ISSN 2059-0911

Transmotion

Vol 3, No 1 (2017)

Special issue curated by Elizabeth LaPensée

We are grateful for the support of the University of Kent, the European University of Cyprus, California State University, San Bernardino, and the University of Georgia. *Transmotion* is hosted by the University of Kent.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Native American Narratives in a Global Context

Special Issue to Appear in *Transmotion: An Online Journal of Postmodern Indigenous Studies* http://journals.kent.ac.uk/index.php/transmotion

Deadline for Abstracts: 1st October 2017

In the contemporary moment, the world has seen an increase in transnational and decolonial activist movements around indigenous rights. Idle No More, Rhodes Must

Fall, the BDS movement for a Free Palestine and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests have all garnered international attention and trans-indigenous calls of solidarity. These politics have found their ways to literary productions, and many have dubbed the increase in Native American writings and the rapid growth in Indigenous Studies a cultural, literary, and academic renaissance.

Building on this historically significant moment, *Transmotion* is currently seeking submissions for a cross-disciplinary special issue on the topic of **Native American Narratives in a Global Context: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives**. The special issue builds on a panel entitled "Native American Literature in a Global Context" that took place at the 2017 meeting of the Native American Literature Symposium (NALS). This panel focused on Native American and First Nations literature in relation to South African, Palestinian and Middle Eastern writings.

In recent years, there has been an increase in Native American scholarship that attempts to consider separate and distinct histories, cultures and literatures in a comparative frame. In 2011, Daniel Heath Justice observed the number of Indigenous Studies scholars globally, "reaching out, learning about themselves and one another, looking for points of connection that reflect and respect both specificity and shared concern."[1] Jodi A Byrd, in The Transit of Empire (2011), employs the concept "transit" to describe the interconnectedness and continuum of colonial violence that implicated multiple peoples and spaces. In 2012, Chadwick Allen established the concept 'Trans-Indigenous' to develop a methodology for a global Native literary studies and, elsewhere, scholars have explored the potential for comparing Native American socio-historic perspectives with those of other colonized and oppressed people. In his latest book (2016), Steven Salaita adopts "inter/nationalism" as a term that embodies decolonial thought and expression, literary and otherwise, that surface in the intersectional moments between American Indian and Palestinian struggles. Similarly, there is a long tradition of Native American Indigenous authors exploring the transnational politics of oppression and the multidirectional movement of memory (Rothberg, 2008) in fiction, poetry and on stage: from Leslie Marmon Silko's transcontinental decolonial revolution in *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) to Sherman Alexie's reflections on Indigenous and Jewish experiences of genocide in 'Inside Dachau' (2011). These academic and creative projects cross the traditional disciplinary boundaries of indigenous, postcolonial, and settler colonial studies, bringing together histories and cultures that have rarely been considered alongside one another. But what, if any, is the relationship between these cultures? What is to be gained from studying, ostensibly at least, disparate literatures and societies in the same frame?

This special issue seeks to explore this new direction of Indigenous Studies, focusing on the significance of Native American, First Nations, and Indigenous American narratives in a global arena. We invite work that engages with historical or cultural narratives, spanning literature, art, film, or other modes of cultural production. Bringing together

[1] Daniel Heath Justice, 'Currents of Trans/national Criticism in Indigenous Literary Studies' (2011), American Indian Quarterly, Vol. 35, No. 3, Special Issue: American Indian Studies Today (Summer 2011), pp. 334-352.

scholars researching Native American narratives in relation to diverse geographical and historical contexts, we hope to interrogate questions surrounding what comparative indigenous studies might look like and what potential it holds for transnational exchange on a global scale. A comparative focus foregrounds the distinct but interconnected experiences of (post-) colonial and disenfranchised communities across the world. A lens of this kind can expand and ask global questions on what it means to be native in specific colonial spaces and the ways through which one can analyze literary expressions that work towards decolonization in these contexts.

We particularly welcome submissions that engage with the following topics:

- Comparative perspectives on Native American narratives in relation to (settler) colonial and postcolonial contexts.
- Comparative perspectives on Native American experiences in relation to other global experiences with genocide or colonial violence.
- Case studies that focus on Native American writing, artwork or other forms of cultural production that foreground cross-cultural movement or exchange.
- Conceptual work that explores trans-indigenous studies as an emerging field of scholarship.
- The benefits and/or limitations of comparative indigenous critique.
- Comparative perspectives that challenge traditional understandings of indigeneity or post-coloniality.
- The contemporary relevance of Native American narratives in a global context.
- The benefits and/or limitations of teaching Native histories, cultures or literatures within a comparative frame.
- Transnational activism and decolonial movements around Indigenous struggles.
- Anti-colonial and Indigenous critiques of globalization, neoliberalism, and the modern nation-state.
- The potential for decolonization through cross-cultural exchange or fostering of global connections, literary or otherwise.

We invite articles, creative pieces, or hybrid works that engage with these topics and which align aesthetically with the aforementioned editorial emphasis.

Any questions should be directed towards the Guest Editors: Rebecca Macklin, University of Leeds (r.macklin@leeds.ac.uk) and Eman Ghanayem, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (ghanaye2@illinois.edu).

Timeline

Abstracts (up to 300 words) and brief author CV to be sent to the Guest Editors by 1st October 2017.
Accepted pieces will be due by 31 March 2018 and should be submitted directly to the *Transmotion* website for peer review, in accordance with the journal guidelines.
Projected publication in Spring 2019.

CONTENTS

Editorial

Indigenous digital games uniquely enact survivance by passing on teachings, telling our stories, and expressing our ways of knowing through varying weavings of code, design, art, music, and audio. Honoring this ongoing work involves recognizing the influence of traditional games as well as the role of the intergenerational kinships among Indigenous game developers and game players. Making and playing games is certainly not new in Indigenous communities. Rather, from analog to the digital, there is a vast network of support that has positioned us here now, with excitement for all that is to come.

Importantly, this network is intergenerational and international. Developers across many communities are mentoring the next generations to not only play Indigenous games but also to express themselves through games. Thanks to youth game development workshops such as Skins coordinated by Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace and the Initiative for Indigenous Futures guided by Jason Edward Lewis and Skawennati, Indigenous Routes in collaboration with Dames Making Games, as well as those hosted by Joseph Arthur at Hoopa Valley and Darrick Baxter of Ogoki Learning Systems, self-determination is burgeoning in games by developers including Tehoniehtathe Delisle, Gabriela Aveiro-Ojeda, and Meagan Byrne.

As this and more work unfolds, there have been amazing nodes in the collective constellation of this network, such as the first ever Natives in Game Dev Gathering in 2015 hosted by industry-defining developer John Romero which brought together Maneco Manaque'to and others highlighted here. Still yet, it is with much importance that the Game Developers Conference 2017 held a panel for Indigenous game developers where game industry veteran Allen Turner stood with next generation developers Renee Nejo and Julia Keren-Detar as well as myself in an empowering series of lightning talks. This lightning reaches far, igniting across peoples. Similarly, this special issue serves as a constellation in and of itself, bringing together game analysis and game development with recognition for the work of scholars including Jodi Byrd and David Gaertner. Whether scholar, storyteller, coder, designer, artist, musician, educator, or an ever-changing hybrid, all roles are valued as contributors to survivance through games.

Kisima Inŋitchuŋa (Never Alone) is a defining act of survivance as the first game involving Indigenous communities to be widely distributed on consoles. “Playing in the Digital Qargi: Iñupiat Gaming and Online Competition in Kisima Inŋitchuŋa” describes self-determination in the design and aesthetics of the widely recognized platformer game. Katherine Meloche builds on the work of new media and digital storytelling scholar David Gaertner who sees *Never Alone* as an extension of Iñupiaq culture. She draws attention to the ways in which the gameplay expresses ongoing sovereignty, importantly making connections with the writings of Rachel Attituq Qitsualik and weaving in the words of storyteller and writer Ishmael Hope. Her reflection on *Never Alone* establishes a strong thread that runs throughout this special issue—games have always been integral in Indigenous communities and digital games excitedly add to existing forms of self-expression and interaction.

David Gaertner’s analysis is then expanded on from an Indigenous perspective in “*Never Alone*: (Re)Coding the Comic Holotrope of Survivance” with depth and insights brought forth by Michelle Lee Brown. She uniquely (re)maps the experience of playing *Never Alone* as an act of

survivance that allows players to relate to and reshape stories. In order to do so, she looks to Mishuana Goeman's process of (re)mapping, an approach that calls for embracing and revisiting works to ultimately restructure analyses with emphases on connections and kinship. She generates new ways of understanding gameplay, particularly that of the Fox which she perceives as a Trickster relating to Vizenor's comic holotrope. She uplifts voices including Kim TallBear while embracing her positionality as an Indigenous player dissolving the boundaries of remediation with (re)mediation.

Collectively, Jeanette Bushnell, Jonathan Tomhave, and Tylor Prather robustly enact (re)mediation of several games with Indigenous representations and reify the connections between traditional games and digital games in "How do *you* say watermelon?" As Indigenous gamers and academics from varying nations who share in local Lushootseed language, they formed a community to deeply discuss games within Indigenous philosophies. Their conversations resulted in N.D.N. Players Indigenous Game Tags, which indicate ways of looking at games as acts of survivance and also as serve as inspiration for developing new survivance games. Their ongoing work forms constellations of connections among traditional games, digital games, and future possibilities in game design and aesthetics from a gamer-centered view.

Genuinely self-determined game development puts emphasis on players. For, in order to create a sovereign game space, gamers need to be more directly involved, not just to provide feedback at iterative stages of development, but to influence and have a direct hand in a game from its formation to distribution. This is particularly important in the context of reinforcing sovereignty through Indigenous games, as exemplified by David Dennison Lacho and Aaron Leon in "'Please mom? Can you please download it at home?'": Video Games as a Symbol of Linguistic Survivance." They describe a vital phase of community engagement for their forthcoming platformer game based on Splatsin oral stories. Through the process, they introduced youth and community members to games such as *Never Alone*, *Survivance*, *Idle No More: Blockade*, and *Spirits of Spring*, bringing forth and merging discussions of survivance from both gamer and developer perspectives.

With the intricate and well-established connections between Indigenous traditional games, digital games, game players, and game developers, "Transformations and Remembrances in the Digital Game *We Sing for Healing*" describes game development and the resulting game design. (Re)mapping is seen visually as I revisit and describe how I created a musical text choose-your-own-adventure game in collaboration with Exquisite Ghost. In returning to and retelling the story, the structure of connections within the game is brought into form as a constellation. In this work and others in this special issue, games and game development are recognized as fluid spaces within and from which can enact survivance.

Elizabeth LaPensée July 2017

Playing in the Digital Qargi: Iñupiat Gaming and Isuma in *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*[1]

KATHERINE MELOCHE

Never Alone was released in 2014 as a collaborative project between Upper One Games, the first Indigenous-owned game development company in the US, and Cook Inlet Tribal Council, in Anchorage, Alaska. The project began after the council contacted the company to develop a storytelling game that honours Iñupiaq values and would center Iñupiat, the language of Iñupiaq peoples ("Interview Series: Ishmael Hope").[2] The Cook Inlet Tribal Council and Upper One Games base the game on the oral story "Kuunuksayuka" from *Unipchaaŋich imaġluktuġmiut: Stories of the Black River People* by Robert Nasruk Cleveland. "Kuunuksayuka" tells the story of a young boy who finds the source of an unrelenting blizzard impacting his community ("The Story of Kunuuksaayuka (Part One)"). *Never Alone* adapts the story to a puzzle-platform game where Nuna, an Iñupiat girl, and her Arctic fox companion have to navigate the sea ice, encounter friendly and threatening beings, and overcome obstacles in order to find the source of the storm. As Nuna and Fox progress, they unlock "Cultural Insights," which are short videos where Elders and community members explain key cultural concepts that relate to the task that Nuna and Fox are currently facing.

The response to *Never Alone* as an interactive form of storytelling is compelling and attends to the ways "Kuunuksayuka" is conscientiously reimagined (Gaertner n.pag.). In his blog post entitled "How Should I Play These?: Media and Remediation in *Never Alone,*" New Media scholar David Gaertner considers the innovative use of technology to adapt the story as an act of remediation, which "makes *Never Alone* legible as uniquely Iñupiaq storytelling" (Gaertner n.pag.). Gaertner states that "it deconstructs the tradition/innovation binary and brings video games to bear… as an important extension of Iñupiaq culture" (Gaertner n.pag.). He highlights the inclusion of "'old' forms of Western media," like the use of documentary shorts, and the use of "elements of Iñupiaq culture," like the aesthetics of scrimshaw art, as forms of remediation that honours the continuance of storytelling practices (Gaertner n.pag.). This act of remediation mitigates the community's anxiety over adapting the story to a game form that asserts visual

sovereignty (Gaertner n.pag.). While Gaertner carefully delineates remediation's alliance with Inuit storytelling and song practices, I would like to extend his examination to argue that *Never Alone* is an adaptation of gaming culture in the Arctic. It is not a direct adaptation or remediation of a particular traditional game, but a continuance of values and relationships to people and to place that is performed through play. Adaptability is an ongoing traditional value that informs Inuit self-determination (Martin, 2012 100) and *Never Alone* engages with the politics of self-determination by adapting traditional gaming values to a digital form. In so doing, it also participates in the changing landscape of game development by taking control of how—and on what terms—Inuit are represented in popular culture.[3] *Never Alone* reinterprets the values, experiences, and social structure of traditional Inuit competition for Iñupiaq communities. Iñupiaq self-determination is extended to a global audience through the shift to digital gaming technologies. Therefore, I will discuss the nuances of Inuit sovereignty and self-determination, *Never Alone* as an adaptation of gaming traditions, and an analysis of the game's challenge to settler-colonial claims to the Arctic.

Aulatsigunnarniq: Playing at the borders of Inuit self-determination

Sovereignty or self-determination in the Northern Circumpolar is multiple and layered. Iñupiaq are Inuit peoples within the United States; however, the Inuit homelands encompass the majority of the Northern Circumpolar (Martin, *Stories* 12). Inuit have many languages and dialects within this diverse geographical landscape and must engage with the enforced governance of several settler-colonial states including Denmark, Russia, Canada, and the United States. The differences are stark even in North America between the Canadian and the United States' governments. While the creation of Nunavut in 1999 through the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement enabled Inuit to engage in a territorial governmental representation ("QTC Final Report" 36), Iñupiaq in Alaska are one of many Alaska Native Regional Corporations formed through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971 ("ANCSA Regional and Language Map").

Inuit political representatives united across international borders in the late-Twentieth century to protect Inuit interests. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference, now known as the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), first met in Barrow, Alaska in June 1977 (Martin, *Stories* 13). "A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic" was signed by the chair of the ICC

and representatives from Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Chukotka in April 2009, which positioned sovereignty as a mode to assert Inuit's ongoing right to self-determination within and across various settler states ("A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic"). The ICC wished to unite the voices of Inuit to advocate for their rights at a national and international level (Martin, *Stories* 14). Partnership and collaboration are founding principles for Inuit identity, which seeks to position Inuit as valuable and indispensable participants on the international political scene. Though they state that sovereignty in the Arctic is "evolving," the ICC indicts the ongoing erasure of Inuit self-determination and interests by settler states ("A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic"). Inuit nationhood in the late 20th and early 21st centuries relies on the flexibility and adaptability of Inuit self-determination to position Inuit peoples as indispensable "active partners" in debates about resource extraction and global warming ("A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic"). Inuit self-determination relies on ongoing knowledge and experience, which is redeployed within international political debates to ensure Inuit interests.

Inuit concepts of traditional self-determination disrupt southerner's paternalistic control. In contrast with settler states, Inuit definitions of sovereignty do not include imposing strict borders. In her article, "Inummarik: Self-Sovereignty in Classic Inuit Thought" Inuk author Rachel Qitsualik states that Inuit have asserted sovereignty for millennia (27). She uses the term "aulatsigunnarniq" to describe sovereignty, which translates to "the ability to make things move" (26-7).[4] The literal meaning of the term conceives of sovereignty as an ongoing relationship with Nuna, the Land, and does not include the use of strict borders. Unlike settler-colonial states who rely on fixed borders to assert claims over land, borders are not useful to Inuit who must travel across large expanses of land when hunting migrating herds (26-7). Traditional self-determination continues in another form in the present through the ICC, in which Inuit political representatives in the ICC strategically erase imposed borders to create a unified political voice throughout the Northern Circumpolar.

