

**CREATIVE COMBAT:**  
INDIGENOUS ART, RESURGENCE, AND DECOLONIZATION

by  
JARRETT MARTINEAU  
Master of Arts, University of Victoria, 2011  
Bachelor of Arts, McGill University, 2006

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the School of INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE

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University of Victoria

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## **SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

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### **Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Taiaiake Alfred, Indigenous Governance, University of Victoria  
**Supervisor**

Dr. Jeff Corntassel, Indigenous Governance, University of Victoria  
**Departmental Member**

Dr. Arthur Kroker, Political Science, University of Victoria  
**Outside Member**

## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the transformative and decolonizing potential of Indigenous art-making and creativity to resist ongoing forms of settler colonialism and advance Indigenous nationhood and resurgence. Through a transdisciplinary investigation of contemporary Indigenous art, aesthetics, performance, music, hip-hop and remix culture, the project explores indigeneity's opaque transits, trajectories, and fugitive forms. In resistance to the demands and limits imposed by settler colonial power upon Indigenous artists to perform indigeneity according to settler colonial logics, the project examines creative acts of affirmative refusal (or creative negation) that enact a resistant force against the masked dance of Empire by refusing forms of visibility and subjectivity that render indigeneity vulnerable to commodification and control. Through extensive interviews with Indigenous artists, musicians, and collectives working in a range of disciplinary backgrounds across Turtle Island, I stage an Indigenous intervention into multiple discursive forms of knowledge production and analysis, by cutting into and across the fields of Indigenous studies, contemporary art and aesthetics, performance studies, critical theory, political philosophy, sound studies, and hip-hop scholarship. The project seeks to elaborate decolonial political potentialities that are latent in the enfolded act of creation which, for Indigenous artists, both constellate new forms of community, while also affirming deep continuities within Indigenous practices of collective, creative expression. Against the colonial

injunction to 'represent' indigeneity according to a determinate set of coordinates, I argue that Indigenous art-making and creativity function as the noise to colonialism's signal: a force capable of disrupting colonial legibility and the repeated imposition of the normative order. Such force gains power through movement and action; it is in the act of turning away from the colonial state, and toward one another, that spaces of generative indeterminacy become possible. In the decolonial cypher, I claim, new forms of being elsewhere and otherwise have the potential to be realized and decolonized.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deep thanks to my family, ancestors, and relatives for bringing me into this world and guiding me here. This project would not have been possible without the artistry and creativity of the Indigenous art-making community on Turtle Island and I am deeply indebted to the incredible Indigenous artists who participated in this process with me. Mahsi cho to Nicholas Galanin, Christi Belcourt, Marianne Nicolson, Leanne Simpson, Csetkwe Fortier, Dean Hunt, Bracken Hanuse-Corlett, D’Arcy O’Connor, Paul Wenell Jr., Sacramento Knoxx, Jaque Fragua, Sonny Assu, Raymond Boisjoly, Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martínez, Kade L. Twist, Nathan Young, and the Black Constellation for creating such inspiring work and raising up our communities in strength and with love. My thanks to everyone at IGOV for their guidance, support, friendship, and encouragement. Hiy hiy to Taiaiake Alfred, Jeff Corntassel, and Arthur Kroker, with whom I have worked closely throughout this process; I am grateful for your rigorous intellectual engagement and expansion of my thought. My gratitude to Audra Simpson and my colleagues at Columbia, as well as to Ruth Wilson Gilmore, David Harvey, Sujatha Fernandes, Christina Heatherton, Belinda Rancon, Karen Miller, Keith Miyake, Libby Garland, Steve McFarland, and my colleagues at the Centre for Place, Culture, and Politics at CUNY, for their insight, incisive critique, and community. Thanks to Glen Coulthard, Daniel Heath Justice, and the First Nations Studies Program at UBC for their provocations; and to Ashon Crawley and Fred Moten for their inspiring work and poetic pursuit of transformations found in the break. Kinanâskomitin to my mom and dad for enabling me to pursue this path, and for affirming each step of my journey with love and patience. Mahsi to Siku for believing in me all the way along. And mahsi cho to my friend and comrade, Betasamosake, for her continued kindness and compassionate wisdom. I am grateful to you all and hope this work contributes in some small way to the betterment of our people.

## **DEDICATION**

*To creating and expanding decolonial constellations of love and resistance,  
wherever they emerge.*

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Fig. 1 Jaque Fragua, *Untitled* (2014)

*Creativity armed is an  
unstoppable force.*

- Raoul Vaneigem

# **CHAPTER 1**

**‘Everything We Do is Political’: Indigenous Creativity, Nationhood, and Decolonization**



*Art does not have to be  
more or less than it is to  
fulfill its purpose.*

- Jimmie Durham

# CHAPTER 1

## ‘Everything We Do is Political’: Indigenous Creativity, Nationhood, and Decolonization

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### INTRODUCTION

Indigenous art-making is inseparable from political struggle. Under colonialism, Indigenous life is overcoded by power. Art, therefore, is not simply “a weapon in the struggle of ideas” (Baraka 1974); it is a weapon in the struggle to decolonize. Resistance still matters because the lives of Indigenous people are still subject to colonial rule. Art-making, *the act of creation*, connects us not only to the long continuum of resistance that Indigenous people have waged against colonial invasion and dispossession, but also to antecedent creative forms that have existed since the world was first created. Resurgence remains our decolonizing imperative. This project thus examines the power and potency of Indigenous arts and media practices embedded within this continuum of resistance and argues that Indigenous artists are creative visionaries and cultural warriors at the forefront of contemporary resurgences against colonialism. Indigenous artists show us that movements in artistic and cultural production have always existed in parallel to, and intimate interrelation with, political action. Acts of creation are entwined with movements toward freedom. Indigenous creativity, therefore, cannot be neutral: it provides a dynamic reflection of our contentions with the structuring logics of settler colonialism and the resilient survival of our peoples. Not only is Indigenous art inherently political, it is inextricably linked to the form and content of our lived circumstances and experiences. Our social movements and cultural renaissances evolve in dynamic response to societal and social change, and Indigenous art provides us with languages, tactics, and strategies for self-determination and self-expression

that respond to the multiple, differential ways in which we have represented ourselves (and our struggles) to one another and to the world. Throughout our nations' and peoples histories, we have used our talents for creation not simply to reflect our reality, but to transform it. Indigenous art is thus mobilized in creative contention with a violent system that continues to seek our assimilation and elimination.

Colonialism is an invasive structure that orders but does not define our reality. Although it works to dispossess us of our lands and bodies and to colonize our consciousness, it is not a totalizing system. We have always resisted; and our resistance shapes both *how* we imagine and *what* we create. Indigenous creativity provides us with inventive forms of decolonizing praxis: methods of resistance, techniques of resurgence. To consider Indigenous art in relationship to decolonization, then, is to consider the potential for creativity to be brought into direct relationship with political struggle. In this view, decolonization becomes more than a political commitment; it becomes an art of creative combat, a collective practice of freedom. As we move defiantly into the twenty-first century, Indigenous existence must be continue fought for — and art-making continues to be a necessary strategy for our survival. As we struggle to reclaim, regain, and revitalize the land-based practices and knowledges that have sustained us for generations, our nations are increasingly threatened by shape-shifting forces of Empire produced at the nexus of global capitalism and settler colonialism. While admitting the ambivalent necessity of confronting colonialism, we are now also challenged to navigate the new terrain of the technologized present, evolving networked landscapes of the mediatized, the digital, and the virtual. My research interrogates these spaces of complexity and contradiction to contend that new possibilities for visioning and mobilizing anticolonial struggle can be realized in and through the creative practices of Indigenous artists. I argue that we must not only *locate*

creativity within anticolonial struggle, we must inhabit sites of generative indeterminacy: emergent spaces of creation from which to imagine and perform decolonial potentialities into being. This project is thus grounded in Indigenous philosophies and ontologies of emergence and movement, potentiality and becoming. Art-making becomes a critical, decolonizing political praxis when it provides us with new ways of visioning the world, reclaiming our presence, and creatively transforming reality. Indigenous artists give form to these visions and imaginings by creating pathways for action in the name of freedom still to be won.

Within societies of control, Indigenous life persists in resistance to systemic and structural forms of domination. By living into spaces of possibility, however, we embolden ourselves to attempt the seemingly impossible: not simply to survive ongoing forms of colonial violence, but to move beyond imposed technologies of subjection in order to regenerate our nationhood and revitalize Indigenous forms of life. These reclamations are onto-epistemic revaluations of value that affirm and validate our own ways of knowing, being, acting and, creating in the world. We are makers; we sustain the world that sustains us through action. Our actions are, in turn, guided by the responsibilities we carry to our original instructions and natural laws: knowledges, languages, and protocols that govern our societies and locate us within continually renewed cycles of existence. Indigenous creativity is thus animated in such cycles, composed and performed through ceremonial and cultural practices that renew our commitments and fulfill our responsibilities to all creation. Anishinaabeg storyteller and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes that Indigenous “creation as presence” provides us with a window into decolonial possibilities: “a glimpse of a decolonized contemporary reality...a mirror of what we can become” (Simpson 2014: 116). In this mirroring of our collective decolonial potentiality, Indigenous creativity is enacted as an *embodied becoming*, an inhabitation of the space-time of

performance, ritual, ceremony, song. In the twenty-first century, we remain challenged to reclaim the discursive and imaginative terrain of freedom from within an entangled colonial present. As settler society continues to benefit from the terms of our marginalization, abjection, and suppression—relegating Indigenous life to irrecoverable, conquered pasts or apocalyptically doomed futures—the colonial imaginary negates Indigenous presence by affirming its own immanent linear trajectory: cybernetic modernity accelerating toward a utopian, posthuman promised land. Not only must we reject this trajectory, we must rupture its presumed immanence and inevitability.

The linear trajectory of progress configured by coloniality and modernity, however, is not new. Tropes of the vacant, open, colonial frontier coupled with the dying, vanishing, disappearing, maligned, forgotten, abjected, and invisible Indian have been with us since the first waves of settler invasion. What distinguishes our contemporary moment from previous eras, however, are the strategic and creative ways in which Indigenous peoples are contending not only with the tired tropes of colonial misrepresentation found in contemporary media and normative discourse<sup>1</sup>, but also with the systems and structures of power that re/produce this dialectical antagonism of conjoined forces. Settler colonialism orders Indigenous social, political, and economic life by conditioning and facilitating its own reproduction. It deploys violence, coercion, and dispossession to instantiate an ideological and material apparatus of control in which Indigenous peoples are subjected to imperial techniques of governance. This regime of rule denies our autonomy and freedom by creating us as “subjects of Empire” (Coulthard 2007). Colonialism is thus deeply entwined with contemporary capitalism in a doubled helix of domination; it enforces material forms of “accumulation by dispossession” and

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<sup>1</sup> As Michel de Certeau writes, “*normative* discourse ‘operates’ only if it has already become a *story*, a text articulated on something real and speaking in its name” (1984: 149).

the transformation/eradication of the psycho-affective and place-based foundations of Indigenous existence: *land and life*. Indigenous peoples are thus forced into a reactive, relational struggle that is contiguous with settler society, a struggle in which our very existence is constituted in contention with colonial powers that seek our complicity, enfoldment, absorption, and elimination. Contemporary power, following Hardt and Negri, Tiqqun, Susan Buck-Morss, among others, can be understood within the colonial dialectic as a networked, diffuse concatenation of global forces known as Empire, which extends colonial logics of domination to encompass, enframe, and render the colonial (both for Indigenous nations and settler colonial societies) determinate within a globalized nexus of late capitalism and technological modernity. Recasting resistance as a non-threatening, non-disruptive unit of democratic action, or a speech act of minimal impact and consequence, Empire has both reconsolidated around a new set of ostensibly liberatory values and meanings, and reaffirmed existing colonial relationships of domination under the guise of a new pluralism, inclusion, and tolerance of difference. In their influential articulation of this profound shift in global relations, Hardt and Negri define Empire as a deterritorialization of power that, absent a centre, no longer relies on fixed boundaries and barriers:

Empire...is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. (Hardt and Negri 2000: xii)

Accordingly, Empire can be understood as a flexible modality of power that infiltrates, re/colonizes and disciplines exterior worlds and interior spaces. Its “expanding frontiers” take the “entire global realm” as its purportedly limitless domain. Empire is an expansive force of incorporative command that combines a concealed (neo-)colonial ideology with the unrestricted flows of global capital and, by adopting the staccato rhythms of rote technological repetition, its

most profoundly destructive impacts can be reduced to rhetorical caricature: the restricted character-length residue of legitimate opposition. Against the “moving ground” and “omnivorous universality” of Empire (Buck-Morss 2014, Tiqqun 2011), however, Indigenous presence becomes a cipher for anticolonial/anti-imperial resistances and resurgences. Indigeneity contests Empire’s intimate interconnections with networked forms of global capitalism and settler colonialism. As Tsalagi artist Jimmie Durham writes: “Our struggle has always been not only to maintain our own lands and culture, but to fight the political system of capitalism itself” (1993).

Not only are we challenged to acknowledge our entanglement within these global(ized) networks, we must also admit our complicity in sustaining them. In the contradictory and conflicted world we inhabit, colonialism seeks to contain indigeneity by rendering us subject to capture, confinement, and control. But decolonial possibilities remain for *being elsewhere* and *becoming otherwise* to power. We are challenged to consider indigeneity as a mobile concept through which to reclaim the radical alterity of Indigenous being in a fugitive movement of decolonial becoming. Indigeneity, in this context, can be thought as “a trajectory of movement” (Byrd 2011) that resists colonial entrapment. This resistance traces a strategic arc in flight from legibility to the settler gaze, state surveillance, and captivation, not in a landless, nomadic movement away from the “grounded normativity” (Coulthard 2014) of Indigenous place-based existence. Following Alfred and Corntassel, Indigenous resistance is constituted not in a defensive retrenchment to “zones of refuge”, but in a strategic movement to occupy the “breaks from colonial rule that create spaces of freedom” (2005: 605). As such, Alfred and Corntassel contend, that

we will begin to realize decolonization in a real way when we begin to achieve the re-strengthening of our people as individuals so that these spaces can be occupied by decolonized people...our true power as Indigenous people ultimately lies in our relationships with our land, relatives, language, and ceremonial life. (2005: 605)

Resistant and resurgent movements embedded in decolonial struggle are regenerative sources of collective power. These are the movements we must create and support if we are to realize the demands of decolonization.

## RE/VISIONING THE WORLD

How, then, are we to create spaces of freedom in a present that is defined by complexity and entanglement? Colonialism remains both an originary structure of dispossession “that is fundamentally grounded in the theft of land and the usurpation of Indigenous peoples’ political authority in relationship to [the] land and their communities” (Epstein 2015) and a “dictatorial myth [for] how we live our lives” (Schlebrügge 2000) that continues to shape the Indigenous imaginary. Colonialism reproduces itself as both a hegemonic narrative and a normative order. The colonial imaginary occupies Indigenous land and consciousness, but Indigenous artists have resisted its discursive enclosure and the democratic dictatorship of coloniality by performing indigeneity<sup>2</sup> as a counter-imperative and counter-presence to Empire. Indigeneity marks our difference in multiplicity; our diverse nations, homelands, and ways of being provide the literal and symbolic ground from which our creative practices are derived and mobilized.

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<sup>2</sup> Indigeneity is inseparable from Indigenous relationships to land, language, community, and cultural practices, in effect, to *nationhood*. I employ a definition of *indigeneity* in this project that considers a distributed composition of onto-epistemic practices that comprise Indigenous forms of life, or modalities of being and becoming, not simply as “the quality of being Indigenous” or as an interchangeable definitional synonym for ‘Indigenous peoples’ (see the United Nations and UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples definitions for historical precedent: <https://johansandbergmcguinne.wordpress.com/official-definitions-of-indigeneity/>). Following both Byrd and Moten (albeit in different contexts), I take up the question of indigeneity as a figure that both enters and exits the stage of representation and mediatized forms. Indigeneity, then, is an expressive form of creative action and praxis rather than an ‘identity’. In my usage, it becomes a fluid and dynamic term by which to invoke the ‘radical alterity’ of Indigenous forms of life and the simultaneous excess and lack of being proposed by Indigenous becomings that creatively negate, refuse, and mobilize alternative ontologies and imaginings against/apart from colonizing identities, subjectivities and normative categorizations of being. Indigeneity is a mobile term that ‘transits’ not only Empire, colonial mythologies, and histories, but also a diversity of Indigenous experiences, geographies, communities, and spatial practices. As such, it suggests a unifying current of contemporaneity/commonality within Indigenous forms of life that connects distinct/disparate ways of being in the world without reifying a hegemonic, universal, or normative expectation of identification. “As radical alterity,” Jodi Byrd writes, “indigeneity functions as a counterpoint that disrupts the fictions of multicultural settler enfranchisement and diasporic arrivals; as event and as horizon, indigeneity is temporal as well as spatial, structural as well as structuring” (2011: 32).



This project is guided by my belief in the power of art and creativity to transform the world. In my view, Indigenous artists are uniquely positioned to address the challenges and complexities of anticolonial struggle. Artists are not simply cultural producers; they are communicative tacticians able to embrace the chaotic flux of spectacular society while interrogating, re/visioning, remixing, and recoding Indigenous resistances in the midst of the mediatized present. Indigenous artists confront colonialism by asserting the resilient continuance of collective creativity and articulating lines of flight through and away from Empire's masked dances. Indigenous art-making is not inherently decolonizing, but it can activate and actualize forms of freedom through its deep connections to acts of dreaming and creating. Songs, stories, art, music, dance, performance, and ceremonies are communicative forms of Indigenous art and *decolonizing media* — languages through which to glimpse visions, echoes, and refrains of decolonized realities.

I employ a definition of media, here, and Indigenous media specifically, that emphasizes mediated forms of creative and communicative expression. Following Galloway, Wark, and Thacker: “Media are transformative. They affect conditions of possibility in general” (2013: 1). Although media are generally understood “along two interconnected axes: *devices* and *determinacy*” they are also considered to be “synonymous with media devices, technological apparatuses of mediation...evaluated normatively as either good influencers or bad influencers” (2013: 7). Rather than proceed from this determinate frame, however, I am interested in the nature of mediation itself. How does art-making constitute a set of creative practices that produce media qua mediation? And, following Galloway, Wark, and Thacker: “Does everything that exists, exist to be presented and represented, to be mediated and remediating, to be communicated and translated?” (2013: 10). Colonial imperatives to communicate Indigenous knowledge in

ways that are normatively intelligible to settler society engenders deep ambivalences among our people about both the role of media and the nature of mediation in the *representation* of anticolonial struggle. Much contemporary scholarship on Indigenous media and the arts, therefore, presumes that Indigenous peoples simply suffer from a lack of representation or from an overabundance of mediatized misrepresentation in popular media forms. Increasing Indigenous presence and participation in contemporary media, however, does not guarantee that Indigenous peoples will be represented more accurately, and it rarely questions the role of mediation, as such, *within* representational regimes. I examine Indigenous art-making and cultural production as forms of media animated by creative and communicative practices, produced by Indigenous peoples, that effect transformative mediations of representation, speech, and communicativity. I do not assume that Indigenous media and art-making will be commensurable with settler demands, or that Indigenous artists view communication as such (considered, here, as the transmission of an intended message between sender and receiver), as necessarily desirable in the colonial context. Rather, decolonizing art and media may, instead, suggest an apposite trajectory toward the indeterminate and the opaque — a shift toward strategic occupations of *dark matter* found in communicative forms that resist transparency and generate power in the transmission of encoded flows.

Art-making is one such form of this spatio-temporal resistance, in which the act of claiming and creating spaces of indeterminacy can give form to an emergent decolonial politics. Ciphers of resistant dissonance and reverberant, resurgent rhythms generate potentialities in which the other/wise of indigeneity can become a creative force to reimagine the world. In 2005, Kanienkehaka scholar Taiaiake Alfred wrote that “we have lost our ability to dream our new selves and our new world into existence” (2005: 165). Almost a decade later, in an interview I

conducted with Diné artist Tom Greyeyes for this project, he described the need for colonized peoples to reclaim a *decolonial imaginary*. For Greyeyes, Indigenous art becomes decolonizing “where the colonized start to dream again” (DIES 2014: 229). The ability to dream new worlds into being is an essential part of the decolonization process.

New worlds demand new stories, and Indigenous creativity and storytelling offer a primary means through which to mobilize resurgent art-making within decolonial struggle. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes:

Contemporary Indigenous storytelling in its variety of formats — whether it is performance (theatre, spoken word, music, performance art), film and video, literature, or oral storytelling — plays a critical role in rebuilding a culturally based artistic renaissance and nation-based political resurgences because it is a primary way we can collectivize alternative visions for the future. By collectivizing I mean not just sharing these visions with a broader Indigenous community, but also nurturing and deepening relationships with others in our community. Douglas Cardinal writes that ‘Aboriginal peoples live in a dream state of vision. As Native Peoples we are trained to bring dreams up into reality, into the real world. As a Native person, I am trained to bring out people’s visions. I am a dream-maker trained to make people’s dreams a reality. I am totally involved in a dream in making. It is a way for you to view yourself’. Although visioning is often a solitary process, part of making dreams and visions a reality is growing our collective base. (Simpson 2014: 110)

Indigenous art-making is not simply a utopian project of creative imagining or a commercial enterprise of commodity production; it is a transformational process that demands dreaming *and* doing. To become a weapon in the struggle to decolonize, creativity must be connected to collective action and political practice.

Indigenous communicative forms that attempt to address the complex entanglements of contemporary life under capitalism and colonialism are necessarily imbued with the flux and flows, breaks and ruptures, opacities and intensities of hypermediated experience. This project proceeds from within such entanglements to consider new possibilities and trajectories toward freedom. In order to avoid the entropic recursion of modernist and colonial logics that seek to reduce the world and our lived experience of it to false binarisms and agonistic, oppositional

identitarian categories, I inquire into Indigenous creative practices that frame/claim life according to different coordinates. Indigenous creativity is derived from ancestral connections to place, onto-epistemic and material foundations that give form to imaginative possibilities. In the following pages, I attempt to map a specific terrain of struggle: decolonizing art and cultural production that proposes a structural engagement with colonialism but exceeds the narrow paradigm of settler-Indigenous essentialisms. In a similar modality to the Indigenous artists, creators, musicians, performers, thinkers and storytellers that I analyze in my research, I examine works and practices that contribute to the proliferation of Indigenous forms of life in their difference, multiplicity, and decolonial potentiality. Decolonizing art-making not only contests colonizing narratives and mythologies, it gives form and voice to transversal movements within and against Empire.

Much contemporary scholarship on Indigenous art, media, and performance often equates creativity with a delimited set of aesthetics and subjectivities. In response to this problematic, my work questions both the persistent fetishism of “the Indigenous artist” and the relentless reproduction of colonial tropes of the so-called “traditional” and “contemporary” — art-making that relegates Indigenous creative forms to predetermined positionalities within the colonial gaze. Instead, I examine the ways in which Indigenous artists navigate colonial strictures through their creative practices in order to establish their own terms of engagement. Rather than analyzing the anticolonial representational “content” of Indigenous art, I proceed from ethico-political commitments to the revitalization of Indigenous nationhood and the decolonization of Turtle Island. My research is rooted in resurgence discourse and attempts to elucidate critical contours in contemporary decolonizing praxis. As such, I pursue a guiding set of research questions that inform my analysis: *How does Indigenous art-making support Indigenous resurgence*

*movements? How can it contribute to the revitalization of Indigenous nationhood? And how might Indigenous creativity offer new possibilities for decolonial thought and action?*

Any project that attempts to think the complexity of our colonial present — alongside Indigenous knowledge and creative forms, the relationship between art and political struggle, and the effects of new media technologies on social movements — will, necessarily, be limited in scope. My intent, therefore, is not to provide a comprehensive view of such wide-ranging issues and phenomena, but to attempt a simultaneous, dual intervention into Western discourse on Indigenous art, media, and politics and the burgeoning, Indigenous-led discourse of resurgence and decolonization. “Decolonizing praxis”, Tsalagi scholar Jeff Corntassel argues, “comes from moving beyond political awareness and/or symbolic gestures to everyday practices of resurgence” (2012: 89). Such quotidian resurgent practices, I suggest, are evident in myriad forms of Indigenous creative expression. Indigenous communicative media (visual art, performance, film and video, music, literature, storytelling, and diverse digital and new media arts) comprise a complex prism through which to reflect, understand, critique, and interpret our reality. Although the techniques and technologies we have access to have changed over time, Indigenous peoples have always made use of the materials available to us to communicate the richness and diversity of our experiences, worldviews, and relationships to all of creation. Thus, although it is tempting to read Indigenous art and creativity in the contemporary moment as evocative or suggestive of a vanguardist movement bent toward capitalist innovation and the demands of creating “the new”, such an interpretation denies the continuum of Indigenous resurgent practices that have always been with us. Indigenous art-making is a dynamic movement of creative forces and intensities. Creativity, in turn, reflects the flux and becoming of not simply of art, but of all life and matter. My research, therefore, explores the forces and

intensities that give form, shape, sound, and voice to Indigenous creation; forms that Indigenous artists and media-makers, in turn, give to their visions and experiences.

At its core, my research is committed to developing a better understanding of the ways in which Indigenous peoples can mobilize art-making and creativity to build resurgent and decolonizing movements. Although the artists, projects, and practices detailed in my project do not always share this commitment to decolonizing struggle, some do see their work as inextricably linked to resurgence, while others do not see art-making as part of decolonization at all. “Perhaps art can be a form of decolonization,” Haida artist Raymond Boisjoly provocatively suggests, “when it ceases to be art” (2015: 3). As in every Indigenous community, there is a vast spectrum of opinions and perspectives on what art is, what the role of the artist should be, and what art-making is expected to *do*. While I refrain from instrumentalizing the creativity of the artists interviewed in this project toward my own particular political aims, I think it is important to account for, and to interrogate, the ways in which we think about art, creativity, indigeneity, and politics, both discretely and together. This project attempts to open the terrain of the visible and sayable, the knowable and imaginable, in the discourse of Indigenous art and decolonization. I aim to contribute to a further refinement of conceptual and theoretical language with which to consider resurgence and decolonization rooted not only in the grounded normativity of Indigenous *forms of life*, but also in creative praxis. For Indigenous artists, these questions are neither academic nor abstract; they are lived, embodied, and experienced in everyday life. My project, therefore, does not seek to elucidate a particular typology for the critique of Indigenous art considered with respect to its efficacy or utility in furthering specific forms of political communication or decolonizing practice. Rather, I aim to expand the scope of Indigenous study that pursues the political potentialities of the unthought, unseen, and unheard: generative ciphers

found in breaks and ruptures, opaque forms, and in the dark matter of Indigenous creation. What nascent decolonial forms can be found within existing Indigenous modalities of creative expression and performance? How do Indigenous artists understand art-making in relation to nationhood and political struggle? And what forms of resurgence can be animated by this reflexive consideration and reflection?

Indigenous art and media can be *re*-colonizing as much as decolonizing. There is no necessary correlation between Indigenous art-making, media, and decolonization at the level of form and content. The creation of the former does not precipitate the activation of the latter according to determinate coordinates or with any teleological precision. Indigenous creativity, and *indigeneity* more generally, exceed normative and deterministic political categorizations. As I argue throughout this dissertation, the excessive/transgressive and transversal qualities of indigeneity become expressive through the creative practices of Indigenous artists and media practitioners. These emergent processes of what I term *decolonial becoming* reconfigure and redistribute the normative effects of the colonial order (which constructs subjectivity, aesthetics and politics according to a networked spatial grid) through techniques of disruption, intervention, and interjection. Indigenous resurgence is premised on a collective return to presence that is not an inevitable outcome of coloniality. Rather, resurgence must be actively constructed out of the social and economic relationships produced by the colonial experience. Resurgence is a relational practice of regeneration; it is not defined by coloniality but its imperatives are derived, in part, from the structuring effects of settler colonialism that imbricate and implicate both Indigenous peoples and settlers within specific matrices of intelligibility and power. Colonialism is an apparatus of command and control; and settler colonial invasion “is a structure not an event”, as Patrick Wolfe reminds us (2006). Indigenous artists contend with this structure not to

evade it but in order to transform it. Transformation is essential to resurgence and decolonization. By re-visioning the world from within our own aesthetic, social, and political vocabularies we become better able to see the world with “Indian eyes” (Alfred 2005) — to understand what has gone before and what might yet be possible. Reclaiming the literal, discursive and imaginative terrain of decolonial struggle demands that we not only re-centre Indigenous existences, art, culture and resistance as primary loci for creative transformation, but also that we make and claim space in generative breaks away from the dialectics of coloniality and modernity (Martineau & Ritskes 2014: iii). As the following pages will show, *indigeneity* (Indigenous ways of being/becoming as figured in their differential multiplicity) is animated *in the break*, in movement, in creation. As Anishinaabe curator and scholar Wanda Nanibush states, “our art forms are never separate from our political forms” (Martineau & Ritskes 2014: i). This project attempts to map decolonizing horizons of creative and political transformation in the midst of colonial entanglement.

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

In 2013, the National Gallery of Canada exhibited *Sakahàn* — meaning “to light [a fire]” in the language of the Algonquin peoples (Hill 2014) — a massive, international survey of Indigenous art that brought together more than eighty artists from sixteen countries around the world. The exhibit marked both a burgeoning public interest in Indigenous art and the global transit of indigeneity, however, it also restaged long-standing debates over definitions, frameworks, and terminology with which to consider questions of the “indigenous”, the “global”, and the “contemporary” (Hill 2014: 17). *Sakahàn* was curated around the question of “what it means to be Indigenous today” and proposed to “lead us into [a] future” where it will no longer be necessary “to reiterate that today’s Indigenous artists are among the leading contemporary artists



around the world” (2014: 19). Rather than imaging this future, however, the exhibit retread familiar curatorial grounds. By traversing the well-established discursive terrain of “global indigeneity”, *Sakahana*’s curatorial focus necessarily limited its ability to shift existing discourse beyond recycling tropes and trepidations over the terms by which to represent Indigenous peoples and experiences. This deliberative dance often leads to endless enframing discussions over who and what “counts” within the realm of Indigenous cultural production, such that the lived political realities of *actually existing* Indigenous peoples are eclipsed by curatorial anxieties over how to frame their questions and investigations in the first place. This self-conscious curatorial imperative (to avoid conflict and the marginalization/exclusion of voices from what is presumed to be a global conversation attenuated to local differences and regional specificities), is motivated by an admirable commitment to ethical integrity, however, in practice it can lead to the reification of existing discursive frameworks and a concurrent displacement or erasure of on the ground political struggles that demand equal consideration and analysis.

My research departs from discursive debates over the terms by which to stage indigeneity on a global scale and examines the work of Indigenous artists on Turtle Island. I examine the specific practices of transdisciplinary artists working within and across music, sound, visual art, performance, hip-hop, storytelling, and digital media. To date, much contemporary scholarship on Indigenous art and cultural production has focused exclusively on Indigenous literature and cinema (film/video), but other forms of creativity have received significantly less critical attention. As such, I focus on creative forms of expression that traverse contemporary arts, new media forms, and multimodal performance and offer generative sites of investigation and critique. Indigenous art, however, is neither a singular, static, nor universal category of analysis. Indigenous creativity is a rich and expansive field encompassing all forms of creation, art-

making, and cultural production. Although settler colonialism attempts to reduce and erase our ability to thrive as nations and people, it has also had the inverse effect of generating an incredible diversity of Indigenous creative responses to colonialism borne from the ruins of modernity. Indigenous art-making and creativity are not reactive; they are emergent, immanent forces that are integral to life and creation. As Simpson observes, “Creating was the base of our culture. Creating was regenerative and ensured more diversity, more innovation, more life” (2011: 92). My work explores the creative centre at the core of our being and the heart of our nations.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that Indigenous peoples have long understood the relationship between creation and survival. “Creating,” she states “is about transcending the basic survival mode through using a resource or capability that every Indigenous community has retained throughout colonization — the ability to create and be creative” (Smith 2012: 159).

Creativity is not only essential to the regeneration of Indigenous societies in *response* to colonial invasion, it is intrinsic to who we are as human beings:

The project of creating is not just about the artistic endeavours of individuals, but about the spirit of creating that indigenous communities have exercised for thousands of years. Imagination helps people to rise above their own circumstances, to dream new visions and to hold on to old ones. It fosters inventions and discoveries, facilitates simple improvements to people’s lives and uplifts our spirits. Creating is not the exclusive domain of the rich, nor of the technologically superior, but of the imaginative. Creating is about channelling collective creativity order to produce solutions to indigenous problems...Throughout the period of colonization indigenous peoples survived because of their imaginative spirit, their ability to adapt and to think around a problem (2012: 160).

Our imaginative spirit is a strategic mechanism for adaptation and survival. Creative thought not only helps us respond to colonization it also helps us to produce solutions. Making art is a means for Indigenous people to assert the autonomy and sovereignty of our creativity. But autonomous creativity is relational; and it operates within interconnected networks of community, history, and culture. For Brian Massumi, “Autonomy is always connective, it’s not being apart, it’s being

in, being in a situation of belonging that gives you certain degrees of freedom, or *powers of becoming, powers of emergence*” (Massumi 2008, emphasis added). For Indigenous artists, however, these “powers of becoming” and “powers of emergence” are animated by the resurgent force of Indigenous creativity that, once mobilized, can become an irrepressible assertion of interconnected struggle.

## INDIGENOUS RENAISSANCE(S)

Throughout the twentieth-century, Indigenous artists have led movements for cultural, social, and political change and, in the early days of the twenty-first century, they continue to lead us toward resurgent and decolonizing horizons. A burgeoning Indigenous artistic renaissance is spreading across Turtle Island. As journalist Jesse Kinos-Goodin claimed in a laudatory piece on the rise of Indigenous music in Canada: “A resurgence. A revolution. A renaissance...Call it what you will, but we’ve reached a significant moment in the history of Canada’s relationship with First Nations, and it’s reflected not just in the proliferation of Indigenous music, but also in its mass acceptance by the mainstream” (2014: 1). In popular media discourse, the emergent Indigenous music renaissance is increasingly accepted by the mainstream. But is mainstream acceptance the goal of resurgent Indigenous cultural production? For Indigenous artists, creative waves of cultural expression have encompassed a wealth of media forms and generated a diverse range of audiences. And whereas mainstream acceptance may have once sufficed as a political objective of such movements, today’s “renaissances” in Indigenous music and the arts are not exclusively focused on building external mainstream audiences for Indigenous creativity, they strive to generate self-affirmative forms of collective power *within* Indigenous communities. Historically, Indigenous artists have also used cultural production to traverse the terrain of contemporary politics by developing “renaissances” that have strategically intervened into

dominant discourses and provided mechanisms for mobilizing collective creativity in connection with political struggle. In the section that follows, I trace a genealogy of several exemplary movements in literature, visual art, film, and music that have inspired contemporary waves of Indigenous cultural production and that contextualize the current Indigenous creative “renaissance” in relation to those that have preceded it.

In 1983, Kenneth Lincoln published *Native American Renaissance*, a collection of essays focusing on the rise of Indigenous literature, or what he termed “a written renewal of oral traditions translated into Western literary forms” (1983: 9), that had followed the breakout success of Scott Momaday’s *House of Made of Dawn* in 1968. Even then, however, Lincoln observed that “Contemporary Indian literature is not so much new...as regenerate: transitional continuities emerging from the old” (1983: 9). This recurrent model of Indigenous artistic flourishing is marked by its affirmation of a continuum of Indigenous creation that has persisted, independent of form, genre, or modality. The specific designation of the “Native American Renaissance” popularized by Lincoln, however, “referred overwhelmingly to the literary phenomenon” (Velie and Lee 2013: 3). And while there has been a wealth of Indigenous literature that has emerged since, and an accompanying proliferation of academic scholarship on published Indigenous literature of the Americas, this renaissance was itself preceded by an earlier movement among Indigenous visual artists in Canada in the early 1970s, who established the Professional Native Indian Artists Inc. (PNIAI) alliance.

Responding to a previous decade of Indigenous activism, widespread social change and a shared desire for self-determination, the PNIAI emerged to enable Indigenous art and artists to claim their rightful place in the discourse of contemporary art on Turtle Island (Lavallee 2014: 23). In 1972, the PNIAI’s membership consolidated around its Indigenous “Group of Seven” —

Jackson Beardy, Eddy Cobiness, Alex Janvier, Norval Morrisseau, Daphne Odjig, Carl Ray, and Joseph Sanchez — forming “the first self-organized, autonomous First Nations artists’ advocacy collective in Canada” (2014: 23.). As curator Michelle Lavallee writes in her introductory curatorial essay to *7: The Professional Native Indian Artists Inc.*, a “retro-active exhibition” of the group’s work mounted in 2013 at the Mackenzie Art Gallery: “The significance of the PNI AI cannot be underestimated. As a cultural and political entity, they ignited a renaissance that gave subsequent Indigenous artists, arts advocacy organizations, and collectives energy and momentum that continue through today” (2014: 24). As the successive waves of Indigenous creativity that both preceded and followed PNI AI’s catalytic output have shown: “It is impossible to disentangle [their] *raison d’être*...from social advocacy and political activism” (Ace 2014: 198). PNI AI’s “story is deeply intertwined with the quest for recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights, self-determination, and self-government as a countermeasure to the longstanding consequences of colonization, displacement, and poverty” (2014: 198). Alongside the diverse currents of social and civil activism that ran throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Indigenous artists were deeply shaped by this “revolutionary period for active engagement, organization, mobilization, advocacy, and change” (2014: 207).

## CREATIVE SOVEREIGNTIES, SOVEREIGN CREATIVITY

Indigenous artistic renaissances are frequently discussed in relation to the discourse of sovereignty<sup>3</sup>. As Indigenous creativity expanded across disciplines, genres and aesthetics, many

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<sup>3</sup> The discourse of sovereignty has been criticized by Indigenous scholars, including Taiaiake Alfred, who suggest it is an “inappropriate concept” because of its “foreignness” to Indigenous thought and its “roots...in Western domination, and imperialism” (1999: 78-79). However, as Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson suggests, it remains “a critical language game in the conditions of settlement”, which, in the colonial context, contend with the “structural condition of ongoing Indigenous dispossession and disavowal of that dispossession and structure” (2014: 105). I employ usage of the concept along similar lines: both to account for the continued structuring (and concomitant disavowal) of socio-political relations formed through colonial power, and also to take up Simpson’s provocation to

critics and Indigenous artists themselves, began to appropriate the trope of sovereignty to describe their interrelated commitments to creative praxis and political freedom. In the context of its application to artistic, literary, cinematic and creative forms, however, sovereignty is an ambivalent terminological placeholder for interlocking claims (among other socio-cultural and political objectives) to self-determination, cultural empowerment, and autonomy. In his 2006 book on the cinema of Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, Randolph Lewis describes this rhetorical flourishment within Indigenous creative production as a turn “toward the reestablishment of *representational sovereignty*, by which I mean the right, as well as the ability, for a group of people to depict themselves with their own ambitions at heart” (2006: 175, emphasis in original). Representational sovereignty, or the ability to achieve self-representation, is understood, in this context, as an aesthetic and creative correlate to political movements for sovereignty and self-determination. But what is at stake in transposing the discourse of political sovereignty into the realm of artistic and cultural production?

For Lewis, the Indigenous film renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s produced the emergence of what he terms the “*cinema of sovereignty*” (2006: 179), in which Indigenous people increasingly obtained “the opportunity to make films that tell their own stories, in their own way, to the world” (2006: 179). The cinema of sovereignty is, for Lewis “about authority, autonomy, and accountability in the representational process” (2006: 180). Although the Indigenous film renaissance first emerged in Canada in the late 1960s, following the National Film Board of Canada’s establishment of the *Indian Film Crew* program in 1968 (which has since become *The Aboriginal Voice*), it was not until a decade later that Alanis Obomsawin and her Indigenous creative comrades began to codify a cinema of sovereignty in earnest. Lewis

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consider sovereignty within a decolonial politics of refusal and resistance to the “discursive containment and pathology” imposed by the normative colonial order.

details its distinguishing characteristics according to a distinct, six-part cinematic typology emblemized by the work of Obomsawin: “it is the product of a sovereign gaze”; it speaks “in the language of equals”; it includes “a strong pedagogical element”; it exposes “the continuing brutality of state violence against First Nations”; it aims “exposure of such issues at more than one audience”; and it rests on an Indigenous epistemological foundation rooted in “a profound respect for Native ways of knowing and remembering” (Lewis 2006: 184). While I would be reticent to suggest that Obomsawin’s films function as a metonym for an Indigenous aesthetics of cinema, Lewis’ detailed analysis reveals the “radical indigenism” inherent in her creative expression that provided a foundation for the development of “a cinema of sovereignty in which Native expertise is allowed to stand on its own, free from patronizing attempts to buttress it from the outside” (2006: 186). Inspired by the Indigenous film renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s, a resurgent wave of contemporary Indigenous cinema has emerged in recent years, led by Indigenous filmmakers like Lisa Jackson, Helen Haig-Brown, Jeff Barnaby, Sterlin Harjo, and Elle-Maija Tailfeathers. This renaissance, however, like those that preceded it, is not simply about visioning sovereignty or laying claiming to self-definition, it is about “the creation of space for Native actuality” (Lewis 2006: 186). In this view, renaissances can be understood as forms of resurgence: regenerative assertions of Indigenous presence, continuity, and community.

Our current moment is marked by a similar flourishing across many interconnected movements in contemporary Indigenous arts. Of these, perhaps none has achieved more sustained public interest and attention than Indigenous music. Led by internationally recognized artists like A Tribe Called Red, Tanya Tagaq, and rising talents including Frank Waln, Inez Jasper, and Tall Paul, the so-called “Indigenous music renaissance” has precipitated an unprecedented wave of media attention, reviews, awards, accolades, and global interest. This

new generation of Indigenous musicians is breaking through the invisible glass confines that have, until recently, conflated the diversity of Indigenous musical expressions and contemporary sonic experiments within narrowly-defined singular genre categories. “Aboriginal” music, however, is not a musical genre. Indigenous musics are rich in their historical and contemporary diversity and Indigenous artists are creating some of the most inspiring and innovative music in any genre. As the co-founder and creative producer of *Revolutions Per Minute*, a global platform for Indigenous music established in 2011, I have witnessed the arrival of a dynamic and resurgent movement in Indigenous music creation.

In November 2014, MTV’s *Rebel Music*, a documentary series profiling artists and musicians engaged in social activism around the world, chose to launch its second season with an episode dedicated to Indigenous music. “Rebel Music: Native America”, the show’s season premiere, debuted online and quickly garnered more than a million views within hours. Indigenous fans flooded the video’s comments section, hailing the episode as a much needed reflection of themselves and the ascendance of Indigenous artists working across multiple communities of creativity and political struggle. The episode followed Lakota hip-hop artist Frank Waln, Sto:lo R&B singer Inez Jasper, Lakota hip-hop artists and community activists Naataani Means (son of AIM leader Russell Means) and Mike “Witko” Cliff; and it offered a glossy fly-over of the expanding presence of Indigenous voices in every aspect of contemporary society: young artists who are successfully navigating both their responsibilities to their families, home communities and nations, and their concurrent commitments to building artistic careers and creative community with other Indigenous artists. What signalled *Rebel Music*’s significance was its attentiveness to the collectivization of creativity occurring within the burgeoning Indigenous music renaissance. As Bear Witness, DJ and member of Indigenous electronic



ensemble A Tribe Called Red stated in an interview posted on the Rebel Music website: “Our culture has always grown, our culture has always adapted. We’re trying to get everybody else to catch up with where *our* culture is today” (RPM 2014: 1). His casual flip of the ‘colonial myth’ — in which Indigenous peoples are relegated either to an already vanished past or a hauntological future — inverts the colonial paradigm by simply stating the self-evident: Indigenous artists are, and have always been, adapting, resurging, and innovating across multiple forms of creativity. Now it is time for “everybody else to catch up”.

#### INDIGENOUS ART AND NATIONHOOD

If Indigenous art-making can be understood within successive renaissances, or waves of cultural production, what is the relationship between art and Indigenous struggles for nationhood and self-determination? Returning to the example of Indigenous literature, in 1981 Acoma Pueblo writer Simon Ortiz published a widely circulated essay entitled, “Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism”. This generated new directions not only in Indigenous literary studies, but toward an emergent ‘literary sovereignty’ or ‘Native nationalist’ movement championed by writers including Ortiz, Paula Gunn Allen, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Jace Weaver, Robert Warrior, and Craig Womack. Recent scholars including Daniel Justice, James Cox, and Lisa Brook have also sought to approach Indigenous literature in direct relationship to questions of “Native national sovereignty and self-determination” (Weaver et al. 2005: xxi). As an overt attempt at critical intervention into dominant discourse, the literary sovereignty movement attempted to account for, and to generate, Indigenous literature in support of political and aesthetic commitments. As a political movement *within* the arts, however, it is much less easy to discern its impact and successes in transforming social change at the level of communities and nations. While the emergence of explicitly politicized artistic ‘renaissances’

have signalled an interest on the part of artists and creators to pursue creative expression in support of resurgent politics; it is not clear what role cultural production should play in struggles for Indigenous nationhood and nationalism.

Throughout Indigenous arts and media discourse, this debate has been staged as a question of representational aesthetics and sovereignty. In his book *Indigenous Aesthetics*, Stephen Leuthold considers representational sovereignty in relation to Indigenous nationhood by arguing that Indigenous nationhood “leads to a reassessment of the past that rehumanizes the colonized and rejects the degrading portrait of indigenous peoples offered by...colonizers” (1998: 34). In the context of Indigenous art and media creation, he argues, “Allegiance to nation or tribe serves to prevent the fullest development of indigenous art as *art*” (1998: 40), by virtue of its imposition of a narrowly essentialist identity on its membership. For Leuthold, “the concept of sovereign nation or tribe...seems to require an essential unity that masks internal divisions and conflicts” (1998: 40). Leuthold not only sees this as a political liability, but also as an aesthetic and creative one. Within a regime of “indigenous aesthetic representation” that has acceded to his rather Euro-centric liberal conception of Indigenous nationhood, Leuthold suggests that “art’s role in collective representation may lead to a double code for art: one internal and either ‘national’ or ‘tribal’ in scope, the other international or cross cultural” (1998: 41). In this view, any Indigenous creative movement that advocates for Indigenous nationhood, let alone ‘nationalism’, appears doomed to effect the very internal divisions over “taxation, community policing, tribal membership policies and gambling” (1998:41) that Leuthold equates with an inevitable inheritance of European nationalism’s historicity. Not only does this view fail to account for articulations of Indigenous nationhood that are distinct from Western liberal nation state-based forms, it also dangerously conflates the affirmation of Indigenous political and

cultural autonomy with the ‘inevitability’ of internal division, conflict and the potential rise of “racism, militarism, colonialism, and xenophobia” (1998: 41). That Leuthold considers these conditions to be necessary byproducts of Indigenous peoples’ self-valorizing and self-affirmative desires for self-determination is, not only problematic, it is a mistaken view of Indigenous nationhood.

Indigenous nationhood, when it comes into contact with art, media and creativity, often does so through an interpretive prism of Western political theory and non-Indigenous critical scholarship that assumes an inherent symmetry between European historical nationalisms and Indigenous political formations, or casts Indigenous nationhood as a thinly-veiled threat to the imagined coherence of Indigenous communities, such that any claim to nationhood posited as desirable or strategically necessary by Indigenous people for themselves, is interdicted by external interpretations that re/code Indigenous nationhood as “an inherent problem” whose “nostalgic reliance on a mythical past” (1998: 42) is destined for failure. But, what then, are we to make of those creative renaissances and resurgent artistic movements that have been directly shaped by Indigenous peoples’ own theorizing of Indigenous nationhood that is not coeval with, or co-determined by, European Western ethno-nationalisms? Indigenous nationhood is immanent to, and constitutive of, Indigenous subjectivation, collective identity and political community; it is distinct from Western epistemologies, historical articulations and, importantly, social relations and values. Indigenous nationhood is commensurate with our political organizing or movements for creative expression. Rather than being conceptualized as an ‘obstacle’ to be overcome, or a fixed model of ‘being’, Indigenous nationhood can instead be understood as a regenerative and restorative structuring of social and political life that contests Euro-Western nationalisms and statist conceptualizations of nationhood. “Traditional Indigenous nationhood”, Taiaiake Alfred

writes, “stands in sharp contrast to the dominant understanding of ‘the state’”: There is no absolute authority, no coercive enforcement of decisions, no hierarchy, and no separate ruling entity” (1999: 80). Nationhood does not pose a threat to the internal unity of our communities, nor does it advocate for essentialist collective forms that fracture unity and produce internal divisions. It makes no claims to power *over* others; and it is not oriented around claims to external recognition or representation. It is, in fact, a form of collective being that works toward unity by compelling individual and collective action to reaffirm our presence throughout our homelands, practice our languages and ceremonies, and restore traditional forms of governance. Unlike Leuthold’s fearful anticipation of Indigenous nationhood reproducing the very worst effects of Euro-Western nationalism, Alfred forcefully argues that we must revitalize our nationhood through land-based practices, natural laws, and communal participation:

We need to focus our activism on the root of the problem facing our people collectively: our collective dispossession and misrepresentation as Indigenous peoples. Now is the time to put ourselves back on our lands spiritually and physically and to shift our support away from the Indian Act system and to start energizing the restoration of our own governments. Our people and our languages and our ceremonies should be saturating our homelands and territories. Our leaders should answer to us not to the Minister of Indian Affairs or his minions. Our governments should be circles in which we all sit as equals and participate fully and where all of our voices are heard, not systems of hierarchy and exclusion legitimized and enforced by Canadian laws. Restoring our nationhood in this way is the fundamental struggle. Our focus should be on restoring our presence on the land and regenerating our true nationhood. These go hand in hand and one cannot be achieved without the other. (Alfred 2013: 1)

In Alfred’s view, the restoration of nationhood is “the fundamental struggle”. Art-making is an embedded part of this process; one that flows from both relational practice and Indigenous understandings of nationhood without the state<sup>4</sup>. For Leanne Simpson, Anishinaabeg nationhood is “based on a series of radiating responsibilities” (2013: 2) that form an interconnected network of relational ties to land, people, place, and all beings. Like art, music, film, storytelling and

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<sup>4</sup> The State, Ronald Bogue writes, “is the quintessential ‘form of interiority’...a structure of enclosure, organization, and regulation—in short, a structure that creates a sedentary, striated space and an appropriately structured population to inhabit it” (2005: 20).

other kinds of creative expression, Indigenous nationhood is an embodied practiced that is lived and expressed within a dynamic continuum of existence, not asserted militarily or “based on enclosures defended with violence” (2013: 3). Resurgences in the arts are deeply tied to resurgences in other areas of Indigenous life. Indigenous art-making *and* nationhood can be thought as co-extensive creative processes that inflect one another in their multiple, differential articulations. “There are as many ways to articulate and embody Anishinaabeg nationhood as there are Anishinaabe individuals,” Simpson writes. “Collectively, no matter how we speak it, our nationhood is about land, culture, language, our bodies, minds and spirits and the survivance of our Kobade as Anishinaabeg” (2013: 4). Many Indigenous peoples and nations share a similar view of nationhood, in which respect for difference and unity in multiplicity empower the collective, nourish the community, and embody nationhood through interlocking concentric circles of responsibility. In this view, art-making can be understood as a unifying force to support Indigenous nationhood through individual and collective practice, rather than simply a representational technique to aestheticize Indigenous politics.

#### CONSTELLATED CREATIVITY: SELF/COLLECTIVE/COMMUNITY/NATION

The *collective* provides a model for creativity that best reflect this dynamic, mutable, and embodied articulation of nationhood expressed through reciprocal and relational difference. In my research, I examine the work of individual artists, musicians, and media practitioners, however, I also analyze Indigenous artist collectives. The artist collective, I claim, embodies Indigenous values of individuated creation and collaborative, interdependent communality. In the transdisciplinary work of artist collectives including Postcommodity, Skookum Sound System, A Tribe Called Red, and the Black Constellation, collectivization becomes a means of instantiating micro-communal forms of relationality, governance, and creation. In the case of Metis artist

Christi Belcourt, for example, the *Walking With Our Sisters* “exhibit” becomes a collectively-produced and collaboratively authored work that self-generates structures of creative Indigenous women’s and queer leadership and accountability. As the exhibit travels between communities, it creates locally-organized, lasting relationships between co-creators and collaborators. Elsewhere, as in the street art of Pueblo artist Jaque Fragua and the social practice work of Dine/Navajo artist Tom Greyeyes, the collective *Honour the Treaties / Honour the People* enables the artists to work within a loosely-organized creative network that facilitates their nation-based connections to community and place in dialogic motion with collaborators in their crew. Hip-hop artist, local organizer and educator, Sacramento Knoxx, works within a similar model to provide urban education through *The Raiz Up*, a Detroit-based collective that uses hip-hop “as a tool to create social awareness in [their] community through community dialog[ue], artistic creation and collective action” (Raiz Up 2015). For Leanne Simpson and Kwakwaka'wakw artist Marianne Nicolson, nation-based connections to their home communities intermix with work they intentionally circulate with a wide community of inter-Indigenous, literary, musical and artistic audiences. For Indigenous peoples, artistic creation is inseparable from community. As I detail in later sections of the dissertation, our creativity is *constellated*: collectivized through shared practices, distributed knowledges, and the interweaving of individual voices that, while remaining unique in their respective voicings, are enfolded within a continuum of Indigenous creativity. Brought together through a relational spatialization that prioritizes and re-centres collective forms, Indigenous artists frequently refute Western notions of individualized artistic “genius” by working within dynamic models of collectivity that support our concentric constellated relations to crew, collective, family, community, and nation.

## FIGHTING WHERE WE ARE

Mobilizing our collective creativity demands the inclusion and participation of all members of our communities and nations. As Taiaiake Alfred writes: “there [is] a place for all Onkwehonwe in the regeneration of our fires, no matter whether we born in the secure centre of the ring [closest to our home fires,] or were brought into this world living separate from the core of our cultures, lands, and communities” (2005: 259)”. *We must fight where we are*: wherever we live and work is our warrior zone (Alfred 2005). With respect to media creation and mediatized movements, Alfred continues:

resurgence action is an exercise in manipulating resources...conducting struggle effectively in the twenty-first century requires a degree of technological sophistication and access to technology and resources that were previously the exclusive privilege of those people who held power over us. Mass media technical capacity, money, and institutional support from foundations and foreign sources are absolutely essential. A movement simply cannot afford hope seriously to challenge power in this technology-based political and economic environment without the financial capacity to to effect changes in perception and to convey critical messages on the Internet, radio, and television...there is no substitute for the financial resources which make it possible to influence people through the projection of voices, images, and ideas in a sustained way using indigenous media capacities. We should also consider developing high-tech communications capacity to take advantage of the media resources we access or develop, building alliances with other movements and gaining high-profile support and participation. (2005: 208)

Alfred prioritizes movement-based “resurgent action” in the form of developing “mass media technical capacity” and acquiring sufficient resources “to effect changes in perception and convey critical messages” (2005: 208) through Indigenous media production. In my view, however, this conceptualization should be expanded to include a broader definition of ‘media’ that encourages the collectivization of our creative practices in all forms of art, music, media and technology. Indigenous social movements demand both technological sophistication and collective participation in contemporary media. We need to reach beyond the imagined borders of our own communities to mobilize support effectively. But to conceive Indigenous media exclusively as a set of instrumentalizing technologies to be deployed in support of a movement’s

goals, is to limit the potential inclusivity and mobility of the concept. Indigenous art-making and creativity could be collectivized across all media to encourage a broad-based *resurgence of creation* within our nations.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: DECOLONIAL BRICOLAGE

My research is guided by my commitments and responsibilities to my nations, the Nehiyaw and Dene Suline people, but it is equally committed to supporting Indigenous resurgence and decolonization struggles throughout Turtle Island. As a result, I have chosen to work closely with Indigenous artists and media practitioners from many nations. Like those whom I interview, I am also a member of this burgeoning inter-Indigenous community of artists, musicians, and media-makers and, as such, I am responsible to this community of mentors, friends, colleagues, comrades and peers. In all aspects of my academic, media production, and organizing work I work to build community and support the freedom struggles of our people. While the artists I interview in this project do not always share my political aims or analytic critiques, the goal of my research is not to resolve these conflicting, even contradictory, perspectives but, rather, to allow for their plurality, difference, and multiplicity. As will become evident in the following the pages, the contradictions and conflicts produced by colonialism cannot not easily be resolved. In my research, as in other aspects of my life, I have worked to embrace the inchoate colonial present by avoiding the reductive didacticism of prescribing ‘easy solutions’ to what are often incommensurable ways of knowing and being in the world. This, as I understand it, is the work of critical, decolonial bricolage. Following Kincheloe (2001):

critical bricoleurs are politically capable of disrupting this authoritative control over knowledge production...[T]o contribute to social transformation, bricoleurs seek to better understand both the forces of domination that affect the lives of individuals from race, class, gender, sexual, ethnic, and religious backgrounds outside of dominant culture(s) and the worldviews of such



diverse peoples. In this context, bricoleurs attempt to remove knowledge production and its benefits from the control of elite groups. (Rogers 2012: 13)

My research is similarly interventionist: it seeks to unveil the contradictions of Indigenous life under contemporary colonialism and late capitalism in order to disrupt colonial control and commodification of Indigenous knowledge. By embodying the same spirit of intervention, disruption and ‘social transformation’ in my research that the Indigenous artists and media-makers I interview in the project maintain in their own creative work and practice, I perform a reflexive practice of bricolage that works to support (and reflect) a shared set of commitments to reciprocal and relational Indigenous knowledge production. My research, in form and in practice, is produced *for* the community of which it (and I) am already a part. It is research shared within and across multiple communities in common struggle to decolonize; research that elaborates ongoing conversations happening among Indigenous peoples, artists and non-Indigenous allies, for whom the relationship between Indigenous art, media and creativity is not simply an intellectual concern, but a lived one.

