrete overflow spillway—sign of settler time—with Indigenous cosmological time. That Indigenous claim to what Erdrich later calls "Our river. / Map of the Milky Way, / reflection of stars / from whence all life commenced" (*"Pre-Occupied"* 24–27) appears as the spiral petrograph, which works as visual refrain, or mnemonic, throughout the film. The

speaker's alliterative invocation of "river," paired with the repetitive negation of "never," sets up a complex relationship between present and past occupations of this place:

River, river, river
I never, never never
etched your spiral icon in limestone (Erdrich, "Pre-Occupied" 1–3)

In the film these words spiral into being on a rust-colored shape that reveals itself as a door in an urban graffiti-marked landscape. This simultaneous movement of word and form in a specific locale opens portals between cosmological time, precontact time, and contemporary time. In their collaborative essay, "The Story as Primary Source: Educating the Gaze," Joe Feddersen and Elizabeth Woody describe petroglyphs as artworks that "serve the land and indigenous history by providing a greater connection to the story of how we have come to be, how we have learned to become human, and what prophetic visions we have inherited" (175). In *Books and Islands in Ojibwe Country*, Louise Erdrich strives to read island rocks inscribed with petroglyphs, living texts of Ojibwe memory that she says "refer to a spiritual geography" (50). In its structure and significance, the spiral in Ojibwe territories communicates the dynamic copresence, or simultaneity, of past and present time. Heid E. Erdrich indicates that the spiral also honors the understory of the Twin Cities as it signifies Dakota cosmologies that mapped the river and lands. As the film's moving signature, the spiral embodies LeAnne Howe's well-known concept of tribalography, an ethos and aesthetic that honors collaborations across genre, time, and space. Or, as Howe describes it,

Native stories, no matter what form they take, seem to pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, and multiple characters and all their manifestations and revelations and connect these in past, present, and future milieus. Tribalography comes from the Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another. ("The Story of America" 42)

The poem-film's addition of the recurrent spiral image, along with visual pairings such as an image of birch bark homes merging into a photograph of Occupy tents, extends the poem's situated convergence of

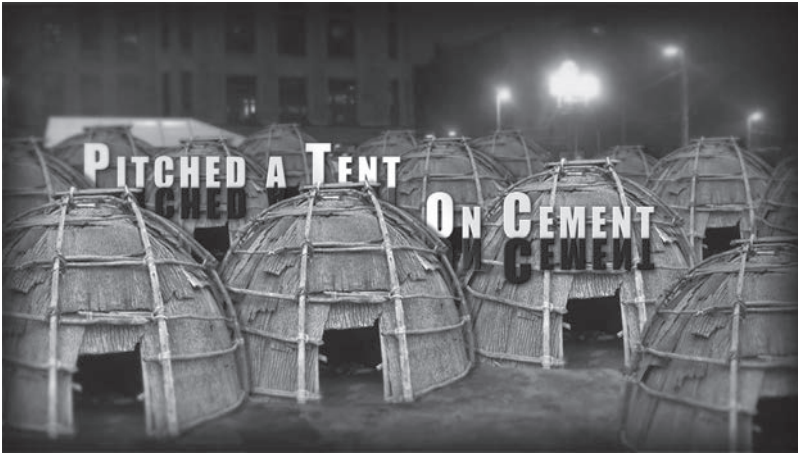


Fig. 1. Jonathan Thunder, *Tents on Cement*. Still from the short film *Pre-Occupied*, 2013. A digitally manipulated collage animation. Video images used by permission of Heid E. Erdrich. Art images used by permission of the artists.

temporalities. This convergence serves as a reminder of long-standing Indigenous presence and perseverance through settler time. More ambitiously, it serves as emphatic refusal of the kind of willful amnesia that underwrites linear “timeline” notions of US settler history.

At the same time, viewers are invited to make connections across multiple forms of occupation that compress centuries. For even as the river flows “both ways in time,” the poem-film’s fast-moving format of collaged images, sounds, and words “means to reveal the distracted human mind at a particular point in history” (HeidErdrich.com). In the film, the invocation of the river keeps getting interrupted, flooded with preoccupations both comical and serious:

Excuse my digression, my mind tends . . .
 In reality, my screen is lit with invitations:
 bake a casserole—send pizza—make soup for the 99%
 (“Pre-Occupied” 9–11)

Erdrich’s “pre-occupations” are manifest: preoccupations with gender norms; with expectations to serve at the behest of others; with environmental calamities; with the unexamined white privilege of Occupy activists. An animated photograph of Erdrich stages digital distraction: her mouth speaks those invitations as the top of her head pops



Fig. 2. Angie Erdrich, *Butter Maiden*. Watercolor on paper, 2012. Based on a photo by John Ratzloff.

open to release an overflow of figures and images. This exuberantly Monty Python moment, like other moments of animated movement in this piece, wryly ushers in a self-reflexive sequence. Her words move us through several 1950s cartoon images of classically “Clever” white mothers preparing meals and serving their families, images borrowed from her sister Angie Erdrich’s collection of cookbooks. Erdrich juxtaposes these by-now parodic images of nurturing white middle-class mothers with the line “there’s a river to consider after all,” a reminder of Indigenous sustenance and nourishment.

In the next frame we see a second sardonic (self-)representation of Erdrich, a portrait by her sister Angie Erdrich. Hinging on hilarity

and irony, on the familiar reframed, this portrait casts her as the Land O'Lakes butter girl: twin braids, buckskin, headband. Seated and facing the viewer, the artist holds a container marked "creamed corn" and maize to match her earrings. Yet with her clothes and pose, she feeds us something more than that creamed corn in her hands: she redirects this enduring emblem of sexual, economic, and environmental commodification. Books "have her back" after all: she is framed by two bookcases filled with volumes whose spines repeat key words from the poem: "river, river, river"; "re-occupied"; "pre-occupied"; "tar sands." The author's name on one of the spines brings "home" the power of writing as a scene of Indigenous memory and intervention. It also reinforces the film's personalizing of the poem's preoccupations. Two animated gobbling turkeys pop up in the foreground as we hear her recite a litany of "no's": "no time, no hours, no decades, no millennia. No, I cannot dump cans of creamed corn and turkey on noodles and offer forth sustenance again." Together, stanza, animation, and visual cues gleefully traffic in numerous visual, popular cultural, and historical allusions. Viewers' recognition of these allusions yields to a broader recognition of how national mythologies and histories of gendered colonialism thrive today, as familiar and ritualized as Thanksgiving dinner.

In Erdrich's playful but pointed self-representation, she does more than play Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Heid. She identifies a direct link between the representational and environmental health of Native women and their territories. Erdrich's work has often communicated the dangerous lack of imaginative and representational range available to Native women. For example, in her poem "Butter Maiden and Maize Girl Survive Death Leap," Erdrich writes:

Even now, Native American Barbie gets only so many roles:
Indian Princess, Pocahontas, or, in these parts, Winona—
maiden who leapt for brave love from the rock where eagles mate.

(1-3)

With this poem, Erdrich refuses the "death leap" forecast for Native women in settler mythologies of nation building, or what foundational Mohawk writer Pauline Johnson in 1892 deemed the Indian girl's "suicidal mania" ("A Strong Race Opinion"). By (re)occupying the widely recognizable Land O'Lakes image, Erdrich also reframes the "joke" of

that figure's sexualization at the hands of generations of consumers and at the hands of adolescents who knew, in the words of Eric Gansworth's poem, how to

Carefully position her
and her magical side emerges
transforming those round knees
into ample breasts, ditching her
old franchise for Hooters, as she
flashes you with a smile and so much more. (27–32)

Like many Native and First Nations activists, Erdrich notably underscores the interrelationship between settler violence toward the environment and toward Native girls and women. As many news sources have noted, recent energy extractive booms in the northern plains and western Canada highlight foundational settler sexual terrorism as both endemic and enduring. Tara Houska, national campaign director of Honor the Earth, notes that “the effects of the fossil fuel industry are not limited to the environmental. There is a very real human cost that is disparately felt by people of color, and women in particular.” In a representative report from *Indian Country Today*, Mary Annette Pember describes the Brave Heart Women Society's intercession in communities around Fort Berthold against the “unprecedented rise in domestic violence, sexual assaults and sex trafficking in their communities [in North Dakota] since hydraulic fracturing or fracking technology brought about the oil boom of 2008 in the Bakken shale oil fields. . . . [T]here has been a doubling and tripling number of sexual assaults, domestic violence and sex trafficking incidents in North Dakota since 2008.” These women's efforts to protect their communities, grounded in crucial roles occupied by Indigenous women for millennia, provide the kind of sustenance that can nourish the 1 percent, as we continue to see with NODAPL and related movements.

In Erdrich's wry refusal of the malnourishing roles asked of her, to “make soup for the 99%,” she also finds an antidote of sorts in her sustaining collaborations with other Native women artists both for this film and for other projects. Frequent collaborators such as filmmaker Elizabeth Day, dance artist Rosy Simas, painters Carolyn Lee Anderson, Andrea Carlson, and Angie Erdrich, and poet/linguist Meg Noodin have nourished collaborative arts practices that feed contempo-



Fig. 3. Andrea Carlson, *City*. Watercolor on paper, 2012. Art images used by permission of the artist.

rary Native literary and visual arts in the Twin Cities and beyond. For example, in Erdrich's book, *Cell Traffic*, Meg Noodin translates a series of Erdrich's prose poems into Anishinaabemowin, first as a literal transcription, next as a poetic translation, and finally reexpressed back into English. This collaborative study of language in motion, of translation across form, of forging relationships, seeded the poem-film *Lexiconography*, in which Noodin's voice animates, in verb-based Anishinaabemowin, the poem Erdrich recites in English. In the closing seconds of *Pre-Occupied*, Noodin sings "Imagine"—John Lennon's anthem of imagined global unity—in Anishinaabemowin. Ojibwe painter Andrea Carlson has provided the cover art for Erdrich's poetry collections *National Monuments* and *Curator of Ephemera at the New Museum for Archaic Media*. She has also worked with Erdrich on numerous collaborative arts exhibits, including *Pilot Car*, where *Pre-Occupied* was paired with Carlson's painting *100%*. In the poem-film, this vibrantly colored urban landscape of Minneapolis serves as the screen across which a proliferation of words scroll: "sulfide emissions, tar sands, pipelines, foster care, polar bears, hydro-fracking." Purposeful shorthand, this list notably links government-sanctioned corporate crimes against the environment with assaults on Native families and communities across the United States and Canada. The keywords "extraction," "extrication," and "exploitation" serve as interconnective tissue linking Indigenous territories, urban and not.

In an interview for her curated exhibit *Artifact Traffic*, Erdrich observed, "When I work as a curator, I feel drawn to those things that traffic contemporary images with traditional images. I love push-

ing forms against one another” (Keith). The poem-film’s traffic jam of colliding references, images, animation, and soundings enacts the “pre-occupations” she’s experiencing while also challenging viewers to make speedy associative and relational connections. For example, as she moves from the perspective of the “I” (“no I cannot offer forth sustenance again”) to that of the “we” (“a bit pre-occupied, we original 100%”), the cocreators of *Pre-Occupied* lay it on the table: literally. Layers of maps of the United States, old and newer, cover a table, reminding us that everywhere is Indian Country. Scores of animated gunights pop up in locations across the map that serve as explosive visual shorthand for reservations and the history that established them. At the same time, spirals appear again through the map, underscoring the message of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith’s acclaimed map paintings: “Every map is a political map and tells a story—that we are alive everywhere across this nation.” As Channette Romero powerfully argues, *Pre-Occupied* animates newer forms of activism through “contemporary environmental reoccupation efforts and a reappropriation and a recontextualization of maps and cinematic images in the digital realm.” What’s in a name? For Erdrich and her collaborators, the full ironic force of the Occupy movement arrives in the final frames of the poem-film *Occupy. Occupy. Worked for the 99*. The old image of Indigenous homes reappears, segueing into maps and black-and-white photographs of Alcatraz and Wounded Knee. These juxtapositions and layerings remember and make visible ongoing essential strategies of Indigenous territorial resistance. It’s striking that the Idle No More movement, which is so extraordinarily recounted in Alanis Obamsawin’s 2015 documentary, *Trick or Treaty*, emerged in late 2012 just as Erdrich, Thunder, Moniz Jr., and other collaborators were finishing this film. The poem-film’s concluding return to the river, its invocation of story-history-story, and its images of planetary relatedness resonate with Idle No More’s interventions in treaty violations and environmental assaults by the Harper regime. Returning to the opening images of St. Anthony’s Falls, stars, and spirals, the speaker suggests a possible shift:

River, river, river
 I never, never, never—
 but that is not to say that I won’t ever. (Erdrich, “Pre-Occupied”

Or, in the words of Dakota scholar James Rock at a Mississippi River Symposium, "The river and all these lakes beneath the water are her lifeblood and . . . it's [about] the relationships to water here, now, and always."

Never: "At no time in the past or future." Ever: "At all times. At any time." Just one letter separates these words of negation and potentiality. Not just wordplay, but a play on the possibilities of the poem-film form, on the transformative power of imagination aligned with political, environmental, and social calls to consciousness. "Pre-Occupied" recognizes the imperative, in the words of Tuscarora artist and curator Jolene Rickard, "to invest in the apparatus of the imagination." In doing so, how does the poem-film harness imaginative and collaborative arts practices to Indigenous futures? About the cocreation of *Pre-Occupied* and her other poem-films, Erdrich says that "these films taught me that a shared vision is a liberation, even in a simple thing that lasts only a few minutes" (Combs). What is the potentiality of a collaborative Indigenous arts practice that refuses to "stay in its place"? How does *Pre-Occupied* move in shifting locales and digital venues? On Erdrich's website? At its screening in an exhibit of video poems entitled *Text(e)/Image/Beat* in New Brunswick, Canada? At film festivals, or in local collaborative arts spaces? The poem-film's extensive screen time—at film festivals, on Erdrich's website, on YouTube—extends the audience for her poem while also opening up new ways of interacting with poetic form. At the same time, how does the reprinting of "Pre-Occupied" in Erdrich's new collection, *Curator of Ephemerata at the New Museum for Archaic Media*, open up even more forms of dynamic interaction? Erdrich has had QR codes placed within the text so that readers can access the poem-films through their mobile devices.

PART 3: PORTAGES

The multiple platforms and places occupied by both the published poem and the film—blog, print, film festivals, multimedia arts installations, the Internet—suggest the moving practice of contemporary Indigenous arts practices. To return to the river, as Erdrich so powerfully urges, we can liken this moving practice to portages. If we consider how river portages function as both noun and verb, as both the place of carrying and the carrying itself, we recognize how *Pre-Occupied* communicates the challenges of place-based activism grounded in Indigenous cosmolo-

gies, values, and epistemologies. As many Minnesotans know, the word “portage” refers to the act of carrying canoes, as well as to the carrying place where canoes need to be transported between water bodies. In its visual return to St. Anthony’s Falls and in its recurring spiral signifier, *Pre-Occupied* similarly traffics across time and territories. Dual but not dueling, the poem and poem-film differently carry and make accessible knowledges about Indigenous memories, territories, and temporalities. Through its moving parts, this collaborative poem-film enables the reference points of Erdrich’s poem to travel in both local and broader waters. At the same time, the form itself is also the message, as the poem-film’s fast-moving digital format helps to accentuate its activist tactics of navigating distracting, proliferating demands on the time and energy of Indigenous peoples. Despite the hyperdemands posed by digital media, the digital form of *Pre-Occupied* also extends the concept of the river as digital *and* Indigenous communication strategy. Rivers occupy other Native artists, after all, such as Mohawk installation and multimedia artist Alan Michelson, whose work has focused on rivers such as the Grand River in Ontario and “the East Coast Hudson where this all started.” In *TwoRow II* (2005) Michelson has created a moving, multisensory, and panoramic installation of the Grand River. Layering the Haudenosaunee Two Row Wampum with panoramic video of the Grand River, Michelson (re)situates the river within a network of relationships, reminders, and responsibilities rather than simply a tense, divisive border between settler residents and Six Nations citizens. In reminding viewers that the Grand River used to facilitate social relationships, Michelson helps us to see why Erdrich and her collaboration with Vincent Moniz Jr., Jonathan Thunder, Andrea Carlson, Carolyn Lee Anderson, Angie Erdrich, Meg Noodin, and others produced such a riverine mixed-media form. The collaborative aesthetics of Indigenous arts production, built on complex affiliations, intergenerational memory, and carrying knowledges across time and space, means that “there is a river to consider, after all.”

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(Rutgers) and facilitated a new edition of *In the Land of the Grasshopper Song: Two Women in the Klamath River Indian Country in 1908–09* (Bison Books) in collaboration with André Cramblit and Terry Supahan. She served as guest editor for *Western American Literature's* special issue on Indigenous westerns in 2014 and has recent publications on contemporary Indigenous mixed-media and comic/graphic arts appearing in *SAIL* and the *Routledge Companion to Native American Literature*.

NOTES

1. Febna Caven, in "Being Idle No More: The Women behind the Movement," recounts that "the Idle No More movement began as a thread of emails between four women from Saskatchewan: Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean, who decided to make a "sincere effort to make some change." The context for their resolution was the Canadian Bill C-45, the government's omnibus budget implementation bill that includes changes to land management on the reservations. It attacks the land base reserved for Indigenous people, removes protection for hundreds of waterways, and weakens Canada's environmental laws. The women started a Facebook page to brainstorm ideas and a plan for action. Gordon, who is from Pasqua 4 Treaty Territory, decided to name the page "Idle No More" as a reminder "to get off the couch and start working" (*Cultural Survival*, Web).

2. Given the mixed format of "Pre-Occupied," Erdrich also considers it an essay (artist talk, Colgate University, September 28, 2016).

3. The lead credits for the poem-film are Heid E. Erdrich, author, producer, and codirector; R. Vincent Moniz Jr., codirector; Jonathan Thunder, art director and animator.

4. A reader for this essay noted that Erdrich's use of this refrain invites us to look more closely at Hughes's poem, especially in terms of how its invocation of rivers and routes of slavery intersects with Erdrich's scrutiny of settler occupations. I thank the reader for drawing connections between Abraham Lincoln's presence in Hughes's poem and his presence in Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds's 1990 installation alongside the Mississippi River in Minneapolis. Aptly entitled *Building Minnesota*, the installation featured forty road signs that served as both epitaphs and indictments. The signs memorialized each of the Dakota men hanged by Lincoln's executive order at Mankato, Minnesota, in December 1862 and by Andrew Johnson in 1865. In his artist statement, Heap of Birds explained why the signs were placed along the Mississippi River: "As the forty signs are now offered in the Nash Gallery symbolically along the water called the Mississippi, which remains a highway for American business, we seek not only to extract profit from our surroundings. We also wish to honor life-giving force of the waters that have truly preserved all of us from the beginning, and to offer respect to the tortured spirits of 1862 and 1865 that may have sought refuge and renewal through the original purity that is water" (*Building Minnesota*, March 10–May 6, 1990, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis).

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Toward an Indigenous Feminine Animation Aesthetic

CHANNETTE ROMERO

Indigenous women's animated films are emerging as some of the most engaging contemporary digital media. Unfortunately, much like women's animation in general, this growing body of work has garnered sparse critical attention. This essay seeks to call attention to the growing field and to prompt increased study of its aesthetics. Analyzing works by better-known filmmakers/artists like LeAnne Howe, Diane Obomsawin, Lisa Jackson, and Heid E. Erdrich alongside less well known filmmakers Alethea Arnaquq-Baril and Gyu Oh, I hope to highlight the range of innovation in Indigenous women's animation, as well as its political motivations. Examining Howe's *Noble Savage Learns to Tweet* (2015), Arnaquq-Baril's *Sloth* (2011), Obomsawin's *Walk-in-the-Forest* (2009), Oh's *I Am but a Little Woman* (2010), Jackson's *The Visit* (2009), and Erdrich's *Pre-Occupied* (2013), I demonstrate some of the field's most prevalent formal characteristics: frequent use of flat design, growing popularity of cutout collage animation, reclamation of Indigenous domestic arts and crafts in the digital realm, privileging of spatial relations, connective aurality, and the emergence of hybrid cinematic-literary films that attempt to contribute to real-world activism. I contend that these six aesthetic strategies are employed in an effort to raise viewers' political consciousness in the service of Indigenous rights.

Calling attention to the ways that mainstream animation's stylistic conventions work to "naturalize" imperialism, Indigenous women's formal experimentations with animation seek to disrupt deep-seated settler ideologies. These films blend the genre's conventional techniques with Indigenous designs and domestic arts in an effort to assert the ongoing vitality of Indigenous women's art and storytelling traditions. Actively situating themselves and their viewers within arts traditions that histor-

ically helped humans negotiate their interdependent place within the natural world, Indigenous women's animation shows how the digital realm is yet another of the dynamic communication networks Indigenous peoples in the Americas have long navigated with alacrity and complexity. Exploring films digitally produced and distributed, I argue that Indigenous women's innovations in the animation genre work to bolster tribal political, cultural, and spiritual sovereignty.

Increasingly cheaper digital technology has led to an exponential growth in Indigenous women's animation, with many films digitally produced and then distributed and viewed globally online. While digital cameras, computers, and the Internet are all obviously newer technology, multimedia production is not new to Indigenous peoples; it fits within a long tradition of sophisticated communication networks. Trade routes, well traveled by Indigenous peoples in the Americas, historically utilized nonlinear designs and infographics to pass messages long distances within and between tribes. These complex informational networks joined other messaging systems like wampum belts, petroglyphs, symbols, traps, and monuments, all based on interactive mnemonics between visual design and oral storytelling. Because the messages required audience interpretation, Matt Cohen contends, "something like multimedia literacy" characterized "communications norms" (2). Cherokee scholar Angela Haas asserts that Indigenous peoples are "the first known skilled multimedia workers and intellectuals in the Americas" (78). Returning to the earliest definition of "digital" as literally referring to fingers, digits, that code information, whether in computer languages or wampum, Haas demonstrates Indigenous peoples' "long-standing intellectual tradition of multimediated, digital rhetoric" (94).¹ Mohawk-Jewish multimedia artist and scholar Steven Loft argues that Indigenous peoples "have always 'mapped' our environments" through storytelling and signage; multimedia has continuously functioned as "a spiritual, cosmological, and mythical 'realm'" that "provided a direct link between the past, present, and future" (174–75, 178). While Indigenous peoples and their communication networks have obviously changed over time, their long-standing storytelling, design, and networking traditions provide a strong basis for contemporary digital multimedia. The lack of oversight online also offers a space for highly political commentary, providing a freedom of expression that might not be possible in more established filmmaking, publishing, and museum venues. As Joanna

Hearne notes in her introduction to this volume, “digital platforms for aesthetic production and activism, such as social media networking, low-cost independent short-form film and animation production, and web-based distribution systems, are far more available to Indigenous women” and “create opportunities for women in positions of creative control.” Indigenous women’s appropriation of the animation medium is especially significant, as the genre’s narratives and formal grammar have historically been used to disseminate settler cultures’ imperialist and patriarchal ideologies.

My analysis of Indigenous women’s animation seeks to demonstrate how its generic innovation exposes the medium’s settler ideologies, but it also begs the question, is there an Indigenous feminine animation aesthetic? By asking such a question, I have no wish to assert an essentialist argument that locates the “feminine” in a supposedly universal Indigenous female body unmarked and unaffected by differences among tribal cultures, histories, and gender expectations. This is not a search for an Indigenous “écriture féminine,” for Pocahontas’s “mother’s milk” (Cixous 881).² Instead, I suggest that Indigenous women animators are influencing each other’s productions through shared techniques, approaches, and narratives, creating an emerging aesthetic that provides viewers with alternative ways of engaging with the world based on Indigenous cultures. Through their films, these filmmakers uphold Indigenous women’s historic roles of utilizing stories and domestic arts to help humans negotiate their relations with each other and the land. This growing field is appropriating a film genre that has historically disseminated destructive stereotypes about women and Indigenous peoples. Critiquing the way mainstream animation has historically condoned violence against Indigenous women, the narrator in Blackfoot/Sámi filmmaker Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers’s *A Red Girl’s Reasoning* (2012) says, “Forget what Disney tells you, Pocahontas was twelve when she met John Smith. It’s pretty little lies like this that hide the ugly truth.” Walt Disney Studios’ films and other Hollywood animations have long perpetuated racial and gendered stereotypes that romanticize or naturalize imperialism. Contemporary Indigenous women’s animation resists these destructive stereotypes and reveals how the sleek, formal conventions of mainstream animation work to “hide the ugly truth” of their real-world consequences on the lives and land of Indigenous peoples, especially women. As Susan Bernardin notes in her essay in this

volume, there is an “interrelationship between settler violence toward the environment and Native girls and women” that is both historic and increasingly rising in recent years. Indigenous women are using their films to animate, bring life, to the (hi)stories of tribal women that are discarded, materially and metaphorically, by the cinematic stereotypes that naturalize and elide violence against Indigenous women.

It might seem strange to frame animation as a political medium, since North American settler cultures typically consign the genre to the realm of light entertainment. Because of its public association with children’s programming and tongue-in-cheek comedy, the genre is ideal for strategic appropriation. The medium conditions viewers passively to accept its messages, making them potentially less guarded than when watching more didactic political films. Recognizing the political potential in animation, Jack Halberstam argues that the “magical mixture of color and craziness definitely allow[s] for cartoons to serve as attractive tools for the easy transmission of dense ideologies” and thus offers “a rich technological field for rethinking collectivities, transformation, identification” from womanist and queer perspectives (175, 174).³ Terrance Lindvall and Matthew Melton contend, “The cartoon mocks itself,” using humor to deconstruct and then reconstruct our views of the world in a way that “brings forth new birth, life, hope and laughter” (203). The carnivalesque humor Lindvall and Melton see creating “hope” has a darker, more satirical edge in Indigenous works, which often use humor to mediate historical trauma. According to Blackfeet writer Stephen Graham Jones, “What seems to work best” when negotiating the past “is comedy, or some sort of exaggeration. Ridiculous, overblown stuff that, once we wash all that fun off, is more real” (3). Indigenous animation enlists the genre’s parody, exaggeration, and humor, washing readers in “all that fun” so it can ultimately undercut the legacy of imperial acts, rendering them ridiculous instead of all-powerful. Indigenous appropriations of the genre are highly political, considering animation has historically used stereotypes about Indigenous peoples to assert settler cultures’ rightful claim to land in the Americas. Jeff Berglund says that “Disney’s magic” “is a disappearing act. Add the right elements, create distractions, play into the audience’s needs, and ‘poof,’ genocide and the enduring trauma of conquest vanishes” (50). Indigenous women’s appropriations counteract an animation tradition that elides conquest and its ongoing legacy on the material lives of Indigenous women.

Employing animation as a tool of decolonization, Indigenous women's innovations prompt a reexamination of scholarship on the genre, particularly women's animation. Scholarship on women's animation focuses on the genre's openness to self-exploration. Jayne Pilling argues that animation is an apt genre for female artists because it can "give voice to the intensely personal" and presents "a safe place . . . a private space in which to experiment" (6). María Lorenzo Hernández asserts that the genre's historic focus on "the legitimization of professional status has become less important" in contemporary women's animation "than the reflection of the animatrice's personal legacy" (83). Complicating the critical understanding of women's animation as a focus on the "intensely personal," private, and individual, Indigenous women's animation reflects different tribal understandings of history, gender, and the arts. In fact, throughout this essay I will demonstrate how the tensions between Indigenous and settler cultures' views of the land, identity, and representation are often self-reflexively negotiated in Indigenous women's animation aesthetics.