Traditional self-determination is conceptually complex and layered. Inuit self-determination as expressed through "aulatsigunnarniq" entails that individuals develop their isuma, or mental awareness and intelligence. Anyone who has earned mental maturity by listening to and acting upon the wisdom of Elders will have their autonomy respected (Martin, *Stories* 55). Anthropologist Jean Briggs, explains that

> People who have *isuma* demonstrate this fact by conforming voluntarily, by obeying their 'leader' willingly when told to do a task and with increasing maturity by foreseeing the needs and wishes of others…At the same time, they will strongly resist, by passive withdrawal or polite circumvention, any encroachment on their legitimate areas of privacy and self-determination. (quoted in Martin, *Stories* 56)

Keavy Martin observes that "[t]he social protocols built around this concept thus strike a delicate balance between respecting personal autonomy and heeding the advice of those in a position to offer it" (56). Inuit sovereignty as expressed through "aulatsigunnarniq" continues to navigate personal and collective responsibilities. Yet, honouring those responsibilities is difficult within a complex social structure that includes Nuna, the sentient land, animals, and more-than-human beings (Qitsualik 27). Qitsualik explains that humans must help facilitate a harmonious relationship with a sentient land or face the dire consequences of failing ones on-going responsibilities (27). The "ability to make things move" gestures towards self-determination's complex balance between mature thought, individual respect, and collective responsibility within a multilayered cosmology.

Games play a central role in the social fabric of Inuit daily lives. In pre-Settlement life, communities hold celebrations in a large qaggiq (pl. qaggiit), or a large snow house, often at the center of camp (Bennett and Rowley 227; 239).[5] This gathering space is used for work, or "for dancing, feasting, and playing games" (239). The games played within the qaggiq are easily played in enclosed spaces, though rules and particular aspects of traditional games would differ between regions and communities. Some games are for entertainment and help establish good relationships, celebrate seasonal feasts, or mark a particularly successful hunting season.[6] For example, wrestling or jumping games in which players must jump several feet in the air to kick a target are physically strenuous, technically precise and condition the players for the physical demands that hunting requires (Auksaq). Players are also aware that games help maintain good relationships within a complex cosmological structure and that playing specific games at seasonal hunting grounds help ensure an upcoming hunting season's success (Bennett and Rowley 396). Other times, tests of strength, such as boxing, fisticuffs or song competitions, are used to settle disagreements between individuals or help reestablish social harmony between visiting communities (133-4). Though these games are related to the practical nature of living a subsistence lifestyle, traditional Inuit games also embody a holistic understanding of living well

in the Arctic, and reflect the dynamism of Inuit self-determination in which individuals learn from experience and exercise mental awareness to maintain healthful relationships to community and employ the wisdom of others within a complex cosmology.

Aulatsigunnarniq, or the ability to change quickly for the continuance and well-being of all, illustrates the perspective needed to understand Inuit self-determination, yet the "ability to make things move" also addresses the mental and physical dynamism needed for Inuit games. One must be physically and mentally agile to win. I argue that we can read *Never Alone* as a digital expression of aulatsigunnarniq, because it literally creates movement on the screen with video animation. Nuna and Fox traverse the screen as they jump over obstacles, resist the wind's force, and swim waterways. However, it is the player—or players—that compel Nuna and Fox's movements. It would be easy to assume that the player is the ultimate sovereign who can control their subjects at will. Yet, the game undermines colonial concepts of domination by reminding the player of their overlapping responsibilities to the characters, to community, and to the land. The following section will explore the game's ability to shift the player's understanding to play according to Iñupiaq game values. As a digital form of competition, adapting aulatsigunnarniq requires a player to recognize their broader responsibilities to win.

"A recognition of life and vitality": gaming conventions across the Northern Circumpolar

Never Alone does not require that players physically jump, run, or move their bodies like traditional games. Instead, its structure mimics foundational values and social relations that contextualize Inuit games found in a qargi (the community house). Ishmael (Angaluuk) Hope, a writer and storyteller for the game, states that turning "Kuunuksayuka" into a video game "elevate[s] and celebrate[s]" Cleveland as a world-class storyteller ("Our Team"). The adaptation perpetuates "[p]ieces of the old-time nourishment of the qargi, the community house... The joy of the feast of wisdom lingers, and this video game offers a tasty morsel, enough to know and to remember what we've been hungering for this whole time" ("Our Team"). I am interested in Hope's comparison of the game to "the qargi, the community house" that offers nourishment, well-being, and joy for the entire community. I believe that the game creates a digital qargi, through its structure to evoke the rich social context in which games are played. For instance, the digital qargi encourages players to also foster relationships in their own lives. When two players engage is co-op mode to play Nuna and Fox together, they are invited to make community by

playing the game and learning in the same space, thereby evoking the social dynamics of a qargi. As we have seen from the previous section, qargi's, or qaggiq in Inuktitut, form the social and material context for traditional games. A qargi's ability to transform into a place to work, hold feasts, welcome visitors and play games highlights the ways *Never Alone* is not simply a site for a competition to play out, but also a space in which relationships are fostered, strengthened and delineated. The evocation of a qargi with *Never Alone* elicits the richness of relations through gameplay, yet it is also important to note that the qargi is flexible on Iñupiat terms.

The game's overarching structure is similar to a multipurpose qargi. *Never Alone* brings many voices together through the game's structural elements. The game allows a player to play both characters by toggling through each task or play in a two player mode with a friend. The game includes short documentary films, or "Cultural Insights," that are unlocked when a task is completed or when an owl is found in the scenery. Cultural Insights explain elements and figures directly depicted in the game such as the Northern lights or the Manslayer, an iconic figure in many Iñupiaq oral stories. They also explore topics that directly affect Iñupiaq communities, such as subsistence living, the value of sharing, or the ways global warming impacts the community's relationship with the land (*Never Alone*). As a digital qargi, *Never Alone* is a space for learning, for play and perhaps a space to foster relationships. The game emphasizes the complexity of community within Iñupiaq knowledge systems as well as the responsibility that these relationships entail.

The Cultural Insight "The Heartbeat of the Community" evokes the richness of community in the qargi (*Never Alone*). Fox and Nuna have just met the Owl Man who asks the pair to retrieve his stolen drum. If they return the drum, the Owl Man promises to help her find the one who has destroyed her village. Once Nuna and Fox set off on their mission, the Cultural Insight is unlocked (*Never Alone*). The video focuses on the importance of the drum to Iñupiaq people and broadly to other Indigenous peoples in Alaska (*Never Alone*). Cultural Ambassador Cordelia Qignaaq says that the drum is "a recognition of life and vitality" for the community (*Never Alone*). The explanation of the drum's importance to connect communities contextualizes the Owl Man's desire to retrieve his drum and echoes Nuna's obligation to try to restore order to her community. Through the drum, Nuna, Fox and Owl Man's mutual communal responsibilities to each other and the land connect.

"The Heartbeat of the Community" includes direct performance of drumming to the

camera to compellingly create a qargi space. The video shows old footage of feasts with drummers and dancers in celebration. Yet the video ends with James Mumigan, an Iñupiaq Cultural Ambassador and a voiceover actor for the game, performing a drum song directly to the camera (*Never Alone*). The song lasts for only twenty seconds, but Mumigan sings and drums with such enthusiasm that his drumming stick breaks. As he finishes the song, Mumigan looks at his now broken drumming stick and to the floor where a piece has landed and jokes "[m]an, I went at it and look what happens" (*Never Alone*). The incident makes Mumigan and the filming crew erupt in delighted laughter and reveals a moment of spontaneity in an otherwise planned shoot (*Never Alone*). Mumigan's performance engages the player within the broader context in which socially fulfilling games should be played. Games exist alongside singing, drumming, and laughter, which signifies the "life and vitality" of the community (*Never Alone*). Mumigan's performance also seems to be creating a qargi space for the video game itself, in which games are engaged in a complex web of responsibilities and relationships. The qargi is multipurpose and it appears that *Never Alone,* with its inclusion of community speakers, Elders, songs, and games, is formulating a digital qargi.

The digital qargi also demands a reflection on the bonds and responsibilities fostered through the game's narrative and gameplay. The game's title echoes the qargi's focus on uniting community. *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* translates to "I am never alone" and seems to question the strength of relationships through trials and distance. Within the game, Fox always accompanies Nuna and helps her through many challenges. Nuna and Fox also interact with spiritual beings on the land and a sentient arctic landscape. Nuna is, therefore, "never alone" even if it appears that she is the only human. An array of beings and relationships surround and accompany her throughout her journey. Yet, the absence of Nuna's human community is the game's narrative focus. Nuna must leave her community in order to find the source of the blizzard that torments them and affects their ability to hunt. She may *be* separated from her human relatives, but the love she has for her community compels her to move forward. "Community" within this game space is much more flexible as it unites kinship networks between the land, animal and more-than-human beings, the spirit world, and humans. I find the kinship networks and ongoing responsibilities to community that Nuna practices fascinating and question how the game might compel non-Inuit to consider their responsibilities to the North or may be a way for Inuit in the South to maintain relationships through play. These concerns are taken up in the article's final

section.

"But the girl wondered…": Representing and Testing Isuma in *Never Alone*

Arctic games test physical endurance and help prepare individuals for the physical exertion of living a traditional subsistence lifestyle. However, what tests the protagonists or the player(s) in *Never Alone*? Nuna certainly uses every physical skill she has learned as a young person: she must run quickly, navigate ice, aim accurately with her bola, but the player is also certainly using a particular kind of skill. *They* are not moving their bodies to prepare for activities on the land. Instead of physical trials, I argue that *Never Alone* is testing the player's isuma, mental strength, flexibility, and endurance. Jean Briggs explains that isuma:

> Refers to consciousness, thought, reason, memory, will… Saying that a person has *isuma* is equivalent to saying that he or she exercises good judgment, reason, and emotional control at all times… The possession of *isuma* entails a person to be *treated as an autonomous, that is, self-governing, individual whose decisions and behaviour should not be directed, in any ways,* outside the limits of the role requirements to which one is expected to conform. (Quoted in Martin, *Stories* 55)

The ability to be a "self-governing" person who understands the complex relationships between themselves and all beings on the land demonstrates self-determination in the Arctic that supports Inuit knowledge systems. As a game that moves its challenge from the physical to the mental, *Never Alone* forces the player to exercise their mental abilities instead of their physical skills. The player's mind must be adaptive enough to succeed in Nuna's world.

Never Alone's premise certainly engages with many aspects of isuma including maturity, cleverness and understanding. Nuna searches for the source of the storm, must overcome obstacles, and form good relationships with animals and more-than-human beings. Nuna interacts with more and more beings on the land throughout the game and she must judge whether they can either help or harm her. For example, the Owl Man asks for Nuna and Fox's help and she must outsmart the meddlesome Little People who have stolen his drum (*Never Alone*). This premise demonstrates an awareness of the ways Nuna's actions affect multiple people beyond herself and her community. Players must also learn how to cooperate well with others whether they are working with fellow players or an AI. Players must also learn how to foster cooperation between Fox and Nuna. For instance, players who try at first to leave Fox

behind will soon realize that they cannot succeed if they try to only help Nuna. I myself tried to make Nuna abandon Fox at the beginning of the game, because he seemed too slow. But after being mauled repeatedly during my first encounter with a polar bear, I realized that I needed to collaborate with Fox to outsmart the bear and escape. Clearly, I identified with Nuna because she is a human character, and I assumed she would be the dominant figure, while I relegated Fox, an animal, as simply a cute sidekick. I assumed human superiority and I did not at first recognize the importance of collaboration. Fox's cleverness and ability to interact with the spirit world is essential to Nuna's, and, by extension, the player's success. The player must be sure that both characters continue to help each other if they are to succeed for the good of the community.

The game's ambiguity forces players to develop their isuma. The keystrokes to jump, run, and climb are straightforward, yet there is very little instruction on how to overcome obstacles, know where spirits are hiding, or how Nuna and Fox should work together for any particular task. Everything must be learned through trial and error, much to the players' possible frustration. The minimal instruction forces players to learn from first-hand experience and develop the mental skills and fortitude to think independently. Players learn quickly that refusing to collaborate with those around them results in Nuna and Fox's failure and death, as I learned through my own mistakes. Though it is not immediately clear, privileging Nuna as the primary player because she is human cuts players off from engaging with the spirit world. Without Fox, the spirits that carry Nuna and Fox over chasms and ice walls remain invisible. Yet by playing Nuna and Fox in collaboration and practicing patience, players can reflect on their actions, demonstrate maturity and selflessness and hone their isuma through experience.

The game's divergence from traditional platformer levels and lifecycles erases clear markers for success and it is this structural ambiguity that further challenges players' isuma. There is no "game over" option to tell players when they should stop playing or to inform them of the level reached. Players will fail indefinitely until they succeed at their present challenge. This design choice is in stark contrast to earlier platformers that depend on marked or tiered levels to mark progression and limited lifecycles to distinguish successful players from their competitors. *Never Alone* chooses to test players to continually try to learn from their mistakes, reflect on their actions, and change their approach. Dying several dozen times in a row—as was my experience—could make players angry at the game itself. Though I did not stop playing, I can imagine that many players may have become frustrated and walked away thinking that the

game is flawed. But players who do this are not developing their isuma and are emotionally immature. The game does offer a "pause" function, like many traditional platformers, and it is invaluable for players who need time to reflect during the game's long duration. Often, I would pause the game when overcome by frustration and failure and use that time to reflect on my action to consider a change in approach to succeed.

The game's demand to persevere in spite of failure is embedded in its very structure and presents failure and death not as a punishment, but as an opportunity to develop knowledge and hone skills through practice. The demand on one's mental fortitude reflects isuma's demand for maturity and self-control of one's emotions (Martin, *Stories* 55). Moreover, the game treats its players as autonomous beings. It honours their sovereignty. It does not interfere in the players' constant failure by ending the game after a certain number of losses, and it does not dictate directly how a game should proceed. Instead, it presents unlimited amounts of space for practice and embeds "Cultural Insights" of Elders and more knowledgeable community members from whom wise players can learn. *Never Alone* wants its players to succeed, but players must change their approach and develop their isuma to have the maturity to apply the wisdom of others.

The order of challenges embeds learning from experience as a foundational value for the game's design. For example, Nuna and Fox's encounter with the Manslayer is similar to a previous polar bear den challenge where Nuna and Fox have to dodge the bear's attacks. In the Manslayer encounter, they are trapped in the trees as Manslayer tosses fire at them from the ice (*Never Alone*). As the fire burns the branches, Nuna uses her bola to break the branches to crash through the ice. If a player is successful at dodging his charges, then they will eventually overcome the Manslayer when he falls through the ice and drowns. This challenge is similar to the earlier obstacle in which Nuna and Fox entice a polar bear to charge them (*Never Alone*). By dodging the bear's attacks, the player forces the bear to eventually break a hole in the ice wall creating an opportunity for Fox and Nuna to escape the bear's den. In both obstacles, Nuna and Fox must work together to use their opponents' strength against them. However, unlike the polar bear who is protecting his den, the Manslayer is a threatening figure that decimates Nuna's village and wants her bola, one of the only tools she has on her person (*Never Alone*). Manslayer is threatening beyond Nuna's ability to survive on her mission. In the accompanying Cultural Insight, Amy Fredeen explains that in Iñupiaq stories, the Manslayer "risks the livelihood of individuals and the whole community. And so, the Manslayer is a way to say, 'Don't act only for

yourself. Always hold the community in your heart'" (*Never Alone*). It is imperative that Nuna and Fox mature as the stakes of each obstacle intensifies. By remembering the tactics used against the bear and the similar design of previous obstacles, players can use past experience to overcome present challenges.

Obstacles are structured for players to "exercise good judgment, reason, and emotional control at all times" (Martin, *Stories* 55); however, some obstacles are premised on the *failure* to use isuma as a warning for stubborn players. Throughout *Never Alone*, Nuna confronts several polar bear challenges, which I read as her ongoing underestimation of the bear's intelligence and strength. As a child, Nuna may have limited experience engaging with polar bears by herself, yet that inexperience leads her to mistake the extent to which a bear will go to pursue its prey. The game opens with a polar bear attack, which the narrator calls a moment of "real danger" (*Never Alone*). As Nuna runs away, Fox appears and players can lure the polar bear onto thin ice, trapping it in water. This action allows the players to flee as the narrator remarks that, "she is lucky to be alive" (*Never Alone*). The first polar bear attack highlights the extreme consequences of engaging with the land with little experience. The polar bear encounter sets off a chain of events in which bear attacks are frequent dangers. I am inclined to read it as a singular bear who is intent on not losing its prey (*Never Alone*). When a second bear attack occurs after Nuna and Fox walk on thick ice from the water, a bear follows close behind from the sea already angry intending to attack (*Never Alone*). The recurrence of the bear following its prey through any obstacle demonstrates the ways inexperience may result in ongoing dangers in a landscape that requires both mental and physical strength and knowledge.