What is at stake in generating research this way is the necessity for Indigenous research to respond to the complex socio-cultural, political and aesthetic entanglements of life under Empire. To that end, I develop a self-reflexive *decolonial bricolage* research methodology that is derived from the critical imperatives of Indigenous resurgence and anticolonial struggle and inspired by my affinity and love for hip-hop culture (within which bricolage is a central tenet of hip-hop praxis) and the critical, rhetorical, material and discursive strategies employed by the Indigenous artists who have participated in the project. Although the term bricolage has etymological and conceptual roots in Western discourse and the anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, as a research methodology, it has been detoured, remixed and indigenized to reflect a critical disposition toward colonial knowledge production that seeks to challenge and subvert

given structures of power. In hip-hop, as elsewhere, bricolage refers to a “mode of construction” in which the creator (or researcher) makes use of only the tools and materials “at-hand” (Levi-Strauss, 1966). Creating something new from what are given discursive and material limitations, not simply ‘making due’ with what is ‘at-hand’, is a foundation of hip-hop culture — and an important praxis of Indigenous survival in the face of colonial elimination and erasure. As a research methodology, a means of survival, and a creative technique, bricolage implies and demands the reimagining of possibilities. Rogers observes that in “the domain of qualitative research [bricolage] denotes methodological practices explicitly based on notions of eclecticism, emergent design, flexibility and plurality. Further, it signifies approaches that examine phenomena from multiple, and sometimes competing, theoretical and methodological perspectives” (Rogers 2012: 1). I employ bricolage as a decolonizing methodology: a tactical emergent design and strategic practice through which to engage multiple communities, traditions, events, socio-political phenomena, works of art, and discursive sites of analysis. As a self-reflexive practice, bricolage facilitates mobility and mutability; it enables me to account for my own positionality and multiple forms of relationality to the communities within which I work as an author, researcher, ‘bricoleur’, community member and Indigenous media practitioner.

Bricolage, as I employ it in this project, is not simply a ‘methodology’ in the strict sense of the term. Rather, it is, itself, a creative praxis of embedded/embodied participation *within* the communities that it intends to serve, one that reflects the onto-epistemic values, aspirations and differences of those individuals and communities. The artists with whom I have worked to produce this project come from diverse personal backgrounds, geographic locations, and nations, however, they share in common their participation in creative communities and their creation of contemporary art, music, and media forms. In choosing the artists for this project, I built on my

established connections and relationships with a wide community of Indigenous artists and musicians. Through my own creative and professional practice as a hip-hop artist, cultural curator, researcher/scholar and, most recently, as a producer of the global Indigenous music site *Revolutions Per Minute*, I have been fortunate to meet and collaborate with numerous Indigenous practitioners working in the creative and contemporary arts. In considering the problematics of colonial knowledge production in the academy, generally, and specific lacunae in contemporary scholarship on Indigenous art and media that occlude the specificity of a resurgent or decolonial lens and analysis, I sought co-participants for the research project whose work and practice would be both thematically relevant to my inquiry and who would be well-positioned to respond to the research questions, as I have outlined them above.

The artists included in this project are at the forefront of the contemporary Indigenous music and arts renaissance and resurgence. Some are emerging artists working at a local community level, others are well-known by a broad public, others still are world renowned. What distinguishes this group from many others working in the field are their respective commitments to artistic integrity, creative sovereignty, and unique forms, aesthetics, and understandings of resurgence and decolonization. This project is not intended to be representative of ‘contemporary Indigenous art’ (which would assume an already dubious and fraught categorical designation to begin with), and my research reveals the many continuities and discontinuities between Indigenous artists working within contemporary media. Although lines of aesthetic and political affinity could be drawn ‘through’ this group of artists to connect their respective creative practices, I remain cautious in doing so throughout the project. I recognize the utility of marking such affinities in order to support a line of argumentation, however, my research proceeds from an ethical and political commitment that respects Indigenous

multiplicity. I advance my claims through a considered investigation of the issues at stake in conducting this research with Indigenous artists, rather than in an attempt to ‘reveal’ the underlying commonality between them. My goal is not homogenize or subsume the individual perspectives of each artist within a meta-narrative of ‘Indigenous identity’, but instead to reflect the existing diversity of Indigenous experiences that underlie and give form to the discursive and semiotic transit of indigeneity as such.

My research is conducted with a heterogenous group, all but one of whom are self-identified Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, the other is Indigenous/Aboriginal to ‘Australia’. Due to the geographic scope of my project and limitations on resources and research funding, I was not able to visit each of the artists in person. I conducted in-person interviews when possible, and the remaining interviews were conducted through a combination of email communications, telephone, and Skype video calls. The research interviews were conducted over the period of several months. From July 2014 to January 2015, I interviewed the following sixteen Indigenous artists, musicians, and media practitioners: Christi Belcourt (Metis); Jaque Fragua (Pueblo); Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Anishinaabe); Marianne Nicolson (Kwakwaka'wakw); Nicholas Galanin (Tlingit/Aleut); Cristobal Martinez (Mestizo/Chicano) on behalf of the artist collective Postcommodity; Raymond Boisjoly (Haida); Sacramento Knoxx (Anishinaabe/Afro-Mestizo); Bracken Hanuse-Corlett (Wuikinuxv/Klahoose), Csetwke Fortier (Secwepemc), D’Arcy O’Connor (Wiimpatja), and Dean Hunt (Heiltsuk) of Skookum Sound System; Sonny Assu (Ligwilda’xw/Kwakwaka'wakw); and Tall Paul (Anishinaabe).

Although some of these artists work in a single genre, discipline, or medium (music, for example), many are self-described transdisciplinary artists who work across multiple media and forms of expression and whose creative output is polymorphic and mobile, adapting easily to

changing contexts, circumstances, and locations. I tailored the interviews to reflect the specific practices of each artist and asked interviewees to respond to a set of questions exploring the nature of their creative practice and how they understand art-making and creativity in relationship to their nation/community and broader decolonizing, resurgent and political struggle. Common questions included, “How do you understand creativity?”; “What makes Indigenous art and music political?”; “How important is self-representation in your work?”; and “How, or perhaps when, is art-making a form of decolonization?”. I made the choice to approach the artists I interviewed as I would engage scholarly work. In other words, I engage Indigenous artists and media practitioners as knowledge holders, experts and scholars of their art.

In conceiving the broad parameters of my research project, and in keeping with my decolonial bricolage methodology, I wanted to make use of the expertise that *already* exists within Indigenous creative communities, that is, the knowledge, embodied theory and critical thought that is derived from Indigenous artists’ lived practices of creating art, music and media. I draw from these critical and divergent perspectives throughout the dissertation to elucidate Indigenous articulations of agency and decolonial creativity that provide critical counterbalances to my extensive engagement with critical literature and scholarship. My intention in doing this is to provide a dialectical/dialogic mode of analysis that recentres Indigenous perspectives within an evolving multi-site examination of critical issues in the fields of Indigenous art, media, performance and anticolonial theory. I interweave quotes from the interviews throughout my analysis to provide the reader with direct access to the interviewees’ voices and perspectives.

Quotes from the artist interviews are interwoven with a detailed examination and critical interrogation of key thematic emergent in the literature and discourse of my analytic fields. My

research is a self-reflexive, intersectional<sup>5</sup> and transdisciplinary project that cuts across multiple concurrent fields of inquiry simultaneously: Indigenous politics, resurgence, and governance, contemporary art and aesthetics, (new) media and communications, music and performance, hip-hop, social movements, critical theory, and decolonial/anticolonial studies. While the scope of my inquiry is broad, my research investigates a recurrent set of critical thematics and concepts refracted and co-determined by the Indigenous artists interviewed in my research. My approach to engaging critical texts, literatures and voices from such diverse sources is not simply the collation and re-presentation of concepts implicit in existing bricolage research methods but, instead, a critical practice of *sampling*<sup>6</sup> and *remixing* that makes use of all available theoretical sources and intellectual histories as the source material for a recombinant critique that is inspired as much by Indigenous art-making and bricolage, as it is by hip-hop artists and Situationist practices of detournement. As I suggest later, these practices are double refracted in the media-making practiced by Indigenous artists. I propose this research method as a means of embodying an ethico-political commitment to achieving symmetry and balance in the form and content of my work, such that it remains true to the aims of decolonization, resurgence, and Indigenous theory.

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<sup>5</sup> Although there is extensive writing on intersectionality as research practice and theory, I take up the notion of intersectional research following Linda Tuhiwai Smith, for whom intersections can be considered generative sites of both analysis and resistance: “*Intersections* can be conceptualized not only as intersecting lines but also as spaces that are created at the points where intersecting lines meet. Spaces created by intersecting ideas, tendencies or issues are sites of struggle that offer possibilities for people to resist” (Smith 2012: 202)

<sup>6</sup> Paul Miller (aka DJ Spooky), describes the nature of sampling as hip-hop/bricolage praxis: “Sampling is a new way of doing something that's been with us for a long time: creating with found objects. The rotation gets thick. The constraints get thin. The mix breaks free of the old associations. New contexts from the old. The script gets flipped. The languages evolve and learn to speak in new forms, new thoughts. The sound of thought becomes legible again at the edge of new meanings. After all, you have to learn a new language. Take the idea and fold it in on itself.” (Miller 2004: 26)

## MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF STRUGGLE

In her influential work, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith sets out to “map the conceptual terrain of struggle” (2012: 201) for decolonization. She conceptualizes “five conditions or dimensions that have framed the struggle for decolonization” as follows:

1. *critical consciousness* (“an awakening from the slumber of hegemony”)
2. *unleashing the creative spirit* (“a way of reimagining the world and our position...within the world”)
3. *convergence* (“the coming together of disparate ideas, the events, the historical moment”)
4. *movement/disturbance* (“the competing movements which traverse sites of struggle, the unstable movements that occur when the status quo is disturbed”)
5. *structure* (“the underlying code of imperialism, of power relations”) (Smith 2012: 201)

Smith’s map provides a concise and useful framework within which to locate and interrogate the inter-relations between art-making, Indigenous media, resurgence and decolonization. How do the practices of Indigenous artists, musicians and media practitioners contribute to the dimensions Smith outlines? Rather than providing a hegemonic model, Smith acknowledges the diversity of Indigenous peoples’ experiences of colonization. She notes that this conceptual map reflects “the multiple positions, spaces, discourses, languages, histories, textures, and world views that are being contested, struggled over, resisted and reformulated by [Indigenous peoples]” (2012: 201). Decolonization is a dynamic, multiform process of collective articulation and rearticulation.

Given that Indigenous peoples’ lives have been overdetermined by the imposition of colonial relationality, struggles for decolonization are marked by their specificity in given socio-historical, geographic and political settings. These contexts are neither hegemonic nor universal, but colonialism’s systemic ordering of social and economic life can be understood, in the contemporary period, to be co-constitutive and coextensive with the instantiation of Empire—a present political landscape that, in Tiqqun’s words, “does not confront us like a subject, facing us, but like *an environment* that is hostile to us” (2010: 171). The terrain of contemporary

political struggle is no longer defined by strict contentions of opposing powers or identity categories bound to the modernist binarisms of native/settler, colonizer/colonized. Rather, under Empire, power is diffuse: the “hostile environment” of the present has become, as Susan Buck-Morss suggests, “moving ground” (Galloway 2014: 127). This moving ground, for Hardt and Negri, reframes possibilities for action and resistance according to a new logic:

What if [we] are so intent on combating the remnants of a past form of domination that [we] fail to recognize the new form that is looming over [us] in the present?...what if a new paradigm of power, a postmodern sovereignty, has come to replace the modern paradigm and *rule through differential hierarchies of...hybrid and fragmentary subjectivities*...? In this case, modern forms of sovereignty would no longer be at issue and the postmodernist and postcolonialist strategies that appear to be liberatory would not challenge but in fact coincide with and even unwittingly reinforce the new strategies of rule!...This new enemy is not only resistant to the old weapons but actually thrives on them, and thus joins its would-be antagonists in applying them to the fullest. Long live difference! Down with essentialist binaries! (2000: 138).

The dual character of settler colonialism operative at both structural and psycho-affective levels among colonized populations and territories intersects with Hardt and Negri’s articulation of the differential and hybridized character of this new form of domination at precisely the point where techniques of subjection/subjectivation meet imperial technologies of recognition/inclusion. Insofar as this emergent model of what I term *affective imperialism* has come to dominate contemporary politics by thriving on the reproduction of “essentialist binaries” and incorporating resistance within a distributed field of coercive power, we might characterize the present terrain of decolonial struggle as one in which the demands of identity-based political claims can no longer be mobilized to effect transformative or systemic change. Rather, following Alexander Galloway, what this regime compels is in fact the opposite: “a politics of subtraction or a politics of disappearance” (Galloway 2012: 129). For Indigenous peoples, this subtraction could be read as subtending a more generalized move toward what Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2014) has called a “politics of refusal”. Subtraction and refusal, however, are distinct from outright *disappearance*. While I support a nuanced reading of (subtractive?) Indigenous refusal that



combines Galloway and Simpson's suggestions, to read a politics of subtraction as disappearance qua invisibility would be simply to accede to *existing* forms of colonial violence that paradigmatically and continually produce/render Indigenous peoples as politically invisible, disposable populations.

The flight from visibility implied by a politics of refusal framed in this way seeks instead to refuse the normative categorization of indigeneity as such, and its political claims to representation, recognition and inclusion. As Dene scholar Glen Coulthard has eloquently explicated: the hegemony of "liberal recognition-based approach[es] to Indigenous self-determination...now [serve] to reproduce the very forms of colonial power which our original demands for recognition sought to transcend" (2014: 24). Rather than reproducing the conditions of our own domination, Coulthard argues, Indigenous peoples should refuse the conciliatory politics of recognition and, instead, "collectively redirect our struggles...toward a *resurgent politics of recognition* premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural practices that are attentive to the subjective and structural composition of settler-colonial power" (2014: 24). In practicing this refusal (or, in Galloway's terms, subtraction), we create space in which to mobilize resurgence through self-valorizing and self-affirmative forms of self-recognition. This is a strategic political orientation toward the demands of Indigenous interiorities that need not be exclusionary but, rather, regenerative *from within*. Re-centring our political practices around self-actualization means shifting the focus of our collective struggle away from direct contention with "essentialist binaries" that facilitate the reproduction of colonial forms of power. Returning to Hardt and Negri: "The [de] colonial political project, then, is to affirm the multiplicity of differences so as to subvert the power of the ruling binary structures" (2000: 145). Following Coulthard, if settler colonialism "should not be seen as

deriving its reproductive force solely from its strictly repressive and violent features, but rather from its ability to produce forms of life that make settler-colonialism's constitutive hierarchies seem natural" (2014: xx), then Indigenous resistance can be thought as an apposite modality of *affirmative refusal*, that is to say, a positioning/articulation of *becoming other/wise* to power. While there may be no outside to Empire, there are other ways in which to refuse its logics of domination by seeking decolonization elsewhere. In later sections of the project I take up this question in more detail to consider the decolonial potentialities immanent to abjection (thought as a generative site of becoming) and ciphered Indigenous practices of critical desubjectivization that refuse the terms of colonizing subjectivity presumed to found the subject's capacity for anticolonial resistance and, instead, provide new ground for activating a resurgent decolonial politics of fugitive indigeneity (revolutionary/radical non-identity and affirmative difference).

To turn away is always to turn toward: a decolonial Indigenous politics of refusal is thus constituted in a redoubled movement away from the colonial normative order and toward Indigenous alternatives and potentialities. This is a form of affirmative refusal, or creative negation, that embodies the dynamic dialectical relationship between Indigenous resistance and resurgence. "Forms of Indigenous resistance...are...*reactive*," Coulthard suggests, "But they also have ingrained within them a resounding 'yes': they are the affirmative *enactment* of another modality of being, a different way of relating to the world" (2014: 169). Such sustained and transformative resistances, he continues, "become a *way of life*, another form of community" (2014: 169). As strategic disruptions and refusals, this decolonial political praxis becomes a means of activating "both a negation and an affirmation" that, while rejecting dominant forms of colonial politics, simultaneously embodies "affirmative gesture[s] of Indigenous resurgence" (2014.: 170). Such forms of affirmative refusal are not predetermined; they are repeatedly

subject to co-optation and reintegration within dominant political norms and imaginaries and, as such, must be self-reflexively attenuated to the structuring principles they attempts to make visible. They must be brought into being through collective action that is explicit in advancing resistance, refusal, and resurgence in support of struggles for decolonization.

#### ‘TO LOOK FOR NEW WEAPONS’

My research aims to supports this dual decolonial movement and is informed by an intersectional, recombinant sampling from multiple theoretical perspectives, ontologies, aesthetics, and discourses. To navigate the emergent terrain of anticolonial struggle explicated through an analytic prism of Indigenous creativity, art, music and media praxis, I constellate my analysis around recurrent conceptual sites of analysis that mark the necessity of employing a prismatic and transdisciplinary approach in the study of Indigenous resurgence and decolonization. I draw from the foundational writings of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and the emergent resurgence discourse led by Indigenous scholars including: Taiaiake Alfred, Jeff Corntassel, Leanne Simpson, Glen Coulthard, and Audra Simpson in my analysis. Although the work of these scholars has deeply informed my own thinking and analysis, in many ways this project was set in motion toward its current form by a series of short posts made by Nigerian writer Teju Cole on Twitter in 2013, in which he responded to American President Barack Obama’s “clarifying” statements on America’s expanding and secretive program of drone warfare. Over the course of several posts, Cole considered the political implications of America’s demanded transparency of the Other, such that the Other can be not only physically mapped and captured, but rendered visible, knowable and identifiable as a potential target for potential elimination. “Against this transparency”, he suggested “we must offer a strategic illegibility” (Cole 2013).

I consider the image of strategic illegibility in relation to contemporary Indigenous political struggles for decolonization to suggest that implicit and important connections can be made between the targeted Other produced through America's endless war against so-called "global terror" and the performative demands imposed by the state and settler society upon Indigenous peoples to make ourselves visible and transparent, in order for our political claims to be recognized and rendered legitimate within the normative colonial order. But what effects do the demands of transparency have on those called upon to be rendered visible, knowable, intelligible, and transparent? If "visibility is a trap", as Foucault has claimed, what decolonial political potentialities might inhere in Cole's proposition to fight the colonial imperative of transparent capture with the weaponization of strategic illegibility? Indigenous art-making and cultural production are already entangled with regimes of representation and legibility. As a result, this project takes shape around an interrelated consideration of indigeneity and Indigenous creativity as it is seen, heard, read, and understood. Although I privilege Indigenous perspectives in my analysis, the project considers the onto-epistemic effects of legibility and illegibility on creators and makers; and the impact these imposed codes have on Indigenous people in relation to the externality of settler-colonial power and the internal cohesion between Indigenous communities and nations.

Illegibility is not a telos of decolonization, but given the character of contemporary power, it must be considered within a matrix of creative tactics and strategies that contend with colonialism and its insidious forms of coercive inclusion, recognition, reconciliation and rule through freedom. As Raqs Media Collective write: "To be legible is to be readable. To be legible is to be an entry in a ledger — one with a name, place, origin, time, entry, exit, purpose, and perhaps a number. *To be legible is to be coded and contained*" (2010: 31, emphasis added). What

follows from this investigation of legibility and power, are questions related to the coding and capture, containment and confinement of Indigenous forms of life. In considering these questions, I turn to the work of cultural critic and media theorist Rey Chow, who writes that entanglement and mediatized apparatuses of capture/captivation characterize contemporary cultural production that is “thoroughly immersed in processes of commodification” (2012: 163).

Opacity and transparency provide an optic corollary to legibility and illegibility: not the *readable*, but the *visible*. Here, Martiniquan literary scholar Édouard Glissant provides an insightful analysis of colonial resistance in his lucid and clamorous call for “the right to opacity” for the colonized, not as an “enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy” but as the right to a singular multiplicity “that displaces the demand of difference for transparency” (Demos 2009: 123). In Glissant’s formulation, opacity needs to be both claimed and defended as the right to remain unknowable to colonial power. Following Byung-Chul Han, we can perhaps understand our contemporary conjuncture as one in which the “society of transparency” demands the absolute knowability, legibility, and visibility of the Other (Loock 2012: 3). “As far as I’m concerned,” writes Glissant, “a person has the right to be opaque” (Loock 2012). Under the surveillant gaze of Empire and the specific socio-technical relations produced through settler colonialism, the right to be opaque affirms the right of difference, of the Other, to remain unknown (if not fully hidden or camouflaged). Insofar as the colonizer’s power derives, in no small part, from surveillance, “opacity sometimes takes the form of simple concealment” as Celia Britton writes (1999: 19), in order to evade the colonial gaze. Celia Britton defines the stakes of this claim:

Opacity transforms the status of the colonized subject’s visibility from a source of vulnerability — the kind of vulnerability to which Fanon refers when he writes that ‘the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man — to the active production of a visible but unreadable image. (1999: 24)

I understand opacity, in this formulation, as both a practice and a site of potential resistance and resurgence. It necessarily implies a position of relative power for those who are able to maintain or assert their opacity as well as for those “who control the ability of others to remain opaque or be compelled to transparency” (Bettivia 2014: 5). Opacity, thus, becomes “a discursive strategy that acts as a space of resistance” — one that that must be defended and expanded against “the violence of transparency” imposed by settler colonialism and state power. To maintain ourselves and our opacity as “an irreducible density that evades comprehension and control” (Lindner and Stetson 47), Glissant suggests, can enable us to claim this resistant space as a generative site and praxis that “produces movements that open new and unforeseen configurations of difference” (1990: 30). This dynamic and contested relational configuration (of opacity/transparency and its textual correlate legibility/illegibility) provides a critical axis of theoretical and conceptual investigation in my project.

Identity and representation have been overcoded by power. As a result, opacity and transparency have increasingly become the subject of critical engagement in contemporary art and politics. “Should art works reveal their cultural origins and references or should they hide them?”, asks Ulrich Loock. “Do political claims still depend upon making identities visible?” (2012: 1). For many Indigenous artists, the political is formulated in direct relation to making visible both one’s cultural self-location and identity. This visibility, however, effects significant limitations in advancing collective political action. We remain trapped in a reactive, defensive political posture that presupposes the continued efficacy of identity-based claims to provide sufficient grounds for political transformation despite the fact that “the liberating possibilities of identity politics” appear to have “mostly evaporated” (Morris 2012: 106)

“Identity itself”, Adam Morris writes, “has become fertile terrain for gains in the accumulation of capital. Technologies of neoliberal capitalism have produced a new stage of accumulation: the accumulation of identity as capital” (Morris 2012: 106). Identity becomes capital when it is transposed into visible, legible forms that are commodified and appropriable. Insofar as Indigenous politics can be understood to have been brought into alignment with a broader shift toward what Coulthard terms the politics of recognition, Indigenous struggles for political representation frequently remain trapped in endless recursive circulation of politics staged and fought for in the realm of identity. At this new stage of accumulation, however, where identity politics has been evacuated of its liberatory potential, recognition-based political formations instead cast Indigenous struggle back within a discursive regime of production in which identity has become a mechanism of entrapment.

Resistance to this regime requires a revisioning of political claims toward forms of non-identity that escape commodification. Non-identity becomes generative when considered in relation to illegible, or opaque, forms of being that resist normative coding and capture. Opacity provides an important tactic of anticolonial praxis that “resists...attempts to assimilate or objectify it” (1990: 18). As The Invisible Committee, Tiqqun, Simon Critchley, and Alexander Galloway have argued, resistant subjectivities must now be constituted in non-identity, anonymity, or “becoming imperceptible” to power. I locate this transformative and emergent movement toward communicative praxis that resists being rendered legible, visible, and intelligible in opaque spaces and encoded flows. This is the space and the practice of *the cipher*. In hip-hop praxis and contemporary media forms, the cipher (or cypher) is a means of encoding transmission, encrypting information, and generating linguistic codes and flows that dwell in the darkness of shadowed forms. The cipher is an immanent creative technique and embodied

practice of decolonial becoming that generates new forms of community from within, while resisting interference from without; the cipher stages communicative action as a resistant language of collective creation.

Indigenous art and ciphered praxis effect disruptive techniques of intervention that break open and into the normative colonial order to transform it. In elaborating the transformative effects of Indigenous art-making that takes up an interventionist, decolonial praxis of rupture and disruption, I analyze Felix Guattari and Gerald Raunig's writings on transversalism; Jacques Rancière's writing on dissensus; and Fred Moten's poetic investigation of *the undercommons* and modalities of being and becoming that are activated *in the break*. From there, I trace theoretical connections between creative praxis, performance, and decolonial politics through an analysis of hip-hop's rhythmic, aesthetico-political practices of reconfiguration in the cipher, the remix and the break. Through an analysis of hip-hop's performative techniques of cutting, sampling, remixing and looping; and in Imani K. Johnson's writing on hip-hop "cypher theory" and Eduardo Navas' work on "remix theory", I develop concentric conceptual constellations that frame my research and analysis.

Opacities and codes, ciphers and breaks, flows and loops — these concepts are also creative practices; and they resound in my work in harmonic, if dynamic, tension with theories of emergence, becoming, virtuality, and potentiality. In a related constellation, I turn to the philosophical work of Deleuze and Guattari, Brian Massumi, David Bohm, Leroy Little Bear, and Jeff Conant in order to articulate a recombinant view of Indigenous art-making that is aligned with continuously re-emergent processes of prefigurative, transformative becoming; a philosophy of emergence that is constitutive of worlds that are never static, but always *coming to be*. I look to the decolonial potentialities evident in Indigenous creativity that suggest possible



pathways through a contemporary political landscape increasingly defined by blockages and impasses: colonial dispossessions, displacements, and disavowals of Indigenous presence. In order to survive and resurge, we adapt, intervene, interject, disrupt, encode, break, transform, and resist. “As First Nations People”, A Tribe Called Red state, “everything we do is political” (ATCR 2012). Creativity activates possibility, and with it, decolonial potentiality. To realize and reimagine what is possible, we must continually create.

## CHAPTER OUTLINES

In the following chapters, I explore the divergent, parallel and intersecting trajectories of these concepts in relation to the broad questions that have inspired the project. As Imani K. Johnson states, “To re-imagine the contours of our lived reality is to change those conditions and open up new possibilities of being” (2009: 31). This project attempts to traverse the terrain of the present in order to discover new possibilities of being, new constellations of becoming. In the flux of an indeterminate present, we might question Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that, “there is no need to fear or hope”, but we would be wise “to look for new weapons”.

Chapter Two, “The Masked Dance of Empire: Defiant Subjects and Creative Resistance”, traces a schematic outline of contemporary power and the production of Euro-Western and colonial subjects. I develop a critique of colonizing subjectivities and subjectivation, while critically interrogating contemporary forms of anticolonial resistance. I question the decolonial potentiality of non-identity and abjection as generative sites of strategic opacity; and look to Indigenous practices of critical desubjectivization that animate alternative imaginings of resurgence.

Chapter Three, “‘Resurgence Is Our Original Instruction’: Indigenous Art, Survival and Transformative Praxis”, expands my investigation into Indigenous resurgence, articulates a

critique of Indigenous and decolonial aesthetics, and examines resurgent practices in art-making and creativity. I explore the ruptural and transversal work of several Indigenous artists, consider the role of creativity in Indigenous societies, and conclude by suggesting that Indigenous art is enfolded in the implicate order of creation.

Chapter Four, “Encoded Flows: Indigenous Hip-Hop and Cypher Theory”, looks at Indigenous creativity through specific practices embedded in hip-hop culture, art, and music. I examine remix theory and cypher theory as interrelated creative forms that enable Indigenous artists to express themselves in the breaks and junctures effected through ciphered/encoded communicative forms.

Chapter Five, “The Next World: Notes Toward Decolonial Futures”, examines Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous artist collectives working in constellated form and connects the collaborative, creative practices of artists working across multiple disciplines and communities of struggle. I develop a critique of their interconnected futurisms to outline possibilities for decolonizing, *sovereign sovereignty* that embolden artists to hack new coordinates toward the present-future. I conclude with a provisional sketch of an Indigenous *politics of frequency* that is constituted in the infrapolitical performance of resistance through noise, resonance and sound.

Chapter Six, “Decolonizing Horizons”, provides concluding reflections on indigeneity as both a figure and cipher for the emergent becoming of decolonial potentialities, rhythmology, and movements of resurgent return.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Masked Dance of Empire: Defiant Subjects and Creative Resistance**

*Aqui estamos.*

*Resistimos.*

*We are here.*

*We resist.*

- Zapatista saying

## CHAPTER 2

# The Masked Dance of Empire: Defiant Subjects and Creative Resistance

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### INTRODUCTION

*In order to live well and fruitfully on this planet, humankind must sense the sacred in an experiential world beyond the human-created environments, information, and images that currently surround us. Finding ways to once again value experiential learning in the world seems the best antidote to an ideological abstraction that promotes an impoverished form of experience. The incredible technologies on which we rely so heavily have latent consequences we can recognize if we are paying attention—not the least of these is a growing insulation of our everyday lives from the living planet that sustains us.*

- Daniel Wildcat (Yuchi, Muscogee)

*For the most part, we were not interested in learning about things that did not concern us. We were happy the way we were. The sun came up. The sun went down. The moon is there as light in the night. The land is here and takes care of us. This was enough to know and understand.*

- George Blondin (Dene Elder)

The paroxysm of colonization is the negative being of subjectivity. Through the violent imposition of imperial ideologies informed by apparatuses of power and regimes of domination, subjectivity itself, the very self-consciousness and self-reflexivity of Indigenous being is transformed from a state of freedom, of human *being*, into a nihilistic frame of existence defined by self-negation, subjugation, even self-hatred. This is the true source of colonial domination: the coercive mutation of life as *being* into life as *subjection*. This is no trickster's game, no play of willing personas, but rather an enforced technological enframing of life ruled by racism, oppression and domination. The unmasked face of power is a revelation: its language is an apparatus of movement, a fluid appropriation of violence as a means of containing the world within its imaginary frame. Colonial subjects are not constituted as *victims* but as commodified

*byproducts* of an ideological rule that increasingly threatens to override the long-held natural laws of the world's Indigenous peoples. In practice, the violence of colonization has wrought destruction on the lands, lifeways and bodies of Indigenous populations but, more deeply, it has veiled our world in the gauze of its alienated gaze—driving us ever further from the traditional ways of being that have sustained our peoples and nations for generations. Empire has morphed and shifted over time, leading us to assume its gaze as our own, to misperceive the world, to imagine ourselves in its image, and to speak in its language. As paradigmatic modernist binary oppositions (colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed, etc.) have been eroded by new languages of recognition and reconciliation, cooptation and appropriation, *dissent* has itself been commodified, assimilated, and reabsorbed within an emergent neocolonial regime of *affective imperialism*, in which the language of Empire is expressed, under late capitalism, through emancipatory tropes of technological progress, universal networks of connectivity, individuated neoliberal rights and freedoms, and global democracy. Following Jim Tully, Glen Coulthard suggests that, within the specific context of Turtle Island, “contemporary colonialism works *through* rather than entirely *against* freedom” (Coulthard 2014: 156)

In this chapter I explore the ways in which forms of Indigenous resistance, subjectivity, and *resistances to subjectivity* (or critical desubjectivations) are constituted under Empire, in order to suggest potential pathways to negate domination and (re-) articulate Indigenous creative praxes of resurgence and decolonization that prefigure other worlds, possibilities, and ways of being in relation to the entanglements of Empire, colonialism and global capitalism. Against persuasive currents of affective imperialism that would both subject Indigenous peoples to ever-encroaching modalities of power, while abjecting us from subject positionalities and socio-political spaces within which agentic capacity is articulated *for power*, I argue that the conditions

of colonial abjection, dispossession and dislocation constitute sites and spaces of generative, if ambivalent, potentiality through which non-identity, critical desubjectivation, disidentification, and flight—performed through strategic opacities, anonymity, multiplicity and fugitivity— can be mobilized as creative forms of anticolonial resistance. Resistance predicated on the production of oppositional consciousness and direct contention with the state and its apparatuses (regimes of recognition/rights, etc), often reproduces the forms of domination it intends to oppose. But fugitive forms of defiant non-subjective liminality propose creative sites of mobility and movement — refracted spaces of opacity and regeneration activated through place-based forms of Indigenous decolonial praxis. By rupturing regimes of colonial legibility and command, and recentring Indigenous ontological alterities, such resistances have the potential to produce internally differential and multiple modes of affirmative, decolonial consciousness and praxis. Indigenous resistance can thus prefigure both the radical alterity of indigeneity and future anterior<sup>7</sup> forms of struggle that resist the reductive colonial framing of normative, reactionary and recognition-based identity politics imposed from without. Resistance can radically re-interpellate indigeneity in interdependent relation to forms of praxis that reconfigure the landscape of political struggle. To reimagine the terrain of the possible is thus to envision the transformative potential of *emergent or immanent becomings* realized in the transformation of the abjected Indigenous non-subject.

As such, I argue that contemporary forms of Indigenous resistance can inscribe new logics of articulation and new languages of communicative praxis through an activated politics of what I term *affirmative refusal*, or creative negation, that seeks to forestall its appropriation under Empire by creatively revitalizing decolonial imaginaries and foregrounding affirmative

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<sup>7</sup> Following Thomas Nail, the time of the future anterior is a conjunction of past, present and future predicated on “an event which will have been” (2012: 85). It is not a synthesis of the past and future (as an “event of becoming”) but, rather, the future anterior can be understood as “the creation of a new present” (2012: 85).

forms of re-emergent Indigenous presence. To evade being captured and coded by colonial regimes of visibility and technologies of surveillance, the resistant non-subject must take up *resistance in (and as) movement*: not as an escape to an imagined outside, but as a practice of moving — a fluid and continuous passage through the occupied psycho-affective and material terrain territorialized by settler colonialism. Resistant movement, thought here as resistance in motion, does not imply a delinking of indigeneity from ancestral connections to place, or from land-based practices and defense of our homelands and territories. Rather, it suggests a necessary strategic response to state power and colonial techniques of carceral control and technologized surveillance through which Indigenous peoples become subject to code, capture, and confinement. Resistant movement, or remaining in motion, implies occupying a conceptual position of refusal in relationship to the state and settler society; and an assemblage of tactics and strategies designed to resist the state's ability to see into, and thereby to contain and control, Indigenous life among individuals, families, communities, and nations. Our collective embeddedness in capitalist-colonial relations means both that there is no outside to Empire, and that we cannot completely flee entanglement but, rather, that we might instead seek possibilities for disrupting the normative interior order of the settler colonial world by re-envisioning and reconstructing new forms of Indigenous multiplicity as a decolonial world “in which many worlds fit”. This demands that subjectivity be transformed and no longer made subject to the nihilistic, alienating effects of colonization's psycho-affective forms of domination (at the personal level of consciousness) and the violent dispossession of being, life ways, and territories (at the structural and systemic levels of land and place-based existence). Indigenous resistances will continue be mobilized in contention with the state and with Empire as long as colonialism persists; but we must seek new languages of creative disruption to embolden us to re-imagine our



freedom and take action to achieve it. “For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die”, Glen Coulthard convincingly argues, “And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it” (2014: 173). So too, for colonialism, which equally requires our active participation in its eradication and the decolonial reconstruction of a society free from oppression.

## FORMS OF RESISTANCE

*No, I repeat. We are not men for whom it is a question of ‘either-or’. For us, the problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond.*

- Aimé Césaire

*Resurgence is acting beyond resistance. It is what resistance always hopes to become: from a rooted position of strength, resistance defeats the temptation to stand down, to take what is offered by the state in exchange for being pacified.*

- Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk)

Indigenous resistance is reciprocal: it is constituted from within a state of complicity with colonial power and domination. As colonized peoples, we are implicated in Empire; we have ingested and digested its assimilative values. Yet the excrescent nature of this process has left us diabetic, morbidly obese, starved for sustenance in a pathologically consumptive world. Our participation in hyperconsumerism has led to chronic deprivation. In forsaking what has sustained us, we are forced to face the consequences of the disease. Resistance is a restorative force forged from within spaces of psychic and material containment. In this chapter, I consider the ways in which Indigenous resistant subjectivities are coded and enframed by colonization, through what Kelly Oliver describes as “the colonization of psychic space” (Oliver 2004) and attempt to trace decolonial pathways toward new forms of subjectivity and community. The imaginary is a key site of our material and political struggle for decolonization on Turtle Island,

but decolonization is often problematically articulated as an futurity—a desired state-of-future-being denied to us in the present. In considering resurgence and decolonization with respect to the imaginary, however, we must be attentive to the ways in which contested forms of Indigenous resistance have the potential to reproduce colonial modalities of being and binary categories of identity and subject position (civilized/savage, colonizer/colonized, etc.) that we seek to overturn, or that were used to justify colonial dominance in the first place. For Indigenous peoples to mobilize effective resistances to Empire, I argue, we must affirm a radical politics of difference, alterity, and multiplicity. This requires (re)conceiving what resistance looks like beyond established conceptual frameworks and political practices of affective and ideological opposition. Is it possible to think *resistance* beyond such binary categories of being, without reference and recourse to colonial forms of subjectivity? Is it possible to think resistance beyond resistance? What would such strategies of regenerative action look like?

Although the given coordinates of anticolonial resistance qua resistance propose an, at times, appealing political and rhetorical image of anti-colonial contestation, resistance is often misconstrued as colonialism's *antithesis*—rather than as a prefigurative practice of creating and mobilizing alternatives. Indigenous resistance need not only be reactionary; it can affirm the urgent needs of *resurgence* and creative action which, in turn, have the potential to disrupt settler colonialism's frequently enforced demand to engage it on its own terms. As such, Indigenous resistance suggests the possibility of generating breaks in the normative colonial order that changes the terms of Indigenous engagement. Resistance, however, is frequently imperilled by its proximity to what it opposes. "Resistance", as Michel Foucault has noted, "is never in a position of exteriority to power" (Brown 1995: 22).

In his recent book, *On Resistance*, Howard Caygill offers an eloquent and systematic analysis of the term and concept. Resistance, he notes, is as a means of defying political oppression that is always expressed in a dynamic relation of power understood “in terms of force, consciousness, violence and subjectivity” (Caygill 2013: 10). Foundational to his analysis is the discursive framing of resistance as a *force* — one that founds, enacts and mobilizes the “very capacity to resist” (2013: 6). Resistance is thus the self-actualization of its own capacity to exist, as such. But resistance is neither a unitary concept nor one that has been conceptually and tactically deployed in uniform ways. Rather, resistance is a multivalent and fluid movement of forces, between power and its opposition, that is both “shaped by that which it opposes or complements” (2013: 13), and that simultaneously instantiates new political potentialities, performances, and trajectories. Caygill argues that resistance functions as the conditioning possibility for new forms of subjectivity and agency to emerge. Through resistance, a new politics becomes possible as a force for action, albeit one that is ambivalently co-constituted by that which it opposes. From this ambivalent nexus, multiple modalities of resistant subject formation and varied tactics and strategies of resistance action.

“The resistant subject”, he notes, “does not enjoy freedom; on the contrary, the resistant subject finds itself in a predicament that does not admit the luxury of possibility” (2013: 97). Yet the striving for such possibility, not as luxury but as necessity, is inextricably tied to the development of one’s resistant capacity, wherein “the capacity to resist occupies a subject that *must* resist” (2013: 98). In the absence of freedom, and explicitly under conditions of colonial domination, resistance necessitates the development of such capacity in direct response to “intolerable, repressive conditions”, but also in order break from them. “Yet this break”, Caygill argues, assumes various forms, reactive and/or affirmative, expressed in violent action,

vengeance or the vow and invention of community” (2013: 98). Under colonialism, reactive and affirmative forms of resistance are pursued in different, though often complementary, ways. Anti-colonial reactive resistance is characterized by its complex interrelation with violence, Nietzschean *ressentiment*, and psycho-affective experiences of alienation. In this mode, decolonization is conceived as an antagonistic battle between colonial and anti-colonial forces “under the sign of violence” (Fanon 1961: 452). Anti-colonial violence is figured as cathartic, necessary and inevitable, but not without consequences and contradictions. For Fanon, violent struggle becomes a means by which, the “resistant subject does not discover possibility and freedom, but their own necessity to resist” (Caygill 2013: 103). Yet in constituting this necessity, where resistance is articulated through violence, subjectivity risks collapsing into itself and melding with the Nietzschean subject of *ressentiment* into a mimetic form, in which the resistant subject is “at risk of adopting the qualities of its oppressor” (2013: 104). Reactive anti-colonial resistance thus proposes a reciprocal violence that, while perhaps morally justified, potentially reproduces the very forms of oppression it seeks to abolish, even while attempting to break free from the “intolerable, repressive conditions” of colonial domination. Affirmative resistance, by contrast, suggests a modality of possibility that links the capacity to resist with the capacity to imagine, conceive and realize alternatives to relations of domination and power. Echoing Césaire’s desire “to go beyond”, affirmative resistance links subjectivity to a project and practice of creativity, becoming and renewal:

through the invention of new forms of solidarity and subjectivity - the formation of new capacities to resist - through attempts *to escape oppositional logics* and the trap of escalation on the enemy’s terms. Exits from the course of the world through...communities and the invention of new capacities and subjects characterize these affirmative resistant subjectivities. (2013: 99, emphasis added)

Indigenous resistances figure and work within both modes, not always in opposition, through the development of a complex and complementary network of strategies and tactics. As Caygill

notes, Indigenous peoples constituted as “marginalized and excluded — and in many cases literally — hunted people who are being violently subsumed and expropriated by global capital [contribute] to and [are] supported by an emergent global capacity to resist” (2013: 183).

Affirmative resistance comes to be inscribed as both the affirmation of individual and collective capacities of resistance for its own sake — “as an end in itself” (2013: 186) — while also seeking to build networks of solidarity with other Indigenous peoples fighting to maintain their ways of life and livelihood. As such, “resistance itself” becomes “the weapon of resistance” such that it is actualized “not by mimicking or directly confronting an adversary but by avoiding struggle on terrains where it cannot win” (2013: 187). Taking the model of the EZLN and Zapatistas as exemplary of this modality, Caygill suggests that the Zapatistas prefigured new possibilities within this form of resistance precisely by exercising their capacity to mobilize on multiple fronts: both in direct militant contestation of domination, but also through imaginative methods of subversion, subterfuge, anonymity and aesthetic camouflage. The clandestinity of the EZLN resistance works to prevent infiltration and cooptation by the state, power, and Empire through its internally-oriented organizational structure and, simultaneously, through the externally-facing “deliberate performative contradiction of the public masking of the Zapatistas” (2013: 188). In their ambivalent interplay (and ironic play) on private and public, internal and external, modalities of resistance, the Zapatistas reimagined the terrain of struggle on both aesthetic and political grounds. By affirming their imaginative and literal capacity to resist, as its own end, made possible the narrative articulation of new stories of their resurgence and re-emergence. In the contemporary moment, this dialectical, dual modality of affirmative resistance (that affirms what is externally denied by power, while denying to power what it affirms internally) seems both logical and necessary. It is perhaps only in this complex and ambivalent

interplay of relational resistance that Indigenous peoples will be able to mobilize against power — by affirming indigeneity — without falling into a reactive modality that reproduces that which it opposes, or that allows its articulation to be assimilated and re-appropriated by Empire. Clandestinity, anonymity and subterfuge, it seems, remain essential elements of affirmative Indigenous resistance.

Nevertheless, the effects of articulating collective politicized identity (or potentially post-revolutionary, non-identity) remain to be considered. In her excellent analysis of the dangers inherent such articulations, Wendy Brown considers “the *discursive political context* of [political identity’s] emergence” (Brown 1995: 62) and the impacts this effects on subjectivity and subject formation. Quoting Foucault, Brown observes that “the disinterment of ‘insurrectionary knowledges’ of marginalized populations and practices”, such as those of Indigenous peoples, “are no sooner brought to light...and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation” by “unitary discourses” of power (1995: 63). To Foucault’s assessment of this assimilative or recolonizing danger, Brown states that the capacity for resistance and its articulation is, perhaps, insufficient: “whether or not resistance is possible is a different question from what its aim is, what it is for, and especially whether or not it resubjugates the resisting subject” (1995: 64). In other words, resistant capacity does not guarantee that resistant subjects will take individual or collective action in pursuit of liberation. In fact, resistance actions may in fact replicate and resubjugate the resisting subject to logics and practices of domination. For Brown, resistance is a question of both the capacity to resist and, importantly, “*the direction of the will to power*” that “only potentially, animates a desire for freedom” (1995: 64).

In the context of Western liberal democracy generally, and settler colonial society throughout Turtle Island in particular, liberal subjects are embedded and produced through an

assemblage of power relations that makes them vulnerable to the effects of Nietzschean *ressentiment*: “it is their situatedness within power, their production by power, and liberal discourse’s denial of this situatedness and production that cast the liberal subject into failure, the failure to make itself in the context of a discourse in which self-making is assumed, indeed, is its assumed nature” (1995: 67). *Ressentiment* is form of suffering produced by the subject’s situatedness within such relations of power and by the subjugating force of these relations on the individual, for whom such suffering becomes constitutive of identity as such. Under neoliberal, disciplinary society, “nakedly individuated” subjects are stripped of commonality and community and “the fragmentation, if not disintegration, of all forms of association not organized until recently by the commodities market...combine to produce an utterly *unrelieved* individual” (1995: 69) that is literally subject to suffering, and set up to fail.

This modality of subjectivation as subjection produces alienated, disaffected individuals who, in turn, seize hold of “politicized identity...as both a product and reaction to this condition” (1995: 69). Politicized identity becomes a mode of reactive resistance that is intertwined with “an effect of domination that reiterates impotences, a substitute for action, for power, for self-affirmation that reinscribes incapacity, powerlessness, and rejection” (1995: 69). Paradoxically, then, resistance is figured through politicized identity as a futile gesture toward recognition that seeks to displace the suffering of the individual through “identity structured by *ressentiment* [that] at the same time becomes invested in its own subjection” (1995: 70). Even while seeking an exit from this status, the liberal subject remains a defeated and self-defeating subject. This is power’s infiltration into the interior world of the subject; Empire’s masked dance that colonizes psychic space. Insofar as the subject wills its own subjection “in its demand for recognition as identity”, this modality of resistance does not effectively resist the conditions of its own

oppression. Rather, it is reiterated in, and therefore reiterates, the very “oppositional political formations” that are characteristic of “late modern democracy” and settler colonial society (1995: 74).

Against this pessimistic view of politicized identity as self-defeating, reactive resistance, Brown suggests that what is needed is the reinvigoration of a resistant creativity that can “rehabilitate the memory of desire” and orient action toward an emancipatory futurity. Brown seeks to liberate affirmative desire, where what the subject desires, or wants to be, can become “modes of political speech” that affirm the subject as perpetually and “potentially in motion” not as a fixed identity category of opposition (1995: 75). This subject in flux, in motion and movement, transforms the terrain of struggle from one oriented toward external recognition, or self-defeating subjection, to a form of resistant becoming, or becoming resistant, in which the present is taken up through affirmative gestures of non-identity, a deconstructable “not-I” that is “understood as an effect of an (ongoing) genealogy of desire” that “reopens [the] desire for futurity” that was foreclosed by resentment. Affirmative resistance becomes a transformative praxis of becoming other that demands evacuating the fixity of politicized identity — becoming “not-I” — by recovering the creative action within subjectivation itself: “a recovery of the moment prior to its own foreclosure against its want, prior to the point at which...sovereign subjectivity is established through...foreclosure and through eternal repetition of its pain” (1995: 76). For Indigenous peoples, what is the moment prior to the foreclosures of resentment and suffering subjection other than indigeneity? Indigeneity figures as a site of transit, a transformative pre-political force that re-opens and re-affirms our capacity to resist.



## ABJECTION, SUBJECTIVITY, SURVIVAL

*Living constantly inside an environment of our own invention, reacting solely to things we ourselves have created, we are essentially living inside our own minds.*

- Jerry Mander

*We are shadows, silence, stones, stories, never the simulation of light in the distance*

- Gerald Vizenor

Under rubrics of neoliberal global capitalism, colonialism, and technological progress, subjectivity emerges through the Eurocentric figuration of a subject produced by domination and control. The Western subject seeks conquest: to “remake the world” in its own image. This is the effect of a primary dispossession and redoubled alienation; the settler’s removal from the land and removal from ways of understanding their interdependent relationality with each other and with the world. Under capitalism, subjectivity is founded in alienation and violence that, in turn, re/produces a vision of the earth turned into property — a commodified world, a standing reserve. Capitalism creates a vision of this world and institutes a system of relating to it as a totalizing simulacrum, what Vine Deloria calls an “artificial universe”. The Western subject, however, is lost in artifice, inculcated in an ideological and material apparatus that fails to realize alienated spaces of simulation remain “dependent on the real world” (Wildcat 2009: 427).

Symbolic and subjective alienation are thus normative preconditions for, and constitutive effects of, Eurocentric subject formation, and of subjectivity as such, that have enabled estrangement, guilt and anxiety to be elevated to the status of a “perverse privilege” (Oliver 2004: 2) for the modern Western, neoliberal subject. Within this pessimistic portrait of estranged modernity, however, the *colonized* occupies a curious position of negative presence and injurious absence. Far from being immune to the effects of modernity’s universal commodification of the world,

colonized peoples and populations have been reduced to an *abject* status: “the inassimilable alterity of the determined faced with the omnivorous universality of Empire” (Tiqun 2011: 44).

Indigeneity is the abjected surplus of colonial subjectivity. To be abject, Julia Kristeva suggests, is to be neither subject nor object: “The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire...The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (1982: 1). The abject is that within which contains “dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” (1982:1). Abjection, however, is not simply a condition of being, it is an excess of being: “the abject is the excessive dimension of either a subject or an object that cannot be assimilated...it is simultaneously outside or beyond the subject and inside and of the subject” (Buchanan 2010: 1). This excessive quality of abjection is important in the context of our previous discussion of indigeneity mobilized in resistance to colonialism. Under colonialism, I claim, indigeneity is produced as intolerable, unassimilable excess: the abjected being of subjectivity. This is, in part, due to colonialism’s structuring of reality, within which Indigenous peoples are reduced to being Other. The excessive difference of indigeneity not only founds the self-definitional claims to the subject qua citizen status (and implicitly, the ontological subjective existence) of the settler as such, indigeneity also figures as a metonym for a radical alterity in which “the otherness of the other”, or the fact of indigeneity’s relational “strangeness” to settler ontologies, creates a framework through which Indigenous peoples come to be known, and to know themselves, under conditions of abjection. Insofar as the former is also used to designate and “describe the relationship between the self and the other, namely that part of ourselves (such as the abject) that we have disavowed” (Buchanan 2010: 12), colonization constructs indigeneity

as the disavowed part of the settler's existence, that which cannot be admitted. Indigeneity is thereby abjected from being; reduced to an inherent strangeness that must be dominated, subdued, and subjected to the violence of self-repression. Abjection, like indigeneity within settler colonialism, "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 1982: 4) by making visible a founding disorder: "that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (1982: 5). This is not an originary position for Indigenous people, it is a relation position of marginalization, exclusion, and disavowal imposed by colonialism. Insofar as abjection can be understood as a negative condition of being, however, it also contains a hidden generative potentiality. The settler's disavowal of indigeneity posits the site of the abject as both an unassimilable excess/surplus and radical lack of being. It is both a negation and an affirmation of Indigenous being that marks the impossibility for colonialism to contain indigeneity. As a site of simultaneous lack and surplus, indigeneity becomes a disruptive site of decolonial potentiality, in which its abject status can be re-appropriated and transformed. To mobilize the very radicality of Indigenous alterity is to affirm a praxis of decolonial becoming *in resistance to subjection*. Activating indigeneity as the revolutionary non-identity of the abject qua non-subject provides a prefigurative grounds through which to reimagine being Indigenous as an excess that resists both erasure (as negation/lack) and capture (as surplus). Colonial abjection becomes, paradoxically, an indeterminate site of regeneration from which to reclaim that within ourselves which we have been conditioned to disavow. For, indeed, if we can understand the production of subjectivity as an imperial technology of psychological violence and a technique of colonial domination, then, perhaps Coulthard's proposed "ethics of desubjectification...directed away from the assimilative lure of statist politics of recognition, and instead...fashioned toward our own on-the-ground struggles of freedom" (2014: pp) can be

found in a fugitive move to mobilize abjection as a subversive site of opaque transformation. Decolonization demands a “‘break’ in the forms of colonial subjection that have hitherto kept the colonized ‘in their place’” (Coulthard 2014: 115). This break is not only a practice of refusal, it is also a spatial relation that is produced in the distance between subject and object — the space of the abject. The abject proposes a modality of being (and implicitly, of decolonial becoming) in resistance to power; being that does not require a subject, as such, to perform itself and the irreducible force of its alterity against colonialism. Abjection suggests new possibilities for transfiguring resistance within an ethics of desubjectification and a renewed anticolonial politics of disidentification. Disidentification, following the late queer theorist José Muñoz, describes a passage from resistance that seeks external validation and recognition to one that works to take up that which “has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” — the disavowed, the abject:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality than has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (Colucci 2014)

Disidentification is not strictly a representational practice, it is a “transformative restructuration” of subjectivity. It is “a mode of *recycling* or re-forming” the space between subject and object status — a mode of transformative encounter with their concurrence and disjunction. In the interval produced between these axes of being, abjection proposes a strategically generative form of disidentification. As a new praxis of anticolonial resistance and becoming-other: abjection suggests the possibility of “a subject without subjectivity” (Steinweg 2011: 45). What is the subject without subjectivity but the abject? The revolutionary non-subject claims a contingent space of existence and an ontic occupation of visibility and intelligibility within which “*to*

*produce forms of visibility that are not easily identifiable and disperse the categories of an established order*” (Broeckmann 2010: 91, emphasis in original). Claiming these spaces requires a willingness on the part of the colonized to occupy sites of discomfort and forms of visibility that disrupt the “established order”. In the interface between what is identified and what is rejected, the abject remains visible but “not easily identifiable”. As a resistant modality, then, this is not a politics of total invisibility or disappearance, which would imply passive acquiescence to colonial erasure, but one that instead seeks to make ontological hierarchies established and reproduced by colonialism visible and brought into contention. To mobilize abjection against colonial subjection (through a qualitative and collective appropriation of disavowed, desubjectivized and excessive forms of life) is thus to claim the space between identity and nonidentity as the generative ground for both “the terrain of a new biopolitics” and new forms of decolonial political praxis:

what would a practice of self be that would not be a process of subjectivation, but to the contrary, would end up only at a letting go, a practice of self that finds its identity only in a letting go of self? It is necessary to maintain or ‘stay’, as it were, in this double movement of desubjectivation and subjectivation. Obviously, it is difficult terrain to hold. It’s truly a matter of identifying this zone, *this no man’s land between a process of subjectivation and a process of desubjectivation, between identity and nonidentity*. This terrain would have to be identified, because this would be the terrain of a new biopolitics....The subject would neither be the conscious subject, nor the impersonal power, but what holds itself between them. Desubjectivation does not only have a dark side. It is not simply the destruction of all subjectivity. There is also this other pole, more fecund and poetic, where the subject is only the subject of its own desubjectivation. (Agamben in Broeckmann 2010: 121)

If subjectivity is founded in the violence of dispossession, alienation, and domination, our task should not be to advocate for “the destruction of all subjectivity”. Rather, we should consider how processes of desubjectivation, disidentification, and non-identity can enable us to refuse becoming subjects in order to make space to become more fully ourselves. Abjection is not intrinsic to indigeneity, it is a condition of being produced in relation to colonization that compels us to re-appropriate and transform it.

Denied the “perverse privilege” of becoming subjects, Indigenous peoples are instead colonized by deformed images of liberation: regimes of recognition, inclusion, and participation that subjugate us to the very processes, logics, and conditions of our own subjection. To participate fully as colonial and liberal subjects, we must voluntarily sacrifice our foundational relationality with our lands and lifeways. But if “alienation from indigenous tribal identities, worldviews, and knowledges is marked by matriculation into...an ‘artificial universe’” as Daniel Wildcat has suggested (2009: 427), what kind of subjectivities does this produce? If subjects are constituted in sacrifice and substitution, what is at stake when the process of our subjectivation requires a denial-of-world to affirm the reality of its simulated surrogate?

In this transformation, affective imperialism functions by disavowing and substituting relationships of explicit domination for a symbolic language of pure representation: in which a play of masks and revelation conceals what Jean Baudrillard calls “a hegemony of world power” (2010: 34). This is the masked dance of Empire: where power disguises and effaces reality through processes of substitution and virtualization; where hegemony conceals the real through a “profusion of signs” that have been liquidated of all meaning and value. This “masquerade of power” illuminates profound differences in Indigenous and Western articulations and philosophies of power. As Taiaiake Alfred has suggested:

Nowhere is the contrast between indigenous and (dominant) Western traditions sharper than in their philosophical approaches to the fundamental issues of power and nature. In indigenous philosophies, power flows from respect for nature and the natural order. In the dominant Western philosophy, power derives from coercion and artifice—in effect, *alienation from nature* (Alfred 1999: 84).

But if alienation, artifice and parody comprise a new language of global power under Empire, how does this inform and affect Indigenous subjectivity? To what symbolic order does hegemony subject us?