Scholarship on broader women's experimental animation can be useful when examining animation by Indigenous peoples of all genders. Paul Wells claims that since the 1970s, "women have used animation to create a specific *feminine aesthetic* which resists the inherently masculine language of the live-action arena" and Walt Disney Studios' animations (198, emphasis in original). Wells characterizes the "feminine aesthetic" as presenting an "engagement with different narrational approaches that challenged lineal orthodoxies and the address of specifically personal, *gender*-led issues[, which] resulted in the direct politicisation of some women's animation" (198, emphasis in original). Because a feminine aesthetic "mistrusts language," according to Wells, it "demand[s] greater participation from the viewing audience," which is forced to interpret narratives that are portrayed in metaphoric, "predominantly visual terms" (200). Wells's description of a "feminine aesthetic" is overly general and describes many animated films (by all genders) that seek to disrupt Walt Disney Studios' commercial, hyperrealist narratives. However, Wells's assertion that experimental animations require greater audience participation and that such participation has a potential for politicization is useful when analyzing animated films by Indigenous peoples. Pilling's analysis of time contributes further. Noting that women's animations tend to be "unhampered by the constraints of

naturalism,” Pilling asserts that “issues can be presented not as linear arguments . . . [but] literally played around with for the viewer to experience and interpret for themselves” (6).

Indigenous animators of all genders are constrained by an animation tradition that privileges linearity, hyperrealism, and historically patriarchal narratives over alternative forms of storytelling. Walt Disney Studios’ far-reaching influence over animation has led to a genre dominated by hyperrealist styles and plots that follow mainstream European and US models of narration that privilege linear understandings of time and individuality and position viewers as passive recipients of texts’ ideologies. Innovative films like Nance Ackerman and Alan Syliboy’s *Little Thunder* (2009), Steven Judd’s *Neil Discovers the Moon* (2011), Joseph Erb’s *We Prayed in Water* (2012), and others all disrupt the hyperrealism associated with patriarchy and conquest. They join many Indigenous animations that resist audiences’ historically passive positioning toward animation and open a space for viewers’ greater participation and perhaps potential politicization. Because Indigenous cinema is often influenced by tribal storytelling traditions, it frequently highlights nonlinear understandings of time, Indigenous languages, and interdependent relational identities. It also frequently prompts audience engagement in constructing stories. Allan Ryan notes, “Aboriginal film narrative, like its oral counterpart, often disrupts the concept of linear historical time, unfolding instead in a kind of ‘mythic’ time, where ancestral voices engage with those of future generations to inform current conversations and decision making.” Though Ryan is specifically addressing Indigenous Canadian cinema, I believe his study can be extended to other Indigenous films made in North America. In addition, Ryan highlights the growing visibility of Indigenous women filmmakers; he contends that their “resolute presence before and behind the camera reflects a broader movement among Aboriginal women to reassert a position of traditional power and authority that has been diminished in patriarchal societies.”

Following the American Indian Movement, more Indigenous women publicly are reasserting matrilineal positions of power in place of settler cultures’ historic patriarchy, and this reclamation has led to increased visibility in a number of fields, including filmmaking. These women meet informally and in organized groups like Tajarniit Productions and Native Women in Film and Television, which seeks “to empower Amer-

ican Indian & Indigenous Independent women filmmakers; to create diverse roles for American Indian & Indigenous women; to increase exposure for movies made by American Indian & Indigenous women.” These formal and informal networks provide useful support, mentorship, and guidance for the filmmakers; they also raise questions about how such alliances affect the narratives, aesthetics, and genres of films by Indigenous women. For example, Cree/Métis filmmaker Danis Goulet, the artistic director of imagineNATIVE, created the Embargo Collective I and II, where Indigenous women filmmakers collaboratively place creative restrictions on each other to challenge themselves to “push creative boundaries” and present alternatives to the “racist and one-dimensional portrayals of Indigenous peoples” in settler cinema. Lisa Jackson’s profile was significantly raised after she won a Genie Award for Best Live Action Short for her Embargo film, *Savage* (2009). The Embargo’s creative restrictions on sound led to Jackson’s ingenious *Savage*;⁴ her aurally innovative animated film *The Visit* was released the same year. Could Jackson’s *The Visit* (2009), which blends animation with audio from real-world personal testimony, have influenced the similar aesthetic in Alexis Young’s *Where We Were Not, Part I: Feeling Reserved* (2011)?⁵ Collaborating with and viewing other Indigenous women’s experimental narratives and aesthetics potentially provides communal authorization and a sense of legitimation for other, especially emerging filmmaking women.

While many feature films, especially dramas, by Indigenous women appear indistinguishable from films made by their male counterparts, all seemingly more influenced by tribal storytelling and Hollywood genre traditions than gender roles, there is a noticeable difference in animation aesthetics. Films made by Indigenous male animators—like Neil Christopher’s *Amaqut Nunaat / Country of Wolves* (2011), Jonathan Wright’s *The Bear Facts* (2010), Adrian Baker’s *Injunity* (2013) series, and others—are often created using popular CGI animation and present coherent narratives and a smooth style that simulates cameras’ movements. Hearne argues in her introduction to this volume that the camera’s single directionality mimics “a gendered, colonial gaze.” In contrast, animated films by Indigenous women are far more likely to employ experimental aesthetics and discontinuous narratives that alert viewers to conspicuous tensions, gaps, and erasures in their gaze. I believe this difference is a product of both gendered alliances and the

appeal of a film genre long amenable to experimentation. Since Indigenous women filmmakers like Lisa Jackson, LeAnne Howe, Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, Mary Code, and Velma Kee Craig choose to make films in multiple genres (animation, documentaries, live-action dramas, etc.), their experimental animated films reveal a greater collective willingness to innovate. Critical examination of these filmmakers' mutually influencing aesthetics reveals their highly political nature. The following discussion of the six most recurring aesthetic strategies in Indigenous women's animation seeks to demonstrate not only the field's range of innovation but also its shared political motivations.

One of the most striking characteristics of Indigenous women's animation is the prevalence of flat two-dimensional animation that is markedly at odds with settler animation's privileging of hyperrealist three-dimensional images that attempt to reflect "reality." Indigenous women's strategic use of flat design critiques and repurposes stereotypical images of Native peoples found in settler cinema and popular culture. Rather than following Walt Disney Studios' tradition of making a stereotype seem "real" by making it appear three-dimensional, many Indigenous women purposefully flatten out their images, seeking to literally and figuratively deflate negative stereotypes. For example, Choctaw writer/filmmaker LeAnne Howe's *Noble Savage Learns to Tweet* (2015) utilizes a simplistic, neon-colored, flat-design background reminiscent of early 1980s computer graphics to feature a stereotypical "Noble Savage." Complete with bright red skin, braids, feathers, and a loincloth, the "Savage" is presented as a two-dimensional cardboard cut-out figure with hinged limbs; it is resolutely impossible to mistake this flat image for a real-life Indigenous person. The popular culture origins of this stereotypical "wooden Indian" are revealed by the film's inclusion of clips from the famous western *The Searchers* (1956), images of the Washington Redskins, and photos from the notorious 2012 runway show staged by Victoria's Secret that featured nearly nude models in lingerie and elaborate feathered headdresses. By having the "Noble Savage" see and then choose to resist these images, the film portrays Indigenous peoples returning the gaze that has long been used to sexualize and objectify them. *Noble Savage's* wholesale condemnation of popular culture images reflecting a gendered, imperial gaze is conveyed quickly through its iconic deployment of flat design and two-dimensional figuration. Indigenous women filmmakers like Howe use flat animation

to call attention to the dissonance between representation and material reality, objectification and agency, the past and an engaged present.

Indigenous women's flat animation aesthetic is part of a larger "remix culture" in Indigenous new media that reflexively calls attention to both loss and survivance by recontextualizing popular cultural images of Indigenous peoples, asserting creativity and survivance in their stead. For example, Mohawk artist Jackson 2Bears describes how his multimedia works appropriate audio and video files that historically disseminated stereotypes like the song "Ten Little Indians," which horrifyingly naturalizes the violent disappearance of "little Indians." 2Bears sees his recontextualization of earlier media as "a performative gesture in which presence replaces absence; where the *disappearance* of the 'Indian' in the lyrics would be subverted by the (re)appearance of an Indigenous subjectivity that stood against the manifest manners of colonial mythmaking" (21–22, emphasis in original). 2Bears and other Indigenous new media artists layer popular cultural sounds and images in new ways that actively resist "colonial mythmaking" by powerfully asserting Indigenous survival in the face of material and cultural dispossession. The resultant dissidence between possession and dispossession in Indigenous multimedia, especially Indigenous women's animation, calls attention to cinematic stereotypes and their effects on real-world Indigenous peoples.

The work that renders these frictions most visible is Inuit filmmaker Alethea Arnaquq-Baril's animated film *Sloth* (2011). *Sloth* incorporates flat, cutout, line-drawn images of an Inuit man placed over a two-dimensional watercolor background meant to simulate a nineteenth-century moving panorama. Highly popular predecessors to cinema, panoramas' painted scenes were accompanied by an instructional narrator (a tradition continued in early ethnographic documentaries) that provided often inaccurate information about "exotic" Indigenous lands and cultures, allowing settlers visually to lay conquest to Indigenous peoples and their homelands. Panoramas and ethnographic films perpetuate the stereotype of the naturally "Vanishing Indians" and their conveniently "empty" lands in ways that effectively denied imperial violence while acting in its service. *Sloth's* painted watercolor background and narrative voice-over appropriate these historic instruments of conquest, complete with the scratchy sounds typically found in documentaries shot on standard 8mm film. The film begins by portraying a cutout

drawing of an Inuit man harpoon hunting seal while a scratchy instructional voice-over rehearses panoramic and early cinematic stereotypes, describing precontact Inuit as “friendly, jovial little people” and “noble savage[s].” The film then quickly shifts, replacing a line drawing of an igloo with a contemporary home. The voice-over laments, “Unfortunately,” the “modern Eskimo” is “no longer . . . noble” and is instead characterized by “paralyzing laziness,” alcoholism, and social media addiction, which are represented visually by a drawing of an Inuit man drinking a beer as he types on a computer. When the narrator describes how European contact has changed the contemporary Inuit, sections begin disappearing from the man’s body and home. First, shading is erased from the man’s chair and legs until only a vague outline remains; then the man’s computer loses shading, and his torso is erased completely. Gradually, the man’s body, chair, computer, and beer are erased until all that is left is a framed film-still on the wall depicting the stereotype of a happy Inuit hunter grinning with an overly wide, special effects-enhanced smile with an unnaturally sparkling tooth. The film ends with the film-still falling off the wall; the sound of breaking glass off-frame signifies its destruction. *Sloth* is self-consciously breaking with the racism of panoramas and early ethnographic films. Its use of flat, two-dimensional images of the happy Inuit hunter seeks to literally and figuratively deflate negative stereotypes, rendering them powerless by exposing their total absence from reality.

Further, the recontextualized cutout aesthetics in *Sloth*, *Noble Savage Learns to Tweet*, and other Indigenous women’s animation exposes the ways in which popular images of stereotypical “Indians” affect Indigenous peoples in ways that are both explicitly material *and* digital. In *Sloth*, the Inuit man’s hands holding a beer and typing on a computer are the last images erased before the breaking film-still, calling attention to the potential effects of settler popular culture on real-world Inuit peoples’ struggles with identity and alcoholism. The discontinuous lines initially used to draw the Inuit man and then his body’s overt erasure formally call attention to how the popular media’s representations of “Indians” hinge on the erasure, denial, and suppression of real-world Indigenous bodies. The continuous lines used to draw the seals the Inuit man hunts and their shading provide more three-dimensional depth and lifelikeness than the discontinuous, two-dimensional lines used to depict the Inuit man. *Noble Savage Learns to Tweet* reveals similarly

mediated bodies when the bull icon representing the US stock market has more three-dimensionality than its two-dimensional representation of the tweeting “Noble Savage.” Both the contemporary Inuit man and Noble Savage in these films are depicted typing on social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter, respectively), suggesting not only that the perpetuation of the stereotypical “Indian” occurs in film but that it is a characteristic of digital media. Fascinatingly, these films highlight their own digital construction: *Sloth*’s voice-over announces, “This film was made by a modern Eskimo.” *Noble Savage*’s voice-over is composed entirely of tweets, and, along with the clicking sounds denoting typing tweets, it makes up almost the entire soundtrack; viewers see the tweets appear on the screen as if through a smart-phone screen. The film’s non-Twitter visuals are dominated by retro graphics heavily referencing Disney’s 1982 film *Tron*; these graphics appear as if through a computer screen of that era, complete with its limited color scheme of black, white, and blue-green. Groundbreaking as one of the first films extensively to use computer-generated imagery (CGI), *Tron*’s plot revolves around a video game engineer who is transported into the digital world through an experimental three-dimensional laser scanner capable of turning material bodies into simple data; once you entered *Tron*’s digital world, your material body no longer existed. *Noble Savage*, *Sloth*, and other Indigenous women’s recontextualizing aesthetics explicitly reference several earlier forms of multimedia (panoramas, early ethnographic films, early CGI, laser scanners, video games, etc.). They suggest that the imperialism of the “Vanishing Indian” stereotype is not only similarly outdated but also a common characteristic of mainstream multimedia and the digital.

These animations not only disrupt the ongoing “Vanishing Indian” stereotype but also call attention to the historic ways that Indigenous peoples’, especially women’s, material bodies and labor have “vanished” from histories and understandings of the “digital.” Lisa Nakamura calls attention to the invisibility of (predominantly women) workers of color who build the material circuits and components needed for digital platforms. The real-world bodies of hundreds of Navajo women working in a Shiprock, New Mexico, factory between 1965 and 1975 to assemble the first semiconductors, “the basis of all digital media devices,” are unknown and erased from most histories of the digital age (Nakamura 939n6). Through formal recontextualizing aesthetics and self-reflexive

metacommentary about the Indigenous women's labor used in their own construction, Indigenous women's animated films work to reinsert material Indigenous bodies and Indigenous women's labor back into conversations about digital production. Unlike *Tron*, these films assert that Indigenous women exist and create, both within and outside the digital world.

The films' layering of analog and computer-drawn images demonstrates a second common characteristic of Indigenous women's animation: its recuperation of crafts and domestic arts in the digital realm. Several animated films by Indigenous women present cutout aesthetics created through a scrapbook-like collage of different materials (digital animation, paintings, photographs, fabric swaths, plant cuttings, etc.). Sophie Tamas notes that scrapbooking is "an accessible feminized form of self-expression" that allows for the "recognition of the exceptional in the everyday" (90). Recombining familiar materials into "impressionistic" collages "reveal[s] the everyday as both strange and marvelous" and, according to Tamas, provides "potentially useful sites for expressing and managing loss because they turn us from the abstract and theoretical towards the material and sensory realm of textures, colors, objects and images" (88). It is unsurprising, then, that when Indigenous women seek to represent both the wonder and the loss in their lives they choose everyday materials: hand-drawn illustrations and letters, plant and herb cuttings, materials used in sewing and quill work, but also very contemporary materials like photographs, computer graphics, newspapers, and Hollywood film clips. While the earliest animated films, like Lotte Reiniger's *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926), used cutout techniques, computers and digital animation are more often now used to simulate cutout-style aesthetics. Notably, Indigenous women animators often choose to combine both digital and analog animation in an effort to retain, at least to some degree, the sensory feel of scrapbooks and their potential for representing and managing the material realities of their lives.

Scrapbooks also require viewers to work to interpret the disparate pieces' relations to each other and the larger work or world, engaging viewers themselves in creative acts. Indigenous women's collage animation illustrates the power of media, and it exposes how artistic representations reflect differing cultures' creative interpretations of reality. These films appropriate animation's characteristic self-reflexivity to expose not

only the negative stereotypes embedded in the genre's grammar but also to question settler understandings of "reality." Paul Wells claims that experimental animation "interrogates dominant perceptions of 'reality' and the received imagery which apparently represents it" (51). Indigenous women's animated films appropriate experimental animation's self-reflexive questioning of dominant notions of "reality" and privilege Indigenous realities instead. Abenaki animator Diane Obomsawin's film *Walk-in-the-Forest* (2009) presents a salient example of this technique, since both its aesthetics and its plot strategically call attention to the ways arts traditions reflect cultures' understandings of reality. The film's narrative follows its titular character, a medicine man humorously named Walk-in-the-Forest as he walks through the woods in search of a plant that grows on the shores of the animals' medicine lake, described in many tribes' stories. The film is constructed through a collage of cartoon-style digital animation, cutout photographs of birds and pine trees, hyperrealist drawings, and oversized scans of grocery store plastic bags and flowers that appear at times larger than humans. The collage aesthetic self-consciously calls attention to the way the film is constructed by bringing together different technologies—a healer's plant knowledge, photographs, digital and analog animation—while also reminding viewers of the pollution that results from such technology: the lake becomes polluted with plastic bags and oil drums immediately after the medicine man finds and picks the healing plant.⁶ While the healer's knowledge and the medicine lake are portrayed as "real" within the film's plot, its illustrations introduce elements of the marvelous when the lake is portrayed instantly and spontaneously polluted and when it is shown capable of healing not only local woodland creatures like wolves and moose but also plains animals like buffalo and ocean creatures like flying fish, seals, and whales that somehow make their way unhindered to the lake in the woods. Danika Medak-Saltzman asserts in this volume that Indigenous women filmmakers use "play, fun, and imagination" to "playfully recenter ways of relating to animals that do not configure them" as "property" or "infinitely exploitable resources." The tensions among *Walk-in-the-Forest's* deliberately discontinuous cutout aesthetics (photographs, handmade illustrations, and scans of three-dimensional objects over computer graphics) self-consciously call attention to the tensions among different cultures' understandings of the world, ani-

mals, and reality; images of medicine worlds are visually at odds with portrayals of contemporary pollution.

Walk-in-the-Forest is critical of settler cultures' technologies that cause pollution, and its narrative questions Indigenous cinema as well. In the film, an Indigenous healer visits the pristine animals' medicine lake and picks the only healing plant visible; the medicine man wants to use the plant to save a member of his village suffering from a fever. The healer's harvest is unsustainable and a violation; he attempts to heal a single human, not the numerous animals the lake is intended to heal. Immediately after he picks the plant, the lake is shown polluted with oil drums and plastics. The film shares the same name as the offending medicine man, Walk-in-the-Forest. Since viewing the film's collage of digital and analog animation is obviously not the same as taking an actual walk in the forest, it highlights the difference between representation and material reality. Through its self-conscious naming, the film calls attention to the way it contributes to the incongruity by potentially serving the interests of a singular filmmaker (albeit one, like the medicine man, who is bent on helping her world). Because the film never confirms that the medicine man's theft of the animals' plant actually heals the sick person, it ultimately calls into question the need for the transgression. Once the healer's actions are shown to cause pollution, the sole witness to the violation (an innocent bystander) looks directly at viewers, indicting the audience as witnesses. This censure comes as an unforeseen surprise, prompting viewers to consider what possible transgression we have witnessed. Through its overt naming practice and complex visual metaphors, viewers are encouraged to imagine the possible aftereffects of creating and viewing films about Indigenous peoples, especially those films that rehearse stereotypes about medicine men and healing lakes. The film suggests that even Indigenous-made productions run a risk by appropriating a medium that historically stereotyped Indigenous peoples in ways that led (sometimes indirectly, like picking the healing plant) to their exploitation. To ensure viewers understand *Walk-in-the-Forest's* self-reflexive critique of film, it purposefully portrays several additional cinematic stereotypes about Indigenous peoples—a dream catcher hangs on the wall of the sick person's home, an anachronistic tipi sits outside the cabin, and a cutout photograph of an eagle ridiculously is shown wearing another cutout photo

of a long, flowing, eagle-feather headdress. The film's collage aesthetics indict itself, its viewers, and Indigenous filmmakers who inadvertently propagate cinematic stereotypes, showing how seemingly serving the interests of a few can potentially lead to unintended, harmful practices. Its conspicuously awkward recontextualization of everyday materials calls attention to the many layers of representation, technologies, and understandings of reality that Indigenous filmmakers must negotiate in their medium.

The metacommentary seen in *Noble Savage*, *Sloth*, *Walk-in-the-Forest*, and other Indigenous women's animation is not new; animated films from their origins have historically been self-reflexive, actively calling attention to their construction. Watching a male hand draw an image that then becomes able to move, seemingly on its own, was a common trope in early animation. A third prevalent aesthetic in Indigenous women's animation self-consciously riffs off this early animation convention by replacing the male drawing hand with frequent depictions of women's hands sewing or stitching. Joanna Hearne asserts, "Although all animated films have th[e] capacit[y] for self-conscious reflection on issues of authorship and discourse, Native American and First Nations animations harness these aesthetic qualities for . . . politicized work" (97). Emphasizing Indigenous women's sewing is political. Including domestic arts alongside fine and digital arts not only highlights many tribal women's historic material labor but also demonstrates the ongoing vitality and contemporary value of Indigenous domestic arts like beadwork, quillwork, and sewing.⁷ Indigenous women's animated films call attention to the influence of both Hollywood conventions and tribal arts on contemporary Indigenous cinema, actively revealing both the contemporaneity of Indigenous cultures and Indigenous women's historic role as creators.

Though Indigenous women's animation demonstrates the co-influences of tribal and settler cultures, it often privileges Indigenous visual and domestic arts over mainstream cinematic traditions, even as its very medium as film complicates this preference. Inuit animator Gyu Oh's *I Am but a Little Woman* (2010) provides an especially illustrative model of the interplay in Indigenous women's films between Inuit arts and the European fine arts that influenced animation conventions. The film juxtaposes graphic, black-and-white depictions of animals found in early Inuit carving with the domestic art of weaving Inuit women began

in the 1970s and chiaroscuro shading techniques from European fine arts. While one might be tempted to read the more detailed, chiaroscuro shaded drawings of a mother and daughter sewing in their home as the film's primary narrative, the film instead begins and ends by portraying the graphic tapestry the females create, and it devotes far more space to that portrayal. Striking images of animals, women, and the Inuit homeland are depicted in graphic black form lines. The first full minute of the 4.5-minute-long film depicts images of animals and land in the traditions of Inuit carving and domestic arts; a quarter of the film has progressed before it reveals that the images are actually being sewn with needle and thread by a mother and her daughter. These static form line representations are shown alongside jerky, digitally animated versions of the images that mimic early stop-motion and cutout animation techniques. The juxtaposition of static and moving images, and of Inuit and European arts, highlights the self-reflexive quality of the film's world in ways that resist animation's historic traditions of hyperrealism and narrative coherence. The greater time and attention devoted to the tapestry's static "sewn" images, instead of to the more detailed and animated fine arts portrayals of mother and daughter, privilege Inuit carving and domestic arts over and against the acknowledged influences of other art traditions on the film.

I Am but a Little Woman highlights the function of Inuit domestic arts to help peoples negotiate their relations with each other and the land. Once the tapestry is completed, the drawings of the mother's and daughter's hands come closer together, signaling how domestic arts taught multiple generations practical skills, gender roles, and notions of identity based on intimate relations with others. The relational function of Inuit arts is highlighted by the fact that the tapestry is no more static than the film. Once the tapestry is complete, the sewn characters begin to move and interact with each other, demonstrating the living quality of Inuit arts and the ways creating it participate in a dynamic process that leads to the ongoing construction of not only art but also living stories and interdependent identities. It reveals the way stories interact with Indigenous arts. The film is almost entirely black and white, and it is striking when color is introduced. One of the first times color appears is when a string of symbols leaves the mouth of one of the moose in the tapestry, presumably a visual metaphor for the animal's story. We watch as a "sewn" image of a goose takes the string of

symbols from the moose's mouth and flies out of the tapestry, revealing that some of the animals' symbols are yellow, pink, and orange, and they become intermixed with abstract images of fireweed, an important component of traditional Inuit diet. Once the goose has brought the animals' story into the world outside the tapestry, the sewing mother is able to enter into it; viewers see a sewn image of the woman looking peaceful within the Inuit landscape her labor reproduced. Through a complex visual metaphor we learn that Inuit women's art is a dynamic negotiation among art, storytelling, and the land. Viewers and the girl come to see that we have a lot to learn from the animals and must work hard to understand their language and stories, though it is visually suggested that such stories are worth much, since they provide some of the only color in the mostly black-and-white film and offer humans clues about food sources. Viewers learn that it requires work to communicate with the animals, a fact the film emphasizes through its predominantly visual language. The only sounds we hear are the sounds of geese, moose, and a river, until the film's end, when the first written poem by an Inuit woman, "Kivkarjuk's Song," which was first written down by an explorer in 1927, is sung in the film's background in nontranslated Inuktitut. Through the Inuit arts of sewing and poetry, the mother has been teaching both the young girl and us viewers to see ourselves as simply one among a number of beings occupying the land. If viewers work to interpret the film's narrative, we are rewarded by understanding our relatively "little" status (per the title) within a land populated primarily by animals, water, and fireweed. The film's visuals suggest that awareness of our relational status connects us to a larger natural world in intimate, nurturing relationships that bring peace and a stable, communal identity. Indigenous women's arts (domestic, poetic, and cinematic) provide the means to help humans actively negotiate their relations with other beings and land in the Americas.

Indigenous women animators are upholding their historic tribal roles by utilizing stories and domestic arts to help humans construct sustainable, interdependent relations with each other, the land, and the cosmos. In this way, their animation aesthetics are similar to Jack Halberstam's concept of "queer" animation. According to Halberstam, queer animation aesthetics "question and shift the location, the terms, and the meanings of the artificial boundaries between humans, animals, machines, states of life and death"; they "refuse the idea of human

exceptionalism and place the human firmly within a universe of multiple modes of being” (33). Because these aesthetics prompt viewers “to explore ideas about humanness, alterity, and alternative imaginaries,” Halberstam argues that “it is *only* in the realm of animation that we actually find the alternative hiding” that is capable of inspiring “revolution and transformation” (33, 23, emphasis in original). Queer animation’s political potential lies in providing viewers with models of nondestructive engagements with the world, over and against global capitalism’s rhetoric of individualist exceptionalism, which has long been used to justify exploitation and destruction. Similarly valuing and authorizing interdependent, cooperative subjectivities, Indigenous women’s animation differs from queer animation’s focus on failure. Both animations narratively and formally wrestle with loss in a way that differs from mainstream “progress” narratives of success. However, queer animation highlights inaction, destruction, and failure (past failed political formations, lost Olympic medals, etc.), subtly opposing and “stalling the business of the dominant” culture by revealing what is excluded from it (Halberstam 88). In contrast, Indigenous women’s animation focuses on ongoing creation and survival *despite* loss. It, too, asserts other ways to measure meaning, not through new imaginary realms but through real-world cultures that exist alongside, yet different from, dominant culture.⁸ If queer animation’s oppositional aesthetics’ primary function is to “talk back” to dominant culture, Indigenous women’s animation engages viewers in a dialogic “talking back” to Indigenous peoples, cultures, and lands.

This dialogue requires privileging place and land over time, a fourth common characteristic of Indigenous women’s animation. Films like *I Am but a Little Woman* resist a specific historical setting, instead contextualizing themselves within the ever-present time of Indigenous homelands. Writing about “atemporality” in another Inuit film, *Atanarjuat / The Fast Runner* (2001), Shari Huhndorf contends that while it upholds negative stereotypes begun in ethnographic filmmaking that present Indigenous peoples as anachronistic emblems of the past, the film can be used by Inuit filmmakers to assert their people’s occupation of this land “since time immemorial and it thus sets a precedent for their continued control of Nunavut” (825). Inuit land is portrayed as living and dynamic in *I Am but a Little Woman*; because the land continues to live, the film asserts, it presents a more continuous and vital pres-

ence than the “little” humans depicted in the film. Rather than organizing around the limited category of linear time, the film urges viewers to shift their narrative framework to one organized around place.⁹ This is quite a feat, since viewers must watch the film in chronological time, most likely in a setting removed from the Inuit homeland in which the film is set. To resist a focus on chronological viewing, the film’s complex visuals present an aesthetics of delay, making a film that is 4.5 minutes in length seem much longer. The film’s slow visuals, sparse soundtrack, and repetition of images protract the experience of watching the film and make it live on in viewers’ minds long after its seemingly delayed conclusion. Because its meaning requires extensive audience interpretation, an effort that is significantly rewarded by multiple viewings, the film’s aesthetics repositions viewers to focus on place and land instead of time.¹⁰ This shift is essential, as linear time has long been used to justify imperialism. Vine Deloria Jr. asserts, “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,” and this “same ideology sparked the Crusades, the Age of Exploration, Age of Imperialism . . . [a]nd later, of course, the United States” (63).