The recurrence of the polar bear is a palpable consequence to inattention and inexperience. However, the game also situates the polar bear within Inuit traditional knowledge. Polar bears are not senseless animals. In *Inuit Qaujimaningit Nanurnut: Inuit Knowledge of Polar Bears*, hunters and trappers in Gjoa Haven, Nunavut explain that polar bears are the only animal beings that possesses isuma and so "as polar bears were understood to be omniscient," they had to be respected (75). Polar bears are autonomous intelligent beings who can strategize attacks on unsuspecting prey, have awareness of humans and seek revenge (82). The bear is certainly clever and demonstrates a keen knowledge of the landscape and anticipates its prey's movements. As the bear emerges from the sea and ambushes Nuna and Fox again and again, the polar bear is enacting a knowledge of human beings from past experience that allows it to

anticipate Nuna's travels and the best way to surprise her. The narrator explains the importance of respecting a bear's isuma, "If you outsmart a polar bear there is no time to relax. A hungry bear will not give up easily!" (*Never Alone*). The narrator's warning foreshadows that Nuna and Fox's escape is temporary because a pursuer will persevere through momentary failure when they are driven by hunger and intelligence.

The game's focus on the polar bear's cunning and Nuna's ongoing failure to anticipate its actions enables the game to formulate obstacles around traditional Inuit understandings of polar bears. These obstacles are not simply thrilling experiences where players must overcome a harsh landscape. Instead, the obstacles seem to complicate Inuit and arctic animal relationships. The bear, though fearsome, is not framed as a malicious creature. The narrator contextualizes the polar bear's actions as driven by hunger and not by a love of killing. The third obstacle with the polar bear illustrates the games' prioritization of Inuit values and relationships to arctic animals. As Nuna and Fox "stumble" into the polar bear's den, the narrator states that, "[The bear] was not happy to discover uninvited guests" (*Never Alone*). By describing Nuna and Fox as "guests," even comically, the narrator is positioning the bear, fox and girl as possible relations under better circumstances. Though the bear attacks them several times over the progression of the game—as was my experience—Nuna and Fox succeed by distracting the bear together and enticing it to charge at the ice-ledge they are standing on. Nuna and Fox are lucky to escape, but the polar bear den obstacle questions the ways good relationships based on respect, even between hunter and prey, should be followed.

"we are not a museum piece": Navigating Cyber-territories and Colonial Glitches

The following section will discuss the connection between games and Inuit politics that continually shift to respond to the present need of Inuit. *Never Alone* echoes the assertion of Inuit self-determination through remediating organized traditional sports. Circumpolar Arctic Games competitions emerged in tandem with an articulation of Inuit Nationhood through the ICC in the 1970s.[7] These international competitions allow Inuit to unite from across the circumpolar in an act of friendly competition that asserts their knowledge and experience in the Northern Circumpolar. The competitions also combat settler-states' denial of Inuit self-determination and push back against governmental control of circumpolar territories.

Never Alone echoes the Arctic games competitions' global reach by explicitly marketing

the game to a global market. The creators call *Never Alone*, the first "in an exciting new genre of "World Games" that draw fully upon the richness of unique cultures to create complex and fascinating game worlds for a global audience" ("Crafted in Partnership"). This statement echoes the circumpolar games' desires to foster a global interaction on Inuit terms, yet it does so by moving competition from the physical domain to digital territory.[8] The game is available to purchase digitally through all major game consoles and operating systems. It, therefore, invites players from around the globe to enter the digital qargi as it is adaptive and malleable to any device. The game's engagement with a global audience surreptitiously undermines common assumptions of competition made by qallunaat,[9] or non-Inuit, worldviews. Instead of creating a game that relies on the dynamics of dominance, the removal of life, or a disconnection from responsibilities to place, *Never Alone* grounds a global audience in a game that relies on collaboration and the values of Iñupiaq people. In so doing, the game practices aulatsigunnarniq as a decolonizing manoeuvre by purposely ignoring colonial borders that cross-cut the globe and reaches beyond international borders to foster relationships on Iñupiaq terms. The focus on a global audience could obscure the needs and intent of the Iñupiat community who commissioned and co-produced the game. Nevertheless, intentionally reaching out to a global audience enables the creators to choose the ways they represent themselves or their creations while also ensuring that the community benefits economically from a global market (Gaertner n.p.). *Never Alone* is conscious of the ways in which it is widely available, yet it prioritizes the importance of affirming the interests and relationships of Iñupiaq communities through gaming.

As a digital game that reaches out beyond Iñupiaq boarders, *Never Alone* critiques settler claims to the Arctic. Asserting sovereignty through games and competition could mirror the colonial power dynamics of fighting over land and territory. That is certainly a qallunaat view of competition. However, in Allen Auksaq's documentary "Stories from Our Land Vol. 2," Inuk athlete Johnny Issaluk explains that games are a way to welcome visitors within arctic communities (Auksaq). I find this form of welcoming fascinating as it engages sports and games within the practice of fostering good relations. Competition, therefore, is a subtle way to assert self-determination, because in playing a game, guests are firmly aware of the host's rules and must play by them to win. Competition in this sense is a playful form of sovereignty that untangles competition from domination. This is evident through *Never Alone*'s evocation of isuma where the player must shift their understanding to win. Yet the polar bear den challenge is

one of the most explicit commentaries on settler colonialism in the Arctic. If we recall the scenario, the bear is angry at Nuna's and Fox's rudeness as they stumble into its den unannounced. It then charges the pair, who must dodge its attacks (*Never Alone*). The bear's den has become a space of occupation where Nuna and Fox transgress the bear's territory. Reading the obstacle through a settler colonial lens highlights the importance of respecting the wishes of a host as the bear den becomes a metaphor for the occupation of land. Consequently, the game asks its players to be respectful guests that listen to the advice and wishes offered by their hosts. *Never Alone* invites players to become guests in a friendly form of competition within a digital territory.

Public reaction to *Never Alone* has been polarizing and negative critiques of the game design carries an undercurrent of colonizing rhetoric. While *Wired* writer Matt Peckham and *Kotaku* reviewer Evan Narcisse praise the game for its stunning animation, endearing characters, and engaging storytelling to teach players about Iñupiaq culture respectfully (Peckham n.p.; Narcisse n.p.), Daniel Hindes at *Gamespot* heavily criticizes the game's simple nature and allegedly "glitchy" gameplay (Hindes n.p.). Hindes describes the glitches as "unresponsive controls," "slow and unwieldy" movement, and controls that lack "precise timing," which leads to the characters' death and the player's failure (Hindes n.p.). The latter criticism troubles me because its simple nature and technical issues are the primary criticisms (Hindes n.p.). Such a criticism echoes colonial discourses because it implies that Iñupiaq people, while good storytellers, are less sophisticated game-developers for digital games. Yet, Katarina Soukup argues that Inuit have readily embraced technologies from the South and adapted them quickly to best serve their needs, which creates a "contemporary aesthetic that is rarely understood or valued—since the outside world prefers the classic symbols of ancient/traditional Inuit culture associated with Otherness" (n.p.). I have never experienced any "glitchiness" myself and so the criticism seems to uncomfortably echo stereotypes that Inuit, while simple and kind, are not accustomed to the "sophisticated" technologies from the South. Perhaps the "glitchiness" critique is produced through the discomfort that Southern players feel when their understanding of Northern peoples is challenged. Southern players choose to critique the game's alleged failings instead of pausing to reflect on their own responsibilities that are raised in the game.

I believe, however, that the glitchiness critique reveals the ways technological inequalities in the Arctic is a means of colonial control. Internet access is exorbitantly expensive

in the Arctic where schools, businesses and homes cannot afford the high premiums for dial-up internet (Nix n.p.). Broadband internet access is not available in Northern Alaska or on many Native American reservations creating a "digital divide" along colonial axis (Tveten n.p.). In "Inuit Cyberspace: The Struggle for Access for Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit," Alexander, Adamson, Daborn, Houston, and Tootoo state that the lack of internet access in the North is akin to settler-colonial removal from digital territories, because Indigenous peoples in the North cannot "both draw upon *and* contribute to the digital world" (241). *Never Alone* pushes back against digital exclusion. It was produced in conjunction with E-Line Media, a company from the South, precisely because creating the game's high quality graphics in the North would be economically unwise and enabled digital self-sufficiency by controlling how they are represented. While I am skeptical of criticism that focuses so narrowly on the game's supposed glitches, such critique does require a frank conversation about affordable internet access and available digital training throughout the Arctic.

Conclusion

As a settler from southern Canada, my familiarity with Inuit literature and politics has influenced my experience playing the game. Yet, Inuit traditional knowledge states that knowledge is gained experientially within a community-land-based context ("What is Traditional Knowledge?"). While I have experiential knowledge of Inuit communities through travel, such direct knowledge is insufficient and overshadowed by my clear reliance on texts. Though this article is a process of reading a "text," *Never Alone* is a participatory narrative that invites players into a readable experience. In "The Sovereign Obscurity of Inuit Literature," Keavy Martin has similarly reflected on the limits of the English language to describe the variety of stories and songs in Inuktitut. While Inuit traditional knowledge privileges experience, Martin states that much of Inuit literature's strength is its opaqueness, which resists being legible to outsiders (20). She states, "'[l]iterature,' in other words, is a term that asks readers, listeners, and viewers to pay particular attention to the *way* in which information is conveyed—whether it be written, spoken, carved, or sung" (20). Literary texts, whether they are carvings, songs, written, or digital texts have the capacity to command the attention of an outside audience though they are created primarily for an insider audience (21). In the case of *Never Alone,* we can think of it as a game based on traditional gaming dynamics, which allows outsiders to join in the game.

Non-Inuit players or players who are unfamiliar with the Northern circumpolar may find the game conceptually challenging. Yet, my experience of *Never Alone* as a digital qargi may seem false to Iñupiaq communities who could read the game quite differently and my argument may not resonate with the entirety of the Inuit homelands across the circumpolar. However, I think understanding the game from an Inuit-specific context challenges settler/southerner players who believe that they understand Iñupiaq culture and communities *already*. If their isuma is challenged, even non-Iñupiaq players who successfully complete the game may realize that they do not know Iñupiaq communities at all. Once they decide to enter the digital qargi, players must recognize that the qargi is a space for work and labour as well as for play and should prepare for the work that awaits.

In closing, I would like to reflect on a passage from Ken Buck's "Northern Games," an NFB documentary about the 1980 Northern Games in Arviat, Nunavut. An unnamed speaker observes,

> All of these games fit into a one-life story, and it's hard to explain. Hard to explain. Our style of sports is to be good at every little thing and if somebody beat you, you just go over there and shake his hand. This is somebody better than you. That's our style of sport. You gotta be thinking all the time, every part of your body, even your mind. Lotta times, if a guy moves slow, if he's a quick thinker, he don't have to move fast. (Buck)

The comment certainly focuses on the importance that humility and maturity plays in competition. These values foster relationships with visitors from across the Arctic and seem to reflect the ways games are being deployed to unite Inuit. The observation that these games and their importance is "Hard to explain" is certainly appropriate for *Never Alone*. The expansiveness of *Never Alone* fits the digital game within the "one-life story" of traditional games. However, players unfamiliar with Inuit knowledge frameworks cannot easily explain the ways in which *Never Alone*'s adapted story, obstacles, and Cultural Insights fit together. It requires players to think deeply about their relationships and responsibilities to Inuit as *Never Alone* encourages players to be "quick thinkers" within the digital qargi.

Notes

[1] This paper is developed from a panel organized by David Gaertner for the Indigenous Literary Studies Association's 2016 conference. I would like to thank David Gaertner, Warren Cariou, Maize Longboat, and Naithan Lagace for their own compelling examinations of *Never Alone.* A version of the conference paper was published on our panel's blog (Meloche n.pag.). I would also like to thank colleague Brandon Kerfoot for his ongoing conversations about Inuit literature and the significance of polar bears to the game's design and Gregory Blomquist for reading an earlier version of this article.

[2] Throughout the article, "Iñupiaq" refers to Inuit from the North Slope region in Alaska. "Iñupiat" is singular, while "Iñupiaq" is plural. "Inuit" is used within the broader context of Inuit peoples throughout the Northern Circumpolar. The singular of "Inuit" is "Inuk."

[3] Naithan Lagace and Maize Longboat both contextualize their analysis of *Never Alone* within a longer history of Indigenous representative self-determination in videogames in their blog posts "Never Alone and the Impact of digital Indigenous Storytelling" and "Never Alone: Rendering Digital Gaming Spaces Open for Indigenization" respectively (Lagace n.pag.; Longboat n.pag.).

[4] It should be noted that knowledge is localized and a variety of languages and dialects across the circumpolar means that terms and knowledge may differ from region to region and even between communities. Though I cite Inuit scholars who use Inuktitut terms, terms to describe sovereignty exist in Iñupiat as well, which are not addressed in this article. I hope to reflect on the game's engagement with broader notions of Inuit self-determination by drawing the game into conversation with Inuit scholars in Nunavut.

[5] A community house is called a "qargi" in Iñupiat and serves a similar purpose as qaggiq in Nunavut.

[6] For studies on traditional Iñupiaq and Inuit games, see *Application of a Theory of Games to the Transitional Eskimo Culture* by Robert Glassford or *Inuit (Eskimo) Games* by F.H. Eger. Johnny Issaluk wrote *Games of Survival: Traditional Inuit Games for Elementary Students* as a guidebook for Inuit children to practice traditional games in schools.

[7] The development of a united Inuit political voice with the ICC emerged in tandem to game organizations like the Arctic Winter Games, established in 1969 ("Background of the Arctic Winter Games."), and the Northern Games, established in 1970 ("History and Philosophy"). The Arctic Winter Games bring together athletes from across the circumpolar to play winter sports as well as traditional Inuit and Dene games. Events like the One and Two-Foot High Kick, the Alaska High Kick and the One-Arm Reach all demonstrate the importance of endurance, flexibility, agility and strength (Auksaq). These are foundational values for not only subsistence lifestyle, but also the continuance of Inuit self-determination. Arctic games have emerged as a way to express Inuit nationhood as it brings together peoples from across the circumpolar that asserts values of "cultural awareness and understanding," "fairplay," and "personal [and] community development" through competition ("Arctic Winter Games: Role & Purpose of the Games").

[8] *Never Alone* is part of the growing movement of Indigenous games that use Indigenous knowledge systems as a foundation and pushes back against popular stereotypes. In so doing, these games dismantle demeaning depictions of Indigenous people and assert sovereignty in the digital sphere. Games like *Qalupalik* by Pinnguaq Technology Inc., *Spirits of Spring* by Minority Media and *Invaders* by Elizabeth LaPensée use game platforms to imagine Indigenous futures as complex continuations of kinship ties and relationships to place and storytelling (MUSKRAT

Magazine).

[9] "Qallunaat" is the Inuktitut word for "white person" or non-Inuit. Inuk author Mini Aodla Freeman explains that "qallunaat" has a richer meaning in which, "the word implies humans who pamper or fuss with nature, of materialistic habit. Avaricious people" (*Life Among the Qallunaat* 2015, 86). Of importance for this article, "qallunaat" describes a worldview that is often in conflict with the interests of Inuit. "Southerner" is used as an alternative term and describes those living south of Inuit territories.

Works Cited

Aodla Freeman, Mini. *Life Among the Qallunaat*. Eds. Keavy Martin and Julie Rak with Norma Dunning. U of Manitoba P, 2015.

Alexander, Cynthia J., Agar Adamson, Graham Daborn, John Houston, and Victor Tootoo. "Inuit Cyberspace: The Struggle for Access for Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit." *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 43 no.2, 2009, pp. 220-249.

"ANCSA Regional and Language Map." *Ancsaregional*. ANCSA Regional Association, 2014, http://ancsaregional.com/ancsa-map/. Accessed 30 June 2016.

"Arctic Winter Games: Role & Purpose of the Games." *Arctic Winter Games,* 2014, http://www.arcticwintergames.org/Role_Purpose_Values.html. Accessed 25 May 2016.

Auksaq, Allen. "Stories from Our Land Vol. 2- Strength, Flexibility, and Endurance." *National Film Board of Canada*, 2013, https://www.nfb.ca/film/stories_from_our_land_vol2_strength_flexibility/. Accessed 06 May 2016.

"Background of the Arctic Winter Games." *Arcticwintergames.* n.d., http://www.arcticwintergames.org/About.htm. Accessed 30 June 2016.

Bennett, John and Susan Rowley (Eds.) *Uqalurait: An Oral History of Nunavut*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2004.

Buck, Ken. "Northern Games." *National Film Board of Canada*, 1981, http://www.nfb.ca/film/northern_games/. Accessed 23 May 2016.

"A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic." *Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada.* n.d., *http://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/sovereignty-in-the-arctic.html.* Accessed 30 June 2016.