## MEDIATIZATION AND UNCERTAIN SUBJECTION

*We may dream of utopian modes of communicative action as much as we wish – free of power, technological mediation, spatial-temporal compression, hegemonic-subaltern and pre-reflective subjectification. But if we wish to confront the historical situation in which we are thrown, then...we need to situate our question in the existing field of relationships.*

- James Tully, “Communication and Imperialism”

*“in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves”*

- Carl Sagan

In the mediatized present, we are faced with endless injunctions to *participate* (as in the case of social media platforms that compel users to reproduce themselves as subjects who write, represent, make visible, or speak). Although his injunction is primarily temporal, demanding one’s *time* (within an economy of attention), rather than a specified *place* of participation, Hardt and Negri have observed that, whereas in previous eras “political action was stifled primarily by the fact that people didn’t have sufficient access to information or the means to communicate and express their own views<sup>8</sup>...today’s mediatized subjects suffer from the opposite problem, stifled by a surplus of information, communication, and expression” (Hardt and Negri 2012: 9). This communicative surplus overwhelms us with limitless data and infinite communicative possibilities; and its temporal occupation of our attention becomes spatialized through a mediatized occupation of consciousness. Mediatization is an emblematic form of contemporary subjectivity in which we are “subsumed or absorbed in the web” (Hardt and Negri 2012: 10). In this view, the “mediatized subject” is not so much alienated, as perpetually *occupied* by the network:

the consciousness of the mediatized is not really split but fragmented or dispersed. The media, furthermore, don’t really make you passive. In fact, they constantly call on you to participate, to choose what you like, to contribute your opinions, to narrate your life. The media are constantly responsive to your likes and dislikes, and in return you are constantly attentive. The mediatized is

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that, within settler colonialism, Indigenous ‘political action’ is consistently ‘stifled’, silenced and delimited by State-sanctioned forms of violence and repression.

thus a subjectivity that is paradoxically neither active nor passive but rather constantly absorbed in attention. (Hardt and Negri 2012: 9)

To effect social transformation without becoming fully “absorbed” by technologically-mediated engagement, new subjectivities must be generated through collective action. “Facebook, Twitter, the Internet, and other kinds of communication are useful”, Hardt and Negri suggest, “but nothing can replace the being together of bodies and corporeal communication that is the basis of collective political intelligence and action” (2012: 11). Although we would be wise to question the incontrovertibility of this claim, it is clear that one of the subsuming effects of mediatization is to displace other forms of collective action. How, then, does this form of mediatized subjection come to colonize Indigenous subjectivity?

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler offers a provocative inquiry into subject formation that, echoing Wendy Brown’s investigation into the wounded subjects produced through politicized identity, examines “how to take an oppositional relation to power that is, admittedly, implicated in the very power one opposes” (1997: 17). But Butler’s eloquent analysis suggests that, for colonized and Indigenous peoples, subjection is always an ambivalent process in which the agency of the colonized is simultaneously subjected to power while being constituted “from precisely the power it opposes” (1997: 17). Subjection, Butler asserts, is an aporetic structure involving one’s “primary complicity with subordination” (1997: 17). Although this definition of subjection could be read in deference to colonial power and authority enacted as the source of agency for the colonized, Butler critiques the ambivalence at the heart of Western subject formation, in which the coming-to-be of the subject involves a dual move: “subjection of desire”, she claims, “require[s] and institute[s] a desire for subjection” (1997: 19). The subject, for Butler, can be “understood as a kind of *necessary fiction*” (1997: 66, emphasis added), such that it is only through the performance of subjection that the fictive persona status



of the subject qua subject can be said to emerge. Butler's depiction of the emergence of modern subjectivity as deeply conflicted and melancholic can be read as an acute rendering of Western consciousness — manifest, in this case, as a colonial (or colonizing) form of subjectivity that is deeply pathological in nature. Butler's critique effects an important inversion of the normative conceptualization of subjectivity under colonialism, in which the subjectivity of the colonized is pathologized as aberrant, wounded and degenerate. Butler argues that it is in fact, the colonizing consciousness of the Western subject that is psychically wounded, corrupt and pathological. *The foundational psychic structure of power and subjectivity is violence*: a repressive and nihilistic mode of self-injurious being that Western society and modernity have normalized, conditioned and accepted. In the context of settler colonialism, the normative order instantiates vectoral forms of coercive power and domination. "Settler-colonialism," Coulthard claims, "should not be seen as deriving its reproductive force solely from its strictly repressive and violent features, but rather *from its ability to produce forms of life that make settler-colonialism's constitutive hierarchies seem natural*" (Coulthard 2014, emphasis added). Settler colonialism not only naturalizes oppression, subjection, and subjugation, it acculturates us to violence.

Indigenous forms of subjectivity can be said to emerge, then, *in relief*, against the background of colonialism and colonial violence. For Indigenous peoples, however, there are catastrophic consequences to the "negative narcissism" (2014: 50) of colonizing subjectivities. Subjection distorts what it creates: presenting forms of false consciousness that masquerade as mirror images of the self; and a distorted, prismatic simulacrum of indigeneity that risks being (mis)taken for the real. This process is dangerous because it produces colonized subjects for whom subjection is constituted by internalizing a melancholic, alienated mode of being that reproduces conditions of psycho-affective dispossession as a fundamental estrangement from

Indigenous ontologies, spiritual practices, and connection to the land and the world. Having internalized external, neocolonial, and neoliberal languages of power, Indigenous peoples are inhibited from realizing autonomous forms of self-consciousness and subjectivity. As Empire extends its hegemonic purview into the networked global production, distribution, and regulation of biopolitical subjects, these logics infiltrate psychic spaces (in addition to relations/modes of cultural and material production), such that they colonize and disfigure the imaginative terrain of decolonial struggle, thereby curtailing our emancipatory possibilities and capacities.

The colonization of subjectivity and imagination has thus led Indigenous peoples to reproduce colonial power relations internally, through modalities of subjectivity that reiterate and reconstitute the conditions of our subjection by seeking political legitimacy through external approval and state sanctioned legitimacy. The countervailing forces of colonizing subjection, Coulthard suggests, has resulted in a thirty-year Indigenous self-determination movement in Canada that has been oriented almost exclusively toward external forms of validation “increasingly cast in the language of ‘recognition’” (Coulthard 2007: 1). The *politics of recognition* has produced an

expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to reconcile Indigenous nationhood with Crown sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identities in some form of renewed relationship with the institutions of the Canadian state. Although these models may vary in both theory and practice, most tend to involve the *delegation* of land, capital and political power from the state to Indigenous communities through land claims and self-government processes. (2007: 2, emphasis added)

The “delegation” of power and rights from the colonial state to colonized peoples maintains and reproduces systemic forms of dominance and asymmetrical relations of power. “The politics of recognition in its contemporary form”, Coulthard argues, “promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous peoples’ demands have historically sought to transcend” (2007: 2). Coulthard’s insightful analysis suggests that Indigenous demands for

recognition reinscribe a dialectical relationship with power that does not transform colonialism, that is easily accommodated by the state, and that fails to account for the “psycho-affective aspects of imperial power”. Such continued efforts can be understood as the mobilization of indigeneity as a politicized identity and fixed political category in precisely the form that Wendy Brown criticizes. This form of politics not only compromises the efficacy of Indigenous resistance but also the terms of struggle and the psycho-affective, imaginative terrain within which resistance is imagined and defined.

Having become instruments of our own dispossession and oppression, as Glen Coulthard suggests, following Frantz Fanon, Indigenous peoples must reconfigure the terms of our engagement with state-based political practices of recognition and move toward an “explicitly non-state orientation of...[a] radicalized politics of Indigenous empowerment” (Coulthard 2014: 17). In seeking liberation from colonialism and colonial *subjection*, we must advance a “radicalized politics” of movement instigated in a concomitantly *radical desubjectivation*—a critical, liberating “turn away” from the source of subjectivizing recognition. “[T]hose struggling against colonialism must ‘turn away’ from the colonial state and society,” Coulthard suggests, “and find in their own *transformative praxis* the source of their own liberation” (2014: 17). This transformative *turn* proposes a radical refusal to engage the terms by which subjection is produced and recognition is conferred. This break from the normative order, in turn, animates liberating forms of *self-recognition*. The transformative political praxis of self-affirmation and self-recognition is thereby constituted in affirmative forms of creative resistance. But might this “critical ethics of desubjectivation” (Coulthard 2014) also propose a new foundation for what Butler terms “being elsewhere”?

Is there a possibility of being elsewhere or otherwise, without denying our complicity in the law that we oppose? Such possibility would require a different kind of turn, one that, enabled by the law, turned away from the law, resisting its lure of identity, an agency that outruns and counters

the conditions of its emergence. Such a turn demands a willingness *not* to be—a critical desubjectivation—in order to expose the law as less powerful than it seems. (Butler 1997: 130)

To turn away from the law, the state, and Empire evokes Wendy Brown’s description of the practice of becoming “not-I” — an active and transformative gesture of critical desubjectivation as subjection. Affirming one’s inherent resistant capacity in the interstitial space between subjectivation and its foreclosure proposes a refusal and defiance of the normative determining conditions of the subject. This turning, this break from domination, opens into new potentialities: self-determined forms of Indigenous subjectivity and consciousness that become thinkable, conceivable, and possible in the break from colonial normativity. Indigenous alterity can thus be actualized and affirmed *in movement* away from predetermined identity categories and relational definitions. A decolonizing praxis of desubjectivation compels our complete revaluation of the terms by which Western subjectivity and the neoliberal subject are produced. Our challenge is, thus, to reclaim the terrain of the possible and redefine ourselves on our own terms. But what if, as Kelly Oliver writes, “within contexts of domination, colonization, oppression, and exclusion, subjectivity can be a product of conflict” (Oliver 2004: 81). Can indigeneity be mobilized as a generative *non-identity*, a *desubjectivating subjection*, that in conflict and contention with colonialism becomes productive, empowering and, ultimately, transformative? Or does the deployment of indigeneity (as individual and collectivized Indigenous practices of being/becoming) against and apart from politicized identity-based representational practices of resistance risk losing its *force* by virtue of the interior turning foregrounded in the form of its articulation?

## DÉTOURNING SUBJECTIVITY

One way to understand the generative aspects of this turn is through the Situationist practice and technique of *détournement*. The Situationist International (SI) define *détournement* as “the reuse

of preexisting elements in a new ensemble” (SI 1959). Détournement is fundamentally a practice of reappropriation and remix that generates new meanings from what it samples and repurposes. “In its broadest sense,” Raoul Vaneigem states, “repurposing means putting everything back in play. It is the act whereby the unifying force of play retrieves beings and things hitherto frozen solid in a hierarchy of fragments” (Vaneigem 1967: 237). For Vaneigem and the SI, “détournement is the most elementary form of creativity” (1967: 237). Although the SI deployed it most often in the context of remixed artistic and cultural forms, it was understood to be relevant to every aspect of social, cultural and political life: “The *weapon of repurposing*, first used in the sphere of art, has now been deployed in every sphere” (1967: 239, emphasis added). The SI understood détournement as both an aesthetic practice and a “weapon” in the struggle to reclaim and revision forms of life that had been coded by “the decay affecting the entirety of spiritual and material behaviour...made inevitable by the imperatives of consumer society” (1967: 238). Against this “decay”, the SI proposed détournement as a radical turn against the totalizing, destructive effects of life under Empire — capitalist encroachment into all spheres of social life and power’s colonization of the imagination and subjectivity. “With negativity embedded in factual reality”, Vaneigem states, “repurposing comes increasingly to resemble a tactic of supersession — an essentially positive act” (1967: 238). Détournement is positive and generative precisely because it turns toward the creation of recombinant meanings and possibilities. Vaneigem outlines three essential historical conditions that uniquely position the technique as a viable and revolutionary practice:

(i) As the swamp of cultural cultural disintegration broadens, spontaneous repurposing proliferates. The age of consumable values is remarkably well suited to the creation of ‘new signifying wholes’.

(ii) Nor is culture now an especially privileged sphere in this regard. Repurposing can be an integral part of all forms of resistance in everyday life.

(iii) Under the dictatorship of the fragmentary, repurposing is the only subversive technique that serves the totality. (1967: 238)

Although I would contest Vaneigem's claim that détournement is the "only" subversive technique of its kind, it provides an interventionist aesthetic and political form of resistant praxis that aims to produce meaningful social transformation. It is defined by conceptual/technical malleability, the ability to sample anything from anywhere, and to repurpose any signifying practice or social meaning to new ends. As a form of remix, détournement is both a ubiquitous feature of contemporary society and a technique of copying, appropriation, hijacking, and subversion. As McKenzie Wark notes, appropriation and recontextualization are widespread techniques in contemporary culture, however, détournement proposes the possibility of appropriating not simply images and representation, but power relations:

*Détournement* is already a widespread practice, but in a world that is never anything more than a plagiarism of itself, the would-be plagiarist treads carefully. That culture can be copied, that it is nothing but a copy, is merely a statement of fact. The trick is to turn the possibility of copying into an act that restores agency to the act of appropriation, rather than merely adding to the stock of worthless copies that surround us. The key to *détournement* is not to appropriate the image, but to appropriate the power of appropriation itself. (Wark 2009: 146, emphasis added)

"To appropriate the power of appropriation" requires that the practice effect "a negation of the value of the previous organization of expression" (SI 1959: 1). By devaluing previous value, *détournement* opens the possibility for new valuations to be made, for a revaluing a value.

In the context of Indigenous resistance, subjectivity and indigeneity (and perhaps even representational politics and resistance as such) must be détourned and recoded through an affirmative praxis of creative negation. By devaluing both the imposition of colonizing subjectivities and re-instantiating the inherent internal signifying power of indigeneity, thought and lived on its own terms, Indigenous resistance, figured as a turning to the *not-I* that is also a critical desubjectivation, *devalues* the terms of Indigenous subjection under Empire while subverting the concept of subjectivity and *revaluing* it according to our own practices and

lifeways. Bringing the detoured elements of colonizing subjectivity and indigeneity together in this way “can cause the loss of significance of each detoured element. Out of this devaluation, a revaluation via the organisation of another meaningful ensemble which incorporates it” (Wark 2009: 146) becomes possible. In this sense, the detournement of subjectivity, as a political practice of remix, offers a technique for Indigenous People to reappropriate the language of our subjection and reconfigure the terms of our resistance. But to appropriate this technique and apply it in service to Indigenous struggle is to effect a doubled *détournement* of the “weapon of repurposing”, itself repurposed and redeployed toward decolonization. Becoming non-subjects through this strategic refiguration of resistance is consistent with what the SI termed “ultra-*détournement*”, or “the tendencies for *détournement* to operate in everyday social life” where “gestures and words can be given other meanings” and there is “need for a secret language, for passwords” (Debord and Wolman 1956: 5). The refiguration of subjectivity is a praxis of *becoming-other* that is equally of becoming ourselves by detourning the terms by which we define and imagine ourselves, and by re/turning in the coded folds of Indigenous languages and knowledges an affirmation of our continued presence within and against the invisibility and absence of indigeneity in the settler imaginary. The ultra-*détournement* of subjectivity “might thus have two aspects: the construction of completely new landscapes out of the appropriated material of the old, and the redeployment of existing landscapes, in unaltered form, to new purposes” (Wark 2009: 150). This redoubled return occupies and transforms the spatio-temporal terrain of our becoming. It is a resistant and prefigurative act of remembrance, imagination, and creation that suggests a revolutionary future anteriority, already present, that will already and inevitably have arrived.

## ‘THE ARMOUR OF FLIGHT’: NON-IDENTITY, ANONYMITY, AND FUGITIVITY

*Knowledge of freedom is (in) the invention of escape, stealing away in the confines, in the form, of a break.*

- Fred Moten

Thus far I have explicated becoming other as a strategic movement away from the terms of subjection and subjectivity, considered through strategic refusals mobilized in abjection, disidentification, détournement, and opacity. Taken together, this resistant constellation can be understood as a modality of flight, both away from identity and identity politics as such, and in anticipation of an arrival to an elsewhere that is already here, if hidden from view. This elsewhere is a decolonial turn away from the romantic rhetoric of revolutionary subjectivity *represented* in direct contestation against Empire. “There is no ‘revolutionary identity’”, the French anarchist collective Tiqqun write:

Under Empire, it is instead non-identity, the fact of constantly betraying the predicates that THEY hang on us, that is revolutionary. For a long time now, there have only been ‘revolutionary subjects’ *for power*. To become neither particular nor general...to become imperceptible, to conspire, means to distinguish between our presence and what we are for representation, in order to play with representation...From the point of view of representation, singularity as such is the complete abstraction, the empty identity of the here and now. (2011: 43)

“To become imperceptible” is not to flee entirely from identity, but to resist representation under a rubric of identity political claims. As Adam Morris and David Harvey have noted, “movements, based essentially in the liberal tradition of individual freedom, are not dissonant with late or neoliberal capitalism” (Morris 2012: 106]. Such movements may in fact have the opposite effect than they intend. Under capitalism, Morris contends, oppositional politics have been co-opted by Empire’s masked dance:

capitalism has managed to accommodate resistant political movements organized around identity, smoothing over historical structural disadvantages by co-opting the rhetoric of equality. The energies of these movements have been captured by the ‘neoliberalization of culture’ and have thus lost their oppositional character. Rather than combat and subdue movements for recognition by minority groups, late capitalism deploys ‘culture’ to co-opt and commodify resistance, in order to rob it of its revolutionary potential. (2012: 107)



Empire captures and commodifies resistance by assimilation and inclusion. Its “omnivorous immanentization” absorbs politicized identities by rendering them visible, recognizable and, therefore, subject to the effects of disciplinary control. If Empire makes both identity and resistance transparent, to be brought into and under a regime of surveillant visibility and disciplinarity in which capital shifts from its strictly materialist aims toward “the accumulation of biopolitical information, or identity capital” (Morris 2012: 110). Identity capital inscribes subjects within state apparatuses of regulation and a normative order of commodified subjectivity and sociality. Thus figurations of opacity and anonymity surface in contemporary discourse as modes of political resistance and “aesthetic revolt against the era of navel-gazing narcissism that has hypnotized the subject of these regimes into passive or tacit acceptance of this new phase of ownership and control, where subjects and their bodies are now convinced to co-construct new technologies and tactics of control” (Morris 2012: 110.).

For anonymity to become a form of resistance to Empire, then, it must be actively deployed as a strategic intervention into the politics of appearance and representation. Anonymity must interrupt and recode what Alexander Galloway calls “the relationship between identification legibility” (2012: 110). For Indigenous peoples, anti- (or post-) representational resistance proceeds from and through a process of desubjectivation in which “the retreat of the person away from subjectivity and into a zone of anonymity...shields the person from the panoptic regime of biopolitical control” (2012: 110). This is a resistant detournement of subjectivity constituted precisely in the form of a retreat or turning away from Empire which “seeks to interiorize everything on its path to immanence” (2012: 115). In becoming unknowable subjects, we find the proposition and possibility that new forms of Indigenous subjectivity can re-emerge for themselves rather than for power. Our place-based knowledges and cultural,

ceremonial practices (Indigenous languages, songs, stories and ceremonies) provide the basis for the internal resilience of our nationhood and a protective barrier against external co-optation and commodification. Turning away from regimes of inclusion means discontinuing the representational performance of indigeneity for the consumption of settler society and the state. Returning to ourselves demands affirming resurgence as the source of our strength and protection. The transformation effected in the detournement of indigeneity and subjectivity is not only an aesthetic revolt facing outward to power, but an affective and powerful “force of self-valorization” (2012: 117).

Concealment marks the passage from a regime of visibility and capture, to one of motion, flight, and fugitivity. Anonymity is not an end in itself. Indigenous resistance, as it is most often articulated, is understood in precisely opposite terms: directed toward increasing the external visibility of political struggles and the legibility of Indigenous representations in every sphere of social, cultural, and political life. But this has not come without consequence. Where Indigenous forms of life and communicative praxis are commodified in order to be rendered consonant with state power and neoliberal governmentality, what autonomous spaces for Indigenous self-representation and self-valorization exist? We need to get comfortable with what Fred Moten calls “being in the break” (Harney and Moten 2013: 6). This first order refusal of the terms of representation, or the choices offered to us under capitalism and colonialism, enables us to inhabit — actively, creatively and strategically — the very sites and spaces of dispossession that we already find ourselves living within. Indigenous abjection, absence and invisibility can be radicalized as potentially regenerative non-identities in and through which to reclaim and repurpose indigeneity. This turn is not a retreat from resistant struggle, it is a tactical movement toward fleeting sites and forms of autonomy that makes possible the prefigurative decolonizing

praxis of resurgence. In his introduction to *The Undercommons*, Jack Halberstam reworks Moten's read of Fanon: "In order to bring colonialism to an end then, one does not speak to truth to power, one has to inhabit the crazy, nonsensical ranting language of the other, the other who who has been rendered a nonentity by colonialism" (2013: 6). This is not to suggest that the colonized must passively accept their abject status but, rather, that for the colonized to inhabit "the other world" of the abject and the nonentity can render new subjectivities possible in the world that already is; in the movement that fugitivity compels yet opens anew. Fugitivity, following Moten and Harney, is not reducible to the status of the criminal, oppressed, or hunted, but is rather a "being separate from settling" (2013: 11). The settler settles; and, in settling, colonizes. Indigeneity wants to move. Fugitivity thus performs an "undercommon oppositionality" that is figured in movement but not in removal. It demands that Indigenous peoples reclaim the possibility of fugitive motion throughout our homelands to reoccupy and reclaim our sacred sites and ceremonial practices, *in and for themselves*. The purpose of fugitivity is to rupture the normative order of representation; "to open the enclosure" (2013: 11) that makes new political practices and subjectivities possible. This is a symbolic and strategic necessity against the expansive enclosure of capitalist development, resource extraction, and the expropriation/dispossession of our territories. Power, like capital, desires smooth flows and unrestricted, uninterrupted access to spaces, minds and bodies. It welcomes *representations* of indigeneity that, in their commodified (non-resistant) forms, are mobilized within its apparatuses of control and circulation. But in the opacity of the anonymous, non-identity of anti/post-representational practice, indigeneity does not circulate; it moves *for itself* to re/occupy, re/claim and self-valorize. The masked dance of Empire is thus met with a masked anti-performance of indigeneity that refracts rather than reflects what it intends to transform. Opaque indigeneity, in

its fugitive forms, does not intend to mirror Empire's masquerade but to mock, subvert, and evade its techniques of subjection and disciplinary apparatuses of capture. Where decolonial movement can be found in "the armour of flight" (2013: 19), the masked movement of indigeneity "brings about a metamorphosis from collective silence to collective insurgency." (Conant 2010: 131)

The masking of Indigenous resistance seeks to protect the resisting figure and force and transform the conditions of colonial domination. "The true purpose of masks", Salman Rushdie writes, "as any actor will tell you, is not concealment, but transformation". Masked indigeneity can be mobilized as a fugitive decolonizing praxis of resistant non-identity. As the Zapatistas have shown, the iconic ski mask worn by Subcomandante Marcos and EZLN members, provides a rich, symbolic and poetic expression of Indigenous resistance that simultaneously performs a representational function, while tactically concealing the interior "face" of the movement and its membership. A flight from identity is never a flight from oneself. The Zapatistas actively embrace, detourne, and play with the contradictions of their clandestinity, which is simultaneously staged through the anonymity of the resistant's masked face and the mask itself, which offers an immediately recognizable, iconic image that represents the movement to the world. The Zapatista ski-mask is a dialectical even multiple figuration of the visible and invisible that resists and retreats from representation just as it instantiates it in hypervisible, commodified form. And the Zapatistas seem to enjoy the irony. As Jeff Conant suggests, "the ski mask, while playing on the trope of absence, of the disappearance of the individual, of the mysterious terrestrial darkness of the unknown other, becomes the established symbol of mass presence" (2010: 150). The mask both stands for and stands against representational politics. Its purpose is not to resolve these contradictions but, perhaps, even to expand them.

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To embrace indigeneity in the form of a radicalized non-subject-based politics, as I have suggested, requires abandoning subjection and embracing the non-identity that exceeds it. This is constituted not only in the disavowal of a *politics of recognition*, but in the strategic abandonment of a *politics of identity* as such (and as configured within liberal regimes of recognition, rights, and state-based, juridico-political discursive regimes). Modalities of resistance articulated in direct contestation and opposition to power are still necessary; however, following Coulthard and Alfred, equal attention and creative consideration must be given to non-state and non-representational political alternatives. Decolonization demands strategic engagement on all fronts. By recentring our political action, agency and subjectivity in radical turns, breaks, and the flux and movement of indigenous decolonizing praxis, Indigenous resistance can be understood as a revolutionary non-identity that refracts, rather than reflects, the masked dance of Empire. By seeking to move within and against its logics, rather than retrenching into the fixity of an oppositional, categorical war of identity positions and conventional, contestatory politics, this modality of resistance opens new possibilities of becoming. Insofar as Empire is readily able to assimilate such directly contestatory modes of resistance, oppositional forms of non-identity, strategic anonymity, and fugitivity/flight — hidden or concealed movements — unveil relations of power, while camouflaging internally intelligible Indigenous coded, subversive logics and dissonant, dissident rhythms from being coopted and absorbed by colonial power. This is a *becoming (for) ourselves*, rather than *being for power*.

In the realm of representation, where the hegemony and internal violence of power masquerade within languages of recognition, accommodation and inclusion, to “play with representation” (2011: 43) is a radical means of revaluing difference and resisting normative

signification. As I have suggested, for Indigenous peoples, resistance to subsumptive practices of inclusion enables a redoubled return to ourselves to reclaim other present futures: neither as Nietzschean “lord[s] of sufferers” (Nietzsche 2003: 90), nor as utopian “revolutionary subjects”, but as originary sources of our resistant and agentic capacity. To resist, to resurge, to transform, to decolonize. To prefigure other worlds and ways of being. These are the forms and goals of decolonial struggle.

A radical Indigenous politics of affirmative non-identity thus demands a revisioning of indigeneity that exceeds Empire’s attempt to control our lands, bodies and minds; it compels us to confront both our psychic complicity in a colonizing form of alienating consciousness and self-repression while enabling us to abandon a fundamentally colonial mode of being. Nihilism arrives from beyond; colonization conditions us to assimilate, accept and interiorize self-negation as though it were of our own making. Where Empire seeks to obstruct the development of critical consciousness it is imperative that we develop creative and psychic resistance. Only by identifying and abandoning the desire for subjection, colonial inclusion, and the external recognition/production of politicized identity can we begin to imagine our freedom.

This operative principle is evident in the regulatory, juridical functioning of the state. As Judith Butler, following Foucault, observes: “what we call identity politics is produced by a state which can allocate recognition and rights to subjects totalized by the particularity that constitutes their plaintiff status” (1997: 100). Abandoning the pursuit of identity politics enables us to pursue “a radical remaking of subjectivity formed in and against the historical hegemony of the juridical subject” (1997: 101). Foucault claims:

that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to liberate us from both the state, and the state’s institutions, but to liberate us from the state and the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (1997: 101)

Can we understand Foucault's designation "us" as inclusive of Indigenous peoples? Or is it comprised by a different set of state subjects? For Indigenous peoples, Foucault's important suggestion does not account for the double valence of *colonial subjection*—wherein we are produced as biopolitical subjects not only through state institutions of domination but also through state-sanctioned systemic forms of colonial racism, violence and territorial dispossession. "New forms of subjectivity" are, for Indigenous peoples, not located solely in acts of refusal. In addition to contesting state-produced forms of individuality and subjection, we must also participate in the revitalization of multiple, alter-, and differential forms of consciousness. New forms of Indigenous subjectivity will necessarily be rooted in *future anterior forms*: Indigenous ways of thinking, living, being and becoming that are antecedent and contemporaneous with the experience of more than five hundred years of external domination. In this sense, as Fanon argues, "decolonization requires disalienation, which is possible through a reevaluation of what it means to be human" (Oliver 2004: 42).

Where the settler subject sees only the objectification of the world as world, we must resist this transformative violence:

In order to transform the world into object, however, Being must be radically transformed through violence. The enframing technological subjectivity of man does not occur in harmony with nature; it is wrought out of warfare with Being itself. The war is fought through a '*radical revaluating of values*'. (Heidegger 1977: 95)

If we accept that, under Empire, life as war is an imposed modality of being, we will continue to reproduce the nihilism that limits our ability to realize alternative forms of life. The logical progression from ascetic modernity to postmodern nihilism is clearly at work in even the most radical non-Indigenous politics of our time:

It is only on this *total* terrain, the ethical terrain of forms-of-life, that the war against Empire is being played out. It is a war of annihilation...Empire is not the enemy. Empire is no more than the *hostile environment* opposing us at every turn. We are engaged in a struggle over the

recomposition of an ethical fabric...Here the classical, abstract conception of war, one culminating in a total confrontation in which war would finally reunite with its essence, is obsolete. War can no longer be discounted as an isolable moment of our existence, a moment of decisive confrontation; from now on *our very existence, every aspect of it, is war*. That means that the first movement of this war is *reappropriation*. Reappropriation of the means of living-and-struggling. Reappropriation...of the common: the constitution of autonomous languages, syntaxes, means of communication, of an autonomous culture—stripping the transmission of experience from the hands of the state. (2011: 68)

The language of ecological, political and ethical crisis is endemic to the present and has come to dominate the rhetoric of both resistance and Empire, operating in parodic form as a view of “our very existence, every aspect of it” (2011: 68) reduced to the bare life of warfare. Thus, while contemporary European anarchists might grasp at a movement to reappropriate authenticity through “the means of living-and-struggling” (2011:68), there remains a spiritual crisis at the core of this nihilistic radicalism — a Nietzschean lack, or “tremendous void” (Nietzsche, 2003: 117) — that encircles such politics: deprived of affirmative liberatory strategies, they continue to suffer from the problem of their own meaning. To limit the conceptualization of resistance to a structural reproduction of the trope of warfare as the only constitutive act of being, subjection, and survival is an unfortunate consequence of this melancholic mode of being.

To move beyond life lived as mourning, uttered only as a lamentation for what has already been lost, requires a fundamentally different “revaluing of values” (Heidegger, 1977: 95) than what Nietzsche and Heidegger have proposed. For Indigenous and colonized peoples, this revaluation requires an abandonment of violence and an understanding that, under Empire, we are already implicated in what Baudrillard calls a “catastrophic dialectic” of “involuntary complicity” (2010: 60):

Absorbing the negative continues to be the problem. When the emancipated slave internalizes the master, the work of the negative is abolished. Domination becomes hegemony. Power can show itself positively and overtly in good conscience and complete self-evidence. It is unquestionable and global. But the game is not over yet. For while the slave internalizes the master, power also internalizes the slave who denies it, and it denies itself in the process. Negativity reemerges as irony, mocking and auto-liquidation internal to power. *This is how the slave devours and*



*cannibalizes the Master from the inside*. As power absorbs the negative, it is devoured by what it absorbs. There is justice in reversibility. (2010: 59, emphasis added)

Colonial power is a grotesque figure of self-cannibalization: “At the height of its hegemony, power cannibalizes itself—and the work of the negative is replaced by an immense work of mourning” (2010: 62). This mourning is a ritualized act of grieving the lost *real* as capitalism moves inextricably “toward a total consumption of reality” (2010: 63). An Indigenous “revaluing of values” would thus consist in refuting the West’s problematic and appropriative misunderstanding of its “potlatch by excess” as “the potlatch of death” (2010: 69). For Baudrillard, the world is lost in a self-annihilating mode of symbolic exchange, which he describes in an intended subversion of the imperial gaze:

Our potlatch is indignity, immodesty, obscenity, degradation and abjection. This is the movement of our culture—where the stakes keep rising. Our truth is always on the side of unveiling, desublimation, reductive analysis—the truth of the repressed—exhibition, avowal, nudity—nothing is true unless it is desecrated, objectified, stripped of its aura, dragged on stage.

Indifferentiation of values but also indifferentiation to ourselves. We cannot involve our own death because we are already dead. (2010: 67)

Coloniality makes its self-annihilating logic visible self-consuming being that eats its own life and, still, this is “cannibalism accompanied by no spiritually meaningful ceremony or ritual” (Forbes 2008: 25). The Western “potlatch of death” is a parody of ceremony—a spiritually barren appropriation of an imagined ritual of self-negation. It is a self-contained exchange stripped of real relations and relations to the real—the apex of nihilism at the threshold of self-sacrifice. As Daniel Wildcat reminds us, in the face of this destructive force, “we must remember that we are trying to reconnect, in a deep spatial and spiritual sense, to the places where we live and the life systems that support us” (Wildcat 2009: 133). If we intend to rebuild the strength of our nations and peoples, we must find creative ways to resist subjection and root our actions in an affirmative revaluations of indigeneity.

“The great fallacy of Western thought,” Wildcat writes, “was to think of the ‘human condition’ as exclusively a condition defined by and about ourselves—a fallacy of omission engendered by a historical amnesia perpetuated by our increased habituation in manufactured spaces, places, and environments” (2009: 103), Indigenous revaluations of value begin with acts of remembrance and recovery. Vine Deloria reminds us of a story from Black Elk: “Crazy Horse dreamed and went into the world where there is nothing but the spirit of all things. That is the real world that is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world” (2006: 201). Under Empire, the shadow of the real is the mask; but the masquerade itself is a delusion. In attuning ourselves to the rhythms of Empire, to “the pulse of power [and] the fluidity of phenomena” (Tiqqun 2011: 204), we remember ourselves as the keepers of our places and homelands, our stories and songs. Perhaps, in listening to the land where Empire dances, we might come to see that, “in a sense, the revolutionary question is now a *musical* one” (Tiqqun, 2011: 204).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **‘Resurgence is Our Original Instruction’: Indigenous Art and Transformative Praxis**

*We have a  
responsibility to carry  
the fire, be it in our  
stomachs or on the end  
of torches.*

- Amiri Baraka

## CHAPTER 3

# ‘Resurgence Is Our Original Instruction’: Indigenous Art and Transformative Praxis

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*We are already here, moving.*

- Fred Moten & Stefano Harney

### INTRODUCTION

At its core, Indigenous art reaffirms our relationality with the dynamism of all creation. Art-making enables Indigenous people to intervene into dominant colonial discourses, histories, and regimes of colonial representation that have normalized our dispossession (Simpson 2011). By altering the terrain of our perceptual experience, creativity reconfigures not only given distributions of the sensible, but our relationships to place, space, and time. This movement marks an interruption of aesthetic normativity, an anarchic break from the fixity of Western aesthetics and colonial subjectivities, a movement toward the immanent flux of Indigenous presence. As an emergent motion, Indigenous art and knowledge are “created and communicated through the movement of body and sound, testimony and witnessing, remembering, protest and insurrection” (Simpson 2011: 96). Resurgence is animated by “creating a space of storied presencing, alternative imaginings, transformation, reclamation” (2011: 96).

Creativity is a foundational practice in Indigenous societies; and Indigenous art-making is a (re-)generative praxis of creation. Our creative forms are expressed through *action*: doing, making, and creating. Creativity, Leanne Simpson writes, “engage[s] in processes or acts to create meaning. Indigenous cultures understand and generate meaning through engagement, presence and process — storytelling, ceremony, singing, dancing, doing...creation requires presence, innovation, and emergence” (2011: 93). Indigenous art-making is not simply an

*assertion* of presence but a practice of transformative becoming that “requires the support of the spiritual world” (2011: 93).

In this chapter, I argue that Indigenous art-making is inseparable from decolonial struggle. Our art gives us power and expresses the dynamic force of creativity directed toward resurgent purpose. Indigenous art is thus an art of struggle; and this makes our world visible, speakable, knowable, sayable. Although it often finds expression in singular manifestations of individually created artworks, in songs sung by singular voices, or in performances staged by individual artists, Indigenous art is also inseparable from the communities in which it is birthed and to whom it returns. Does the Indigenous artist have the “privilege” of creating art for its own sake, based solely on individuated aesthetic interests and personal proclivities? Do community relationality and accountability delimit what the Indigenous artists can or should say? And to what extent does our inheritance of localized, place-based aesthetic practices and traditions enable us to create new forms, or restrict us to re/producing art within a narrowly-defined paradigm of essentialized “Indigenous” creative praxis? Is the binarism of so-called traditional and modern (or contemporary) Indigenous art still a relevant distinction, still a challenge? In this chapter, I argue that *resurgent aesthetics*, and resurgent art more generally, pursue new languages of creative expression and political struggle to open the field of possibilities available to Indigenous artists. I define resurgent aesthetics as distinct from existing formulations of “Indigenous aesthetics” (Leuthold 1998), in order to map distinct trajectories of Indigenous creative praxis that seek to embolden, rather than subsume, art within struggle. Resurgent aesthetics offer a distinct theoretical and culturally-grounded prism through which to re-centre Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies as an inseparable aspect of our creative movements for change. Resurgence mobilizes indigeneity beyond reified identity categories and reductive

instrumentalization in service to oppositional identity politics. As Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred states: “Resurgence is acting beyond resistance. It is what resistance always hopes to become” (2005: 151). “Acting beyond resistance” means moving away from the reinscription of reactive political subjectivities and toward new possibilities for transformation that, in process, practice, and action, connect us to the creative forces immanent to all living things. Resurgence is an original becoming.

## THE ART OF RESURGENCE

The art of resurgence seeks the re-coherence of our fragmented existence in a dynamic return to presence, unity, and holism. Resurgence rests on an aesthetic axis of transformation that, by developing critical consciousness, undoing colonial fragmentation, and revitalizing our nationhood, restores strength and re-coherence to our lives and our communities.

Conscientization is an inherent aspect of resurgence enacted as a decolonizing political praxis, in which critical consciousness can be mobilized through reflection and action “against the oppressive elements of society” (Freire 1977). To transform the oppressive conditions realized through conscientization, however, reflection demands strategic and sustained actions.

“*Consciousness of and action upon reality*”, Freire states, “are, therefore, inseparable constituents of the transforming act by which men [and women] become beings of relation” (1977: 40). Resurgence becomes decolonial conscientization in *practice* where “consciousness is never a mere reflection of, but a reflection upon, material reality” (1977: 41). Resurgent action must be transformative, or it risks replicating, representing, and simply reflecting the world as it is, rather than working to change it. Decolonial transformation, however, is an indeterminate horizon that can move in unexpected directions. Change is not inherently positive or liberatory. Resurgent conscientization directed toward cultural, political and spiritual action for freedom

becomes revolutionary when, as Freire suggests, it activates “ a process in which the people assume the role of subject in the precarious adventure of transforming and recreating the world” (1977: 56). Indigenous worlds of multiplicity and difference — our ways of being *in* and *for* the world, rather than alienated *from* and *against* it—provide us with a restorative foundation rooted in creative, cultural, and ceremonial practice. From within these practices, resurgence takes shape within a philosophy of re-emergence to envision the decolonial becoming of renewed forms of collectivity. Resurgence is, therefore, not simply a commitment to “cultural action for freedom”, it is also “an effort to negate the dominating culture culturally, even before the new culture resulting from that negation has become reality” (1977: 65). Thus we can understand resurgence as an art of *creative negation* that compels both a critical politics of refusal and revolutionary, self-affirmative forms of praxis. In conjoining conscientization, cultural action, and revolution, Indigenous resurgence works to overturn the dominating conditions of colonial oppression, while reasserting the integrity and validity of Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural forms, and aesthetics. In this sense, resurgence can be understood to support anticolonial struggle insofar as it is conceptualized and mobilized from within Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Creativity and art connect us with what Taiaiake Alfred calls “sacred memory” (2005: 131)—ancestral consciousness and collective inheritances in the long continuum of our survival. In this sense, resurgence should be understood “as practice, a dynamic of reflection and dialogue” (2005: 139). Alfred challenges us to consider what *becoming resurgent* means for our peoples in the twenty-first century. How are we to realize this interrelated movement of consciousness, bodies, thoughts, words, and actions? If “we are directionless on what to do now that we have succeeded in surviving” (2005: 148), as Alfred has suggested, can resurgence provide us with pathways forward, beyond, and away from colonial domination and erasure? We



are challenged, here, to direct our creativity beyond the status quo of survival and toward the revitalization of Indigenous land, life, languages, and creation.

To transform the world that *is*, however, we must contend with the oppressive conditions that threaten our continued survival. Survival, itself, presupposes continuity and resilience in the face of potential elimination. If colonialism has conditioned us to frame our lives and histories within stories and narratives of erasure and elimination, resistance and survival, colonial logics also dictate that we should simultaneously give thanks to our colonizers and “celebrate our survival” because it evidences our refusal to be erased and eliminated. Although we have resisted more than five centuries of genocidal and assimilative attempts to annihilate our people, however, should we be content with this minimal level of abject continuance? Under colonialism, to demand anything other than survival is, in effect, to expect too much. Colonialism allocates to us determinate places within settler colonial society, in the form of interlocking subjugated positions: abjection or assimilation, bare life survival or co-opted Aboriginal complicity. In the first form, survival is predicated on precarity, on the absence of a subject-position qua subject, the removal of agency, and the reduction of Indigenous life to its barren dependency on the historical detritus of colonialism’s legacy. This form of abjected survival conditions its own negation through “slow death” and incremental decline: the self-annihilation of suicide, lateral violence, obesity, sickness, social suffering and neglect. Survival, here, persists in a perverted and pathologized form constituted in the creeping progression of Indigenous absence; self-negating life in death, indigeneity is stripped of subjectivity and rendered as a passive victim position able to be blamed for its own suffering. We are routinely blamed for failing to disappear, for failing to recover, for failing to perform our remaindered liminal place in colonial society. Indigenous abjection, here, becomes a precondition for the

continuation of colonialism. In the second form, however, indigeneity is reified and valorized by settler society as something to be incorporated, insidiously celebrated, and appropriated. Survival is the celebration, by settler society, of Indigenous (or, rather, “Aboriginal”) people and culture as markers of a performed incorporative history that is no longer threatened by its colonial past, but is instead conscripted into the neoliberal, multicultural present.

Indigenous survival can be celebrated by settlers in recognition of the state’s conferral of rights to Indigenous peoples and in settler society’s consumptive tolerance of Indigenous culture relegated to performative politics, rather than insurgent movements for autonomy and self-determination. In this context, settler society “allows” Indigenous self-determination to be pursued according to the politics of recognition, through the acquisition of rights and economic benefits allocated according to our state-based citizenship and willing participation in colonial society. Indigenous peoples are implored to participate in fantasies of settler democracy, participation that, although willing, effectively renders us complicity in our own incremental erasure and assimilation. In the settler’s view, Indigenous survival is less a question of the independence of our peoples and nations, than one of inclusion, the ability for our political demands to be integrated, regulated, and accommodated within neoliberal colonial politics. In both forms of survival, indigeneity is configured within a biopolitical project of settler governmentality that defines and confines indigeneity to strict limits that, through either neglect and absence or in celebration of our successful assimilation, are determined by the state’s management of our lands, bodies, territories, and populations. “Settler colonial rule”, Glen Coulthard writes,

is a form of governmentality: a relatively diffuse set of governing relations that operate through a circumscribed mode of recognition that structurally ensures continued access to Indigenous peoples’ land and resources by producing *neocolonial subjectivities that coopt Indigenous people into becoming instruments of their own dispossession*. (Coulthard 2014: 156, emphasis added)

But another form of Indigenous survival persists in the interstice between these coded and cooptive forms of neocolonial subjection. The third space of Indigenous survival is resurgence. This resurgent current of survival is necessarily anticolonial and anti-imperial. “Survival demands that we act on the love we have for this land and our people”, Taiaiake Alfred states. “This is the counter-imperative to empire. Our power is a courageous love” (Alfred 2005).

The resurgent imperative of survival is decolonization: disentanglement and renewal, breakages and transformative cross cuttings of survival’s other forms. To reorder the world we must reconfigure the syntactical assemblages through which we conceive life *after* survival, rather than life *as* survival. When our “courageous love” is mobilized into action, survival recedes from its colonizing horizon and reemerges as a source of regenerative strength and power. As life rises and returns to presence, it overturns its covalent colonial forms: this reemergence marks the transposition of survival into resurgence. In other words, resurgence breaks survival out of its colonial enclosures in order to recover the mobility and autonomy of Indigenous life and creativity.

Creativity is captivity’s negation. It mobilizes fugitive crossings to remain in motion. But survival is complicated by an intermixing of resistant forms. Resurgence, then, compels both self-transformation and strategic dis/entanglement from the normative colonial order. For Rey Chow, entanglements are produced in “the collapse of neatly maintained epistemic borders” (2012: 10) that, in turn, destabilize their normative differentiation. Resurgence is thus constitutive of an active redistribution of “normative intelligibility” that is premised on confronting epistemic and ontological colonial entanglements in order to recover the rightful place of indigeneity within a reconfigured normative order, “including a realignment of the grids, sets, and slots that allow for...intelligibility in the first place” (2012: 11). The third space of

survival thus operates as a liminal conduit toward the renewed coherence of Indigenous existence. Entanglements are “linkages and enmeshments that keep things apart; the voidings and uncoverings that hold things together” (2012: 12), that code our embeddedness within colonial structures and orders. As we seek to disrupt and recode these structures, resurgence marks our movement from the creative transformation of survival into “evolving states of freedom” (2012: 12).

## INDIGENOUS & DECOLONIAL AESTHETICS

Language gives form to our perceptual reality; it is both communicative and aesthetic. That which we apprehend and experience in the world, we communicate through language, art, music, movement, stories, and songs. We create to communicate. We communicate to share. Aesthetic experience marks our immediate encounter with the world, in all its sensuous richness and fullness, in a dynamic, embodied interaction between the self, the senses, and others. At this interface, we interpret experience by giving voice, image, form and movement to that which is immanent to being. Aesthetic experience mediates the immediacy of ontological immanence. Aesthetics thus mark a relational contact point between the body, consciousness, and the “external” world. Communication, then, is the creative transformation of apprehended experience into communicable form. All communication is an interpretation, a mediation, a translation. And all communication is a creative act. “Aesthetic experience”, Steven Leuthold suggests, “is bodily, sensory; it is not just abstract and theoretical. Our value systems are rooted in our experience of the world” (1998: 6). Indigenous aesthetics are thus inextricably bound to the means by which Indigenous peoples apprehend, interpret and conceive the world: through place, language, ceremony and culture. Resurgent survival is the aesthetic reemergence of an absent and jettisoned ontological alterity, the return of indigeneity to presence. This return is a

becoming, a movement of force immanent to life itself. This force is the creative spirit. In all animate things, in all matter and forms, this spirit moves and dwells, in flux and movement, stirring all things into dynamic, perpetual motion. Creativity is the movement of this becoming as it achieves pitch and resonance (speed and space) to move at the frequency of perceived or imperceptible phenomena. Indigenous aesthetics are the sensible and ultra-sensorial movement of this patterned becoming of forces and flows that is latent yet present in all matter. Creativity is this dynamism in motion.

Art realizes these frequencies and forces in form: whether in object, motion, temporality, or ceremonial expression. Art is the interstice-borne expression of form/matter, space/time, and flux/becoming of spirit. Art is the dream of an emergence that conditions its own possibility. Creativity moves with, and is moved by, the energetic force of spirit that flows through everything — not as a current to be harnessed or a wave to be caught, but as the immanent self-becoming and transformation of the world as world. This is the essence of creativity in Indigenous epistemological understandings of existence. As Blackfoot philosopher and teacher Leroy Little Bear has written: “Blackfoot philosophy includes the idea of constant motion/constant flux, of all creation consisting of energy waves and imbued with spirit, of everything being animate, of all creation being interrelated, of reality requiring renewal, and of space as a major referent...All creation is a spirit” (Bohm 1996: ix). Constant flux is constant transformation. In this immanent becoming, or becoming immanent, the world as we apprehend and experience it is perpetual movement, a force already in motion. The dynamism of its motion is not a predetermined movement *toward*, but an interdependent cosmological movement *between* — passages from/through order and chaos that is continually reshaped and transformed by the mutually determining, creative interactivity of all living beings and matter. Indigenous

aesthetics, then, reflects creativity's *flowing through* forms into expression, art, language, and communication.

Indigenous aesthetics do not always inscribe, or circumscribe, a particular content to such forms, rather, they reflect a set of processes and practices that guide and constitute creativity as such. Rather than conceive Indigenous aesthetics and art-making as determinative of a specific identity, content-based articulation of collectivity, or deployment of indigeneity at the level of an intelligible politics (though much contemporary Indigenous art does precisely this), I am interested in the aesthetic praxis of creative production by Indigenous artists. This praxis is necessarily and inherently political, insofar as it exists and is produced in continuous relationship to colonial domination and Indigenous survival, resistance and resurgence. We should not assume that all Indigenous creative praxis effects a particular aesthetic or political end, though it occasionally does, but instead frame our consideration of Indigenous art as the manifestation and articulation of continuous energetic forces of creation. Art is inseparable from other aspects of life and consciousness. As a result, Indigenous artists, even when they produce commodified works or aesthetic objects, are guided by cosmological, epistemological and ontological alterities that frame creative expression according to its alignment with our own ways of seeing, doing, being and living in the world, rather than in terms of its aesthetic content. I draw attention to this distinction between form/content and process/praxis in order to elucidate both the specific subject positionality of Indigenous artists and the forces that drive creativity. Indigenous aesthetics mark the intersectional spaces produced in this distinction. "Intersections", Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes, "can be conceptualized not only as intersecting lines but also as spaces that are created at the points where intersecting lines meet. Spaces created by intersecting ideas, tendencies or issues are sites of struggle that offer possibilities for people to resist" (Smith 2012:

202). Space and spatiality, as the passage from Leroy Little Bear quoted above indicates, are “a major referent” in Indigenous philosophies. Here, we can understand the praxis of Indigenous art-making at the intersection of form and praxis, subjectivity and force, as creating spaces of emergence — spaces expressive of resistant, resurgent, and decolonial potentialities.

To effect this emergence, however, Indigenous artists derive strength from “the collective aspects of aesthetic experience, not just the formal properties of art” (Leuthold 1998: 16). Art is the relational communication of aesthetic experience that gives form to life within and beyond art’s formal properties. In contradistinction to usage of aesthetics developed within Western art history, which refers to “a regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possibly ways of thinking about their relationships” (Rancière 2004: 10), Indigenous art also posits regenerative, creative, and cosmological forms of communicative praxis. Indigenous aesthetics, then, cannot be thought as simply a “regime of identification” or an analytic system which which to categorize the formal properties and content of works, it must be reconceived in relation to all of creation. It is only from this expanded and inclusive perspective that the spatial dimension of Indigenous art can be rendered visible and realized in practice, process, and movement.

Led by Walter D. Mignolo and his colleagues at the Transnational Decolonial Institute, the emerging field of decolonial aesthetics “seeks to recognize and open options for liberating the senses” (TDI 2011) beyond the confining force of colonial modernity. Decolonial aesthetics is concerned, primarily, with “ongoing artistic projects responding and delinking from the darker side of imperial globalization” (Martineau & Ritskes 2014). However, as I have argued previously, within this emergent field of study, “decolonization is frequently represented,

conceptually, in expressions of ‘epistemic disobedience’ and discursive ‘de-linkings’ from colonial thought”, rather than in relation to the resurgent praxis of Indigenous artists engaged in material struggles for decolonization (2014: ii). While I focus less on the strict “materiality” of anticolonial struggle in this project, I do not share scholars of decolonial aesthetics preoccupation with a founding dialectic of Euro-Western coloniality and modernity. In the settler colonial context of Turtle Island, colonialism persists in new forms. Our engagement and consideration of so-called “decolonial” aesthetics, therefore, must not only take up questions of political and material struggles for decolonization, but also the aesthetic and onto-epistemic imperatives of Indigenous resurgence. For decolonial aesthetics to have relevance to Indigenous resurgence, it must contend with power and Empire. It must be expanded to include both Indigenous aesthetic frameworks, theorizations, and practices, as well as the disruption of borders, bordered thinking, and colonial axes of power. In Luam Kidane’s cogent and concise formulation, decolonial aesthetics must not simply “de-link” from, or “disobey”, the colonial gaze, it must break space and interject imagination. Decolonial aesthetics are not given, they must be activated; and they become decolonizing through creative practices that “inquire | map | ignite | incite | disrupt | transform | build” (2014: 189).

In my interview with her for this project, Leanne Simpson mapped an alternative taxonomy of Indigenous aesthetics drawn from a comparative investigation of Kuna and Anishinaabeg creativity that emphasizes shared use of four key elements: *repetition*, *duality*, *multi-dimensionality* and *abstraction*. I quote from the interview at length in order to mark Simpson’s discursive emphasis on a resurgent aesthetics that is derived from within Indigenous creative practice, rather than formulated in response to the imposition of a (de)colonial or Euro-Western framework:



A few years ago I was at a talk by Monique Mojica. She was explaining her process in working with a Kuna visual artist and in writing a play in pictographs. She talked extensively about Kuna aesthetics – *repetition*, *duality*, *multi-dimensionality* and *abstraction*.

That resonated in a huge way with me because I saw those aesthetic principles underlying all kinds of things in Anishinaabeg culture from ceremony, to storytelling, to art making of all kinds and I recognized that I was already using them in my practice and that I wanted to grow that. So I thought carefully about each principle. Repetition is interesting because as a writer, editors unfamiliar with Indigenous aesthetic principles, hate repetition. Repetition is a bad thing whether you are writing non-fiction or fiction. Editors look for it because the assumption is that the reader will get bored. Repetition is at the base of Nishinaabeg intelligence. We hear variations of the same creation story for our entire lives, and we are expected to find meaning in it at every stage of life – whether that meaning is literal (when we are kids), metaphorical, conceptual, within the constellation of our collective oral traditions or that meaning comes from lived experience. Our way of life is repetitive – every fall we collect wild rice. We don't take a year off because we are bored because aside from that being ridiculous, if we are not continually and collectively engaged in creating and recreating our way of life, our reality, our distinct unique cultural reality doesn't exist. If you're bored, frankly you're not paying attention.

I use *repetition* in my work a lot. It drives non-fiction editors insane. Fiction editors also don't like it, it always gets flagged, but I've been able to argue to keep it in. My short story "she told him ten thousands years of everything" has a paragraph that is repeated (with a gender change) because I wanted to cause the reader to pause. I wanted them to slow down and feel the weight of things. To read the paragraph again, only know, because it was further along in the story, to experience a different meaning. That's the trick with repetition – staying with it and letting it shift things a bit.

*Duality* is another principle that confuses western thinkers because they get it mixed up with dichotomy. Duality again is present in all of our stories and our ceremonies and our daily lives but it is not an either or situation. I understand it really as holism. In a couple of days, we are all going to experience the fall equinox where there is the same number of hours of darkness and light everywhere on earth. Now that's not what really happens – our experience of an equinox is mitigated by weather for one thing, but even if we understand that one day as a dichotomy, there are 363 other days of shadowlands, and all of it, is part of complexity whole – a whole that is constantly in motion and constantly changing.

I like writing *multi-dimensionality* into my work not because I'm trying to write speculative fiction but because that's how Indigenous worlds work – there is an organization of time and space that's different than the colonial world's and different plans of reality, the implicate order if you want to use that term is influencing and intertwined within our own continually created physical reality. I was recently asked to write Indigenous science fiction which coming from Indigenous aesthetics didn't make much sense to me. Our old stories have always talked about the future and the past at the same time. They've always co-inhabited the spiritual real, the birthright of the storyteller has always been to make the stories that come through them relevant to the current generation. A lot of what science fiction deals with – parallel universes, time travel, space travel, and technology is what our traditional stories also deal with.

*Abstraction* is also a grounding principle in Anishinaabe aesthetics. Again, I think western thinkers get this confused with extraction, but to me abstraction is different. Extraction is a cornerstone of capitalism, colonialism and settler colonialism. It's stealing. It's taking something, whether it's a process, an object, a gift or a person out of the relationships that give it

meaning and placing it in a non-relational context for the purposes of accumulation. Abstraction to me, is shifting the relationality to change meaning or to illuminate a different meaning.  
(Simpson 2014, emphasis added)

The constellation of Indigenous collective and creative practice is, as Simpson suggests, derived “from lived experience”. Our aesthetic systems are relational; and this elaboration of Indigenous creativity that emerges through aesthetic practices of *repetition, duality, multi-dimensionality* and *abstraction* connects the terrain of Indigenous art and politics to embodied and lived experience. Indigenous aesthetics are literal, metaphorical, and metaphysical. Our aesthetics can be mapped to the land, the body, the world, and other possible worlds.

Given this framework for understanding critical perspectives on *Indigenous, decolonial* and what I tentatively term *resurgent aesthetics* (elaborated later in this chapter), how, then, do Indigenous artists understand their creative and aesthetic praxis in relationship to politics? What makes Indigenous art political? I posed this question to many of the artists I interviewed and, although their responses and perspectives on the question varied, there was consensus that *being Indigenous* (as I suggested in the opening chapter) — living and surviving as an Indigenous person in the twenty first century — is *inherently* political. Given this inherent politicization of Indigenous existence within the context of settler colonialism, however, the Indigenous artists I interviewed prioritized key aspects of their creative practice as contributing to *the political* in Indigenous art: *intent, perspective, embodied being/survival, duty/responsibility, voicing/narrating personal and collective experience, and provoking dialogue*.

For Leanne Simpson, politics is a matter of “intent”, as it is for Tlingit/Aleut artist Nicholas Galanin, who sees the political as determined by “perspective” and cultural continuity: “We are responsible to those that have struggled before us. Empowering ourselves through creative voice, empowering our oppressed communities with knowledge, education, standard

human rights, clean water...For me, to live, hunt and fish on my home land [is] an act of defiance” (Galanin 2014).