I Am but a Little Woman resists linearity and uses the noticeable disparity between time as portrayed in the film and time as experienced by viewers to call attention to other, larger dissonances—between Inuit notions of time and linearity, between Inuit and settler cultures’ understandings of land, between land and its representation in art. Rather than trying to elide these differences with a hyperrealist animation style, a coherent narrative, or a commanding soundtrack, the sparseness of the film’s visual and audio tracks calls viewers’ attention to cultural gaps and absences, including the historic dispossession of Inuit land and the contemporary creation of the new territory, Nunavut. Through visual metaphors, like the image of a woman’s feet walking above, but not directly on, the tapestry’s depiction of land, *I Am but a Little Woman* uses Indigenous arts to reveal the Inuit’s ongoing connection to portions of their homeland, despite their dispossession of it. Their creative arts lay claim to the lost land and assert that even if they cannot currently walk on it, the land continues to live in Inuit memory and arts. The film, like other Indigenous women’s animation, undermines linearity and creates a space to acknowledge and commemorate the loss that is a part

of Inuit women's lives; further, it reveals how the ongoing creation of Inuit arts keeps alive their relations with the land.¹¹

I Am but a Little Woman and the other films I examine here exhibit a fifth common aesthetic of Indigenous women's animation: innovative use of sound to reveal the interpenetration of the domestic and the public. Paul Wells argues that in experimental animation, "silence, an *avant-garde* score, unusual sounds and redefined notions of 'language'" are often used to make pointed statements (46, emphasis in original). These films include Indigenous languages, which Angelica Lawson asserts in this volume are "a powerful political act." Indigenous languages, drums, sounds from the natural world (running water, wind, animal calls, etc.), and silence are all used to redefine "home" and to demonstrate the connection between the domestic and the larger world. One notable example is Ojibwe filmmaker Lisa Jackson's *The Visit* (2009), a digitally animated film that recounts a real-life Cree family's (the Ahenakews) encounter with a UFO in 1996. In the film's opening we watch a man, Barry Ahenakew, drive home to his rural house on the Cree Ahtahkakoop Reservation in Saskatchewan. The man enters a house dominated by his wife and daughters, who are depicted at the kitchen table actively engaged in domestic labor—making tea, caring for children, and creating a beadwork image of a howling wolf. A young daughter is shown drawing a picture of the night sky at the table, visibly linking fine arts drawing with domestic arts and the interior of the home with the exterior night sky. The interplay between the traditional and contemporary, the visual and the aural is emphasized when the older teenage daughter's beadwork wolf morphs into a digitally animated "real" wolf howling outside the family home. The overlap between drawing, beadwork, and animation and between domestic and interior sounds reveals the ongoing role of Indigenous women's art in bridging the domestic space with the exterior world. The Indigenous women portrayed are all creators. The film reveals Cree male gender roles as well; when a UFO appears above the house, the father burns sweetgrass, sings, and plays a drum to communicate with the aliens. Both the father and women in the family use traditional tribal visual and aural arts to reflect on and negotiate their contemporary world.

The interpenetration of the domestic and global is actively reinforced through the dynamic interplay between the visual and the aural. The film's cartoon-style animation—digitally animated to mimic stop-

motion animation—is paired with a real-world recorded interview of the Ahenakews recounting their experience. The formal juxtaposition of rural rez accents and high-tech CGI works alongside drawings that depict burning sweetgrass in far more detail than the film’s simplistically drawn UFO. Contrasting its cartoon-like CGI with its seemingly “real” audio track, the film prompts its audience to question their presumed assumptions about Indigenous cultures. Jonathan Sterne notes that sound recording emerged simultaneously with imperialism. US government and military aggressions against Indigenous peoples in the nineteenth century were justified with rhetoric about modernity and “progress” based on the “Vanishing Indian” stereotype, and “the drive to build and fill phonographic archives with the sounds of ‘dying’ nations and cultures” was used to elide imperial acts (*Audible* 37). Sterne asserts that sound recordings are versions of history writing, and “history, like all forms of memory, is first predicated on forgetting” (“Preservation” 65). Susan Bernardin’s essay in this volume explores the “willful amnesia” underwriting settler US history. Contemporary Indigenous women’s experimentations with digital sound recording reveal what settler narratives willfully “forget”: the continued vitality of Indigenous peoples, arts, and oral traditions. Engaging viewers in trying to bridge the gap between a narrative about a UFO and a seemingly “real” audio track that includes Indigenous drumming and singing, *The Visit* prompts its audience to explore cultural differences and dialogues. For example, the teenage daughter’s detailed beadwork image of a wolf is contrasted with the simplistically drawn (but obviously far more high-tech) spaceship. Cree and alien cultures are depicted as vastly different in the film; however, it shows how they might be bridged through the Ahenakews’ use of tribal arts. When the father sings and plays the drum for the aliens, the UFO begins to flash its glowing, brightly colored lights in time with the drum’s beat. While Cree and alien cultures remain distinct and different, the film suggests they are able to nonviolently communicate through Cree art and oral traditions.

Indigenous art acts not just as a medium for communication across cultures but also as a space for reflection and adaptation for Indigenous women. By the film’s end, the young daughter’s drawing of the night sky changes to incorporate the spaceship, and the teenage daughter is shown creating a beadwork UFO that is then able to hover and glow on its own. Cree females and traditional Cree arts are both shown capa-

ble of adapting and reflecting upon contemporary Indigenous lives. The film's experimentation with visual and aural aesthetics helps highlight the cultural differences crossed daily by Indigenous women who work to maintain traditional practices, such as beadwork and a focus on the domestic, alongside increasingly high-tech settler cultures that might initially appear "alien." The interplay among images and sound, rural and high-tech cultures, public and domestic spaces exposes viewers' preconceptions about the presumed content of Indigenous films. As Angelica Lawson notes in this volume, Indigenous women's digital new media often "challenge[s] mainstream audiences' expectations of 'Indianness.'" Indigenous women's animation suggests that filmmaking, much like Indigenous life, is complex and requires acknowledging how differences coexist in the contemporary Americas. These differences include negotiations among tribal and settler cultures; agricultural and technological lifeways; domestic and public spaces; and the roles of males, females, and other-gendered persons. Animated films by Indigenous women often depict Indigenous women negotiating these differences through fine and domestic arts (e.g., drawing, beadwork, sewing, etc.) and through their relations to natural sounds and music. The film's self-reflexive strategies highlight the way animation connects the visual and aural and suggests it joins historic tribal arts in providing a means to reflect upon and negotiate larger differences between the Indigenous home and the world beyond.

One final formal innovation that increasingly appears is hybrid cinematic-literary films that enlist animation as a bridge to link literature and politics in an effort materially to contribute to real-world political activism. Ojibwe poet/filmmaker Heid E. Erdrich's *Pre-Occupied* (2013) is a quintessential example of the genre because of its explicit link to political activism and because it reveals how the other five aesthetic techniques discussed here—prevalence of flat design, collaging of digital and analog images, privileging of tribal visual and domestic arts, promotion of spatiality over temporality, and connective aurality—all work in the service of Indigenous rights. Created in response to the Occupy Wall Street movement, Erdrich's website calls the film "a visual landscape of associations and references that match the tremendous irony of how the word 'occupy' can be meant" (Erdrich). *Pre-Occupied* reveals the ways that mainstream US animation, cultural imperialism, and even some leftist activist movements help to uphold the ongoing

occupation of Indigenous land in the Americas. It combines CGI, cutout, and graphic animation; maps; photographs; visual art by Indigenous women artists; images from 1950s advertisements; and various video clips, including from a 1942 Superman short film, *Electric Earthquake*. It pairs these visuals with audio recordings of Erdrich reading her titular poem, Langston Hughes reading his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," snippets of the Crash Test Dummies' "Superman Song," and Margaret Noodin singing an Anishinaabemowin language translation of John Lennon's "Imagine." *Pre-Occupied* acknowledges numerous popular cultural, Indigenous, and literary influences for its creation and suggests that awareness of this multicultural inheritance is necessary to resist settler cultural and material occupation. By labeling the film's experimental form a "poem-film" on her website and acknowledging the way "the film inadvertently anticipated the Idle No More Movement" (Erdrich), Erdrich suggests that experimental films can be enlisted to animate poetry, to make it live off the page in ways that materially support real-world activism, like the Idle No More activist movement.¹²

Pre-Occupied uses the Occupy Wall Street movement as a touchstone to consider the historic European occupation of the Americas. Erdrich's voice-over announces her unwillingness to support the Occupy movement because she is "simply distracted by sulfide emissions, tar sands, pipelines," and other environmental and social ills that resulted from her homeland's occupation by settler culture. Though the film reveals Erdrich's current refusal to join with the Occupy protesters, it resists binary thinking in its closing statement, "but that is not to say that I won't ever." The film's focus on inclusion, rather than exclusive binaries, resists the Occupy Wall Street protesters' claims that they are radically different from the Wall Street bankers they protest. Instead, the film asserts that both protesters and bankers alike are guilty of occupying and destroying land and rivers in the Americas. The film's poem and animation link the "stock still" cement river "banks" that Occupy Wall Street protesters clog with tents with the "banks of marble" occupied by Wall Street banks; both are juxtaposed against the flowing, living Hudson River and other rivers. Rather than focusing on political divisions, the film highlights "our river, map of the Milky Way . . . [w]hence all life commenced," joining "100% of all life on our planet" in "creation." Like many animated films by Indigenous women, *Pre-Occupied* privileges creation over destruction.

The film provides a space both to critique environmental destruction and to support Indigenous activism against it. The notes at the end of the film contend that contemporary protesters' focus on economic change and/or "alternative energy" is just another form of "the new land grab," as none of it supports returning land to Indigenous control. The film's coda asserts, "As the Occupy Movement took hold Indigenous groups continued struggles to protect our homelands from imminent threats such as the tar sands in Canada and its Keystone pipelines, copper mining in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and hydro fracking elsewhere—everywhere it seems." Though the film focuses on the Ojibwe homeland (located within what is now called Canada, Minnesota, and Wisconsin), it uses this land as a base both to critique environmental destruction and actively resist it "elsewhere—everywhere." Linking political divisiveness and environmental destruction, the film asserts instead humans' mutual interdependence with each other and the earth. It informs viewers that perspectives "flow both ways, story, history, story. There's a river that considers us after all." *Pre-Occupied* warns that the earth is animate and watching ("consider[ing]") our story, and it implies that rivers (whether the Mississippi or the Milky Way) can take back their life-giving support in the face of destruction and division.

Like many animated films, *Pre-Occupied* self-consciously reflects upon its own position in regard to the animation tradition; it juxtaposes its inclusive focus on how rivers give "life" and "creation" to all peoples with the divisive racism found in the animated 1942 Superman short film, *Electric Earthquake*. In the Superman film, when an unnamed Indigenous villain seeks to regain Manhattan through violent schemes, Superman admits that Indigenous claims to Manhattan are "possibly" valid legally, but he questions, "What do you expect us to do about it?" Susan Bernardin contends in this volume that *Pre-Occupied*'s recontextualization of this scene reveals "the superhuman powers required of Indigenous peoples on a daily basis." *Pre-Occupied* critiques all contemporary refusals to discuss the ways in which imperialism negatively continues to impact Indigenous peoples and lands today. Rather than supporting the Occupy protesters, the film proposes that Indigenous people "ReOccupy." It asks viewers to consider its cinematic reoccupation of stereotypical images like Superman and early advertising images depicting "squaws" on cans of corn, and it contextualizes its efforts alongside photographs of Indigenous reoccupations of Alcatraz and Wounded

Knee. It suggests that Indigenous reoccupation of images, water, and land is essential for life. *Pre-Occupied*'s inclusive collage-like style reinforces its content, bringing together multiple visual and audio tracks to examine numerous issues involving media representation, land, gender, and political rights. The film shows how Indigenous animation could potentially raise viewers' political consciousness in the service of real-world Indigenous activism. It suggests that imperialism's legacy can be resisted through both contemporary environmental reoccupation efforts and a reappropriation and recontextualization of maps and cinematic images in the digital realm. "These juxtapositions and layerings," argues Bernardin, "remember and make visible ongoing essential strategies of Indigenous territorial resistance."

Pre-Occupied suggests that to fully reoccupy negative media representations of Indigenous peoples, the historic link between mainstream animation and imperialism must be exposed. The film explicitly references the well-known animator Max Fleischer and his teams' use of Technicolor in Superman cartoons to portray a "lushly rendered" and thus culturally appropriated Hudson River. While *Pre-Occupied* is obviously critical of Fleischer's Superman, it appropriates his tradition of animating, and thus calling attention to, darker subjects and gritty urban environments. It acknowledges that Fleischer's Indigenous villain is, in some ways, not a stereotypical "Indian," because he has "lost his signifiers: no braids, no blanket"; but it laments, "We recognize him" nevertheless as an "ignoble savage." Despite portraying him in a suit (instead of leathers and feathers), the film uses the double negative—"he is not not your TV Indian"—to emphasize how the cartoon does indeed uphold racist "Indian" stereotypes by juxtaposing the unnamed, dark-skinned Indigenous villain against the named, light-skinned Superman, who secures Manhattan once again for settlers. The Superman short film ends with Superman's alter ego, Clark Kent, announcing to Lois Lane, "You know, Lois, the old island looks just as good as ever," asserting settlers' "everlasting" claim to and knowledge of "the old island" of Manhattan. By recontextualizing the Superman short within an Indigenous perspective, *Pre-Occupied* calls attention to and resists the ways in which mainstream animation historically has been used to legitimize and help continue cultural and material imperialism. Like other films by Indigenous women, *Pre-Occupied* suggests that Indigenous women's animation can serve as a tool of decolonization by exposing the way set-

tlar cultures' media "naturalizes" violence against Indigenous land and women and replacing it instead with powerful images of creation and cooperation. By connecting its efforts in the digital realm with real-world political activism, *Pre-Occupied* proposes a cinematic activism that materially can contribute to contemporary Indigenous struggles for rights and land.

The formal aesthetic techniques I examine here—flat design, collage animation, incorporation of domestic arts and crafts, privileging of place, connective aurality, and activist cinematic-literary films—are just a few among many in the field.¹³ The common motivation of each is not to express an individual female animator's personal, private individuality or relation to the world, as might be the case in broader women's animation; instead, many of these films seek to enlist viewers' interest and engagement in Indigenous issues. To do so, these films must experiment with animation conventions that privilege linear, hyperrealist narratives that position viewers passively to accept status-quo ideologies. Over and against the historic conservatism, racism, and sexism of the settler animation tradition, animated films by Indigenous women promote interdependent, relational identities and practices that uphold creation and connection over destruction. The focus on creation is extended to their viewers. Seeking to produce forms that uphold their content, these films' aesthetic experimentations attempt to engage viewers in acts of creation, promoting active interpretation and critical questioning over passive acceptance of destructive practices and ideologies. The films suggest that enlisting viewers in the micro act of helping to create their narratives might encourage them to participate in larger, more macro acts of creation outside of the films' world. The films' discontinuous, often nonlinear narratives are paired with conspicuous tensions and gaps between numerous collage images, visual and aural tracks, and different cultural and artistic influences, all in an effort to enlist their viewers' engagement in constructing and interpreting meaning in both digital and material worlds.

Not only do Indigenous women's animated films function as mediums for cross-cultural communication, but their formal innovations act as critical interventions in the animation tradition. The films' appropriations of a genre long used to uphold cultural and material imperialism are innovative and valuable but not without risks. Their formal experimentation has the strong potential to turn off the wider, global

viewership they might seek. All of the animated films examined here, and many others, can be watched for free online, presumably reflecting a desire for a wider global audience. However, the films' imagistic and metaphoric visual narratives, nontranslated Indigenous languages, and temporal experimentation require much work from their viewers, work some might refuse after being long accustomed to more conventional narratives that elide their status-quo ideologies through seamless animation. Further, the films' Indigenous audience is limited by their digital medium. In 2016 the US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reported that 41 percent of Indigenous peoples living on tribal lands in the United States lacked access to broadband, while 68 percent lacked access in rural tribal areas (Tveten). Many Indigenous peoples are currently accessing digital content through cell phones, since they do not require a broadband connection (Guskin and Mitchell). The short film format of most Indigenous women's animation makes for easier distribution and cell phone viewing; however, Internet inaccessibility, even on cell phones, persists on tribal lands.

The radical newness of Indigenous women's digital animation and ongoing issues with its accessibility could lead to either lasting generic and political impact or continued silence and marginalization. Regardless of their global efficacy, the field's formal innovations demand critical attention and a redefinition of our understandings of women's animation. Instead of consigning the genre to the realms of light entertainment or highly personal self-examinations, Indigenous women's animated films expose the medium's historic collusion with imperialism and seek to replace it with potentially decolonizing aesthetics. Better understanding Indigenous women's formal innovations and interventions into the animation genre can help to better reveal its efforts materially to contribute to Indigenous rights.

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Indigenous filmmakers' growing fascination and appropriation of genre films (comedy, horror, science fiction, animation, etc.).

NOTES

1. Haas's and Cohen's rethinking of early Native communication systems offers a provocative challenge to scholarly understandings of Indigenous peoples' supposedly fraught relationships with representation, media, and the digital. In her introduction to *Native on the Net* (2006), Kyra Landzelius questions how technologies like the Internet can be "indigenized," which she defines as "being creatively integrated and indexed into practices and beliefs rooted in a local cultural logic" (2). Calling attention to the economic reality of Internet access and the way the Internet spreads inaccurate stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, Landzelius is ultimately unsure that virtual technologies can be inscribed and shaped by "local perspectives and for local agendas" (33). While understanding that local tribal context is essential to understanding Indigenous works, I believe it would be limiting to imagine that *all* Indigenous art has a solely "local" focus. Trade routes throughout the Americas connected numerous tribal peoples through vast communication networks; Native peoples have historically communicated both locally *and* intertribally. By posting their films online and making them available in tribal communities (through local screenings, distributed CD-ROMs, mobile cinemas, etc.), many Indigenous filmmakers engage in and speak to local tribal audiences about local affairs, but they also draw upon earlier, *intertribal* communication traditions to speak to a global audience.

2. Indigenous women's decolonizing politics should not be collapsed with settler cultures' feminist discourses. The relationship between Indigenous women artists and activists and mainstream feminist movements is complex. Devon Abbott Mihe-suah contends that many Indigenous women do not identify with settler feminism because "they have witnessed white women [in the movements] enjoying power privileges that come with being white at the expense of women of color" (160). However, Mishuana Goeman and Jennifer Nez Denetdale claim, "The false dichotomy of feminist and nonfeminist is oversimplified and undermines Native women's approaches to decolonization" (Goeman and Denetdale 10). Goeman, Denetdale, and other self-described "Native feminists" assert the value of Indigenous feminisms to tribal sovereignty. Because I believe that self-definition is an essential component of self-determination, I hesitate to apply the politically loaded term "feminist" to Indigenous women filmmakers and their aesthetics, choosing instead to show how these films assert the ongoing vitality and diversity of Indigenous women's arts.

3. As will be discussed later in the essay, Halberstam's concept of queer animation both overlaps and differs from Indigenous women's animation aesthetics in constructive ways.

4. The Embargo Collective charged Jackson with creating "a musical with heavy metal in it" and "no English allowed" (McMillan).

5. *The Visit* (2009) could be viewed as an influential predecessor for Steven Judd's *Neil Discovers the Moon* (2011), which also combines animation with real-world

audio (though not personal testimony). One could make the case that Indigenous animation influences the field at large, regardless of filmmakers' genders. While I believe this is certainly the case for individual films, when looking at Native animation en masse, Indigenous women's animated films employ more experimental aesthetics in general.

6. The opening and closing digital illustrations of curtains that reveal and then conceal the world depicted in the film further highlight the film's metacommentary. *Walk-in-the-Forest* deliberately calls attention to the limited knowledge it will reveal for viewers' pleasure, as it does not disclose the location of the medicinal lake or the name of the healing plant.

7. Even in *Walk-in-the-Forest's* critique of cinematic stereotypes, a notable hand-made tapestry hangs on the wall alongside the aforementioned stereotypical dream catcher.

8. Halberstam briefly references Indigenous arts as "the erased and lost art of a people destroyed by successful white colonizers" (93). Indigenous women's animation suggests that while tribal arts traditions have adapted, they are not "lost," and their cultures are not "destroyed."

9. It is important to note that while several animated films by Indigenous women employ atemporality and visual delay tactics, time is still an essential category in the films. Animated films are historically short, which might appeal to women struggling to make art while balancing other life obligations. The films' brevity also makes for easier cell phone viewing, the medium many Indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada use to access the Internet due to limited broadband connections (see Guskin and Mitchell).

10. In 2010 María Lorenzo Hernández called attention to the fact that contemporary women animators in general often "describe the artist in relation to her spatial context," "especially her dwelling, her recreational sites and/or nature" (75). Hernández ultimately concludes that animating a "*variety of spatial contexts*" helps women animators best create "self-portraits" that reflect their individual personalities (75, 76, emphasis in original). Broader women animators' focus on the personal and the individual is clearly at odds with Indigenous women's animation that seeks to represent the interdependent, communal identities that emerge in relation to Indigenous arts and homelands.

11. In contrast, Halberstam's queer animation focuses not "on becoming, being, and doing but on shady murky modes of undoing, unbecoming, and violating" (4). Both animation traditions acknowledge loss and violation, but Indigenous women's animation positively affirms the value of ongoing creation and "being."

12. As Susan Bernardin asserts in this volume, writing can be a "scene of Indigenous memory and intervention."

13. While I attempt here to explore aesthetics that frequently appear in Indigenous women's animation, I am cognizant that the films chosen for investigation also determine which aesthetics are examined, as do the films' production and distribution. Many of the films examined here were produced and/or distributed by the Na-

tional Film Board of Canada (NFB), which might explain their overlap in aesthetics. However, I think their shared association with NFB requires a more nuanced understanding, since NFB funding has led to the production of numerous animated films by non-Indigenous women and men that do not share the formal characteristics I have been exploring. As Jayne Pilling has argued, the “National Film Board of Canada has done perhaps more, historically, than any other institution to support the development of animation as an art form, and [has] provided opportunities for many women filmmakers” (7). While NFB’s sometime openness to experimental animation has led to a wider distribution of these films, the fact that not all of NFB’s animated films reflect the shared aesthetics examined here suggests that Indigenous women filmmakers have some levels of agency and control over their films’ style and content.

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Waasamodibaajibiigemaazoying

Bright Lines of Story in Song

MARGARET NOODIN AND STACIE SHELDON

Note: For the best results, read this article with your browser open to the website discussed and open images and audio when indicated in the “netnotes.”

All of the songs posted on this site are intended to be shared. They are songs with stories and beginnings, and we hope their journey continues. As they travel into your life it would be nice if you share each song’s story when you sing it. We always like to know when you use a song, but we put them here as gifts to all of you, so please practice, sing, and share them.

Weweni anishinaabemaazan nindan miinwaa gaa minowaadaaman
nagamwinan abjikaazanan. Sing these songs carefully in Anishinaabe and
look well on them as you use them.

—<http://ojibwe.net/songs/>

For thousands of years Anishinaabemowin has been spoken in the Great Lakes basin. One of the earliest songs recorded for the language revitalization website Ojibwe.net is “Epaaskaakonesed Epaaskaakonesed Agaashiin Anangens,” a version of “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/childrens-songs/twinkle-twinkle-little-star/>). The song is not new or original, but as Margaret helped her daughters, who were quite young at the time, sing the long word *epaaskaakonesed* (one who sparkles), we talked about words for sparks and lights and the way fires start. That word is also sometimes spelled *biskaakonese*, and it can be used in many more ways, but it entered our lives as part of a song, a half-familiar refrain eventually sung so often that we had no need to look at the words. What this essay explores is how this song and others are part of the Internet on a website designed to protect the spirit of what

is sensuous and sentimental using wire, code, creativity, and a language that still sparkles.

This essay is not about technology and revitalization or educational practices that produce the best outcomes. Numerous sources exist for more information on those topics. This essay is instead about the depth and dimensions of one drop in the bucket, *ezhi-ziiginigaadeyaang bagosendiziibing*, the way we are pouring what we know into a river of hope. It is an offering of metadata, the architectural autobiography of one website, one endless invitation to interpret and engage with Anishinaabemowin.

Anishinaabemowin is one of many endangered languages. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), “It is estimated that, if nothing is done, half of 6000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of this century.” For Anishinaabemowin, also known as Ojibwe, the US 2000 census and the Canada 2001 census records combined show a total of 12,260 self-reported speakers. For the related language, Potawatomi, there are only 50 remaining speakers in all of North America. This is how the vanishment begins and identity is eroded. In some Anishinaabe communities, elders who grew up speaking Anishinaabemowin are still active and teaching. In some communities there are no longer any speakers of Anishinaabemowin, and citizens with an interest in learning must travel far or find new and innovative ways to learn the language. Teachers and linguists make attempts to come up with more accurate estimates, but this is like measuring electric current during a storm. Just as one student feels confident and proficient, an elder may walk on, and a light goes out. What everyone is sure of is that there are not enough children learning the language.

Ojibwe.net was added to Google Analytics in Ode’imiini-giizis (the month of the Strawberry moon) just before the summer solstice in 2007. It was likely a dream and a discussion topic before that, but if a birthday has to be chosen, that’s the point to pin on the calendar. As a young site it was known as *Noongwa e-Anishinaabemjig* (People Who Speak Anishinaabemowin Today) and was hosted on a personal webspace, then moved for a while to the University of Michigan, finally moving to a space paid for and managed by a small group of Native friends. Today the site regularly reaches nearly two thousand people per month. Many

elders have been a part of the site and have generously contributed their voices to the collective efforts, but the core keepers of the site are Stacie Sheldon and Margaret Noodin. Alphonse Pitawanakwat serves as the resident elder in cyberspace and male voice in our circle. *Gizaagigo*, Alphonse. As the page “about us” notes, the site “represents many things, most of all, it is evidence that Anishinaabemowin is alive and well,” adding that one component of a living language is that it be used creatively.

Ojibwe.net was created with these two realities in mind: the language is declining in use, and to survive it must be used fully and creatively. At first, the website was simply a way to collect, share, and reference any language material we could find as a group of learners residing in an urban community with limited access to speakers. Then as the language nest blossomed, the website grew. In 2009 members of that language community formed a women’s hand drum group. Miskwaasining Nagamojig is a gathering of women who write and perform songs in Anishinaabemowin. Their interests and work fill a space in the landscape of revitalization (<http://ojibwe.net/miskwaasining-nagamojig-swamp-singers/>). Their work is a primary feature of Ojibwe.net. Others have created dictionaries, grammars, and spaces to learn online and at language gatherings. With the contributions of Miskwaasining Nagamojig the site is a celebration of women’s voices as they connect with male voices in lessons and stories, as they fit into the history and future of Anishinaabe song, as they work to bring Anishinaabe lyrics to an intergenerational community singing for joy and well-being. It is an act of digital selves-publishing. By archiving and sharing creative use of Anishinaabemowin, the site echoes the paradigms of the language and culture. The very structure of the site, the artifacts embedded in the pages, and ultimately the experience of interpreting meaning are multi-modal, relational, and open-ended. Even that muskrat who dove down to get dirt when every other animal had failed knew that we live in an interactive, multiplayer environment where you can level-up unexpectedly and encounter a destiny you never imagined was possible.

STRUCTURE

The overall structure communicates complexity and flattens authority. Nearly every posting lists multiple sources for content and sets the expectation that layers of contribution will be acknowledged and

accepted, inviting the reader/learner/singer/inter-actor to be responsible for the knowledge they find. Our content exists and is accessed across various platforms and media. It is device agnostic. The website leverages Open Source software that is created by hundreds of people around the world. The knowledge is coded, ordered, indexed, and situated on pages that emphasize usability, clarity, and permanence. Like “The Humble Song” it is predictable and solid (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/womens-traditional/humble-song/>). It is advice, admonition, and psychology combined. Steady beats falling between consonants, the song provides a lyric metaphor for the way things have been added to the site in layers as time, breath, and energy allow.