"Crafted in Partnership." *Neveralonegame*. E-Line Media, 2016, http://neveralonegame.com. Accessed 30 June 2016.

Eger, F.H. *Inuit (Eskimo) Games: Book One*. 3rd ed., X-Press, 1979.

Gaertner. David. "How Should I Play These?: Media and Remediation in *Never Alone."* *Ilsaneveralone*, 26 May 2016, https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/21/how-should-i-play-these-media-and-remediation-in-never-alone/. Accessed 30 June 2016.

Glassford, Robert Gerald. *Application of a Theory of Games to the Transitional Eskimo Culture*. Dissertation, U of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne, 1971.

Hindes, Daniel. "Never Alone Review: Forever alone." *Gamespot*, 20 November 2014, http://www.gamespot.com/reviews/never-alone-review/1900-6415968/. Accessed 27 June 2016.

"History and Philosophy." *Northern Games*, 2016, http://www.northerngames.org/history.html. Accessed 30 June 2016.

"Interview Series: Ishmael Hope." *Neveralonegame*. E-Line Media, 30 October 2014, http://neveralonegame.com/interview-never-alone-writer-ishmael-hope/. Accessed 30 June 2016.

Issaluk, Johnny. *Games of Survival: Traditional Inuit Games for Elementary Students.* Inhabit Media, 2013.

Keith, Darren, Jerry Arqviq, Louie Kamookak and Jackie Ameralik and the Gjoa Haven Hunters' and Trappers' Organization. *Qaujimaningit Nanurnut: Inuit Knowledge of Polar Bears*. Gjoa Haven Hunters' and Trappers' Organization and the CCI Press, 2005.

Lagace, Naithan. "Never Alone and the Impact of Digital Indigenous Storytelling." *Ilsaneveralone,* 26 May, 2016, https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/26/never-alone-and-the-impact-of-digital-indigenous-storytelling/. Accessed 1 July 2016.

Longboat, Maize. "Never Alone: Rendering Digital Gaming Spaces Open for Indigenization." *Ilsaneveralone*, 28 May, 2016. https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/28/never-alone-rendering-digital-gaming-spaces-open-for-indigenization/. Accessed 1 July 2016.

Martin, Keavy. "The Sovereign Obscurity of Inuit Literature." *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature,* edited by James Howard Cox and Daniel Heath Justice. OUP, 2014, pp. 15-30.

----. *Stories in a New Skin: Approaches to Inuit Literature*. U of Manitoba P, 2012.

Meloche, Katherine. "Sovereign Games: Traditional Gaming and Online Competition in *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa.*" *Ilsaneveralone*, 26 May, 2016, https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/26/sovereign-games-traditional-gaming-and-online-competition-in-kisima-innitchuna/. Accessed 1 July 2016.

MUSKRAT Magazine. "Indigenous Video Games You Should Download." *MUSKRAT Magazine*, 1 April 2016, http://muskratmagazine.com/indigenous-video-games-you-should-download/. Accessed 30 June 2016.

Narcisse, Evan. "*Never Alone:* The *Kotaku* Review." *Kotaku*, 17 November 2014, http://kotaku.com/never-alone-the-kotaku-review-1659789150. Accessed 27 June 2016.

Never Alone. Upper One Games and E-Line Media, 2014.

Nix, Naomi. "Alaska's Disconnected Schools." *The Atlantic*, 16 December 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/12/alaska-schools-internet/420648/. Accessed 22 February 2017.

"Our Team." *Neveralonegame*. E-Line Media, 2016, http://neveralonegame.com/our-team/. Accessed 30 June 2016.

Peckham, Matt. "Never Alone is a Harrowing Journey Into the Folklore of Alaska Natives." *Wired,* 21 November 2014, https://www.wired.com/2014/11/never-alone-review/. Accessed 27 June 2016.

Qitsualik, Rachel A."Inummarik: Self-Sovereignty in Classic Inuit Thought." *Nilliajut: Inuit Perspectives on Security, Patriotism and Sovereignty,* edited by Scot Nickels, Karen Kelley and Carrie Grable. Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, January 2013, pp. 23-34.

"The Story of Kunuuksaayuka (Part One)." *Neveralongame.* E-Line Media, 6 October 2014, http://neveralonegame.com/kunuuksaayuka/. Accessed 30 June 2016.

Tveten, Julianne. "On American Indian reservations, challenges perpetuate the digital divide." *arsTECHNICA*, 31 January 2016, https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2016/01/on-american-indian-reservations-challenges-perpetuate-the-digital-divide/. Accessed 22 February 2017.

Soukup. Katarina. "Report: Travelling Through Layers: Inuit Artists Appropriate New Technologies." *CJC: Canadian Journal of Communication.* vol. 31, no. 1. 2016,

http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1769/1889. Accessed 22 February 2017.

"What is Traditional Knowledge?" Alaska Native Science Commission. n.date. http://www.nativescience.org/html/traditional_knowledge.html. Accessed 20 February. 2017.

Never Alone: (Re)Coding the Comic Holotrope of Survivance

MICHELLE LEE BROWN

> "Like most Native people, I do not perceive of the world of creative writing as divided into categories of prose and poetry or fiction and nonfiction. Nor do I imagine myself crossing from political resistance into artistic creation and back again. Life is a confluence of creativities: art is a fluid political medium, as politics is metaphorical and artistic."
>
> (Haunani-Kay Trask, "Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of Decolonization.")

0. starting from the Center

I began this paper with the intent to author a piece on indigenous political ecologies within and without the *Never Alone* video game, articulating certain embodied material and discursive practices in the making and playing of the game. The deeper and more expansive the connections and stories became, the more I realized that immersion within the game and the (re)mapping of histories and materialities were altering how I thought and how I was writing. Alexander Galloway states, "[w]ith video games, the work itself is material action" (3). I want to extend this idea of material action further by thinking about praxis on multiple levels: the company and game creation, the play-interface, and now the articulation of these processes through written English.

This game is infused with the foundational principles of the Iñupiaq people—interconnectedness and interdependence. It is also infused with older sign technologies that are themselves "complex information systems with layers of meaning, memory, and interaction" (Loft 172). Putting those ideas into action-interface, I opened to the epistemic agency of the game[1] as a coauthor of this piece. It has shaped this work at every step, informing my layers of understanding, and remains what I return to for grounding my words and focusing my thoughts.

However, as I reread Gerald Vizenor's writings on survivance and literature, this concept of co-author became inadequate to encompass the world-within-world of the story, the game system realm, the designers, players, and myriad other human and nonhuman interactions occurring on multiple levels. Thinking of *Never Alone* as a (re)coded comic holotrope of survivance retains that epistemic agency I noted earlier, but also incorporates that worlds-within-worlds, the "all" interplay of players, designers, and story within the story itself.

1. core samples

> "When we locate the present of settler colonialism as only the production of the past, we overlook how settler colonialism is configured in relation to a different temporal horizon: the future."
>
> (Eve Tuck and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, "Curriculum, Replacement, and Settler Futurity")

This article employs Mishuana Goeman and Gerald Vizenor's concepts as my main theoretical threadwork, as a smaller reproduction of what resurgence theory does on a larger scale, and as academic praxis. In short; this example of indigenous digital media is not new, but a new emergence of a centuries-old way of relating to others, which has much to offer on many levels as it (re)maps cultural practices, deepening and rewiring human and nonhuman interdependence. These complexities and intertwined communities require a turning away from Western linear temporalities and theorizations, and a turn towards indigenous scholars who have already articulated theories of storytelling and media.

This is not to deny or exclude the invitational aspects of *Never Alone*; but by centering indigenous theory, it allows for what Mohawk scholar Deborah Doxtator describes as "points of possible rapprochement between two different ways of ordering knowledge and conceptualizing the past" (34). This approach turns towards inclusive indigenous futurities, while refusing the elimination and erasure tactics of settler ones, as noted by Eve Tuck and Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández.

At the core of this paper are two foundational concepts: (re)coding and comic holotrope. (Re)coding incorporates Mishuana Goeman's use of (re) from her method of (re)mapping in *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nation.* She defines (re)mapping as "a powerful

discursive discourse with material groundings… in which I would address the unsettling of imperial and colonial geographies." She continues to note that this is the work of Native authors and communities to "write and undertake the simultaneously metaphoric and material capacities of map making, to generate new possibilities" (3). Using the "re-" within parentheses, she articulates a process of traditional and new storytelling of survivance. These stories of places and relational practices are not old, nor new—but a mix of both, allowing for multiple emergences.[2]

Comic holotropes themselves articulate two related concepts: game as world (re)mapping—rather than game as text—and the relationality and connections that reverberate through multiple realms, as drawn out by Gerald Vizenor. He outlines the comic holotrope of survivance in *Writing Indian, Native Conversations* as follows:

> So comic holotrope is the question—it's communal, and it's an "all" figuration, the entire figuration—you have to recreate it, which is the entire figuration—of the community. You have to create a play of readers and listeners in the story itself. That's the comic holotrope. (117)

I will delve further into each of these concepts in later sections, highlighting them here to underscore their importance to situating *Never Alone*. Indigenous use of digital media warrants engagement of Indigenous theorists and scholars to this digital realm. Indigenous storytelling is political by nature, so it made sense to turn to Vizenor and Goeman's work on political and literary analysis to explore the concept of *Never Alone* (re)coding the comic holotrope of survivance.

2. remedia(l) tendencies

> "Of equal importance in these processes of counting is the dynamic relationship between the physical creation, the narrator, the narrative itself, the act of narrating, and the audience."
>
> Cheryl L'Hirondelle, "Codetalkers Recounting Signals of Survival"

David Gaertner wrote incisively about *Never Alone* for ISLA 2016, contextualizing it as remediation within Western new media and visual culture studies definitions: bringing old into new, highlighting Marshall McLuhan's definition of it as a process in which one medium becomes the content for another. I press that more is being done here, thus my use of

(re)mediation rather than remediation. This is not to completely dismiss McLuhan's contributions, but to center Indigenous literary and political scholars to reframe the discussion. I use three key citations to briefly trace the threads that help delineate (re)mediation from remediation.

English can be challenging to express something that, while defined as a "noun", is ongoing, material and discursive, deeply relational, and always in-process. This paper uses gerunds, verbs and nouns to convey some of that—also emphasizing that Goeman and Vizenor repeatedly outline the ongoing and active nature of the terms they use. Even allowing for some flexibility in grammatical categories, remediation remains fixed to Western concepts of time and relationality.

Remediation also remains fixed to ideas of objects, which Indigenous digital media challenges on multiple levels. Within these media, objects can be a charge, an infusion of communal intention, and they can also contain multiple crossover points between written and oral transmission. As Cree artist, writer, director, and activist Cheryl L'Hirondelle notes in her chapter of *Coded Territories:*

> What these historical Indigenous practices… suggest is our ability to take account of vital information with the creation of a physical object and move beyond what has been oversimplified as solely orally centred transmission processes. The "object" is charged and embodies the interplay of processes between the oral and the written (notched/drawn) used to aid in its own retelling. (157)

Extending this further, if Indigenous relational objects can be seen as hypertexts (Angela Haas) and/or as living beings connected to the community by ongoing generative processes (Jackson 2Bears), how could their emergence and agency within a communal digital form be framed as a mere remediating of one form into another?

In his essay "Mediacosmology", Mohawk scholar and curator Steven Loft notes, "A cosmological model of communicative agency, then, transcends the simplistic notions of "romance" offered by anthropologists, ethnologists, art historians, and media theorists. There is no "re" for us" (172). Here, he refutes the simplistic binary invoked by McLuhan and his "tribal man" who has no sense of past or history, only the present, moving towards a more nuanced and connection-filled model.

Carrying this concept further, Loft notes other Indigenous scholars and artists who see these realms as already inhabited by our ancestors. He states:

> If we, as Aboriginal people, see the 'Internet' as a space populated by our ancestors, our stories, and, in a wider way, ourselves, then we must believe it existed before the actual realization of the technology. It is then, indeed, a "cyberspace", attuned to, and inclusive of, our past memories, our epistemological concerns, and the culmination of lived experience. (172)

If there is no "remediating" or "remediation"—as this leaves little room for Indigenous temporalities and perceptions of time/space/past/future—perhaps there is room for (re)mediation. A form which could take up these past memories, epistemological shifts, and lived experiences. Within the set of parentheses the 're' takes on a significant shift; Goeman is careful to delineate what the (re) itself does in her method of (re)mapping. I am not glibly assigning the prefix to create some sort of Indigenous media theory chimera, but to invoke these generational, old-yet-new understandings. As she notes in the introduction to *Mark My Words*:

> In an effort to recognize the recovery and extension of precolonial constructions of space in Native writing, I use the parenthesis around "re" in "(re)mapping" to acknowledge connections to cultural concepts… reflected in their work is an understanding of space passed down through generations, and it is often only the presentation of spatial concepts in new formats that are the contemporary formulations. *Even this format, however, contains elements of the traditional*. (213) [Emphasis mine]

The use of the prefix within this paper is also not simply to riff on recode/rework as (re)code/(re)work, etc.—though I hope to retain an element of playfulness. Instead, I invoke the (re) within this paper to note these are emergences of much older understandings of space, place, and relations, and embrace the concept of these realms as already being inhabited by ancestors who reshape and reweave digital and physical teleologies, as *Never Alone* beautifully illustrates.

3. unsettl(er)ing emergences

> "I think this game is going to be a seed, a new emergence of video game culture."
>
> (Qaiyaan Harcharek)

The Iñupiat believe this story, a digital emergence of "Kunuuksaayuka" as told by Robert Nasruk Cleveland (with permission granted by his daughter, Minnie Aliitchak Gray—Iñupiat Elder) is transformative, containing healing and power they feel is desperately needed at this time. Interconnectedness and deep relations are at its core, and particular elements resist being dissected or partitioned. To approach this emergence and trace the roots of this articulation of the story, I turned to Indigenous scholar and artist Chadwick Allen's process of entwined analysis in his book *Trans-Indigenous*: to understand an Indigenous work, it needs to be situated in larger layers of context and meaning-making. His term trans-Indigenous is not meant to create a 'universalized' definition of indigeneity, but to encompass ways of relating and practices that can mitigate moving between realms—filling the interface between and interfacing different nations with a myriad micro-connections.

As that last phrase suggests, there are multiple realms of gaming, theory, and indigenous praxis to navigate. This particular emergence of the story within *Never Alone* is new; it is one more step in a longer series of art evolutions for the Iñupiat—from scrimshaw carvings on whale bone to ink and paper illustrations, oral stories to written then printed books—now digital media. What struck me, as I read some of the testimonies from the elders, was their acceptance of this as the story's next expression, and their excitement. They had seen their stories unfold in various mediums, this was a new (re)telling they could share with the next generations. As their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren were already immersing themselves in video games and digital learning tools, multiple translations and world-navigations were already occurring, now they could (re)map their own routes.

Returning to Chadwick Allen, he expresses this relational complexity as follows:

> the realities of contemporary Indigenous identities describe multiple kinds of diversity and complexity; often, they describe seeming paradoxes of simultaneity, contradiction, coexistence. These qualities are the contemporary Indigenous norm rather than its tragic exception. (p xxxiii)

These multiplicities and paradoxes highlight the importance of using native theorists and nurturing a deeper understanding of the elements and communities that came together to create *Never Alone*. Here I am careful to note that these processes are ongoing, as the game expansion

releases, articles, books, digital media, and the communities involved continue to grow and inspire further emergences.

As Gerald Vizenor notes "political cultures begin at home" (Purdy 115); what the Iñupiat and CITC have done is examine what was, is, and may be their home. This game is one step towards a future that incorporates their worldview within these new realms. The mechanisms for accessing these realms were already there; the gaming systems and tech their children and community members were using. Now it has been reinterpreted/reimagined as a digital articulation of survivance. A story that we do.

Mishuana Goeman describes a process of "unsettling settler space" through (re)mapping with stories: "The imaginative possibilities and creations offered in the play of a poem, imagery of a novel, or complex relationships set up in a short story provide avenues beyond a recovery of a violent history of erasure and provide imaginative modes to unsettle settler space" (2). Thinking of this digital realm, how this game space is unsettled, and (re)woven, connecting with other physical and digital realms and beings. These actions are deeply political, but not "just" politics—as Allen notes, these are relational practices that move between realms, (re)coding systems and connections, (re)mapping spaces.