As Pueblo artist Jaque Fragua states, the politicized practice of Indigenous art-making compels a responsibility to reciprocate and empower the community:

To be indigenous is to be radical. This is an inherent identity and life-way that opposes colonization or a Western way of being, because it's not focused on capitalism but more on community and environment. Thus, any creativity coming from indigenous people will automatically be radical. It may not be overt, but it's definitely in opposition of the status quo of the Western Eurocentric world...I am an artist because I live to create, it's what gives me peace and sustains my happiness. Because of this, I feel it is a gift and I feel obliged to return the peace I receive in art-making through community work. And what my native community needs most is awareness, acknowledgement and the understanding of why most of us live and tolerate poverty and abuse. I feel that through my experience as an artist that I can reveal the truth about my community and be a voice of empowerment through art. (Fragua 2014)

Connection to community and communal experience is also reflected in Anishinaabeg hip-hop artist Tall Paul's assertion that our lived experiences as colonized and Indigenous peoples compel us to tell the stories of our struggles: “We all have a story to tell in relation to that...Racism, oppression, genocide, inter-generational trauma; it's these lived and reactive experiences that make Indigenous art and music political. I feel like making music that speaks to these struggles is necessary because it is a huge part of who...and why I am the person I am” (Wenell Jr. 2014).

The members of Skookum Sound System, a west coast multimedia and transdisciplinary arts collective, concur. Wuikinuxv/Klahoose artist Bracken Hanuse-Corlett states: “Even if a particular piece isn't overtly political just making art as an Indigenous person is an inherently political act” (Hanuse-Corlett 2014). For Wiimpatja (Aboriginal Australian) crew member D'Arcy O'Connor, “politics is life” (O'Connor 2014), as it is for Heiltsuk artist and beatsmith Dean Hunt: “It goes back to...the heart of being Heiltsuk: understanding the environment, and living with the environment, speaking and acting in a good way...I just try and make art that

reflects who I am. When I bring it down to it, that's the message I'm getting across, it's...personal: change yourself first, help yourself grow. And then you can expand that to the larger community" (Hunt 2015).

Syilx and Secwepmecw singer and visual artist, Csetkwe Fortier, contends that her living presence is already a political statement that contests colonial logics of elimination and erasure:

*we're political whether we want to admit it or not. Whether we're aware of it or not. Just walking and breathing is a political statement.* But when we're able to, and especially when we express ourselves, when I express myself, whether I'm talking about current events and what's going on in that 'political word', or whether I'm talking about love, or heartache, or being a mom...I'm still making that statement. Because *I'm not really supposed to be here.* Our people went through a lot of suffering, and are still going through a lot of suffering, and I'm not supposed to be the strong, healthy Indigenous woman I am. I was meant to be broken down, if I was even...breathing. So in that respect, I feel like when I just wake up in the morning, and when I go to bed...I'm making political statements all the time! [laughter] Just by being who I am. (Fortier 2014, emphasis added)

Indigeneity is being who we are; it is an embodied practice of survival. Indigenous art is thus not only politicized within creative works, it is an expressive, dynamic, and living politics of resurgence.

## ART, POLITICS, COMMUNICATIVITY

The conjunction of art and politics is also taken up, in a non-Indigenous context, within critical theory and art criticism. Returning to questions regarding how the political is constituted within contemporary art-making, this discourse frequently invokes recurrent debates regarding the terrain of a discursive struggle to map either a politics of aesthetics and/or an aesthetics of politics. Delimiting the role of art in political struggle is a contentious question and, in the context of Indigenous art, has the danger of proceeding from a contradictory set of assumptions about the nature of political art, its objects and effects. Jacques Rancière has argued that, in recent years, "there has been increasingly frequent talk of art's having 'returned to politics'"

(Rancière 2010: 134). He suggests that much of this discourse and cultural production re/asserts an implicit (or in many cases explicit) belief in “art’s capacity to resist forms of economic, political and ideological domination” (2010: 134). However, he also criticizes what he calls “the *pedagogical* model of art”, which has the tendency to assume that the “political capacity of art” is to compel social and political action:

Art is presumed to to be effective politically because it displays marks of domination, or parodies mainstream icons, or even because it leaves the spaces reserved for it and becomes a social practice. Despite a century of critique — or so-called — directed at the mimetic tradition, it appears to be still firmly entrenched, including in forms of supposed political and artistic subversion. Underlying these forms is the assumption that art compels us to revolt when it shows us revolting things, that it mobilizes when it itself is taken outside of the workshop or museum and that it incites us to oppose the system of denouncing its own participation in that system. (2010: 135)

But *does* art compel us to revolt? Rancière argues that it does not, “but we continue to act as if reproducing a commercial idol in resin will engender resistance against the ‘spectacle’, and as if a series of photographs about the ways colonizers represent the colonized will work to undermine the fallacies of mainstream representations of identities” (2010: 136). In the context of Indigenous art, figured as resistant, this assumption also holds: it is often presumed that the representational inversion of colonizing images and narratives is sufficient, unto itself, to subvert domination and effect social change. As Rancière argues, this “logic of mimesis consists in conferring on the artwork the power of the effects that is supposed to elicit on the behaviour of spectators” (2010: 136). While there are moral and affective reasons to desire this outcome, it is the presumption of art’s efficacy at this register that Rancière importantly critiques. In his view, art’s efficacy “resides not in the model (or counter-model) of behaviour that it provides, but first and foremost in partitions of space and time that it produces to define ways of being together or separate” (2010: 136). Thus rather than focus critique on imagined or desired behavioural outcomes in the spectator, we should instead look to art’s role in its demarcation of unique (or

new) spatialities and temporalities, in his parlance, re-distributions of the sensible. Art's political efficacy, then, should not be a question of making the spectator active, but rather its ability to constitute politics as such, when it "breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the 'natural' order" (2010: 139). Against the dominant acceptance of political art and its presumption of activating effects, defines "the aesthetic regime of art" as a configuration "which itself stands in contrast to the regime of representational mediation and that of ethical immediacy" (2010: 138). The aesthetic regime is premised on a political possibility which is the invention of new subjectivities and collectivities through an "aesthetic rupture" that intervenes and reconfigures sensory forms and their possible effects (2010: 139).

Rancière calls this rupture dissensus: "a conflict between sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it" (2010: 139). Art and politics realize their transformative potentiality in conflict, in the break, "by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and inaudible, new distributions of space and time — in short, new bodily capacities" (2010: 139). Dissensual art marks a creative break out of the normative status quo; it is embodied, sensual, perceptual and aesthetic (of the senses). Art's generative capacity to break, or rupture, time and space thus marks its ability to define "a dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible" (2010: 140). The break makes the production of new subjectivities and processes of subjectivation possible. By reframing the real in this way, both art and politics produce an "aesthetic clash" with indeterminate horizons. To overdetermine art's political potential is to overcode it with intended effects that are neither self-evident nor guaranteed. To open the horizon of art's political potential into an indeterminate rupture of sensible experience, however, is to allow the aesthetic clash to express its dissensual discontinuities in their open-ended

fullness. Art's political efficacy cannot be presumed to anticipate the "reality of what it evokes" (2010: 146). As Rancière suggests, "There is no clear path from the viewing of a spectacle to an understanding of the state of the world, and none from intellectual awareness to political action" (2010: 143). If this were otherwise, projects of truth-telling and counter-representation would, in the context of Indigenous art and decolonial struggle, be ends in themselves. In this way, we can read Rancière alongside Indigenous ontological understandings of art in relation to the interdependent, fluid nature of existence, in which there is no outside of art, there are simply "configurations of what is given as our real, as the object of our perceptions and the field of our interventions" (2010: 148). This real is in continual flux, a reality shaped by continual cycles of renewal, emergence and resurgence, within which, Indigenous art-making figures as a political and creative practice "that invents trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said and what can be done" (2010: 149). Indigenous art is about relationality, agency, and becoming: the transformation of sense experience, perceptual reality and its objects, the dynamic reframing of the world, forms of life, and subjectivities.

I follow from Rancière's elaboration of art's generative political potential by examining Indigenous art-making as an aesthetic/political/communicative praxis that resists technical instrumentalization and reductive identitarian categorizations. I do not presume that Indigenous art can, will, or should compel the revolt of spectators but, rather, that it can effect the resurgent transformation of Indigenous consciousness and community by reconfiguring the order of what is knowable, sayable, visible and doable. But if "art is generally understood as a form of social communication", as Boris Groys suggests, where "it is taken as self-evident that all people want to communicate and strive for communicative recognition" (2008: 113), how might we understand Indigenous art not only as a mode of aesthetic and political communication, but as a

mode of striving for communicative recognition? From whom does Indigenous art seek recognition? Here we might turn to the recent work of Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou in *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, where they dialogically explore political performativity and “the costs of recognition within the struggle for survival” (2013: 80). Athanasiou observes that, under colonialism, the relation between recognition and survival is “always a question of surviving recognition” (2013: 78). As many scholars on the politics of recognition have demonstrated, the perilous pursuit of political recognition can have unintended and deleterious consequences. In resistance to the disfiguring effects of misrecognition and misrepresentation, Butler and Athanasiou explore the extent to which the desire for communicative (and other forms of) recognition can be realized without assimilating or subjecting the desiring body to “matrices of self-definition provided by regulatory power” (2013: 79). In other words, how can we seek forms of communicative recognition within and against normative apparatuses that create “spaces for articulating alternative versions of intelligibility” (2013: 79)?

Indigenous art is a primary means by which to articulate such alternatives and to question the very nature of intelligibility that is both governed by normative apparatuses and regulated by regimes of recognition. Art is a form and means of political communication that is embedded in language and community/society:

Language, including visual language, can be used not only as a means of communication but also as a means of strategic discommunication or even self-excommunication, that is, a voluntary departure from the community of the communicating... One can also wish to erect a linguistic barrier between oneself and the other in order to gain a critical distance from society. And the autonomy of art is nothing other than this movement of self-excommunication. It is a question of attaining power over differences, a question of strategy — instead of overcoming or communicating old differences, new ones are produced. (Groys 2008: 114)

These new differences are produced through art’s autonomous movement to reconfigure the normative order of the sensible. Aesthetic clash and rupture take form, in this instance, through a



use of language in “strategic discommunication”. By disarticulating or decoupling communication from its desire and drive to be recognized, Indigenous art pursues alternative versions of intelligibility that may be understood only by Indigenous peoples and communities. Under colonialism, “strategic discommunication” can thus provide a necessary form of Indigenous resistance that works “to expose and trouble the normative terms that regulate and accommodate identity-based claims, reducing politics to claims of recognition” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 87). The disjunction of communicability and recognition, as a movement *into* the opaque and illegible, can be a productive refusal of the hegemony of recognition. Indigenous art — in its myriad forms of visual art, music, dance, cinema, and performance — can become resistant and politically effective by mobilizing and self-valorizing this strategic illegibility to power. It can hide the visible, protect the speakable, and defend the untranslatable. Indigenous languages, ceremonies, and cultural forms are internally intelligible and coherent, but they do not require recognition from without to acquire meaning and significance. These fugitive forms reorder the colonial regime of the sensible by presenting an alternate internal order, or Indigenous coherence, that protects and hides, when necessary, our knowledge, art, ceremonial and cultural practices from appropriation, translation, recognition, outright theft and usurpation. “Creating has always been something different from communicating”, writes Gilles Deleuze, “The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control” (1990: 2).

MARIANNE NICOLSON: *WANX'ID*

Dzawada'enuxw (Kwakwaka'wakw) artist Marianne Nicolson explores the nexus of the seen/unseen in her powerful work, *Wanx'id*. Displayed as part of the BorderZones exhibition

held in 2010 at UBC's Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, *Wanx'id* is a series of glass boxes that Nicolson

blackened on the outside, mediating or prohibiting immediate visual access. The box designs are carved into the interior surfaces. If lit properly, the interior images faintly emerge on the outside of the box, like shadows or ghosts. On initial viewing the designs are only accessible if people lean over and peer into the space. This disrupts the traditional vertical viewing experience of work in galleries, where the viewer stands upright and looks with a horizontal gaze at work. It requests a more physical engagement of the body. (Nicolson 2010)

The full title of the series is *Wanx'id: to hide, to be hidden* — embodying its resistance to revelation. There are prohibitions on what can be known. In its opacity, the work refuses to communicate, refuses visibility and contests domination. *Wanx'id* creates “closed spaces of refuge” (Alfred 2010), in whose dark illegible interiority, the work's visibility remains hidden to the outside. Even illuminated, the work refuses to be recognized, offering only faintly emergent, liminal images that haunt their internal figuration “like shadows or ghosts” (Nicolson 2010). “The hidden meanings and subtly inscribed knowledge contained in our traditions of thought and speech and ceremony”, Taiaiake Alfred suggests, “should never be presented facilely or made accessible to every gaze cast upon them” (Alfred 2010). *Wanx'id* represents the unrepresentable in its absence. Nicolson's work, modeled after a bentwood box that she saw at the Portland Art Museum that “was painted on the interior and bare on the outside” (Nicolson 2010), marks a precise conjuncture of strategic discommunication that, by refusing recognition, effects a generative aesthetic rupture and creative dissonance. In its simple architecture of darkened transparency and ghostly legibility, *Wanx'id* marks a communicative call to self-recognition, by and for an Indigenous audience, “‘about us’ as well as ‘for us’” (Nicolson 2010). Self-excommunicated from the colonizing gaze of spectatorship, in the coded darkness of its own light, *Wanx'id* reveals itself by hiding.

Yet the boxes are not completely closed. On closer examination, as the viewer moves toward and above them, she is able to see inside. The designs glow from within, and historical photographs of the artist's home community are placed at the bottom of the boxes, facing up to the viewer. The outside is not closed off from the gaze. The viewer must only navigate to a new position. From above, the viewer's gaze changes; the darkened box reveals its semi-hidden secrets. Once revealed, this momentary rupture and intentional discommunication is translated and transposed back into intelligible, visual speech. In this translation, the existing order is restored. The break is momentary, a flash in consciousness. But is this enough to demarcate a space of new political possibility and potentiality? The fracturing of a work or performance's legibility to a non-Indigenous audience marks an interruption of the expected flow of sense experience and access, but in its passing, the appropriative gaze is allowed to return.

Appropriation is commodification; and commodification is enclosure. Thus to enclose a work completely within its own meaning and signifying system would, in effect, redouble the colonial logic in a mutated form. Yet, this is precisely the practice of much Indigenous art-making in which, in the context of ceremonial practice, certain works and objects were not produced to be seen but, according to cultural protocol, were to remain hidden. In hiding, in fugitivity, this art remains inaccessible to, and incommensurable with, colonialism. And there is value, for Indigenous peoples, in works and performances that refuse to be illuminated, that refuse the capture of visibility. Yet to remain invisible is equally amenable to colonialism. In this conjunction of revelation and hiding, at the interstice of external access and internal protection, Indigenous art-making turns, unable to resolve this contradiction. Although there is potential strategic benefit for Indigenous peoples to return to and to reaffirm forms of art-making and creative praxis that resist cooptation by ciphering knowledge and aesthetics; this puts Indigenous

art in the precarious position of internalizing the logic of erasure and invisibility that it often seeks to overturn. As a result, the fugitive aesthetics of such forms are located in the continually contested space that defines the colonial contradiction for Indigenous artists: how much should be made known, made visible? How much should be revealed? And what should remain hidden, ciphred, and protected, internally ordered in relation to our own communities and nations?



Figure 2.1 Marianne Nicolson, *Wanx'id* (2010).



Figure 2.2, Marianne Nicolson, *Wanx'id* (2010, detail).

Works, performances, objects, songs and images that confront this contradiction work not to resolve it, but to explore its inner workings and expand its potentialities. Colonialism's injunction is always to reveal, to lay bare, to gain access, to discipline and enforce a regime of visibility on Indigenous peoples and lands. Denial of such access, whatever the reason, is uniformly construed as a willful obstruction of the normative expectations of settler society. Access and vision are demanded and required; indeed, they are the very biopolitical techniques by which the State surveils, disciplines and controls Indigenous bodies, territories and consciousness. To this extent then, we can position the strategic illegibility of Indigenous art-making within a broader political project to disinter histories of Indigenous cultural resistance from their museum-ified usurpation, dispossession and forcible relocation and confinement to the carceral spaces of the anthropologist's home, the museum, or the gallery. Against this continuing

project to render all forms of indigeneity representable, and therefore accessible, to settler society, we must also retain space for the defense of the opaque and the hidden, which must not be labeled and offered up for recognition and protection, like so many day-glo flagged sacred sites. Our internal orderings of cultural production, which already constitute unique and varied systems of Indigenous knowledge and understanding, do not require settler society institutions or the state to catalogue and codify them in order to be rendered intelligible. Indigenous artists must cautiously and continuously navigate this tension in the form and coherence of their work. For whom does it communicate? To whom does it speak? And to whom is it accessible?

For Nicolson, the series is about investigating and challenging the intended viewer and audience for the work while recognizing that, in her own community and cultural context, a spectrum of opacity exists that determines what is to be shared and what is to be hidden:

[I]t always comes back to that notion of audience. Who is your audience? *[C]ertain ideas are appropriate to present in certain forms, and other ideas are better off restricted to a different audience. Audiences are very diverse...always be strategic...because any type of expression is a communication. So, you have to be aware: what are you communicating and who are you communicating to?*

I know within our own traditions we have *degrees of opaqueness*. So, certain things are generally known, other things were not generally known, and some things were very much kept hidden...it's *so dynamic...you always go into it very conscious of your context—and what's your objective*. What is appropriate to share at this point in time and what is appropriate to hold back? (Nicolson 2014)

Nicolson's creative practice is notable for its strategic engagement with questions of legibility, representation, and communicative forms. Subversion, she suggests, is often needed when engaging with the non-Indigenous art world, institutions, multiple audiences and communities:

If someone approaches me and says, 'we're interested in your work, we'd like you to propose something for this'...I'll look at it, *politically*, and I'll think 'how can I strategically use this'? If I can't strategically use it, then I *won't do it*. [laughs] And sometimes it's difficult...I come up with political pieces that are extremely subversive. And their political message, it's almost like you engage with them first and then you realize that 'oh, there's a political message'. But I'm highly conscious of that and I create those pieces to exist in those spaces in that way. So, *it's very, very strategic...But, always with...the idea of advocacy and the notion of strengthening Indigenous peoples position within this country; helping to bring understanding to these issues, but I never*

*want to just create a piece of candy for people to chew on. [...] That's how I approach every single space that I deal with. Can I actually do this? Is it possible to do this? And I do make compromises at times because I think: it's better for me to soften this up a little bit and then come in under...create the work and then I can say whatever I want once it's made. So it's always strategic and thoughtfully considered. (Nicolson 2014, emphasis added)*

## TRANSFORMATION, TRANSVERSALITY, AND THE PERFORMATIVE EVENT

For Indigenous artists, the paradox of singularly narrating claims to presence has the twofold effect of generating representational visibility that, on the one hand, gives force to self-assertions of cultural ownership and legitimacy and, on the other, renders the work or performance readable, visible, and knowable to the gaze of spectatorship. Indigenous art-making that disrupts these definitional categories of experience, however, has the potential to produce new forms of performative, aesthetic and artistic encounters. Here we can turn to an insightful praxis proposed by Felix Guattari in the form of transversality. As Anja Kanngieser notes, Guattari proposed “transversal movement” as a way of opening space “for the self-determined engendering of collective and singular subjects” (Kanngieser 2012: 266); it is a path of flight that opens into the creation of new subjectivities, relations and worlds. Gary Genosko summarizes Guattari’s concept of transversality as follows:

Transversality belongs to the processual subject’s engendering of an existential territory and self-transportation beyond it. The key concepts involved are: *mobility* (traversing domains, levels, dimensions, the ability to carry and be carried beyond); *creativity* (productivity, adventurousness, aspiration, laying down lines of flight); *self-engendering* (autoproduction, self-positing subjectivity), territories from which one can really take off into new universes of reference. (Kanngieser 2012: 270).

Transversality is a space and movement of potentialities in which “a flash of common praxis” makes possible new collective and individual subjectivities. As Gerald Raunig writes:

Transversality...implies a precondition for evolving new forms of collectivity, or rather, *for dissolving the opposition between the individual and the collective*. There is no longer any artificially produced subject of articulation...transversality is linked with a critique of representation, with a refusal to speak for others, in the name of the others, with abandoning identity, with a loss of a unified face, with the subversion of social pressure to produce faces. (Raunig 2003: 4)

Indigenous art that disrupts the distribution of the sensible so as to reconfigure it, seeks such transversal moments in collective expressions and movements, or trajectories, toward freedom. Indigenous art embedded in resurgent praxis, then, animates collective desire for the recuperation of other worlds by making sense of creativity's often inchoate flows within a transversal synthesis of mobility and self-affirmation. Kanngieser suggests that transversality proposes "an ontology of 'becoming'" which "foregrounds movement, processuality and transformation" (2012: 284). The transversal is that which traverses the ground of art and politics in a pre-political movement through aesthetics and affective intensities. Kanngieser grounds this in the context of "the performative encounter" which, she suggests, instantiates this transversal movement to and through aesthetic and political forms. For her, as for Guattari, the potency of the transversal moment and movement, as political praxis, is that it has the potential to "affectively engender 'unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being'" (2012: 275). It is an open process of becoming with indeterminate coordinates or horizons. As such, its pure potentiality conditions its productive politicization to the extent that, as Claire Bishop states, transversality's "constant flight into and across disciplines, [puts] both art and the social into question, even while simultaneously reaffirming art as a universe of value" (Bishop 2012: 278). For Guattari, Kanngieser, and Bishop, this transversal movement to break open the relationality between the aesthetic and the political, to reconfigure their ordering and sensibility, is the constitutively generative act that does not seek easy resolution but, instead, seeks to redefine relationality as such. "Art and the social", Bishop suggests, "are not to be reconciled, but sustained in continual tension" (2012: 278).

Transversality opens into a space of potential, though indeterminate, transformation. It is a space of process and practice, a relation of becoming, though not of a becoming toward, rather



a becoming of new subjectivities and collectives. Toward this coming new community, we can see that Indigenous art, in and for itself, conditions the possibility of new emergences. It is perhaps not inherently transversal, however, under colonialism it effects a similar ruptural reconfiguration of the common, and of common sense. Indigeneity figures, here, as the irruption of the shadow or silhouette into three dimensionality that may yet refuse a definitive form. In this becoming solid, or becoming of its mass, its movement from flight into form, indigeneity appears as a transformation of coloniality and “the terrains of both aesthetic and political regimes, institutions and categories” (Kanngieser 2012: 275). Indigeneity is the shadow-form of the Indigenous artist or artwork, as such. And vice versa. It is Indigenous presence that becomes solid in the transversal movement, moment and break. In this sense, the transversality of Indigenous art is its instantiation of the becoming-Indigenous of art; its horizon is the resurgent freedom of decolonization. The transversal “acts as a mutational force” (2012: 275) that opens Indigeneity into a field of possible articulations by transforming the relation between the artist, the event, and the performative encounter. The categories of the political and the aesthetic are opened up by the presence of transversal indigeneity, which stages an encounter with the colonial, and moves to disrupt normative expectations and externally imposed codes by generating “a perpetual contradistinction between power and dissidence” (2012: 276). Such an encounter can be a staged rendering of an event-based or site-specific performance, however, it can also be understood as a meta-encounter between indigeneity and colonialism. Indigenous art’s unique transversality is to stage, repeatedly, a double encounter between both the work or performance and its potential audience and participants, and between the symbolic figuration of indigeneity and the colonial, as such.

The Indigenous artwork or performance is subtended by an implicit re-presencing, re-staging, and repetition of the colonial encounter; in which Indigenous art holds the colonial-social and the colonial-political in “sustained continual tension”. Indigenous art both resonates and resists this nominalization according to a representational regime of standing in and standing for indigeneity as category of being and identity, however, it cannot escape this contradiction and tension within colonialism. Indigenous art can be understood as transversal in this context to the extent that it “renders visible the vectoral nature of subjectivation, showing that there is no fundamental subject form but rather movements and compositions” (2012: 276). Indigeneity disrupts the universalizing hegemony of the Western subject qua subject by proposing, through art, music and the performative encounter, an entirely different set of recombinant movements and compositional possibilities. Indigenous alterity activates transversality’s transformational capacity by breaking open the categories of subjectivity and the assigned/expected political positionality of Indigenous peoples as co-constitutive of colonial relationality. This is an inversion of dominance, an encounter that stages a metapolitical process of dissensus, in which the hegemonic narratology of colonialism is precisely what is drawn into question through the aesthetic presencing of indigeneity that disrupts, while making possible, new aesthetic forms and practices. This metapolitics, Rancière suggests, is “the destabilizing action that produces dissensus about what is sayable and thinkable in the world” (Bishop 2012: 36).

Indigenous art traverses the shapes of the sayable and thinkable colonial world, while shadowing them with its emergent three-dimensionality. The encounter staged in this interstice is a breaking of rules, a necessary “destabilizing action” that works to unsettle the binarism and bifurcation of settler colonialism rigid hewing of indigeneity to a mythological and misrepresented past. Against fixity, against the law, indigeneity appears in an embodied form

whose mass is, like dark matter, traversed by the shadow of the work and the shadow of its author/creator. The Indigenous artwork is always twinned by the presence of a silhouette: the known shadow of indigeneity that haunts the artist, or the author's that haunts the work. In both instances, what is at stake is the configuration of the known and unknown, the knowable and sayable. Where colonialism renders indigeneity to the realm of shadow and absence, Indigenous art works to recuperate the mass of bodies and the energy of presence while resisting, when necessary, the harsh glare of determinate light. In other words, Indigenous art is an exemplary transversal movement of the known and hidden that performs becoming in "a liminal moment acting to rupture the everyday narrative to bring about...change" (Kanngieser 2010: 119). It is an emancipatory gesture toward liberating indigeneity and the Indigenous artist from the aesthetic strictures of colonialism, a movement of forces and intensities that seeks freedom from determinate form. Indigenous art that makes possible these creative and transversal breaks, affirms "art's inventive forms of negation as valuable in their own right" (Bishop 2012: 284). By critically intervening in a momentary occupation of consciousness, whether in viewing a work or staging a performative encounter, Indigenous art reclaims the alterity of indigeneity as a mediating force between aesthetic experience and political possibility. Indigenous art is the becoming aesthetic and the becoming political of indigeneity; it is the radical proposition of an inventive becoming that does not seek recognition in form or practice but, rather, to reorder the conditions of its own visibility and potential communication.

Not all Indigenous art is ruptural, fugitive or transversal in the ways I have described, however, Indigenous art-making, as creative praxis, presupposes this latent or emergent political potential. What interests me in exploring Indigenous art according to this method is to excavate and reveal this potential as a precondition for the emergence of art's decolonizing and liberatory

possibilities. As such, I suggest that what differentiates Indigenous art and creative praxis from non-Indigenous forms and aesthetics is its capacity to realize (implicitly or explicitly) Indigenous ontological and epistemological perspectives on art in relation to creativity and the world. We can think of this conjuncture as one that characterizes the fundamental interrelationality of/in existence posited according to these perspectives. As Leroy Little Bear has suggested, Indigenous philosophies are rooted in a conception of the world and existence as consisting of energetic movement, flux and transformation: “The idea of all things being in constant motion or flux leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the world. If everything is constantly moving and changing, then one has to look at the whole to begin to see patterns” (Little Bear 2000: 78). Patterns are cycles, and cycles, like revolutions, are turnings and returns. “Creation,” he suggests, “is a continuity. If creation is to continue, then it must be renewed” (2000: 78). Art is an essential part of creation and creative renewal. Indeed, the dynamism of existence, its flux and motion, are the essential force of creation and, therefore, of creativity. Indigenous art is grounded in an understanding of, and an appreciation for, the cyclicity, relationality, dynamism and balance of all life. As a result, Indigenous art-making cannot be extricated from this holistic conception of existence.

Creativity is immanent to being insofar as immanence provides the conditioning possibility of transformation inherent to all creation. “Immanence,” as John Krinsky suggests in a radically different and more overtly political context, “is another way of speaking about this potential to change the world” (Krinsky 2013: 111). For Brian Massumi, “To be at all is to become, actively creative” (Massumi 2011: 2). Immanence is always a gesture of creative becoming and becoming creative. As this relates to art, Massumi suggests that “Artistic practices that explicitly attempt to be political often fail at it, because they construe being political as

having political content, when what counts is the *dynamic form*. An art practice can be aesthetically political, inventive of new life potentials, of new potential forms of life, and have no overtly political content” (2011: 54, emphasis added). The question of immanence as it relates to art, aesthetics and politics revolves or turns on this question of “dynamic form”, which I understand not as the aesthetic content of a work or performance, but rather as the determinative (though indeterminate) becoming of art. Massumi continues:

In art, we see life dynamics ‘with and through’ actual form. Or rather, we always see relationally and processually this way, but art makes us see that we see this way. It is the technique of making vitality affect felt. Of making an explicit experience of what otherwise slips behind the flow of action and is only implicitly felt. Of making the imperceptible appear... Art is the technique for making that necessary but normally unperceived fact perceptible, in a qualitative perception that is as much about life itself as it is about the things we live by. (2011: 45)

This is not suggest that art and life are inseparable, for they are unique and distinct experiences, but rather to suggest that art instantiates life dynamics and makes explicit experiences, or forms of life, that would otherwise remain indistinguishable or “imperceptible”. Art does not simply make life visible, however, it renders the dynamic force of creation affectively perceptible. Art-making is a practice/process of uncovering and becoming, of composing and transforming reality; a praxis of “forms of life in the making” (2011: 169). If this making is conditioned or grounded by the immanence of being, it is itself composed of a dynamism, a movement of potential becomings, from and through which the creative force of spirit can be channeled toward transformation.

“When one looks at reality through Blackfoot eyes”, Leroy Little Bear suggests, “one cannot help but think of the Creator’s creation as art. One cannot help but express wonder at the constant movement and flux. One cannot help but conclude that all is about creative possibilities” (Bohm 1996: xiv). The nature of our existence is creative transformation and becoming; we are enfolded in the “*implicate...unbroken internal relatedness of all things*” (1996:

xxxii). We participate in this interrelatedness by becoming creative, by creating, by moving within a continuum of flux to realize new forms and possibilities for life and creativity. These recurrent cycles of transformation are natural and present throughout existence. In this sense, as physicist David Bohm observes, “it can be seen that nature is a *creative process*, in which not merely new structures, but also new *orders of structure* are always emerging” (1996: 12, emphasis in original). Emergence is the movement, or immanent becoming of nature, to which Bohm recognizes that “many artists seem to understand the primary role of movement quite naturally and spontaneously” (1996: 95). Paraphrasing Leonardo da Vinci, he summarizes this emergence as follows:

- 1 Movement gives shape to all forms
- 2 Structure gives order to movement (1996: 95)

Art, like matter, forms and is formed by the structuring of movement. In performance, as in music, movement is embodied and transposed into a syntactical arrangement of gestural or acoustic patterns, arrangements of aesthetic and perceptible experience. Art is the pursuit of creative possibilities that arise and recede from view, the horizon of becoming that is immanent to creativity. In this reciprocal relationality between movement, forms, structure (order) and chaos, we see the emergent syntax of an Indigenous paradigm of resurgent aesthetics, in which Indigenous onto-epistemological understandings entwine with creative praxis. Indigenous art-making, then, can be understood as the dynamic interplay between elements of existence manifest in creative force, or spirit, and comprised by:

- *immanence/becoming*
- *flux/movement*
- *transformation*
- *renewal/re-emergence (resurgence)*

Indigenous art is enfolded in this implicate order of creation. Creativity is the movement of art's becoming. As I have suggested elsewhere: "Art is the contentious dance of the spirit that, like a spark, 'shines across, a burst of light, a tiny explosion in the sky'" (Martineau and Ritskes 2014).

#### CHRISTI BELCOURT: *WALKING WITH OUR SISTERS*

In 2012, Metis artist Christi Belcourt had a dream. She envisioned a new project to honour the lives and families of the thousands of Indigenous women in Canada that have been murdered and disappeared -- a project to resist the gendered violence of the settler colonial state. It would become the largest work she had ever produced. The project, *Walking With Our Sisters* (WWOS), "is by all accounts a massive commemorative art installation comprised of 1,763+ pairs of moccasin vamps (tops) plus 108 pairs of children's vamps created and donated by hundreds of caring and concerned individuals to draw attention to this injustice" (WWOS 2015) is a collaborative touring installation that is scheduled to be exhibited in more than 30 communities across Turtle Island from 2013 until 2020:

Each pair of vamps...represents one missing or murdered Indigenous woman...Together the installation represents all these women; paying respect to their lives and existence on this earth. They are not forgotten. They are sisters, mothers, aunties, daughters, cousins, grandmothers, wives and partners. They have been cared for, they have been loved, they are missing and they are not forgotten. (WWOS 2015)

As a socially engaged work that is co-created with hundreds of collaborators from across Turtle Island, *Walking With Our Sisters* is a provocative intervention that prompts audiences to reflect on the processes involved in its creation, circulation, and representation. WWOS intentionally blurs the line between art and ceremony so as to disrupt them: it is both about ceremony and a work that involves ceremonial objects and practices that are reorganized/recontextualized according to local protocols in each community where it is installed. In the form of its exhibition and in the continuously regenerative process of its collaborative emergence and creation, WWOS

embodies a resurgent aesthetics (immanence, flux, transformation, and renewal) that is co-determined by, and responsible to, multiple communities and audiences. I asked Christi how she understands the project in relation to community:

I'm excited by WWOS because art has become the vehicle to accomplish ceremony. And I love the way the lines between the two have been blurred here. In my personal life I don't separate my beliefs from my art, or the practice of my beliefs. But sometimes in the 'art business' we are required to leave part of ourselves at the door. This is the first time I feel that it is truly all one and the same and I don't have to define which part is which or deconstruct it. [...]

WWOS, for me at least, is challenging me to do things differently than I have been. We are challenging the concepts of space and sacred space and ceremony. We are blurring the lines between art and ceremony and asking why do they need to be separate? Reminding people that our protocols are not rigid and our ceremonies have since the beginning of our existence been adapted to the needs of the people. To be able to go into mostly non-native run spaces and get them to agree to let us take the lead, governed with Indigenous traditional knowledge and not compromising on this point, I am always so amazed at how open the people have been, and how willing they have been to go along with what we say needs to happen.

And then there are the audiences who come. We have them walk on cloth and remove their shoes, not because we don't want the cloth to get dirty. It is because we are creating 'body memory' and we know the act of removing shoes and walking on cloth with medicines under it, means they are forced to walk slowly, softly and carefully because the cloth is not carpet and it doesn't sit securely on the floor. What memories will they take into their bodies as they interact with the materials in the installation – the tobacco, the cloth under feet, the smell of sage? Will act of bowing their heads, reverently, whether they know it or not as they look at the floor to view all the vamps change them? The act of honouring and remembering our stolen sisters happens in real time, as people walk through. *This art is not meant to be permanent. The art and ceremony is in the doing. The audiences are as important as the artists here.* (Belcourt 2014)





Figure 3.1 *Walking With Our Sisters*, Thunder Bay (2014).

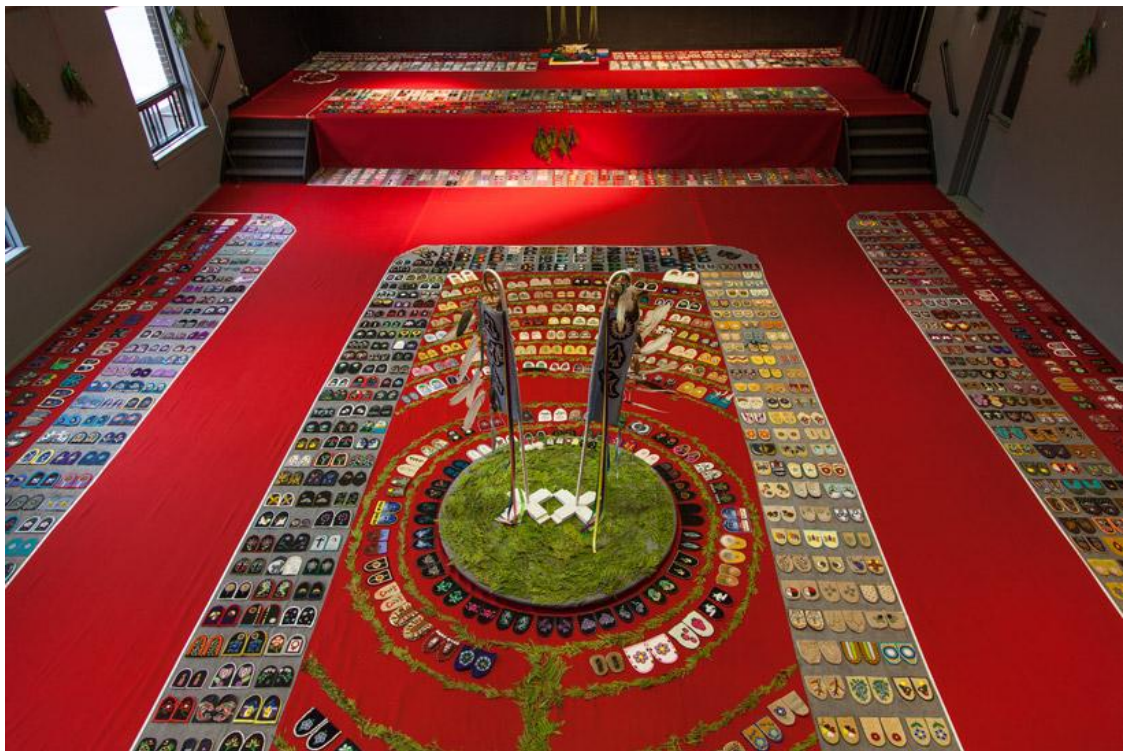


Figure 3.2 *Walking With Our Sisters*, detail (2014).

*Walking With Our Sisters* is propositional. Belcourt's intervention is to suggest potential lines of becoming that may or may not emerge following an encounter with the work. Rather than prescribe a set of intended effects, however, WWOS opens up a field of potentialities for action and reflection, memory and empowerment, that emerge immanent to the project and its process. From the outset, the work was not simply collaborative, but created by a nascent and geographically distributed community. From May 2012 to July 2013, Belcourt put out a "general call" to anyone who wanted to contribute a pair of moccasin tops. By the closing date of the call, Belcourt had received 1725 pairs (WWOS 2014).

But this collective mode of production was redoubled through an additional concentric circle of creativity. *Walking With Our Sisters* generates collective leadership, creativity, and accountability -- new forms of community. To produce their submissions of moccasin vamps to the project, beading groups began to emerge across Turtle Island. This unanticipated aspect of the project was comprised by a diverse group of "women, men and children, both native and non-native" who "gathered in living rooms, universities, community halls and penitentiaries across North America to bead, sew, quill, weave, paint, embroider, and create mixed media pairs of moccasin tops" (WWOS 2015). Prior to its public exhibition of any kind, the very concept of the installation solicited such impassioned participation from communities that community members took it upon themselves to organize micro-communities of learning, knowledge sharing, and, collective creativity. *Walking With Our Sisters* gave form to Indigenous peoples' desire not simply to mourn the loss or express their love for missing relations, but to enact new forms of community and relationality through collectivized resurgent practice.

*Walking With Our Sisters* is a multi-modal installation includes material, visual, audio cinematic, embodied, digital, and written forms of expression; and it is collective and

collaborative at every level of its organization, process, and production. It is also profoundly non-hierarchical. The exhibit is led by a national organizing collective of twenty people, and is self-organized by local groups as it travels to each community where it will be installed. As Belcourt told *Canadian Art* magazine: “*it is not my project anymore—I’m just helping make it happen as a lead coordinator and member of the collective*” (Sandals 2014, emphasis in original). WWOS disrupts the Euro-Western/colonial reification of both the individuated artist and the neoliberal subject, by proposing a radical form of collective Indigenous creativity (and distributed desubjectivization) in which the author or creator is decentred and collectively voiced to embody a decolonial community in becoming — through shared creative practices, value, ethics, and commitments to honouring the diversity of its participants and the specificity of each community’s local context and protocols. In addition to its national organizing collective, WWOS works with self-organizing community councils at the regional/community level “that consist of elders and keepers, finance people, all the people they need in the community—usually about a dozen at least—to make the project happen” (Sandals 2014). The project’s vectoral mode of creative production distributes responsibilities for the installation, movement, and continuity of the work as it travels. It creates new participatory structures of Indigenous relationality.

WWOS is a work of art and ceremony that is in perpetual becoming. Although its official open call closed in 2013, Belcourt and the collective have continued to receive new pairs of vamps. The content of the exhibit continues to grow, much as the organizing collectives, learning communities, and bundle keepers also continues to grow as the installation moves, transits, and emerges in a dynamic relation to its creators, participants, witnesses, audiences and caretakers. As in ceremony, *Walking With Our Sisters* requires multiple communities to bring it into being.

The installation is simply a transient manifestation of the continuous becomings of these communities; their collectivized actions, prayers, and creativity given material form. As such, the visitor does not simply encounter a representation of the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls to whom the project is dedicated, one encounters the total multiplicity, diversity, and unity of the project's contributors: every voice, song, artist, pair of hands, prayer, relative, family, Indigenous nation and relation involved in the installation's creation. "When you walk in you are walking into a space where 1,372 different artists have put their energy", says Belcourt. "You feel it; it's palpable. And it can be quite overwhelming" (Sandals 2014). *Walking With Our Sisters* embodies the decolonial potentiality of Indigenous creativity mobilized through an evolving and continuing community of resurgence.

For Belcourt, creativity emerges in connectivity and interdependence: "nothing I do is in isolation from anyone else. Which individual ant can be credited with building the anthill? It's the same for us", she says, "perhaps creating, resurgence, and regeneration is in the act of doing? [It's] not an individual act but a collective one" (Belcourt 2014). Collectivity, complexity, and resistance are critical themes in creative practice. Although she is reluctant to typify her work according to specific delineations between art and politics, she makes clear that Indigenous art is embedded and deeply implicated in decolonial struggle:

Anytime we are exercising our autonomy as Indigenous peoples, even while under a colonial regime, we are in the process of decolonizing ourselves on an individual basis. Doing things like holding ceremony or learning our languages or practicing our languages in art are decolonizing practices. Art is not only the kind practiced for public audiences, but also includes the songs, like ceremonial songs, or stories told around a fire. What [about] regalia making and the teachings that go with that? All of those practices are art, and are in various states of decolonization. Learning a new teaching and having that inform a new work, even indirectly, is an act of decolonization. The question for me is: *how do we decolonize collectively?* Is it even possible? We can do this individually, but can we do it as Nations? How do we do it under colonial state rule? (Belcourt 2014)

Decolonization demands confronting the occupying forces of the settler colonial state. As

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson observes:

I'm engaged in a political struggle for my existence on the planet as an Anishinaabekwe. I live in an occupied state. I don't have access to my homeland in a way that enables me to embody what being an Anishinaabekwe means to me and has meant to my ancestors...Because of the totalizing system of colonialism I have to approach life with a critical mind in order to make space to exist. (Simpson 2014)

Survival demands creativity and resilience, but for Indigenous art-making to become decolonizing it must be animated by the artist's deep understanding of their own aesthetic systems, traditions, and ways of being: "I see my art practice as decolonizing because it decolonizes me. You can't use Indigenous aesthetics in your work if you don't know what your nation's aesthetics are. You can't base your work in the spine of the oral tradition if you don't know what that tradition is" (Simpson 2014). Jaque Fragua shares this view, suggesting: "Art is decolonizing when the intent is to decolonize oneself, before making anything. Otherwise, its just plain ol' creativity, which can be used for capitalistic reasons, or narcissistic indulgence" (Fragua 2014).

In order to make this determination, however, Indigenous artists must not only be rooted in their community and nation's aesthetic traditions, cultural practices, and political philosophies, they must also understand the socio-political, historical, and cultural contexts within which Indigenous art exists and circulates. As Marianne Nicolson suggests, this means taking up the *responsibilities* that inhere in being an Indigenous artist:

If you're going to speak, and *if you're going to speak as an Indigenous person, you're representing a whole history, and therefore you have a responsibility*. So don't tell me that you can exist outside of that context and that you don't have a responsibility in terms of what you are going to say. Because if you're representing me as an Indigenous person in this country, you need to know what the hell you're talking about. So, learn these things. Know these things. Embody these things. And don't try and pretend you can be one thing and not the other. You're going to profit from this but you're not going to take responsibility for it?

[I]t bothers me a lot when I see artists out there who, through their work whether they acknowledge it or not, are representing us, and are profiting individually, but not giving anything

back to the community — or are not responsible for what they're saying. And I say: you need to understand what you're saying, even if you're just putting something on the wall. You're saying something. Understand what it is you're saying. But in order to do that you need to understand the broader context. (Nicolson 2014)

For Nicolson, however, simply understanding the social context for Indigenous art is insufficient to change the political reality in which it is implicated.

you have to be aware to actively integrate [your] voice coming from a perspective of *resistance*. Otherwise, it's quite possible—and I see this happen quite often—where First Nations artists, their work gets re-appropriated or appropriated *into* the mainstream. And then what does it really do? It's no longer reiterating its origins; it's actually amplifying outsider desire. It's actually functioning in that way and serving that purpose. And then it's no longer *our work*. It might look like it; it might have the aesthetic and the form of it, but it's just another *consumed object*. (Nicolson 2014)

Within a settler colonial reality, she suggests, being an Indigenous artist demands creative contention with colonialism and resistance to assimilation, appropriation, and commodification. Indigenous creativity comes to be in and through practices that refuse to be enframed by colonial aesthetics and politics and, instead, affirm that, “creating, resurgence, and regeneration [are] in the act of doing”. Insofar as art-making can be understood as an integral part of Indigenous struggles for decolonization, “the act of doing” (of making or creating), is, for many Indigenous artists, “not an individual act, but a collective one” (Belcourt 2014).

## CONCLUSION

Indigenous artists make use of every tool and weapon available to pierce the veil of colonial abjection that haunts and confines our imaginative and creative spirit and to liberate the possibility of decolonial exits, unseen doors, and trajectories into freedom. Whether in the form of work, sound, object or performance, Indigenous artists effect a ruptural “mirroring of what we can become” (2014: 98), that reflects our presence in transformed shape, an act of mirroring that, in revealing our altered gaze, refracts what it discloses. Indigenous artists, Simpson states,

“interrogate the space of empire, envisioning and performing ways out of it” (2011: 98). This flight is the fugitive movement of Indigenous art that refuses captivity, that unbinds itself from stasis, and seeks freedom not simply in imagining an elsewhere, but in actively moving toward it. In anechoic refrain against colonial enclosure, Indigenous art is refracted in its parallel motion through Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s undercommons — the resonant presence of the *surround* — in which flux becomes immanent to a recuperated politicized creativity in transformative being and becoming: “We ask and we tell and we cast the spell that we are under, which tells us what to do and how we shall be moved, here, where we dance the war of apposition” (Moten and Harney 2011: 987). Indigenous resurgence occupies the space of Indigenous consciousness in conscientious refusal to be limned by colonization. For Indigenous artists, creative action must be continually brought (back) into alignment with the dynamic forces of life and creation, renewed through story, song and ceremony, and performed in the making and re-making of decolonial struggle, where “resistance and resurgence are not only our response to colonialism, they are our only responsibilities in the face of colonialism” (Simpson 2011: 66). Indigenous artists carry responsibilities inherent to our existence as Indigenous peoples and members of Indigenous nations and communities. Our continued presence depends on our ability to fulfill these responsibilities and to be guided by our natural laws and the creative forces of ‘the implicate order’. Indigenous art navigates these tensions and contradictions as an immanent expression of human creativity. In its movement to synchronize with the energetic currents of embodied experience, Indigenous art is harmonic. In its appositional dance against dispossession and disappearance, it is rhythmic. In its pursuit of emergent potentialities and transformation, its “visioning and dancing new realities and worlds into existence” (2011: 70), it is resurgent. Harmony, rhythm, echo, refrain. Immanence, flux, transformation, renewal. Indigenous art is an

originary becoming: an aesthetic movement of re-emergence and return. And in the spaces it creates and claims, Indigenous art returns us to presence, reminding us, gently, through its images, ideas, stories, songs and performing bodies that, “Resurgence is our original instruction” (2011: 66). Decolonization is a praxis of creative becoming and action. In “the actual *doing* of the project,” Skookum Sound System member Dean Hunt states, “that’s where the freedom lies” (Hunt 2014, emphasis added).



## **CHAPTER 4**

### Encoded Flows: Indigenous Hip-Hop and Cypher Theory

*Decolonization...infuses a new  
rhythm...a new language and a  
new humanity.*

- Frantz Fanon

## CHAPTER 4

### Encoded Flows: Indigenous Hip-hop and Cypher Theory

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*we are innovation in motion  
spontaneity on the tongue*

- Walidah Imarisha

#### INTRODUCTION: IMPROVISATION / COMMUNICATION / EXCHANGE

Hip-hop is a global transformative force and one of the most far-reaching arts movements of the past two decades (Chang 2006). Not only has it “set the imagination of a generation afire”, as hip-hop scholar Jeff Chang writes, it has become a “grand expression of our collective creative powers” (Chang 2006.). In this chapter, I argue that hip-hop, and its specific assemblage of creative practices, animate decolonizing possibilities in musical, embodied, and aesthetic forms of Indigenous creative expression. In particular, I suggest that the concept and technique of the hip-hop *cypher* (or cipher) provides a site of emergent, autonomous communality and collectivity, a critical praxis of decolonial desubjectivization (the becoming of revolutionary non-subject), and a strategy of resistance that, in its coded language and enciphered forms, stages/performs communicative action that is strategically illegible to power and capture. Indigenous hip-hop artists, I suggest, are uniquely positioned to deploy hip-hop’s recombinant creative techniques (rupture, remix, sampling, bricolage) in conjunction with ciphered or encrypted speech, that open into generative spaces of freedom. Further, I suggest that hip-hop is not an appropriated artistic and cultural form, it is a contemporary iteration of ancient currents within Indigenous creativity. My interrogation of hip-hop thus proceeds from an interest in the potential politics produced at the intersection of hip-hop aesthetics, creative praxis, and indigeneity. Hip-hop continues to impact and influence a rising generation of Indigenous artists

for whom it has become a ubiquitous, dominant and unifying language of communication. Although hip-hop has much to offer Indigenous peoples, we, in turn, have much to offer to its continued evolution and transformation. Much contemporary scholarship, however, continues to read hip-hop according to axes of identity, representation, lyricism/poetics, and resistant content. In contrast to this established line of inquiry, I examine hip-hop as a decolonial and recombinant modality of creativity and cultural production. Hip-hop's most generative aspects, I argue, are found not only in its representational forms, but in its dynamic and mutable practices. Like indigeneity, hip-hop is lived, embodied, and expressed in transformative intertextual forms that take flight in movement. As Chang suggests: "hip-hop's internal creative force does not rest" (2006: x). If hip-hop is an art of reinvention and reimagination, resurgence is moved and motivated by a similarly restless spirit.

Hip-hop is a "global art of communication" and creative combat in which its "regeneration and evolution" have evolved through "the ritual of the style war and the art of battling" (Chang 2007: 60). "In the cipher," writes Chang, "hip-hop's vitality is reaffirmed, its participants recommit to its primacy, and the culture transforms itself" (2006: 4). In the cipher, as in creative contentions against colonialism, hip-hop praxis can become a weapon for self-defense, protection, regeneration, and transformation. The struggle is always primary. The battle is a necessity. And it is in the doing that hip-hop reinvents reality.

Hip-hop has transcended its narrow genre codifications to become both a global arts movement and an assemblage of cultural practices and commodities. Hip-hop is a unifying language of creative expression that has been mobilized by individual practitioners and communities in every corner of the world. As a culture, its adaptive and expansive forms have been endlessly appropriated and remixed. As an art form, hip-hop affirms its continued relevance

through its continuous renewal, reinvention, and reconstitution. Birthed in the South Bronx and borne of social, economic, and political unrest, hip-hop is rooted in diverse aesthetic practices: rhythm and rhyme, music, visual art, dance, media/technology, and community. Its forms are inseparable from its content, just as its elements are inseparable from its potential purposes: to give voice to lived experience; to represent the motions and emotions of struggle; to set bodies, words, images, and ideas in motion. Hip-hop is a resonant and rhythmic art. Its potential and its power exist in its ability to communicate spirit: the rawness, realness, and individuality of its diverse practitioners. Hip-hop transmits something essential about creative, generative action: that art-making retains inherent potential to transform self, place, community, and collective consciousness. Hip-hop produces community through a complex interchange of bodies, spaces, words, images, and sounds. But it is not simply a representational art form. Although its aesthetics and architecture provide a language for communicative expression (narration/representation, etc), hip-hop's injunction *to represent* serves as a call to action, not simply to description.

Every MC, DJ, turntablist, graffiti writer, b-boy, b-girl, beatboxer, knowledge holder, elder, and rhythm scientist that heeds hip-hop's call to participate in the culture's creation becomes a member of its revolutionary collectivity. Hip-hop is built from the ground up by its practitioners: hip-hop animates its transformative power through self-reflexive communality. Although in many ways hip-hop is premised on individuality, cultivating one's unique style and voice/vision, this individual expression always exists in relationship to a multivalent collectivity — hip-hop's micro/local and macro/global cipher. Hip-hop, then, is both relational and dialogic; a vital, recursive and self-reflexive culture that is forever circuiting back on itself to remap its own emergent history, call upon its forebears and ancient ancestors, and to affirm its present

relevance and future potentialities. Hip-hop is a continuous mode of becoming and creating that draws strength and inspiration from both the deep currents of ancestral memory and the hypermediated, technologized contemporary world. As such, it is fraught with contradictions. “To listen to hip-hop,” Imani Perry writes, “is to enter a world of complexity and contradiction” (2004: 1). Frequently debated and often derided for its sexism, misogyny, and denigration of women, its neoliberal reproduction of hypercapitalist values in its circulable commodity forms, and for its, at times, vacuous celebration of wealth and excess in its most mainstream mediated representations, hip-hop *appears* and *circulates* as a language of both artistry and artifice. But hip-hop is not simply a commercialized form of cultural imperialism. As Jeff Chang, following Cristina Verán, suggests: “it’s a liquid process that allows the renewal and transformation of many cultures” (2006: 1)

In its most transformative forms, hip-hop gives voice to everyday struggles: individuals and communities seeking to contest lived experiences with oppression, colonial power, racism, exploitation and dispossession. Hip-hop is flux, breaks, ruptures, rhythms, and repetition. It remains relevant by refusing stasis — by digging in the virtual and literal crates of collective, cultural memory and hyperlocal experience, by listening for cracks in the system, and by searching for new ciphers and breaks through which to regenerate. Hip-hop proposes a re-emergent rhythmological reflection of the world as it is: contradictory, celebratory, passionate, urgent, unapologetic, and always on the move. Hip-hop's breaks are the continuation of an originary rhythmic force; hip-hop makes the rhythmological possible — an Indigenous anticolonial rhythmology of resurgence.

## ANCIENT FUTURES

Hip-hop has been influenced and impacted by Indigenous presence since its Bronx inception in the mid-1970s. In the four decades since, hip-hop culture has itself been remixed, transformed, revitalized, and indigenized. But some have suggested that hip-hop is *already* (and perhaps has always been) an Indigenous art form. Hip-hop communicates something that is essential to many Indigenous cultures: the sacred act of gathering together through dance, song, and story. “Hip-hop was a gift from the Creator,” the renowned Cree hip-hop photographer Ernie Paniciolli explained to the Indigenous DJ crew A Tribe Called Red. “It was ancient. Because we’ve always had the DJ — that was the drum. We always had the graffiti — that was the sand painting. We always had the MC — that was the storyteller. We always had the b-boy — that was the fancy dancer. C’mon man! It’s ancient. They say it started in ‘74. Nothing started in ‘74... you guys just absorbed that vibe in ‘74”. (MK-1: 2014). Paniciolli identifies interconnections between hip-hop praxis and Indigenous cultural forms that, although similar, are not constitutively derivative. Nevertheless, they remain symmetrical both at the level of aesthetic form and in a resonant commonality of spirit. This spirit of collective creation and transformation brings Indigenous cultural forms and hip-hop praxis together. African griot and Indigenous oral traditions find contemporary iterations in the era of hip-hop, where traditional arts are remixed into new forms. But, at the heart of these forms, is a shared vision for creating community and revisioning the world. Hip-hop, then, is an iterative remix of Indigenous cultural and creatives practices that is not simply *derived* from originary sources in African societies and the Indigenous nations of Turtle Island, but exists within an ongoing continuum of Indigenous creativity. We have always gathered around the drum and the fire to dance, sing, talk story, celebrate, feast, conduct

ceremony — to build community and to share. As Kathleen Ritter and Tania Willard write in their curatorial catalogue essay for *Beat Nation*:

The prevalence of hip-hop in Aboriginal communities should not be seen as a radical break from the past, but a continuum. Aboriginal cultures on this continent have consistently adapted to new influences. This sense of innovation and transformation...continues today in contemporary Aboriginal experience and mainstream culture and weaves through many different elements of Aboriginal society. (2013: 4)

To understand hip-hop within a continuum of Indigenous cultural expression, then, one that is implicated within multiple, interconnected histories and communities of struggle, is to revision it not as the birth of a new culture, but as *a culture of rebirth and remix* that gives new form to ongoing practices of creation. Indigenous hip-hop gives renewed voice to our resistance and survival. In this chapter, I argue that it is this essentially spiritual and ancient dimension of hip-hop that enables its mobility and continued resonance. Hip-hop remains relevant to multiple audiences and creators by speaking in a language of the body and the community; it is an embodied communicative language and an art of creation and movement. I argue that hip-hop's *creative practices* (as opposed to its commodity forms) offer Indigenous peoples a language of creative expression with which to create new pathways of resistance and resurgence. In this chapter, I examine the aesthetics and politics of hip-hop and remix culture — recombinant techniques of bricolage, breaks, sampling and rupture; and the inchoate, encoded flows found in the hip-hop cypher/cipher. The cypher, I argue, offers a model for Indigenous space-making and claiming and creativity that is resistant to appropriation and external control. The cypher is a site of what I term *generative indeterminacy* — a decolonizing space of simultaneous resistance and resurgence, negation and affirmation that makes Indigenous forms of knowledge legible to some, while remaining strategically illegible to others. It is within the cypher, I argue, that Indigenous creativity opens into decolonial potentialities. The cypher connects hip-hop to forms of Indigenous cultural and ceremonial practice through a shared spirit of collective creation. I



conclude with an analysis of contemporary Indigenous hip-hop artists, musicians, art exhibitions and community-based initiatives working within this paradigm, including A Tribe Called Red, Tall Paul, Skookum Sound System, Sacramento Knoxx, Jaque Fragua, and *Beat Nation* to suggest that hip-hop is a potentially decolonizing medium through which to invent new forms of creative resistance. Hip-hop aesthetics contain potent political possibilities that remain unthought and unrealized in contemporary scholarship. In *the break*, *the remix*, and *the cypher* hip-hop makes space for new forms of decolonial struggle to emerge.