Gda dibaadendizimi kido Gizhemanido. (We all should be humble,
says Gizhemanido.)

Gda jiiingwanitawaanaan. (We should kneel before her/him.)

Gda dibaadendizimi kido Gizhemanido. (We all should be humble,
says Gizhemanido.)

Gda gikendamin gikendamowaad. (We should know what they
know.)

Gda naadamadami ji ni ishpigaabawiyiing. (We should help each
other raise up.)

Gda naadamaadami. (We should help each other.)

The pages have been constructed, and words are placed in a way that helps one group know what another group knows. The goal is to raise one another up. The digital environment allows shifts in presentation that are more able to reflect Indigenous systems of knowledge production: know the story of a song, absorb the song by hearing it, then repeat the audio as many times as required to have it enter long-term memory. No notes are provided, no specifics about size or character of the drum. The gap between the sound and production is the replication of traditional apprenticeships. It’s easy to pick up the words and the songs, but not too easy.

The landing page eschews state-based politics, and no commerce is ever present. The community is not defined by current national boundaries but by the palimpsest of a precolonial and now longpast-postcolonial confederacy. By invoking the Three Fires Confederacy the site reaches across the entire diaspora of speakers who choose to identify as Anishinaabe. This also signals traditional linguistic alli-

ances and focuses the identity of the language on fire, not capital, as a form of energy and means of confederation. There are few signifiers of “indianess” and instead the simple juxtaposition of a statement about the (Native? North?) “American” dream translated into Anishinaabemowin.

It is a subjective location that is both open and closed that exactly mirrors the third-person plural options of the language itself. In Anishinaabemowin *wiin* is “he/she,” simply not “you” or “I.” There is no gender specificity. What is more important is alignment of relationships. The language implies that it is less important to know whether a person is male or female than it is to know whether they are acting with you or without you. The statement “we are going to the store” is either “ni wii izhaamin adaawewigamig” or “gi wii izhaamin adaawewigamig.” A speaker must clarify whether or not the listener is included or excluded from the statement. This key facet of the language reflects the nature of the site itself. There is awareness that the audience may be an auntie or a daughter trying to learn a song, a stranger looking for a way to connect with their heritage, or a curious seeker surfing culture online. There is really no way to know. But they all can be led through certain patterns of information recognition that feel familiar to some, new to others, and essential to the site creators.

The fact that “Lessons” are positioned in a primary location for left-to-right readers of English privileges core teachings in attention to detail. One should learn the phonetics, the pronoun options, and the centrality of action, motion, and energy in grammar before moving forward. “Stories” are next, with the implication that one should listen before engaging in “Song” or taking on “Projects.” Songs have biographies. The history, meaning, and value of a song are explained before the song itself. That introduction and the responsibility to share it forward are part of the cultural protocol. Certainly one can skip forward, but that in itself is an act. A “skipper” will do that and will be forced to recognize the “skipness” in themselves, which is what an elder in person might elicit from a child, the awareness of personal learning style, and the idea that knowing your own way of learning is as important as the outcome of a standardized exam. For those who want to test their reflexes, there is always the Anishinaabe tongue-to-toe twister “Dip, Dinmaanganan, Gidigong Miinwaa Zidansan” (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/childrens-songs/head-shoulders-knees-toes/>).

ARTIFACTS

In Native American studies, artifacts are contested remnants of archaeology and history. In digital media, artifacts are something Hamlet encounters on the holodeck or Paul Ford embeds in born-digital, bot-supervised essays on code. On Ojibwe.net artifacts are primarily linguistic or at least serve as regalia for linguistic events. Visual images are chosen to fit with the text, and embedded audio is provided to add dimension and definition to the encounter with the language. The images for the song sections evoke a group of drums belonging to a group of women (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/womens-traditional/>), the single drum of a group of men (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/mens-traditional/>), intergenerational silliness and the deconstruction of romanticized assumptions (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/popular-songs/>). In many cases, the digital images offer cognitive balance, as with the waxing and waning moons above a table of dialect variation (<http://ojibwe.net/projects/months-moons/>). Art on the site is a reflection of Anishinaabe modernity. From Dave Shananaquat's crane painting on one of the drums to Zoey Wood Solomon's female faces of the seven grandfather teachings (<http://ojibwe.net/projects/prayers-teachings/the-gifts-of-the-seven-grandfathers/>) there is a disassembly of expectation that speaks to a very practical and syncretic whole.

One good example of blended artifacts is the page constructed as a bridge across time and scholarship between a lull-a-good-bye song from the 1800s to a book centering Jane Johnston Schoolcraft as a Native and American poet. As Robert Dale Parker explains on his own web page, the recovery of an Ojibwe poem by Jane led him to linguists, historians, and singers who brought the text new life (<http://thesoundthestarsmake.com/writings.htm>). On Ojibwe.net, Miskwaasining Nagamojig take the tiny trailing vowels Parker found in the poem as evidence of the potential for the lines written long ago by Baamewaawaagizhigokwe (Woman of the Sound the Stars Make Rushing through the Sky) to be a song for her children as she returned home after delivering them to an East Coast boarding school (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/womens-traditional/nindinendam-thinking/>). As a final touch, Jane's curled and lace-collared portrait shatters expectations with her wise Jane Austen smile. Both visual and audio artifacts give visitors much more than only text.

Another recent bridge represented on the site is the connection between language, light, swamps, and highways. The Overpass Light Brigade is a collective of mostly urban and sometimes rural activists who invited Miskwaasining Nagamojig to sing in a reclaimed industrial city space where land was returning to the wild. At the event in 2014, hundreds of people collected milkweed and mulberries between the crumbling bricks of former breweries, lyrics were disassembled, and single words were carried, one adult-sized letter at a time, to a stage where old meanings were given to new neighbors. As cultures merged, an Anishinaabemowin version of “We Shall Overcome” rang out between the lights (<http://ojibwe.net/projects/community-projects/overpass-light-brigade/>).

EXPERIENCE

Anishinaabemowin is a language of options so diverse and extreme that the act of seeking a center becomes the focus. Sentences are not linear, they are frames of meaning radiating from core verbs. Situating the language in a digital environment offers distinct freedoms for exploration of new ways to scaffold lessons and information. Words for language contain variations of the following verbs: *inendam* (consciousness), *inewe* (sound), *izhigiizhwe* (intentional patterns). Meaning is a network, not a number line. For instance, one of the many words for a computer combines morphemes to indicate “something used to make an image with metal and lines,” *mazinaabikiwebiinigan*. The experience of interacting with the site mirrors the way students of Anishinaabemowin are taught to build words and sentences and narratives. Start with clear action, make a choice, move in one direction, then circle back to the starting place and go in the other direction. For example, *zaagi* means “to love someone.” Consider the following:

Gi+zaagi+in = I love you.

Gi+kchi+zaagi+ ina = Do you love me much?

Nibii zaaga’iganing ina gizaagi’aanaan? = Do we love the water in the lake?

Choices are made, and adverbs, pronouns, and interrogatives are thrown in front or back, like a coded fractal, making every piece still a part of the whole meaning but a smaller percentage of the increas-

ing whole. The final sentence speaks of the water as animate, which is common in many Anishinaabe songs. The context-based presentation of the songs on Ojibwe.net highlights some of the most complex forms of the language.

One of the songs we hear often out in the world (because someone learned it on the site) is the American Indian Movement song (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/womens-traditional/aim-song/>). The version on Ojibwe.net is an auntie's response to humiliation and anger. At a small local protest in 2005, a group was spit on, and the song they turned to was a song of the 1970s and the civil rights era. As the story goes, the song was first used by AIM during the protest of Raymond Yellow Thunder's brutal murder in 1972. For many, this anthem remains a symbol of survival and was sung at pantribal gatherings without any words, only immediately recognizable vocables. With permission from several of AIM's current leaders, Anishinaabe words were added so that young people could carry on the message of this song in the language. The reference within the song itself to a "seventh fire" is a gesture to multiple temporalities where past confederacies inform present political realities with the clear implication that the long-term future must be acknowledged. Adding style to the spiral, the word *boochigo* is a favorite of writer Jim Northrup and is used in many dialects to simply say emphatically, "We have to do it." All of this is offered with the song itself. In this way, the site carries forward a tradition of Anishinaabe song ethnography that began with Henry Schoolcraft's 1839 *Algie Researches* and Frances Densmore's 1907 wax cylinders and continued through albums, cassettes, CDs, and MPs to the point of total artistic control in the hands of the singers. Most of the recordings on Ojibwe.net were made using an iPhone 5 and involved numerous takes and conversations as the singers themselves decided which versions had the best honor beats and the most balance.

On the opposite end of the experience spectrum are the ways that the site can invite people to reflect on private moments. The song "Miigwechwendam" combines the word for giving thanks (*miigwech*) with the word for being consciously thoughtful (*enendam*), gesturing toward philosophy in everyday life. In some instances, songs are merely for pleasure or to show artistic prowess, but in Anishinaabe culture they are more often tools, transitions, or unexpected sprouts in fertile ground. Singers might be tired or not in the mood to do the dishes, but the

tumble of long vowels and the way *bimaadiziwin* (life) is spoken of as animate reminds us and those who learn the song that living is the act of having a relationship with the journey itself. We are gifted with hot water and a home to do dishes in. Songs can shift the attitude to one of gratitude. Songs help with chores, and long walks and putting children to bed and suddenly work and worry are just another few steps on a long journey. As the song repeats, “Aa miigwechwendam maabaa bimaadiziiwin. I am in a state of gratitude for this good life” (<http://ojibwe.net/songs/womens-traditional/nimiigwechwindam/>).

One of the most powerful songs on the site is “The Strong Women’s Song,” which is the second most popular song on the website after Jane Schoolcraft’s “Nindinedam.” As a community we have relied on this song to provide a ray of hope as relationships fall apart, during custody disputes, through cancer treatments, and into hospice rooms. It is first on the list whenever one of the Swamp Singers is struggling and when she is triumphant. This song was introduced to Miskwaasining Nagamojig by the Ode’min Kwe Singers from Toronto and is credited to the Anishinaabekwewag and Zhaaganoshikwewag who were in solitary confinement in the Prison for Women in Kingston, Ontario, during the 1970s. Nancy Stevens once reminded us, “This song emerged as a way of staying alive, of supporting each other.” The song originally had only two words, *anishinaabe* and *kwewag*, and was sung as a round of overlapping verses that sped indefinitely, limited only by the physical ability of the singers. During the Idle No More movement of 2012, this song became the round-dance rhythm of street gatherings and protests, and Miskwaasining Nagamojig added new words to create the version on Ojibwe.net. We kept the pattern of voices weaving with one another and added images to connect the daughters of the earth to the stars, the wind, and one another. Having a cyberspace to save the song has definitely increased the ability for the song to be shared and performed by others in Anishinaabeakiing.

RESPONSE

Anishinaabemowin is a verb-based language where volleys of action are the essence of aesthetics. The digital humanities along with the increase in virtual knowledge have shifted the way learning happens. Relation-

ships are built with students, site visitors, Facebook friends, Twitter followers, and many other branded and unbranded identities. Ojibwe.net has multiple platforms for feedback. Recognizing the opportunity to extend our network of students, teachers, and supporters, Ojibwe.net joined Facebook in 2008 to share events and photos. In November 2009 we had 406 fans. In November 2010 we had 1,944 fans. By November 2011 we had 2,317 fans. As of August 2016 we have 3,978 fans. This is only the population of a very small town and not much by comparison to other pages and personalities in popular culture. But compared to the number of speakers cited earlier, this is one-third of the population. The following facts paint a portrait of our audience:

77.45 percent of our visitors come from a desktop or laptop computer, 17.36 percent from a smartphone, and 5.19 percent from tablets.

68 percent of our Facebook fans are women.

59 percent of users are from the United States, and 33 percent are from Canada.

Songs are the most popular destination on our website (since 2007), with 84,218 unique visitors to the menu of songs since the website launched. Some organizations or educational groups create their own programs or platforms. We chose instead to keep solutions as simple as possible and follow our users onto the information highways they already drive. The main site is for information and educational interaction. Facebook allows us to freely connect with a dispersed population to share updates, photos, and events and to announce our newest content or to give Anishinaabe context to something happening in the world. Just as importantly, we get instant feedback on whether people like what we post, if they shared it, if they valued it. In this way, the ambient affiliation of Ojibwe.net becomes even more collaborative rather than just two women posting their latest worksheets or the cool link that they found. A digital environment fosters visible community engagement. People share stories and songs and their own latest work, they become stewards of the language, participants in the process of revitalization. Corporations turn to social media to tell the story of their brand and foster brand loyalty, and that is not dissimilar to how we use it. It all comes down to storytelling.

CONCLUSION

N'gii minozheyaami gii Anishinaabemaaziyaang Miskwaasining Nagamojig. We enjoyed singing in Anishinaabemowin, the Swamp Singers.

—Stacie Sheldon, August 23, 2010

Mjimendan gaa-binjibaayan. Remember where you came from.

—Alphonse Pitawanakwat, May 6, 2011

Johanna Drucker speaks of knowledge as the product of interpretation located “in a perceiving entity whose position, attitudes, and awareness are all constituted in a co-dependent relation with the environment” (20). An entire generation of digital rhetoricians now works in speculative computing and computational analysis, sifting the differences between objective equations and predictable chaos. A separate, sometimes overlapping group considers the way writing and digital spaces are connected. Ojibwe.net offers something to each group in the form of evidence that the digital can be personal and audio truly can be transmitted from heart to mind with vast spaces between the endpoints. For cultures used to oral ambiguity and impermanence, the digital humanities are a better representation of a narrative home. As language and identity are revitalized, the term “digital Natives” perfectly suits the voices and minds of Ojibwe.net. When Stacie posts a thought about singing in Anishinaabemowin she defies English syntactic habits, employs the eastern orthography of her home area, and puts what she knows into a space that exists because others continue to look for new knowledge. As Alphonse reminds us, we do this to remember who we are and where we came from and to continue the creative use of a language that has survived thousands of years of human innovation. Will our descendants be gesturing with wavelengths of light to converse with the bees? If the bees and our language are still around . . . they just might.

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Coyote's Way

Missy Whiteman's Indigenous New Media

ANGELICA LAWSON

Shortly after accepting a position as an assistant professor of American Indian studies at the University of Minnesota, I was invited to meet with a dozen international professors as part of a panel on Indigenous film. I was happy to be a part of this panel of Indigenous filmmakers, since I had just moved to the Twin Cities and was looking forward to meeting other Native Americans involved in film. We met with the international professors for over two hours, and what struck me most about this exchange was the assumption on the part of the professors that the young up-and-coming American Indian filmmakers would want to eventually work in Hollywood or in mainstream film. There was a lot of murmuring at the table as the women were shaking their heads. Finally, Arapaho-Kickapoo media artist Missy Whiteman spoke up and explained that this was generally not a goal. No one at the table wanted to work in Hollywood, and in fact they saw themselves as working against the decades of stereotypical Native American representation Hollywood had produced.

The women filmmakers' main point of resistance was feeling they would have to give up their autonomy to work in Hollywood. As Joanna Hearne points out in the introduction to this special issue, "The structures of traditional film production are notoriously discriminatory, overwhelmingly organizing men into positions of creative control . . . [whereas] digital platforms for aesthetic production and activism . . . are far more open to Indigenous women." All present at this meeting claimed to prefer to work in new media in order to reach larger audiences and in Whiteman's case specifically to reach Native youth through this medium. The Indigenous women's articulation of the importance of media sovereignty became the topic of conversation. Included in this discussion was an emphasis on the importance of giving back to their

communities, educating and positively influencing Native youth, and expressing the values and ethics of Indigenous peoples through new media. The women highlighted the significance of new media in being able to achieve these goals, since new media is primarily digital and often made accessible online. Digital media is a much more affordable medium to work with, compared to traditional film, and can be made available through the Internet, circumventing the often prohibitive costs of traditional distribution, especially for independent artists.

Affordability and accessibility are part of the appeal for Indigenous media makers like Missy Whiteman who in particular want to reach Native youth. Working in new media allows Indigenous media makers to be in complete control of their artistic productions. This control is the very definition of media sovereignty. According to Elise Marubio and Eric Buffalohead in *Native Americans on Film: Conversations, Teaching and Theory*, “Both cinema of sovereignty and visual sovereignty are aspects of media sovereignty: the act of controlling the camera and refocusing the lens to promote indigenous agency in the media process and in their own image construction” (10). Indeed, definitions of media sovereignty began to form with Jolene Rickard’s essay on sovereignty and visual arts and has been expanded on by numerous scholars over the years to encompass “cultural sovereignty” as applied to Native filmmaking (Singer), representational cinema of sovereignty in documentary filmmaking (Lewis), and visual sovereignty (Raheja, *Reservation Reelism*).

Self-representation in the media by Indigenous people the world over has been an exciting movement, empowering the people who have historically been rendered savage or invisible in most films and documentaries. With the surge in new media creation by Indigenous people we see not only more accurate historical and contemporary representation of the people but also counternarratives that intervene in colonial oppressive histories and serve as activist documents to be shared with audiences worldwide. New media provides an affordable and creative outlet for Indigenous artists to intervene in dominant national narratives and to exert visual sovereignty. As Michelle Raheja states, “The visual, particularly film, video, and new media, is a germinal and exciting site for exploring how sovereignty is a creative act of self-representation that has the potential to both undermine stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and to strengthen the ‘intellectual health’ of communities in the

wake of genocide and colonialism” (“Reading Nanook’s Smile” 60). This essay will explore the work of Arapaho-Kickapoo media artist Missy Whiteman and how her videos are examples of Indigenous media sovereignty designed to engage and influence Native youth, relay Indigenous ethics and values, and contribute to Native language revitalization. I first provide a brief historical context for Missy Whiteman’s work, establishing a genealogy of Indigenous women filmmakers (focusing on Sandra Osawa as Whiteman’s predecessor) and documenting the emergence of Indigenous filmmaking collectives and youth media organizations such as Longhouse Media that both gave rise to Whiteman’s generation of filmmakers and comprise a focus of their intergenerational, activist media pedagogy.

As most of us know, American Indians have appeared in film since the early “actualities” of the late 1800s, but Native Americans did not have control of those images. The “Indian” of popular culture is a far cry from the lived experiences of American Indians, and Native characters often have been used to promote an American nationalist agenda, rather than reflect Indigenous reality. The lack of realistic depictions of American Indians in film has been due, in part, to the penchant for limiting these characters to the western genre, which emphasizes the nation-building narratives of colonization and conquest through the myth of the frontier. In fact, until very recently it was difficult to find a Native character in anything other than a western and even more difficult to find one that did not fall into a number of stereotypical categories such as the polarized constructions of the bloodthirsty savage / noble savage, the drudge/princess, and the vanishing American.

As a result, for many Native American filmmakers, of which there began to be a large number in the 1970s, addressing this history becomes a main motivation for their work. Established documentary filmmaker Sandra Osawa is one of the leaders and founders of early Native American film. Osawa is a Makah writer and director of Indigenous-themed films and was the first Native American to produce a television series in 1975 for NBC, as well as the first to produce a program for the PBS series *POV*. Osawa’s films disrupt the image of the Hollywood Indian and have been doing so since she first began work as a filmmaker and producer in the 1970s. She notes in her interview with Lawrence Abbott, “When I did the Native American series in 1975 for NBC, they asked me what kind of set I wanted. I think in their minds they were thinking of a teepee and

campfire and so forth, and I told them I would like to have a kitchen table. Their response was 'Oh, no.' One of the first *struggles* to get a different image across was to have a kitchen table where the host sat" (114, my emphasis).

Osawa highlights further obstacles throughout her career, including the difficulty in securing funding for her film projects due to a lack of interest in producing contemporary images and stories: "The funding agencies don't understand Indian humor; they don't understand [contemporary] Indian music. So it's been quite a struggle in terms of trying to create different images. America has got quite a hold and quite a grip on our identity. It's a stranglehold at times and very destructive" (Abbott 115). In reaction to the lack of understanding, support, and funding, Osawa and her husband, Yasu (also her cameraman and editor), founded Upstream Productions out of Seattle and began producing their own films. Osawa's work often tackles political issues in both direct and indirect ways via narratives and imagery.

Many of Osawa's documentaries are about Native American activists fighting for treaty rights or human rights; others are about unique individuals who haven't received the attention they deserve. Focusing on overlooked American Indian individuals doing unexpected things, Osawa's films challenge mainstream audiences' expectations of "Indianness." For example, her film *Pepper's Powwow* (1996) explores the music of saxophonist Jim Pepper (Osage) and his unique fusion of jazz and American Indian music (such as round dance and peyote songs). Her focus on Pepper takes audiences into city nightclubs, as well as reservations and schools, where they hear Pepper's music in a variety of contexts. Her film *On and Off the Res' with Charlie Hill* (1999) also explores both the urban and reservation settings of Hill's youth and city life as he builds a career as a successful stand-up comedian. Finally, her latest film, *Maria Tallchief* (2007), focuses on the first American prima ballerina, again undermining mainstream media's depictions and expectations of American Indians.

Osawa's conscientious decision to make films that highlight contemporary American Indian people and their stories reflects her early motivations to go into filmmaking. In an interview with Larry Abbott, she recalls working for a recreation program for young Makah people in the 1970s when she decided to have movie nights as part of the program: "I tried to get Indian films and couldn't really find anything . . . I

searched and searched but learned that there was just nothing there for us. Here we were, a tribe in the Northwest, and there were no images about us” (Abbott 111). She goes on to imply that this absence was connected to issues of low self-esteem in Native peoples. She speaks of an experience when she wanted to read a poem about the Makahs to a group of high school students, and one student said, “Who would write a poem about us?” (111). Osawa states, “That question always stuck in my mind, the fact that this person didn’t think that we were the type of people who were worthy of being commented on, or having a poem written for, or much less having a film about” (111). In this interview, Osawa makes clear her reasons for filmmaking: “The absence of our image was an important factor in motivating me to do something” (111). In defiance of the trend to locate Indians exclusively in the past and most often in the western, Osawa set out to make films with contemporary heroes. Her award-winning work, which has appeared in mainstream venues such as PBS, is pathbreaking and has laid a critical foundation for Native filmmaking.

However, as noted, Osawa is quick to comment on the slow road to getting a film made due to high costs and the necessity of fund-raising for years at a time. By contrast, new media allows much more affordable access to media making, as well as a potentially limitless audience via the Internet. While this accessibility solves some problems in regard to media production and dissemination, there are still ethical issues to consider, several of which are of great importance to Osawa:

We have more and more Indians coming into media. . . . Numbers alone won’t help us grow stronger, however. We grow stronger as long as we are not just doing these stories to become famous directors. We are not doing these to become rich. If you are, you really don’t belong in the category of Indian filmmakers. I think you really need to be committed to a purpose and a mission. You need to be conscious of why you are doing each story you do, why you are doing your edits this way, why you are doing your filming this way, why you are doing your narration this way. You have to be filled with a powerful mission basically to right the wrongs that have been done to us as Indian people, in the media. (Saza Osawa 321)

Perhaps this is why some Native American media makers are rejecting notions of breaking into mainstream filmmaking and instead are approaching media production and distribution via grassroots methods. In doing so, they are creating artistic ways of storytelling that are more in line with traditional, pedagogical, and community-oriented purposes, such as teaching tribally specific or pan-Indian value systems, addressing issues of identity, and perpetuating culture. These digital productions can be viewed as Indigenous activism and in fact often contain content about historical activism, as well as addressing social injustices and the ongoing effects of colonization. More importantly, this kind of media making allows for a sharing in the process through youth media training that would not be as possible on a much larger and more impersonal scale. As such, the process becomes as important as the product in terms of community activism and Indigenous empowerment.

YOUTH MEDIA TRAINING

Indigenous youth media training engages young people and teaches them how to intervene in dominant master narratives while offering strategies and alternatives for circumventing obstacles in the production and distribution of creatively controlled Indigenous media arts. Through nationally known programs such as Longhouse Media, Outta Your Backpack, and Migizi, Native youth receive training in media literacy and production. Longhouse Media was founded in Seattle in 2005 and through its Native Lens program has worked with over fifteen hundred Native youth. Their mission statement clearly emphasizes the significance of youth training and its connections to improved self-esteem in young Native trainees. It seems that Osawa's dream—to use media to improve Native youths' self-esteem via control over our own images—is in many ways realized in Longhouse Media's mission:

Central to Longhouse Media is the belief that young people are the next generation of storytellers and educators and we focus much of our efforts on our nationally acclaimed youth media program "Native Lens." Native Lens teaches filmmaking to Native Youth as a form of self-expression, inquiry, community development, and cultural pride and preservation. . . . Youth produced

work created through Native Lens has not only yielded strong and positive new media, but also increased participants' self-esteem. (Longhousemedia.org)

Similarly, Outta Your Backpack, based in Arizona and founded in 2004, focuses on mentoring and training Indigenous youth for the purposes of becoming "empowered with tools of media literacy for media justice" (oybm.org). One filmmaker defines media justice as "having access to the tools to tell your own story in order to address social and environmental justice issues in our communities" (oybm.org). Once again, the goals of Indigenous youth media training tie back to Osawa's concerns about Native filmmakers and how "numbers alone won't help us grow stronger. . . . [Y]ou have to be committed to a purpose and a mission . . . to right the wrongs that have been done to us as Indian people, in the media" (Saza Osawa 321). Outta Your Backpack's all-volunteer-run program emphasizes youth media sovereignty in order to produce media makers and media that allow young Natives to express themselves and diversify the range of Native representations available. In his essay analyzing the significance of Paper Rocket Productions, founded by Native youths Deidra Peaches (Navajo) and Hoyungowa (Hopi and Navajo), Xamuel Bañales discusses how Native youth films can provide "multifaceted, present-day, and culturally relevant narratives" that are part of a "growing movement of Native Americans that actively partake in the creative control of images that concern them, using film as a medium of political and cultural expression" (154).

MIGIZI Communications out of Minneapolis emphasizes youth media sovereignty through various programs such as New Media Pathways, for which Missy Whiteman was the coordinator from 2009 to 2011. MIGIZI hosts various programs that focus on media and youth training, such as the Sacred Voices Youth Gathering, designed to "empower, educate and mobilize Native youth to promote a healthy community" (migizi.org). Such mission statements are in line with Missy Whiteman's goals in media production, as she was once a Native youth being trained and mentored in media production herself. She consistently emphasizes the importance of giving back by educating, mentoring, and reaching out to Native youth. This is clear not only in her personal projects, such as working with UNITY on her father's home reservation at Wind River, Wyoming, but also in the media projects she creates. The three vid-

eos discussed here demonstrate the intersections in Whiteman's work designed to engage and influence Native youth, relay Indigenous ethics and values, and contribute to language revitalization.

Like Osawa, Whiteman was motivated to take up filmmaking to address some of the gaps she saw in Native media representation. In an online video interview, she says she went into filmmaking to create media that moves away from what "the general audience wants us to be, which is *Dances with Wolves*, which is living on reservations, you know, not so much somebody like myself . . . who grew up in the city" (Butter City interview). Whiteman, who mainly grew up in Minneapolis, became interested in acting at a young age and then filmmaking. She participated in some of the youth media training programs in Minneapolis before starting her own media arts organization and leading youth media training workshops herself. Whiteman's media art reflects this training and her concerns with disrupting mainstream assumptions about Native people and reflecting instead her own lived realities. In his discussion of Native youth media, Bañales points out how this art can "interrupt and transform pervasive colonial logic by refusing nostalgic portrayals of the past, which include a sense of purity, authenticity, and accompanying stereotype" (154). Indeed, it is a common misconception that most American Indians live on reservations, when in fact most do not. Yet contemporary urban Indians are rarely the focus of film and media, which is something Whiteman wants to change with an eye toward reflecting not only her daily reality but the lived experiences of many Native people rendered invisible by Hollywood's obsession with the past.