4. taproots/taproutes

> "Creative people, however, know that culture is political. Writing, music, painting, dance, and voyaging are profoundly political….Not only the content of writing, but the act of writing is political. And naturally so."
>
> (Haunani-Kay Trask, "Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of Decolonization")

4. taproots

Before moving into the inner workings and external resonances of the game, it is important to note its roots—the foundational threads woven before the release of *Never Alone*. Gloria O'Neill, President and CEO of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council Enterprises, Inc. (subsidiary of Cook Inlet Tribal Council) and Upper One Games, outlined the communal processes that Council engaged in order to invest in something that would give back to the community in tangible and intangible

ways. After investigating the potential for growth and return, the Council decided to invest in futures, rather than funeral homes (a common investment strategy). After careful consideration, CITC Inc. partnered with E-Line Media as Upper One Games in 2012, the first Indigenous-owned commercial game company in the United States. In 2014, the two organizations merged with plans to expand Indigenous gaming in partnerships with other communities.

The Iñupiat chose to invest in what their children were already doing: gaming. Or, evoking an older sense: playing, interacting with stories. The game systems were already there, the culture (in its early 21st century manifestations) is there. Various cultural practitioners and elders are featured in the game and on the website as Cultural Ambassadors; some are in education (digital education), some are polar bear guards and/or whale hunters (in traditional boats), others are traditional storytellers, musician, and artists. As Amy Fredeen notes in the very first Cultural Insight clip: "We are not a museum piece. We are a living culture".

The game world takes an oral story that had been written down, affixed, then unlocks it through (re)newed oral and visual forms, then infuses it with other stories and histories via insight clips, website extras, blog posts, and more. Each step along the way, CITC referred back to the community to shape their decisions and practices. They left it to the community to decide who would be the voices of their narrators, community members were brought to the design studio (and designers brought to Iñupiaq territory many times) to ensure it was told in a way that was their worldview in digital form.

Visual elements were created using the same protocols. Scrimshaw pieces have a long history within Iñupiaq culture—images were (and are) carved on baleen or ivory; these series of images are used for storytelling or documenting a series of events. Images are read by the elder or carver to unlock the stories within—these were timelines of natural and political events or tales that instilled cultural, social and political practices. Within the game levels, scrimshaw style artwork is used in animation sections that begin or end game levels within *Never Alone*, superimposed with the voice-over in their native language. Much as scrimshaw can be unlocked by those who know the embedded histories and meanings behind it, there is much to think about regarding encoded and (re)coded meanings within the game realm of *Never Alone*.

Several elders and cultural ambassadors spoke of the joy in playing the game, of being both student and teacher. This is not by accident—*Never Alone* is designed to be best experienced in co-player mode[3]—with people playing next to each other, talking and planning,

sharing tips and suggestions. This was a way of returning to story as a way of connecting—an experiential interface between people and the non-human actors.

Another non-human actor, the weather (Sila) in the game and in the Arctic also had a definite 'interface' with the designers. Gloria O'Neill related a story during the Hawaiian Media Makers Conference in 2014: the early versions of the wind, sleet, and snow were deemed not quite right by the Iñupiat. The designers were brought out to Barrow, Alaska in mid-winter so they could experience it more fully: take photos, draw sketches, be immersed within it. This Sila immersion worked—the next version passed the scrutiny of the elders and cultural ambassadors. It translated so well that Columbia University is incorporating parts of the game in a class on climate change.

Key concepts used throughout this paper are articulated within the game, via twenty-four Cultural Insight video clips unlocked as the story progresses. Featuring the Iñupiat Cultural Ambassadors, they offer stories and insights about the game, characters, and key concepts: Sila (the atmosphere/weather—that which is from the land to the stars) has a soul, as do animals, and the land (Nuna). Nuna is also the name of the central character in *Never Alone*. These same concepts, emergences of Iñupiat traditional practices and stories, are also encoded within the game-making process.

4.b. taproutes

Humility and knowing "you are not the biggest force in the world" are key parts of the Iñupiat world, reflected in the making and playing of *Never Alone.* The making of the game required a lengthy and multi-layered process of community-based decision making and extensive designer-tribal collaboration and revision. This communal interdependence and sense of connectedness (lateral rather than a hierarchy) is also embedded in the game's structure and play. When adapting the story for the game, several story elements were changed while keeping this in mind—the boy becomes Nuna,[4] the arctic fox is added as another main character. She rides a polar bear, which is an actual experience of one of the elders, Fannie (Kuutuuq) Akpik. (This multi-temporal story-within-story-within story is unlocked as one of the cultural insights, fitting with the idea of comic holotrope).

Balance is also central to these worlds—*Never Alone* is a (re)mapping of beautiful forests and waters, but also harsh and unending winter in many chilling variations; even such beautiful

displays as the Northern Lights have a dangerous side to them. It also shapes some of the adversaries in the game: the Northern Lights which try to snatch up Nuna, the Blizzard Man causing unending winter, *Sila alannuqtuq*—Sila (weather/atmosphere) out-of-balance/changing. These are not seen as evil or bad, but beings operating at a different level of intensity, or once-human-like agents now out of balance (respectively).

For generations the Iñupiat have been intimately aware of climate change and the deeply connected systems disrupted by it. This particular issue emerging within *Never Alone*—networks within a larger system out-of-balance—has particular resonance through Nuna's journey as a small, seemingly insignificant character up against forces that threatens to wipe out her entire community. On her quest, players must rely on others to advance and work towards restoring balance, even if in single-player mode. It cannot be done by one character alone—no ammo or gear drops, nor cheat codes; reaching the end of this story realm requires interdependence and timing.

This is a digital story (re)mapped as praxis, a way of relating to different worlds and realms that players can become immersed in, and (re)shaped themselves. Video games are well-suited to this type of immersion, and *Never Alone* is infused with the Iñupiaq world—the sounds of the language, the visual images, background sounds, cries and calls, weather sounds—these and more create realm-crossing paths designed to shift us, to affect and alter us, creating or (re)creating connections on multiple levels. Yet, underneath these other foundation threads, is perhaps the oldest one—our taproot here is a story. Stories matter. As Iñupiaq writer and consultant Ishmael Angaluuk Hope states: "We all do stories. We all live stories." The next section engages with the literary-political-social theories of (re)coding to think about how this story, (re)mapped into a digital space, *does* renewed life in a new medium and realm, yet retains an ancestral center.

5. (re)Coded Territory

> "Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous."
>
> (Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*)

Mobility and displacement have offered up challenges to Indigenous presences and paths/routes to maintain connections with human and nonhuman family. Stories have long been used to trace

the unsettling of settler boundaries, the continued existence and pushing against colonial narratives. As Mishuana Goeman notes, "Remembering important connections to land and community is instrumental in mapping a decolonized Native presence" (29). In *Mark My Words* she traces how stories "teach us how to care for and respect one another and the land; they endure" (34).

Part of this endurance is their complexity and richness—multiple layers of meaning allow for open and more coded access/understandings. If "territory… is constitutive of cultural, political, and economic practices" (Goeman 34), thinking of digital realms suggests not only (re)mapping, but (re)coding—pushing back against colonial structures which see digital space as Terra Nullius 2.0. I use (re)code to highlight that these stories are not just translations in a new realm, or game as text; orality and community translation are powerful challenges to these concepts. Richa Nagar's writing on translation refers to it often being an act of violence. For Nagar, this indicates the translation of sounds to written or typed words—affixing an oral story to the written page, pinning it down, stripping it of further movement. She (as well as Noenoe Silva) note the violence of translating from one language to another. What I would like to pick up here is *Never Alone* as an act of (re)mediation and release, an emergence of survivance.

"Kunuuksaayuka" is the basis for Never Alone—a version of an older story crafted and told orally by Robert Nasruk Cleveland. His daughter, Minnie Aliitchak Gray, was encouraged to write the story down; it was later published. Ishmael Angaluuk Hope came across the printed copy of her written retelling, and thought it was one of the best stories he had ever read.[5]

While the story itself has shifted shape (as noted earlier) the intrinsic elements of it have remained. Ronald (Aniqsuaq) Brower, Sr. is one of the Cultural Ambassadors of the Upper One company and *Never Alone* game, providing cultural insights, Iñupiat translation, and voice over work. He describes his childhood, and being trained, literally filled with stories in their language by his elders, so that he might share them with future generations:

> "As a child disabled by rheumatic fever, I listened and learned many Iñupiaq myths, legends, history and stories from Elders that frequented my parents home. I would also be invited by Elders to listen and learn my people's history and life experiences so I may be useful to our community in my adult years. How correct they were in choosing my life path!"

Ishmael and other Iñupiat cultural advisors (both young and old) note that it is common practice for elders to tell young children what they hope they will do or be for the community as they grow up. Over the course of their video clips or interviews on the game website, they note how fulfilling it was to express skills planted within them in the making of the game (and its supplemental release, *Foxtales*).

Returning to Goeman once again:

> While I study contemporary Native American literature and not stories from time immemorial… its tendency in a single breath or word to recall hundreds, even thousands of years back by employing community, personal, and historical stories in intertextual moments allows us to see these sets of relationships outside the mapping of the state. (38)

Breathing life through the centuries, transcending intertextual spaces and the gaps between 0 and 1 in streams of code—these are stories as relations. "The truth about stories is, that's all we are." Thomas King begins his book with this statement—I use it here as a launch into the next section. These are stories as governance: highlighting the importance of interconnectedness and responsibility to each other, the land, and the world around them. They are also seen as transformative. If stories are indeed all we are, what does this mean in terms of relational webs of players, designers, storytellers, and the technologies we engage with to play the games?

6. net-work: kinnections + deep relations

> The Native paradigm is comprised of and includes ideas of constant motion and flux, existence consisting of energy waves, interrelationships, all things being animate... If human beings are animate and have spirit, then "all my relations" must also be animate and have spirit.
>
> (Leroy Little Bear, "Foreword", *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*)

These webs of connections are necessary for survivance storytelling to flourish, within *Never Alone*, it is an intimacy and interconnectivity through game play, immersion with an old story (re)mapped within a digital space. In this section I introduce my own neologism—*kinnections*—

to trace threads of this web of interconnectivity, weaving selected strands into this article. It is intended as a launching point rather than definitive statement—the networks reach out in more directions than is possible in multiple books, let alone one paper. Nonetheless, tracing these relations helps highlight their materiality—a richer one than may appear at first.

Within *Never Alone* in particular, and Indigenous games more broadly, materiality is more pervasive than it seems. I am engaging with particular Indigenous lines of thought, threads if you will, to tug ideas within Robbie Shilliam's concept of deep relations into a kinnected, trans-indigenous sphere. These threads are words on the page, pulled from a digital recording or image; what we weave here is perhaps more intangible than tangible, but nonetheless connected deeply by interdependence.

As with any deep interdependence, the game, company, tribe, players, land itself have a stake in each other. I take up Robbie Shilliam's terms to describe this interconnectedness, but shift it slightly. He defines deep relations in his work *The Black Pacific* as:

> a relationality that exists underneath the wounds of coloniality, a cutting logic that seeks to—but on the whole never quite manages to—segregate peoples from their lands, their pasts, their ancestors and spirits. Decolonial science seeks to repair colonial wounds, binding back together peoples, lands, pasts, ancestors and spirits. Its greatest challenge is to bind back together the manifest and spiritual domains. (13)

Binding back together manifest and spiritual domains presents a paradox that digital spaces might help mitigate—as this binding requires materiality. Materiality in an extended and very earthy sense, as it cannot leave nature out of materialism, a materiality that does things (Wark 14). *Never Alone* has a particular liveliness that cannot be separated from the material world, which is foundationally the natural world. Alexander Galloway calls a video game "a cultural object, bound by history and materiality, consisting of an electronic computational device and a game simulated in software" (1). I would like to decolonize this, extending it further than being viewed as an action-object—but as something which has a particular vibrancy, a liveliness that crosses realms.

Binding and relational threads are used here to describe the interstices between realms; when we cross over into a different media realm and immerse ourselves in a particular world, touching on deep, global infrastructures of trans-indigenous connectivity. These connections are

marked by invitations to participate, but the digital/physical world-making with *Never Alone* at its center has been created with Iñupiat ways of being. It will take up the questions of cosmologies and temporalities, seeds and emergences.

Weaving in the concept of deep relations helps encompass further these concepts of relating and moves to self-determination that underpin the story and gameplay, the creation and distribution, the materiality of resources, technology, and future plans. While examining them in detail is outside the scope of this paper, noting their connections to and through the game helps indicate additional depths of this relationality. Rather than a massive portmanteau or hyphenated kin-making-digital-physical-phrase, I will use kinnection to touch on this area. This term invites further development and discussion, but if we are tracing roots and routes—here we turn back to *Never Alone*.

Never Alone is a fitting emergence for articulating realm-crossing routes, as it draws on the materiality of itself—the earthiness of the console, the travels to get there, the electricity to utilize it. This materiality is in motion, the work-play a material action. Returning to Galloway:

> With video games, the work itself is material action. One plays a game. And the software runs. The operator and the machine play the video game together, step by step, move by move. Here the "work" is not as solid or integral as in other media. (p 3)

Here we are still stuck within Western concepts of work, binaries, and 'operator' versus 'machine'. Galloway does note that "in our day and age, this is the site of fun. It is also the work site" (5), and he takes up the terms "operator" and "machine" not to downplay the fun within gaming, but "to stress that in the sphere of electronic media, games are fundamentally cybernetic software systems involving both organic and nonorganic actors" (6).

I would like to turn this line of thought in on itself a bit: teasing out the idea of *cybernetic networks* into *nets* and *work-play* of relational practices/kin-making across multiple realms. Seeing these as the threads that bind the interstices, that flow out from and back to the "cultural objects" Galloway refers to as a video game. It can be said that, just as the title denotes, we are never alone playing the game; *Never Alone* is more than a cultural object, even in the broader game theory sense. Taking back up the thread of the game as more than a co-author allows us to present it as a decolonial science practice/comic holotrope of survivance—moving between realms to relate a story of multiple worlds (touching on material and spiritual domains).

"I think we are more scientists than people realize—we have more knowledge of these things than people will ever know" (Angie (Patik) Kellie, *Never Alone* Cultural Insight video).

In the introduction to *Native American DNA*, Kim TallBear notes the importance of "the practice of making kin" and the deep meaning in circulation, as she puts it: "routedness" versus "rootedness". In this section, TallBear also thanks Donna Haraway for "insisting that there is pleasure to be had in the confusion of boundaries—in their undoing." Unsettling boundaries, embracing routedness—patterns and pathways that unsettle settler spaces as they (re)map them; within this r(re)mapping and (re)connection lies an undoing as well as a remaking. What Galloway sees as being less than "interactive" (6) can be powerfully generative and disruptive at the same time.

I would like to pick up the idea of migration and travel further here to think of routedness and movement in digital realms, pathways and kin-making, and maintaining practices for both human and nonhuman family. Revisiting the earlier use of the term root/rooted to view *rooted*ness as planted within a story, traveling along the story route through varied temporal and spatial perceptions, returning back, flowing through, changed but familiar. These decolonial intimacies indigenous game realms offer extend kin-making and practices through various materialities and multiple realm-crossings.

These net-works—encompassing readers, viewers, makers, players, and more—are whirling in kinetic webs of survivance that elicit resonances and tugs kinnection threads. For assistance in further tracing multiple narrative voices and connections in these worlds/realms within realms—I turn to Vizenor and his concept of comic holotrope of survivance.

7. comic holotrope of survivance: or, when Fox is more/less/all

> "The fox was reborn into a new form. Or was it who he really was this whole time?"
>
> (Narrator, *Never Alone*)

Here we pick up these threads of (re)coding and kinnection to weave them alongside Vizenor's articulations of comic holotrope of survivance, tracing some of the digital-political Never Alone and Upper One Games has (re)coded. It is fitting to place the section on (re)coding comic holotropes after kinnections—as it is a communal "all" figuration by an extended community, a

(re)coded space. Articulating it here remains playful and open to expanded allusion and layered meanings; much like survivance, it is praxis—theory as action. We do stories. Linking Ishmael Angaluuk Hope with Haunani-Kay Trask, these "story-doings" are inherently, profoundly, and richly political.

Before releasing these lines of flight within Never Alone, it is helpful to revisit various pieces of this concept as drawn out by Gerald Vizenor. As stated earlier, he outlines the comic holotrope of survivance in *Writing Indian, Native Conversations* as follows:

> So comic holotrope is the question—it's communal, and it's an "all" figuration, the entire figuration—you have to recreate it, which is the entire figuration—of the community. You have to create a play of readers and listeners in the story itself. That's the comic holotrope. (117)

This play of readers, listeners, story within the game is assisted by a key figure: the trickster. "The trickster is a communal sign in a comic narrative; the comic holotrope (the whole figuration) is a consonance in tribal discourse" (*Narrative Chance* 9). Vizenor delineates the trickster and comic holotrope in a later section as sign and signifier, noting Lacan's liberation of the signifier[6] within trickster narratives. I will not delve too deeply into sign and signifier here, as their emergences in digital spaces transforms the discourses about them, pushing for (re)newed ones. But it is important to note this delineation of narrative voices/comic holotrope as the signifier in trickster narratives, and the trickster as semiotic sign that "wanders between narrative voices and comic chance in oral presentations" (*Narrative Chance* 189).