The recent exhibition *Beat Nation: Hip-Hop as Indigenous Culture* affirms the deep affinity and interrelationality between Indigenous and hip-hop cultures:

As Aboriginal identity and culture continue to change, and as artists reinvent older traditions into new forms of expression, their commitment to politics, to storytelling, to Aboriginal languages, to the land and rights remains constant, whether stated with drum skins or turntables, natural pigments or spray paint, ceremonial dancing or break dancing. (MACM 2013)

Indigenous hip-hop marks a specific iteration, and cultural remix, that is synchronous and synergistic, self-reflexive and co-constitutive of a decolonizing, resistant praxis of Indigenous resurgence and creativity. Lakota hip-hop artist Frank Waln reflects on Indigenous peoples' affinity with hip-hop culture as a resistant practice of survival: "Disconnected from our language, ceremonies and culture through genocidal government policies, many of us were a generation searching for anything that would help us survive while we try to reclaim our culture and language. Hip-hop was one of our answers." (Waln 2015: 1). Hip-hop continues to be a resurgent force for the cultural revitalization and the revisioning of community. As hip-hop scholar Cristina Veran writes:

I understand hip-hop as having arisen among a milieu of urbanized youth from 'detrribalized' origins. Whether we're talking about Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino, or African-American folks — and also including U.S. urban Latinos of indigenous Amerindian ancestry — hip-hop, particularly in founding collectives like the Zulu Nation, imagined itself as a new kind of kinship group embracing myriad 'lost tribes'.

At the same time, I find it very exciting and encouraging that indigenous youth here and abroad — particularly those who have remained connected to their cultural identities — have actually found in hip-hop a useful tool to remain strong in their cultures. It's not a question of replacing their own cultures with hip-hop, but rather using hip-hop elements as ways to translate their own messages, mores and movements into this universal language of sorts. (Veran in Chang 2006)

Hip-hop is an creative apparatus for the transmission and translation of Indigenous aesthetics, politics, and experience. “Native hip-hop movements have had no choice but to be political”, Veran suggests, “their very engagement in the public sphere can constitute a political act in itself; a patent refusal to be silenced or invisible” (Chang 2006).

## REMIX CULTURE & HIP-HOP PRAXIS

To remix is to reimagine, to reworld. Hip-hop, as an aesthetic, cultural, and political would not exist in their contemporary commodity forms without the development and codification of specific formal musico-technical practices: sampling, remix, recording, and reproduction, among others. Distinct from the foundational *elements* of hip-hop culture (MCing, DJing, breakdancing, graffiti, and knowledge of self), remix as method and sampling as practice provided the aesthetic and atomic matter out of which hip-hop's elements could be formed and re/produced. Hip-hop's contemporary forms are inseparable from these practices and the culture's very ubiquity can in part be traced to the infiltration, mass distribution and uptake of these formal practices in global culture at large. Eduardo Navas writes:

Remix has its roots in the musical explorations of DJ producers; in particular, hip-hop DJs who...took beatmixing and turned it into beat juggling: they played beats and sounds, repeated (looped) them on two turntables to create unique momentary compositions for live audiences. This is known today as turntablism. This practice made its way into the music studio as sampling, and eventually into culture at large, contributing to the tradition of appropriation. (2012: 4)

Remix is an art of sampling and re-appropriation that provides a foundational praxis for the evolution and development of hip-hop arts. Remix is a ubiquitous mode of contemporary cultural production that, through “the constant recyclability of material with the implementation of

mechanical reproduction” (2012: 3), and the advent of widely accessible new media technologies and digital tools, enable the sensate world and every form of aesthetic experience to be considered potential source material for sampling, creative appropriation, and remix. If every cultural object and form remains open to the possibility of appropriation and remix, questions of authorship and ownership take on new resonances given the availability and immediacy with which new technologies can be used to continually mine the increasingly recent past as source material for the reconfiguration of new aesthetic forms, cultural objects and commodities. But the mass cultural saturation of sampling and remix as practice has also contributed to an evolving culture of creation and reproduction that increasingly enable anyone to participate in practices that were previously in the domain of only select practitioners with the knowledge, resources, technology and access to participate.

Remix, then, is an ideology as much as a practice; a way of conceiving the world as an object-world rendered open to interpretation, appropriation, and recombination according to the availability of given technologies and and aesthetic/political and social context of the creator/practitioner. It offers a recombinant language to claim the world through a Nietzschean/Heideggerian *revaluing of value* that breaks open the world of aesthetic experience to specific practices that give form to articulation and experience, to narration but also to sound, image, and embodied movement. Although the potential effects of remix’s ubiquity contain a contradiction or tension and danger that all forms of knowledge and experience can be appropriated and, thus, potentially co-opted, for Indigenous artists working within and through remix and hip-hop praxis, it also offers potential pathways for claiming and reclaiming the world once denied us through racism, oppression and colonial dispossession. Remix offers Indigenous artists a method by which to both apprehend and refigure the world according to our own

experiences, perspectives and worldviews and thus can be understood as a generative framework within which to conceive new signifying practices and new modalities of being through creative arts.

This is most evident in Indigenous forms of creativity expressed through music, where the practice of remix can be said to originate (as above), however in a broad context and culture of remix, as such, this methodology (and implicit) ideology is given and understood to be part of a wider network of forms that also includes visual art, dance, performance and cinema (film/video). To that we might also add new forms of internet-based and post-internet art, which are readily adaptable to appropriation and reconfiguration, given their immaterial object-status in digital networks. Contemporary Indigenous artists work with remix as an appropriative and self-reflexive modality precisely because of the mutability of cultural forms seen as the potential source material for new iterations, dubs, and mixes. The act of mixing and remixing constitute a recombinant praxis that reflects indigeneity's tactical need, under colonialism and global capitalism, to remain in motion and continuously shift shape — compelling mimetic forms of resistance that mark/chart Indigenous creative praxis as not only fluid and mobile, but disruptive of modernist binaries, categorical identities, and reified traditionalism. Remix, as an indigenized practice, becomes relevant at a specific historical conjuncture produced by colonialism, one that places Indigenous peoples in contention with threats to our survival and the mis/appropriation of our knowledges and arts by outside forces. To resist appropriative cooptation, Indigenous artists must contend with these threats while making/claiming new spaces for autonomous creative expression. Although such forms are, of necessity, implicated (or entangled) within the systems they oppose, Indigenous creativity need not be compromised by this ambivalent position. Remix, sampling, bricolage, and other recombinant hip-hop practices makes use of any and all available

means at their disposal. Indigenous remix seeks to invent new languages of empowerment, presence and possibility. As a practice, however, remix designates not an identity but a means for re/naming and re/claiming the world. Through tactical techniques of rewriting, recombining, and recomposing, Indigenous artists are able to appropriate the colonial encounter (in its historical, present, and contemporary iterations), and by investigating interfacial/interstitial potentialities, transform them. This effects a dual transformation of the appropriated object, gaze, practice, image/concept or colonial form, and of the artist and her subjectivity. Artist Marianne Nicolson considers remix an Indigenous practice that has historically sought to invert and revision the colonial gaze:

I tend to think about it from a visual point of view through the notion of appropriation and reappropriation. I'm working on a piece right now that has to do with *representations of colonization*, but out of tradition. On the coast, when the ships were first coming, our people created these representations of that experience and story in order to understand them. But, then, when the collectors came along, they were like, 'that's not authentic' and it was pushed aside...I was interested in [this] because they were deeply embedded in our own experience and they were expressions that came out of that. *And we were appropriating their iconography into our forms. And now the Western world is appropriating our iconography into their forms and I want to put those images up and say 'no look, we're doing it too'. And have been all along.*

And I think that's much more dynamic. And it's good, because there is a point of almost *confusion*—a point of 'what is this thing?'—and that's the point of engagement you want, because if you just make a statement, and throw it out there, it goes under the water and it disappears. (Nicolson 2014, emphasis added)

For Nicolson, remix is a practice that Indigenous peoples have deployed in order to reconfigure colonial forms according to "Indigenous coordinates". Remix is an art of re-creation that demonstrates Indigenous agency in the face of colonial invasion — one that generates a productive confusion that forces the viewer to reconfigure their own sense of how colonization, and implicitly decolonization, are represented.

Remix transforms representation by recoding and reimagining Indigenous presence through multiple forms. What aesthetic and political possibilities, then, are opened by its ruptural recomposition of representation and the performative event? In other words, how can Indigenous

remix perform (effect/create/envision) new practices and processes for creative expression into being that move beyond signification, cross thresholds, and re/generate indigeneity?

To respond to this question, we must look to creative forms that express this transversal movement. Hip-hop continues to provide Indigenous artists with a generative model for creative expression of this kind. At its best, Danny Hoch writes, hip-hop “is highly articulate, coded, transcendent, revolutionary, communicative, empowering” (Hoch 2007). Although it can be fraught with conflict and contradiction, hip-hop is, fundamentally, an art of *creative transformation*. Indigenous artists on Turtle Island have increasingly taken to hip-hop to rediscover and reinterpret their experiences:

Since the early 1990s, hip hop has been a driving force of activism for urban Aboriginal youth in communities across the continent. The roots of this music have been influential across disciplines and have been transformed to create dynamic forums for storytelling and indigenous languages, as well as new modes of political expression. In the visual arts, artists remix, mash up and weave together the old with the new, the rural with the urban, traditional and contemporary as a means to rediscover and reinterpret Aboriginal culture within the shifting terrain of the mainstream. (MACM 2013)

Hip-hop’s *elements*, its aesthetics and creative practices (or, as the Universal Zulu Nation call them, hip-hop’s “tools of war”), can be mobilized to tell stories, depict collective experiences, and build community. Hip-hop’s multivalent creative forms enable practitioners to cultivate their own *style* and *flow* through self-reflexive techniques of self expression that refract hip-hop praxis through personal experience. In this dialogic communicative modality, hip-hop finds its most dynamic expressions at the intersection of individual and collective voicings. Indigenous artists and hip-hop artists occupy a parallel positionality in giving voice and shape to a self articulated in relationship to multiple communities. This configuration of self in self-reflexive dialogue and relationality with others binds the hip-hop community through a set of shared creative practices that are claimed and remade by each participant. Formally, this occurs through hip-hop’s practice

of *call and response*, in which continuity and flow are established through participatory action: the echoed presencing of individuated expression speaking to, and responding to, a continuously reforming community. This dynamic relationship, wherein solo voices rise and fall in rhythm with others, where individual dancers move in step and in turn to claim space in the centre of the circle, is embodied in multiple spatialized forms, such as the cypher.

Hip-hop's community is formed in physical spaces of performance and in the imaginary spaces of the "hip-hop nation" and the global hip-hop movement. To participate in hip-hop culture is to take one's place in relation to others co-present in these spaces of immediacy: both to those in proximate position to the circulation of sound recordings or the spectacle of public performance; and to those who have gone before — one's elders ancestors, and antecedent artistic forms. Hip-hop culture's persistent use of sampling and remix produces a culture in constant dialogue with its past, and with *the past* as such; its meta-narratological praxis of speaking to and through the past and, in so doing, re-creating the present and the future, is essential to hip-hop creativity. Hip-hop appropriates the past with both reverence and disregard for historical memory. Through *bricolage*, hip-hop practitioners make due with what is, by sampling sounds, images, influences, and ideas from any source available. In this way, hip-hop's aesthetics reflect an inherently political praxis of circular and recombinant creativity, where multiple temporalities, signs and signifiers meld in the mix. Hip-hop techniques of sampling and remix both effect and rely on an aesthetics of *break* and of *rupture*. Taken together, hip-hop practices can be understood as a creative assemblage defined by a specific *rhythmology* in which layered histories and multiple subjectivities are broken open, sampled, looped, reconfigured and fed back into endlessly recursive forms. "[A]rt practices like hip-hop," writes Robin James, "can

successfully rupture hegemonic modes of perception, ‘magnify the misperception inherent in everyday hearing’, and cause one to see, hear, and experience...in new ways” (2011: 11).

Through hip-hop, history is endlessly deferred and forever repeated. New historical apertures are forged *in the break*, in the transversal motion of cut and capture codified through sampling. The sample exists as a moment in space or time that is dislocated from context and a continuous past and reintegrated into new flows of creative production. Insofar as colonialism produces, in the colonized, an experience of being dislocated from (or “outside” of) history, hip-hop provides Indigenous artists with a means to contest colonial alienation by formally re/appropriating the language of alienation itself and reworking it toward alternate and potentially anticolonial objectives. Hip-hop enables self-sampling into remixed histories. Hip-hop’s ontology presupposes the artist’s active movement to produce and reproduce the self through what Edouard Glissant terms a *poetics of relation*<sup>9</sup> (2004). Asserting interdependence as a precondition for its creative relationality, Indigenous hip-hop artists break *from* the past while simultaneously breaking the past *open* in order to seek out new trajectories to communicate experience.

Hip-hop is an embodied praxis that restructures relational Indigenous aesthetics by creating new orders of sense experience and new structures of feeling. Hip-hop claims spaces that “short circuit” the social order. Through graffiti writing, rap freestyling, b-boy cyphers, and DJ battles, *the break* creates spaces of emergence. Following Kodwo Eshun and Robin James, “breaks are human movement (sense perceptions, dance moves), encoded in music”(James 2011: 2). But the break also operates as a site of *dissensus* and *disagreement* wherein normative distributions of sensibility are interrupted and thereby reconfigured (Rancière 2011: 2). Against

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<sup>9</sup> For Glissant, the poetics of relation is a principle of connectivity and decentred subjectivity, “in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (2004: 11).



the domination of normative orders, the break opens *into* possibilities within the regime of the sensible: where politics is “whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration — that of the part of those who have no part” (2011: 3). The part with no part, according to Rancière, are those members of society that are both excluded from the normative order and yet always present as a latent, critical potentiality capable of rupturing the hegemony of the social fabric by making and claiming space. To claim such spaces, the excluded make visible their invisibility and thereby, reconfigure common sense experience. This is the terrain of the dissensual, the rupture of disagreement. “[D]isagreement...is a form of remix”, Robin James argues, one that “can successfully rupture hegemonic modes of perception...and cause one to see, hear, and experience one’s embodiment in new ways” (2011: 11). Hip-hop produces a politics of the possible by reconfiguring aesthetic experience. But what happens in the break? What happens following this reconfiguration of the social order? And what kind of politics does this produce?

The critical potentiality of hip-hop’s politics is realized in specific modalities of creation: *ruptures* and *flows*. Hip-hop praxis is founded at the interstice of these modalities, which comprise both an aesthetic and political assemblage of practices. In hip-hop, breaks and ruptures produce new flows. The concept of *flow* is integral to hip-hop culture as an expression of one’s unique style, rhythm, cadence and ability to improvise. In hip-hop, Carvell Wallace writes, “flow is, in many ways, the magic ingredient that turns despair into hope, pain into action. As long as you can flow, you can do something” (2015: 1). Hip-hop flows find form in liminality — through momentary ruptures in consciousness, spatiality, and temporality that intensify aesthetic experience and elevate an individual’s style of creation and movement in ruptural flows.

Through this movement, through the discovery of rhythmic vocalizations and bodily movements, flow becomes an arc and trajectory generated in the break, whether through the interruption of architectural space in graffiti pieces and tags, in a DJ's looped breakbeats, or in an MC or b-boy/b-girl cypher. Flow is a kinaesthetic practice of creation that is developed in sensate relation to the rhythm of the whole; the individual capitalizes on interstitial performative openings and voicings generated in momentary breaks, beats that notate interstitial spaces. In this sense, hip-hop redistributes sensibility at two levels: first, for the individual whose flow unfolds in kinetic steps and poetic metre, in the ability to ride a beat or pattern a performance according to irruptive rhythmic forces and, at a second order, in the effect individuated expression generates in the becoming of the collective, at the perceptual edges of autonomous spaces claimed in communal creation and aesthetic intervention. The break thus generates meaning from within an assemblage of positionalities and perspectives. Whether perceived in the moment of performance or in disjunctive connection to its mediatized representational forms (for example, in glimpsing a pieced train speeding past a viewer, or in the reconfigured graf-hewn walls of decolonized urban spaces), hip-hop breaks sensate semblances of continuity into their constitutive parts, then reorders. and recontextualizes them. The break is both a method for deriving new meaning from reconstituted samples and a means of disrupting hegemonic narratives and orderings of space and time. By operating within and through the ruptural and the liminal, however, hip-hop imparts both a desire for *multiplicity* (as difference) and, somewhat paradoxically, a desire for *singularity*, in that hip-hop enables the strategic occupation of abjected, excluded spaces to become generative sites of creative resistance and transformation.

The flow transforms the break by articulating new rhythms within and through it, by giving the break its contrapuntal form — hip-hop operates in counterpoint to logics of

dominance. Its strategic dissonance, however, has the additional effect of creating new harmonic resonances through juxtaposition and repeated refrains that embody its aesthetic contradictions. Hip-hop is both rupture and continuity, disruption and coherence: to flow in the break is to embody this duality in the same step, beat, movement, and breath. Flow, then, is both a performance and a demonstration of one's ability to appropriate liminality and to transform it into a centre of creativity from which to imagine new possibilities of expression. Following Deleuze and Guattari, hip-hop's flows are deterritorializing insofar as they "transgres[s] rigid and obligatory lines of communication, rules of governing, and structures of power" (Marzec 2001). The break makes space for the emergence of a decolonial politics of creation; in flows that marks a line of dissent, in departures that are constitutive of subjectivity and agency. The break is a horizon of potentiality and agentic capacity. To claim the break is to claim a space and practice of rupture as an autonomous zone of refuge and creative communality. Breaks shape and deconstruct borders. Flows define a rhythm of their perception and transgression. Flows are the shadowed shapes of opaque spaces illuminated in the break, whose decolonial potentiality is generated not only in corporeal movement and kinaesthetic motion, but in the incorporative "dark matter" of hip-hop's coded communicative forms.

#### INVISIBLE FORCES: CODED LANGUAGE & CYPHER THEORY

*Light years are interchangeable with years of living in darkness  
The role of darkness is not to be seen as or equated with ignorance  
But with the unknown and the mysteries of the unseen*

- Saul Williams

*I encrypted my lyrics to stay alive in a song*

- Immortal Technique

*Pow wow in downtown the sound pounds the pavement  
you better treat the cypher like it's sacred*

- Poz Lyrix (Ojibwe/Lakota Sioux)

Hip-hop sounds the unseen. Its vibrant matter codes opacities, darkneses and invisibilities with fractured forms of brilliance, ciphered textuality. Hip-hop's potently braggadocio doublespeak is able to convey a multiplicity of meanings and intelligences through the endlessly self-referential and self-reflexive practices of remix, sampling, aurality and textuality, and mute speech. Against the strictures and demands of commodified legibility, hip-hop seeks always new linguistic turns that enable its politics to be at once highly legible and visible, while retaining an internally coded logic of resistance. Since the advent of the culture and the birth of its aesthetic forms, this coded language has been realized in a multiplicity of sites and registers. Hip-hop remains relevant to new generations of listeners, consumers, and participants based on its ability to shapeshift and accommodate limitless diversity, divergent place-based vernaculars, and dialectical differences. Hip-hop absorbs the plurality of the world's languages, their region-specific slang and shorthand descriptors of collective experience, and its recombinant aesthetics inspire collective participation and continued co-creation. Hip-hop interpellates spectatorship through mediation — it is an action-based praxis that compels participation. A viewer or listener's sense experience of the music, the break, and the art more generally, are co-determined by their ability to decode hip-hop encrypted linguistics and internal logics.

Hip-hop's resistant capacity is highly encoded. As an art of creative combat, hip-hop performs techniques of confrontation and strategic evasion. Its unique doublespeak is animated in a contradictory mode of communicativity that, at once, seeks an audience to engage its spectacular practices and commodity forms while it develops, simultaneously, a language for enciphered articulations of experience that limit its intelligibility and coherence to an internal

community of practitioners and listeners, or those “in the know”. Hip-hop’s duality is a signalling system for externalized performance and internal subversion, wherein dominant codes and languages of power are stretched across a plane of linguistic intelligibility to the point of being unrecognizable to outsiders. Hip-hop’s internal coherence, then, is a variable, mutable and context-dependent practice. Rap music generates a specific politics and poetics that not only represents its creators’ experiences, it also develops clandestine forms of tactical, creative camouflage that affirm its community of knowledge keepers (those who know its codes and understand its subversions), while also seeking new audiences and collaborators to speak in its performative tongues<sup>10</sup>.

Hip-hop is dialogic: its modalities of communicative action call attention to multiple audiences and sites of intelligibility, while simultaneously affirming the internal coherence and cohesion of a community performed into being. Hip-hop is dialectical: it moves within and against codification by speaking in tongues, through dialectics and codes of its own making and imagining, while appropriating diverse sonic and sampled source material from the perceptible world. Hip-hop is relational: its communality is created through collective action and participation by its co-creators who craft its creative forms and forge its sacred spaces. Hip-hop is movement: but its “movement carries with it the trait of a refusal” (Marzec 2001). This refusal is ciphered and refracted through hip-hop’s intricate signifying system. Hip-hop thus finds its

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<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence, then that hip-hop megastar Jay Z’s recent high-gloss, biographical memoir was entitled, *Decoded*, or that RapGenius — a site specifically dedicated to crowd-sourced analysis and the decoding of rap lyrics for a global audience — has become one of the internet’s most successful recent startups. This suggests a deeper political problematic within hip-hop that belies, or perhaps underscores, the success and popularity of RapGenius. In the internet age, semiocapitalism produces the desire to know, to see, to make visible, to objectify and commodify. Insofar as hip-hop’s coded language resists intelligibility, it also compels audiences (in the form of the participatory crowd) to join in decoding its living archive of multivalent speech. RapGenius is a translation and dissection machine specifically engineered to do exactly this; it is literally and ironically, to cut hip-hop’s opaque poetics into intelligible units of speech and thus, to foreclose their autonomous self-referentiality.

axiomatic resistant form not simply in the content of its creations, but in its *practices of creating* as such.

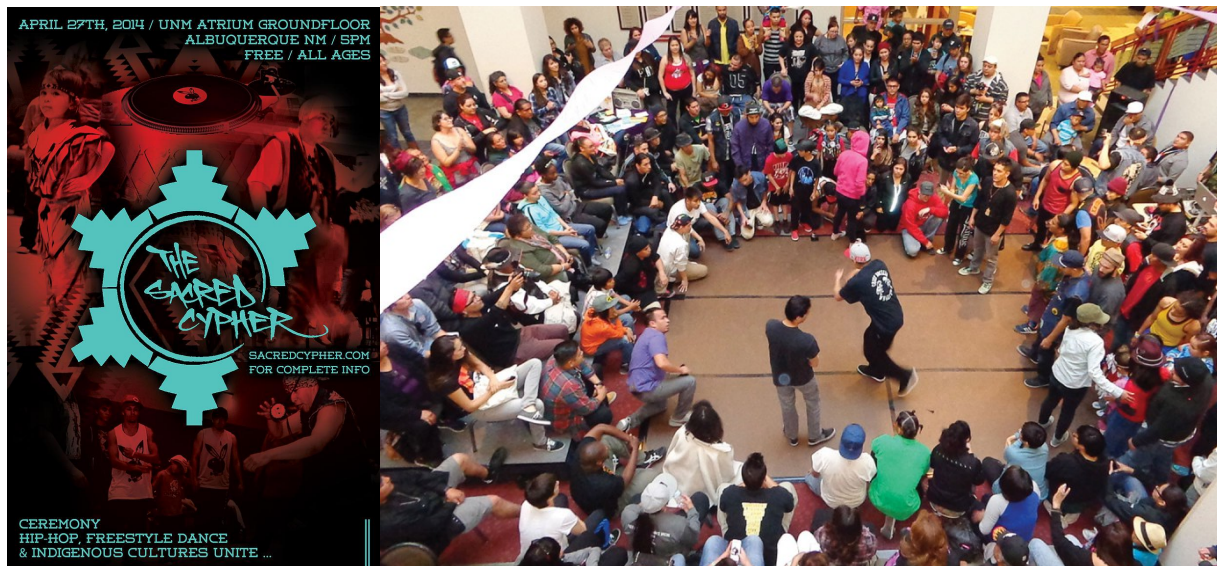


Figure 4.1 & 4.2. *Sacred Cypher 2014, University of New Mexico, Nizhoni Days, Albuquerque, N.M.*

Hip-hop composes countervailing codes of communicative articulation that encrypt semiotic flows and resist algorithmic surveillance and illumination. As an embodied set of practices and knowledges, *hip-hop praxis* (as opposed to its mass commodity and capitalist forms) occupies and makes use of enciphered speech: the hidden, the ruptural, the fugitive, the opaque. This is the space of the *cypher* and the break. “The essence of hip-hop is the cipher”, Jeff Chang writes, it is both a spatial configuration and a relational creative practice of competition and communality (2007: 65). The cipher (or cypher) is a site of creation and emergence:

is the circle of participants and onlookers that closes around battling rappers or dancers as they improvise for each other. If you have the guts to step into the cipher and tell your story and, above all, demonstrate your uniqueness, you might be accepted into the community. Here is where reputations are made and risked and stylistic change is fostered. That this communitarian honoring of merit...can transcend geography, culture, and even skin color remains hip-hop's central promise. (Chang 2007: 60)

To step into the cypher is to perform oneself into an emergent community of co-creators. In “Dark Matter in B-boying Cyphers: Race and Global Connection in Hip Hop”, hip-hop scholar Imani K. Johnson’s offers a brilliant inquiry into hip-hop’s b-boy/b-girl cyphers. The practice, politics, and kinesthetic knowledge produced in the hip-hop cypher, she suggests, can be understood as a form of *dark matter* — “a valuable metaphor for the force of the circle” (Johnson 2009: 84). In hip-hop culture, the cypher is a circular form of improvisational, social, and competitive performance that spontaneously coalesce through practices of b-boying/ breakdancing, MC freestyling, and graffiti writing. The cypher channels *invisible forces*. It is a connective and generative space of collective creation and energetic exchange. Not all circles are cyphers, but, as “energy is channeled among dancers and with spectators, *circles become cyphers*” (2009: 5, emphasis added).

The cypher (or cipher) is rooted in concentric circles of motion, dialogue, and interpersonal communicative and kinaesthetic exchange. For hip-hop scholar Toni Blackman, “the cipher is about community building: it’s about connection. And Popmaster Fabel, the legendary b-boy, says that we’ve been cyphering for centuries — dancing in cipher (circles), eating, praying, drumming—forever, since [hu]mankind has been around” (Blackman 2014). The cypher relates to a circle and a specific constellation of conceptual coordinates: “360 degrees; giving and exchanging energy; information and ideas; completion of thought; continuum; the sum of all things and zero at the same time” (Blackman 2014). The term became popularized in hip-hop culture in the early 1990s, through the influence of the Nation of Islam and the Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE). In the NGE’s cosmology and “Supreme Mathematics” the cypher refers both to zero and to their communicative practice of gathering, sharing, and speaking in circle. For the NGE, known as the Five Percenters, the cipher

is defined by its shape, a 360 degree circle. The reference to degrees is important as Five Percenters define the cipher as 120 degrees of knowledge, 120 degrees of wisdom, and 120 degrees of understanding, which all carry particular meaning in their philosophy. Ciphering among Five Percenters also refers to standing or sitting in a circle and speaking with one another to 'build' intellectually among those schooled in their 'Lost-Found' lessons, which incorporate a coded use of numbers and letters (2009: 4)

As hip-hop artists took to the faith, the term became incorporated into hip-hop culture.

Etymologically, the concept originates in early mathematics as a concept for zero that derives from the Arabic word *cifr*, meaning empty or void (Johnson 2009: 5). At its most technical level, the cipher also refers to forms of encoded writing "for which one needs a key to understand" (2009: 5). The cipher's multiple referentiality, which encompasses spirituality, mathematics, and encrypted/encoded writing, takes on new resonances when it is appropriated by hip-hop and applied to hip-hop practices of battling, dance, MCing, and graffiti writing. The cypher comes to designate a space of productive "emptiness", a creative void, *into* and *from* which meaning, energy, and knowledge can be derived. The cypher has the capacity to generate and to "contain the knowledge shared within it, or the energy of the collective" (2009: 5). Cyphers bring collectivities into being through collaborative communal expression, the shared contribution of energy. But this form of collectivity is dynamic and expressive and its collaborative form can also be, as Johnson suggests, a "gateway for psychic and spiritual elevation" (2009: 5). The cypher is an energetic space of emergence<sup>11</sup>. For Skookum Sound System member D'Arcy O'Connor, "The cipher is something each must work toward unlocking within. We have ceremonies for these reasons. All humans have ceremony from these families who have carried

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<sup>11</sup> The cypher also instantiates Hakim Bey's well-known formulation of the *temporary autonomous zone* which, "is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it." (Bey 1991: 3).



them. I also learn from my own ciphered codes constantly. We hunt these within ourselves if we are built in this way from our bloodlines” (O’Connor 2014).

The cypher’s spontaneous and improvisatory codes lend to it a liberatory and insurrection quality; its ruptural form can be occupied and performed, clandestinely, as a modality of creative defiance from which to affirm power and resistance. The cypher generates power by constructing autonomous sites of collective creativity and encoding performance. This autonomy, however, is relative. In this context, it can be understood as a transient flow in the breaks between imposed codes of colonial relationality and ordering structures generated from within. In hip-hop, the kinesthetic practice of improvising within the inchoate emptiness of the cypher’s *dark matter* animates its inherent dynamism. The cypher’s invisible force is thus generated in a complex flow of interconnected motions that reconfigure individual voices and bodies, substances and surfaces, sounds and stories, images and influences.

For Indigenous artists and communities, the hip-hop cypher is an analogue to Indigenous forms of cultural and ceremonial practice. The space of the circle, or the cipher, that represents both presence and absence, wholeness/completion and emptiness, spiritual communication and collective creative expression, is ubiquitous among Indigenous peoples. Through numerous traditions of storied and circular forms of orality, storytelling, griots, drum dances, and ceremonies the circle comes to define both a specific perimeter and a collective arrangement of space that are figured and shaped by the opaque interiority of the cipher. The “inside” of the circle, or the heart of the cypher, is a semi-autonomous zone that can be occupied and inhabited by its participants, but it may only be legible or intelligible to those who participate in its creation. In hip-hop culture, the cypher is a space of creative combat that stages performative

“battles”, however, it is also a space for artists to practice and develop their skills in dance, song, story, and freestyle improvisation.

In the cypher, dancers, singers, or MCs take turns vocalizing and improvising, sharing stories and routines, coding rhythmic sequences in patterned forms of communication. Participants interweave their voices and movements in flows of individuated articulation. Each dancer or MC takes their turn performing; each must claim their space to speak or to move with the cypher’s internal flow and emergent rhythm. Contemporary forms of pow-wow music and drumming employ similar formal properties to those found in the cypher: call-and-response vocalizations, kinaesthetic flows between bodies and voices, and the insistent repetition of synchronous rhythms that guide dancers, singers, performers, and witnesses through a complex interplay between individuated expression with the performative unity of an emergent collective. For many hip-hop artists, the cypher produces an experience of elevated consciousness, or heightened aesthetic and affective sense, a hypnotic *flow-state* in which participants are both witnesses to, and co-creators of, the cypher’s invisible force — its performative semblance of the sublime and the sacred. The cypher’s “sacredness” parallels Indigenous cultural and ceremonial forms that generate similar forces through collective creation, action, and improvisation. However, the cypher does not simply produce affective experiences of conscientization, it also enable new forms of subjectivity and community to be realized in its strategic staging of performative events. These events, in turn, generate transversal movements and creative modalities that give form to *aesthetic and resistant* spaces. The cypher breaks away from normative orderings (metaphorically re-centring new forms of community within the circle) and opens *into* an interior site of generative indeterminacy and decolonial potentiality. Indigenous ceremonial spaces, like hip-hop’s cyphers, are produced in a similar movement away from

external visibility and control. Ceremonial and cultural practices produce dynamic articulations of individual and collective subjectivity; and the hip-hop cypher models an emergent form of micro-community in which mutable collectivities achieve their “communicative capacity” (2009: 13) through a dynamic interplay of movements, bodies, sights, and sounds.

The cypher, like remix, is a practice of worlding and re-worlding, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, that admits the need to defend its perimeter from external encroachment and while recentring the collective power of its interior communalism. Cyphers are resurgent circles, decolonizing spaces of artistry and agency. Agency, in this context, is more than individual ability, it is the creative power to expressed and perform resistance to external appropriation and against colonizing codes. Hip-hop’s enciphered practices model a new form of decolonial political practice located in the breaks marked by ruptural performance that defend communities-in-becoming that are neither rigidly bordered nor territorially enclosed. A cypher is collectively defined by its participants: it can invite new voices to participate, battle, exchange, and build its power, or it can defend its resistant interiority in the flows encoded within its opaque internal world.

Cyphers, like ceremonies, connect us to the invisible forces of creation. This “dark matter,” Imani K. Johnson writes, “is the very presence of possibility in the universe” (2009: 86). Hip-hop performs both the visible and the opaque; it invites us to inhabit improvisation and indeterminacy as essential elements of our creativity. But the cypher is also an *embodied action*, a verb. To cypher is to join the dance, to speak the self, to fill the space of emptiness with collective presence. And in this collective presencing the sacredness of the cypher is revealed: knowledge, creation, and imagination fuse in the act of creation. The cypher produces a sensate experience of elevation, a fleeting, rhythmic form of freedom, that can be found in many

Indigenous contexts and cultures, from the drums, songs, and ceremonial practices of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, to capoeiran *rodas*, West African *ring shout* ceremonies, and Puerto Rican *bomba* (Johnson 2009: 106). Encircled stories, songs and dances are cyphers of collective, creative expression. For both participants and spectators, the cypher is a means of “transporting them to a different place” (2009: 100) — an embodied flight into elevated consciousness and spiritual connection. Cyphers also produce affective experiences of immediacy, of being present, in the creative becoming of a transformed world. Although not all circles are sacred, and not all cyphers are “transcendent”, the practice and form of the cypher has the potential to instantiate an intervallic space of freedom in which forms of casual performance (everyday battles, friendly competitions, or displays of skill among peers) can become ritualized sites of creative transformation. For participants, the experience of *being transformed*, of being *moved* by the cypher’s invisible force, can prefigure new relational forms of decolonial consciousness and spontaneous desubjectivization. The cypher fractures consciousness and redistributes affectivity, subjectivity, and sensibility.

The cypher is not a metaphor for spiritual experience, it is a “plane on upon which the force of that mediation between the physical reality in the circle and our more connected or liberated selves take place” (2009: 107). As a communicative praxis, the cypher enables communal continuity to ancestral memory and spirit. For Indigenous peoples, generative spaces and practices through which to express our “connected and liberated selves” are essential to our decolonizing struggles against the stultifying and fragmentary effects of continued colonialism. The cypher proposes a model for collectivizing creativity and animating decolonizing possibilities.

The cypher is, thus, a space of decolonial potentiality, resistance, and resurgence that instantiates an Indigenous politics of *affirmative refusal*, or what I term elsewhere, *creative negation*, in which the circle is formed by the cypher's participants as a turning away from the colonial gaze and recognition, and toward the self-generating space of the emergent community within the circle, inside the cypher. At the heart of this embodied and symbolic model of decolonial praxis is the cypher's spontaneous formation and reconfiguration of subjectivity and collectivity. Inside the cypher, each artist (speaker, storyteller, MC, dancer, etc) participates in a dynamic regenerative art of collective and individual voicing in which the unique style/flow of every participant exists in an immanent interplay of emergence and disappearance, visibility and invisibility, individuality and community, unity and combat. The code of the hip-hop cypher is to find one's place and voice within an energetic space of collective emergence. This code is collectively improvised and authored, but it allows and makes space for the individual voicings (whether phonic/sonorous, kinaesthetic, or visual) of each participant. The cypher is "relational, in flux, and open to transformation" (Levell 2014: 39); it is a practice of becoming. As Nicola Levell argues

It is this ongoing process of becoming (a kind of remapping of the subject) that gives rise to a proliferation of identifications — the many ways we identify and articulate ourselves through everyday practices, social engagements, and visual, material, and performative expressions — in which stable and transitory, complementary and contradictory elements coexist. The individual self therefore emerges not in a linear, "progressive", coherent way but as a complex, multidirectional, non-unitary, interactive, and dynamic entity. (2014: 39)

In parallel to Indigenous ceremonial practices in which the individual qua subject is decentred in favour of collectivity—the *becoming community* of the collective—the cypher enables this multidirectional and dynamic emergence.

As Johnson notes, "A subject need not be there in material form for its historical and political potency to exist" (Johnson 2009: 26). Thus, to decentre the subject in this context is to

assert the need for a critical praxis of desubjectivization such that subjectivity is accounted for in a fluid and mobile state of becoming: appearing and receding, ebbing and flowing, in rhythmic performance. Within the cypher, the decolonial becoming of subjectivity is achieved in a simultaneous emergence of self and collective in inter-relational forms. This can be extended further to effect the becoming of a *collectivized non-subject of subjectivity*: the subject that is simultaneously both self and non-self within the cypher. At the the height of the cypher's flow-state individual consciousness and subjectivity become one with the flux and flow of collective creation and, as in ceremony, become conduits for a process of recoding subjectivity.

Following José Muñoz, the collapse of the distinction between self, other, and collective that occurs in the cypher can be understood as a strategic form of *disidentification*, a practice of “rethinking encoded meaning” and both literally and symbolically reconfiguring individuated subjectivity:

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (Muñoz 1999: 31)

Hip-hop encodes in/dividuality within collectivities mediated by relational communicative praxis. By reworking hegemonic identity categories and reimagining the immanent decolonial potentiality of autonomous, creative communities in becoming, the cypher can be understood not simply as a desubjectivizing process of disidentification, but as a transversal practice of resistance to legibility and visibility:

'transversal practices' must often negotiate a double and sometimes paradoxical move. A logic of refusal – of resisting visibility, or taking on recognisable forms. This refusal while running serious risks of invisibility, marginalisation, or inoperability, however also becomes a condition for an opening out of another logic, or system of valorisation. This is what I take to be the proposition of the work of art, that's really not a work of art...one should recognise and work with

the paradox that in order to defend something you might also need to displace it, and its categorisation at the same time. (Kelly 2005: 1)

Hip-hop is a dialogic technology that enables Indigenous artists to destabilize recognisable forms by claiming the space for self-affirmative forms of cultural autonomy to be expressed.

Indigenous youth are “fusing hip-hop’s expressive elements of MCing, DJing, b-boying, and aerosol graffiti art with their own traditions of oratory, music, drumming, dance, and the visual arts” (Chang 2007: 278). But the cypher — as concept, spatial relation, and creative practice — not only activates new forms of community and communication within this composite, creative fusion, it provides Indigenous peoples struggling against colonialism with a model of regenerative refusal.



Figure 5. *Idle No More Round Dance*, Calgary (2013)

## THE ROUND DANCE AS CYPHER

In late 2012, the Indigenous social movement Idle No More exploded into view across social media platforms and in ciphered forms of communicative media. In its early weeks, the movement staged a networked wave of flash mob round dances held in shopping malls and public spaces across Turtle Island and around the world. Striking simultaneously at the heart of capitalist consumerism at the height of the holiday shopping season, and at the contemporary state of Indigenous absence in the public imaginary – in which Indigenous peoples have been disappeared, forcibly erased, or rendered invisible – Idle No More signaled a collective and communal return to presence mobilized in concentric circles of resistance, place-based action, and performance. Indigenous communities forged resurgent forms of politics using the ancestral and cultural form of the round dance. As both a representational gesture of Indigenous resistance and a performance of self-affirmative continuity, presence and struggle, the round dance proposed an evocative interimage of indigeneity that reterritorialized Indigenous presence beyond the normative borders in which it is often inscribed (such as reservation and rural communities) and staged strategic interventions into public spaces, including shopping malls, urban intersections, and government buildings.

The flash mob round dance was mobilized as a tactical form of enciphered resistance that self-authorized Indigenous presence in public and brought Indigenous cultural and ceremonial practices into the view of settler society. The round dance originates among Indigenous nations of the prairies, but it is paralleled in the tea and drum dances found in the north, and in many other social dance forms among Indigenous nations across Turtle Island (Martin 2013: 1). Although the round dance has historically emphasized social inclusion, participation, and



healing, as a resistant practice, it encouraged broad-based social participation that mobilized both Indigenous and non-Indigenous supporters in multiple communities..

In the early weeks of the movement, hundreds and then thousands of Indigenous bodies filled shopping malls across Turtle Island for temporary gatherings, where the sound of hand drums and traditional songs echoed through the hallways of hyper-consumption, disrupting holiday shopping, and bringing new acoustic resonance into the semi-public and muzak-filled banal spaces of the everyday. The round dances brought spirit, energy, and music inside the atriums of capitalism; and Indigenous songs and dances into auditory contact and visible dialogue with settler society and governments. Many witnesses to the round dances did not know what to make of these simultaneously defiant and celebratory actions. Were they acts of resistance? Performance? Celebration? Or something else entirely?

In the context of hip-hop praxis as I have discussed it above, the round dance can be understood as a revised form of the cypher: an open enclosure codified through ritualized performance, collectivized creation, and spatio-temporal rupture. During Idle No More, the round dance became a site of “disruptive convergence”, in which “a crowd physically overruns a space, so that it can no longer be used in the way required by [a governing] institution or system” (D’Arcy 2014: 91). The round dances disrupted both physical and symbolic terrain using Indigenous song, ceremony, and bodies to transform mediatic/virtual and place-based/material sites of strategic occupation into a convergent technique of “disruptive outburst”. As D’Arcy suggests, the round dance staged a “form of insurgent street theatre” that was performed in “unauthorized spaces” (2014: 91). By disrupting the quotidian rhythms of the capitalist status quo, and by calling attention to asymmetries of settler colonial power, the round dances created and claimed autonomous sites of Indigenous presence and re-emergence.

The drum is the generative centre of the round dance, the heart of the cypher that visions and sounds resurgence. It is both the organizing principle and rhythmic force through which the round dance's resistant capacity is given form in song. The songs performed during the Idle No More round dances ranged from warrior songs and ceremonial chants to social and contemporary songs, thereby making visible not only the intergenerational survival and continuance of the songs themselves – and the song carriers who bring them forth in the present – but also their resilience and adaptability to new contexts and iterations. In this way, the round dances performed an apposite movement through remembrance and futurity, presence and return. As one CBC news report noted: “The Idle No More flash mobs are a part of...returning a beat, a song and a dance to the heart of the territories where they were born, and where they still thrive” (Martin 2013: 2).

The round dance instantiated a self-affirmative and self-authorizing form of resistance that celebrated Indigenous autonomy and called on settler society to witness and account for historical injustice. As a cypher, it embodied individual and collective voicings that affirmed the interior coherence of its spaces of regeneration. Although the round dance brought Indigenous peoples into mutual visibility for one another during Idle No More, it simultaneously defended Indigenous presence within the emergent performative collectivities and as members of resilient nations and communities. The round dance, then, as a remixed form of the hip-hop cypher, claimed an indeterminate space of decolonial becoming in which new forms of individual and collective subjectivity could be heard in refrains, echoes, and rhythms of change.

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Hip-hop is an art of continuous reinvention whose recombinant techniques and creative practices can be mobilized across multiple spaces and contexts. As the round dance form demonstrates,

hip-hop's aesthetics can be found in creative forms beyond the hip-hop arts. Thus, although it is often conceptualized in relation to its original elements (MCing, DJing, b-boying, graffiti, and knowledge of self) or to its commercialized, commodity forms, hip-hop can equally be understood according to its aesthetico-political practices, which Danny Hoch defines according to its specific techniques of creation:

- *metaphor*
  - *codification*
  - *allusion*
  - *call and response*
  - *battle/competition*
  - *performance*
  - *reappropriation*
- (Hoch 2007: 355)

Following my discussion of Indigenous, decolonial, and resurgent aesthetics, as outlined in the previous chapter, this conceptualization of hip-hop aesthetics can be expanded to include an integrative matrix of creative elements that incorporates Indigenous aesthetic coordinates into Hoch's taxonomy:

- *repetition*
- *duality*
- *multi-dimensionality*
- *abstraction*
- *immanence/becoming*
- *flux/movement*
- *transformation*
- *renewal/re-emergence (resurgence)*

Although I do not intend to delimit the specific forms of resurgent Indigenous creativity that can be developed within hip-hop praxis, the above elements illustrate affinities between hip-hop and Indigenous forms of cultural production, whose practitioners share a common vision for remixing and reimagining themselves and the world. Hip-hop can be understood, in this view, to become decolonizing when it enables transversal forms of creative expression to be collectivized and actualized. I emphasize the transversal aspects of these aesthetic elements, here, in order to

attenuate my critique to their embedded political potentialities. Transversality, as Gary Genosko writes, is a practice that involves movement and transformation:

Transversality belongs to the processual subject's engendering of an existential territory and self-transportation beyond it. The key concepts involved are: *mobility* (traversing domains, levels, dimensions, the ability to carry and be carried beyond); *creativity* (productivity, adventurousness, aspiration, laying down lines of flight); *self-engendering* (autoproduction, self-positing subjectivity), territories from which one can really take off into new universes of reference. (Kangieser 2012: 270).

Mobility, creativity, and self-engendering forms of creative praxis are essential to both hip-hop culture and Indigenous art-making. As I have suggested above, the fugitive movement of indigeneity is, in the context of hip-hop praxis, a transversal movement of self-engendering creativity. The cypher instantiates transversal acts of creation where “the collective affirmatively aris[es] out of ‘the flash of common praxis’” (2012: 272) and performs decolonial subjectivities into being. In the cypher, new forms of community become possible, new worlds can be dreamed and improvised into being, and new modalities of decolonizing creativity can be not only performed, but protected and defended. “Improvisation is simply motion,” Bobby McFerrin states. “It precedes musical knowledge, or understanding about anything. It’s simply... the courageous act of...following...the courage to keep moving...to keep going” (McFerrin 2014).

To elucidate the complex interrelationship between Indigenous hip-hop, art-making, resurgence, and decolonial struggle, I now turn to an analysis of several contemporary Indigenous artists and musicians working with hip-hop aesthetics and practices: A Tribe Called Red, Tall Paul, Skookum Sound System, Jaque Fragua, and Sacramento Knoxx. In their creative practices and artistry, commonalities between Indigenous and hip-hop aesthetics become apparent and give force to the decolonial potentiality of hip-hop’s dynamic forms when brought into alignment with the resurgent force of Indigenous creativity.

## A TRIBE CALLED RED: *ELECTRIC POW WOW*

A Tribe Called Red are an acclaimed trio of Indigenous deejays and electronic musicians that have taken Indian Country and the world by storm. Comprised by DJ NDN (Anishinaabe), Bear Witness (Cayuga), and Zoolman (Mohawk), A Tribe Called Red have elevated the art of remix to newly indigenized heights. Their riveting reconfiguration of pow wow and traditional Indigenous musical forms mixed with hip-hop, dancehall and electronic dance music, has birthed a compelling new iteration of contemporary Indigenous music culture that has received nearly universal acclaim. The group's name invokes both their influence and indebtedness to hip-hop: A Tribe Called Red (ATCR) is both a clever nod to, and a remixed moniker of, A Tribe Called Quest, one of hip-hop's most enduring and influential groups. Reclaiming the *tribe* and slyly playing on pan-Indian tropes of the *red*, ATCR places themselves squarely within Indigenous and hip-hop traditions and cultural forms, while making use of both sets of influences as the source material for their unique form of auditory storytelling. Theirs is the sound of Indigenous soundclash, the native sound system. Paul D. Miller (aka DJ Spooky) writes: "The best DJs are griots, and whether their stories are conscious or unconscious, narratives are implicit in the sampling idea. Every story leads to another story to another story to another story" (Miller 2004: 21). A Tribe Called Red speaks through samples in sound, video, and dance to tell multiple, interlocking stories of Indigenous resurgence. Although their music traces the simultaneous contours of contemporary club and dance music while remixing less widely-known forms of Indigenous cultural expression, the compelling premise of their project has thus far been simple: to intercut elements of seemingly disparate genres and styles — *to remix indigeneity*<sup>12</sup>. The

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<sup>12</sup> In this view, it is perhaps surprising that ATCR have been the first to gain widespread recognition for remixing these forms, given that the rhythmic proximity of pow wow music and drumming lends itself easily to being mixed with the beat-driven aesthetics of hip-hop and electronic music.

results of this collision have been widely resonant, earning the group a global audience of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners.

In 2011, A Tribe Called Red released their first single, “Electric Pow Wow Drum”. The song has come to define their sonic aesthetic and it articulates an early iteration of their emergent new electronic music subgenre known, appropriately, as *pow wow step*. The track opens with the solo repeated quarter notes of a pow-wow drum that is looped for several bars before being interrupted by rhythmically intercut samples of a modulated and soaring pow wow vocal. The melody is layered over the beat, as a synthesized bass line oscillates and flows, then pitches down an octave from the melody, aligned with the vocal line in parallel and perfect rhythm. But the full force of the song’s impact is not felt until a hip-hop beat is added to the opening pow wow drums and samples. These crash, in unison, into a blasting, maximalist chorus fed by the looping repetition of the pow wow vocal melody paired with a massive, dubstep-inflected bassline. The potent cry of pow wow singers brings an urgent *human* vocality into the intimate chaos of the electrified nightclub, pushed to the centre of the dancefloor, and brought into friction with the anaesthetic precision of digital software-based sonics. This is Indigenous music made ready for new sites of aesthetic remix and rhythmic combat. And yet, “Once you hear it, it makes total sense” (Shingler 2013).

The self-evident “sensibility” of ATCR’s sound evinces an essential quality of the group’s appeal: who is the *you* being addressed here? Who is the audience? What is it about their unique take on Indigenous remix that makes “total sense”? A Tribe Called Red’s indigenized aesthetic trades on affective immediacy and the ability to be read in multiple ways and, ultimately, appreciated (and thereby potentially appropriated) by multiple audiences. Ian Campeau (DJ NDN) reflects on the group’s growing and changing audience in relation to a

recent performance in Montreal. Following the legacy of the Oka conflict in Kahnawake, and some Mohawks' resistance to coming into the city of Montreal, Campeau observed that more residents from the local reserve have "made the trip" to see ATCR's latest shows than had done so previously. Campeau wondered if this was because the Mohawk community wanted "to claim us as their own" (Shingler 2013). A Tribe Called Red have been claimed by many communities because they practice self-reflexive forms of remix that are operative, here, at several levels. First, by producing music and art that samples from pow wow and non-traditional Indigenous forms they make work that is accessible and legible to Indigenous nations and communities. Second, by making their work circulate within dominant representational circuits of networked performance and commodification, they render themselves vulnerable to further sampling, remix, and appropriation by non-Indigenous listeners. And, third, by enabling themselves, as Indigenous performers, to be symbolically "claimed" by (and, therefore, metaphorically remixed into) multiple Indigenous nations and communities, A Tribe Called Red effects a dialectical and recombinant movement both to *re/claim* indigeneity and to *be claimed by* their audiences. As Bear Witness suggests, however, this was first motivated by their desire to create contemporary Indigenous music for Indigenous people: "We wanted to make something for Aboriginal people that was club music...that we could have as our own; that people could claim as [being] for them" (RPM 2011). ATCR functions then as an anticipatory synecdoche for the reclamation of an inter-communal and inter-Indigenous creative unity, in which Indigenous artists and performers that navigate multiple audiences and communities through their work are simultaneously able, in turn, to be claimed by communities and brought into an imaginative genealogy and symbolic geography of collective Indigenous action, struggle, creation, and performance.

A Tribe Called Red are electronic griots, digital storytellers, and rhythm scientists. The group takes up hip-hop's injunction to *represent* by creatively navigating discursive and mediatized appropriations of indigeneity. ATCR plays, replays (and plays with) tropes of the *indigenous* by remixing, reimagining and redeploying them within and across a regime of "semiotic guerilla warfare" (Hebdige 1979: 101). The group subverts normative codings by using self-representative practices to disrupt public discourse and sonically/visually voice multiple, contemporary figurations of indigeneity. ATCR moves within a field of representational arts to interject into new spaces of performance, cultural production and consumption. By connecting with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous listeners, however, A Tribe Called is able to move in and between contested spaces of representation, where indigeneity has been either rendered invisible (as it has been in the electronic dance music community) or disfigured (through the continued reproduction of stereotypical depictions of Indigenous cultures and peoples in Western/mass popular culture). However, ATCR does not create (or advocate for) an essentialist rendering of indigeneity figured as unitary or static. Rather, they acknowledge, and sample from, the wide range of mis/representations that have been produced about Indigenous people. By intervening in these narratives of disappearance and deformation, the group brings Indigenous presence into sonic, visual, and embodied spaces of cultural production. A Tribe Called Red locates the dancefloor, the global music community, and popular consciousness as sites of potential Indigenous reclamation and reoccupation. Set to the rhythm of the electric pow wow drum, ATCR resonates at multiple frequencies: modulating and making space for an open-ended and imaginary community of Indigenous nations and listeners to cohere around their music and art, while remixing dominant sonics and narratives for



Indigenous purposes. In this sense, ATCR reconfigures social codes and Indigenous ancestral memory simultaneously, by calling attention to the absence of indigeneity in the colonial present.

ATCR member Bear Witness places the group's music within a frame of "cultural continuance" that marks what he calls a "*continuum*...from pow wow to what [A Tribe Called Red is] doing in the clubs now" (RPM 2011). The group develops this aesthetic practice out of a hip-hop tradition of sampling, in which "sampling plays with different perceptions of time", writes Paul D. Miller (2004: 28). For A Tribe Called work, playing with multiple temporalities enables them to remix collective memory in new flows and continuities. By re-centring Indigenous songs<sup>13</sup> and aesthetics in their work, ATCR affirms the continuity of these forms and our ability to represent ourselves on our own terms, even when using colonizing images as the language with which to speak. As DJ NDN states: "we're decolonizing these images and these songs and we're taking that power back ourselves" (PRI 2012). The reclamation of power, cultural ownership and decolonization are recurrent themes throughout A Tribe Called Red's art and music. They have made it their explicit purpose to do battle in the hypercommodified mediaspace of representation. And this has proven a compelling narrative by which to invite audiences to pay attention and to listen.

For Indigenous audiences, however, A Tribe Called Red's music functions differently: it affirms our creative resistance against invisibility and misrepresentation while simultaneously cultivating new form of Indigenous community. ATCR's popular "Electric Pow Wow" club

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<sup>13</sup> A Tribe Called Red's music samples from contemporary native pow wow groups, including recording artists from the Indigenous record label, Tribal Spirit Music, with whom the group has established a deeply reciprocal relationship. ATCR was given access to the full catalogue of releases on the label in exchange for providing remixes back to the artists who they sampled (Tribal Spirit 2013). Although formally the music is, in many cases, 'traditional', A Tribe Called Red also samples from more recent forms of pow wow music that lend a generative atemporality quality to the samples, which are then blended with decidedly contemporary electronic beats. In their live performances, the group plays with a background of accompanying live visuals projections (produced and remixed by Bear Witness) that juxtaposes images sourced from an endless pool of historical and current pop/mass culture, films, videos, cartoons and televisual representations of indigeneity.

nights, held monthly in Ottawa (and elsewhere), were first established to bring the communal Indigenous form of the pow wow into the urban space of settler colonial cities. The Electric Pow Wow claims Indigenous space and claims space for *being Indigenous*. Transposing the pow wow into the nightclub provided the group with a space for community: an informal relational site for Indigenous people living in cities to gather and create. As DJ NDN has suggested, “It’s a place where you meet people...It’s a place where you dance. It’s a place where you share songs. It’s the same as a pow wow. It just so happens that it’s in an urban setting and a modern setting, it takes place in a club” (PRI 2012). Despite its apparent and deceptive simplicity, the electric pow wow has remixed notions of Indigenous community by re-creating it in a mobile, urban form. As ATCR moves from city to city, and community to community, each performance becomes its own electric pow wow — a vector for the micro-performance of Indigenous communalism that brings together diverse and often disconnected members of urban Indigenous communities, as well as non-Indigenous listeners, in an affirmative celebration of presence. Although these sites are necessarily temporary, the electric pow wow reconfigures the space of the nightclub according to an Indigenous rhythmological force of presence. This is not the opaque circle of the hip-hop cypher, but an opening into something else — the possibility of reforming new Indigenous collectivities mobilized by the sound of the Tribe toward potential political and aesthetic action. A Tribe Called Red’s remix aesthetics and vectoral electric pow wow forms suggest that Indigenous music and art can prove transformative in potentially unanticipated and productive ways. Paul D. Miller describes this practice as a form of “rhythm science”:

not so much a new language as a new way of pronouncing the ancient syntaxes we inherit from history and evolution, a new way of enunciating the basic primal languages that slip through the fabric of rational thought and infect our psyche at another, deeper level. Could this be the way of healing? Taking elements of our own alienated consciousness and recombining them to create new languages from old (and in doing so to reflect the chaotic turbulent reality we all call home), just might be a way of seeking to reconcile the damage rapid technological advances have wrought on our collective consciousness. (2004: 72)

A Tribe Called Red's Indigenous rhythm science is created through remix, sampling, and strategic acts of reappropriation. In their music and creative praxis, we see that it is possible not only to resist the psychic damage of colonial consciousness, but to recuperate ancestral memory, reform community, and to heal. Indigenous hip-hop praxis that channels the affective power of anticolonial rage and transforms it becomes a force for healing and decolonization. "Hip-hop is one of the many driving forces that are shaping Indigenous resurgence in our lifetime," writes Lakota hip-hop artist Frank Waln, "If we allow it, hip-hop provides us with a much needed outlet for colonial rage and a framework for decolonial love" (2015: 1).