The majority of Native Americans live off reservations, with many of them living in urban areas (Ramirez 1; Child 141), yet this perspective is rarely seen. Whiteman's media art reflects this reality, one that is all she has ever known. While she maintains ties to her father's home on the rural Wind River Reservation in central Wyoming, her experiences have been largely urban, though still distinctly Native. As someone who mostly grew up in the Twin Cities, she has had the opportunity to be part of an urban Indian community with deep roots. The Twin Cities is famous for having one of the largest urban Indian populations in the United States (Child 141). It is well known for being the birthplace of the American Indian Movement (AIM) but is less well known for the signif-

icant activist work that American Indian women have been doing there for the past several decades.

The Twin Cities has been a hotbed for all kinds of Native American activism largely led by Native women whose work has manifested in social and legal change and has benefited Native Americans across the country: “A generation of Ojibwe women stayed in Minneapolis to attend school, seek employment and raise families. Their efforts and connections were essential to the development of a complex of organizations and networks that formed the bedrock of the urban Indian community” (Child 148). The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is just one example of legal change that has roots in the Twin Cities, and there are plenty of other examples as well. Whiteman’s artistic passions reflect this activist history, and she is often seen at activist events participating as a leader or filmmaker. Most recently, the Twin Cities urban Indian community embraced the Idle No More movement, creating a large media presence and hosting a number of flash round dance protests. The Twin Cities also created a historic moment when they legally changed Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day, celebrating the event at the Minneapolis Indian Center in 2015. Whiteman was there, participating in the event and filming. As part of this significant urban Indian activism, it is no wonder that she includes “activist” as part of her job title.

Whiteman’s organization, Independent Indigenous Film and Media (IIFM), which was founded in 2001 in Minneapolis, can be viewed as a continuum of this activist history. As founder of IIFM, Whiteman specializes in digital media production, training, and design. On the IIFM website she describes herself as an Indigenous filmmaker, digital media consultant, director, producer, writer, and activist. She states her goals as an Indigenous media maker “to be a voice for her ancestors to educate and to foster better understanding among all peoples as well as to promote change in native and non-native other communities” (<http://vimeo.com/iifmmw>). Through this organization she works with a number of different artists and community groups, but it is notable that she devotes a significant amount of time working with Indigenous youth in the Twin Cities and on nearby reservations. Indeed, as previously stated, one of her goals as a media maker is to reach Native youth with her art. She accomplishes this goal in part through her inclusion of hip hop music in her artistic productions.

HIP HOP

Whiteman's inclusion of hip hop music exemplifies trends in American Indian music because it fuses traditional elements of Indigenous culture, such as Native language and stories, with contemporary production. In her essay "Rhyming out the Future: Reclaiming Identity through Indigenous Hip Hop," Lindsay Knight notes, "Hip hop music has begun to transform the ways in which young Indigenous people perceive their environments and assert their identities. Examples of resistance in Indigenous music can easily be discovered through hip hop." Whiteman's music video *American Holocaust* is an example of resistance and resilience in that it educates audiences about the history and impact of off-reservation boarding schools while simultaneously bringing to light this invisible aspect of American history. Rejecting the trope of the "vanishing American," Whiteman's video asserts a contemporary Indigenous presence via popular music. In her analysis of Whiteman's music video, film scholar Michelle Raheja states:

Moving in tandem with the production of new media technologies, Native American film, video-makers, and cultural artists are doing more than simply resisting and surviving, they are interrogating the powers of the state, providing nuanced and complex forms of self-representation, imagining a futurity that militates against the figure of the vanishing Indian and engaging in visual sovereignty on virtual reservations of their own creation. (Raheja, *Reservation Reelism* 240)

While interrogating the political and cultural impacts of boarding schools, Whiteman's video also engages a young and potentially global audience through contemporary popular music. In much the same way that Osawa's film on Pepper challenged audiences' expectations of "Indian music," Whiteman's video undermines mainstream audiences' understanding of "Indianness" by demonstrating new ways Native people have adapted popular culture as a means to relay important messages about American Indian history. Hip hop music *is* Native music and is a medium the youth can relate to. It also presents a contemporary and more realistic snapshot of urban Indian life. In his essay "Can We Live—and Be Modern? Decolonization, Indigenous Modernity, and

Hip Hop,” Kyle Mays explores hip hop’s connection to community and urban spaces:

Hip Hop is an expression of community and self. As Indigenous people participate in and produce Hip Hop, as a modern cultural art form, they contradict the idea that Indigenous people are relics of the past, incapable of engaging with and producing modernity. Indigenous Hip Hop artists and producers, by taking up Hip Hop, a cultural artifact that emerged out of urban spaces, also challenge mainstream conceptions of the incompatibility of Indigenous people and urban spaces.

In addition to challenging audience expectations regarding American Indian culture, Whiteman also states that she is interested in healing and redefining cultural identity. This is an important aspect to her work in terms of visual sovereignty, which Marubbio and Buffalohead define as the “belief in indigenous peoples’ right to represent themselves and their histories in ways that reflect their cultures, needs and ways of knowing and telling” (10). What might surprise most audiences is that these reflections of culture and ways of knowing don’t always look the way mainstream audiences might expect them to. Take, for example, the concept trailer to her current work in progress and Sundance Lab project, *The Coyote Way*. Here Whiteman fuses traditional storytelling and coyote tales with the urban landscape of Minneapolis.

INDIGENIZING THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

As discussed earlier, Minneapolis has a long history with its urban Indian population, yet media representations of this history are relatively invisible. Enter Whiteman’s work. Her films and videos highlight this history and the urban Indian population by Indigenizing the Minneapolis landscape through Native characters, allusions to trickster stories, Indigenous value systems, and Native language. In her latest ongoing project, *The Coyote Way*, Whiteman re-creates a coyote story to demonstrate the relevance of the ethics and values embedded in trickster stories in a modern context. The film is described on its Kickstarter page as a “short sci-fi/documentary film about choice, destiny and the journey home.” According to Kristin Dowell, “One of the appeals of the experimental forms of media making is in the ability to reimagine media

practices to fit within cultural values, iconography and aesthetic frames of aboriginal communities" (157). This is certainly true for *The Coyote Way*, which when finished will feature time travel, contemporary Native characters, tricksters and coyotes, and Indigenous animation, reflecting what Channette Romero points out in this special issue's essay on Indigenous feminine animation: "Because Indigenous cinema is often influenced by tribal storytelling traditions, it frequently highlights nonlinear understandings of time, Indigenous languages, and interdependent relational identities. It also frequently prompts audience engagement in constructing stories." The narrative focuses on a young boy / coyote who is at a crossroads: he must decide whether to join a street gang or learn from the elder coyote, who will teach him who he really is (vimeo.com). The elder coyote is a grandfatherly figure who literally reaches out to the youth when he takes his hand to set out on their adventures.

Whiteman's emphasis on intergenerational Native families is significant for a number of reasons. First, it alludes to the importance of passing on oral stories not simply to entertain but because those stories are embedded with the values and ethics of the people. This is demonstrated in the voice-over when the narrator says coyote tells him that "women are sacred." Second, the inclusion of children in Indigenous new media radically challenges centuries of Hollywood stereotypes and vanishing Indians. As clearly stated by Joanna Hearne in *Native Recognition: Indigenous Cinema and the Western*, "Envisioning Native families . . . is always a political act, and representations of youth in particular stake claims about the future of Indigenous nations as legitimate, and legitimating heirs to the land" (9). Whiteman's film trailer goes a step further not just by creating characters who represent three generations of Native people but by literally including three generations of her own family. The elder coyote is played by her father (Ernest Whiteman), and the young coyote is played by her son (Louis). As such, the film does not simply suggest the importance of teaching and mentoring youth, it literally performs it through the film storytelling process that Whiteman puts in motion.

In addition, the movement of Native characters over urban landscapes also reinforces the idea of Indigenous nations as "legitimate heirs to the land." As the elder coyote cruises past historically Native neighborhoods on his low-rider bike he passes the All Nations Gallery and Powwow Grounds coffee shop on Franklin Avenue. Through this scen-

ery the viewer is invited to participate in the visual inscription of an urban Native history. Audiences literate in the symbolic significance of such landmarks as Franklin Avenue (the birthplace of AIM) and the All Nations Gallery (which regularly hosts American Indian community events) recognize their rightful place within that landscape. As a counternarrative to the typical media representations of American Indians, Whiteman's videos feature urban landscapes, even as they acknowledge Indigenous traditions and language. This is part of her agenda as a filmmaker. As she states in an interview, "I still consider myself connected to my homeland . . . connected to my people. . . . In a way new media helps us to be traditional people in that we can document language. . . . And that's the thing I've noticed with media, it gives us the ability to tell our stories . . . [i]n our own words, in our own languages and own music" (Butter City interview).

LANGUAGE

Whiteman's short experimental video *Nawa Giizhigong* is an example of visual sovereignty in its nearly exclusive use of Native language. The film resists audience expectations of "Indianness" by featuring two urban Natives speaking Ojibwe as they go about their daily work in the city. This video is an example of "Indigenous artists and activists [who] are using new technologies to craft culturally distinct forms of communication and artistic production that speak to local aesthetics and local needs while anticipating larger audiences" (Wilson and Stewart 2). The video was made in Minneapolis and features an Indigenous language of the area, but as new media it was made accessible to a larger audience via YouTube and ultimately reached a more specific film audience when it was accepted to the National Geographic All Roads Film Festival in 2012.

The video is significant for a number of reasons. As an example of both "cultural" and "visual sovereignty," it performs the work of decolonizing media images of American Indians. In using an Indigenous language, it performs a social and political action. Considering the history of colonization worldwide and the significance of language eradication in the policies of assimilation, writing in one's own Native language is indeed a powerful political act. As Nugugi wa Thiong'o contemplates the ideological and psychological power of language, he asserts the necessity of a return to tribal languages as a vital part of the decolonizing

process: "In my view, language was the most important vehicle through which that power [colonization] fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (287). In their discussion of the significance of Native language revitalization, Ofelia Zepeda and Theresa McCarty state: "It is language, of course, that orders, carries, and expresses this [Native] experience and . . . transmits it to future generations. But this implies more than simply language capacity or language as speech. The meanings, symbolism, shared history, and experiences of a people within a landscape all reside within individual languages" (198). This is the beauty of Whiteman's video. The narrative concept is that two young men "discuss the theoretical beginnings and current existence of life and the universe," and though they are also dealing with a tragedy (only alluded to at the end), it "enlightens their understanding of life and death, especially as they relate to their own Native American origin story" (All Roads website). This understanding is carried through Indigenous language. It appears to the audience through subtitles that they are discussing the big bang theory; however, the use of Ojibwe language reframes the story through an Indigenous lens, telling instead a Native story as they drive around a historically Native landscape.

CONCLUSION

Whiteman's new media productions are examples of Indigenous media sovereignty not only in the subject matter they convey but also through their means of production. In creating infrastructures for Indigenous creative control over the videos she produces and in her efforts to mentor, train, and reach Native youth, Whiteman's work embodies many of the goals outlined by Osawa that are grounded in an ethical approach to Indigenous media. As Raheja notes at the end of her analysis of Whiteman's music video, "Native American filmmakers continue to create work that radically expands the kinds of images that were available to early twentieth-century spectators and media makers. The way these images are disseminated through film festivals . . . [a]nd on the internet will continue to shape exciting new possibilities for critically engaging and creating representations of Indigenous people" (Raheja, *Reservation Reelism* 240). Whiteman's dedication to her craft has contributed to dozens of works available on the Internet and may also come

to be screened in major venues such as the Sundance Film Festival. Whiteman was recently named a Sundance Lab Fellow in 2014 for her project *The Coyote Way* trilogy, and her efforts to complete this project have gained much headway due to this award. Most heartening about this recent development is how Whiteman continues to espouse what she defines as a Native value system, which emphasizes cooperation and community over competition, thus demonstrating how her art emulates her life.

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Residential Schools and “Reconciliation” in the Media Art of Skeena Reece and Lisa Jackson

KRISTIN DOWELL

Warning: This article discusses the historical trauma and ongoing intergenerational legacy of the Indian Residential School system in Canada. Some information and media art discussed here may stir up or trigger unpleasant feelings or thoughts. One organization that provides emotional support and assistance is the Indian Residential School Survivors Society, which can be contacted toll-free at 1-800-721-0066 or at the twenty-four-hour Crisis Line, 1-866-925-4419.

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I stand before the twenty-five students in my Anthropology of Media class lecturing about the history and contemporary impact of the Canadian Residential School experience as context for this week's reading on Aboriginal media in Vancouver. It is a lecture that I have given too many times to count over the last ten years, as most of my students have never learned about Canadian residential schools or American Indian boarding schools. I provide this background information in preparation for screening Lisa Jackson's film *Savage*. The hand on the clock clicks past 12:30 p.m., and I notice that most of the students sit before me blank-faced, tired, and anticipating the end of the class so they can head to lunch. I am frustrated by their apparent lack of interest as I scroll through archival images and facts about numbers of children removed from their homes and sent to residential schools. I remind them that the last federal Indian residential school in Canada closed in 1996. I speak passionately about the intergenerational impact of the residential school. I explain that I myself did not fully appreciate the extent of the impact of residential schools until doing fieldwork with Aboriginal media makers in

Vancouver, where every single person that I interviewed and worked closely with was either themselves a survivor or the child or grandchild of a survivor. I explain that Prime Minister Stephen

Harper made an apology on the floor of the Canadian Parliament in 2008, and I begin to read the words of the apology: “Mr. Speaker, I stand before you to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history. . . . The government now recognizes that the consequences of Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this legacy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. . . . The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country,” and here my voice catches, and I begin to cry.

For the first time in ten years as a professor I weep in front of my class. “I’m sorry,” I say to my students. Deep breath in and deep breath out. I think of all of my filmmaker friends and colleagues whose families and communities were so violently disrupted and harmed by residential schools. I sigh and shake my head, brushing away my tears, determined to finish reading Harper’s quote. I am viscerally struck and nauseated by the hollow ring of his words as I read, “asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

We are sorry.” For failing them so profoundly. If ever there was an understatement, this is it. My students are on the edge of their seats now, unsure how to react to this show of emotion from their professor. Later I am embarrassed that I cried in front of the class, and yet I ask myself, Really, when you think about residential schools and their horrific trauma and intergenerational legacy, what else can you do but weep?

Aboriginal women have long been at the forefront of the vibrant Aboriginal media world in Canada as they create innovative works that speak back against their misrepresentation by outsiders—including anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers—to articulate visual sovereignty through inventive digital storytelling.¹ In her article in this volume, scholar Danika Medak-Saltzman explores how three Diné women filmmakers—Melissa Henry, Sydney Freeland, and Nanobah Becker—

have pushed the boundaries of Indigenous futurism and the flourishing emergence of Indigenous science fiction films. Channette Romero examines the development of a unique Indigenous feminine aesthetic through an analysis of the specific animation techniques of women filmmakers—including Diane Obomsawin and Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, as well as others—particularly their use of flat design, cutout collage animation, and reclamation of Indigenous domestic arts and craft practices in the digital realm. Angelica Lawson analyzes the efforts of the filmmakers Sandra Osawa (Makah) and Missy Whiteman (Arapaho-Kickapoo) to articulate visual sovereignty and build production practices outside of dominant media institutions, while Susan Bernardin highlights the intersection of experimental film practice, Indigenous poetics, and political action in the experimental films of Heid E. Erdrich (Anishinaabe). This article resonates with their perspectives on the ways in which Indigenous women are pioneers moving Indigenous media practices forward to reclaim and reinvent the screen while imagining and creating empowered Indigenous futures. I am moved by Margaret Noodin and Stacie Sheldon's discussion of the architecture of their website, which brings Anishnaabemowin teachings, songs, and lessons into cyberspace to encourage other speakers in their language revitalization efforts. I invite readers to listen to "The Strong Women's Song" performed by the women's hand drum group Miskwaasining Nagamojig (Swamp Singers) shared on the ojibwe.net website. I reference it here as an honor song for Skeena Reece and Lisa Jackson, whose media artworks are discussed below, as well as for their relatives and all Aboriginal people impacted by residential schools.

Canada's Indian residential school policy wrenched children from the embrace of their parents, families, and Aboriginal communities, with mothers and grandmothers often bearing the brunt of this loss of their children to these state- and church-run institutions. In this article I examine the cinematic mediation of the historical trauma left by the residential school experience through short digital media works by Skeena Reece (Tsimshian-Cree) and Lisa Jackson (Anishinaabe), both of whom are the daughters of residential school survivors. Their works were featured in the exhibit *Witnesses: Art and Canada's Indian Residential Schools*, curated for the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at the University of British Columbia in September 2013 in connection with the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Van-

couver National Event. To witness takes on a particular cultural valence for West Coast First Nations, signifying public recognition of inherited rights to intellectual and cultural property—such as names, dances, songs, and designs—in the elaborate performative system of expressive culture associated with the potlatch.² In the Belkin Art Gallery’s art exhibit, the term “witness” refers to the insider perspectives represented in the art and media made by residential school survivors and also is a call to settler audience members to bear witness to the horrific legacy of residential schools with the hope of moving toward a “reconciled” future. Is “reconciliation” possible in Canada given ongoing settler colonial policies that disregard Aboriginal sovereignty, land rights, resource rights, and equity with regard to education, employment, and housing? What role, if any, can art and media play in the ongoing processes and practices of reconciliation? Analyzing two digital media works featured in *Witnesses*—video documentation of Skeena Reece’s performance art piece *Touch Me* (2013) and Lisa Jackson’s award-winning short film *Savage* (2009)—I explore the complex category of “reconciliation” and the inventive ways in which these media artists draw on their personal and familial histories to repair and suture kinship ties, particularly the mother-daughter relationship, disrupted by residential schools while creatively reimagining spaces for Indigenous resistance and renewal on-screen.

CANADA IN THE ERA OF “RECONCILIATION”

The insidious Canadian Indian Residential School system was in place from the late nineteenth century until 1996, when the last federal Indian residential school closed. During this time over 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were forced to attend one of 130 schools in operation across Canada.³ It is widely documented that the treatment of Aboriginal children in these state- and church-run institutions was deplorable, as they faced malnutrition, physical and sexual abuse, and even death. Residential schools had a tremendous negative impact on the ability of Aboriginal people to maintain kinship ties, Aboriginal languages, and cultural and ceremonial practices. Elsewhere I have described the way in which Aboriginal media makers enact sovereignty by recuperating family histories, repairing connections to their relatives, and reconnecting with their communities of origin through the process

of media production (Dowell 107). The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement of 2007 and was implemented in the wake of the federal apology given by Prime Minister Stephen Harper on the floor of the Canadian Parliament in June 2008. The TRC was created to take public testimonies from residential school survivors at a series of national public events across Canada. According to the website, the mandate of the TRC is to “inform all Canadians about what happened in the Indian Residential Schools” by documenting the truth of what happened there from survivors with the hope to “guide and inspire Aboriginal peoples and Canadians in a process of reconciliation and renewed relationships that are based on mutual understanding and respect.”⁴ In addition to the creation of the TRC, the Canadian government created a \$1.9 billion compensation package for those who were forced to attend school. Part of this funding was allocated as “common experience payments” of \$10,000 for the first year they attended school and \$3,000 for each subsequent year (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “A History”). The TRC held seven national events over the course of six years, collecting over seven thousand testimonies and compiling archival and historical records related to the Indian residential school system. In Ottawa at the end of May 2015, the TRC released a summary of its final report of its six-year investigation, concluding that the Canadian government had committed cultural genocide and highlighting recommendations to move from “apology to action” to implement policy changes with regard to health, education, language, and justice, particularly with regard to creating a public inquiry into the over twelve hundred cases of murdered and missing Aboriginal women in Canada (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “Truth”).

There have been many critiques of the idea of “reconciliation” and suspicion with regard to the capacity of the TRC national events to fully redress the horrific abuses suffered by Aboriginal youth in residential school alongside a concern that there may exist a public perception that the TRC events have “solved” much larger ongoing issues related to Aboriginal-settler relationships, particularly with regard to land rights, resource rights, sovereignty, and self-determination. Scholars Taiaiake Alfred, Glen Coulthard, and Leanne Simpson have all emphasized the importance of redress instead of reconciliation, particularly with regard to Aboriginal land rights, and they have critiqued the idea that “recon-

ciliation" creates closure as it elides the ongoing policies of Canadian settler colonialism. Alfred argues that reconciliation often works as a "pacifying discourse," demanding that Indigenous people become "reconciled with imperialism" ("Restitution" 182–83). He advocates for a course of action pursuing the restitution of Indigenous lands, resource rights, and traditions of governance, declaring that "without massive restitution, including land, financial transfers and other forms of assistance to compensate for past harms and continuing injustices committed against our peoples, reconciliation would permanently enshrine colonial injustices and is itself a further injustice" (*Wasase* 152). Coulthard critiques the politics of reconciliation for attempts to confine colonial injustice to the temporal past, masking the ongoing Canadian settler-colonial practices that seek to profit from the extraction of resources and dispossession of Indigenous land. Coulthard states, "Rather than addressing these structural issues, state policy has instead focused its reconciliation efforts on repairing psychologically injured or damaged status of Indigenous people themselves" (123), and later asserts, "Indigenous subjects are the primary object of repair, not the colonial relationship" (125). Métis artist and scholar David Garneau affirms this perspective, observing, "Colonialism is not a singular historical event but an ongoing legacy—the colonizer has not left. The government's frantic race to a post-historical space of reconciliation, rather than submission to a permanent state of negotiation, of treaty, is short-sighted" ("Art, Curation, and Healing" 37).

Scholars and activists have also expressed unease with the way in which the TRC public events put Aboriginal suffering on display while seeking to absolve settler Canadian society from the injustices perpetrated against Aboriginal Canadians in an effort to "move on" or "turn the page" on this history. Scholars Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall assert, "Reconciliation. A troubled and troubling term often used to impose a sense of closure on experiences of colonization that are very much alive and ongoing" (vii). In noting the stark differences between transitional reconciliation and settler reconciliation, scholar David Gaertner asserts that "settler reconciliation is founded on the *promise* of change and performances that convince the audience that while the government remains the same, it will now *act* differently" ("Reconciliation" 2). A critique about the TRC is that the government has facilitated these national events in which reconciliation is super-

ficially “performed” without legislation regarding land title, resource rights, economic development, and self-government that will fundamentally shift the power dynamic between First Nations and settler society to redress historical and contemporary inequities. David Garneau critiques the use of the term “reconciliation,” which he observes is a religious term referring to the reunion of a person to a church, particularly in the Catholic tradition: “Reconciliation refers to the repair of a previously existing harmonious relationship. This word choice imposes the fiction that equanimity is the status quo between Aboriginal people and Canada” (“Imaginary Spaces” 35). Instead, Garneau argues that conciliation is a more appropriate term, noting that “‘conciliation’ is the action of bringing into harmony. . . . The word calls to mind the meeting of two previously separate parties. Applied to the Canadian situation, it allows the picturing of First Nations and Inuit people having an independent existence prior to contact” (35). Garneau acknowledges that despite its shortcomings, the TRC has gone to great lengths to establish sites of healing apart from state monitoring. However, as Garneau asks, “How are we to change sites of Reconciliation into sites of conciliation? How do we prevent Reconciliation from being primarily a spectacle of individual pain for settler consumption and Aboriginal shame? How are artists and curators to contribute to the conciliation process?” (“Imaginary Spaces” 34).

MEDIATING “RECONCILIATION” THROUGH ART

On September 6, 2013, the Belkin Art Gallery opened *Witnesses*, a collaborative exhibit curated by seven Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists. I would argue, as does Kwakwaka’wakw Chief Robert Joseph, that the curation process itself represented a form of reconciliation. Chief Joseph explained, “For the curators at the Belkin to organize this exhibition of artists, and for the artists to agree to show their work—that’s reconciliation right there” (30). Featuring twenty-six artworks by twenty-two artists, the majority of whom were either residential school survivors or the children of residential school survivors, this was the first comprehensive exhibit of Indigenous art about residential schools mounted in a Canadian public gallery or museum. The art exhibit grew out of a request from Chief Joseph and Leona Sparrow, the Musqueam Nation liaison to UBC, to “think of reconciliation and

not just narratives of victimhood” (Watson 5). Through a symposium, gallery tours, artist talks, and performance art events, *Witnesses* facilitated opportunities for the audience to engage with the art exhibit, calling on audiences to “share in the work of witnessing the history and present-day legacy of the Indian residential schools” and, in witnessing these testimonies, to take on the responsibility of asking themselves “how they are connected to this difficult history, but also how they can contribute to some measure of justice, healing, and reconciliation” (Carr 19). This is not an easy task, and it is certainly not an easy art exhibit to view or an easy history to which to bear witness. As Tahltan artist Peter Morin eloquently stated at the end of his performance artwork entitled *This is not a simple movement* (performed in two parts at the opening and closing of *Witnesses*), “It’s hard work. I want to acknowledge everyone here for their work, for their presence. It’s a difficult history. We confronted that difficult history together. It was scary and there’s violence and vulnerability in that residential school and in that history. I wanted to say that together we can make something else. It’s not just me here. Together we can make something else.”⁵ What might that something else look like? What might a conciliatory relationship between First Nations and Canadian settler society look like? How do media artists envision that rapprochement?

PERFORMING RECONCILIATION: EXPLORING THE HAPTIC IN SKEENA REECE’S *TOUCH ME*

Skeena Reece’s performance artwork *Touch Me* (2013), created specifically for the *Witnesses* exhibit, is one artist’s vision of what reconciliation might look like. Skeena Reece, a Tsimshian-Cree artist and the daughter of Red Power activist and filmmaker Cleo Reece and internationally renowned carver Victor Reece, is an accomplished performance artist, video artist, and musician. She is known for creating powerful and provocative performance artworks that unsettle audience expectations by confronting political issues related to ongoing settler colonialism, particularly the impact of these destructive policies on Aboriginal women. In a recent retrospective of Skeena Reece’s performance art practice at the Urban Shaman gallery, curator Daina Warren explained, “Much of her early performance work was influenced by Indigenous theory around Sacred Clowning and Trickster, which both are exempli-



Fig. 1. Skeena Reece, *Touch Me*, 2013, video. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, purchased with support from members of the Belkin Curator's Forum, 2013. Photo by Ian Barbour. Image courtesy of Skeena Reece and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery.

fied through ideas around the contrary, and how individuals use their bodies and performative actions to disrupt and add chaos to all types of situations." Performance art is a particularly apt medium for addressing the historical trauma of the residential school experience given the regimented discipline and control exerted over Aboriginal bodies by administrators. Canadian art historian Dot Tuer explains that performance art "renders visible the politics of representation as a struggle over the control of real bodies in time and space" (13). Artists and scholars Dana Claxton and Tania Willard have described Aboriginal performance art "as a creative intervention of the oppression of Aboriginal people(s)." The intervention in *Touch Me* is the performative action as Reece bathes Sandra Semchuk, a Ukrainian Canadian artist who is an accomplished photographer and performance artist. The fourteen-minute video documenting this performance was displayed in the back corner of the Bel-



Fig. 2. Skeena Reece, *Touch Me*, 2013, video. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, purchased with support from members of the Belkin Curator's Forum, 2013. Photo by Pete Hagen. Image courtesy of Skeena Reece and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery.

kin Art Gallery, a space of quiet contemplation where a bench faced a TV monitor framed by dark velvet curtains.

The video is shot on a pitch-black stage with a vintage metal claw-foot tub sitting in the middle of the frame. Skeena Reece and Sandra Semchuk present a stark contrast standing on opposite sides of the tub, with Semchuk's gray hair, light skin, and a panel of white cloth wrapped around her body standing out from the blackened stage. Reece is eight months pregnant, and as she stands up straight, her dark gray shift dress stretches across her taut stomach. She closes her eyes and sighs before looking up at Semchuk to offer a hand to help her step into the tub. Reece sits on a chair next to the tub and uses a copper cup to pour water over Semchuk, tenderly shielding her eyes as she pours water over her head. For several minutes the only audio is the quiet, soothing sounds of dripping water as Reece bathes Semchuk. The camera cuts from a wide



Fig. 3. Skeena Reece, *Touch Me*, 2013, video. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, purchased with support from members of the Belkin Curator's Forum, 2013. Photo by Pete Hagen. Image courtesy of Skeena Reece and the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery.

shot of the tub to a luminous close-up framing of beads of water falling across Semchuk's shoulders.