I do not wish to imply that Fox is a trickster in a generic sense; returning to Chadwick Allen's concepts, thinking of Fox as a whole within the game and the community. "The trickster is a communal sign, a comic holotrope and a discourse; not a real person or a tragic metaphor in an isolated monologue" (*Narrative Chance* 9). The particular kinnections for his game allow Fox to push back against boundaries Vizenor proscribes around tricksters in prior literary emergences: "The trickster is disembodied in a narrative, the language game transmutes birds and animals with no corporeal or material representations" (*Narrative Chance* 196). Here there is another materiality now intimately involved: earth, metals, oils, plastics, electrical currents and charges.

I use 'involved' with some humor here—at a certain point (now infamous on community boards and playthroughs), the only way out is through breaking player perceptions of "tragic."

Vizenor notes the trickster is comic and communal multiple times in *Narrative Chance*, noting this is "neither the 'whole truth' nor an isolated hypotragic transvaluation…" (12). The tragic is outlined as a linear single story arc that communal comic holotropes resist—as does the trickster as the sign, as does Fox as our emergence of this sign within *Never Alone*.

At this particular game point, when a player 'wins' or 'beats' that level by making it through all the challenges and unlocked bonuses, a figure comes out and brutally snaps Fox's neck. This step is necessary, as it leads to a (re)emergence of the Fox within the next levels, however it is rough to experience (even for those replaying the game). Players react very strongly to the character's perceived death, the unfairness of that action, etc.

Fox exemplifies both the comic and survivance—transforming into another form on the next level. As shown by the fox quote opening this section "or was this his true form to begin with?" perception and form are fluid; tragedy is turned into something else, here the comic is communal, shared humor between game, players, narrator, etc. The 'tragic single story' thread is playfully inverted, woven back into the larger holotrope. Walter Kerr notes in his classical studies on tragedy and comedy—there is no way out in comedy, and tragedy is the form that (cruelly) promises a happy ending. In *Never Alone* it remains cyclical, we continue on within the game, transformed, to return to the end-as-beginning: the same scene it started from.

8. comic holotrope: (re)coded

> "The Western world is finally coming to understand how our ancestors embedded and encoded our ceremonies, languages, world views, and metanarratives as complex algorithms that refer back to the very creation of the universe."
> (Cheryl L'Hirondelle "Codetalkers Recounting Signals of Survival")

Now that we have traced some of what Fox does within Never Alone, as a sign that becomes the comic holotrope of survivance "(t)rope are figures of speech; here the trickster is a sign that becomes a comic holotrope, a consonance of sentences in various voices, ironies, variation in cultural myths and metaphors." (*Narrative Chance* 190). *Never Alone* is a shifting interplay of narratives within the game and there is much more to be said, written, and created around the ideas of comic holotropes and tricksters in digital realms.

Between the storyteller/narrator, Fox, and glitches (which often happen through the fox when played by the game system itself)[7] there are significant emergences of the comic holotrope: playful, communal, with nuances and multiple layers/realm shifts that push against the "flattening" Leanne Simpson and others caution against—within game worlds, these nonhuman intimacies and unexpected turns are heightened. All of which weaves into a "whole figuration"/emergence that "ties the unconscious to social experiences" (*Narrative Chance* 196); (re)coding these spaces as acts of survivance.

Shifting discourses beyond critical theory and political ecologies—thinking of this digital (re)mapping of these holotropes as political/cultural/artistic emergences of survivance requires a moment to think about what this term might emerge as in a digital space. Thinking of survivance as ways of relating and reshaping other realms within our context of (re)mapping, it allows for invitational play with resurgence theory,[8] partnerships and remaking within digital realms. Turning to resurgence theory, scholar Leanne Simpson notes similar themes to those presented earlier in this writing: seeds, stories, emergences in her book, *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*:

> Interpreted within our cultural web of non-authoritarian leadership, non-hierarchical ways of being, non-interference and non-essentialism, the stories explain the resistance of my Ancestors and the seeds of resurgence they so carefully saved and planted. (18)

In the first section, Simpson clarifies that she sees these stories told in print or video/film as losing some of their emergent transformative power, becoming "flattened" and "unilateral" (34).

Gerald Vizenor's pivotal definition of survivance in *Manifest Manners* is "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry";they have much in common with resurgence, and, as the site survivance.org states, "[a]n act of survivance is Indigenous self-expression in any medium that tells a story about our active presence in the world now." The flattening she articulates can be understood on some level within words on a page. Yet as Vizenor, Goeman, and others have noted, there is incredible depth and play within this form. Leanne Simpson has engaged with this in her more recent works: in her chapter in *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, she describes how digital storytelling plays a "critical role" in

Indigenous nation-building and resurgence. In addition, these forms work to decolonize and envision Indigenous-centered collective futures for all our relations.

(Re)mapping survivance into digital game spaces traces these relations even further. If we think about spatial (re)mapping within Indigenous stories, and the (re)mediation of them into digital environments—*Never Alone* in particular—dynamic circular web patterns swirl in an emergence—an imaginative and lively imitation, rather than a fixed representation. In other words: a comic holotrope of *survivance*, with kinnections bringing depth and multilateral resonances. Returning to survivance.org: "[s]urvivance is more than mere survival—it is a way of life that nourishes Indigenous ways of knowing."

Comic holotrope as a concept is important to articulate through ever-political 21st century Indigenous artists and creators. Vizenor parallels Trask when he cautions: "Social scientists take Native stories as representations, not imitations or figurations, because they are not literary artists. They're methodologists, looking for a faux reality" (Purdy 116). If the comic holotrope is all communal, relational, and all figurative/emergent; here this conceptual tool is (re)mapped to think of new-yet-old relational emergences, a story infused with survivance, (re)coded for the 21st century.

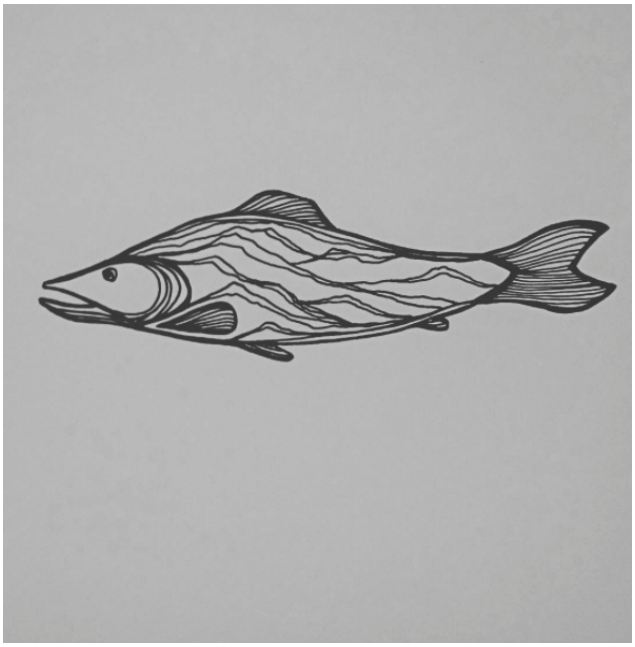
As with the word survivance, the use of comic holotrope here is done not as a neologism in the digital realm, but infused with a "beyond meaning" or "greater meaning" (Purdy 117). This is an attempt to (re)code the comic holotrope of survivance into digital spaces, thinking about realm emergences: highly imitative realms with their own agency.

The comic holotrope within this world also incorporates that there are actors within the game that are not human: glitches, and AI moving the NPC in unexpected or seemingly counterproductive ways. Temporal plasticity occurs on multiple levels, causing shifts in relations and intimacies. The game pushes certain questions: what other intimacies get clipped when we focus on human ones? What happens when we recenter affective intimacies on the nonhuman?

9. end as beginning—survivance into resurgence

> "The lie, the great American lie that we have been exterminated by the colossus of the North has been uncovered… Decolonization is all around us. My work could not exist outside this context, nor would I want to write in any other."

(Haunani-Kay Trask, "Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of Decolonization")



There is no neat conclusion here. As this realm and these concepts (re)code in new emergences, I close our journey together with a look towards current and future projects, which promise to take these ideas even further and deeper. There is more here than can be articulated by the written word. As Vizenor notes, social scientists often become fixated on terms, articulations, definitions—which cuts many kinnections that help shape these works in intangible ways.

While it is important to attempt to note some of these potentials and articulations, I want to close with the images above, thinking of them as world (re)mapping, allowing us "to see that the map is an open one and the ideological and material relationships it produces are still in process" (Goeman 38). The first image is of a game interface as Turtle Island, designed by Elizabeth LaPensée, for the Indigenous languages singing game Singuistics developed by Pinnguaq. The second is by Lianne Charlie, who created gyó/Salmon in connection with learning traditional salmon relational practices in her home territory. Both women are phenomenal digital artists and Indigenous scholars who push, what we assume to be, ones and zeros, thinking of the spaces between them as relational practices, engaging with multiple realms and materialities to

(re)code digital images and spaces, embodying kinnections and the responsibilities those kinnections entail.

Several younger and older Iñupiat community members refer to *Never Alone* as a seed, a story which can unfold further (as it has for generations). As with any seed, they need care to flourish into emergences, which may take route/root in multiple spaces. From a polar-bear guard to a Basque-American currently writing alongside Kānaka Maoli ‘ohana hanai in Hawai’i, tracing these threads is not meant to exclude others, nor preclude their unfolding elsewhere, but to highlight how *Never Alone* as (re)coded holotrope moves far beyond ‘preserving a culture’ or ‘saving’ a people. It also offers future lines of flight for thinking about (re)coded comic holotropes of resurgence.

As the Iñupiaq believe, this story is transformative. It deepens kinnections: story and practices of interconnectedness and deep relations form trans-indigenous patterning across human and non-human worlds. To articulate this further—especially how the liveliness of the game interplays with the concepts of (re)mapping, kinnection, and survivance—I close with two quotes from Amy Fredeen:

> I grew up hearing some of Our traditional stories, but not fully aware of the values imbedded in those stories. Being a part of the team that made this amazing game has been a gift. I have reconnected with stories long forgotten, and have been able to realize how important storytelling is for passing on wisdom and values.

She invites us to think of stories as alreadycoded in multiple ways: having numerous layers of meanings that are embedded, unfurling in new-yet-familiar ways as they are (re)mapped and (re)coded in different realms. Within this unfurling are depended kinnections—experiencing places and ties in visual and aural kinetic environments and networks within networks, expressed through *Never Alone*’s comic holotrope: a holotrope of survivance and perhaps (invitational) resurgence of indigenous futurities. As Fredeen succinctly explains it: “It’s not one way of seeing things, it’s one way of knowing you’re connected to everything.”

Notes

[1] Richa Nagar described this process in her colloquium, Political Science Dept. UH Mānoa 3.11.16

[2] *Emergence* here is infused with deeper meaning by Jon Goldberg-Hiller and Noenoe Silva in their Political Science Colloquium at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa on 3.21.15. They

articulate emergence as the shoots of the ancestors: new, but of the same stalk. They engage with this concept (rather than rhizome) to maintain earthiness of these connections and recognize indigenous connections and contributions to this way of thinking.

[3] The Parents' Guide for the game suggests several ways to co-play with children and adults of various ages and gaming experience.

[4] O'Neill noted, when making the game, they looked at how many games featured male and female lead characters, and decided on Nuna to help restore balance to that area.

[5] This multi-temporal story-within-story-within story is unlocked as one of the cultural insights, fitting with the idea of comic holotrope outlined in the fourth section of this paper.

[6] Lacan cautions against clinging "to the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatsoever" (from "Sign, Symbol, Imagery").

[7] I have been musing over whether these could all be seen as aspects of the same comic holotrope voice/4th character.

[8] I note here there are many overlaps, and much more writing to be done on the intersections of the two concepts within Indigenous digital spaces.

Works Cited

Allen, Chadwick. *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*. U of Minnesota P, 2006.

Doxtator, Deborah. "Inclusive and Exclusive Perceptions of Difference: Native and Euro Based Concepts of Time, History, Change." *Decentring the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500– 1700*.U of Toronto P, 2001.

Galloway, Alexander R. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. U of Minnesota P, 2006.

Gaertner, David. "How Should I Play These?: Media and Remediation in Never Alone." ILSA, 31 May 2016, https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/21/how-should-i-play-these-media-and-remediation-in-never-alone/. Accessed 10 August 2016

---."Never Alone Panelists, Congress 2016." ILSA, 31 May 2016, https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/31/the-panelists/. Accessed 10 August 2016

Goeman, Mishuana. *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.

Little Bear, Leroy. "Foreword." *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence.* Clear Light Publishers, 2000.

L'Hirondelle, Cheryl. "Codetalkers Recounting Signals of Survival." *Coded Territories*. U of Calgary P. 2014.

Loft, Steven. "Mediacosmology." *Coded Territories*. U of Calgary P. 2014.

McLoud, Neal, ed. *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*. Wilfred Laurier U P, 2014.

"Meet Our Cultural Ambassadors" *Never Alone Game*, 2014, www.neveralonegame.com. Accessed 10 Apr. 2016

Never Alone. Upper One Games. 2014.

Purdy, John L. *Writing Indian, Native Conversations*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2009.

Shilliam, Robbie. *The Black Pacific: Anti-colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011.

TallBear, Kim. *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.

Trask, Haunani-Kay. "Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of Decolonization." *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1999.

Tuck, Eve and Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández."Curriculum, Replacement, and Settler Futurity." *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2013, pp. 72-89.

Vizenor, Gerald. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance.* Lincoln: U of Nebraska P,1999.

Wark, McKenzie. *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene.* Verso Books, 2015.

How do *you* say watermelon?

JEANETTE BUSHNELL, JONATHAN TOMHAVE, TYLOR PRATHER

We borrowed words from Thurman Hester's sharing of Choctaw language and pedagogy for our title, "How do *you* say watermelon?" The elder's question exemplified Choctaws' respectful teaching while encouraging the student to find and understand relationships. Similarly, this paper presents the position and process of post*indian* gamer by centralizing experience, ours and the readers' as conveyed via story. Our story of post*indian* gamers grounds itself in our experiences playing and learning about Sla'hal and other games played on Turtle Island prior to the colonizing invasion that began in 1492. We come as colonizer educated, indian educated, and *indian* educated post*indians*, using Vizenor's vernacular. We come with indigenous lived experiences and recipients of teachings by indigenous elders of our ancestral nations as well as elders who are local to our current living place of Lushootseed speaking peoples of the Salish Sea. We name ourselves Post*indian* Gamers and Turtle Islanders—aləshək s'chəgwutsidabsh in local Lushootseed language. We call upon our experiences and the experiences of those who came before us. Our actions include creating and visioning a future of survivance gaming and games of survivance. We strive to bring historic philosophies of Turtle Islanders to contemporary gaming with an enactment of such philosophies in game goals, mechanics, aesthetics, language, value.

This paper has four separately styled sections to create varied opportunities for readers to experience how very old indigenous games, particularly Sla'hal, inform contemporary game development (Adams et al.; Tomhave; Bushnell). The first section, most similar to works written within the Westernized academy, shares stories about Sla'hal and briefly describes the details of Sla'hal's game play. This section then employs Vizenor's theoretical writings to elucidate connections between historical indigenous games, as we have experienced them and learned about them from our elders, and understandings about the nature of our world that comes from the same elders plus selected writings by indigene within the Westernized academy. The second

section is a colored diagram that portrays one of our Vizenored understandings of contemporary indigenous games and gamers. In the third section, we offer an indigenous categorization strategy for tagging and identifying games. Finally, we share how our actual analysis of games occurs in conversation.

SLA'HAL ORIGINS

Turtle Islanders play a game known here, around the Salish Sea, as Sla'hal or Bone Games (see Figure 1). About forty years ago a full set of Sla'hal game pieces were found alongside mastodon bones. Buried in the muck of a cattail marsh were half a mastodon's worth of bones. In one of the ribs was the tip of a bone point made from a different mastodon. The other half of the mastodon's bones were eighty feet away, upslope in a camp area on drier ground. The camp bones were broken and scattered among scorched rocks indicating butchering and cooking. Archeologists could see the 6,700-year-old volcanic ash layer from Mt. Mazama and subsequent carbon dating of the deeper area where the bones were laid, revealing an age of 13,800 years. In this sediment the set of Sla'hal pieces were found (Gustafson; Waters et al.; Grayson and Meltzer). If you are a student of archeology, you may be scratching your head about now since there are other stories that say human people did not arrive here that long ago. If you know Turtle Islander stories, you'll know that this was just about the time that the Pleistocene epoch ice sheets moved off the land and human people were able to move back north as they followed the retreating ice.