#### TALL PAUL: 'PRAYERS IN A SONG'

*Imagine what it be / to live nomadic off the land and free.*

- Tall Paul

For Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe MC Tall Paul, "Hip-hop might be the only aesthetic that has ever significantly influenced me as a person. Because of hip-hop, I *live* hip-hop. I related to the stories and it made me want to contribute to the communities I'm involved in. It made me want to make the world better, even if only by distantly inspiring others through my music and performance" (Wenell Jr. 2014). Tall Paul's hip-hop is lyrical, personal storytelling that alternates between introspective reflection and critical socio-political analysis; honest stories of daily struggle and rap hymns to hip-hop culture, skill supremacy, and bravado. "I try to make music that reflects who I am completely," he says. "I want my music to reflect me all the way, the good, the bad, the pretty, the ugly, the in-between...because I value honesty. I want those around me and those who listen to my music to be able to get to know me through my music. I want them to be able to say that my music represents who I am" (Wenell Jr. 2014). Although his music and creative expression serve a primary purpose of self-representation, Wenell Jr. also

considers the necessity of writing music that reflects Indigenous political struggles against colonial occupation, colonized society and consciousness.

Can hip-hop be spiritual? Ceremonial? Decolonizing? In his 2011 track, “Prayers in a Song”, Tall Paul evokes these questions in beautiful, poetic form. The moving song recounts his experience of attempting to affirm an Indigenous identity against the alienating effects of colonial dislocation and fragmentation. Wenell Jr. depicts “the harsh realities of growing up in a poor urban landscape” (Olson 2013) and his struggle to learn his Indigenous language, Anishinaabemowin. Hip-hop has always narrated struggle, but Tall Paul’s track is significant and compelling because of its self-reflexive form/content and context. I’m interested, here, in the interplay between these elements. So, rather than focusing exclusively on the internal poetics of the song, which are eloquent and dope, I examine the song as decolonial praxis — as a processual iteration of Indigenous hip-hop elaborating an ethic and aesthetics of resurgence and decolonial struggle. “Prayers in a Song” cogently articulates many of the challenges and opportunities inherent in contemporary Indigenous cultural revitalization projects that seek to make Indigenous linguistic and cultural practices relevant or attractive to youth. In this sense, the song’s reflexivity functions as an aesthetic, metaphorical and explanatory device with which interrogate Indigenous creative praxis. Moving beyond its limited object status as a cultural commodity, however, “Prayers in a Song” transforms the trope of Indigenous resistance into an affirmative call to resurgent action narrated through pedagogical, spiritual, and ceremonial practice.

Tall Paul’s insightful hip-hop is multivalent and ambivalent. The truth of personal experience invokes an always immanent (yet proximate) collective; one that gives form to a decolonizing Indigenous becoming, an Indigenous relational consciousness (or subjectivation)

formed in and through embodied action. In its first reflexive modality, “Prayers in a Song” literally narrates and transcribes Tall Paul’s own process of working through his doubts and questions about how best to navigate notions of indigeneity, legitimacy, authenticity, identity and hybridity, yet one that resists their resolution at the level of form or content. Sonically, Tall Paul’s poetics and the instrumental accompaniment are melancholic in tone, yet they refuse to remain in lamentation of lost origins and colonial alienation. Instead, “Prayers in a Song” literalizes its own invocation to resurgence, by calling itself (and, multiply, to the listener) to account for the inherited responsibility of carrying ancestral memory forward and revitalizing Indigenous language. As the first verse concludes, the song’s purpose is fully revealed: the chorus shifts from English to Anishinaabemowin. Title, form, purpose and process converge. In this dialectical move, the chorus responds to the questions posed in the verses. Call and response. Story, echo, refrain. The Indigenous linguistic chorus flows with a similar rhythm to the verse, yet its introduction introduces a symbolic second order of reflexivity.

The chorus marks the refrain as an emergent return: a resurgent ceremonial referent set against the verses’ intimate questioning, an echoed continuance, and a calling to presence of other worlds, other possible forms of speech. Here, the cipher is inverted: rather than being constituted through an improvisatory space of collective action, the coded language of Anishinaabemowin functions within an established song structure as a ciphered knowledge form that simultaneously literalizes and “speaks out loud” the specific prayers offered by and through the song, while also marking the limited intelligibility of its utterance. The song’s audience is immediately transformed by the chorus, which calls out to a potential community of fellow Anishinaabe language speakers, but also to the spirit world, where the language *transmits* the speaker’s call for help to the ancestors and the Great Spirit (at a strategically intelligible

frequency). Anishinaabemowin affirms the continued living presence of the Anishinaabe people. “I intended for it to be a prayer”, says Wenell Jr. “It’s basically asking the Great Spirit...for help. Help me to learn the language and culture so that I can help our people; so that our culture survives” (RPM 2011: 12). The chorus moves the verses’ narrative quest for understanding and assistance into a new register, by representing the culmination of Tall Paul’s attempt to *speak*: to learn enough of his language to pray and, thereby, to begin the decolonizing work of cultural and linguistic renewal, reclamation and revitalization. Fluency, here, is not a prerequisite; it is the action, the attempt, and the return to the culture that count. At a third order of reflexivity, then, the song reflects a metanarratological project of what it means to learn and to know an Indigenous language. Fluency does not arrive fully formed. Learning demands individual agency, the development of community-based relationships, and embodied practice.

For Tall Paul, this practice of learning how to narrate struggle is essential to hip-hop and to the politicization of Indigenous art and creativity:

We’ve all been oppressed and taken advantage of, and if you haven’t personally experienced this, chances are that your elders and/or ancestors did. Boarding schools for example. I myself went through foster care, something I like to think of as somewhat of a modern day boarding school. Being taken away from the only people you love, and being placed with strangers who deep down don’t really care for you, and some of them even mistreat you. Not only that, but there’s the Indian Child Welfare Act...It says that kids are supposed to be placed with their own families, or at least with other Indian families. In my case, there were times when I had relatives who were capable and willing to take me in, but it wasn’t allowed for whatever reason. Most of the time nothing was even done to place me with an Indian family. *Racism, oppression, genocide, inter-generational trauma, it’s these lived and reactive experiences that make indigenous art and music political.*

I feel like making music that speaks to these struggles is necessary because it is a huge part of who I am and why I am in the person I am. I need to express myself and get these things off my chest, first and foremost for myself, but also for those who relate. Not that I want to play the role of the victim and wallow in pity, but just to get it out of my system and to uplift anyone else who wants to do the same, because music can relieve those feelings in listeners. A lot of people are extremely inspired by music that speaks to their reality. (Wenell Jr 2014)

Contemporary Indigenous resurgent hip-hop thus finds its most relevant articulations in stories, songs, and forms of creativity that not only *reflect* our lived realities, but also adapt, mediate, and transform them. “Prayers in a Song” is a work of remix and translation. Tall Paul is not fluent in his language. He originally wrote the song entirely in English. A friend and language speaker helped him translate the chorus into Anishinaabemowin and Tall Paul took the song to an elder to have the translation checked for accuracy and to seek permission to incorporate it into his song. This powerful, dialectical transmission of decolonizing hip-hop in action, practice and process reflects a deep understanding of the material, spiritual, and psycho-affective conditions within which Indigenous resurgence takes place. Indigenous language provides the cipher through which Tall Paul transmits and encodes his flow.



Figure 6. Tall Paul, “Prayers in a Song”

The YouTube page for “Prayers in a Song” provides a translation of the track’s

Anishinaabemowin chorus:

Gichi-manido wiidookawishin ji-mashkawiziyaan  
*Great Spirit help me to be strong*

Mii dash bami'idiziyaan  
*So that I can help myself*  
Miizhishinaam zaagi'iiwewin  
*Show us all love*  
Ganoozh ishinaam, bizindaw ishinaam  
*talk to us, hear us*  
Mii-wenji nagamoyaan  
*That is why I am singing*  
Nimishomis wiidookawishinaam ji-aabajitooyaang anishinaabe izhitwaawin  
*Grandfather help us to use the indian customs/ways*  
mii-ji-bi-gikendamaan keyaa anishinaabe bimaadiziwin  
*so that we'll know how to live the indian way (the good life)*

Although the song is not uniformly representative of Tall Paul's creative output or artistry, it reflects a resurgent modality of creativity that employs hip-hop as a means of narrating and exemplifying what Cornassel terms "everyday acts of resurgence". Is this hip-hop as a decolonizing media praxis? I asked Tall Paul if he thinks Indigenous hip-hop and art can be forms of decolonization. He admitted that he wasn't sure:

Decolonization is a strong word. For me, that word means to reverse colonization, to take back our lands, to take back our governing power, to take back control of our resources. I believe art and music can inspire decolonization and spread its message. I'd have to seriously think about whether or not they are *themselves* forms of decolonization though. Has a song or piece of art ever caused a nation to change in a way that was truly impactful? (Wenell Jr. 2014, emphasis added)

Whether or not "Prayer in a Song" can be understood as a literal "form" of decolonization, Tall Paul's music proposes a recuperative politics of decolonial potentiality that, through its storied narration of his concomitant commitment to hip-hop and Anishinaabe aesthetics, linguistic revitalization, cultural learning, and resurgence, reflects a self-reflexive, processual and dialogic investigation into hip-hop as a mediating and decolonizing praxis. The terrain of the decolonial imaginary is mapped by doing, asking, thinking, and sharing. Telling our stories of recovery and re-learning can inspire others to do the same and, in so doing, to collectivize our struggles for decolonization.



## SKOOKUM SOUND SYSTEM

Skookum Sound System is a transdisciplinary arts collective formed in 2011 by a west coast Indigenous audio-visual crew that includes Secwepemc vocalist, visual artist, and song carrier Csetkwe Fortier, visual and live-video Wuikinuxv/Klahoose artist Bracken Hanuse-Corlett (aka Amphibian14), Heiltsuk carver, visual artist, DJ and music producer Dean Hunt (aka Teeqwa / DJ Deano) and Wiimpatja visual artist and musician D'Arcy O'Connor (aka Impossible Nothing / Darwin Frost). Known for their multivariant, multimedia live shows, Skookum burst onto Vancouver's Indigenous music scene as an underground crew of Northwest Coast DJs, producers, singers and remix artists. Skookum incorporates hip-hop aesthetics into their uniquely west coast-inflected, hybridized style that fuses traditional Indigenous songs and drums with electronic beats, and blends kinetic cinematic samples with re/mixed visuals during their compelling live performances. Unlike A Tribe Called Red, with whom they share an affinity for remix and mashups, Skookum's style is recombinant yet decidedly *place-based*. "Skookum" is a Chinook slang term that has multiple definitions and is used throughout the Pacific Northwest. It is used as a casual descriptor for things that are variously "good", "strong", or "powerful"; and, as an auxiliary verb, it is similar to "can" or "to be able". The term is also used as an identifier for specific Indigenous place names in British Columbia and Washington state; and as a referent for certain kinds of mountain "giants" or creatures similar to Sasquatch. Skookum incorporates this plurality of resonances into their art and music and create spaces of transformation, healing and celebration in their live performances. Crew member D'Arcy O'Connor emphasizes the circular and ceremonial aspects of their crew, art and audience:

Together we make up a multi-media hoop. We take spaces and we transform them into places where people can heal, where people can feel good. Where there is sound and there is visuals and activity and loudness and bigness. Where they can go inside and take part in this and they can take it inside themselves and they can leave with something. The hoop of all four of us doing

slightly different things and working together is us taking our ceremony to different places.  
(Swan 2012)

Skookum renders transformational space intelligible through the aesthetics and language of hip-hop and remix culture and techniques of multimodal auditory, visual, and intertextual juxtaposition.

In addition to their multimodal work as a crew, each of Skookum's members are accomplished visual artists in their own right. Bracken Hanuse-Corlett, their live visual tactician, describes the influence hip-hop and remix culture have had on his creativity:

Remix and mashup are prevalent in my work. As a child from the 80's who grew up breakdancing I can't help but be influenced by my experience. I began listening to and became active in some of the elements of hip-hop at a young age. I recognized the political and socially conscious messages within it and it was easily relatable to our own struggles with oppression. As hip-hop pioneer and photographer Ernie Panicioli has stated, the four elements of hip hop have an equal in our Indigenous cultures: The DJ is synonymous with the drummer, the MC is equal to the singer, the Breakdancer is akin to our ceremonial dancers, and the graffiti artist is related to our artists and makers. (Hanuse-Corlett 2014)

For Hanuse-Corlett, connecting Indigenous creative expression to hip-hop and remix culture is a means of destabilizing bounded categories of artistry and authorship: "Remix and mashup subverts the need and want as an artist to be *original* or *unique*. Through use of collage, remix, and 'cutting it up' we can...create something that is our own movement or expression" (Hanuse-Corlett 2014).

Heiltsuk crew member Dean Hunt approaches his creative practice with a similar mindset — deploying hip-hop's recombinant techniques of sampling, remix, freestyle, cuts/loops and breaks, in both his musical production and beatmaking and in his visual work through painting, carving, and sculpture. Hunt's style works to adapt and reconfigure given forms and styles to his own purposes and aesthetic sensibilities:

Through Northwest Coast art and the northern style that I practice, that I learned from my brother and my dad there, the forms are quite set. They're elastic, but they're really precise in the way that you do them—the way that we do them, anyway. But once you get that language down, I

look at it like hip-hop, in a lot of ways. Because once you get that language down, or if you're an MC, once you get the freestyle down, or you know how to make a beat, then you can start being more experimental and switching things. Changing colours. Incorporating whatever you want. *It's that same mashup, sample theory*. And then apply that to painting and carving (Hunt 2015).

Hunt applies this incorporative collage/bricolage praxis to his creation process by sampling and re-sampling from his own previous work in sound and visual art. Drawing parallels with his compositional praxis in music which recombines/remixes disparate beats and sonic fragments, Hunt describes the way this ethic/aesthetic are at work within his visual creations. Following a practice he learned from Hanuse-Corlett, Hunt describes “using [his] sketchbook like a sampler”:

A lot of times, [in my] sketchbook, there will be certain characters and I'll try and mash those up. So I'll take a piece of cellophane paper and a projector. And I'll put a bunch on there from throughout the sketchbook. And then you can blow them up and shrink them down and do a bunch of things. But you can use different overlays to build a picture out of many different pictures. Which is a lot like *sampling*. You grab something from here, something from there. *So I'm using the sketchbook like a sampler*, in a way. I have all these different things. And I'll use the cellophane and put them all together and then I can move them around on the projector to project onto the canvas or whatever I'm working on. So, it does kind of work the same way. (Hunt 2015, emphasis added)

Hunt refigures the practice of sampling, here, as a compositional technique that draws equally from hip-hop and Indigenous aesthetics and processes.

“Hip-Hop was not created in New York”, says Skookum Sound System member D'Arcy O'Connor (aka Impossible Nothing / Darwin Frost), “It was a resurgence of four very old ceremonial elements” (O'Connor 2014). For O'Connor, hip-hop is interconnected with Indigenous cultural and ceremonial praxis:

Hip-hop is only a term used to describe a finitely measured temporal popular cultural mechanism. What we do as indigenous people ceremonially in life is our culture. Our culture is remix because we are communicating our will to have being. This is life or what some have now come to label after enduring so much violence, ‘survival’. *There is no rediscovery for us just continuation*. (O'Connor 2014, emphasis added)

For vocalist Csetkwe Fortier, hip-hop connects creativity to essential elements in both Indigenous and hip-hop praxis -- community and continuity:

hip-hop was born...from displaced Indigenous people...who were going through a lot of suffering, [persevering] and calling on lots of strength. And so we're very much similar in that way because we're...Indigenous and [hip-hop] has those same values and those same roots: What needs to be done?...I have all this stuff here...a mixture of different kinds of things, and how can I use [them] to get my voice heard, to get my people together, to get everybody in a safe place, to feel that energy and that sense of community? [For] a lot of Indigenous peoples from all over the *world*, that's a really big value—that *community* and that *connection*: through music, through food, through dance, through expression, through ceremony. (Fortier 2015)

African-American and Indigenous artists across Turtle Island have used hip-hop to cultivate dynamic, interconnected forms of communality that reflect shared commitments to creative transformation in resistance to oppression. Hip-hop provides communities across the world with a language to express this interconnection. Skookum Sound System is influenced as much by hip-hop aesthetics as by their own remixed reimaginings of Indigenous iconographies and semiotics. Their work is essentially *rhythmic*: Skookum uses live performances and video works to recalibrate cultural forms and breaking colonial visual codes into new cadences.



Figure 7. Skookum Sound System, “Ay I Oh Stomp / Operator”

On tracks like “Ay I Oh Stomp” Skookum blends dancehall sirens, rumbling basslines, and hip-hop beats with looped samples of traditional west coast songs and ambient sounds of splashing water. In performance and recorded video, these sonics are set to Hanuse-Corlett (aka Amphibian14)’s hyper-colour saturated, remixed renderings of archival film footage. Sampling from diverse sources, including Edward Curtis’ infamous 1914 silent film, *In the Land of the Head Hunters*, which fictionalizes the lives and world of the Kwakwaka’wakw people, Skookum loops a Curtis clip that depicts Indigenous paddlers moving over open water, gliding across the frame. The image is then cut, spliced, and inverted, transforming the source sample into a redoubled representations that converge at the center of the frame, folding in on themselves, before re-emerging in a repeated, fractured form that traces a non-linear narrative of obverse spatial symmetry.

The track “Operator” emerges out of “Ay I Oh Stomp” by juxtaposing a club-style hip-hop beat with reverberant, beatboxed percussion loops, staccato drums, and a micro-sampled rhythmic cut up of R&B vocals. Skookum pairs the rhythmic foundation with a hypnotic video mashup of dance moves sourced from hip-hop and Indigenous forms. Shot at night, a young hip-hop dancer stands in an outdoor hallway and begins a slow-motion popping and locking b-boy routine, illuminated only by dim overhead lights. The beat builds, and the dancer’s body twists and bends in half-speed contortions. As a flickering black and white archival image of a mask-clad Indigenous dancer bounds into view, layered over the image of the contorted b-boy. The masked figure dances quickly, squatting and standing, raising and extending wing-covered arms, bouncing in step, moving in a wide circle. As the dual images of the two dancers converge, the masked dancer appears to encircle and transform the b-boy into a white-outlined silhouette -- dubbed, echoed, repeated. The now duplicate/doubled images of the masked dancer moves in,

around, and through the center of the frame, grounding the b-boy's subtle movements in ancient form lines. Yet as each film clip is overlaid and repeated, the dancers' apparent dissimilarity appears to dissolve, rendering each dancer in an evocative, three dimensional interimage of co-presence and contemporaneity (in visual spatiality if not in literal time).

An embodied dialogue between the dancers' movements begins to emerge. The video progresses, the b-boy's movements speed up, his arms and legs extend wide and across the frame; the masked dancer bounces and crouches in tandem with the b-boy's intricate moves. The masked dance mimics the b-boy. Or is it the other way around? Who is echoing who here? The dancers flows are synchronous slippages from identifiable shapes to silhouetted outlines, from shadows to bodies and back again. Skookum explores multiplicity such that no single position of representational authority can be discerned. The dancers co-exist and interrelate in coterminous, if symmetrical, indeterminacy. They collide and blend, break and reconverge. They speak in kinaesthetic embodied speech, in chaotic visual unison. Their multivocality precedes a formal juxtaposition of space and time reimagined as co-constitutive practices—self-affirmative forms borne from the coded flows of hip-hop culture and the winged rhythms of masked movement, a hauntological Indigenous resonance pulled from the colonial archive. Within this multimodal and multimedia piece, past and present are rendered contemporaneous. Skookum refigures ancestral memory through a hip-hop imaginary that claims a spatialized simultaneity in the fluid interplay of conflated sampled, contorted images, and recorded sounds.

Skookum's multimodal aesthetics propose figurations of indigeneity in which multiple temporalities and images converge, transform, and are made to speak. They shape inchoate, multiple worlds by occupying and rupturing interstitial spaces of consciousness: where music becomes movement, image becomes flux, and ancestral knowledge arcs and bends through

mediated space with the force of renewed presence. The archive is revived, here, but its representations are recast in coded turns, enciphered circles. In Skookum's strategic doublespeak, indigeneity becomes chimerical: an irreducible evocation of hip-hop's aesthetic cacophony that generates an internally coherent collectivity in which many voices can (still) be heard.

Where capitalism seeks to smooth the terrain of its expansion through endlessly assimilative flows and forces, colonization fragments consciousness, breaking the circular and unitary wholism of Indigenous existence. Colonialism breaks the unity of our collective forms. But as Fred Moten writes, "the broken circle demands a new analytic (way of listening to the music)" (2003: 23). In Skookum's art, the broken circle demands kinaesthetic transformation, not simply a syntactical, semiotic reordering of inherited languages. As an anticolonial modality, this transformation enables the interarticulation of multiple Indigenous subjectivities that resound in the collective performance of the *ensemble*. To perform collectivity into being, Moten suggests, is "to experience, understand, describe, generate, imagine, improvise, ensemble. It is not a kind of totalistic substitute or cipher for individuality or singularity; it is rather a mechanism by way of which we understand singularity and totality to be phenomena within the larger phenomenon of ensemble (Moten 2003: 98). We might call Skookum Sound System's versioning of hip-hop collectivity an *echolocational praxis of performance* wherein indigeneity is both refigured and recovered in the break. By subverting the smooth surfaces of narrativized representations, Skookum codes Indigenous presence in spectral liminality and polyphonic motion toward simultaneity: indigeneity surfaces and hides, appears and is displaced, disappears and reemerges, in a collectivized voicing and remixed performance of decolonial ensemble.

\* \* \* \* \*

Remix aesthetics provoke us to rethink our mode of inquiry into Indigenous hip-hop as resurgent praxis. Instead of asking what Indigenous remix *represents*, we can ask: what does it *do*? How does it *move*? And what aesthetic/political possibilities are opened by its ruptural reconfiguration/recomposition of the performative event? In other words, how does remix enable new practices and processes of Indigenous creative expression to move beyond signification, cross thresholds, and resist univocal intelligibility? How can remix re-centre and rhythmically re/generate indigenous resistance and resurgence?







Figure 8.1 *Beat Nation* (at top); Figure 8.2 Skeena Reece, *Raven on the Colonial Fleet* (2010, at bottom)

## BEAT NATION: HIP-HOP AS INDIGENOUS CULTURE

At the contemporary confluence of Indigenous hip-hop, art, and remix, *Beat Nation: Hip-Hop as Indigenous Culture* is a travelling exhibition that explores how “the roots of hip-hop culture and music have been transformed by indigenous cultures and identities into new forms of visual culture and music that echo the realities of Aboriginal people” (Willard 2009). As I have suggested, contemporary indigeneity is figured in multiple ways, in echoed realities remixed through the polyphonic/polyvocal practices of hip-hop culture. *Beat Nation* proceeds from a foundational curatorial claim: that there is a productive symmetry and relationality between hip-hop and Indigenous visual arts, music, and cultures.

*Beat Nation* began at *grunt gallery* in 2008 as a website project curated by Secwepmec artist and curator Tania Willard and Metis/Cree/Tsimshian/Gitksan performance artist Skeena

Reece. The early web-version of the exhibit functioned as a space to explore “the development of hip hop culture within Aboriginal youth communities and its influence on cultural production” (Beat Nation 2009). Drawing together a diverse community of Indigenous musicians, visual artists, writers to participate, *Beat Nation* sought to document the rise of contemporary forms of hip-hop-inspired Indigenous creativity and to represent this nascent community online. With extensive representation from the vibrant Indigenous hip-hop scene on Coast Salish territories, and the Vancouver area, that had been developing since the early 1990s, *Beat Nation* brought the transformative potential of hip-hop’s indigenized collective forms into wider public view. But it also responded to criticism within the community that Indigenous hip-hop was potentially assimilative. As producer Glen Alteen notes:

There has been some criticism over the years by older community members who see [hip-hop’s] influence as a break from tradition and the movement of the culture towards a pop-based mainstream assimilation. But in *Beat Nation* we see just the opposite happening. These artists are not turning away from the traditions as much as searching for new ways into them. Hip hop is giving youth new tools to rediscover First Nations culture. What is most striking about this work is how much of it embraces the traditional within its development. (Alteen 2009)

*Beat Nation* was formed in direct reference to contested debates over the terms of Indigenous “art”, “legitimacy” and “authenticity” framed in and through continuing discursive struggles to claim the terrain of traditionalism and the contemporary. This early iteration of the exhibit framed its curatorial inquiry within a paradigmatic search for an originary continuity that had more to do with new ways into traditions, than ways of thinking breaks and ruptures as re/generative. As such, *Beat Nation* moved to return visibility to Indigenous presence, albeit through existing regimes of representation. In her curatorial essay for the project, Skeena Reece asks:

Where can Indigenous expression be seen? Or perhaps a better question is where can it NOT be seen? Mainstream television, blockbuster films, radio stations, government structure and even buildings themselves. The desaturation of Indigenous expression is a sign of colonization. For some people a pencil and paper are the only tools seen as available to document the expression of

oneself. The common denominator is spoken word. Thus, Indigenous hip hop is widely accessible and crosses over cultural barriers. What are they saying? (Reece 2009)

Reece's emphasis on the content of speech (the *what* that is spoken) as constitutive of an essential and common denominator, in fact, marks an anterior modality of return: not simply through spoken word, but through story. Proclaimed in boldly re-saturated colours, words, and sounds, *Beat Nation* marked the rhythmic return of Indigenous storytelling as remixed through hip-hop's expansive and appropriative aesthetics. Yet the literalism of this specific intervention of returning indigeneity to the realm of the *visible* relies on a performative form of political representation that ends up reductively reproducing a binarism between colonial absence and presence. This threatens to code the entire exhibit within a very specific articulation of resistance framed as a formal opposition to invisibility, without offering a more nuanced articulation of the strategic ways in which vision, visibility and unrestrained public access to indigeneity threaten to render Indigenous cultural forms universally legible and, thereby, appropriable and fit for capitalist consumption.

This tension, which is political as much as aesthetic, throughout the exhibit's history. As *Beat Nation* has grown and transited from its early online incarnation to become a gallery-based installation and, subsequently, an international touring exhibition, it has drawn a massive audience and become "something of an art sensation in Canada" (Sommerstein 2014). Its roster of participating artists expanded from its West Coast origins to include more than two dozen artists, working in a range of mediums, from across Turtle Island. But the primary media narrative that has consolidated around *Beat Nation* is similar to one found in non-Indigenous, mainstream media discourse about A Tribe Called Red, which reduces Indigenous hip-hop, arts, and remix to a legibly uniform and apparently singular purpose of challenging stereotypes. By directly contesting narratives of colonial dispossession, disappearance and the ventriloquism of

non-Indigenous appropriations of Indigenous cultures, this new generation of Native remix artists is uncritically (and almost universally) heralded for speaking truth to power, echoing the historical assertions of Indigenous resistance that continue to be framed in univocal claims that “we are still here”. This has the unfortunate effect of mitigating against the political potency and potentiality of Indigenous hip-hop and remix arts that work not only to re-presence but reconfigure consciousness. And not simply the consciousness of settler society. Indeed, the most provocative and challenging forms of Indigenous hip-hop elude such crude and reductionist readings. The oppositional consciousness produced in resistant art framed as protest against Indigenous invisibility (and in assertion of Indigenous presence) is a necessary challenge to colonialism, however, it is insufficient as a strategic form of political praxis. To build new and creative forms of Indigenous resurgence demands a continuous search for new languages of struggle that, using recombinant techniques of remix and sampling, will help shape the imaginative possibilities within which we imagine freedom. This means moving beyond the narrow vision of “indigenizing” hip-hop as an exclusively aesthetic and representational practice and reconceiving it as transformative process and method of creative, cultural regeneration.

My critique of *Beat Nation* focuses on the ways in which the project and exhibit have circulated discursively and, thus, come to shape popular understandings of what Indigenous hip-hop is, does and, following Skeena Reece, what it is “saying”. Although non-Indigenous audiences have uniformly celebrated the arrival of this decidedly contemporary reflection of Indigenous art, the exhibition is routinely framed in sympathetic and celebratory language: “Beat Nation feels like a timely intervention in native cultures and languages that are quite literally fighting to stay alive” (Raine 2013, emphasis added). Critics read the exhibit’s relevance in direct relationship to the persistent colonial narrative of Indigenous disappearance and imminent

extinction, against which the display of indigenized iPods and carved wooden turntables conform to an aestheticization of Indigenous hip-hop culture that reduces them to their object status. As aesthetic objects of vision/visibility, these forms remain politically inert in their materiality; non-confrontational and, therefore, easily assimilable to the settler imaginary. In *Beat Nation*, indigeneity is reproduced through an essentializing objectification. The exhibit, therefore, reinscribes dominant narratives of Indigenous struggles for survival (or in Vizenor's parlance, *survivance*) as the limited means by which Indigenous cultural and creative production can be legitimized and articulated for a non-Indigenous audience. The Indigenous artist must perform this formal act of self-objectification to be rendered intelligible, recognizable and, therefore, *visible* to the spectator. But *Beat Nation* also instantiates an institutionalized version of hip-hop culture that is fraught with the limitations inherent in its circulation and formal containment within the bounds of the urban gallery space. Although some iterations of the exhibit have included the staging of multimedia and live graffiti mural performances within the galleries' interior walls, the politically charged, dynamic spatiality of Indigenous presence have been displaced and ritualistically recoded according to the representational demands of the large-scale exhibition form. Can *Beat Nation* be read as an aesthetic intervention into the exhibition space (or public consciousness) that disrupts normative understandings/perceptions of hip-hop culture and indigeneity? What is being ruptured here? Where are the breaks?

Hip-hop and Indigenous art have been institutionalized and industrialized. They are global industries, with global audiences and markets, whose hypercommodified forms circulate through decidedly conformist modalities of cultural production. Hip-hop's initially disruptive aesthetic and political potential have, over the years, become decidedly muted. Indigenous art has, in many instances, been brought into alignment with capitalist logics and flows. And *Beat*

*Nation* has had a huge audience and been received with nearly universal enthusiasm and acclaim. To remix Skeena Reece's initial question once more: perhaps we should not simply be asking what the Indigenous artists included in *Beat Nation* are *saying*, but what the exhibit is saying about our contemporary moment?

Hip-hop and remix culture offer a set of performative techniques and a syntactical signifying system within which anything can be assimilated, absorbed, and represented. But hip-hop's archival ontology produces recombinant idioms and rhythms that transform:

- *time, space, and memory*
- *aurality, visuality, and narrative*
- *bodies, images, and consciousness*

If the world is conceived as infinite source material for samples, cuts and remixes, indigeneity has the potential to be figured as simply another sample bank to be mined by anyone. *Who* remixes, *where* and *how* remixes circulate, and *what form* they take become critical sites of political and ethical consideration. As the persistence of native appropriations in popular culture makes evident, this problem is real and it has consequences. Doing battle in the realm of representation presents significant opportunities and challenges for Indigenous artists. Hip-hop provides possibilities for creative expression that can render certain forms of Indigenous knowledge and experience intelligible to our own communities while remaining strategically illegible to non-Indigenous audiences. Hip-hop's ciphered sounds and coded languages can be used to break and remake Indigenous space against the dictates of settler society and colonialism that seeks to constitute indigeneity solely through the performance of oppositional consciousness and consumable spectacle.

## JAQUE FRAGUA: SAVAGE NOMAD

Jaque Fragua is a nomadic multi-media artist from Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico. His work examines “the intrinsic processes of art” and he works extensively with “aerosol, found-objects, earthworks, poetry and music” that frequently address topical issues of “civil unrest and social justice” (Fragua 2015:1). Fragua is also an active member of *Honor the Treaties* — an Indigenous artist collective and organization who work “to amplify the voices of Indigenous communities through art and advocacy” (HTT 2015) — with whom he has collaborated on street art, sticker and poster campaigns across Turtle Island. For Fragua,

Art is a Western concept that separates itself from everyday life and into a conundrum of luxury. Art may be perceived as unnecessary, beguiling, and pretentious. However, I believe Art to be an everyday activity, as vital as drinking eight glasses of water. My first language has no word for Art. Although, the traditions I have been raised in are over-flowing with Art. From the prehistoric petroglyphs/pictographs to ceremonial pottery and head-dresses, designs, lines, color, symbols, metaphors, technique, and composition can be found in the physical manifestation of visions we now call Art. I create art within nature and exposed to elements in order to spark dialogue and action. (Fragua 2015)

In a similar modality to hip-hop praxis, Fragua emphasizes the dialogic force of his art and its connection to the sacredness and continuity of creativity that derives from Indigenous place-specific cultural and onto-epistemic knowledges. In my interview with Fragua, he returned repeatedly to themes of “urgency and movement”, dynamism, dialogue and deep connections to his nation and people:

Language, tribal community, and land, which is all culture, [are] inherent in my work. I am a living example of my culture and cannot live without it. I’m trying to understand it, live with it, and be it, as well as exploring the dysfunctions of it, to include colonization. I believe the work of an artist is to reach some masterful control of one’s craft, and I feel that life’s purpose is essentially the same thing, to find enlightenment in one’s path, to contribute a vision of peace, balance, and harmony and for these things to sustain. For this all to come to fruition, solutions to the problems that exist in our communities must be developed and introduced. Language empowers human beings, land empowers human beings, and community empowers human beings. (Fragua 2014)

Language, land, and community are reflected and refracted, in Fragua's work, through frequently abstract works of street art that are deeply informed by both Indigenous aesthetic and material practices, what he calls "the principles of the life-ways and philosophies of indigenous survival":

Aesthetics are ruled by the environment of each tribe, in the nature where tribes live and exist. The aesthetics mimic the natural characteristics of the land. Even the materials applied are extracted and re-purposed from nature, whether that be plant fiber for baskets or minerals for paint applications. The colors, texture, and compositions echo the very source of the tools and materials used for creation. More so than materials used, I employ the inspiration from the nature and practice of certain native crafts to a more contemporary context, so as to bridge the ancient with the present, and keep traditional aesthetics relevant, even through relatively new materials and practices, such as graffiti and graphic design. (Fragua 2014)

Although Fragua doesn't consider himself a graffiti writer or street artist, he affirms the importance of place in his work and the reinterpretation and connection to place-based tools and material for the creation of his work. "From the studio, to the street, to print, or to the web," Fragua says, "context is everything" (2014). Although context is a mobile and fluid articulation of a specific experience or imagining, Fragua is highly intentional and strategic about the interventions he makes in his work, and the ways in which his pieces deploy hip-hop's enciphered communicative techniques to render his work legible/illegible according to how, where, and by whom the work is encountered:

The work I create is highly encoded. I use simple means and forms to mirror the essence of the spirit of my culture and its practices, just by using new techniques and tools. I lift designs and shapes from legacy artwork and replace the canvas with buildings, computer screens, clothing and many other different modes and agents of creativity. I lace modern environments with ancestral perspectives and in this simple way, the culture is immediately encoded and seen as abstract, when really its just a hyper-stylized form of the original representation. I will never create work that is in exact fashion of my traditional context. I will always leave the sacred manifestation in its original environment and leave my translations for the rest of the world to experience. (Fragua 2014)

Fragua's transversal creativity finds its most hip-hop inflected form in his large scale wall pieces that are frequently read, reductively, as strictly graffiti or street art, but that, for him, reflect ancestral interconnections between hip-hop and Indigenous practices and aesthetics:



Hip-hop in essence is tribal, it requires communal participation. This is a parallel to my culture's modus operandi. In this broad understanding, it can be very similar. I grew up in an era when West Coast gangster rap was pervasive on the reservation. This type of hip-hop was also communal but in a violent and gang-related way. The influence from nearby LA was instrumental for instigating gang culture, which also included the practice of tagging, and this is when I first came to understand anything near the concept of graffiti. In respect to graffiti, gang tags are the oldest practice of modern graffiti using spray paint, pre-dating the boom of train-bombing in NYC during the 70s. Before this, perhaps hobo monikers, scribes, and brands would be considered within the modern era. Pre-dating all of this are petroglyphs and pictographs and earth pigments on kiva walls. Indigenous culture is a natural life way, and its close relative is hip-hop, an adaptive life-way that one can live in a modern day urban setting, native or non-native. To me it's a state of mind related to the natural universe, rather than anything else. Once I realized the proximity of both cultures, I found that *creation or creativity was at the center of both cultures*, and this motivated my work. (Fragua 2014, emphasis added)

As Fragua suggests, Indigenous and hip-hop cultures are both centred around creation and creativity: the rhythms of the natural universe and a continuum of collective and communal participation. Creativity, for Fragua, is medicine. "The results of our practices in creativity are processes in healing,' he states. "Colors, designs, patterns, symbols, icons, textures, etc. can be agents in healing for human beings. I believe my work to be a prayer and in this context it is valued in a way that transcends material[ity]" (Fragua 2014). His cipher is the personal interconnected with the communal and the universal, where "life is art and art is life".



Figure 9. Jaque Fragua, untitled work (2014-2015).



Figure 10, 11. Jaque Fragua, recent untitled works (2014-2015).

## SACRAMENTO KNOXX: THE RAIZ UP

“I come from the streets of southwest Detroit, which is now an internal colony within the big colony of the United States, and my original land of the 3 Fires”, says Anishinaabe/Xicano hip-hop artist and community organizer Sacramento Knox, “so it’s always been a culture of resisting and dealing with oppression at all moments and times” (Knox 2014). Knox’s hip-hop is borne from the lived struggle to survive as an Indigenous man in an oppressive colonial society:

With shoot outs, the underground economy of drugs, violence, apartheid-style public schools, and making something out of nothing, this has always been the way of life until others starting telling me, ‘you’re in the matrix young homie’. The[se are the] affinities [of] being at the bottom and learning through unlearning what you’ve been told by the colony. *Hip-hop and Indigenous cultural production are intertwined by the ways of storytelling to the people, using drums to pray and connect, dancing our stories and styles, and understanding identity through the culture.* (Knox 2014)

For Knox, hip-hop is inseparable from indigeneity: the two are intimately intertwined in the way they are practiced. This duality and cultural confluence is at the forefront of Knox’s creative and community work. As a multitalented producer, MC, educator and organizer, Knox employs hip-hop practices of bricolage, remix, and cyphering to make his work relevant and accessible to his community: “In regards to remix aesthetics”, he says” “it’s a matter of making the revolution cool and beautiful, especially for the youth. If it’s not cool or authentic, it will not be accepted and engaging. It’s a constant practice of being innovative and designing creatively with the art of the streets and community organizing” (Knox 2014).

Making work that reflects “the art of the streets” and that practices a shared ethical commitment to decolonizing struggle is critical to his creative praxis, which he describes as “a mixture of reality of what life is at this moment, and dreaming of the future”. As a multidisciplinary creator, Knox describes his creative process a dynamic and self-reflexive movement that “usually changes with the seasons and...builds based off the reflection process

and *minobinmaadziwin* towards the next 7. From chopping a beat, to writing and connecting letters, followed by an electronic visual stamp of time, to cyphering it in the circle to share with the community” (Knox 2014.). The heart of his hip-hop praxis is *sharing* and *building* community, collectivity, and communality — which he connects to a strategic engagement with the audience and participants of collective creation: “We always have to know who we are speaking to and why, so that we can be accountable to that audience and really connect...It’s mad important, but also almost necessary, to be able to speak to *our* audiences first and then connect *universally*” (Knox 2014). This flow from individual to communal, from self to collective to universal, is a dynamism integral both to hip-hop modalities of creative expression and Indigenous forms of governance and creativity.

As one of the founding organizers of *The Raiz Up* (pronounced “rise up”), a cross-cultural Southwest Detroit “collective of musicians, artists, educators, students, community organizers, and media makers” who use hip-hop “as a tool to create social awareness in [their] community through a cypher of dialogue, artistic creation and collective action” (Knox 2013). In this collectivized creative modality of expression, Knox works directly with community members to organize community events, workshops, gatherings, and performances that employ all five elements of hip-hop — including beatmaking and DJ workshops, freestyle and b-boy/b-girl cyphers, graffiti and street art, and knowledge sharing — to express creative resistances that contend with “the attempted colonization of our mental, emotional, and spiritual well being” (Knox 2013). Direct contention with oppressive and colonizing forces through art is essential to what and who the *Raiz Up* is and, more importantly, does. Knox and the collective work to build collective power in their communities by encouraging artists of all disciplines to join the cypher. Knox consider his creativity and community work to be directly related “to all



movements against colonialism and the symptoms that come from it” (Knox 2014). For Knox, creativity demands action: “being out there, educating, creating, inspiring, and motivating [his community] for the next seven generations” (Knox 2014). This modality of indigenized hip-hop praxis builds concentric circles of accountability, starting “hyper-locally (the blocks around you), [then] locally (neighborhood), regionally, nationally, and global” (Knox 2014). Knox’s “hybrid, multidisciplinary style of creation” as a contemporary practice of “creating and contributing to the arts movements in Detroit, led by the foundation of hip hop and a collective of Indigenous artists, with a strong decolonial process and framework in what [they] create” (2014). The *Raiz Up* uses collectivized creativity to support local struggles and to connect with communities working to make globalized, structural, and systemic forms of oppression visible.

Knox has maintained a prolific output across a range of communicative media forms including music, film, visual art, design, and community events. He is driven by a deep commitment to art as a decolonizing praxis that demands translation and that reworks internal codes of intelligibility:

Decolonizing is always my intention when creating, but sometimes you have to meet people where they are at and use the language of the streets, language of the community, and language of the ivory tower. So a big part of my creation is to get people hip to decolonization on many levels. Part of that is practicing what your preach, so everyday my practice and collective struggle towards decolonization is a lifelong work for the next seven generations. It’s like preparing a dinner that you will never get to taste or eat, because this is bigger than my life span and this is generational work, which is painfully beautiful. In Detroit, decolonization is practiced with the ideology that ‘the revolution starts at home’. Unlearning the systems of white supremacy, capitalism, and the oppressive structures working against the self determination of the people of Turtle Island. For example, when I organize with the *Raiz Up* to throw popular education-based hip-hop shows in the park, we drop some tobacco down and give thanks for being able to share these gifts with the people. In doing so, we take agency, take back the commons in the face of neoliberal politics and [the] privatizing [of] our city and educate and learn with the people. (Knox 2014)

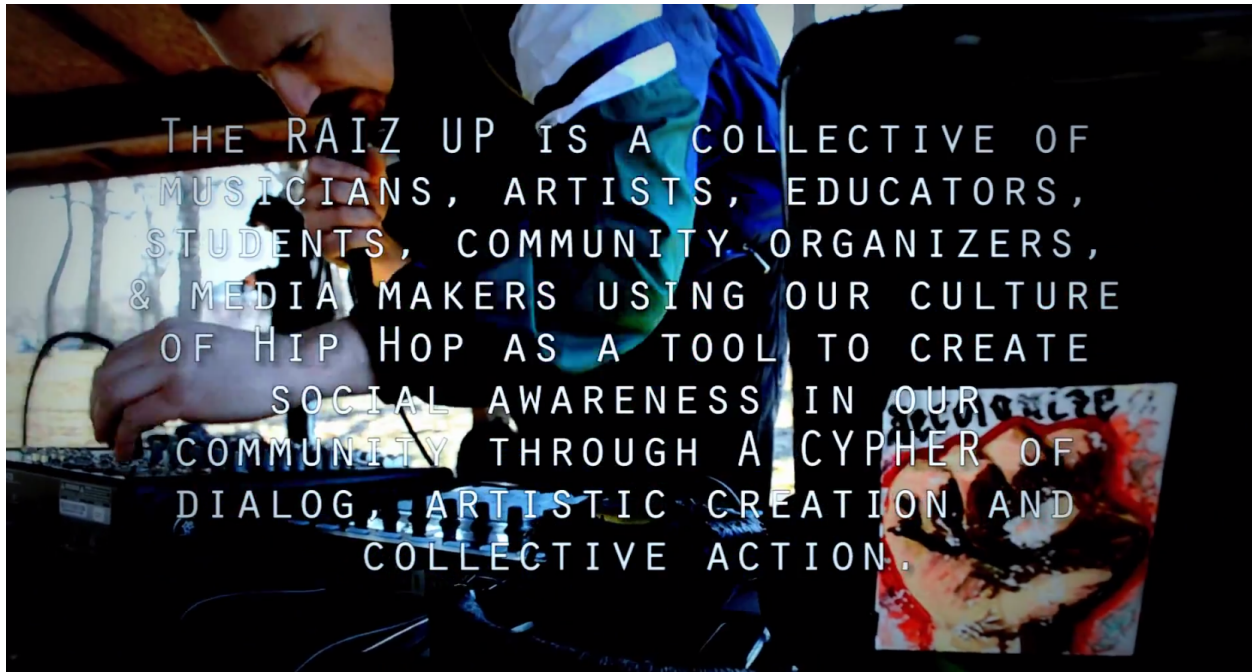


Figure 12. *The Raiz Up*. Video detail (2013).

To ensure that creative expression leads to further action, deeper connections, and stronger communities, Knoxx engages strategic forms of communication. To be a decolonizing Indigenous hip-hop practitioner demands proficiency in the aesthetic and political arts of translation and remix. For Knoxx, speaking in “the language of the savages” enables him to relate to his community and by framing decolonial struggle within space of the urban. The metropolitan landscape of Detroit becomes a battleground to be reclaimed and reimagined:

I would not be able to reach ‘my goons’ out in these streets if I spoke with academic language, so I use my first set of communications [that] I learned in the streets. Even though some may find this approach unhealthy, and/or dangerous, it takes that much commitment to be a warrior and to be able to navigate those spaces in the streets and be humble, empathic, loving, and brave; and at the end of the day, this is my home. Those are the most affected by colonialism, so it is my duty to...decolonize from the bottom. (Knoxx 2014)

New forms of community are built from the ground up. To “decolonize from the bottom” demands that our communities account for and confront the complex realities of the colonial present in order to dream the decolonized future. For Knoxx, Indigenous existence is “an act of

rebellion”; and creativity is “a way of being”, a way of “understanding creation”, that enables and gives form to Indigenous survival and resistance. In the *Raiz Up*’s cyphers in Southwest Detroit, hip-hop is a decolonial weapon of creative transformation.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **The Next World: Notes Toward Decolonial Futures**

*there is a fundamental  
affinity between a work  
of art and an act of  
resistance.*

**-Gilles Deleuze**

## CHAPTER 5

### The Next World: Notes Toward Decolonial Futures

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*The music...was a world within itself.*

- Ralph Ellison, *Living With Music*

*Our past is the western world's future.*

- Maikoyo Alley-Barnes

#### INTRODUCTION: 'EXPANDING THE NOW'

There is an aura of collective remembrance to be discovered in the improvised expression of sonic forms. In the interstellar aesthetic haze of an immersive and expansive live performance by The Black Constellation collective in September 2014, I moved with a sea of artists, onlookers, musicians and stargazers through the echoing spaces of the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, Washington. Organized as both culmination and conclusion of the Frye's exhibit, *Your Feast Has Ended*, a collaborative show featuring works by Black Constellation members Maikoyo Alley-Barnes, Nep Sidhu and Tlingit/Aleut artist Nicholas Galanin, "Expanding the Now: The Continual Line" offered a musical intervention featuring a continuous, four-hour collaborative performance by Ishmael Butler and Tendai Maraire of Shabazz Palaces, Erik Blood, and OCnotes. The soundscape swept through the gallery's opened rooms, resounding between each white-walled space, coursing through the bodies of attendees, and providing a dynamic acoustic and acousmatic live accompaniment to the visual works on view. Each member of the ensemble was stationed in a different room of the gallery, hundreds of feet of microphone and instrument cables providing the linkage between performers connected through headphone mixes. The

improvised performance evolved unhurried, organically phasing between the stuttering staccato rhythms of Shabazz Palace's hip-hop beats, the amplified and swirling sounds of Erik Blood's electric guitar work, and the multi-instrumental mashups made by OC Notes. From their respective corners of the gallery, none of the performers could see one another. Speakers amplified the musical mix into a reverberating wash of frequencies that enclosed the gallery's form, but the musicians were left to blend and balance their contributions by perceptual sense of timbre and timing.

Over the course of an evolving four hours, I wandered, stood, sat, looked and listened to this improvised phonic accompaniment to a compelling exhibition of visual art. True to the form and spirit of the exhibition's participants, the interdisciplinary presentation of the work was constellated—each node arranged in its unique singularity, positioned in dynamic relation to its adjacent counterparts: rooms, forces, sounds, stars. Through live mix and relay, each artist performed in orbit with the other players and performers. The unseen force of their cypher resounded in a multimodal ensemble performance, the collective improvisation of an imaginary and compositional space.

This imaginative space is marked and demarcated both by the immateriality of live performance and the material objects re/presented in the exhibition. Offset by the movement of human bodies within and between the gallery's walls, the exhibition space was then permeated, suffused, and inscribed within a sonic field of expressive interpretation, collapsing the distinction between individuated object and performer. "Expanding the Now: The Continual Line", was inspired by a creative technique of continuous improvisation: "the artistic exercise of drawing without allowing the pen to leave the paper" (Frye 2014). As a transient and incidental experiment in performative accompaniment to the exhibition, the event demonstrated that within

the open exchange of an ensemble's performativity a prismatic vision of temporal flux can emerge that is shaped by deep resonances drawn from both an expressive continuum of creation, and an attenuation to intergenerational forms of mediatic transmission<sup>14</sup> and communicative praxis. These thoughts turned over in my mind as I wandered the gallery space.

Then, much as it began, it was over. The constellation's "sonic sculpture—almost four-dimensional, attuned to and enhanced by its environment, abstracted by sheer duration" that had lasted for four nonstop hours, began to fade". As the music softened to a hum, drifting toward the precipice of silence, the crowd broke its quiet, and "applause surge[d] through the museum like a wave" (Zwickel 2014). But long after the event's sonics had slipped silently back into the museum's walls, the wave remained, humming inaudibly. I am interested in what happens in these moments of creation and performance: in the composition of emergent and improvised spaces and their effects on bodies, places, and consciousness.

This chapter explores Indigenous sounds and frequencies, creative constellations and collectivized practices of art-making that shape ways of imagining decolonial futures. I argue that indigeneity can be mobilized in dissonant frequencies that disrupt normative perceptual space and, by using techniques of encrypted transmission, noise, and aesthetic intervention, Indigenous artists prefigure decolonizing possibilities and other worlds. These decolonial futures and worlds are, in the arts collective Postcommodity's terms, "reverse engineered back to the present", realized out of the immanent potentiality, the inherent flux, of the present, the here and now. Indigenous artists are laying claim to an emergent *politics of frequency* that stages communication as a site of mediatic expression and performative possibility. Decolonial futures,

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<sup>14</sup> This technique of drawing with an unbroken, continuous line, was used extensively by Curtis R. Barnes, whose work was displayed at the Frye in a space adjacent to *Your Feast Has Ended*. In a figurative expression of both creative and genealogical continuity, Curtis R. Barnes is also the father of Maikoiyo Alley-Barnes, one of the contemporary artists whose work was exhibited as part of *Your Feast Has Ended*. Father and son were rendered co-present in a creative continuum occupying both the space-time of the performative event and the exhibition space.

I suggest, can be realized in the interstitial spaces produced in the strategic breakdown of communication, as such, and in the enciphered transmission of resistant codes that hack the coordinates of perceptual normativity to create new forms of community through an aesthetics of interjection and disruption. For this ruptural model of creativity to support an alternate modality of resistance, however, I argue that it must be collectivized. I look to the collaborative work of Postcommodity and the Black Constellation as exemplary forms of intercommunal (and cross-communal) collectivity, whose transdisciplinary art-making and creativity advance both a resurgent and decolonial politics and aesthetics. I propose the *constellation* as a model for this collectivized form of creation and community. The constellation, I argue, is a strategic, relational arrangement of space and subjects that provides Indigenous artists, and allied communities of struggle, with a mutable form for shared creation and action that can be networked to produce collective power. I also examine the interstellar explorations of Haida artist Raymond Boisjoly in order to trace affinities between Afrofuturist traditions and the emergence of Indigenous Futurisms; and the interventionist praxis of Kwakwaka'wakw artist Sonny Assu to envision Indigenous “re-invasions” of representation that disrupt the colonial imaginary by reclaiming Indigenous presence. To inhabit disruption is to inhabit “temporal-spatial discontinuity as a generative break, one wherein action becomes possible, one in which it is our duty to linger in the name of ensemble and its performance” (Moten 2003: 99). Resistance resounds in resurgent subsonics; these are the politics of frequency formed in the phonic materiality of decolonial art-making.

*YOUR FEAST HAS ENDED: NEP SIDHU, MAIKOYO ALLEY-BARNES, & NICHOLAS GALANIN*

The sound wave is an encrypted frequency, an affective, acoustic movement through space, a resonant undercurrent. Its signal and transmission are integral to the emergence of The Black Constellation: a creative collective that produces work from within an evolving interdisciplinary configuration of artists and musicians. It is a hub without a centre, a futurist architecture anchored to the now, intent on the exploration of rhizomatic forms of creative expression. Importantly, for the purpose of this analysis, it is also a collective with members from multiple communities of identity and struggle: diasporic Afrikan, queer, and Indigenous artists working across a wide spectrum of art, music, film and media. The Black Constellation's members include Ishmael Butler and Tendai Maraire of the experimental hip-hop group Shabazz Palaces<sup>15</sup>, OCnotes, Erik Blood, Stasia Irons and Catherine Harris-White of hip-hop duo THEESatisfaction, filmmaker Kahlil Joseph, visual artist and cultural producer Maikoiyo Alley-Barnes, Nep Sidhu, and the recently inducted Tlingit/Aleut artist Nicholas Galanin. The latter three artists joined forces to present their work together as part of the Frye Museum's acclaimed 2014 exhibition, *Your Feast Has Ended*.

*Your Feast Has Ended* is born from interconnected histories of resistance. The exhibit was intended as both an invitation and "impetus for constructive dialogue" on socio-cultural and political issues that are informed by, and that intersect with, their respective communities of struggle. Unlike many of their contemporaries, however, Alley-Barnes, Galanin, and Sidhu present their work through a syncretic exploration of ideas and aesthetics that illustrate points of

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<sup>15</sup> *Lese Majesty*, the latest album from Black Constellation members Shabazz Palaces draws inspiration (in title and content) from the concept of *lèse majesté*: "the crime of violating majesty...an offence against the dignity of a reigning sovereign or against a state" (Mudede 2014). This notion of *lèse majesté* could equally be applied to *Your Feast Has Ended* as a resonant and relevant illustration of the artists' shared desire to violate the normative order of *colonial* forms of sovereignty and the violent reign of the settler state.

affinity, alignment, and alliance. Although their subject positionalities are derived from diffuse genealogies and socio-political contexts, their work, exhibited in common, resists explicit didacticism while remaining urgent, relevant, and highly politicized. *Your Feast Has Ended* makes interconnections between multiple communities of struggle visible in order to

offer a visual cogitation exploring continuum, identity, ritual, and adornment, and signal that natural, cultural, and human resources have been appropriated, exploited, suppressed, depleted, or eradicated.

Each artist works with the ancient and sacred in unison with the new and revised, bound by the belief that a people without myth and a society that fails to look upon itself honestly are destined to the same fate. The artists practice these philosophies through cross-disciplinary approaches to storytelling and employ time-honored and new techniques to create work that ranges from fine art, music, and performance, to film, graphic design, jewelry, and apparel. (Frye 2014)

Although each artist offers a uniquely articulated vision in relation to these guiding themes, the exhibition presents a remarkably coherent and unified vision of collaborative creation and aesthetic interdependence. The artists employ a range of tactile forms and creative processes specific to their communities and contexts: Galanin's work is guided by "generations of Tlingit creativity", Alley-Barnes pursues an inventive form of remix dubbed "refuse alchemy", and Sidhu considers a "third space/feeling" imaginary through storied expression. The resultant works are brought together by creating an "infinite woven rhythm" (Frye 2014) — an emergent, aesthetico-political practice of collective articulation and creative interconnection.