Picking up a white bar of soap, Reece lathers a washcloth, gently taking Semchuk's arm, moving the washcloth across her neck and back and then over her other arm. Tears begin to stream down Semchuk's face, and Reece softly soothes, "It's okay, it's okay," as she wipes the tears from her face. It is mesmerizing to watch as Reece performs these repetitive gentle gestures of bathing, an intimate physical expression of tender care. Toward the end of the performance Reece is visibly overcome by emotion and begins weeping, her shoulders shaking and the sounds of her crying echoing across the audio track. Semchuk reciprocates Reece's previous comforting gestures by reaching out to touch her forehead and then brush the tears from her cheeks while murmuring, "It's okay. It's okay." Reece nods, running her hand across her face, and then picks up Semchuk's hand, gently wiping each finger with the soapy washcloth.

The camera closes in on the image of their two hands touching—one old, one young, one brown, one white—and the tenderness exhibited in that gesture palpably fills the frame. Wrapping Semchuk in a dark-gray towel, Reece reaches out to help her get out of the tub. They stand facing each other and grasp each other in a fierce hug before Reece wraps another towel around Semchuk's shoulders, gently tucking her hair back behind her ears before lifting the towel up to cover her hair. Reece puts her arm around Semchuk, and they slowly walk out of the frame.

For Reece, this performance was such an intense emotional experience that she cannot bring herself to watch the video documentation of it. She is the daughter of two residential school survivors who were themselves the children of residential school survivors. Her parents were scarred by the traumas they experienced there, and neither ever spoke about their experiences. In reflecting upon the impetus for *Touch Me*, Reece poignantly and painfully recalled, "My mother was raised in a convent and in foster homes for ten years starting at age 8. . . . My mother stopped touching me when I was 8 years old. There was a disconnection, a loss of intimacy, which we never regained" (Reece and Semchuk 151). Wanting to create a space in which touch, intimacy, and connection were animated, as well as a desire to perform a nurturing and loving act of bathing an elder inspired Reece to create this performance. In her artist statement, Reece wrote, "Mother. Tell me what happened. Let me touch you, again. I want to forgive. I want to love. Even when it hurts" (49). Reece bears the intergenerational scars of the residential school experience. Her performance work *Touch Me* is a redemptive gesture of vulnerability and compassion, an intergenerational enactment between an Aboriginal artist and a non-Aboriginal artist in an effort to manifest reconciliation.

Sandra Semchuk's identity is also made more complex when understanding that she was married for many years to Cree artist James Nicholas, himself a residential school survivor. They collaborated as a husband and wife artistic team until Nicholas's death in 2007. Their photographic series *Camperville Residential School, Manitoba, 2006–2010* is included in the *Witnesses* exhibit. In her artist statement, Semchuk wrote, "As James's wife, I am a part of the Residential School story, have experienced the lateral violence *that* violence precipitated, as well as being witness to his suffering and addictions. James and I learned together, using dialogue as a way to document history's erasure and

emergence in the present.” Semchuk’s personal understanding about the impact of the residential school experience on the loved ones and family members of survivors no doubt contributes to the emotional resonance of her participation in *Touch Me*. Wary of appearing to viewers as simply a representation of settler Canadian society, Semchuk influenced the cinematography of the video documentation of the performance, remarking:

I am happy to participate in this healing gesture towards reconciliation. As someone who is aware of the profound costs of residential school and who has lived and continues to live with the effects of those state-sanctioned violences, I am honored to be myself within the circumstance. From my point of view, having a camera on my face as well—as an articulation of lived experience—may be useful and may break down the idea that I am a representation of a white matriarch. (Reece and Semchuk 155)

One of the striking things about *Touch Me* is that, given the dark and violent history of the residential school, there is a profound hopefulness within *Touch Me*. Reflecting upon her creative process for *Touch Me*, Skeena Reece writes, “Let us witness this gesture. . . . Let’s gain something good, let’s feel there is hope that we can overcome the damage that’s been done to our communities, our selves” (Reece and Semchuk 154). If reconciliation is possible, and I don’t know if it is, *this* may be what it will look like. Tender gestures of care, kindness, and respect between two individuals showing a willingness to make themselves vulnerable, to strip down to the core and hold out their hands. If we are to have reconciliation, it must take place on this small-scale, person-to-person basis and build from there. David Garneau proclaims, “The government apology and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are important, but the deeper work of conciliation will be among individuals who recognize themselves as also other than agents of the State” (“Art, Curation, and Healing” 38). Chief Robert Joseph poignantly reminds us, “Everywhere I go, I say in the first instance that reconciliation begins with you. Absolutely, only you. . . . Reconciliation is just an endless possibility, a multiplicity of levels, personal, collective, political, spiritual. It is complex, yet so simple” (Joseph 29–30).

THE IMPACT OF *TOUCH ME* ON VISITORS

November 2013

On a brisk autumn morning I travel to UBC to see the *Witnesses* exhibit with Leena Minifie, a media artist whom I have known since I began fieldwork in Vancouver in 2003. The Belkin Art Gallery is nearly empty on this Friday morning as we slowly make our way through the gallery, taking in the vivid and powerful artwork on display. My initial reaction to the intensity of the art is to want to look away. Yet I strive not to give in to the impulse to turn away but instead turn toward this horrific history and the ongoing intergenerational trauma still wreaking havoc in its wake.

Leena and I slowly make our way to the back corner of the gallery, as we are eager to see Skeena Reece's video. She is a dear friend of ours whose art practice we have supported and followed for many years. I sit next to Leena on the bench as we watch Skeena's performance, *Touch Me*, mesmerized and transfixed. We watch the entire video of *Touch Me* and remain seated as the video loops and the performance begins again. Leena, whose family has been affected by residential schools, quietly weeps next to me. I place my arm around her shoulder and pull her closer to me as the tears begin to track down my cheeks. Gitxaala media maker and non-Native anthropologist, we are long-time friends and colleagues, and after all these years, we consider ourselves sisters. We watch the entirety of the video twice more before we can wrench ourselves away, finding ourselves moved beyond words by this simple and yet profound performance in which Skeena bathes a non-Native older woman with such tenderness, vulnerability, and raw emotion. I am not surprised to learn later that *Touch Me* elicited the same reaction in so many other viewers.

Witnesses reached a wide audience and remains the Belkin Art Gallery's highest attended exhibit. *Touch Me* has profoundly impacted many visitors, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, through its embodiment of the gesture of empathy rendered poignantly through the tender interac-

tions between Reece and Semchuk. A reviewer for the *Vancouver Sun* declared, “At this point, I’d been moved to tears—as were several people around me as we watched the video. I’m not sure why Skeena Reece’s video had such a big impact on me. In part, it was because it surprised me. I expected anger—not forgiveness” (*Vancouver Sun* staff blog). In a conversation between Reece and Semchuk reflecting on their collaboration in *Touch Me*, Semchuk remarked, “The opening of *Witnesses* was a social event, people were talking to one another. *Touch Me*, your video, Skeena was in a darkened corner. In the video I am bathed by you. There are two people sitting there quietly, each intently watching the video. One of them, a woman, cannot control her tears” (Reece and Semchuk 162). When asked about the audience reaction to *Touch Me*, Skeena ponders, “I can’t know why each person in the audience cried. Everybody had their own reasons to cry. . . . The piece was a place of respite, a dark corner in the exhibition. The challenge for those in the audience was to find peace with it all. I have found a kind of peace and I am healing. It gave survivors a license to find peace, hopefully. And it gave white people a chance to grieve” (Reece and Semchuk 160). Naomi Sawada, the Belkin Art Gallery manager of public programs, observed:

During guided tours and discussions, Public Programs staff received comments about *Touch Me* from many adult children of survivors. The gentle, nurturing, and restorative act of bathing and taking care of someone as expressed in the work was very powerful for viewers. Many commented that they had not experienced this when they were growing up. Their parents had endured so much trauma when they were children that they were not able or did not know how to demonstrate love (as seen in the video). Many viewers said the title of the work, *Touch Me* referred to a longing to be connected to their parents as well as compassion and love for them because they had endured so much. (Email communication with the author, 2014)

Sawada’s remarks remind us that the *Witnesses* exhibit was as much for other residential school survivors as for educating the non-Aboriginal public about the residential school experience. That *Touch Me* connected with the experiences of many of the adult children of survivors speaks to the complex resonance of this artwork.



Fig. 4. Production still from *Savage* (2009). Photograph by Kris Krüg. Image courtesy of Lisa Jackson, Vtape and Moving Images Distribution.

FINDING RESISTANCE THROUGH DANCE: RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL ZOMBIES IN LISA JACKSON'S *SAVAGE*

Also included in the *Witnesses* exhibit is Lisa Jackson's award-winning short film *Savage* (2009), which critiques the residential school experience through a historical narrative film set in the 1950s.⁶ While Reece explores a gesture of reconciliation through performance art, *Savage* cinematically creates space to illustrate the creative resistance of children who were forced to attend residential schools.

The short film opens with a Cree woman, played by Skeena Reece, singing a lullaby to her daughter, who has just been taken away to residential school. Cutting back and forth between images of a young girl in a car driving through the countryside and images of an Aboriginal mother at home in her kitchen, the film shows the mother singing a soothing Cree lullaby to her daughter as she makes tea and puts away dishes. The woman is sitting at the kitchen table, and the audio track of her gentle lullaby turns to howls of anger and anguish as the film cuts to scenes of the daughter at a grimly institutional school. She undergoes a physical transformation as a teacher roughly takes off her dress,



Fig. 5. Production still from *Savage* (2009). Photograph by Kris Krüg. Image courtesy of Lisa Jackson, Vtape and Moving Images Distribution.

places her in a bathtub, cuts off chunks of her hair, and then outfits her in a drab school uniform. A high-pitched guitar wail accompanies a stark wide shot of the young girl standing in her uniform framed against the stairwell of the school. Cutting back to the kitchen, the film shows tears streaming down the mother's face as she implores her daughter to return to her one day. The anguish of the mother is poignantly captured in a close-up shot as she roughly wipes the tears off her cheeks and runs her hands down the front of her apron, lingering over her womb, where she once carried her daughter. The film cuts to black, and we hear the sound of footsteps. The image fades up on the young daughter as she is walked briskly into a classroom. Once in the classroom, she joins a line of similarly dressed Aboriginal children whose hair obscures their faces as they gaze down at their desks while copying their lessons from the board. When the teacher leaves for a short break, the film abruptly shifts mood; the students look up, and it becomes apparent to the audience they are zombies. The students break out into an energetic, synchronized hip hop dance number before sitting back down when the teacher returns to the classroom.

Jackson uses zombies as a metaphor for the traumatic transformation that many Aboriginal children experienced in residential schools, and she uses the title *Savage* in reference to the Canadian government policy that established residential schools. These critiques draw on Jackson's own history as the daughter of a residential school survivor. Jackson's earlier film *Suckerfish*, an experimental documentary short reflecting on her troubled relationship with her mother, provides significant context for her film *Savage*. In *Suckerfish* Jackson explores the turbulent impact of her Anishinaabe mother's alcoholism, addictions, and depression on her childhood. In the narration Jackson states matter-of-factly, "My mom had a rough life. Residential school stole her childhood and Native culture. Depression, drinking, and prescription drug abuse robbed her of the rest." As a child Jackson fled from this chaotic home environment, moving across the country to Vancouver to live with an older half sister whom she hardly knew. Across the miles, Jackson's mother reached out through letters that Jackson saved and that provide much of the voice-over dialogue for the film. The anguish of a young child unable to connect with her mother is palpable across the film. Just as Jackson was about to reconcile with her mother, her mother died suddenly from cancer. *Suckerfish* attributes the depression and addictions that dominated her adult life to her traumatic residential school experience. *Suckerfish* concludes with a close-up of Jackson standing in front of a mirror, pulling her hair back as her voice-over questions, "Reading my mother's words now I wonder what parts of me come from her. My hands look more like hers all the time, and sometimes I catch her piercing stare looking back at me from the mirror." Jackson's reflection in the mirror is superimposed with images of powwow dancing and singing as she continues, "And lately I wonder how Native I am. Is my mother's pain and suffering my only connection to her heritage? Or is there something inherently Aboriginal about the blood in my veins?" She concludes the film with the same refrain about her Native name that opens the film, except this time she confidently declares, "My Indian name is Nahmabin. My mother told me it means 'suckerfish.'" The final image of the film is a close-up shot of Jackson's reflection in the mirror, which dissolves into a photograph of her mother when she was young, cinematically suturing a link to her mother.

The lingering residual effects of the violence her mother experienced in residential school creates a backdrop for Jackson's film *Savage*. The two prominent sections of *Savage*—the scenes of the mother struggling to cope with the loss of her daughter while the daughter is institutionalized in the residential school, and the zombie dance sequence in the residential school classroom—carry two distinct emotional tenors. The first sequence heartbreakingly captures the horror of an Aboriginal mother losing her daughter to the cold and disciplinary gaze of the institution of the residential school. In contrast, the dance sequence has an air of jubilant vitality and hopefulness to it despite the clear draconian impact of the assimilative residential school as represented in the figures of the zombie children. Jackson explained that she used the zombie dance sequence to represent their deadened state as the result of residential school. However, she also used this dance sequence as a way to express the resistance of the children and their spirit of survival in the face of oppression. In an email Jackson said that she sees dance as a form of creative rebellion and resilience that offers hope for renewal and healing (Dowell 113). In talking about the inclusion of *Savage* within the *Witnesses* exhibit, Jackson proclaimed, "My mother was a residential school survivor who was taken away at age five and I've always known I would work to bring a deeper awareness of this part of Canada's history to light. This short musical is a stand-alone 'gesture' inspired by the subject I feel so passionately about" (Jackson 43). *Savage* and *Touch Me* mediate the residential school experience, cinematically bearing witness to this history while reimagining a space for possibilities of reconciliation and resistance.

CONCLUSION: MEDIATING SOVEREIGN DISPLAY TERRITORIES

Savage and *Touch Me* bookended the *Witnesses* art exhibit in the Belkin Art Gallery, with each media work occupying an opposite corner of the gallery space. Both digital media works draw on the media makers' personal history as the children of residential school survivors to explore the mother-child connection and the intergenerational impact of the residential school system. In *Touch Me* Skeena Reece sought to embody the process of reconciliation through the gesture of bathing a non-Aboriginal elder, an artist whom she sought to honor through this performative act. The inability of her own mother to touch her because

of the trauma of her experiences in residential school provided the impetus and inspiration for this piece. The emotional intensity of the performance speaks to the capacity of art and media production to provide one avenue for healing. David Garneau asserts, “Art is not healing in itself, but it can be in relation” (“Art, Curation, and Healing” 38). Artworks such as *Touch Me* can play a significant role in generating an emotional response among viewers to further stimulate dialogue around these issues, as well as helping to foster and repair relationships within Aboriginal families and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals. While Garneau is critical of the impulse to rely upon the arts to provide healing within the discourse of reconciliation, where “the public display of private (Native) pain” is expected to lead to “individual and national healing,” he does advocate for the creation of “Aboriginal sovereign display territories,” places managed by Aboriginal people yet open to respectful outsiders (37). The *Witnesses* exhibit is one manifestation of an Aboriginal sovereign display territory as an exhibition created by a collaborative curatorial committee of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists, scholars, and curators and as an exhibition space in which residential school survivors and the children of survivors could share their experiences, stories, and voices through artistic expression. Reece and Jackson also articulate cinematic Aboriginal sovereign display territories through their respective media artworks and, in the case of Reece, through the act of performance art recorded in the digital video *Touch Me*. Reece and Jackson powerfully draw upon their personal and familial histories, using media production as a way to bridge the ruptures wrought upon their families through the residential school system and offer up creative new visions for Aboriginal cultural futures.

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NOTES

1. Throughout this article I use the terms *Aboriginal*, *First Nations*, *Indian*, and *Indigenous* depending on the historical and contemporary context. Whenever possible I identify the person's tribal affiliation. I use the term *Aboriginal* as it is more commonly used in Canada as it is inclusive of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. There is currently a shift toward using *Indigenous*. For an excellent discussion about terminology, see the article by Bob Joseph about the recent name change from CBC Aboriginal to CBC Indigenous.

2. For an extensive discussion and critique about the ways in which the TRC generalized very specific West Coast Aboriginal protocols of witnessing throughout the TRC national events, see Gaertner, "Aboriginal Principles."

3. There are many Aboriginal documentary, short, and feature films that address the history and legacy of residential schools. For more information, see *The Learning Path* (1991), *A Century of Genocide in the Americas: The Residential School Experience* (2002), *We Were Children* (2012), *Older than America* (2008), and *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013).

4. For an in-depth analysis and ethnography of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, see Neizen.

5. This quote is taken from a transcript of the video documentation of Peter Morin's performance artwork. This video documentation is archived at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at UBC.

6. *Savage* screened at several of the TRC national events held across Canada between 2010 and 2015.

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Coming to You from the Indigenous Future

Native Women, Speculative Film Shorts, and the Art of the Possible

DANIKA MEDAK-SALTZMAN

Storytelling becomes a space where we can escape the gaze of the cage of Empire, even if it is just for a few minutes. . . . Storytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, and critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives. (Simpson 34–35)

In the first episode of Joss Whedon's short-lived but beloved series *Firefly*, set in 2517, the narrative pivots around the *Firefly* spaceship landing on a moon to load people and supplies for transport elsewhere in the galaxy—the crew, we find, keeps their bills paid by providing an off-the-books intergalactic delivery service. In the background, as the camera surveys the bustling trading post, the audience sees two Native men in powwow regalia make their way across the screen. Although this Indigenous presence consisted of a brief glimpse that was unrelated to the larger storyline and was effectively a scene of Indians at a trading post, I nevertheless found myself both (embarrassingly) surprised and thrilled to see Whedon portraying a future where we exist five hundred years from now as Native people.¹ This is not to say that I had bought into mainstream narratives that bind Native people and the utility of our knowledges and traditions to a time long past, where Native “disappearance” is configured as always-already inevitable. Rather, it is to underscore that even though Native communities, our governance structures, the complexities of our social engagement, and the variety of our narrative traditions have *always* incorporated elements of futurity, prophecy, and responsibility-rooted strategies for bringing forth better futures, mainstream narratives represent a profound and pervasive inability to portray

Native peoples and our continued existence in the present, let alone to project us forward into any potential futures.

LIMITED IMAGININGS OF THE FUTURE / WRITING OURSELVES INTO THE FUTURE

Enjoying science fiction, fantasy, and horror narratives played a much loved and integral part of father-daughter time when I was growing up (and still does), but it became harder and harder, as I got older, to overlook many of the core ideas common across these genres. This was particularly the case with regard to the procolonial, prosupremacy of (certain) humans, proextractive, procapitalist, and promasculinist elements of these narratives that present the natural world and (certain) peoples as needing to be tamed, exploited, civilized, removed, or vanquished. Despite the best efforts of my younger self to tune out these concerns and simply enjoy the family time, wrestling with the overdetermined ways that Indigeneity commonly figures into these genres produced a cognitive dissonance that resulted in some of my earliest (recollectable) experiences with a double consciousness, of sorts (see Du Bois). Indeed, because these genres tend to consistently portray Indigenous peoples, bodies, and epistemes as emblems of prehistory who serve as plot devices, prophets, or pathological killers, the brief representation of “everyday Indians” in this first episode of *Firefly* stood out as remarkable. By including images of Native people, even for a brief moment, as part of the fabric of an imagined future, the first episode of *Firefly* immediately diverged from the standard mainstream use of “Indian-ness” widely implemented across genres.

In spite of my initial excitement, the fact of the matter is that *Firefly*’s inclusion of Native peoples in this one scene neither foreshadowed an Indian importance to the developing series storyline nor signaled a new way forward for Hollywood portrayals of Native peoples in science fiction.² The relatively recent releases of *Avatar* and the *Twilight* series present ample evidence that Hollywood’s Indians are alive and well, however blue and “shape-shifting” they may be in these imaginings. While it is true that we have seen changes in the industry since Indigenous peoples, Native studies scholars, and others began critically engaging and critiquing such portrayals decades and decades ago, much has also stayed the same. More often than not, recent Hollywood portrayals have

simply amended the most egregious infractions of the past by changing negative stereotypic portrayals to “positive” ones—as though “good” stereotypes are not also problematic. Such attempts to update popular representation of Indigenous peoples have taken many forms. This point might be best exemplified by the mainstream’s repeated attempts to adopt and employ traditional Indigenous teaching stories for their own purposes regardless of historical or cultural accuracy.³ For example, the repeated use of Windigo as a simple synonym for cannibal across popular culture renders this figure, in these cases, devoid of the implicit and explicit critique of, and important warnings about, overconsumption, greed, selfishness, and the dangers of over/self-indulgence that I understand to be inextricable from most actual Windigo stories.⁴ Predictably, such one-dimensional usage not only undermines the power, vitality, and significance of these characters and stories for Native peoples and communities but also refracts and distorts them so much—when they are viewed and used this way by cultural outsiders—that they become nearly unrecognizable. This is a manner of appropriation that provides a veneer of cultural diversity that functions as an easily employable way to add “flavor” to mainstream narratives, and/or a means to take on the appearance of inclusivity, but that ultimately serves to reinforce, rather than change, audience expectations about Indigenous peoples.

The fact that mainstream representations of Native peoples have actually changed very little across genre is not particularly surprising, until you consider that this has even been the case in speculative genres where breaking with, questioning, and challenging convention is the expected norm. On one level, this reveals that, by and large, the only futures that have been imaginable for hegemonic society have been those that leave intact, function to maintain, and further entrench settler colonial narratives of Indigenous absence and inconsequence by continuing to represent Native characters as one-dimensional and locked in the past as either all-knowing or violent. The long-standing and profound absence of racial diversity (that continues to exist) in mainstream representations of the future is perhaps best illustrated by an anecdote about a critical moment in the trajectory of the *Star Trek* television show, which broke with such convention in the mid- to late 1960s by having several nonwhite main characters, namely, George Takei as Lieutenant Hikaru Sulu and Nichelle Nichols as Lieutenant Nyota Uhura as helmsman and communications officer, respectively.⁵ At the end of the first

season of *Star Trek*, Nichols informed series creator Gene Roddenberry that she intended to resign from her role as Lieutenant Uhura to pursue other options, but shortly thereafter, during an unexpected conversation with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Nichols found out that *Star Trek* was the only show that Coretta Scott King and her husband allowed their children to watch. According to Nichols's recounting, Dr. King told her that her role as Lieutenant Uhura "reflect[s] what we are fighting for" (Martin). Nichols understood this comment to mean that by continuing to portray Lieutenant Uhura on the show, she was contributing to the larger goals of the civil rights movement. By linking Nichols's key role in an imagined future with the goals of the civil rights movement in this statement, Dr. King was asserting that diverse representations matter, that the future is anything but fixed, that we have the ability, and indeed a duty, to fight on many fronts and, in many ways, to build more inclusive, just, and ethical futures.

The more racially diverse case of *Star Trek*, while often lauded as a great leap in mainstream representations of the future, did not appear in a vacuum, and incorporating this example of more inclusive representations of the future ought not eclipse the fact that the twentieth century saw many racialized communities in North America and beyond begin or continue to engage with the genres of speculative fiction in a more concerted and more broadly representative manner. Importantly, however, science fiction remained largely untapped in Indigenous North American cultural production until quite recently. This apparent longstanding reluctance among Native authors and filmmakers to engage with science fiction topics is attributable, at least in part, to the fact that the genre's traditional narrative constructions—involving stories about colonization, conquest, exploitation of, and conflict with other peoples' worlds—have too closely mirrored Indigenous experiential realities for many to find the genre enticing. As Nalo Hopkinson has said,

Arguably, one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives. . . . [F]or many of us, that's not a thrilling adventure story; it's non-fiction and we are on the wrong side of the strange looking ship that appears out of nowhere. To be a person of color writing [and I would add, enjoying] science fiction is to be under suspicion of having internalized one's colonization. (7)

Yet as much as Hopkinson might be correct about the suspicions our interest in this genre may raise, I see Indigenous engagement with science fiction as an example of a broader and more far-reaching movement of Indigenous resurgence that has been taking many forms as it spreads across North America and beyond.

Emerging increasingly at the turn of the twenty-first century and in keeping with the now decades-long, far-reaching, and influential position of Afrofuturism within and beyond African American communities,⁶ the trend of Indigenous peoples creating narrative and filmic alternative futures has begun to provide important interventions into the ways that futures can be, and are being, imagined. Indigenous futurisms, like Afrofuturisms and other similar movements, provide authors, readers, filmmakers, audiences, and our communities with opportunities to explore beyond what is and what has been and moves us toward imagining, creating, and manifesting a variety of possibilities that better represent our understandings of, our place in, and our responsibilities to this world and to those yet to come. This is to say that Indigenous futurist works do not simply “include” Native people as part of the narrative; rather, they are generated by and inspirational *for* Native peoples.

To be clear, Indigenous futurist work can and does also explore a variety of dystopian possibilities, which allows for critical contemplation about the dangerous “what ifs” we might face and, more pragmatically, can aid us in our efforts to imagine our way out of our present dystopic moment to call forth better futures. Such futurist work, whether dystopic, utopic, or somewhere in between, serves to counter persistent settler colonial fantasies of Native disappearance. Perhaps more importantly, by envisioning Native peoples and our ways of being and understanding the world as essential to any shared futures, these efforts to “imagine otherwise” (a term I borrow from Daniel Heath Justice, <http://imagineotherwise.ca/>) hold the potential to help strengthen our communities as we work to negotiate within and beyond settler colonial realities. Imagination is a powerful tool for helping to envision, bring about, and build better futures. By creating blueprints of the possible and providing a place where we can explore the potential pitfalls of certain paths, Indigenous futurist imaginings make it possible to transcend the confines of time and accepted “truths”—so often hegemonically configured and reinforced—that effectively limit what we can see and experience as possible in the present, let alone imagine into the

future. Considered this way, not only do we begin to see that Indigenous futurist endeavors to “imagine otherwise” are potentially theoretically invigorating, but also we begin to see why their seemingly sudden and growing emergence, which has coincided with the resurgence of broad Indigenous political movements across North America, is a groundswell that I see as anything but coincidental.

Instead, I see the emergence and proliferation of narrative and filmic imaginings of Indigenous futures as representing the creative arm of the Indigenous futurist movement, which joins the more overtly political arm of the movement evident in the protest, legal, and advocacy work, all of which are vital to seeing our way toward, fighting for, and calling forth better futures. This is evident in efforts to make food sovereignty a reality, to ensure the health of the planet, to spotlight and address the epidemic of violence against Native women across North America, to protect our waters, to engage in Indigenous language revitalization, to work toward tribal energy independence, and to work to protect our children from racialized violence, among other important manifestations being undertaken in our present moment. Each of these endeavors, whether they take literary, filmic, advocacy, or other forms of protest, are, in no uncertain terms, Indigenous futurist projects that rely on Indigenous innovation and creativity to bring about change in ways that are always-already informed and supported by Indigenous political concerns and Indigenous ways of being in the world.

In order to address the larger significance of Indigenous futurisms for our contemporary moment, this essay first considers how preventing Indigenous futures has been (and remains) part and parcel of core settler logics, how this remains visible in mainstream representations of the future despite long-standing Indigenous futurist traditions, and how this reflects on the forms that Indigenous futurists endeavors have been taking as they emerge in spite of wide-ranging attempts to relegate Indigeneity to an unknowable and unimportant past. I then consider how three Indigenous futurist film shorts created by Native women (one undertaken by Melissa Henry, another by Sydney Freeland, and a final piece by Nanobah Becker) evidence a broader and multipronged movement to imagine, create, and ensure the place and value of Indigenous peoples, traditions, and knowledges into the future.