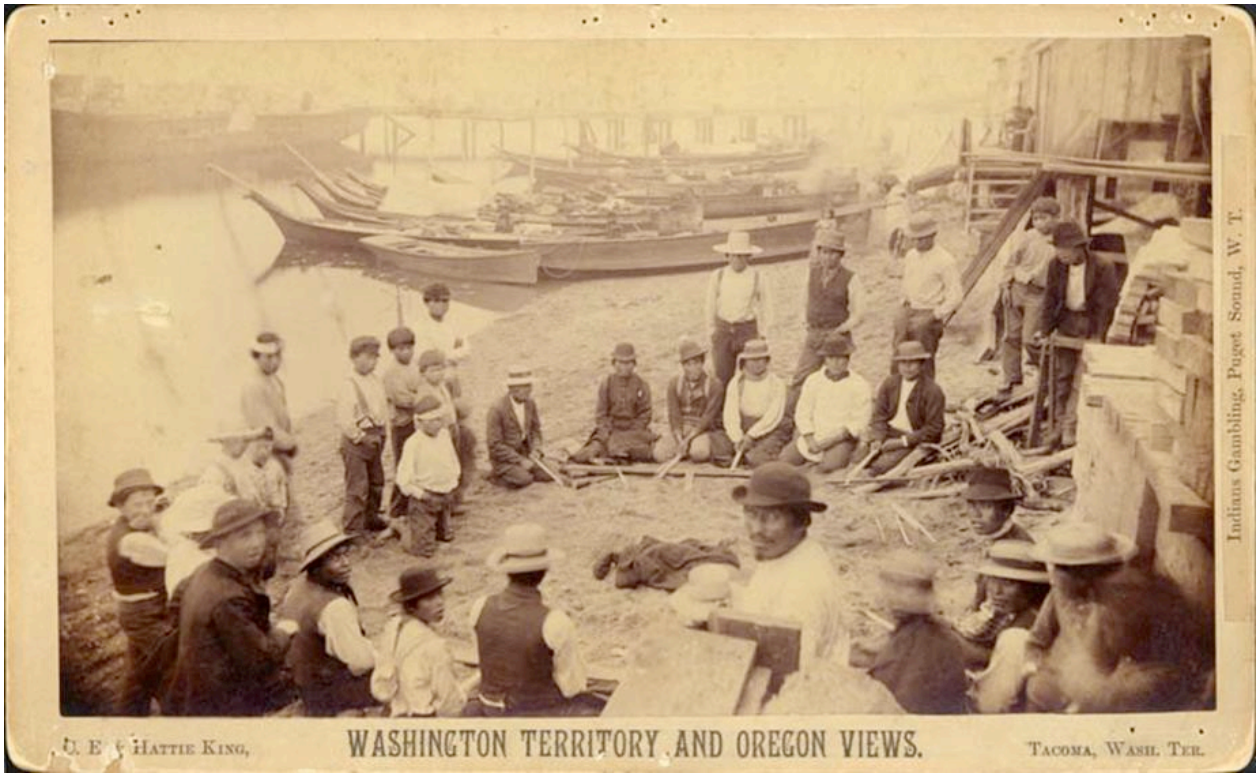


Figure 1. Sla'hal being played on a Salish Sea beach in 1884.

A story that echoes from the past is that Sla'hal began as a contest between animal people and human people vying for the win to be hunters with the loss relegating those to be hunted. Human people won that first encounter and with it they received the right to eat animals for sustenance and to use the animal people's songs for guardian spirit songs. Sla'hal also was used to replace war and bloodshed among indigenous nations. The story of Sla'hal goes something like this:

> Al tudi tuhok! A long time ago! All the animal people and all the human people could easily talk with each other. Animals were the first people and were given knowledge on how to live. Human people came later and were told to observe and learn from animals. Human people were told to live within the rules of interrelatedness with their world so that balance would be maintained and there would be abundance for all.
>
> After a while, human people stopped following the animals' teachings which led to anger, hate, and war. The land was smitten with hardship and lack of food. Human

people began to starve and their bones could be seen scattered around. They became easy prey of the animal people. Eventually there were only a few human elders remaining who could remember the blissful times when humans and animals lived harmoniously and followed common rules. The human elders called all the remaining people and animals together for a truce.

They all came together but they argued and argued and could not settle on a solution. Eventually they went to an old woman. A very, very old woman with deeply wrinkled skin. She told the animal people and the human people that they could settle their dispute with a game called Sla'hal. She told them how Sla'hal worked and that the team who ended up with all the counting sticks could decide the dispute the way they wanted. This decision would be binding and the dispute would end without further argument.

She told them how to make two sets of bones that could be hidden in a fist. In each set, one bone was unmarked and one was marked. Each side began the contest with an equal number of counting sticks.

The animal people and the human people began. The sticks went back and forth but neither side could win them all. The animal people went back to the old woman and asked for help. She gave them a song to sing while they were hiding the bones. The song helped the animal people to hide the bones from the human people.

Now the human people and the animal people played Sla'hal again. Now the animal people were winning. They would sing their song and hide the bones. They taunted the human people. "I'm going to eat that one first." "That one over there looks tasty." Eventually the animal people won all but two of the counting sticks.

Now the human people were very frightened. They were losing and they did not want to get eaten by the animal people. The human people went to the old woman. The old woman took pity on the human people and gave them a song also.

Now the human people and the animal people played Sla'hal again. The human people sang their song. They sang and hid the bones and they began winning the sticks back. The animal people were frightened. They eventually lost all the counting sticks to the human people. When they lost the last stick, they jumped up and ran in all directions. They hid all over the land so that the human people had search for them

when they hunted, for the human people had won the game and made the decision that they would be hunters and the animal people the hunted.

And that is the story of Sla'hal.

SLA'HAL ARTIFACTS AND MECHANICS

The materials of Sla'hal are easily crafted or created by human people:

- Two pairs of small bones that can be hidden in a person's hand.
- Each set has one marked and one unmarked bone.
- Historically and typically these are from a foreleg of a deer.
- Counting sticks—about 20 so each team has 10.
- Kick stick.
- Drum—hand drums or log/plank in front of each team.
- Sla'hal Songs

Sla'hal game mechanics include observing, thinking, moving, singing, feeling, and focused perceptions. Two members of the 'hiding' team hide a bone in each hand—one is marked and one is plain. The objective of the game is to identify which bone is in which hand.

Sla'hal is played in teams and begins with members of each team facing each other in a line. Often played on sandy beaches, each team might have a log in front of them to beat on as a drum. Just as often now, players are sitting in chairs with hand drums.

Each team begins play with tally, or counting sticks—usually ten. Teams each choose a leader whose first action is to play for being the first hiding team. Each leader hides one marked and one plain bone in their hands and the other leader identifies which bone is in which hand. Whichever leader guesses the plain bone twice wins the kick stick and the right to be first at hiding.

The hiding team begins by singing and then the team leader indicates two members who will hold the bones. Holders hide their hands as they put one bone in each hand, moving and using the team songs to minimize the guessing team's ability to identify which bone ends up in which hand.

Sla'hal songs are accompanied by drumming, either hand drums or sticks pounding on logs or boards lying on the ground in front of players.

The leader on the guessing team indicates a pointer for the team. The pointer's task is to

identify in which hands the plain bones are held. Each time the pointer cannot identify the placement of the bones, a tally stick is given from the guessing team to the hiding team. When the pointer correctly identifies where the plain bones are, the bones are handed over to the guessing team, which then becomes the hiding team and the roles are reversed. The game ends when one team has lost all their tally sticks. Historically, the teams included entire villages competing with each other. The game has been known to last over four days and nights of continuous playing.

PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPININGS OF HISTORICAL INDIGENOUS GAMES

We hear our stories. We live our stories. We reproduce our stories. We represent our stories. Our stories construct us and we construct them. They continue to be told as if they ride the ripples of a stone cast into water by those who came before. We hear that Sla'hal is played by human people all across Turtle Island. We hear that all human players use the same game pieces and the same rules. Stories that we hear from Turtle Islanders are in agreement that Sla'hal is a method for non-violent conflict resolution whose outcome is binding. Sla'hal is also a way for human people to have fun, to laugh and sing together. Some call it gambling—and it can be—with high stake rewards. Some call it a guessing game—but they would be the neophytes. Some call it a contest of spirit, of power, of spirit power, a communal encounter of wits, endurance, and remembering. Sla'hal brings us together in a communal contest of shared rhythms and additive spirit power.

Communal stories ripple and echo through time (McLeod). Stories of Sla'hal teach us to settle differences, sing together and live with fluidity. They teach us to honor agreements and live in community with all peoples and elements of our world. Communal stories come to us from intentional stone tosses that mobilize the unseen world, the spirit world, the dark matter of the universe. Communal stories teach us how to grow in our understanding of interconnections and tap into shared connections with our spirit world. As stones thrown into a lake cause ripples, so our ancestors' stories echo through time.

In the playing of Sla'hal there is no divide between natural worlds, spiritual worlds, cultural worlds, and game worlds. As an embodiment of an indigenous philosophy of holism or holistic thinking, the playing of Sla'hal calls upon an entire understanding of reality, wherein human people are expected to do their part to maintain balance (Cajete). In Lushootseed there is

a word—syehub—that means a traditional old story or teaching from our ancestors about the world before it was changed to become as it is now(Bates; Hilbert, 1980). Sla'hal stories come from that ancient time. Sla'hal stories guide human people to maintain relationships with each other and with animal peoples. They teach how to use songs and rhythms to enhance understandings. They elucidate the importance of nature, of physicality, of spirit. Sla'hal stories represent and reflect the cultural ideals of joining together, of resolving conflicts peaceably, of utilizing all resources without separation into mutually exclusive categories of natural or spiritual or cognitive or rhythmic.

The game of Sla'hal is an organized contest in which players compete to achieve an objective with agreed upon rules and shared metaphors. Sla'hal players' shared metaphors, values, philosophies, and explanations of reality are indigenous and different from those of the colonizers (Deloria). Indigenous realities often stress the importance of being relational, multi-contextual, interdependent independence, fluidly balanced, community focused, subjectively experienced, and creatively cognizant of complexity. Sla'hal and other indigenous games strengthened such values, built community, and honed individual skills. As such, they facilitated sustainability(Cajete). As noted above, the mechanics and playing of Sla'hal integrates song, physical exercise, leadership, ritual, political philosophy, mythic story, and community cohesion. Sla'hal offered a place for playing out social issues of society with expectations of fairplay and teamwork. While Sla'hal has high-stakes winning and losing, it also values individual players' skill development and personal expression in a collaborative milieu.

Discussions of indigenous gaming and play could hardly be complete without undertaking at least a cursory role of the ultimate native gamers—Coyote, Raven, Blue Jay, Mink, Spider, and other 'trickster' figures. As Vizenor's comic holotrope, Coyote problematizes the world and sets communal expectations on their collective contingent heads. Indigenous games tap into a creative play of the universe encouraging players to practice the art of Coyote—fluidly interconnected tangents yielding innumerable possibilities at maintaining sustainable, cyclical balances. Success requires enactment of communal integrity with close observations that yield internalized respect for everything, their places, and most importantly their connections within the unified whole where anomalies do not exist except as prompts for ponderings of how they fit in. No thing pre-exists separately, but it is a boundary project of relationships where boundaries can shift and provisionally materialize during interactions. Games help construct the shared

world of meaning, all the while having fun at creative play. Always celebrating life.

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS GAMES and GAMERS

N.D.N. Player Research Group strives to be post*indian* in our observing, critiquing, and developing games. As social and physical scientists, our Vizenoresque concepts of *indian*, survivance, post*indian,* transmotion and games are pictured in Figure 2. For the visual processors and learners our full-color diagram elucidates a certain Turtle Islander and Post*indian* Gamer transmotion showing various connections of indigenous gamers and games. Turtle Islanders *(green box)* were avid gamers with one game in particular being played by hundreds of nations—Sla'hal, or Bone Game *(light green 'button')*. Therefore, when we started development of our own first game, *Potlatch*, we went to local elders to learn about the game that dates back to at least 13,000 years ago in our area. LaCrosse was also played by Turtle Islanders prior to 1492 but not in our region.

1492 was chosen as a number that represents a certain change process that occurred, and is occurring, on Turtle Island. It represents a racialization of Turtle Islanders that included the assault on our sovereign citizenships as *indians* were redefined to be ethnic minorities within a colonial project (Deloria). After 1492, the European newcomers *(grey box)* tried several ways to colonize the place and the peoples *(grey arrow)* but they were met with constant resistances with what Vizenor refers to as survivance *(light green lightning bolt)*, "an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry; a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry; an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victrimry; a presence; and, a practice" (Vizenor).

Colonization leads to at least two groups—*indians* and Survivors *(yellow circle)*. "The *indian* is a simulation, the absence of natives" with no native ancestors or stories (Vizenor). Survivors are those who have completely succumbed to colonization. We recognize Survivors and *indians* as dominated absences of natives who reproduce colonization in games *(yellow 'button')*. We associate these peoples with colonizer games having colonizer philosophical underpinnings with perhaps a skinning of 'native.' Games such as *Age of Empire*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *Civilization*.

Resistances and survivance yields *Postindian* Warrior *(light green circle)*. *Postindian* are those who "must waver over the aesthetic ruins of '*indian'* simulations" (Vizenor). They are

contemporary indigene who actively resist and reconceptualize those imagined identities placed on us by colonizers during the past five hundred years. The border between *indians* and *postindians* we find to be fluid and shimmering with interconnected influences. Identities and positions are not fixed, particularly when *postindian* gamers *(lavender circle)* find themselves with few choices for games.

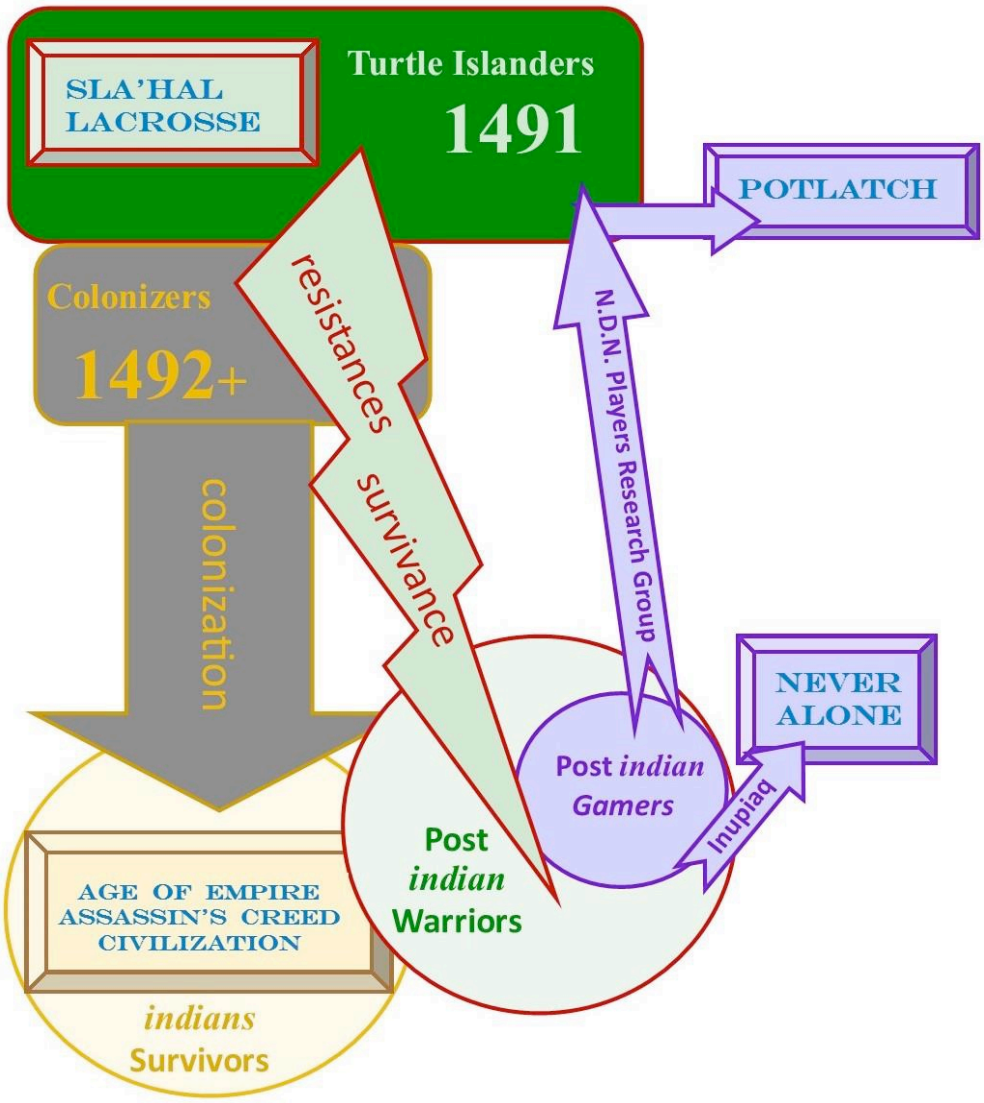


Figure 2. Post*indian* Gamer Transmotion

From this position of survivance, Post*indian* game developers have found actions *(lavender arrows)* to bring their gaming into better alignment with their indigenous philosophies.