The exhibit's rhythmic consistency is achieved by interweaving each artist's resurgent aesthetic sensibility into a common vision of decolonial potentiality that embraces difference and multiplicity while refusing the insularity of identity-based political claims and overtly didactic "political" content bound by representational enclosures that limit the potential efficacy and affective power of their work. Alley-Barnes, Sidhu, and Galanin make work that exceeds both normative categorization and reductive instrumentalization. In an eloquent review of the exhibit, Negarra Kudumu writes that *Your Feast Has Ended*'s power derives from its ability to "signal



the resurgence of [ways] of being, that though hidden for reasons of protection and self-preservation have always existed and have always been about creation, connectivity, being self-determined, and sustaining a community of beings who are free and self-sufficient” (Kudumu 2014). *Your Feast Has Ended* envisions and imagines resurgence from within self-determining creative communities that have never given up their ability to dream new worlds into being.

#### NEP SIDHU: INTO INFINITY

*Your Feast Has Ended* is a generative exercise in coded language. At the outer reaches edge of legibility, the artists posit a third space that, for Nep Sidhu, exists through inter/connective narratives “between architecture and the written word”. Sidhu’s work offers the most explicit framing of this thematic. In his *Confirmation* series, Sidhu creates a sequence of elaborately detailed hybrids of sculpture, textile and painting, each more than seven feet by seven feet, that combine ink on paper, brass and sheet veneer marble. He transforms a personalized/stylized Kufic script (that he spent nine months learning through study with an Imam) “into an infinity” — by painting the script in ever-enclosing, increasingly smaller lines that become illegible as the text spirals into the centre of the works, disappearing at right-angled turns into a three-dimensional infinity point that suggests both boundless expansion/contraction and limitless depth. Each piece in the series is a translation and remix. In the earliest iteration, Sidhu samples the text of his mother’s final words to him before she passed away and, in others, he appropriates lyrics written by fellow Black Constellation members Ishmael Butler about his own mother and a written piece by Maiokoiyo Alley-Barnes, entitled “Curse Words, which ruminates on Seattle’s colonial history. The texts of these narratives, however, are not intended to be rendered legible; rather the narratives appear encrypted in his unique, hand-painted, remixed Kufic script so as to inscribe them within a ciphered form that reflects both Sidhu’s deeply personal vision and his

collaborative attempt to honour the remembrance of shared genealogical connections. By creating “an architecture that represented the blessed unconditional love of our mothers” (Sidhu 2014), the *Confirmation* series prioritizes communicative acts performed through an autonomous, in internal relationality (and, by extension, self-referentiality) that is woven in and between artists, family members, and generations. “The connective narrative source of the words themselves”, he write, “has come from three various impactful storytellers of my time” (Frye 2014).

Negarra Kumudu elaborates Sidhu’s work as an incantatory activation of a “third space” made internally coherent through language and ancestral connection/veneration:

“Re (Confirmation) A”...creates a portal through which Sidhu and Butler can continue to communicate with their deceased mothers – a hopefully soothing realization that though the body ceases to be the spirit is always there in this third space. “Confirmation B” takes it a step further: the combination of language and architecture is not solely a portal, but a vehicle for the necessary incantation that is the precursor to ancestor veneration. The script in “Confirmation B” contains Sidhu’s mother’s last words to him as she made her transition. The message here is that we need simply to activate language and earth in the appropriate iteration, and conversations with our ancestors will recommence. The third spaces of “Re (Confirmation) A and “Confirmation B” represent the realm of the ancestors and more specifically that realm where we our mothers are ever present. The third panel of the Confirmation series, “Curse Words”, is a visual representation of an excerpt of a written work of the same name written by Maikoio Alley-Barnes. This fragment tells the story of the blood-drenched contradictions of the beautiful territory now called Seattle, providing a commentary on the transgressions visited upon the land and its original inhabitants. The mind piercing red reminds us how much blood soaks this land, and forces us to reckon with our stake in it.

This is storytelling as strategic narration where the present resounds within flows of historical memories that are evoked rather than rendered explicit. The language of the Black Constellation is indirect speech, subfrequency, opaque shapes, customized script based on sacred geometry and personal geographies. The interplay within and between constellation members marks and claims a shared imaginative space whose ethos, if not aesthetics, are clearly derived from hip-hop praxis. In this continual feedback loop, Sidhu, finds “the ultimate confirmation of the work, because of how much we openly and instinctively trust, call and respond to each other” (Mistry

2014). This is the essential nature of the hip-hop cypher: where call and response guides each dancer, emcee and artist to claim space and voice within the circle, while adapting dynamically to the feedback of their collaborators and fellow performers. *Within* the cypher, all expressions are autonomous but interrelated. The cypher is, itself, a constellation of forces, flows and voices.

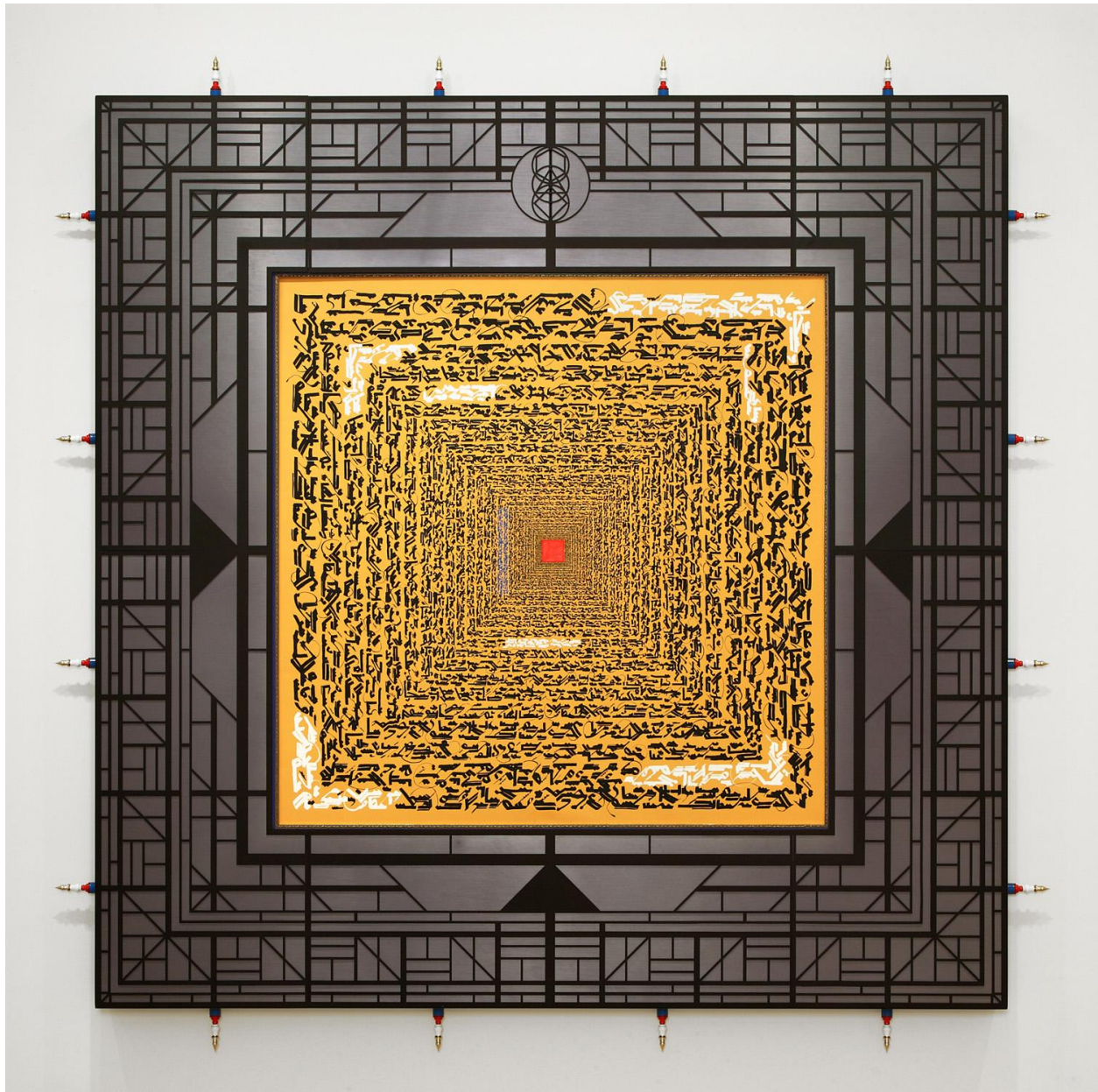


Figure 13. Nep Sidhu, *Re (Confirmation)* (2014)

## MAIKOYO ALLEY-BARNES: REFUSE ALCHEMY

For Maikoyo Alley-Barnes, ciphered sculpture is “refuse alchemy” — a strategically recombinant practice of remix derived from recycling and transforming societal detritus into sacred forms. Alley-Barnes describes it both as practice and as a medium that is “literally hand-formed and bound waste”. The alchemical spirit that informs this practice is invoked in Alley-Barnes’ refutation of Western society’s “vapid and exhaustive penchant for trophy, and the fetish that exists around it” (Flock 2014). Against the capitalist-colonial fetishism of the past and present as infinitely commodifiable landscapes of soon-to-be *future* waste, Alley-Barnes’ alchemy works by collecting/adapting a personalized archive of available materials and employing bricolage and remix to reconfigure them. This reconfiguration of the object’s parts yields new potential for revisioned unity and cohesion. Each new assemblage comports an iterative, strategic reappropriation of language or form to declaim and refute external legitimating authorities and orthodoxy. Alley-Barnes’ work is self-authorizing: conceived and fashioned from the vacated space of capitalist waste, through a hip-hop ethos of making something out of nothing. His sculptural works on display in *Your Feast Has Ended* evoke sites of contemporary socio-political conflict and resistance; spaces where racial dynamics and temporal tensions arise and are inflected by tropes of big game hunting and coercive capture, an imperial mindset of parasitism and consumption that colonizes Other figures and speech through a cannibalized (ill)logic. Alley-Barnes inverts the syllogistic assertion that sites of capture must be rendered appropriable by virtue of their visibility, choosing instead to create chimeric forms imbricated in contestation of colonial forces and logics that are rendered “hyper-universal through their specificity”. Alley-Barnes incites similar provocations to those of his fellow

Constellationaires, by choosing to make works that, “Though archetypal in many ways...are a coded language for those in the know” (Frye 2014).



Figure 14. Maikoyo Alley-Barnes, *Pelt Series* (2014).





Figure 15. Maikoyo Alley-Barnes, *Pelt Series* (2014).

We return, here, to encoded flows put in strategic service for the benefit of a specific community of knowledge keepers, practitioners and creators. Deploying the archetypal to achieve the hyper-universal, through the hyper-specific, the Black Constellation builds community in creative resistance to colonizing knowledges and corporate appropriation. Whether in the trophied display of fetishized conquest, or in usurpation of Indigenous artifacts and material culture for display in colonial museums and institutions, Alley-Barnes disrupts the regimes of knowability and

demanded visibility and access imposed upon the oppressed, by deforming and redeploying an enciphered linguistic flow neither *back* nor *against* the colonizer, but in search of an/other community of becoming. As such, his work avoids the trap of simply echoing tropes of disempowerment and loss of control endlessly in power's hall of infinite mirrors and instead seeks imaginative recourse through this impasse to an otherwise and elsewhere audience of "those in the know". This is autonomous work that creates the conditions of its own self-valorizing existence by codifying value through an ephemeral communing among its co-creators. This is world-making spoken in tongues, rhymes in ancient speech, for whom art and knowledge are made and shared so as to be protected, venerated, and continued.

Alley-Barnes describes the interoperative and inter-relational materiality of work produced by the Black Constellation as "a continuum; people coming together and making art that is responsive, and indigenous to their experiences" but that resists definition and easy interpretation (Mistry 2014). The constellation's *blackness* cannot be easily rendered/reduced to strict figurations of ethnicity or identity. Rather, the constellation's blackness consists in its strategic embrace of a spectrum of opacities whose dark matter is a binding force of relational accountability and interconnection.

#### NICHOLAS GALANIN: SOVEREIGN CREATIVITY

If this binding structure cannot always be seen, it can perhaps be heard, albeit at selective frequencies. As one enters the Frye exhibit, Nicholas Galanin's collaborative piece with his brother Jerrod Galanin (who create works together as Leonard Getinthechar), *Uháan - We*, is visible adorned on the gallery wall: a 19th century Tlingit redcorner bentwood storage box, out of which springs a winding length of black cable, affixed to a metal t-shaped cross. Across from

the piece, a cascading wave of ceramic arrows is hung immobile, mid-flight, each arrow an ironic emblem of coloniality, adorned with decorative blue and white patterning of Victorian stoneware, a wave set to crash at the doors of the gallery, or beyond. Lines of flight. Galanin warns, “when they hit, they're going to shatter” (Frye 2014). Is this an ominous omen of a surprise attack on the gallery visitor, or something else entirely? The piece, *I Dreamt I Could Fly* suggests an otherwise of flight, an arrested image of escape or aggression, belied by the impossibility of safe passage and landing, an imminent exodus into fragmentation. In repose against a backdrop of blue, stands one of Nep Sidhu’s signature pieces of ceremonial apparel, a garment that subtly echoes the button blankets of the west coast, that evokes the regal stature of Indigenous figurations, rather than external imposition of colonial power.

But, inside the bentwood box, the quiet crackle and hum of the radio is audible. The metal cross on the wall is an aluminum antenna. The exhibit opens with an invitation to move in multiple directions at once: the flight of ceramic arrows overhead, the calm poise of Sidhu’s implicitly “shamanic” garb, and the inward gravitational force of the redcorner box that, it can be seen, is filled with a radio transmitter and an iPod Shuffle. Tuned precisely to 93.7FM, *Uháan - We* broadcasts Tlingit language lessons, looped endlessly, to a maximal physical limit determined by the radius of the transmitter, to an even more limited listening audience of Tlingit language speakers, and at a frequency known only to those who encounter it by chance, or by their attention it in the gallery. The volume is minimal, one’s hearing must be intentionally attuned to it. To non-Tlingit speakers, it is also incomprehensible. The piece presents a language coded to be understood by a deliberately specific audience, and to remind non-speakers of what is being preserved and reproduced through its ephemeral broadcast in immaterial form, invisible sound waves that arise and fall through the air. This is a work whose primary communicative



intervention and understated affective power derive from its operative mode of expression:

*Uháan - We* works through proximity and frequency to achieve a sense of intimacy and fleeting immediacy, less as a lament for lost language than as an invocation of pirated culture — the subversive appropriation of encrypted speech — hyperlocal experiences recontextualized and redeployed within the gallery space as an Indigenous intervention that does not seek to “indigenize” the institution, but to operate, covertly, within and through it.





Figure 16 (at top) and 17 (at bottom). Leonard Getintheocar (Nicholas and Jerrod Galanin), *Uháan - We* (2014).

Galanin works to similar effect throughout *Your Feast Has Ended*, where he critically interrogates colonial myth, narrative and historical memory. Galanin’s fondness for “sardonic titles” and “striking juxtaposition” lend his sculptural works a semiotic dissonance that contrasts their form and content with ironic commentary. By disrupting the narratological mechanics of colonial modalities for interpellating indigeneity, Galanin disrupts the placeless historicization and erasure of Indigenous presence through remixed re-insertions, re-appearances and the disfigured re-placements of colonial tropes with Indigenous forms. Encased in plexiglas for rarified museum display, a tiny pair of iron handcuffs is delicately engraved with Tlingit formlines and titled *Indian Children’s Bracelet*; a whistle and its lanyard are beaded and labelled *Native American Beadwork: Rape Whistle Pendant*; a pair of engraved, plastic yellow earrings reveal themselves through the wry title: *Accessorize with These Timeless Beauties! Hand-Carved Native Rape Whistle Earrings Featuring a Traditional Tlingit Lovebirds Design*.



Figure 18. Nicholas Galanin, *Indian Children's Bracelet* (2013)

Form and content resonate, here, at a disturbing frequency that invokes both the cognitive dissonance of asserting Indigenous being against colonialism and in the face of continued carceral and gendered forms of state-sanctioned violence. In these works, as in Galanin's more monumental gestures to the genocidal logics of imperial expansion and conquest, there is always a duality at play that is not easily resolved; the colonial dialectic made visible in structuring creative form.

In *The American Dream is Alie and Well*, Galanin's flag-emblazoned riff on a bearskin rug, the figurative bear's starred and striped flag body spreads out in the middle of the gallery floor, its claws replaced by .50 Cal bullets, its teeth dipped in gold leaf. *Inert* takes this concept a step further by stripping the conceptual apparatus of taxidermied stasis, as a mode of colonial commodification and containment, down to its essence. Here, a re/presented wolf's head and

front legs are positioned outstretched, but not quite upright, in a potential or attempted movement to stand or rise, while its back legs, hindquarters and tail have been flattened to the floor, splayed, crushed into two dimensions, deprived of embodiment, reduced to the object-artifact of the colonized hide.



Figure 19. Nicholas Galanin, *The American Dream is a Lie and Well* (2012).





Figure 20. Nicholas Galanin, *Inert* (2009).

Galanin describes the impetus for the *Inert* series as an attempt to assert “creative sovereign growth” in the face of imperial entrapment:

The inability to progress or move forward was the basic concept [of *Inert*]. It was created so that we could focus on those that are affected by society’s sprawl...I [also] look at this piece in cultural terms—mainstream society often looks at Indigenous or Native American art through a romantic lens, not allowing a culture, like my Tlingit community, room for creative sovereign growth. The back half of this piece is contained, a captured trophy, or rug to bring into the home, while the front continues to move. It is sad, and the struggle is evident.

This contested dualism fluctuates throughout Galanin’s work in a complex interplay of colonial entanglement and dialogic relationality: between stasis and movement, liminality and visibility, order and excess, thresholds/limits and becomings/horizons. It is about claiming space, but also inscribing a new order within it, reconfiguring that which has been oppressively imposed, already delimited. In Rancière-ian terminology, Galanin’s art elucidates the disciplinary order of *the police* in creative contradistinction to generative forms of dissensus (activated through

rupture, intervention and disruption) that constitute *politics* as such. This relationship is made most explicit in a final piece added to *Your Feast Has Ended* in the closing weeks of the exhibition.

*Modicum* is a recombinant articulation of resistance to police violence that literalizes its deleterious effects without resorting to reductive didacticism. Displayed at the end of a long hallway in the Frye, against a large window hand-painted with calligraphy by Nep Sidhu with intricate geometric patterning (dubbed “Shabazz Palaces temple architecture”), *Modicum* is a sculptural work that presents the life-size figure of a police officer outfitted in full black riot gear (complete with helmet, shield and police baton), crouching on a raised dais, assailed by a hail of white cardboard coffee cups, each inscribed with the name of a person of colour killed by police. Hundreds of cups are hung from a supporting structure above the officer, caught as if in mid-flight, raining down on the bent body, and dripping with blood (a mixture of red paint and vegetable oil) that flecks the officer’s shield, spilling from each cup, running over, covering the others and the uniform of the police. As a figuration of symbolic excess, state violence outstrips its commodified containment, overflowing the singular confinement to a personalized object. When branded by its victimized individuated namesake and thrown back on the symbolic perpetration of death, what kind of resistance is posited? *Modicum* suggests a disjuncture between affective responses to police violence that are generative of conflicted resistant forms; forms that may, as the title of the work suggests, offer only “a small quantity” of that which is desired: resistance, retaliation, transformation. Although the officer is positioned in a crouching defensive position, the white coffee cups raining down on the black-clad riot cop, despite their blood-spattered aesthetics, locate the site of resistant politics in a deeply ambivalent space of contention.



Figure 21. Leonard Getintheacar, *Modicum* (2014).

Galanin's piece, following Rancière, does not prefigure a politics beyond the police order but makes *acts of structuring* visible, the ordering of the sensible, against and through which Galanin proposes a disruptive architecture of the present, figured in resistance to (albeit within)

commodified ambivalent forms. Does this, then, suggest an entropic political current, or cynical derogation of resistance, in Galanin's work? Or does it perhaps call into question the effects of resistances articulated through the media they intend to critique? Is this a self-effacing or more obliquely self-reflexive turn? *Modicum* is generative, though inconclusive, of many such provocations and questions.

At the surface, and in initial encounter with the work, it appears to speak directly to the recent wave of mobilizations against police violence, a burgeoning wave of activism whose latest iteration began in Ferguson, Missouri following the murder of Mike Brown by officer Darren Wilson in the summer of 2014, and that has since spread throughout the United States under the banner of #BlackLivesMatter. Yet *Modicum* resists such easy and narrow categorization. Although it makes use of available names of people of colour that have killed by police to illustrate its specific engagement with contemporaneity, the piece also functions as a metonym for settler colonial power relations that remain firmly in place across Turtle Island. Echoing another of Galanin's pieces in *Your Feast Has Ended*, the haunting video *How Bout Those Mariners (for John T. Williams)*<sup>16</sup> extends Galanin's critique of state violence to evoke the necropolitical stakes of both Black and Indigenous social life in resistance to settler colonialism:

In a quiet, darkened corner of one gallery, Galanin's video *How Bout Those Mariners (for John T. Williams)* plays. It's a short, repeating loop of a drawn figure in vaguely traditional garb walking toward the camera in a continuous approach, holding what looks like a knife, faceless and advancing. For audio, Galanin used the actual dashboard recording from the afternoon of August 30, 2010, when a Seattle police officer stopped and shot to death the homeless Native carver John T. Williams for carrying—"brandishing," the officer later said—his carving knife. The figure in the video continues to walk forward. Williams is shot dead. A commentator comes on the police-car radio to talk about that night's game. "So," he calls, "how 'bout those Mariners!" (Graves 2014)

Galanin's piece juxtaposes the raw audio of the dashboard recording with the stop motion-like animation of the moving figure, a dark image against a dissociative all-white background. The

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<sup>16</sup> Video available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_jXIUI-ERlg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jXIUI-ERlg)



sixteen minute audio loop records the encounter, murder, and arrival of additional police to the scene. The officer's radio broadcasts a lively broadcast of Seattle sports highlights complete with exultant commentary<sup>17</sup>.

Indigenous and black life are ordered by violence; apportioned according to the literalization of the order of the police, an apparatus of command and control. Settler colonial rule is a specific technique of managing violence that requires policing its limits: the continual disciplinary enforcement of its illegitimate legitimacy. By legitimating this order through violence, however, colonial rule institutes a regime that inspires its antithesis. As a result, decolonial struggle, figured in this instance by the very form and existence of Indigenous and Black life in the colonies, seeks to negate the regime of the police that partitions the sensible, and to institute a transversal, disruptive reconfiguration of the world. Frantz Fanon describes this in precisely such terms:

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say that it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content. Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies. Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together—that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler—was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons. The settler and the native are old acquaintances. In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing “them” well. For it is the settler who has brought the

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<sup>17</sup> Galanin is not the only Indigenous artist to invoke the murder of woodcarver John T. Williams' by police. A Tribe Called Red member Bear Witness produced a multimedia video piece in tribute to Williams, with an accompanying pow wow step musical track. The 2011 piece, *Woodcarver*, samples video and audio from the police officer's dashboard camera recording of the event, and loops the police officer's call to Williams (off-camera) as he approaches, repeating and looping the refrain “Hey, hey! Put the knife down”, followed by a chilling sample of a pow wow singer's *sagwe* (war cry) as the booming sound of gunfire echoes in the background. This is quickly followed by slowed down, pitch altered samples of news announcers recounting the story, backed by a dubstep beat's warbling bass oscillations. The *sagwe* recurs, the gunshots repeat, the video displays the dashboard view of the vehicle as it drives through Seattle on a sunny August afternoon. Overlaid on this image, the slow motion movement of a long-haired figure runs toward, across and through the frame, a large sun descends to the horizon. The video interweaves images of flashing police lights as backup arrives on the scene.

native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say, his property, to the colonial system. (1961: 36)

If the settler's existence, figured here as "property", is a debt conferred to the colonial system, then the settler's ordering of the sensible may also be understood as an existential regime of property which the settler will do anything to preserve. As a result, the native, the colonized, can only be understood as an existential threat to the settler's very existence. The Native woodcarver is becomes a figure for the persistent metonymic potential of anticolonial resistance that subtends the violence of the colonial order. Galanin's work, while not explicitly framed in reference to this structural inequity, uses a microcosmic site of analysis to provide not only a metonymic imaging of settler colonial power relations but also a synecdochic illustration of resistance to state violence as the decolonizing imperative invoked through creative practice, regardless of its potentially fraught strategic efficacy. Galanin's *Modicum*, and *Your Feast Has Ended* more generally, offer an implicitly critique of settler logic, in which existence is property, fed by greed and nascent capitalist desire.

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Colonialism reveals itself in relief against Indigenous forms of relationality and community. As a parasitic structure, it works to disfigure and consume Indigenous life. An early version of the exhibition was titled, *Oh Ye Parasites, Your Feast Has Ended*: "a reproachful signal to the viewer that this art addresses ideas of power, opportunism and devastation. The ceremonial flavor conjures up images of a gluttonous historical episode being confronted and corrected over the remains of a feast." (Clemans 2014). The settler's feast is invoked for what it is: an invasive form of life that owes its existence to the colonial system, to Indigenous land and bodies. If this exhibition declares the end of the feast, the death of the parasite, and the resurgence of the Indigenous, enslaved host. Further, the exhibition implicates its audience in the feast: "each artist

works with the ancient and sacred in unison...bound by the belief that a people without myth and a society that fails to look upon itself honestly are destined to the same fate” (Frye 2014).

In resistance to the self-consuming logic of colonialism, Nicholas Galanin argues that Indigenous resurgences must be derived from within, from the “power...in our sovereign creativity” (Galanin 2014). This power, he argues, lies in freedom of thought and self-valorizing practices: “[f]ree thinking” and the “open will to progress as we are now” (Galanin 2015). For Galanin, sovereign creativity is an inhabitation of being that is constitutive of agency that demands both an assertion of autonomy and resistance to capture. Galanin expands it as follows:

[That] the colonial machine wishes to define and place us amongst a fabricated framework is not ok and obviously will not work for us, ever. Every attempt at this should be met with one thing that can not be removed, our sovereign creativity. This applies to all aspects of our culture and relationships to an indigenous existence.

*Sovereign creativity is continuum with our visual language, continuum with our language and its ability to grow and change and progress. It is freedom to see and translate our own experiences with the world, with our children and communities. The reactionary state of existence due to forced change is temporary and a conversation.*

*[C]reative sovereignty[is] also an outlook on navigating our paths...and the obstacles placed in front of us. The act of creativity alone is a form of resistance, the act of indigenous creativity symbolizes life, perspective and experience. When colonial cultures and institutions that have worked tirelessly to homogenize and define us through a set lens cannot predict our movement or map our perspective, we actively dissociate that community forcing them into a reactive observational state. (Galanin 2015, emphasis in original)*

Encoded in the creative praxis of the Black Constellation, of which Galanin is a member, sovereign creativity can be understood as a strategic disengagement from the possession and property modality of colonial subjection and capitalist consumption, a drive toward other ways of seeing, hearing, making and being. Sovereign creativity is a practice of freedom and resistance focused *elsewhere*: in fugitive movement away from colonizing language and toward encrypted speech that speaks through opaque arrangements of in/visibilities. If visibility can be loosely correlated with disciplinary techniques of decoding, surveillance and capture, captivation denotes

the ways in which contemporary practices of artistic/creative resistance become entwined with dominant discursive networks:

Captivation...is the deranged remainder that is unassimilable to the metanarratives of freedom that underlie both capitalist consumerism (in which a supposedly autonomous subject makes choices from an endless proliferation of material goods) and socialist revolution (in which a supposedly autonomous subject emancipates herself from the constraints imposed by class, race, colonialism, gender and so forth). Even while inextricably enmeshed with these two dominant discourse networks, captivation poses the question of art and politics not in the form of an integration with such networks but in the form of a disjunction, an encounter—an interrogation—of an insistently ontological import. (Chow 2013, 52)

Chow distinguishes captivity from captivation, where “captivity implies a lack of freedom, a negative state that reacts to external constraints. Captivation, on the other hand, denotes a more positive subjective condition that is nonetheless bound to a force outside oneself.” For Chow, the terms are co-constitutive (Chen 2013: pp). We exist within multiple entangled spatial relations. To be captivated, then, is to be saturated, consumed and subjected to that which has captured one’s attention, enmeshed within specific networks of relationality. Where captivation can be understood as the “deranged remainder” of this encounter, the Black Constellation marks its simultaneous enmeshment within and attempts to refigure/re-order/refuse capture, by strategically positioning collective creativity against commodification and conquest. The collective proposes counter-discursive frameworks for the creation and dissemination of visual, auditory and material (or imaged/sonic/inter-textual). But if “colonization is consumption”, as Nicholas Galanin suggests (2014: 2), then enacting one’s sovereign creativity becomes a means of staging a meta-discursive encounter between art and politics and the network that can disrupt colonial relationality. For Galanin and the Black Constellation, decolonial resistance to the parasitic consumptive drive of colonial capitalism is practiced through creation that interrogates the regimes of property, control, and domination (or technicities of power) that are used to dispossess Indigenous bodies, lands, and consciousness.

## ‘DECOLONIAL CONSTELLATIONS OF RESISTANCE AND LOVE’

The constellation is an ordering, in kind, of other forms of life. Constellated being, relating, existing. Writing on the need for alliances between Indigenous and Black communities in resistance to state violence and power, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes that we must “nurture our relationships to each other by creating decolonial constellations of resistance and love as a mechanism to ensure we are no longer complacent in the oppression of each other” (Simpson 2014: 1). Such constellations demand a new ordering of relationships between communities in struggle. This struggle is not only collective, but paraontological. Fred Moten considers anticolonial disruption to be a form of *paraontological resistance* where, in his analysis, the lived experience of Black social life exceeds, and therefore escapes, normative discursive categorization and designation (Brar 2013). For Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, however, indigeneity marks a similar subject/object positionality, in which the surplus of lived Indigenous experience escapes captivity and refuses to be bound by the ontological parameters imposed by coloniality. With respect to *blackness*, Moten calls this state of being a “fugitive sublimity”, a movement through and beyond being, where blackness is a “vortex” built on “rhythmic turns” (Chandler 2008: 347). Blackness is an ontological otherwise. Does indigeneity, then, figured in its anticolonial resistant forms, pivot through interrelated rhythmic turns and move against capture along similar lines?

If settler colonialism can be understood as a relation of domination that has been extended into Empire’s pervasive conditioning of globally commodified existence, a ubiquitous state of coloniality, then both Indigenous *and* Black resistances must we waged in figurative and literal mobility against capture. Strategic resistances must be articulated not simply against the settler state and its apparatuses of power or in direct contestation of misrepresentation and

misrecognition, they must pursue other forms of decolonial becoming. This is the resistant ground, the plane of consistency, where Indigenous and Black struggles meet. Open resistance morphs into strategic forms of rupture: “in a situation where open political struggle is virtually bound to be ineffective”, Celia Britton writes, “resistance adopts *tactics of evasion and camouflage*” (2004: 181). This is the form of resistance proposed by the artists working together as The Black Constellation. Their collective composition of Indigenous, Black, and queer members exemplifies and embodies a modality of creative resistance, in praxis, that works to overturn the separation of our communities and struggles by forging a common ground on the terrain of art-making. In their constellated creativity, the collective cultivates a resurgent turn toward building power and autonomy as a unified collective that can set the terms of their engagement with Empire by visioning art-making as an extension of their self-generated creative community. The collective models this self-affirmative praxis for themselves, not for external recognition. In this specific sense, we can understand the work produced by the Black Constellation as contributing to resurgent and decolonizing forms of art-making by virtue of their choice to deploy art strategically—and their commitment to creating tactical forms of aesthetic camouflage that posit alterity as the site of new and necessary alliances between the fugitivity of blackness, the transit of indigeneity, and the rhythmic turns of the decolonial collective.

A constellation is “a group of stars forming a recognizable pattern”, a grouping of similar objects or things; *it is an articulation, an ordering, a consistency*. Its consistency derives from its synchronous alignment of individuated elements. The constellation is a relation configuration of community and resistance. In the Black Constellation, each member, each figurative star, must occupy and claim its particular space that, while remaining autonomous from its neighbouring coordinates, exists, always, in relation to them. Through creative practice, and “the duality of

observation and physical execution” the constellation proposes an arrangement of space and inventive action that develops, what Nep Sidhu calls, “an infinite woven rhythm” (Frye 2014), in its collective form and movement. The Black Constellation is produced through (and produces) its rhythmic consistency through harmonic/resonant (vibratory/sonic) practices of sounding and resistant forms visibility and intelligibility (camouflaged/encrypted speech). Creativity becomes a resurgent techne of decolonizing media-making in this remixed version of revolutionary communalism. Collective member Ishmael Butler describes the Constellation as a *being in common* that is “held together more...by *what we do* instead of *what we say*” (Mejia 2014). As I have suggested throughout this project, decolonization is a practice of doing and making; a way of being, individually, and together. The presentation of multiple Black Constellation artists in *Your Feast Has Ended* has the combinatorial effect of producing an alchemical illumination. What the exhibit illuminates, however, is not the essential unknowability of the Other, but the power relations that it instantiates; its constellated formation of creation and resistance. Echoing a common vision, ethos and purpose, the Black Constellation is aligned with a resurgent aesthetics of immanence, flux, emergence: art that protects, re/generates, remembers, transforms, continues. Amid the cacophonous, coded output of the collective and its disparate creative members, Charles Mudede writes, the collective “never lose[s] sight of the brightest star in their sky. *That star is the political*, and it is in the black constellation” (Mudede 2014, emphasis added).

#### HYPER-PRESENCE: AFRO/INDIGENOUS FUTURISMS

As Maikyo Alley Barnes suggests, for Indigenous and Afrikan artists: “Our past is the western world’s future” (Mistry 2014). The Black Constellation opens into a future now: by visioning a resonant model of resistant collectivity that is rooted in a resurgent creative continuum. With the

Constellationaires' aesthetic bent toward expansive, interstellar imaginings of possible worlds, artists affiliated with the collective have been aligned with a renewed interest in Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurisms. This singular framing of their work as futurist, or future-oriented, however, is a marker they often reject. Each member of the collective has their own assessment, however, there is consistency in their shared view that the work they are making in common is, as Ishmael Butler describes it, "ancient and futuristic at the same time" (Mejia 2014). Nep Sidhu goes further, stating unequivocally "I don't think there's anything futuristic about what we're doing. In fact, I think it's hyper-present" (Mejia 2014). This is a political as much as an aesthetic sensibility in which the work the collective creates works with and through articulations of pasts and futures, using material objects and processes associated with each, in order to create a re-imagined sense of co-existent and co-present temporal orders occupying the shared space of a hyper-present. Bringing historical contexts into conflict and contact with the desire for a decolonial reimagining of the new and the beyond of coloniality marks a prefigurative form of resurgent creativity that is created as the continuum of praxis. This is a belief shared by Galanin, for whom (as he suggests above) the act of creating — creativity as such — is a *practice* of sovereign sovereignty, itself a continuum of Indigenous being and resistance, an assertion of present decolonial becoming. The Black Constellation's becoming is figured in hyper-attention to presence. Ishmael Butler: "I try not to really think of past or future, but to make the most of the instinct that's happening in the moment...I learned and got the notion from Sun Ra and cats like that, for sure. I see these guys, who we call Afrofuturists, to be *masters of the now*." (Mejia 2014, emphasis added). Mastery of the now, in the work of Galanin, Alley-Barnes and Sidhu, as in that of their Constellation counterparts, can be understood as a dynamic response to the fixed coordinates of the historicized, colonized past and the other-worldly articulation of futures that



have yet to arrive. To this extent, then, their work can be seen as resonant with the *future anteriority* of the Zapatistas' prefigurative revolutionary practice<sup>18</sup>, which anticipates the future that will have already arrived — that manifests and creates the world in the now that is the desired outcome of the struggle to continue to exist.

Indigenous Futurism has emerged, in the work of contemporary writers, scholars, and artists, to contest colonial logics that seek to eradicate Indigenous presence and history through an entwined capitulation to capitalism's linear drive toward the future-oriented progress of Western colonial modernity. Indigenous Futurisms provide alternative imaginings of the resilient continuity of indigeneity . As Lindsey Catherine Cornum writes, Indigenous Futurism (figured, in her work, as “the space NDN”) arrives “following the rocket trails of black authors such as [Nalo] Hopkinson”, through relational interconnections with the writers, artists and musicians who have been working under the banner of Afrofuturism. The space NDN, however, exists within a long tradition of Indigenous interstellar explorations, “using technologies such as creation stories and ceremony as means of travel” (Cornum 2015: 34). Indigenous Futurisms posit collective visions of Indigenous existence beyond the settler imperial paradigm of final frontiers, Earth exodus, and neocolonial exoplanetary expansion: “In the colonial imaginary, indigenous life is not only separate from the present time but also out of place in the future, a time defined by the progress of distinctively western technology” (2015: 34). Indigenous Futurism disavows speed and linearity in favour of balanced regeneration, cyclical renewal and “bringing traditions to distant, future locations rather than abandoning them as relics” (2015: 35).

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<sup>18</sup> Prefigurative revolution, as Thomas Nail suggests, is “not an opposition nor an *ex nihilo* insurrection, it is a prefiguration in the sense that it creates a new world parallel to the old one. This prefiguration takes place in the future anterior in the sense that it does not assume a pre-given past which it opposes or merely a possible future it hopes to obtain. Revolutionary prefiguration...creates a space-time of its own...It creates the past and future it wants it see in the present...not the inert hope that ‘another world is possible’, but the direct action of that particular world within the present” (2012: 90)

Resurgence and sovereign creativity, then, become constitutive processes of recuperating the past in order to reassert the continuity of Indigenous life in any time, space, or location. “Finding ourselves in new contexts”, writes Cornum, “we are always adapting, always surviving” (2015: 35). Indigenous Futurism articulates our survival and resistance in spite of the interlocking imposition of colonialism and capitalism that have forced us into reactive defensive positions. “I’m not really supposed to be here”, says Csetkwe Fortier of Skookum Sound System. “Our people went through a lot of suffering, and are still going through a lot of suffering, and I’m not supposed to be the strong, healthy Indigenous woman I am. I was meant to be broken down...if I was even going to be, *breathing*. So in that respect, I feel like when I just wake up in the morning, and when I go to bed...I’m making political statements all the time” (Fortier 2014). Indigenous Futurism proposes a politics of affirmative refusal that is unapologetic in its visioning of our continued existence: Indigenous futurities necessitate this continuum, indeed, they are predicated on it. Creation, art-making, then, become means of envisioning futures and dreaming new worlds into being, an embedded, critical part of decolonial practice. As Diné artist Tom Greyeyes suggests:

Art making is a form of decolonization because we need to dream. Without that, how can we envision anything? That’s exactly what artists do. We find inspiration and then we begin to bring it out into the physical reality. When we do that, it carries an energy, and with that it promotes dialogue. We need to take this approach to decolonization theory too. Bring it into a space any way we can and, then, from putting it into action, we start creating and evolving the theory based on our experiments. Art is decolonizing when that fire inside you is re-lit. You realize that we can do anything. The system has our minds confined and part of decolonizing is radicalizing our minds. I don’t have all the answers but I know which direction to face and right now walking that way is enough. Developing a practice out of that and continuing to build that fire is what I’m doing. (Fortier 2014)

Indigenous Futurism is a re-dreaming of our inherent creative potential as Indigenous people, a becoming of the future enacted through present practice: the energetic liberation of our imaginative capability that enables the reignition of action that can be brought “into a space any

way we can” (Greyeyes 2014). Dreaming is an Indigenous technology of projection: a non-proprietary techne of interworld communication that gives force to liberatory desires for decolonial futurities by allowing us to “explore spaces and times outside the control of colonial powers and white supremacy” (Cornum 2015: 37). Indigenous artists make worlds *within* the liminal spaces of creation and imagination. By “remixing the past” and dreaming futures into being, our sovereign creativity is realized in a “collective refusal of colonial progress (namely, our destruction)” that allows us to “chart other ways to the future that lead us and other oppressed peoples to the worlds we deserve” (2015: 37). These pathways are regenerative and indeterminate: they perform and utilize “the past and the future as armaments to combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now” (Muñoz 2009: 12). Thus the Zapatistas’ infamous refrain that “another world is possible” becomes not simply a dream of another present, but an assertion that such worlds can take flight in their potentiality and emergent becoming. Indigenous futurities are thought/dreamed/written/imaged/coded/performed as decolonizing horizons that limn the limits of the colonial present. For Tuck, Guess and Sultan, an Indigenous futurity “is the future *made possible in the present*, it is the time and space in which we can tumble into something differently, so that our locations and labours are more than just who we are to the settler. Henceforward is *the start of the future now*” (2014: 9, emphasis added).

“The start of the future now” follows a similar line of flight from José Muñoz who envisions queer futurity as the becoming potential of “a future in the present”. That such conceptions of futurity as trajectories through diverse thinkers, communities, conceptions and ontologies of becoming locates a consistent desire/drive, on the part of colonized/abjected and dispossessed peoples, toward decolonial futurities that the colonial order through a collective overcoming of the confines of the present. Decolonial futurisms, be they Indigenous, Afro-

diasporic, queer, or otherwise, exist within a constellation of liberatory movements for freedom from capture and enclosure that seek new horizons of resurgent emergence and becoming.

#### RAYMOND BOISJOLY: AN/OTHER COSMOS

Haida artist Raymond Boisjoly and Ligwilda'xw artist Sonny Assu share a similar orientation in their work toward investigating questions of indigeneity, technology, and history — and the means through which Indigenous art comes to be enframed by the colonial gaze. In Boisjoly's work, this is pursued through a highly self-reflexive and research-based creative practice in which “felt correspondences and fictive ties” become generative sites of inquiry. “[T]he Indigenous character of Indigenous work”, he suggests, “is not simply the given set of images or objects one might encounter in a museum or gallery, but also the processes used to create these works. Indigenous artists must always work in changing circumstances that are not of their own making” (Boisjoly 2015). For Boisjoly, Indigenous art comes to occupy its relative positionality through an interrogation of its conceptual and contextual historicity, contemporaneity, and potential futurity. Although not all of his practice considers temporality as primary to creativity, Boisjoly is guided, in part by an interrogation of the contingencies of indigeneity produced by and through the colonial experience. To this extent, his work is guided both by a desire to maintain a “critical relationship to the representation of Indigenous forms of expression” and “the knowledge that things could have always been different should lead to the understanding that things can still be different” (Boisjoly 2015).

Working frequently with photography, Boisjoly uses the lens, the gaze, and regimes of visibility to refigure Indigenous imaginings of other possible worlds. His 2012 series, *An Other Cos-mos (Gen-e-sis, Trou-ble, Dis-ag-gre-ga-tion, Depar-ture)*<sup>19</sup>, makes visible the

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<sup>19</sup> Viewable at: <http://catrionajeffries.com/artists/raymond-boisjoly/works/#26>

indeterminacy of Indigenous futurities proposed in dynamic relation to colonial technologies of vision/visibility and the penetrative conquest of spaces beyond our world. In the series, Boisjoly overlays Northwest Coast formline and designs over images sampled from the Hubble telescope. This recontextualized perspectival take on Cornum's Space NDN here becomes a visioned version of an Indigenous presence hacked into the constellatory frame of modern science — and the technical 'outer limits' of photographic technology. In this space of the beyond, Boisjoly opens up potential lines of affiliation and co-presence with Afrofuturist imaginings of the cosmos populated not only by Euro-Western subjectivities and scientists, but by the dark matter of dark bodies and ontologies. Drawing inspiration from the futurisms of Sun Ra, Parliament, and Funkadelic, Boisjoly pursues a line of indeterminate flight outward and into the galactic, in order to “complex cosmolog[ies]” that are “resistant to simple linear reduction” (Colour School 2014). Boisjoly's concern, here, is with the “generative impulses that subtend the emergence of...cosmic mytholog[ies]” and that compel our imaginings of Afro-Indigenous futurities and elsewhere(s), while remaining attentive to historical resonances including the possibility of pre-Columbian trans-oceanic contact (Colour School 2014). This series proposes indigeneity as a fluid, mobile indeterminate and contingent category of being whose referents can be rooted in historical experiences of colonialism or imagined outward into a continuum of re/visioning practices that connect space travel and liberation. Writing about this practice, in connection to a similar, previous series, Boisjoly states:

There was a point where I was trying to think through certain scientific images, through the seeming capacity for photographic images to be treated neutrally—the idea that there was a neutral contrast, that there was the suggestion that there was an appropriate way to print the photographic images that makes it fully communicable. So those works were a look at this imagery that was derived from a scientific apparatus. It was an attempt to give it a more cultural inflection, of trying to relate it to Northwest Coast form line. It was a funny project. My research at the time was looking at African American musical traditions as reflected or transformed within the music of Parliament Funkadelic, which came out of an African American experience, but

[was transposed] on a cosmic field. I was trying to work through what I saw as the resonance of Parliament Funkadelic, find some way to respond to it visually, and find some way to relate it to my own experience and to how tradition is necessarily transformed. (Skinner 2011)

Although Boisjoly admits he has moved beyond this interest in Indigenous Futurism inflected by Afrofuturist visioning of the cosmic, the series illuminates a recurrent concern within contemporary Indigenous art that both travels and traverses the imaginative terrain of the scopic and the televisual in order to contend with the representational regime imposed upon Indigenous artists to represent the contemporary world according to specifically delimited coordinates of the Indigenous. Boisjoly's work attempts to illuminate this disjunction while claiming the space to interrogate the very construction of such coordinates and to intervene in this constructedness by recombining and reconstructing apparently disparate elements. Boisjoly emphasizes that this practice (often, of collage) is a critical means of unifying previously separate realities to demonstrate that they are not simply inherited or adapted from Euro-Western modernist traditions, but reflect a continuum of recombinant creative praxis "present within ancient Indigenous traditions" (Boisjoly 2015).

Indigenous Futurisms presuppose an art of the continuous and the re-emergent. In Boisjoly's work, futurity is not prescribed according to a determinate vision, rather, it opens into the processual, the practice of pursuing potentiality and possibility. Writing on this question of generative indeterminacy, Boisjoly writes that indigeneity proposes expansion, dynamism, and transformation. As a concept in motion, indigeneity configures movement through sensate experience and transformative creation:

Our travels follow paths and sometimes we must make a path because there are none to be found. Sound can travel, through air and on waves, from a drum and beyond, and even in our place. What change occurs when an image is painted on a drum's face? This alteration is an expansion of the drum's resonance into the realm of the visual, a sounding that is also an image, an image ferried by vibration. An image of this sort is never mute, it always contains the possibility of its activation, a charge and an impact. (Boisjoly 2014)

Boisjoly's practice echoes resonances across media and form lines to envision and image the vibratory potential of indigeneity's transit and motion as an image that "always contains the possibility of its activation" (Boisjoly 2014). This nascent potentiality, within the transit of the image and the concept, proposes a future in becoming and moving toward the paths "we must make because there are none to be found" (Boisjoly 2014).

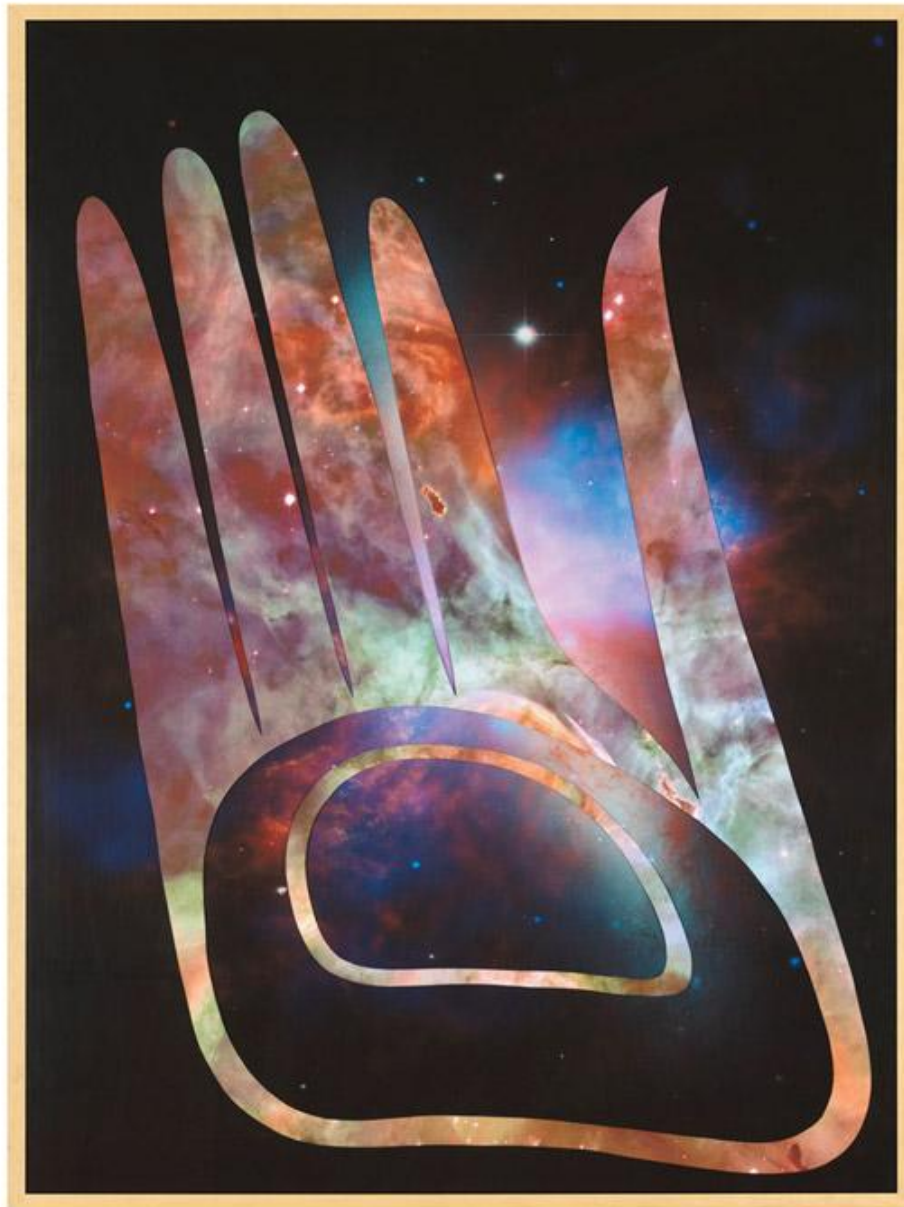




Figure 22. Raymond Boisjoly, *an other cos-mos: dis-ag-gre-ga-tion* (2012, at top);  
 Figure 23. *an other cos-mos: trou-ble* (2012, at bottom).

## SONNY ASSU, RE-INVASION / INTERVENTION

Sonny Assu, a Ligwilda'xw (Wei Wai Kai) artist from the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation, offers a remixed and retroactive articulation of Indigenous Futurism founded through a graffiti-like practice of creative intervention. Mobilized by a theory within his painting practice that he terms “the abstraction of abstraction”, Assu’s work “formulates a meta concept out of the colonial gaze upon the centuries-old cultural and artistic practices of the Kwakwaka'wakw” (Assu 2015). Assu describes this reflexive praxis and its intent:

An abstract theory in and of itself, the “Abstraction of Abstraction” mirrors the gaze of western art movements onto themselves. Particularly that of the Cubists and Surrealist, who have historically looked at non-western cultures for inspiration. This creates a meta-ethnologic exchange: where I am witnessing Western art movements looking at me through my culture, and I



am making work in reaction to this meta-exchange to reveal the counter-narratives of Indigeneity, placing Northwest Coast art and culture within the construct of Western art history. (Assu 2015)

Assu sees Northwest Coast iconography “as a form of stylized abstraction” and deploys his remixed version of its aesthetics in order to break from performative ‘traditionalism’ imposed on contemporary Indigenous artists and as “a political move, to address the western institution’s lack of desire to include “traditional” works (totems, masks, etc) within their institutions” (Assu 2015).

In his 2014 series, *Interventions on the Imaginary* (whose title references Marcia Crosby’s essay “The Construction of the Imaginary Indian”), Assu plays with tropes of the constructed and imaginary Indian of both the historicized past and the colonial present, in order to effect “digital interventions” into and onto works informed by the colonial gaze (Assu 2014). Assu locates his decolonizing media practice within remix culture and deploys digital graffiti-like tags as a means of reappropriating colonial discourse and, in this case, the colonial imaginary, as such, in order to challenge “the colonial fantasy of terra nullius and confron[t] the dominant colonial culture’s continued portrayal of Indigenous peoples as a vanishing race” (Assu 2014). Although Assu literalizes the re-presencing of indigeneity in these pieces. The series intervenes into works of colonial painters, like Emily Carr, to disrupt not only their colonial fantasies of vacant frontiers and open territory, but also to foreground indigeneity in the colonial present. Assu intends to reclaim the stolen terrain of the decolonial imaginary:

With the insertion of ovoids, s-shapes and u-shapes into the images, both the landscape paintings and the Northwest Coast design elements are changed. The landscapes become marked by the spectre of Native presence and the NWC design elements, traditionally two-dimensional in appearance, acquire the illusion of depth through association with Western principles of perspective. I see these bold interruptions of the landscapes as acts of resistance towards the colonial subjugation of the First People. (Assu 2014)

By disrupting the imaginative terrain of the colonial, Assu posits colonial landscapes and aesthetics as potential sites of Indigenous reterritorialization and resistance, resurgence and decolonization. Although pieces like *Homecoming* at first appear to reference a retrograde motion away from the present and toward colonial histories, Assu instead constructs his vision of Indigenous Futurism from the representational ruins of coloniality. In this series, Assu explores a resurgent staging of Indigenous re-emergence as a strategic occupation and reclamation of symbolic territory — the terrain of the creative appropriated by the colonial gaze and art — through which the intervention marks not simply the return of the past, but the decolonial refrain of Indigenous continuity. The colonized landscape overlaid with Indigenous iconographic visions a future in which the settler’s “alien invasion”<sup>20</sup> is remixed and subverted in pieces titled *Re-Invaders* and *Spaced Invaders*. Assu’s inversion images indigeneity’s resurgent return in the decolonized imaginal space of the future. He mobilizes a conception of Indigenous futurity premised on active resistance to colonial occupation through reappropriation of the means of struggle; and employs a strategic array of aesthetico-political practices (sampling, remix, and detouring colonial discursive techniques) mobilized and repurposed toward decolonizing aims. For Assu, remix is creative practice of contending with colonization:

Remix has played a role in my work, off and on for a while. It basically comes out of a discourse of how pop culture has so influenced our lives through mass media, advertising, tv, movies, music; [and] that we have every right to use images of the dominant society as our own. With the Emily Carr interventions, I was curious as to why her paintings have been become known as the definitive iconography of the Northwest Coast (NWC) and its Indigenous peoples. She was floating up and down the coast, documenting the perceived ‘ruins’ of what was being seen as a long gone culture, or various cultures on the brink of extinction. I mean, I won’t mince words and say that the various cultures of the NWC were on the verge of collapse through the effects of colonialism, but I won’t ignore that the efforts of the decolonial canon have started to make deep strides in countering that. Even before decolonization became a major theory in challenging the

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<sup>20</sup> Nicholas and Jerrod Galanin, working together as Leonard GetintheCar, riff on similar themes of inverted invasion in their collaborative 2014 piece “Space Invaders”, which transposes a remixed depiction of the early 1980s classic Atari video game of the same title onto a painted deer hide. In their version, however, the settler’s alien invasion is being defended by Indigenous forces launching arrows from behind a perimeter line of tipis.

dominant society, Indigenous People on the NWC have had a major impact on how the decolonial conversation will unfold. (Assu 2015)

Through his digital interventions, Assu both claims the space for this engagement and counter-narration to occur, while proposing alternative imaginings of decolonial futures in which Indigenous lands and histories are no longer definitively represented by colonizing eyes; they are re-invaded and reclaimed by their original inhabitants.



Figure 24. Sonny Assu, *Homecoming* (2014)



Figure 25. Sonny Assu, *Re-invaders* (2014).



Figure 26. Sonny Assu, *Spaced Invaders* (2014).

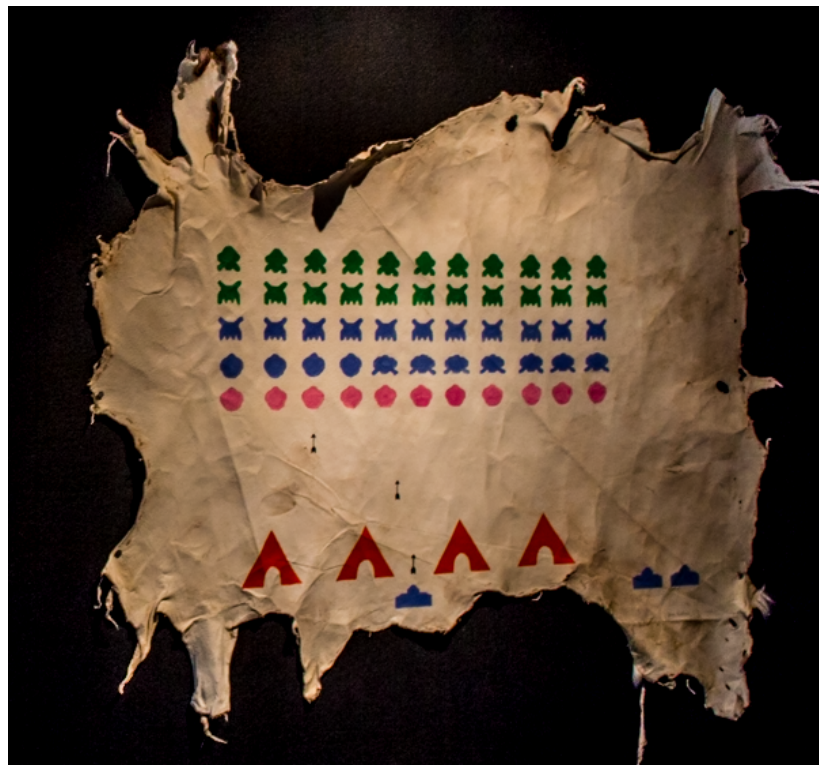


Figure 27. Leonard Getintheacar, *Space Invaders* (2014).