ABSENCE BY COLONIAL DESIGN, PROPHECY AS INDIGENOUS
FUTURIST TRADITION, AND EMERGENCE OF FORM

Indigenous absence in speculative genres has largely been predetermined by our society's acceptance of laws and policies (both *de jure* and *de facto*) that promote and carry out a bloodless genocide neatly hidden by the innocuous term "blood quantum."⁷ Each time we ask a Native person "how much Indian are you?" and each time our tribal governments use blood quantum to determine who is actually "Native," we are participating in, normalizing, and perpetuating deeply problematic ways of thinking about race that are rooted in colonial fantasies of accumulating property at little or no cost to those accumulating said property. Blood quantum, which requires someone to meet a threshold to have "enough" blood to be Indian, is a racialized mechanism that inverts the blood logic of the more familiar "one-drop rule" that marked people with even "one drop" of African blood as black. Considering the blood logics together allows us to see that the one-drop rule and blood quantum have been used as opposite sides of the same coin spent in efforts to establish and maintain white supremacy in the United States. Put another way, while the one-drop rule was intended to create an ever-increasing population by ensuring that all of the descendants of the people brutalized and stolen from Africa would continue to be defined as property that could be accumulated, blood quantum determines that with each generation of "mixing," the peoples Indigenous to the resource-rich territories (read: property) that the United States covets will perpetually decrease until Native people cease to exist (making all once-Native lands permanently available for settler state accumulation). In this way, blood quantum represents bloodless genocide in that it, by design, serves to "legally" vanish Native peoples in order to finally and permanently provide unfettered access to Indigenous property (in terms of both land and natural resources). Thus, while the one-drop rule under slavery was designed to make it impossible for one to escape being classified as property because even one drop "counted," blood quantum is a calculus of disappearance, an algorithm that makes Native existence in the future an impossibility, because survival requires mixing—whether across clans, tribes, or races. Under blood quantum, mixing makes each Native person a fraction of a Native person and thus

farther and farther from existence with every generation. As Daniel Justice commented to me recently, “Another twisted element of blood quantum and the logics of Indian authenticity is that they presume legitimacy as only a past-tense reality—our survival thus undermines our legitimacy, as the only real/fullblood/authentic Indians died in the past, so their descendants are therefore not real *because they survived*.”⁸ To be clear, the ultimate goal of these seemingly contradictory blood logics is to produce the same result, namely, to legitimate settler state and settler property claims to lands, bodies, labor, and/or lifeways of Others that lie at the core of their political and economic systems of supremacy. Since Native presence in North America, by colonial design, is always-already vanishing (rendering Indigenous futures impossible), inserting ourselves into future narratives (as subjects, authors, and participants in futurity) is a particularly powerful act.

Yet, and despite the best efforts of settler colonial societies to deny Native peoples the possibility of meaningful futures, narratives about the future have always been, and remain, deeply entrenched in, and important to, Native communities. A prime example of this is the Anishinaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy, which chronicles as it foretold the history of our migration, the allure of false promises, the forced and accidental loss of traditions, the path to recovering tribal knowledge, the coming of the new people, the rebirth of Anishinaabeg nations, and the challenges we would face together.⁹ The Seventh Fire is prophesied as the time when Indigenous people would renew themselves and non-Indigenous people would be given a choice. According to the teachings as I understand them, this means that the decisions before us will determine whether or not we reach the Eighth Fire. The Eighth Fire and the better and more just world of eternal peace for all people that it promises is only possible, as the prophecy makes clear, if we as Indigenous people renew our commitment to Indigenous ways of being and our non-Native allies work to make the correct choice as we face the fork in the road to our collective futures: one direction leads toward a brown barren wasteland and the certain destruction of our world, while the other moves us into a vibrant green place of possibility.

While the Anishinaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy is just one example of many Indigenous futurist traditions in our communities, I recall it here because I believe that recognizing and claiming when our stories have participated in futurity is an important part of claiming the futures that

our ancestors made every effort to ensure would always be possible. In this way, and because Native epistemologies have been continually targeted for eradication as part of assimilationist plans to “kill the Indian and spare the man” that would effectively and preemptively prevent the futures of Native peoples, projecting the value of our stories and ways of knowing into the future becomes a powerful means of supporting and participating in calls to imagine otherwise and aid in the Indigenous resurgence work as the center of Indigenous futurist endeavors. In *Walking the Clouds* Grace Dillon participates in this important reclamation work by recovering elements of Indigenous futurist work that have been embedded in canonical pieces of Native literature (which at the time of their original publication could not be understood as being both American Indian literature and speculative fiction—as if the two were mutually exclusive categories) and placing them alongside more recent Indigenist futurist creations to draw a longer lineage of Indigenous futurist work than I do.¹⁰

While I find Dillon’s intervention compelling and valuable, I am interested in what considering the sudden influx of Indigenist futurist cultural production that emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century alongside a resurgence of Indigenous political activism can tell us about our present historical moment. Using that perspective to approach the examination of Indigenous futurisms, I see the publication of Sherman Alexie’s short story “Sin Eaters,” from his collection *Toughest Indian in the World* in 2000, and William Sanders’s short story “The Undiscovered,” published shortly before that in 1997, as two of the earliest examples of concerted American Indian engagement with the genres of speculative fiction. Since that time, and although there has been a sudden rise in Native American artists, writers, designers, filmmakers, and others taking up these subjects in their creative endeavors, it has largely been the longer novel-length works by Cherokee men that seem to have garnered the most attention. (There’s a project in there somewhere, folks!) Given the breadth of form and the tribal backgrounds evident in twenty-first-century Indigenous futurist cultural production, and given the synchronicity of Indigenous resurgence efforts to ensure a better future for us all being led by Native women, I find Native women’s futurist production especially compelling. Much of the Indigenist futurist and speculative fiction being produced by Native women happens to take the form of short stories, new media, and film shorts, and of these,

many are being produced as a part of what Randolph Lewis has called “Navajo Nation Cinema.” By discussing three recent film shorts / works in progress by Diné women (Melissa Henry’s *Black Cat in Space*, Sydney Freeland’s *Hoverboard*, and Nanobah Becker’s *The 6th World*), I explore what these films reveal about the utility and significance of Indigenous futurisms and how the genre’s traditional narrative construction has moved from being seen as too closely mirroring Indigenous realities to be popular to being a mechanism for imagining new possibilities and building futures that better honor our epistemologies, traditions, and inherent rights to self-determination in the Indigenous future.¹¹

BLACK CAT IN SPACE

Although this project remains officially on hold, as of the summer of 2016, Diné filmmaker Melissa Henry’s in-progress work titled *Black Cat in Space* was the focus of her attention during her tenure in 2013 as the Eric and Barbara Dobkin Artist in Residence at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Since I was already familiar with Henry’s work, including *Horse You See* (produced by Red Ant Films and winner of the 2012 PBS Online Film Festival) and *Run Red Walk*, I saw this step toward portraying feline space travel as an extension of Henry’s broader filmography involving animals with rich internal lives and complicated goals and motivations beyond what humans usually acknowledge. In this case, the (in-progress) film Henry presented at the end of her residency at the School for Advanced Research had been compiled from richly illustrated storyboards that imagined the adventures of a black cat in space who travels the galaxy in his spaceship and friend *Space Coyote*.

While I would love to provide details about the adventures of Captain Meow and his friend and spaceship, the project remains on hold. Despite its current status, I see including this brief discussion of *Black Cat in Space* as important to illustrating the breadth and creativity of the futures being imagined by Indigenous people. Although the working title of this film short might only inadvertently reference the much adored “Pigs in Space” skit from the original *Muppet Show*, I must admit that I cannot help but hear Jim Henson’s Muppets yelling “Black Cat in Space,” instead of the familiar refrain of “Pi-i-i-i-i-gs in Spa-a-a-a-a-a-ce” that signaled the beginning of each episode.¹² That being said,

whether the allusion to “Pigs in Space” was inadvertent or not, the progressive goals of *The Muppet Show* (aimed at providing TV programming the whole family could enjoy together) and its sibling series *Sesame Street* (geared toward introducing children to music, math, reading, and other skills to make preschool-aged educational material available and accessible to more children) are not entirely unreflected in the early version of *Black Cat in Space* that I saw. Henry’s portrayal of (animated) animal experiences of the world as vibrant, thoughtful, and sensitive is more representative of the way that Indigenous epistemes (similar in this regard across Native communities) engender a basic beingness to our planet and to other-than-human people (inclusive of plants, animals, and other key elements that make up our world). Such portrayals are compelling on a number of levels, not the least of which is that they recognize, highlight, remind, and instruct viewers of our vast responsibilities as humans to human and other-than-human beings alike, as well as the importance of right relationships and systems of reciprocity to maintaining healthy peoples and a healthy planet.

Since Henry’s oeuvre feature animals so prominently, it might be tempting to characterize them as anthropomorphic, but viewing them this way would be to privilege and effectively reinscribe Western hierarchies that view humans as the only beings capable of complex thought, rational thinking, and emotions.¹³ Describing Henry’s films this way would be particularly problematic, because Henry’s films actually function to intervene in such normative assumptions by centering different ways of knowing and being in the world. Henry’s oeuvre can be viewed as a rejection of assertions that proclaim other-than-human beings’ behavior to be based on instinct alone, but this too would overlook how Henry centers Indigenous perspectives in her work. Henry’s work playfully recenters ways of relating to animals that do not configure them, understand them, and relate to them as if their sole purpose on this earth is to serve humans—as property, beasts of burden, companions, protein sources, or infinitely exploitable resources. We need to question systems that hold at their core a rejection of the possibility that any other-than-human (or, as has been asserted in the past, any Othered “race” of humans) can have sophisticated social, mental, or emotional capacities, particularly because such claims have historically been used to justify the oppression, slaughter, disenfranchisement, enslavement, and inhumane treatment of other beings—from colonization and slav-

ery to agribusiness and the meat-packing industry. By centering Native epistemologies that value right relationships with the planet, with other-than-human beings, and with each other, and by representing these as vital to our shared futures, even the most innocuous of subjects (in this case, an animated black cat in space) becomes a powerful means of asserting “you don’t get to take our futures from us, too.” An interplanetary traveling feline may indeed seem the least likely topic for achieving and articulating Indigenous futurisms, but to my mind, harnessing the power and possibilities of play, fun, and imagination in this way is a recuperative act. The extent of the power and recuperative capabilities of Indigenous futurisms, particularly those designed to be enjoyable for the whole family, as is the case with Henry’s work, is brought into stark relief when these narratives emerge out of settler colonial societies that construct red, brown, and black bodies as deviant, dangerous, and in need of surveillance from the time they are young children, particularly since these same race-based assumptions are used to justify the school-to-prison pipeline and the disproportionate rates that children of color become targets of police violence and are incarcerated.

HOVERBOARD

Sidney Freeland’s film *Hoverboard* also involves themes of youth, play, and creativity as it tells the story of a young Native girl who is determined to get her hands on a Hoverboard. The film short introduces the audience to the protagonist (a character who is never called by name in the film but who the credits indicate is “Max,” played by Magdalena Begay), who finds inspiration in *Back to the Future II*, a film she loves. With the help of her teddy bear, Shush (which means “bear” in Navajo), who nods in agreement and offers suggestions silently throughout the film so that only the protagonist can hear, the young girl uses ingenuity, persistence, imagination, and a bit of duct tape in her attempts to build a time machine—not unlike Marty McFly’s DeLorean, if it were made out of a cardboard box, tin foil, Styrofoam plates and ran on imagination instead of compost. While the influence of mainstream US (and Hollywood) culture on (this) Native youth is obviously referenced in *Hoverboard*, the film also and simultaneously rejects the persistent settler colonial logics that mandate Native disappearance and instead illustrates that Native futures are not only possible but in our hands.

Like Melissa Henry's *Black Cat in Space*, *Hoverboard* fuels as it showcases the rich internal lives of children, the power of the possible, and the determination and creativity necessary for working toward your dreams. The film opens with a scene of the little girl's father (Ryan Begay) asleep on the couch with his back to the tv as a football game plays in the background, out of sight. All of a sudden, the teddy bear's head peeks up over the couch to make sure the coast is clear. We then see the protagonist's hand reach out from behind the couch to quietly retrieve a copy of *Back to the Future II* from the DVD shelf. The camera then focuses explicitly on her feet and legs as they emerge from behind the couch. In an effort not to wake her father napping on the couch, she quietly makes her way toward the television. This sequence intentionally draws attention to the child's feet so there is no way the audience can miss that they are clad in child-sized neon-colored high-top sneakers that evoke those worn by Marty McFly in *Back to the Future II* (albeit in brighter hues than the muted futuristic gray of Marty's shoes). Just before she turns off the football game to put on her movie, we catch a glimpse of the field and players. One team is wearing burgundy and gold, while the other team seems to be wearing white, silver, and navy, suggesting that the game may be a contest between the Washington team and their rivals, the Dallas Cowboys. At the sudden devoid-of-football silence her father wakes up and says, "I'm watching football," and then he sees the DVD she is holding and says, "No, you've seen that stupid thing too many times," at which point she and her bear go outside to play.

The camera shifts to a scene of the yard, where a bike, a cinderblock, and a small countertop ironing board are all propped up along the fence. As the camera pauses on this scene the film title appears in pink for a moment and then disappears as our protagonist walks by, holding Shush and dispiritedly kicking some dirt in the direction of the film title. At precisely this moment, the title disappears, the dirt she kicked having erased it from the scene. As she walks out of the frame, the camera lingers on the fence for a moment, and an animated dotted line is drawn and superimposed around the ironing board, an effect that is accompanied by a brief lilting musical scale that ensures that the audience notices this unique shape at the same time that it lures our protagonist back into the frame. As she approaches the ironing board, the dotted line seems to inflate slightly and then pops with a "ding," as if it had been a thought

bubble in her mind. Examining the board, she says to her bear, “That kinda looks like a Hoverboard, huh, Shush? . . . Are you thinking what I am thinking?” and runs inside. The audience sees the back of her head silhouetted against the door of the refrigerator, which is covered with magnets that secure her drawing to the fridge. Other than the words “time machine” and “me” and their accompanying arrows, which point to images that are obscured from the audience’s view by her head, we cannot yet see what, exactly, she had drawn. As the camera pauses on this scene, we hear an up-tempo variation of the theme music for *Back to the Future II* and watch as the little girl proceeds to collect the alphabet magnets from the fridge. As she does so, she moves to the left of the frame, providing an unobstructed view of her drawing, which depicts the girl and her bear standing on a Hoverboard near a time machine, the designs for which are reminiscent of the way these two technologies are represented in *Back to the Future II*.

The next scene brings us again to the yard, where we find our protagonist gluing the numerous magnets collected from the fridge onto the bottom of the ironing board, as Shush observes. Once the magnets have been secured to the board she places (the now safety-goggles-wearing) Shush on top of the board, holds it over the ground, and asks Shush, “Are you ready?” She lets go of the board. When the magnets do not work and her creation falls to the ground, the little girl looks disappointed for a moment as she brushes the dust off of the (still safety-goggles-wearing) bear and stands up. This last action is punctuated both with a facial expression and a now familiar “ding” to indicate that she has had an idea, and with a parting “Stay right there, Shush, I’ll be right back!” she runs off to try a different tack.

In her second attempt to engineer a Hoverboard, the protagonist uses duct tape to attach two hair dryers to opposite ends of the ironing board. She connects the hair dryers to a really long extension cord, readies Shush, turns on the dryers, and drops the board, expecting it to hover. When this, too, does not work (despite the readiness of her safety-goggles-wearing bear) she goes back to the drawing board, literally and figuratively—but only after taking a moment with her disappointment as she walks past the fridge with her head hung dejectedly and exits the frame. As the music begins to hint again at the theme music from *Back to the Future II*, she reemerges in the frame and looks at her drawing on the fridge. Rather than seeing only the back of her head, as we had in

the previous refrigerator scene, this time we see her face deep in thought as she looks at the picture. The camera switches to provide a close-up of her drawing and then cuts back to the image of her face as she looks at the drawing, just in time for her to have an aha moment, punctuated by a “ding” and accompanied by the lamp behind her switching on over her head, providing the physical corollary for the metaphorical light bulb reflected in her expression. She grabs the drawing from the fridge and runs outside and begins to gather materials: flattened cardboard boxes, markers, an Easy Rule II, plastic wrap, and aluminum foil. Using her drawing as a blueprint, she begins to build a time machine as Shush supervises. The end result looks remarkably like the one she had drawn, replete with a remote control. The safety-goggles-wearing bear is then loaded into the creation and dispatched with an encouraging “Good luck, Shush, you know what to do!” and the time machine disappears, leaving nothing but a flaming rectangle in its wake—another homage to our protagonist’s favorite film.

When the machine reappears, the protagonist appears to be both surprised and delighted that this time her efforts have succeeded—at least in terms of having the “time machine” disappear and reappear following the pattern established in the *Back to the Future* films. She hurries over to the cardboard “DeLorean” and opens the door to find that Shush has actually managed to bring back a Hoverboard from the future. With a huge grin the little girl exclaims, “You did it, Shush!” as she examines the Hoverboard and allows her bear to take the first ride. This moment of triumph is only briefly lingered upon in the larger narrative, suggesting that the young girl’s eventual success was always understood as a possibility. This presumption, that her dream was always within reach, is a particularly meaningful element of the story, because in order to perpetuate their own control and privilege, settler colonial societies require that we each learn our places and understand our positions and the possibilities available within this system. Children of color are particularly vulnerable under this system, which compels them to bear the burden and consequences of being exposed to implicit and explicit messages that insist that their cultural and intellectual traditions (and, therefore, their capabilities) are backward, stunted, something to be overcome, and decidedly not useful knowledges into the future.¹⁴ While our young protagonist has clearly been influenced and inspired by *Back to the Future II*, the impact of this film has evidently been a positive one

that planted seeds in her young imagination, where science and creativity are available resources for everyone, including little Indian girls.

In the final scene, we return to the living room, where her father is still “watching football.” In the foreground Shush drifts across the screen riding on the Hoverboard as the girl’s legs and neon high-top sneakers are seen chasing behind her bear and laughing as they exit the scene one after the other. Shortly thereafter, the father, sure that he has heard something, rolls over and looks around suspiciously. Seeing nothing, he goes back to sleep, and the screen goes black. Shortly thereafter, the words “The End” are superimposed on the black screen in the iconic font from the *Back to the Future* series franchise, providing the final reference to the protagonist’s favorite film and source of inspiration.

The persistence and sophisticated reasoning that the young protagonist displays throughout this film are skill sets that are as vital in her attempts to make her dream a reality as they have always been in so many of our stories—from, for example, the earth diver and Skywoman stories to the variety of emergence stories that explain how life was able to begin anew and (re)establish our homelands, among many, many others. Rather than seeing each setback and unsuccessful attempt to reach her goal as evidence that the dream itself is flawed or impossible, the young girl’s persistence (like that of the human and other-than-human beings who work collectively toward success in the stories referred to above) evidences a perspective that recognizes each failed attempt as an opportunity to learn from and improve upon. Each unsuccessful attempt is understood as a chance to try a different tactic, to consider what has been learned, and to head back to the generative drawing board. Using these methods, her own imagination, and age-appropriate knowledge base, the young girl endeavors to utilize and repurpose materials available in her surroundings as she works to realize her goal in a manner similar to how Doc experiments to make it possible for Marty to travel back and forth in the *Back to the Future* film series.

The young girl is not simply playing the role of Doc the scientist as she works to send her own Marty (Shush) forward in time. Instead, she is proceeding based on a clear logic and scientific basis that ground each of her initial attempts to turn the ironing board into a Hoverboard. When the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) continue to have difficulty fostering gender and ethnic diversity within their ranks at all levels, it is important to take a moment to

acknowledge that with each attempt the little girl is employing theoretically possible means of making a solid object hover above the ground. We see this, and evidence that she understands (at least at a basic level) how the dipoles of magnetized metal function (to attract or repel, depending on whether the poles are placed in opposition or not), when she affixes refrigerator magnets to the bottom of the ironing board—even if there were no opposing magnets placed on the ground below the ironing board that might repel it and cause it to “hover” (she is only about eight or nine years old in the film, after all). Similarly, when she duct tapes the two hair dryers to the ironing board, she is implementing and building on her understanding of the power of forced air, which is essential to jet propulsion, even if the materials available to her do not allow this method to succeed in this case. This “if at first you don’t succeed, try, try again” strategy serves the protagonist well and eventually manages to produce the desired result—this despite the fact that Indigenous ways of knowing have commonly been derisively dismissed by the overculture as something Native peoples only figured out by “trial and error.” This is, in fact, the key component of the scientific method. By asking and answering questions, developing and testing predictions, and experimenting and making observations, our young protagonist’s engagement with science and the scientific method presents her as potentially a future American Indian Science and Engineering Society member.

Although it is almost certainly the case that the little girl does not know she is employing Coulomb’s law of magnetism or Newton’s third law of motion (in her first and second attempts to engineer a Hoverboard, respectively), an understanding of these principles of physics is not predicated on knowing which Western scientists named these concepts after themselves. No matter the prestige that these figures and “their” principles have been allocated in the history of Western science, this neither means that other peoples had no similar sophisticated understanding of the way the world works nor that Others lack sophisticated scientific thought—albeit rarely discussed as scientific thought. This is to say that Indigenous knowledge in general and Indigenous scientific knowledge in particular have long been dismissed outright as unsophisticated—portrayed as the product of lucky guesses, or “theories” based on unverifiable belief systems. Such assertions are rooted in inherently problematic and deeply racist assumptions about Native peo-

ples and Native ways of knowing, issues that are beautifully gestured to through the character of John Husk in Linda Hogan's novel *Solar Storms*, who reads scientific publications, voraciously looking to see if they have yet proven things that Indigenous peoples have long known to be true (e.g., that bees communicate by dancing). While Indigenous scientific understandings may not have called their methods explicitly scientific, without a doubt Native and other Othered peoples have always relied on observation, intelligence, innovation, curiosity, imagination, testing hypotheses, and predicting results of future experiments based on what is known and what has been learned.

The emotional and intellectual resiliency the protagonist displays in this process is as instructive as it is endearing. By showing that one can be disappointed when things do not go as one hoped they would while also making clear that this is not where such stories end, what is being modeled is a particular kind of resiliency, a resistance and resiliency (as Angelica Lawson calls it in this volume) that is often undermined by the constant and limiting teaching-to-the-test so common in US classrooms. In such environments many students cannot help but receive the message that it is only the students who score well on tests, and therefore succeed, who are the smart children with potential. Instead, this film represents a more true-to-life trajectory where failed attempts are understood as opportunities to learn along the way, not as roadblocks that foreclose the possibility of success in the future.

Watching our young protagonist go through this process brings two specific points to mind that help to provide another level of depth to this film and my reading of it. The first is that by and large, and across Indigenous communities, children are often considered some of our greatest teachers. Considered this way, our young protagonist is not simply modeling ways of being to her peer groups; instead, there is much we can all learn from observing children as they explore and make sense of the world, even in this fictional account of a girl determined to obtain a Hoverboard. The second point has to do with the way that Winona LaDuke has been championing engineering across Indian Country, encouraging Native youth to become engineers in order to help our nations and Indian Country writ large achieve energy independence. In this way *Hoverboard* portrays Native children and childhood as every bit as innocent, creative, thoughtful, and inquisitive as in hegemonic culture, but the film also, and perhaps more importantly, illustrates how

we can work together toward our dreams and a better future, even in the face of a succession of setbacks. Although some have been quick to portray Native peoples fighting to protect our lands and waters from the dangers posed by extractive industry as the barriers to progress, a position that Native people have been relegated to for centuries, such a framing dismisses Indigenous concerns. This is a method that is often used, to great success, in attempts to reject legitimate concerns by cloaking them as the result of Native ignorance or lack of intellectual sophistication. The fact of the matter is that small fixes, here represented as magnets or duct tape and hair dryers alone, will not be enough to get us where we need to be. To bring forth the better futures that the ancestors prophesied, envisioned, and sacrificed for, we will need to dream, draw, plan, imagine, protect, insist, repurpose, learn, play, persist, test, and try, try again in efforts to engineer the variety of (metaphoric) vehicles needed to bring forth better possibilities.

THE 6TH WORLD

Nanobah Becker's film short *The 6th World* brings together a technologically advanced spaceship, an engagement with concerns about GMO versus sacred versions of corn, and an imagined future where the Navajo Nation and the "Omnicorn" Corporation work together in order to create a colony on Mars that in the end manages to succeed precisely because Indigenous ways of knowing are implemented. In this way Becker's film simultaneously raises critical issues about the value of Indigenous knowledge into the future, underscores how plant life is so often only represented in imagined futures if a particular kind of science interferes to improve (even "civilize") them, and centers questions about whether abandoning Indigenous traditions, Indigenous technologies, and ways of knowing will end up foreclosing rather than fostering potential futures.

Becker's film short opens with what we soon learn is a dream sequence. As the camera pans across the southwestern landscape it settles on a small field of corn that appears healthy, save one plant, which the camera zooms in on. This sickly plant is small, discolored, and covered in insects, and we hear flies buzzing as the camera zooms in. As the camera examines the sickly cornstalk all of the other cornstalks begin to fall down until only one healthy cornstalk remains standing. This dream

sequence and the larger Diné context of the film have been analyzed by Gabriel Estrada. Using interviews that he conducted with Becker, coupled with his own research, Estrada asserts that this opening scene is not only prophetic but also a careful rendering of a “Holy Person [who] appears by a lone corn plant after the rest of the neighboring cornstalks have fallen” as “a glittering yellow steam of corn pollen [that] hovers by the corn plants [to offer] spiritual guidance to Navajos [as they have] since time immemorial” (523). The presence of this spiritual being is represented both by the swirling yellow lights that move toward the remaining healthy stalk of corn and by the moccasin footprints and a trail of corn pollen left in the wake of the swirling lights.¹⁵ The camera and the glittering representation of the sacred being both then pause to focus attention on the single cornstalk that remains standing, and we begin to hear a song—a song that is precisely the kind of offering Margaret Noodin and Stacie Sheldon describe earlier in this issue. The song signals the end of the dream sequence, and we see our main character, who we soon learn is Commander Tazbah Redhouse (Jeneda Benally) of the Navajo Nation, waking up with a start. The screen then goes black, and the viewer is presented with the words “the future” on a black background, followed by a quick switch to an image of the official seal, or logo, of “Project Emergence.” The project’s name here is a gesture to how such space missions are often named in ways that cloak the exploration and resettlement narratives at the core of colonial projects with references to new possibilities or new beginnings. However, and even more importantly, this particular name sends signals to audience members familiar with Diné traditional stories that these are the epistemes that are privileged in *The 6th World*. Not only does the film title itself hint at an extension of Navajo origin stories into the future (as some believe we are either in the fourth or fifth world now, depending on which part of Dinétah [Navajo-land] you are from), but this is also signaled by the title of the project at the center of the film, since these origin stories, Diné Bahane, are often also referred to in English as the Navajo emergence stories.

At the center of the Project Emergence seal is an image of Mars overlaid with an M in yellow and three green cornstalks. This image is surrounded by a ring of navy blue that reads “Project Emergence” flanked by four stars on each side, for a total of eight, which is then ringed by the flags of various nation-states. Notably, none of these flags are Native

nation flags, which is an interesting gesture toward the larger apparatus of statehood and nationhood, also critiqued in this film.¹⁶ This logo and the absence of Native nation representation are peculiar, especially considering that the film and project titles both refer to Navajo emergence stories, and the narrative the film shares—and ultimately the success of the mission itself—relies upon Indigenous knowledge. Moreover, this is even more noteworthy, because while it is unrepresented in the Project Emergence logo, the Navajo Nation flag plays a brief but pivotal role in this film short.

The next scene introduces us to P. Clark (played by Leith M. Burke), who is identified by title as the corporate official of Project Emergence, Dr. Tobias Smith (Louis Aldana) of Omnicorn Corporation, and Commander Tazbah Redhouse of the Navajo Nation. Notably, not only is the Navajo Nation the only nation identified by name in this film, but there is also not a single reference to the United States throughout the film, as if it is no longer relevant to our future worlds (despite its visual referent's brief appearance on the Project Emergence logo). The scene takes place inside the spaceship *Emergence*, which is docked at the International Space Station and set to depart shortly for a mission to colonize Mars. The audience is then treated to a brief tour of the facility, which showcases the hydroponic corn system designed by Dr. Smith that is expected to create oxygen and food both for the upcoming trip and for the colony they will soon establish on Mars. The camera pans over row upon row of unhusked and detassled naked corncobs that have been genetically modified to produce food and oxygen from this naked state thanks to Dr. Smith's hydroponic system, which is designed to feed the corn via the roots that grow out of the cob's unkerneled ends. As Dr. Smith and Commander Redhouse explain how the self-contained system works, an alarm goes off, bringing the tour to an abrupt end. We soon find that the alarm was set off as a response to the corn pollen the Navajo Nation's General Bahe (Roger Willie) brought with him to see the mission off. General Bahe's corn pollen is confiscated, and he is informed that "only company-approved corn substances" are allowed on board *Emergence*. General Bahe responds by asserting, "Navajo corn pollen is sacred, a gift from the holy people, not a *corn substance*," but he hands over the corn pollen as he approaches Redhouse with a special gift. Redhouse responds incredulously as she takes the triangular flag frame from him, saying, "Your Navajo Astronaut flag?!" This flag is one that we can presume,

based on Redhouse's reaction, had been gifted by the Navajo Nation to General Bahe in honor of his service as an astronaut, and therefore it is a gift with great significance. But Bahe assures her that it "belongs" with her, and she thanks him in Navajo. Then the general requests a tour. Afterward he is asked what he thinks about Dr. Smith's system, and he responds skeptically, saying, "Corn with no husks? No stalks? Tassels?" His concern is met with the explanation that these corncobs "are genetically engineered to have very few unusable parts." This is an image and a creation that General Bahe describes as "creepy" and explains that those "unusable" parts *are* useful, and "if they have use on Earth, they can be used on Mars." Redhouse uses this moment to share her previous night's dream with the general and asks if he might know what it means. Sensing they are short on time, and by way of wishing the mission and Commander Redhouse well, the general reminds her, "Out of all of us, you were chosen to lead our people into the next world. You are protected. But," he cautions, "keep that flag close." Like the dream sequence that opens the film, General Bahe's words are similarly prophetic, as they underscore that Redhouse has been imbued with the ability to start the colony for the next "emergence" on Mars, the red planet (pun most certainly intended). And as Dr. Smith and Commander Redhouse ready *Emergence* for departure, she says, "Dr. Smith, did you know that some Navajos believe that Mars is our new homeland and that my going there marks the end of our time on this world and the beginning of new life there?" Looking a bit uncomfortable and seeming to not know how to respond, Dr. Smith comments that the general seems to think Redhouse is "pretty special." Redhouse deflects this assertion by saying, "It's just a story, that's all," as she readies the ship for takeoff. This exchange and this moment seem designed to establish for the audience that part of Redhouse's training for this mission has included making sure that she distances herself from Native knowledge, which is so often viewed by cultural outsiders (and others confident in the supremacy of Western science) as the superstitions of primitive and prescientific peoples.

The next portion of the film chronicles the passage of a long period of time with a short sequence of scenes. As Earth fades into the background, we see Commander Redhouse place the Navajo Astronaut flag on a shelf surrounded by jars with Project Emergence labels on the outside and dried proprietary corncobs inside that are situated above a calendar that calculates 212 days to arrival on Mars. The next scene takes

place on day 141 to arrival. As Redhouse tends the corn, she finds a worrisome black spot that appears to be some sort of fungus. She brings this to Dr. Smith's attention and insists that they need to let "corporate" know, since she thinks the corn is failing, even as he insists it is "minor" and not yet something that might concern corporate. In a manner so common to dismissing the concerns of women, Dr. Smith declares that she is overreacting. In response, she attempts to minimize her own concern by mentioning a dream she had on the day of departure that has left her "freaked" out. He responds in a way that underscores that Western science is superior to other ways of knowing, saying, "You can't let dreams spook you, Redhouse." Following the pattern of acquiescence, she says, "You're right, I am not normally superstitious like this." By once again referencing how Native knowledges are rendered as superstition in the eyes of the overculture, Becker is setting the stage for the final section of the film, which proves not only that Redhouse's dream was prophetic but that the knowledge that was gifted to her by the dream and General Bahe are what allows her to see her way through the traumatic events that are about to unfold. Indeed, it is Redhouse's dream that gives her the means and resolve to solve the problems that arise and prevent her from succumbing to the debilitating fatalism that prevents the rest of the Project Emergence crew from being effective during the impending crisis.

The next scene takes place with 90 days to destination. We see that nearly all the corn in the hydroponic system, as well as the kernels in the petri dishes, have gone black as a result of the fungus that Redhouse was concerned about in the previous scene. As Commander Redhouse desperately tries to find viable kernels, she sighs and with a palpable level of resignation says, "I come from a long line of medicine people and healers. I am sorry I never took the time to learn those ways." Instead, as Redhouse is recognizing, it has taken the current crisis and the failure of the genetically modified, state-of-the-art, hydroponic corn system for her to acknowledge that her training in Western science and space travel has come at the expense of being grounded in the art, science, and intellectual traditions of her family and her people.

The countdown clock now indicates 65 days to destination, and, as an alarm sounds, indicating that oxygen levels are critically low, the crew understand that the system can now only support the hibernation chambers, where Dr. Smith and the commander are ordered to go

immediately. Redhouse picks up the Navajo Astronaut flag, and the shot shows that all the jars that once held dried Project Emergence corn are now empty. As she holds the flag box to her chest and lays her head on it, she apologizes to General Bahe for what she now has to assume is the inescapable failure of the mission. As this happens, the back of the box opens, and Redhouse finds two ears of Navajo corn (one yellow, one white) wrapped in the Navajo flag. She brings them to Dr. Smith, who sits on the floor, and pleadingly says to him, "You can rebalance the system with these, with my ancestor's corn. We have to try. Please." Redhouse and Smith don special masks and gloves and proceed to plant the Navajo corn kernels into the system as quickly as they can, and then they report to the hibernation chamber. As Dr. Smith enters his hibernation pod he asks Redhouse to "say a prayer for us," indicating that the situation has become desperate enough that he is willing to believe in Navajo ways of knowing and being that he had been so quick to dismiss earlier. Indeed, this sentiment that Native belief systems can only be relied upon as a last-ditch effort when all other avenues have failed and a miracle is needed underscores the level of disdain with which Indigenous ways of knowing are so commonly viewed. As Redhouse climbs into her own hibernation pod, she begins to sing the same song we heard with the arrival of the holy person during the dream sequence at the start of the film. In much the same way that Noodin and Sheldon describe "The Strong Women's Song," as Redhouse sings, she is also "relying on the song to provide a ray of hope" (this volume). As she cries and sings alone in her pod, the scene switches to an image of her wearing a white buckskin dress and turquoise jewelry, holding one yellow and one white Navajo corncob in her hands against the backdrop of the universe, singing a new world into being. As she does so, another dancing light appears, this time purplish white and swirling around her, representing another holy person, an assertion further supported by the fact that she now seems to be standing on a rainbow (see Estrada). In the next scene we see Redhouse in her commander's uniform exit her hibernation chamber and walk toward a light. The screen goes black, and the words "years later" appear against the black screen. The camera pans across a familiar red landscape, but this time the sky is red, instead of the blue it was on Earth at the start of the film. We see healthy corn growing in fields, and as the camera pans out we see a well-established colony. The camera continues to move outward until the red planet

fills the screen and is overlaid with white script, first in Navajo, then in English, that reads “The 6th World” and in smaller letters, beneath that, “an Origin Story.”

It might be easy to read what happens in *The 6th World* as a familiar narrative trope in mainstream science fiction wherein non-Natives find that it is Indigenous knowledge that will save them—even as actual Native people remain absent in such mainstream narratives and in mainstream representations of possible futures—such as the apocalyptic film *2012*, in which those who are wealthy or lucky enough to prepare ships to survive the end of the world predicted by Mayan prophecy are the only ones who survive (predictably, none are Mayan). However, such a reading would elide how, rather than a misunderstanding of Indigenous beliefs being projected into the future, *The 6th World* shows actual Native knowledge and Native people being important into the future. Another possible reading might see *The 6th World* as reproducing the colonial fantasy of an empty wilderness because the film revolves around the establishment of a colony on an uninhabited Mars. However, this, too, would be an oversimplification of a complex narrative that centers, draws upon, and extends the significance of Navajo origin stories into the future. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the way that this film engages with the idea that it is women who are endowed with the ability to usher forth our collective futures, but it does so in a manner that complicates this notion and delinks it from being understood only through the lens of biological reproduction. By separating out a woman’s ability to bear children from a woman’s ability to bring forth new life and bring forth the possible, *The 6th World* also expands women’s roles and value beyond the limits imposed by patriarchy, colonization, and heteronormativity. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson makes clear in the epigraph that this essay begins with, narratives like these provide a means of escaping “the gaze of the cage of Empire” and for “visioning, imagining, and critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives.”

In these ways, the narrative of the film manages to present an Indigenous futurist rendering of Navajo emergence stories, which have long told of three or four previous worlds that had to be abandoned for a variety of reasons (sometimes because something made the previous world no longer inhabitable), making it necessary for the people to work toward locating and creating a new world for their next emergence. In

many ways this film gestures toward our present moment and the early twenty-first-century crises we now face, namely, the challenges that have developed out of a system of monocrop agriculture that depletes the health of the water and soil, the engineering of Round-Up-Ready food crops that alter the basic genetic structures of sacred plants (the consequences of which we know very little about), and the (often coerced) abandonment of traditional means of farming (including dry-land farming and permaculture) that are rooted in knowledge and understanding of specific lands that are thousands of years deep. These and related crises were prophesied in many Indigenous communities, providing warnings about the arrival of the crises ahead, including those that are the direct consequence of human-accelerated and human-intensified climate change and those that result from the continuing challenges brought by patriarchal, colonialist, and capitalist impulses that fuel a desire to subjugate others, and our planet, in order to profit or benefit at any cost. No matter how much science was drawn on to develop agribusiness or how many civilizing goals were used to justify beating Native knowledge out of Native people as the embodiment of “kill the Indian, spare the man” ideologies, these are unsustainable and damaging elements of our “modern” lives that may very well prevent the possibility of human futures on our planet. Considered this way, *The 6th World* can be seen as at once a prayer, the fulfillment of a prophecy, the carrying forward of a responsibility, and a confirmation that it is Indigenous traditional knowledge and ways of knowing that will play prominently in bringing forth any of our possible futures—and it is not only in the creative expressions of Indigenous peoples that this can be seen.

INDIGENIST FUTURIST POLITICS

In this section I want to draw attention to the political movements that are arising from within Indian Country—simultaneously with the influx in Indigenous futurist narratives—and spreading outward, movements that are largely being led by women determined to call better futures into being. Like the fights that Indigenous peoples are leading against the kXL pipeline and the Alberta Tar Sands projects, at the core of the Idle No More movement is the desire to assert and protect Indigenous rights and Indigenous futures. The Idle No More movement, founded by Sheelah MacLean, Nina Wilson, Silvia McAdam, and Jessica Gor-

don, started with a goal to protect the waters, the environment, and their individual families from the threat of destruction by legislative acts and extractive industry. What they started has inspired Indigenous people all around the world to protest, and write, and educate, and tell the world that as we have always been, we are Idle No More.

At the time of this writing, the water protectors of Standing Rock, Oceti Sakowin, and their allies have set up camps near the Missouri River to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). The proposed DAPL route will run from the oil fields in North Dakota to Illinois, crossing under the Missouri River. In lockstep with similar fossil fuel projects, investors claim the DAPL is safe, and the corporations have employed private security firms to protect their interests—using dogs and pepper spray against unarmed water protectors—and have even driven heavy machinery twenty miles from the then-current construction site to destroy locations identified as having cultural and religious significance only hours after the protectors filed an injunction to protect these same locations. While those invested (literally and figuratively) in DAPL claim that the proposed pipeline will not run through Indigenous lands, the fact of the matter is that (even without recounting the details of the 1851 or 1868 Fort Laramie Treaties or pointing out that it is all Indian land) the Missouri River, the longest river in the United States (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missouri_River), is a vital and life-sustaining water source, and #waterislife #mniwiconi. Using social media, cellphone videos, and other forms of new media, the water protectors and their allies have put out calls for support, supplies, prayers, and unity—even declaring September 3–17, 2016, the first solidarity week of action. Responses to this movement have been enormous, from a paddle down the Missouri River (in conventional and traditional canoes and kayaks) organized in a show of support for the water protectors, and delivery of five hundred smoked salmon to help feed the protectors thanks to the Colville Tribe, to nineteen members of Congress calling on the president to withdraw federal permits for DAPL, and the American Indian Law Clinic at my home institution providing the water protectors with legal services. As the size of the camps, the number of protectors, and their nonviolent direct actions continue to multiply, so too has the state's surveillance and policing. As nonviolent protestors are arrested and as officials undertake efforts to levy felony charges against these water protectors, Native peoples from the Ecuadorian Amazon to Sapmi have

been arriving in a show of support against pipelines. As camera drones fly overhead, more than fifty Native Nations / First Nations in the United States and Canada have signed a treaty to unify their fight against the tar sands and other extractive industry. As the increasingly militarized show of state force grows to include the pointing of guns at unarmed protectors, the water protectors of the Sacred Stone and Red Warrior Camps are preparing for the long haul through winter, planning to fight the pipeline for as long as it takes. Ladonna Bravebull Allard says, “We will continue to stand in the face of injustice. We stand because we must protect the water.”¹⁷

Native peoples on many fronts are the last line of defense against the endless extraction of natural resources, which is, without question, an unsustainable practice. The challenges we now face were foretold in many of our communities. These prophecies were gifted to Native peoples to prepare us for challenging times and difficult decisions ahead. It is true that many of these stories were misinterpreted by others as the foretelling of the end of days—like the Mayan 2012 prophecy, which was so overblown by U.S. media and Hollywood in the film *2012*, referenced above, that Mayan elders produced a video to dispel myths and explain that the prophecy referred not to the end of the world but to an impending paradigm shift and its attendant challenges.

In conclusion, although these three projects—one about an animated cat who travels the galaxy with his friend *Space Coyote*, another about a little girl obsessed with the film *Back to the Future II*, and finally one about a Navajo astronaut’s mission to create a colony on Mars with hydroponic corn—might seem to have little in common other than being produced by Navajo women, I have sought to show how they represent the power of imagining and bringing into existence alternative realities and alternative futures. The choice to work collectively for the recovery and regeneration of our world requires us to dream better realities into being. Indigenous resurgence, which has become a new buzzword in critical Indigenous studies and envisions this change, requires us to discard the “-isms” and phobias that came with colonialism—sexism, ageism, and homophobia—in order to remake ethical relationships in this world. As Anishinaabe writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson reminds us, we build our sovereignty from the inside out, which then moves outward into the wider world. The reasons for this are that, according to the Anishinaabe creation story that Simpson recounts,

Gizhi Manidou, with her hand on our forehead, imparted all the knowledge of the entire universe into our bodies, giving us the creative capacity to do anything.

Like the traditional stories before them, contemporary scholarly, activist, and cultural efforts remind us of the importance of taking the time for thoughtful consideration of consequences and the need to ask ourselves what kind of world we are making, singing, dancing, and calling into being. This is what #NODAPL, Idle No More (and similar political movements largely led by Native women), and Indigenous futurisms are all about: imagining, dreaming, insisting, building, and demanding that we move together toward the best future yet. By stressing the possible, the importance of fun, and the role of women, animals, and plants in such visioning, these three projects underscore how animated feline futures, playful rendering of alternative presents, and ruminations on the danger of genetically modifying sacred foods being used to establish colonies on neighboring planets aid us in considering what this contemporary shift in Native cultural production means. While it may outwardly appear otherwise to the unfamiliar, Native women's engagement with activities that require or foster speculating about the future is neither new nor anomalous. For that matter, and as Channette Romero discusses in this issue, neither is Native women's engagement with digital media or science fiction, both of which are so often gendered as male. It is in line with our traditions, histories, and present in contemporary movements we see across Indian Country. Winona LaDuke's comment about needing Native engineers, mentioned earlier, is one she has made on many different occasions, and often in reference to how Native nations need to become energy independent, and how we must resist the endlessly extractive endeavors of late industrial capitalism.

These movements cannot be reduced to the tired tropes that represent Native peoples as barriers to progress or that reduce Native relationships with nature to the cartoonish "grandmother willow" or the 1970s PSA of Sicilian American actor "Iron Eyes" Cody crying at the sight of litter. Instead, these movements are about protecting the sacred and recognizing that we cannot allow the practices that we know are destroying the planet to continue. It is our responsibility to the planet and to all our human and other-than-human relations to call attention to these abuses and work against them. With that in mind we would do well to recognize that Indigenous resurgence and Indigenous futurisms

not only are the antithesis of blood quantum politics, narratives, and policies designed to eradicate Native peoples but they also mark the way toward a path foretold to a verdant, green place of possibility.

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NOTES

1. Perhaps the storyline linkage is related to the fact that *Firefly* is often called a “space western,” and every western needs a few Indians? Matthew Wildcat makes the compelling argument that the position of the ship in relation to empire makes the crew more like space pirates than space cowboys. Read either way, however, Whedon's choice to include Native people in the first episode does not actually foreshadow Indigenous presence in the rest of the series. Indeed, Native peoples are absent for the duration after episode 1.

2. Although the series and the subsequent film *Serenity* repeatedly refer to “violent savages” called “Reavers” who live outside the realm of the civilized worlds, they

are never explicitly linked to Indian-ness; instead, these characters seem to parallel the characterizations of Wild West outlaws in Whedon's *Firefly* future.

3. A classic example of the cultural phenomenon Shari Huhndorf describes as "going native" in her book of the same name.

4. As portrayed in a variety of television series, episodes of *Supernatural*, *Grimm*, and *Sleepy Hollow* among others have used Windigo. This appropriation has also run rampant in other elements of North American cultural production, including Hollywood films (e.g., *Wendigo*), video games (e.g., *World of Warcraft*), role-playing games (e.g., *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*), and books (from *Pet Sematary* to the Wendigo character in Marvel comic books), to name just a few.

5. While *Avatar* and the *Twilight* films, mentioned earlier, might seem to provide examples that contradict assertions about the lack of diversity in speculative genres, the fact remains that the main characters and "saviors" in these films are still white men, even though they play characters of color in the film. *Avatar*'s "Jake Sully" is played by Sam Worthington in blue-face (who actually becomes Na'vi during the course of the film), while in the *Twilight* series Taylor Lautner in red-face plays "Jacob Black," a Quileute tribal member who can, and does, change to and from werewolf form to uphold the "treaty" and protect his people from the European-derived bloodsucking (and sparkling) vampires. Moreover, the actual actors of color in these films, as in so many other genres, are represented in one of two ways: as mere side-kicks, or lesser tokenized characters, who are still rendered blue and alien in *Avatar* (which serves to erase or obscure their racialized experiences while remaining reliant on the trope of savagism); or, as in the *Twilight* series, as those whose humanity is undermined by their inability to regulate their emotions and, therefore, unable to control whether or not they "shape-shift" into savage creatures when angered (which also invokes latent understandings of Native savagery). These are but two of the many familiar tropes that render people of color in these genres as not quite human, almost always in need of white saviors to ensure survival, and as people whose "inability" to control themselves justifies their constant surveillance by settler states and/or their agents.

6. See Nelson; Bould; and as further evidenced by the September 14, 2015, symposium hosted by Princeton University's Department of African American Studies, titled "Ferguson Is the Future—Incubating Alternative Worlds through Arts, Activism, and Scholarship."

7. For more on blood logics and race, see Sturm; Kauanui; and Garrouette. For a critique of the fetishization that links DNA to Indianness, see TallBear.

8. Daniel Heath Justice, "Re: Hello and a Query," personal communication via email, 2016.

9. Winona LaDuke uses the Seven Fires narrative as the undercurrent in her historical novel, *Last Standing Woman*, to remind us of the challenges that those of us living during the Seventh Fire will have to face together.

10. See Dillon, *Walking the Clouds*. The interventions that Dillon makes in her other work on Indigenous futurisms have been nothing short of groundbreaking, particularly in the essay "Miindiwag and Indigenous Diaspora."

11. See Denetdale; I believe my analysis of Diné women's cultural productions is in keeping with her work.
12. The "Pigs in Space" skit was developed as an episodic and abbreviated space opera in the vein of its namesake, the TV show *Lost in Space*.
13. I understand that recognizing when human attributes are being projected onto other beings can be important; however, we need to delink assumptions that recognizing the being-ness of other other-than-human beings is somehow primitive or reflects an inability to be scientific or "objective" (as if objectivity is even possible).
14. Such exposure takes place thanks to schooling, media, and other inescapable elements of contemporary society that rely on and perpetuate problematic and damaging assumptions about people of color.
15. While my reading of this film is indeed informed by the work of Diné scholars, Estrada, and others, those interested in a reading of *The 6th World* that is more focused on religion and identity-related issues rather than one centered on considering the implications of an Indigenist futurist narrative tradition and trajectory may find these other works particularly compelling.
16. With special thanks to Joanna Hearne for robust conversations about these aspects of the narrative.
17. Quoted in a press release, where LaDonna Allard, Tara Houska, Angela Bibbens, and Dallas Goldtooth are listed as contacts, issued on October 4, 2016, Mandan, ND.

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Imagining Indigenous Digital Futures

An Afterword

MICHELLE RAHEJA

As I sit writing in my kitchen while the forces of the U.S. military state are brought to bear on thousands of Standing Rock water stewards and land protectors and their allies in Cannonball, North Dakota, I consider how this *SAIL* special issue on digital Indigenous studies not only represents a collection of essays about the critical work Indigenous women are performing in their various digital projects but also illustrates that these online “Indigenous territories” (Hearne), crafted on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, *save lives*. Every single day since the protectors first gathered to oppose the proposed 1,170-mile Dakota Access pipeline (a project that would potentially contaminate the Missouri watershed and the Ogallala Aquifer and desecrate Dakota sacred sites), digital independent and social media have constantly covered the story. At least 1.3 million Facebook users checked in virtually at Oceti Sakowin and other Indigenous camps and communities to ensure that support presence is recognized, while the world monitors the presence of the military and police force gathering at the construction site to curb further violence. The Standing Rock gathering offers hope to networked Indigenous youth, a demographic between three and ten times as likely to commit suicide than the national average peer rate.

The NODAPL action in the Indigenous imaginary is an invitation to stand at the front lines of a global movement to protect water and land resources for all living beings on this planet and to draw attention to and support those whose lives and ways of being are in peril through overt military action and consequential environmental destruction. It is also an occasion, in the words of Jolene Rickard, “to invest in the apparatus of the imagination” (Bernardin). One need only look at the online art, handwritten signs, and logos representing #nodapl, #standingrock,

#waterislife, and #respectourwater to see the ways in which Indigenous artists are creatively and powerfully envisioning this movement, most often immersed with work that features strong images of Native women and girls, the community backbone and life force. Or we need only view digital videos like computer animator and artist Joseph Erb's black-and-red graphic history of Standing Rock, "Mni Wiconi / Water Is Life" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXoy5lzpjiM>), and first-person game platforms like Elizabeth LaPensée's *Thunderbird Strike*, which extend the conversations at Standing Rock to the struggles over Enbridge's Alberta tar sands pipeline and fracking practices as players work to undo and prevent further environmental degradation.

Following Idle No More's digital and geospatial (re)articulation of Indigenous territories, we are now living and loving and hoping in this historic moment as new ways of relating to one another and living in deep connection with the land and all its forms of life are being physiologically, intellectually, and spiritually forged at the geospatial confluence of the Missouri and Cannonball Rivers. They are being forged as well through the confluences of digital rivers on our electronic devices and in our online conversations about the beauty and devastation of the events that are unfolding in Standing Rock. Susan Bernardin's essay in this issue on Heid E. Erdrich's "Pre-Occupied" considers the meaning of rivers to Native peoples and contends that images of waterways, particularly the Mississippi, are mobilized "to make visible the continuing claims of this and other imperiled riverine systems."

In her introduction, Joanna Hearne asks us, "How might such an intersection of digital and Indigenous specificities take place in a way that is 'native to the device'; that is, how might Indigenous specificity be embedded in shared platforms that are therefore central to all of our digital lives?" The essays in this special issue respond to this question by theorizing digital media in fresh and innovative ways. Many of us teach digital humanities courses or classes with strong digital media content, but we lack the language for critically engaging this new field on its own terms as it intersects, extends, and radically reconceptualizes more familiar research areas such as cinema studies, Indigenous / Native American studies, communication, literature, art, and history.

Recently, I started teaching Mohawk multimedia artist Skawennati Tricia Fragnito's *Time-Traveller™*, a nine-episode machinama gamescape that Indigenousizes both three-dimensional online virtual worlds

like Second Life and historiography (thanks to Indigenous science fiction and futurities scholar Grace Dillon's introduction to the work). Skawennati created CyberPowWow.net, an early website and chat space that featured conversations and projects by Native and non-Native artists and scholars online and at "real-life Gathering Sites"; coordinates "Skins: Storytelling in Cyberspace," a video game workshop taught at Kahnawake Survival School; hosts *Otsi!/: Rise of the Kanien'kehá:ka Legends*, a video game platform; and is the codirector of AbTeC (Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace). She is an early adopter of online technology and what Channette Romero in this volume calls "an Indigenous feminine animation aesthetic" that "assert[s] the ongoing vitality of Indigenous women's art and storytelling traditions" in ways that imagine alternate, digital sites of recovery and creation. These essays form the first primer on Indigenous digital production that will inform a new generation of online and networked media scholars, artists, and new technology users.

These essays, by a collective of established and rising scholars writing, thinking, producing, and teaching the work of Indigenous women's imaginative productions in a range of digital formats, are a gift and a responsibility. The writers engage in deep, provocative, and productive conversation with work by Barry Barclay and other Indigenous media theorists (Joanna Hearne); Missy Whiteman (Angelica Lawson); Skeena Reece and Lisa Jackson (Kristin Dowell); LeAnne Howe, Diane Obomsawin, Alethea Arnaquq-Baril, and Gyu Oh (Channette Romero); Melissa Henry and Nanobah Becker (Danika Medak-Saltzman); women's traditional songs archived and activated on Ojibwe.net (Margaret Noodin and Stacie Sheldon); and Heid E. Erdrich (Susan Bernardin), among many others. They make space for and invite the reader to engage in collective art making and future imagining. Margaret Noodin and Stacie Sheldon generously share the songs and stories they've curated with Alphonse Pitawanakwat on Ojibwe.net, their Anishinaabemowin language revitalization and reclamation website. They write, "They are songs with stories and beginnings, and we hope their journey continues. As they travel into your life it would be nice if you share each song's story when you sing it. We always like to know when you use a song, but we put them here as gifts to all of you, so please, practice, sing, and share them." While reading all the essays in this collection and while writing this brief afterword, I learned and sang "Gimikwenimigo" (We

remember you), dedicated to Lake Park Mound, a two-thousand-year-old earthwork near present-day Milwaukee, Wisconsin, ancestors who taught and learned in these sites, and the stories that are embedded in these places. I imagine this song traveling through outgoing *SAIL* editor Chadwick Allen's thoughtful, powerful activation of Ohio earthworks; Allison Hedge Coke's poetry cycle *Blood Run* and the critical on- and off-line mound preservation activism the poems and effigy sites engendered; as well as in my car with my daughters as we laugh, sing, and tell stories on our road trips, traveling through ancient, new, and virtual earthworks that lie along a constellation of networked rivers, rhizomes, and webs the essays in this collection consider, reclaim, and imagine.