## POSTCOMMODITY: ‘REVERSE ENGINEERING BACK TO THE PRESENT’

For the transdisciplinary Indigenous arts collective Postcommodity, Indigenous Futurism is a decolonizing architectural gesture: a practice as much as a movement toward reclaiming the present *through* the past and future. In many of their works, across various media and disciplines ranging from sculpture and installation to video, performance and sound/music, Postcommodity aims to disrupt, intervene into and reconfigure dominant discourse according to Indigenous coordinates. Collective member Cristóbal Martínez describes Postcommodity’s practice as a succession of attempts to “create *new disruptive innovations* by subverting [the] original intentions” (CAFKATV 2014) of imposed colonial logics, hacking their coordinates, and effecting an ideological and functional repositioning that recentres Indigenous perspectives, voices and ways of being. These disruptive innovations stage encounters between institutional norms, imperial borders, and normative discourse in order to break from intelligibility and accessibility. Postcommodity’s interventions that are at once symbolic and material. As their name suggests, the collective is not simply interested in mapping new spatio-temporal articulations of an aestheticized indigeneity, they explicit attempt to generate dialogue through the exercise of their self-determination, or sovereign creativity, in practice. Their works range in size, scope and scale: from the hyper-local and specific to more general contestations of capitalist subjectivities and power relations, however, for the purposes of this closing discussion, I would like to focus on their engagement with the question of Indigenous Futurism.

If the nexus of a latent Indigenous futurity can be discovered within the enfolded colonial present, Postcommodity seeks out pathways toward this hidden potentiality through a process of what collective member Kade L. Twist calls “reverse engineering”:

a lot of our practice, could be labeled as Indian Futurism...A big part of that is imagining a future that is more desirable, and being able to place metaphors, position them, in circumstances of self-

determination. *Reverse engineering back to the present* is what Indian Futurism is about, and what we are doing with our music. (Turions 2015: 2, emphasis added)

Unlike many articulations of futurisms as “possibilities yet to come”, Postcommodity begins by “imagining a future that is more desirable” and working backward toward the present.

Postcommodity do not see this work as a practice of decoding an enciphered future so much as an architectural question, *a problem of engineering*, in which self-determination must be recoded and coordinated, using precise tools, that make possible future anterior “circumstances of self-determination”, constellations of freedom. This practice aims to recuperate the future-past from the future-present in an expanded now.

Indigenous futurism seeks to challenge notions of what constitutes advanced technology and consequently advanced civilizations. As settler colonial governments continue to demand more and more from the Earth, indigenous peoples seek the sovereign space and freedom to heal from these apocalyptic processes. Extractive and exploitative endeavors are just one mark of the settler death drive, which indigenous futurism seeks to overcome by imagining different ways of relating to notions of progress and civilization. Advanced technologies are not finely tuned mechanisms of endless destruction. Advanced technologies should foster and improve human relationships with the non-human world. In many indigenous science fiction tales of the futures, technology is presented as in dialogue with the long traditions of the past, rather than representing the past’s overcoming. (2015: 35)

In this specific sense, then, Postcommodity’s vision of futurism aligns with that of both Cornum and the Black Constellation (as discussed above), for whom *the future* qua futurity is something to be fought for, practiced, and built in the colonial ruins of the now. For Postcommodity member Raven Chacon, the collective’s practice reflects Indigenous conceptualizations of space and time: “A lot of our work speaks about the future, a possible apocalyptic future that American Indians have already seen in the past. This is history repeating itself. We came together as a response to so many contemporary artists speaking only about the past, and not enough about the future” (Turions 2015: 3). Rather than positing an apocalyptic moment that has yet to arrive, however, Postcommodity sounds the imminent arrival of transformed futures that are immanent to the present: conceived through re-emergence, resurgence and cyclical return. In this

re/visioning of Indigenous Futurism, the future is a past returned not deferred, neither a linear chronological sequence nor a point of the unimaginable *yet to be*. In this context, the role of the Indigenous artist, is to elucidate interrelationality: forms of being and becoming that are implicated in disruptions of spatio-temporal and onto-epistemic borders. As collective member Kade Twist suggests, Postcommodity attempts “To always exercise self-determination and the sovereignty of context, to expand the context to create space for an Indian future” (2015: 3), by performing the political through creative and sonic acts of rupture. Postcommodity’s visioning of decolonial futurity does not seek a Virilio-esque “futurism of the instant”, it occupies a variable movement to recuperate the past and reclaim a continuum of indigeneity in the present that can “create space for an Indian future” (2015: 3).

Postcommodity discovers this potential in the interplay of sonic frequencies, in the literal unearthing of the grounded sounds upon which colonial institutions have been built and placed. This strategy of generative disruption is perhaps most evident in the collective’s piece *Do You Remember When?*, a site-specific intervention and mixed installation that was first installed at the Arizona State University Art Museum in 2009 and re-mounted in Sydney, Australia at the Art Gallery of NSW in 2012, as part of the 2012 Sydney Biennale.

The piece consists of a four-foot square hole cut in the gallery’s floor, exposing the earth beneath the institution. The removed piece of the floor is then displayed in the room on a plinth, and a network of microphones, wires and cables feed loops of sound, samples and recorded music through the gallery space:

The hole and exposed earth of *Do You Remember When?* becomes a spiritual, cultural and physical portal – a point of transformation between worlds – from which emerges an Indigenous worldview engaging a discourse on sustainability. The block of concrete on the pedestal – the foundation of the institution constructed on top of tribal lands – functions as a trophy celebrating Indigenous intervention in opposition to a Western scientific worldview. The closed-circuit audio broadcast of a Pee Posh social dance song performed by the collective provides the psychosocial soundtrack of the transformation process. The work shifts the sustainability from a focus

dominated by Western science to a balanced approach inclusive of Indigenous knowledge systems. (Postcommodity 2009)



Figure 28 (at top) and 29 (at bottom). Postcommodity, *Do You Remember When?* (2009).



*Do You Remember When?* refutes colonial absence and refigures Indigenous presence: what is invisible/absent affirms what has always been present. Indigeneity, though hidden and overlaid by concrete, remains the foundation of the colonial world that has been, literally, “constructed on top of tribal lands”. Postcommodity provocatively inverts this paradigm by wryly “reifying” their anticolonial disruption: the slab of removed concrete is placed on a pedestal to function “as a trophy celebrating Indigenous intervention in opposition” to Western imperial worldviews and forms of knowledge production. Like Maikoyo Alley-Barnes’ *Pelt* series in *Your Feast Has Ended*, which slyly satirizes and critiques “Western society’s vapid and exhaustive penchant for trophy, and the fetish that exists around it” (Frye 2014), Postcommodity plays on similar colonial tropes of capture and conquest, by remixing the concept of the trophy for Indigenous purposes. The dissected concrete slab becomes a symbolically detoured artifact of the institution’s foundation and its operating logic, which otherwise “blocks” Indigenous presence by masking it under the force and weight of its institutional self-enclosure and cemented presence. Postcommodity reveals what is concealed, transposing what is “missing” into an ironic, reflexive trophy of what has been made visible, listenable, sensible. *Do You Remember When?* effects a transversal rupture in the sense experience of the visitor’s encounter with Postcommodity’s enciphered logic.

The piece is not only comprised of its concrete slab and the earth revealed beneath the gallery’s floor. Rather, the space of removal, as a site of opened enclosure, becomes both a hole and a portal, “a point of transformation between worlds” (Postcommodity 2009). This transversal portal in turn becomes a site of spatio-temporal transformation through which the past, future and present resound and reverberate, to reflect an expanded now. Raven Chacon describes the

visitor's encounter with the piece, when it was remounted for the Sydney Biennale, in partnership with several Aboriginal Australian artists and musicians:

Upon entering the space, you kind of hear a blur of sounds, a wash of different sounds that aren't easily or immediately identifiable. As you approach the hole, which is probably the first thing a visitor sees as they walk in, what they'll hear first is sound that you're getting from the hole. They'll hear a didgeridoo performed by one of the Aboriginal musicians we've collaborated with. And what then happens, is it becomes a part of the system we've created, which is the microphone picking up the sounds of the earth...we're not using any digital effects to process any of the sounds that were recorded. It's all being filtered through the earth, literally, through the sand. In addition to that, there's other sounds mixed into that motion in the room. More singing...and if you listen carefully...you'll even hear the sound of the cutting of the floor. And the third feedback loop that's happening in the space is any visitor that comes, and their interaction and walking in the space, and their interaction will be picked up by the microphone as well. (USSC 2012)

The three interlocking feedback loops of sound that comprise the aural component to the work reflect the dialogic processes and decolonial analytics at work throughout much of Postcommodity's creative practice, which pursues generative interventions at the level of form and content/context. Kade Twist expands this notion by suggesting that Postcommodity deploys "the intervention as process" in order to stage meta-discursive disruptions of colonial norms that consist in 'action beyond sound'. In *Do You Remember When?*, this disruption takes place through the dynamic interaction [at the interface] of multiple sonic and symbolic feedback loops:

There's one feedback loop, which is a Western scientific worldview, which has created scarcities. And then at the same time they have created an industry...to solve the problems that living with scarcities creates. The Indigenous feedback loop is connected to the earth; it's the knowledge system that predates the Western system that is on the land creating the scarcities on that land. They typically operate parallel, but they're not intersecting — meaning Indigenous People, Indigenous knowledge systems, are not being brought into the processes that the Western scientific institutions have, or engage in, to solve those problems. So the third feedback loop, is the process...it's what connects the two together. *That's the intervention as process*. It connects all the visitors, all the people in the room whether they're Indigenous or non-Indigenous, they all interrupt, momentarily, those feedback loops, and interject themselves into it. So that's a very, very important process to this. It's not just sound. (USSC 2015)

More than sound. *Do You Remember When?* effects a generative interventionist process that produces a surplus of feedback: overflow that occurs through the dissonant intersection of Western and Indigenous cosmological sound and semiotic systems colliding. As in much of the

collective's work, the piece also enacts a dialogic, transversal gesture of decolonial interjection that implicates its audience in the co-construction of the intervention as process. The viewer/listener/visitor becomes the enabler that connects feedback loops that would otherwise operate in parallel, without intersecting. But Postcommodity is interested in what happens when these parallel systems are brought into contact. This interface, constituted in the interstitial third space of sonic/phonic materiality and symbolic rupture, becomes both the site of generative new discourse and the figurative break through which the appositional movement of colonizing and decolonizing discursive practices and knowledge systems are laid bare. The bare earth that is exposed remains opaque, though resonant, visible as depth-in-potential, below the surface that has been rendered present.

The gallery institution as syntagm for a colonial grammar of knowing, containing, ordering and enclosing Indigenous ways of being and knowing within its walls is broken open. The break is not simply a spontaneous irruptive marker of symbolic rupture, but a calculated and concretized *cutting through* of the colonial foundations built on and over Indigenous lands and ontologies. The cut space that marks colonial absence, the missing piece of the floor, turned trophied referent of a returned and resounding Indigenous presence is a cipher for Indigeneity — the affirmative negation of colonial structure that while refusing the structured containment that denies Indigeneity presence and visibility, returns that presence as both a visible and audible force. Microphones are suspended above this ciphered space in order to effect an alternate *protocol for listening* that shifts sensorious attention and aesthetic experience toward the sub-sonic frequencies of the earth itself. The land becomes a source of sound; the excavated/extracted concrete becomes an ironic redoubling of a fetishized prize, an amplified and sonorous material referent of persistent coloniality.

Postcommodity intended “to construct a portal allowing an Indigenous worldview into a space that has typically and historically kept Indigenous voices out” (CAFKATV 2014). But this portal into indigeneity also reflects a Indigenous Futurist form of communicative praxis in which “listening to the earth” becomes enmeshed within a creative intervention that disrupts the visitor’s sensibility of the ways in which Western and Indigenous spatio-temporal understandings can be placed into a dialogic process of mutual decolonial becoming. Postcommodity not only placed microphones in the ceiling and above the cut out floor, they also “buried an audio system underneath the ground, so when you approach the piece you hear [sounds] emerging through the earth and into the space of the gallery” (CAFKATV 2014). They then placed a contact microphone on the slab of concrete, tuned it to its own “natural frequency” such that it emanates a drone sound; and they designed algorithms “to push the sound around the room, so you get this sense when you’re in the space that there’s this *sonic movement* moving throughout and around your body, so you have this ambient experience of music and then you have this a localized experience as you hear directly from the earth” (CAFKATV 2014). The interplay of the visually scarred floor of the gallery serves as simultaneous break and portal into the revealed ground of Indigenous presence that both affirms its continuity/continuum — through interpenetrative sonic movement that generates an ambient field of indigeneity — and localizes a contextualized reflection of the Indigenous grounded normativity that underwrites colonialism’s assumed foundations.

The sonic movement of interconnected past futures and future histories sets resurgent ciphers in motion. The break, here, serves as portal to an Indigenous futurity of reclaimed and regenerated Indigenous presence. For Postcommodity, the break is a generative process: “rather than focus on what’s missing or what’s left out, we focus on...generative aspects...what’s still

functioning, what still works...and the algorithm we developed is a generative sound algorithm, so it's constantly growing, constantly evolving" (CAFKATV 2014) Although this process remains open and indeterminate (in terms of intended effects), *Do You Remember When?* facilitates dialogical discourse through intervention and confrontation: "We had an opportunity to go into that space, to cut a hole in the very foundation of not only the discourse, but of the physical presence it. And remove it. And set it up as a trophy. And force people to look at the land, within that nexus of discourse, and think about the Aboriginal voice, Aboriginal identity, Aboriginal culture, and Aboriginal knowledge system[s]." (USSC 2012). Out of this generative site of dissonance Postcommodity hacks new coordinates toward the present-future.

#### TACTICAL SUBTERFUGE: ENCRYPTION, ENCIPHERMENT, HACKING THE VIRTUAL

As Carcross/Tagish curator Candice Hopkins states, "one of the hardest tasks faced by new media is the ability to address the present" (Hopkins 2014: 132). And the present we live within is increasingly defined by crisis. In the long emergency of the anthropocene, crisis has been normalized under a permanent state of exception, in which accelerating technological progress, pervasive neoliberal governmentality, expansive and rapacious global capitalism, and climatological change have induced hyperbolic predictions of imminent apocalyptic collapse and both mass migrations and population displacements on a global scale. Coupled with the development of new technologies for the coding and capture of human bodies by expansive disciplinary apparatuses of command and control, art-making be considered within a technological matrix of coded mediation — a world suffused with increasing "dromospheric pressure" (Virilio 2011) and the ambient effects of living within pervasive, networked power. Indigenous minds and bodies are disciplined and exhausted by this biopolitical conditioning of existence, rendering indigeneity anxiously hyper-present. Being becomes the state of being

surveilled and captured by codes of power — a conditioning that in turn, produces, new forms of control, what the Raqs Collective (2007) term, “an anthropometry of the soul”. Whether masked by the dance of a globalized war on terror, or hidden in the infracolonial relations of interpersonal communication and self-governmentality,

[a] continuous state of emergency (what Agamben has characterized as the state of ‘exception’ peculiar to our contemporary reality) produces its own specific sense of fatigue – an exhaustion that comes from remaining alert to yielding oneself up to acts of random or routine scrutiny. This wakefulness and watchfulness, this baleful insomniac rendition of the self into units of meaningful information, is the unexamined personal collateral damage of the rise of a global apparatus of interlocking security and surveillance systems. [...]

We see surveillance, particularly new technologies such as facial recognition, retinal tracing and biometric scanning, as performing a similar set of operations to those undertaken by early anthropometry and fingerprinting. The body as data is also put to analogous uses, especially for ‘racial profiling’ at airports and other transit points, just as anthropometric photographs were used to substantiate elaborate theories of racial typage. The intensive application of surveillance technologies at public places, work, and even in the home or in the private sphere leads to a monitoring of thought and affect to a degree that suggests that we can now begin to speak tentatively of an ‘anthropometry of the soul’. (2009: 24)

The quantified self performs its relation to the world through algorithmic conditions that effect performative forms of thought and action; subjectivations rendered through a prism of self-surveilling, self-censure, and mediated subjection. The body that is patrolled by power enacts itself as a *being for power*, a being in relation to power, that is configured to become visible and legible to the logic of the network. This apparatus determines the character and function of networked actors such that the “anthropometry of the soul” subtends a more general move toward a coded replication of human agency governed by circulation, and the surveillable body made available for capture. This is the new face of technologized colonialism: the networked production of colonized subjects whose very “presences and transiencies” are catalogued and archived as pure information—metadata sets, digital content, human architecture, reality commodified for profit.

Surveillance is a biopolitical form of this informational enclosure that demarcates and dictates what (and who) is to be coded counted and coded. In Canada, during the recent Idle No

More Movement<sup>21</sup>, the federal government's previously little known Government Operations Centre compiled extensive surveillance reporting on the Indigenous movement, its participants, activities, and supporters and framed Indigenous resistance as a potential domestic threat to national security. Not coincidentally, environmental and Indigenous activists in Canada continue to be added to national "terrorist" databases and government watch lists. For its part, the GOC expanded its surveillance beyond specific interest groups and movement organizers to the widest possible range of public activities: "to include all known demonstrations across the country". In June 2014, leaked documents revealed that the GOC had issued notification to all federal departments requesting their participation in this expansion: "The Government Operations Centre is seeking your assistance in compiling a comprehensive listing of all known demonstrations which will occur either in your geographical area or that may touch on your mandate (Pugliese 2014). Beyond the specificity and purview of specific departmental aims or mandates, the Government of Canada has increased its powers to surveil, patrol, and enforce any perceived "threat" to the settler colonial state, including new proposals for blanket requests of mass surveillance with "unlimited scope". The GOC worked closely with CSIS, the RCMP and the Defence Ministry's Canadian Joint Operations Command to report on planned, potential and ongoing protest actions during the Idle No More movement (Ling 2013), but the state's increasingly militarized, domestic surveillance program is not limited to the tracking and

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<sup>21</sup> Idle No More is an Indigenous social movement that began in late 2012 in response to the imminent passage of an omnibus piece of legislation, known as Bill C-45—which proposed unilateral changes to the Indian Act, the Fisheries Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Navigable Water Act, all with serious implications for Indigenous nations, treaty rights, and the radical reduction of environmental protection for lakes and rivers (Coulthard 2014: 160). Beginning with teach-ins held in Saskatchewan, the movement spread to social media networks and generated a large public conversation online. The #IdleNoMore hashtag, for example, trended repeatedly on Twitter, reaching 58,000 mentions in a single day on January 11, 2013 (Blevis 2014: 1). Following a first wave of global mobilizations that employed round dances as a tactical form of temporary occupation and resistance, and that supported a highly publicized hunger strike by Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence, the movement crested in the winter of 2013. Although the Canadian political landscape faced "an alarm on colonial questions commonly evaded in the halls of power" (Christoff 2013: 2), the Idle No More movement was not able to defeat Bill C-45 or to sustain the momentum it achieved in its early days, when it initiated nationwide forms of collective organizing and resistance.

investigation of Indigenous peoples. All Canadians have now been made subject to the state's expansive, limitless war on our freedom of movement, speech, and expression. As the Raqs Collective rightly observes, the state of being where being becomes *being surveilled* leads to perpetual conditions of fatigue and exhaustion, "that [come] from remaining alert to yielding oneself up to acts of random or routine scrutiny" (2007: 23).

Against this code of enforced visibility, access and legibility enforced by a state that has further securitized its own privacy and cloaked machinations under the veil of good governance and protection of its citizens, Indigenous peoples in Canada would be wise to consider the tactically immediate (and longer-term strategic) benefits of camouflage and encryption in all aspects of social and political life. Not only in art-making, but in all our communications, we must protect ourselves against these new forms of state invasion. Our "presences and transiencies" must be defended not only in the flight of fugitive movements suturing the undercommons with decolonial spaces of indigeneity, but also through coded and enciphered communicative forms that resist visibility and refuse the colonizing conquest of the dataset and the algorithm. To be rendered legible is to be made visible; to be made visible is to be made violable, a potential target of colonial violence and state power. Our art, music, movements and creativity must be courageous enough to examine the "personal collateral damage of the rise of a global apparatus of interlocking security and surveillance systems" (Raqs 2010: 24) that, in Canada, positions indigeneity as an inherent threat to settler society. By refusing to be disciplined by the state's apparatuses of capture, by tactfully and tactically evading surveillance when and where we can, we may be able to hack new coordinates for a liberatory future. Our decolonizing struggles must be waged creatively, using techniques of aesthetic camouflage: rupture, hacking, ciphers, and digital encryption. As art critic Saelen Twerdy asks: "Surely it's



no coincidence that artists are suddenly interested in military history and tactical subterfuge at a time when the most bellicose federal administration in decades is actively rewriting Canadian history to emphasize patriotic military achievement? Militarism, surveillance, and cryptography are without a doubt relevant topics, but to what purpose are they being mobilized?" (Twerdy 2014).

To my mind, the particularity of Indigenous peoples' abject positioning within settler society, and our embeddedness within resurgent and anticolonial struggle, offers the potential for "tactical subterfuge" to become not only a thematic consideration within art-making, but also a form of Indigenous resistant and resurgent praxis that deploys such tactics as part of a wider social movement. To remain incommensurate with colonialism, *to remain visible but illegible to power*, is a powerful form of resistance when it is mobilized collectively. As the globe is brought under a totalizing regime of code, colonialism becomes a specific technological apparatus of control and a cartographic technique to contain the terrain of indigeneity. Decolonization demands that we hack the coordinates of colonizing maps to liberate spaces of autonomy and to claim new spaces of freedom.

Commenting on the rise of a vectoralist class that controls the flows of both bodies and information through the world's available terrain, McKenzie Wark observes that "the zone of conflict" has "moved to a more abstract level, from data to metadata. But what endures is the challenge of meshing cultural and technical kinds of hacking to create and recreate the possibility that there can be a world" (Gregg 2013). The possibility of the world, the potential world, is always the world to come, the next world. In the becoming of this world yet to be, the figure of the hacker or, for our purposes, *the Indigenous hacker*, takes on a new resonance. The hacker is a figure of creative transformation and resistance: one who escapes both the retrievable traces of

the indexical and the searchable world of the digital archive. The hacker discovers, by hacking the present, that camouflaged speech and encoded flows help her to inhabit the liminal and the indeterminate. The hacker resists representation. For Wark, in this context, “All representation is false” (Wark 2004: #208). Indigeneity thus assumes an abject relation to representation, insofar as “[t]he politics of representation is always the politics of the state”. Representation is dangerous because it is overdetermined by the state, which “is nothing but the policing of representation’s adequacy to the body of what it represents” (2004: #219). To refuse representation, then, does not mean to deny one’s presence, it can be thought as an affirmative movement toward occupying indigeneity as an anticolonial elsewhere that troubles both visibility and subjection. “To hack,” Wark continues, “is to trouble the object or the subject, by transforming in some way the very process of production by which objects and subjects come into being and recognize each other by their representations. The hack touches the unrepresentable, the real” (2004.: #222). To hack politics is to affirm the alterity, multiplicity in difference and mutual self-becoming of other forms of life. This remixed form of decoloniality “as affirmative difference, is the politics that can escape the state” (2004: #223).

In elaborating this claim, Wark describes forms of political relationality akin to the native and newcomer settler colonial dialectic, of a potential decolonial politics of expression in which indigeneity hacks colonialism as its abstruse and generative surplus; an excess that is at once outside the state and always becoming something other: “To refuse, or ignore, or plagiarize representation, to renounce its properties, to deny it what it claims as its due, is to begin a politics, not of the state, but of statelessness. This might be a politics that refuses a state’s authority to authorize what is a valued statement and what isn’t” (2004.: #223). Indigeneity is a figure for this self-authorizing force of refusal and becoming other that, by rejecting

representation claims the space for *difference for itself*: “This is politics as the refusal of representation itself, not the politics of refusing this or that representation” (2004: #231). To affirm difference *through* representation is, for Indigenous peoples and for other minoritarian communities, to become “agents of the state” that “must police the meaning of their own representation, and police the adherence of their members to it” (2004: #230).

As I have suggested, indigeneity is a paraontological site of resistance to the colonizing regime of representation that exceeds and evades categorization. By moving and shifting, indigeneity transits as an abject anticolonial affirmation of difference that contends with the state that “validates all representations”. Indigeneity enables a double refusal of representation and colonizing subjectivity: by rejecting “objectification in the commodity form and seek[ing] instead to become something other than a representation that the state can recognize and the market can value” (2004: #229). Indigeneity, thought as this form of flight, becomes a contingent intensity in resistance to commodification. As a post-representative force toward forms of life beyond the colonial, indigeneity hacks colonial reality to regenerate other realities. The hack is generative form of rupture, or disorder. “[W]hat the hacker calls into being in the world”, Wark argues, “is a new world and a new being” (2004.: #072). The hacker thus creates the new from within the present by hacking into “the surplus of the virtual”, what Wark designates as the “surplus of possibility expressed in what is actual” (2004: #074). Under colonialism, indigeneity mobilizes this surplus of possibility as a decolonial potentiality *within* difference and multiplicity: the horizon of “not just ‘the’ future, but an infinite possible array of futures, the future itself as virtuality” (2004: #078). The Indigenous hacker, I contend, is a necessary actor in the contemporary struggle for decolonization. The hacker is a creative agent of disruption, whose creative work can mobilize indigeneity toward decolonial futures.

Colonialism produces the textural interface through which the settler is rendered dominant and indigeneity is figured as mute savage, abject threat, absent presence, disposable or invisible. Against this technological enframing, however, anticolonial currents of indigeneity operate within the state's techniques of dominance. To seek out new paths toward freedom from the cacophonous coding of Indigenous existence, the Indigenous hacker must recognize that the regime of representation is a critical site of struggle: "In this tiresome age, when even the air melts into airwaves, where all that is profane is packaged as if it were profundity, the possibility yet emerges to hack into mere appearances and make off with them" (2004: #389). Indigeneity, that elusive becoming other, a restless movement that refuses to be fixed in position, or chained to colonialism's carceral grid, can find, in fugitivity, a creative form of resistance and resurgence. Indigenous creative praxis knows no bounds; it is a rhythmic consistency created in flows and cycles of emergence: Indigenous forms of life, resurgent subfrequencies, that vibrate in presence and possibility in the land that lies beneath colonialism's self-represented foundations. Rhythm emerges in repetition, developing from cyclical patterns and repeated attempts to forge movements with common purpose in struggle. Indigeneity admits multiplicity as its relational heart, in the elsewhere and otherwise to be realized in what *is*: "There are other worlds and they are this one" (Wark 2004).

#### ANTICOLONIAL CACOPHONIES: SIGNAL TO NOISE, HACKING THE COORDINATES

Postcommodity are decolonial hackers of other possible worlds. The "concept of *hacking*, of appropriating", collective member Kade Twist suggests, "is really important to our practice; this idea of institutional critique and critiquing institutional narratives...we don't hold back". In relation to their sonic practice and sound-based works, collective member Cristóbal Martínez

states: “We take...tools that are tied to pervasive media and the rapid changes that are happening in the world and, basically, *we hack them*” (Turions 2015: 3). Two concepts become central to this discursive entanglement: *noise* and *the hack*. For Postcommodity, the two are mutually entwined. As Martinez notes,

*Noise is a great format for [hacking] because noise is already a culture that is about repositioning tools in new and innovative ways. How do we reposition these tools in a way that allows a re-imagination suitable to ritual practice and ceremony? [How] can [we] imagine new ways of rationalizing and operationalizing the change for self-determination? Some of the protocols for this music have a lot to do with listening, which is hard. We have been thinking about dialogue and protocols, when it is appropriate to listen and when it is appropriate to speak, realizing it is more about listening than speaking. It’s a lot about relationships and how we encounter one another. (Martinez 2013)*

Noise is a relational field through which dialogic space can be hacked into an encounter with an/other. Noise becomes a conduit for “re-imagination” that allows the collective’s sonic compositions and performances to become self-reflexive sites of listening and reflection. Protocols, in this context, are methods of encounter, processes of learning and realizing when to listen and when to speak. In Postcommodity’s work, they are decolonial, relational, malleable and emergent. Noise effects an aesthetic disruption or disorientation in a listener’s sensibilities; like resistance, it is a contingent, indeterminate and dynamic *force*.

Philosopher Jacques Attali, in his seminal writing on the political economy of music, defines noise as a form of relational interference:

*A noise is a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission. A resonance is a set of simultaneous, pure sounds of determined frequency and differing intensity. Noise, then, does not exist in itself, but only in relation to the system within which it is inscribed: emitter, transmitter, receiver. Information theory uses the concept of noise (or rather, metonymy) in a more general way: noise is the term for a signal that interferes with the reception of a message by the receiver, even if the interfering signal itself has a meaning for that receiver. (Attali 1985: 26)*

Noise is disruptive and dissonant; and, beyond certain biological limits, it can even become “an immaterial weapon of death” (1985: 27). If music represents a limiting and ordering of sounds into social codes, “the code of music simulates the accepted rules of society” (1985: 29), whereas

noise effectuates a violence *against* normative codes and orders. Noise violates order through interjection and excess. Noise distorts the communicative relay, interrogates relations of dominance and “generates modifications in structuring codes” (Castanheira 2012: 89). It is a semiotic and immaterial surplus whose relational becoming is immanent to the signal chain. Following Massumi, noise is an emergent force: a “reservoir of sense...the difference whose modulation is signal” (Massumi 2012: 47). Or, in a more poetic phrasing: “Noise is like the underlayer from which signal, with its message content, rises in relief, under pressure from tectonic forces” (Massumi 2012: 46). Noise is always this relational, dynamic expression of forces and becomings. As such, “*intensity is implied in all noise: noise is the too much, the unwanted, the excess*—in terms of volume, performance practice, simple duration, difficulty (Hegarty 2012: 19, emphasis added). Noise shapes and is shaped by this field of relations and it is within this disrupted order that Postcommodity appropriates and repositions aesthetico-political tools to revision communicativity.

The collective deploys hacking as a bricolage method, a sampling technique, to re-imaginative collective creation. The hack, as a creative praxis, “is to produce or apply the abstract to information and express the possibilities of new worlds, beyond necessity” (Wark 2004: #014). It is more than simply a means of sampling and appropriating information; it is a method of qualitative transformation that “depends on the material qualities of nature, and yet discovers something independent of a given material form. It is at once material and immaterial. It discovers the immaterial virtuality of the material, its qualities of information” (2004: #015). Postcommodity’s experiments in recorded music, sound installations, and sonic performance deploy noise as a disruptive tactic of generative resistance that hacks the phonic materiality of

communicative praxis to discover new rhythms and frequencies. Postcommodity calls “the open-ended futurity virtually present, now, in the event” (Massumi 2012: 57) into being.

To hack communication is to break open possibilities for transmission and transformation. In spectacular society, this takes place at the foundation of communicativity, where “the spectacle is language” (Wark 2009) and the language of the spectacle is derived from communication, representation, and separation:

the spectacle is nothing but the pure form of separation: When the real world is transformed into an image and images become real, the practical power of humans is separated from from itself and representation as a world unto itself. In the figure of this world, separated and organized by the media, in which the forms of the State and the economy are interwoven, the mercantile economy gains the status of absolute and irresponsible sovereignty over all social life. After having falsified all of production, it can now manipulate collective perception and take control of social memory and social communication, transforming them into a single spectacular commodity where everything can be called into question except the spectacle itself (2009: 80.0)

Communicativity itself becomes the ground of commodification and, thus, of alienation from linguistic being. But if, as Massumi has argued: “The base definition of linguistic communication is...considered to be the transmission of syntactically coded content from sender to receiver” (Massumi 2012: 43), the inherent (if ambivalent) power of communicativity is comprised by its excesses and its violations of the spectacle’s code. Language, or linguistic being, not only enacts a violent history of alienation and separation, it also retains a latent potentiality for affirming difference not simply in its communicability, but in “the inevitability of noise”:

Human communication is defined by this linguistic ‘thirdness’, by its capacity not for linear transmission but for indirection. This complicates things: with the third party in waiting down the line comes the possibility of that party jumping the line and intercepting the message. *Indirect relay and message poaching, or hacking, is the true ground of human communication.* With indirect relay comes the inevitability of noise and the accompanying distortion of message content. (Massumi 2012: 43, emphasis added)

*The hack*, for Massumi, is the precedent ground of communication qua communicativity. The hack produces noise in the signal chain. Noise is thus a surplus of content that may convey

meaning beyond its intended message to a potential receiver. Noise is an emergent wave, “the underlayer from which signal, with its message content, rises in relief, under pressure from tectonic forces” (Massumi 2012: 46). It is an indeterminate force from and through which communicative signals emerge: “the reservoir of sense...the difference whose modulation is signal” (Massumi 2012: 47). Thought this way, noise becomes, as Steve Goodman suggests “a reservoir of rhythmic potential” (Goodman 2010: 192). I am interested in this potential for noise to yield more than what it intends; and for noise to carry forms of potentiality that can become political in their modulation of communication and signal transmissions. Under settler colonialism, this “rhythmic potential” can be thought not only as a metaphoric potential for disruption, but also as embedded aspect of creative production and art-making that denotes a generative potentiality, latent within noise, to effect communicative transformations.

Indigeneity is the noise to colonialism’s signal: a disruptive concatenation of forces and intensities that stages an originary, a priori interruption of colonizing discourses, materialities, and actions. Indigenous forms of life are governed by ancient knowledges and persistent practices that have sustained our peoples for thousands of years. Under colonialism, however, indigeneity is repositioned as an excess -- the abject and unwanted surplus of being that cannot be accommodated by the settler state and the colonial imaginary. Against this violence, indigeneity’s consistency is rendered dissonant to colonial order, colonizing harmonics. Indigenous artists expose the limits of the colonial spectrum and create in ways that disrupt its codes of confinement. Indigeneity is the noise to colonialism’s signal because Indigenous peoples have resisted and survived annihilation. We are both the remaindered presence of the colonial encounter and a powerful force for disruption and resistance. Indigeneity as noise is the sound of survival. We occupy the colonial signal chain to claim the indeterminate, where



indeterminacy is a generative opening into collective experience. Indigenous peoples recode ourselves through noise. We are colonialism's *interference*: dissonant frequencies that, at the interstice, or interface, of indigeneity and colonization, refuse to be contained.

As Hegarty notes, "The idea of intensity is implied in all noise: noise is the too much, the unwanted, the excess" (Hegarty 2012: 19). Noise is the abjected surplus that makes durational rhythmic consistency possible by establishing the reservoir of sensate experience and potentiality from which signal, rhythm and, eventually, music can emerge. Indigeneity, thought as a figure for such noise, is the disallowed and disavowed phonic materiality that informs the being of the settler in relief; the shadowed presence of sonic dark matter that subtends the encroaching white noise of colonial invasion.

"To express oneself", Attali argues, "is to create a code" (1985: 143). Whether this code can be legibly transmitted and received by its intended listener depends on the extent to which noise impacts, refract and intercepts the communicative relay as such. Communicative practices thus become the ground through which power relations are both established and expressed as ordering modalities of codification. To hack into this system of ordering, to interject the noise of indigeneity originary becoming-other within and against an imposed system is to effectuate a rupture of that system in order to reconfigure and reorder it: "Noise, situated externally to codes of organization, can lead to a change of these codes" (Castanheira 2012: 88). What indigeneity interjects, however, is the noise of presence in which other codes — Indigenous ciphers of speech/language, sound, image and creativity — are made present in their potentiality to rise to the surface of communicability as emergent waves of decolonial thought and action.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD THE NEXT WORLD

Decolonial futures will be realized in new forms of community and co-resistance: decolonizing praxis that is Indigenous, queered, and Afro-diasporic -- hacked from the ruins of the colonized present. The Black Constellation and Postcommodity practice art-making of this precisely this kind: they deploy aesthetico-political practices of collective creation that seek to disrupt and encode communicativity within strategic ciphers of constellated creativity. Although their respective infrapolitical interventions<sup>22</sup> can be considered assertions of creative sovereignty in resistance to colonial domination, their work refuses binarisms, didacticism and questions what Raqs Media Collective call “the imperative of transparency” (Raqs 2010: 34). I emphasize the specific practices of these two collectives because they offer us an exemplary model for understanding the strategic use of creativity in resistance to the separation of our struggles through processes of colonial violence; and in resistance to narrow categorizations, identifications and colonizing knowledges. Each collective employs transdisciplinary, multimodal practices in visual, sonic, installation, performance and immersive, mediatic forms that demonstrate their shared (although differential) commitment to creative practices that are both collective *and* decolonizing. In the constellated formation of their micro-communities of resurgence, Postcommodity and the Black Constellation are developing decolonizing visions of futures forged in common struggle. Collectivized practices of art-making generate new forms of infrapolitics, “haptic inhabitation[s] of thought” (Moreiras 2014) that assume the primacy of the body and lived experience as the front line of decolonial struggle. Postcommodity creates art that, as Candice Hopkins writes, compels its audience to engage: “the viewer is implicated in the

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<sup>22</sup> James C. Scott defines infrapolitics as a “strategic form that the resistance of subjects must assume under conditions of great peril. ... [where] political action takes forms that are designed to obscure their intentions or to take cover behind an apparent meaning” (Scott 2005). Following Alberto Moreiras, we can understand the infrapolitical as a “haptic inhabitation of thought” that is constituted in this resistance (Moreiras 2014).

artwork from the moment they step in the room” (2014: 131). By implicating the viewer/listener in the encounter with their work, Postcommodity makes visible the structuring violence of colonial and capitalist relations which work to render our complicity in reproducing these structures invisible or hidden. The Indigenous and cross-communal art collectives I examine in this project -- including not only Postcommodity and the Black Constellation but also Skookum Sound System, Walking With Our Sisters and others -- work to disrupt, intervene, and interrogate colonialism. They generate new communities of resistance by making visible and challenging “the underlying vibrations, rhythms, and codes that animate [the] complex and invisible battlefield” (Goodman 2010: xvii) of decolonial struggle under Empire. I extend this prismatic analytic approach to making structural forms of power visible, by framing my examination of decolonizing creativity in the contemporary practices of Indigenous artists who resist settler colonialism, capitalism, colonial violence and power. This prism is embodied: it is a resurgent analytic borne from genealogical connections to lived histories of subjugation, subjection, dispossession and abjection. Against the originary violence that the settler state and society seek to defend, Indigenous artists are creating work that resists the terminal coding of Indigenous life. Postcommodity and the Black Constellation inhabit sites of generative indeterminacy and occupy fields of noise and dissonance in order to challenge the demand to “represent” indigeneity according to normative codes and logics.

But their shared and divergent creative processes not only reimagine the spatio-temporal coordinates of Indigenous resistance, they propose a decolonial “*politics of frequency*” (Goodman 2010: xvii) that recuperates shared histories of resistant and resurgent struggles and re-inscribes them within new forms. Decolonial constellations of creativity create new traditions, invent new languages for “newly encoded collective myths” (Frye 2014), and hack into the codes

of colonialism to infiltrate and occupy other immanent worlds and imaginaries. If creativity is an alchemical admixture of imagination, innovation, thought and embodied practice that is both indeterminate and boundless, indigeneity remains a cipher for decolonial potentialities that thrive as encoded rhythms and resistant transmissions within the colonial system. The Next World is already present in the world that is. Our task is to listen. Then to act.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **OUTRO**

# Decolonizing Horizons and the Practice of Freedom

## Chapter 6

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### OUTRO - Decolonizing Horizons and the Practice of Freedom

*It ends as it begins, in motion, in between various modes of being and belonging...*

- Jack Halberstam

#### PRACTICING FREEDOM

We live in the age of the algorithm. Codes and networks dominate us in new ways, compelling new forms of resistance. Resistance is determined not only by its ability to stage encounters between contending oppositional forces but by its ability to infiltrate the digital and material infrastructure that codes how we come to perceive ourselves and our reality within the network. As global capitalism furthers the network's expansion to new territories of the mediatic and the virtual, as well as toward new technologies of physical conquest, occupation, and dispossession, Indigenous peoples are challenged to reconceive decolonization and decolonial imaginaries so as to reflect the changing material conditions of our entanglement and oppression. How can decolonization be both not a metaphor and an "elsewhere"? As a process, it demands both systemic and psycho-affective levels of transformation: the recovery of Indigenous lands and lifeways and the transformation of consciousness and being among the individuals and communities that comprise our nations. If we are to address the realities of contemporary life under Empire and the cybernetic entanglements of colonial society on Turtle Island, resurgence must be mobilized to reclaim the imaginative and material terrain of struggle. While I have been hesitant to ascribe a determinate set of coordinates or didactic set of political objectives or effects to creative practices and art-making by Indigenous people, it is clear that we cannot conceive Indigenous creativity apart from its embeddedness within specific regimes of power and socio-political and historical contexts that continue to be shaped by continued colonialism, neoliberal

capitalism, and Empire. Our creative practices—as expressed in Indigenous art, performance, music, media, hip-hop, social movements and futurist forms—offer us strategic techniques to engage and respond to the colonizing logic of systems that seek to subjugate and dispossess us of our lands, agency, culture and ways of being. Our complex entanglement within global systems of oppression demands that we collectivize our struggles, build across our movements, and develop new forms of collective power and networked resistance. Under colonialism, *indigeneity is both a figure and a cipher for the emergent becoming of decolonial potentialities*. Creative and cultural production are not determinate forces for anticolonial action, however, decolonizing potentialities inhere in the fact of indigeneity. Struggle and resistance are immanent to our existence; we resurge against colonial extermination and assimilation. The continued presence of our peoples throughout our homelands, in urban spaces, in art markets, as well as in technologically-mediated sites of communication evidences not only our resistance to erasure, but also the countervailing power of indigeneity to be mobilized within and against Empire’s distributed networks of control.

For this resistant continuum to be maintained, however, we must fulfill our original instructions to resurge and revitalize our cultural practice and our nationhood. Art-making is integral to this pursuit. The encroachment of assimilative colonizing ideologies and the resource-based expansion of industrial development throughout our territories has led many of our people to adopt, internalize, and even reify, an insidious form Aboriginal-ized neoliberalism, in which the false mythological paradigms of recognition and reconciliation have become discursive mechanisms by which to justify, normalize, even accept successive waves of accumulation by dispossession. Under the banners of emergent Settler-Aboriginal alliances, like the recently launched organization Canadians for a New Partnership, the liberal expansion of private resource

development on Indigenous lands has been masked and recast under the conciliatory guise of building renewed “partnerships” between former national political leaders of settler state governance, Aboriginal bureaucratic elites and so-called “youth leaders” who have adopted the language of resurgence in the name of achieving a harmonious, reconciled, even, “decolonized” future. This misappropriation of the discourse of resurgence and decolonization, however, entrenches settler and corporate interests in the discursive field of contemporary Indigenous politics as part of a broader attempt to secure increased access to Indigenous lands for the purposes of development, exploitation, and profit.

In Canada, this conciliatory paradigm of Aboriginal-Settler “partnership” is coupled with the expansion of an increasingly militarized security state. The state increasingly subjects contemporary political actors and social movements to violence. Through disciplinary techniques and invasive forms of surveillance, repression, expanded incarceration, and the militarization of civilian life, the settler state aligns with Empire in the name of securitization and “deradicalization”. Colonialism, then, in both its historical and ongoing forms, is obviated by the state’s perceived need to “protect” its citizens, subjects and economy from imagined threats. Although this is framed publicly as an exteriorizing logic of perceived danger “from without”, Canada is increasingly recasting its drive to securitization in the language of domestic, or interiorized, threats to state security. To account for colonialism’s persistent structural presence and impacts on the lives of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island would be to invite those disruptions into the terrain of ostensible “freedom” and “democracy” that the state has committed, in earnest, to protect. As a result, Indigenous resistances to both the ideological foundations and material apparatuses of state control -- including its militarized enforcement on the ground (literally, *on the lands* of our peoples) -- have been criminalized and deemed not only



imminent “threats” to the normative order (discursively/politically) but also reimagined as potential “terrorist” threats to the very stability of the state and settler society themselves. This anxious and precarious regime of power is in fact a defensive and suspect ethical construction whose stability is predicated not on fragility but on violent displacement and disavowal of Indigenous life.

The settler state operates through a regime of democratic governance that codifies Indigenous peoples and nationhood as an ambient relational field through which to “secure” settler society *against* the inherently destabilizing “threat” of *indigeneity*. This dialectical configuration, however, is essential to an originary dualism within settler colonialism, which configures Indigenous and settler relationality not simply in contestation over the occupation of Indigenous homelands, and not only in struggle over the terms of a continued and shared presence, but as an incommensurable, structural antagonism. This antagonism remains unresolved. Yet a danger persists in how we perceive this incommensurability. Insofar as Indigenous peoples have internalized the liberal logics of settler governance -- one that constructs and reproduces longstanding colonial asymmetries of power -- the reality of the contemporary terrain of anticolonial struggle has the potential to be occluded from our view. We must see the reality of settler state surveillance and control for what it is: a form of governance that operates both through overt forms of violence and “background power”:

Freedom and surveillance, freedom and the panopticon belong to the same paradigm of government. Historically, the endless expansion of control procedures is the corollary of a form of power that is realized through the freedom of individuals. Liberal government is not one that is exercised directly on the bodies of its subjects or that expects a filial obedience from them. It’s a background power, which prefers to manage space and rule over interests rather than bodies. A power that oversees, monitors, and acts minimally, intervening only where the framework is threatened, against that which goes too far. Only free subjects, taken en masse, are governed. Individual freedom is not something that can be brandished against the government, for it is the very mechanism on which government depends, the one it regulates as closely as possible in order to obtain, from the amalgamation of all these freedoms, the anticipated mass effect. (Invisible Committee 2014)

If decolonization is not a metaphor, it is equally not an individual process predicated on the potential realization of “individual freedoms”. Individuals will not be freed from the structuring violence of colonialism by decolonizing their minds. Our freedom will be won through collective action and sustained political struggle. It will be won by recognizing our embeddedness within interdependent, interlocking systems of domination *and* resistance. Inter-relationality is inherent to Indigenous, and all, existence. Our freedom will be found in what we do, make, build and create -- and in the ways we hack decolonial futures from the given coordinates of the present. If freedom is habit that we need to start practicing, decolonization is a practice that we need to continuously and reflexively re-invent.

#### SPACES OF POSSIBILITY

Indigenous creativity is an originary becoming: a resurgent movement of re-emergence and return. Within its currents we can discover possibilities for invention, innovation and transformation to guide our evolving practices of creation. Decolonizing art-making disrupts the pacifying effects of normative enclosure, where indigeneity remains a force for survival. In order to effectuate the decolonial becoming of indigeneity, then, we must work toward proliferating our resurgence struggles across all available forms of art and media. This demands that we not only consider, but also actively transform, the stultifying effects and systemic/structuring hierarchies through which colonialism is reproduced according to its specific logics of violence and domination. To fight back, we must learn from our relations and connect with the struggles of Black and Afrikan movements for freedom. As the recent wave of uprisings in Ferguson have shown, America’s war on blackness—much like the settler state’s war on indigeneity—continues. And yet, in the breaks created by collective resistance, in ruptural sites of illegibility

and strategic opacities forged through resurgent creativity, emergent spaces of decolonial becoming are possible. As Ashon Crawley writes:

*it's all about how one chooses to live into the spaces of possibility.* Images made to be grayscale force us to consider not only the problematics of thinking time and space as always already on the path to progression but such images ask us to return to...scenes of subjection, and to think relationality otherwise. It would be like dancing on floors, creating critical and loving distance from otherwise performances. It would be like twisting and elongating, like pulses and pauses, all in the cause of justice making. It would be, in simple terms, a return to black radicality as the space and zone from which otherwise modalities of living can emerge. (Crawley 2015)

Resistance calls us to stand alongside other communities in struggle and to support the emergence of “otherwise modalities of living” wherever we find them. As the first peoples of Turtle Island, we are called to occupy these spaces of freedom as openings rather than epistemic closures. Breaks are sites of generative indeterminacy that open into liminality, wherein multiple forms of radicality become possible. Art-making that seeks out and claims such spaces pursues decolonization as a fugitive movement into the *elsewhere and otherwise*. Creativity borne of this movements can break free from colonial confinement and reopen the terrain of anticolonial struggle. It is there, under a limitless sky, that freedom will be found.

How to live and move toward freedom, how to remain in motion, and how to find each other, these are the challenges of our time. To build movements that can embrace such challenges, we must recognize, as Fred Moten does, that “[w]e are in a condition of...‘quantum entanglement’”. Our struggles for freedom are shared: “We are connected to one another...The condition within which we live is one of *difference without separability*. Our social life is best described as a kind of mass, massive contact improvisation; and the brutality of life emerges out of our refusal or our disavowal of that fact<sup>23</sup>” (Moten 2014). We cannot afford to disavow the fact of our inseparability. Difference without separability is equally difference in multiplicity.

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<sup>23</sup> This passage from Moten’s lecture is available at 01:31:32 of the video, viewable at: <https://vimeo.com/100330139>.

Difference within a shared condition, a shared rhythm we collectively compose, a mass, massive act of creation, of improvisation. We must not refuse this being-together; our refusal of coloniality must affirm our being-in-common, our collectivity in struggle, our shared desire, our loving rage, our songs and stories, and our strength. To interweave the forms of life we share is to imagine and create new constellations of love and resistance, to ready our communities for the struggle ahead.

### DECOLONIAL RHYTHMS, RESONANT FREQUENCIES

We make ourselves heard and felt in synchronous movements, collective rhythms. Rhythm is a “formless form...a disruption (counterflow) in the constant global flux of matter” (Ikoniadou 2014: 12). Indigenous peoples are the silhouettes of a colonizing matrix that produces us as its shadowed presence, its elsewhere and otherwise, its present absence. But Indigenous societies adhere to practices that produce an alternate, anticolonial rhythmology: that of natural law, song, and ceremony. Although settler society frequently mourns us tragically pathologized victims of colonial history, the opposite is, in fact, the case. It is *settler societies* that are trapped in the melancholy of progress, having lost an essential connection to the natural world and its consistent rhythms. As Paul Virilio, writes, lamenting this loss: “*Our societies have become arrhythmic*. Or they only know one rhythm: constant acceleration. Until the crash and systemic failure” (2011: 27). Settler society is a failed form of musicality whose repeated phrasings know only the uniform linearity of acceleration; it is less a feedback loop than a sequence, copied and pasted lines of imperial code, an architecture of unhappiness. Virilio knows this. In his nihilism he awaits the impending crash of a system whose exponential growth and imminent obsolescence admit only some future telos of self-destruction. Thus, even he concludes: “The only solution now is to move constantly or flee definitively” (2011:67).

Against this nihilistic teleology, however, there echoes an/other transmission: *the decolonial refrain*. This sounding of potentiality is a sound of movement, the sound of the cypher, the drum, the surround. The decolonial refrain “renew[s] by unsettling, to open the enclosure” (Moten and Harney 2013: 988), by embracing the very possibility of the decolonial despite being both literally and figuratively “surrounded”. The surround is a spatial opening that makes the cypher possible: a spatiality that must be reclaimed, a terrain, a (battle)ground from which new breaks and rhythms can emerge. The decolonial refrain is a call to action that takes shape in the surround through resurgent emergences, collectivities in struggle, and in creative contention with colonialism (Alfred 2005). As Luam Kidane writes:

politically contentious creative processes bring into being movement *art that breaks space and interjects imagination in the nodes*. this breakage widens the in-between spaces enough to step in, to look where it ain't. it is in these spaces that we find stories of ancestral spirits unfiltered through the white gaze. (Kidane 2014: 189, emphasis added)

Beyond the gaze is the liminal space of “art that breaks space”. Ruptural art. Art that claims its resistant opacity to protect what it keeps within: the dark matter of creativity that is a force that binds, that connects, that makes the cipher always more than zero, but also more than one. Art that occupies excess: noise, surplus, signal; art that connects through rhythm. Rhythm, as Eleni Ikoniadou writes, is a dynamic constellation of events: “Considered rhythmically, there is not distance between two or more events; instead there is only the ‘building up of potential’ swelling the gap between them and turning it into resonance” (2014: 15). In Indigenous art-making, creative contention with colonialism is the active, and act of, interjecting and intervening into normativity so as to break it open to its constitutive potential. Successive transformations of this kind yield, to the break, a new rhythmicity in which the “building up of potential” (*decolonial potentiality*) becomes a force for unfolding new resonances. This is the effect of indigeneity’s presence in the signalling chain of sonic events: indigeneity becomes “*a vibrational field of*

*rhythmic potential*” whose rhythmic consistency “concentrate[s] its forces on affective mobilization and contagion” (Goodman 2010: 11, emphasis added). The decolonial refrain is a consequence of successive waves of action, the cumulative resonances produced through emergent forms of creation and transformation.

In this view, revolution (that most contentious and contested of terms), can be reimagined: no longer in definitive breaks from linear histories or oppressive states of the status quo, but in the dynamic motion of resonant waves, the cyclical musicality of resurgent return:

a movement may take off in one place not so much because activists attribute similarity and begin to imitate practices but rather because the affective claims and struggles of people elsewhere resonate with their own and provide domestic activists with the inspiration to activate dormant potentialities for mobilization back home. This concept of resonance first arose in the Invisible Committee’s manifesto, *The Coming Insurrection*, which noted that ‘revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination, but by resonance. Something that is constituted here resonates with the shock wave emitted by something constituted over there (Invisible Committee 2008). A budding revolutionary wave ‘is not like a plague or a forest fire — a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark’. Rather, ‘it takes the shape of music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythms of their own vibrations, always taking on more density’ (Invisible Committee 2008). As Gaston Gordillo summarizes, ‘this is not a linear spread, but convoluted, unpredictable dispersion...involv[ing] rhizomic, non-linear, vibrating patterns of dispersion *resembling sound waves*’. (Oikonomakis and Roos 2014: 120)

If rhythmic consistency emerges like sound waves, revolution transforms rhythm into resonance. Each transformation echoes at the level of force and intensity; the terms of transmission, in turn, producing a politics of frequency both emanating from, and immanent to, a dynamic movement of creation. Call and response. Echo and refrain. Understood within a resurgent aesthetic frame (conditioned by immanence, flux, transformation, and renewal), *resonance* can be understood as a decolonizing communicative technology that transmits decolonial codes within “rhizomic...patterns of dispersion” that, although indeterminate, remain capable of activating “dormant potentialities for mobilization”. Art and creativity are not simply catalysts but conduits for this activation and emergence.

Flight and fugitivity, encryption and opacity, propose neither a determinate telos for contemporary decolonization struggles on Turtle Island nor a reactive posture of defensive resistance against dispossession. Rather, they suggest decolonization as a dynamic of resonances and unthought potentialities: future anteriorities that have yet to emerge, but that must, necessarily, be imagined and brought into being in struggle. Indeterminacy is not a dead end; it is a generative opening into an elsewhere. “I do not know where we are going”, Aimé Césaire writes, “but I know that we must charge ahead” (Wilder 2009). We must renew Césaire’s challenge to charge ahead, but remain mindful of where we have gone before. As the late Vine Deloria Jr. reminds us: “We need to see where we have been before we see where we should go, we need to know how to get there, and we need to have help on our journey” (2006: xix). For Deloria, this means being able to “glimpse the old spiritual world that helped, healed, and honoured us with its presence and companionship” (2006: xix). To see this world, to hear it, to feel its rhythmic consistency, we need neither return to the mythic past nor romanticize a pursuit of the utopian future. Rather, we must live into decolonial potentialities by affirming the radical alterity of indigeneity: “the possibility of...recognizing oneself as *the subject of the break*” (Steinweg 2010: 82).

In the opaque space where dissonance and noise meet, in ciphered forms of encrypted communication, new possibilities turn. The *wild*, the *undercommons*, the *queer future*, the *decolonial refrain*: these concepts constellate art-making and decolonization to give form to “a set of alternatives that we are in the process of making, imagining, and inhabiting—alternatives to political discourse, to identity politics, to the set pieces of protest cultures, and alternatives to how we want to think about being—both being together and being apart” (Halberstam 2013: 127). This is the flux and flow of creativity conceived not in abstraction but through action, as

“something we already conjure from within the here and now” (2013: 127.). This is a movement to seek, what Halberstam calls, new “languages of unpredictability, breakdown, disorder, and shifting forms of signification” (2013: 127). Decolonizing creativity is animated in the breakdown of colonial forms. Perhaps it is only in such disruptions that epistemic disobedience become possible.

Decolonial futures will be made in the radical inter-embrace of indigeneity, wildness, queerness, blackness, and fugitivity. Such futurity transits cacophonous sites of disruption in which resonant decolonial frequencies traverse the terrain of the colonial world like savage sound waves, or “sonic forms of chaos” (2013: 128). Indigeneity is transmitted across the terrain of the colonial through decolonial aesthetic practices of collectivized creation that, together, create “a kind of unruly music that moves in disruptive, improvisational excess” (2013: 130). Indigenous resistances and resurgences are given communicative form in story, sound, performance, art and creativity, to express the eruptive surplus of indigeneity as not only a radical lack of (abjected) being, but as a force for imagining new forms of community. If freedom can be found in the *armour of flight* that invokes both protection and motion, indigeneity can be thought as a trajectory of movement through oppositional coordinates that form a relational constellation in motion toward decolonizing horizons. Ours is a rhythm of formless form, immanent flux, and continuous transformation. “We are neither the beginning nor the end” (1974: 214), write George Manuel and Michael Posluns. We are the inheritors of our ancestors’ struggles and knowledges. We create and reimagine our world within this continuum.



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