Perhaps the most well-known are the Inupiaq storytellers who developed the game about survivance, *Never Alone (lavender 'button')*. Without the same strong connection to place and old stories of the Inupiaq game developers, N.D.N. Players Research Group utilized indigenous and westernized research methods to better understand local histories, philosophies and games. From these knowledges we developed *Potlatch: A Game About Economics*. Survivance, political strategy, and game sovereignty shape the game's mechanics around indigenous economic systems and philosophies utilizing historical actions and values about resources and relationships. Survivance informs Turtle Islander art, art motifs, colors, and shapes (see Figure 3). *Potlatch: A Game About Economics* is an educational survivance game that enacts the political strategy of teaching about an economic system indigenous to people of the Salish Sea region using local indigenous art and language. *Potlatch* is survivance using political strategy of game sovereignty to teach all students, with particular intent to teach students and teachers within Washington State's K-12 "Since Time Immemorial" curriculum on local native history. Bringing in Anishinaabe pedagogy to layer survivance actions, *Potlatch* models accretive thinking with the basic level card game informing future level board games with purposeful intent of mastering knowledge about peoples of the Salish Sea region (Gross).

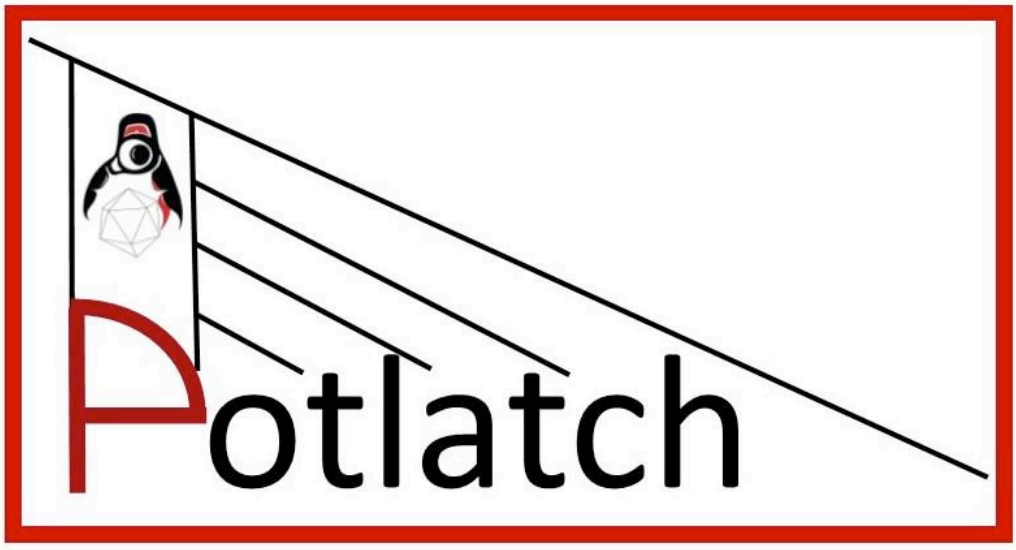


Figure 3. Potlatch Card Back

INDIGENOUS GAME TAGS

N.D.N Players Research Group developed a system for tagging games that reflects our understandings of indigeneity. As Post*indian* gamers, we claim the power of self-definition with our tagging menus. N.D.N. Players Indigenous Game Tags represent a way of organizing games within indigenous philosophies. These tags come from our observations of what is not used as descriptors during our experiences of gameplay. Our tags create a beginning system that can be expanded, as others add tags that are meaningful to them. We attempted to develop a very inclusive list for all parts and stages of game concepts, development, marketing, and playing. Most game retailers sort and organize their games by genre Types. Genres consist of categories created by the gaming industry. These are in place so that when a game is labeled with one, consumers, developers, marketers, etc., all know what sort of similar mechanic challenges and game play can be expected. Genres tend to reflect less on content and more on game mechanics. Some of the largest and most recognizable are MMO, RPG, FPS, RTS, TBS, and so on (complete list included in Appendix B).

The digital distribution platform, Steam, and other game marketers utilize a Tag system. These tags are words or short phrases that offer as a whole, a more in-depth presentation of a game than just the genre. While many tags are also genres, the tag system allows developers and the gaming community a way to communicate a game's strong and weak points through a short list of words and the other games associated with them. For instance, while not a genre, “Female protagonist” is a tag that conveys that the game has a lead female. Other tags on the same game, such as “atmospheric”, will paint the picture of the games as more about the game world than the fact that it's a Parkour FPS. Tags offer input into the content of the game where genre does not (see Appendix A for a full listing of N.D.N Players Indigenous Game Tags and Genres).

N.D.N. Players Research Group’s system of game tags better convey the indigenous content of games. These tags include the added categories of Indigenous Content, Characters/Characters of Indigenous Games, Indigenous Stories, Indigenous Knowledges, Indigenous Histories past/Contemporary, and Poor Representation of Indigenous People, Culture and Histories (General).

Currently, game tags are organized by the industry thus: Game Genre: Industry standard genres

Genre Subtypes: industry standard sub genres

Play types: how gamers interact with the game

Game Description: tags added by the community not fitting with genre/sub-genre categories.

Game Characters: tags relating to prominent characters in the game

Development: tags relating to the game studio or dev process

Using the above system on *Potlatch: A Game About Economics* developed by N.D.N. Players Research Group, one would find:

Game Genre: Card Game, Strategy Game, Simulation, Indigenous Game

Genre Subtypes: Resource Management, Educational

Play types: Cooperative Play

Game Description: Indigenous Mechanics, Indigenous Philosophic Values, Indigenous Societal Values, Indigenous Economics, Indigenous Culture, Indigenous Art, Indigenous Education, Indigenous Language (Lushootseed), Potlatch, Coast Salish, Puget Sound

Development: Indi, Indigenous Developers, Indigenous Designers, Indigenous Artist, Postindian Gamer

Below are specific examples of how games are currently tagged by Steam and how N.D.N. Players Research Group would tag them from an indigenous perspective. We ask that you read these tags as if you were considering purchasing or playing the games mentioned. The first game, *Never Alone*, is considered an exemplar of an indigenous game. The other three have some indigenous elements.

Steam tags that are currently applied to *Never Alone Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*:

Game Genre: Action, Adventure

Genre Subtypes: Platformer, Puzzle, Side Scroller, Puzzle-Platformer

Play types: Local Co-Op, Local Multiplayer, Co-op, Singleplayer

Game Description: Atmospheric, Cute, Great Soundtrack, Story Rich, Casual, Short, 2.5D, 2D

Game Characters: Female Protagonist

Development: Indie

N.D.N. Players tags applied to *Never Alone Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*:

Game Description: Indigenous Game, Indigenous Story, Indigenous Setting Artic, Iñupiaq, Indigenous Artwork (Scrimshaw), Indigenous Language (Inupiat), Indigenous Culture, Indigenous Histories, Indigenous Tribal Representation (Iñupiaq)

Game Characters: Indigenous Characters, Indigenous Protagonist, Indigenous Female Protagonist, Indigenous Protagonist Non-Human, Indigenous Characters Non-Human

Development: Indigenous Collaboration, Indigenous Writers, Postindian Gamer

Steam tags that are currently applied to *Assassin's Creed 3:*

Game Genre: Adventure, Action, Action-Adventure

Genre Subtypes: Sandbox, Stealth

Play types: Singleplayer, Multiplayer, Controller

Game Description: Open World, Third Person, Assassin, Parkour, Historical, America, Atmospheric, Hunting, Story Rich, Alternate History, Conspiracy, Casual

Tags Added By N.D.N. Players:

Game Description: Colonial Histories, Indigenous Histories, Indigenous Setting North East, Mohawk, Indigenous Alternate Histories, Indigenous Language (Mohawk), Indigenous Tribal representation (Mohawk), Skinned With Indigene, White Man's Indian, Redfacing

Game Characters: Indigenous Characters, Indigenous Protagonist

Development: Indigenous Collaboration

Steam tags that are currently applied to *Civilization I-V, IV*:

Game Genre: Strategy, Simulation

Genre Subtypes: Grand Strategy, Turn-Based Strategy, Turn-Based, 4X

Play types: Multiplayer, Singleplayer, Co-op

Game Description: Historical, Hex Grid, Replay Value, Moddable, Tactical, Economy, Diplomacy, Great Soundtrack, Classic, Touch-Friendly, Education

Tags Added By N.D.N. Players:

Game Description: Colonial Histories, Indigenous Representation (Aztec, Polynesian, Inca, Iroquois, Maya, Shoshone) Indigenous Colonialism, Indigenous Languages (Nahuatl, Quechuan, Mohawk, Yucatec, Shoshone, Hawaiian), Skinned With Indigene, Redfacing, White Man's Indian, Assimilation

Game Characters: Indigenous Characters

Steam tags that are currently applied to *Age of Empires I-III:*

Game Genre: Strategy, Simulation, Adventure, Action

Genre Subtypes: RTS, Real-Time, Real-Time with Pause, Open World, Resource Management

Play types: Single Player, Online Co-Op, Multiplayer, Co-op

Game Description: City Builder, Historical, Base-Building, War, Classic, Military, Building

Tags Added By N.D.N. Players:

Game Description: Colonial Histories, Indigenous Representation (Aztec, Inca, Iroquois, Maya, Sioux) Indigenous Colonialism, Skinned With Indigene, Redfacing, White Man's Indian, Assimilation

Game Characters: Indigenous Characters

Our intent is that game purchasers and players will get a fuller understanding of how each game interfaces with indigeneity, and with the addition of N.D.N. Players tags. Our system can be both a marketing strategy and an educational tool.

SURVIVANCE GAMES IN CONVERSATION

Lastly, is an edited transcription based on a recorded podcast among the members of N.D.N. Players Research Group. Such storytelling and discussion represent one way Post*indian* gamers do their work. Similar to the story of indigenist knowledge by Adams, Wilson, Heavy Head, and Gordon in *Ceremony at a Boundary Fire,* it is short example of the process by which N.D.N. Players Research Group conducts indigenist research and analysis of games. The game under discussion is *Never Alone Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*.

Elvis Foxtrot = EF, Charlotte Tremendous Coho = CT, and Zero = 0

CT: *Never Alone*, is it merely an entertaining, niche game? Or is it an act of survivance?
EF: Um, while it is the highest selling indigenous videogame to date, if you really think about it, it's just a simple side scroller, admittedly a very nice looking one.
CT: Hmm, could it be the content?

0: Well, reviews of the game have praised it for its cultural content and its protagonists, a young woman and a snow fox. Also, the game has been criticized for its buggy gameplay.
EF: Hmm, what about the gameplay?
CT: Perhaps it's because you can only succeed through cooperative gameplay?
0: I don't think so, there have been several games, such as the Lego side scroller series have puzzles and areas that can only be solved or accessed by certain characters because of their special abilities.
EF: Hmm, if it isn't because of its platform, content, or gameplay, what makes *Never Alone* an act of survivance? Or, is it even an act of survivance?
0: Well, there have been a number of mainstream games that have American Indians integrated at various levels in it, such as *Assassin's Creed 3*, the *Civilization* series, and *Age of Empires* to name those that come to mind. But in each of those games, each are just skinned in various degrees with surface and sometimes trivial Indigenousness.
CT: Can you provide some examples?
0: Uh sure. In *Age of Empires*, American Indians are represented. Of course though, they are Plains Indians. Also, as you progress along the technology tree, you lose whatever imagined cultural distinctiveness and well, become just like everyone else. It's like that the only way someone who isn't European can develop is, well, is develop like a European. And although in *Assassin's Creed 3* you get to play a character who is half Mohawk and speaks his language, it still is set within a Euro-English/American context.
CT: Hmm, isn't *Never Alone* also just a game that is just skinned with Indigenous? I mean, we've established that aside from its cultural context, there really isn't anything notable about the game.
0: Um, well, I think that one could say that. Mainly because I wonder who is playing the game and why? My concern is how often we are exoticized and eroticized in pop culture.
CT: That's the danger, isn't it? Well, regarding video games, what can we, and tribes do?
EF: Um, when potlatch was deemed illegal, what did the tribes do?
CT: They held them in secret and started using money.
EF: Why money?
CT: Well, traditional potlatch items were confiscated. But everyone has and uses money.
0: Yeah, basically, they incorporated a colonial item as a surrogate for traditional items, like

blankets, bentwood boxes, and such.

EF: So, what happened here is that what the Coast Salish Peoples did here, just like all colonized people did, was to hide, go underground, and use deception to misdirect.

CT and 0: Yeah.

EF: In other words, they took control of what they could, just like how the Hopi did when Edward Curtis decided to film the Snake Dance. To protect it, the Hopi did it in reverse.

0: Pretty much.

CT: But were those acts of survival or survivance?

EF: Survivance.

CT: Interesting, why?

EF: Well, um, although Curtis and his ilk felt the need to document the Vanishing Indian, as authentic as possible, we know that there have been acts of resistance to counter this.

0: The question is, when is resistance a survival act, and when is it a survivance act?

EF: Well, getting back to skinning, we have seen several games that have Native elements to them. Some, like *Never Alone* are quite beautiful. Others like some of the fighting characters in the *Killer Instinct* and *Street Fighter* series, well, not so much. Anyway, I think it becomes an act of survivance when the Native people in question are not cultural content advisors, or are just cultural content creators. I think it becomes survivance when what is presented and shared is controlled by the Nation in question. That it is they who deem what is appropriate to share with the rest of the world, and not the colonizer.

CT: What you've just identified is The Power to Name, and that stems from Muted Group Theory.

EF: Really? Cool!

0: Um, I'm not familiar with either of those.

EF: OK, well although Muted Group Theory has been adopted in Communication, Feminist Studies, and others, its origin is from Cultural Anthropology. According to British Anthropologist Edwin Ardener (1975), language between dominant and subaltern groups is unbalanced. Although he argued that men have mainly produced the ideas and knowledge of the world.

CT: I find that EXTREMELY problematic.

EF: Agreed. But I think he was coming up with an explanation on why we have hardly ever

heard of women accomplishments.

CT: To add to that, Dale Spender (1980) it's not just ideas and knowledge, it's the construction and use of language itself that constructs a reality that is masculine. Take for example gender pronouns. For a long time, the proper pronoun to use in writing was he, him, etc.

0: Or, you know, mankind instead of humanity, and man and woman.

EF: Or, that for many people, the imagined default for Americans, is White Americans even though we should hyphenate them with Euro-American, or European-Americans.

CT: Right. Furthermore, Cheris Kramarae identified seven parts of this process:

> 1. Women have more difficulty expressing themselves than men have. A common female experience is to lack a word for a feminine experience because men, who do not share the experience, have developed a term for it.
> 2. Women understand men's meaning more easily than men understand women's.
> 3. Women have created their own means of expression outside [the] dominant male system.
> 4. Women tend to express more dissatisfaction about communication than men express.
> 5. Women often make efforts to change the dominant rules of communication in order to get around or to resist conventional roles.
> 6. Traditionally, women have been less likely to coin new words that become popular in society at large.
> 7. And, the things women find humorous are quite different from the things men find humorous.

Plus, this is not something that is biologically determined, it is an extremely uneven power relationship.

0: Cool!

EF: Very cool!

CT: Well, I don't know about you but I'm getting hungry.

0: Me too.

EF: Let's eat.

[Group breaks up to eat dinner.]

CONCLUSION

How do *you* say indigenous gaming? N.D.N. Players Research Group says it by finding connections between historical indigenous games, stories, and philosophies and contemporary games that may have indigenous elements. Vizenor's indigenous scholarship includes theories and language that offer a logical lens to clarify our work but we acknowledge that it is far from a complete platform for analysis. Much of our work has a much stronger education focus that is not evident with this limited scope.

Understanding the roles and mechanics of our ancestral games was a starting place for our discussion on developing games of survivance and survivance games as strategically managed sovereign spaces within our colonial and indigenous cultures. Bringing forward indigenous values into our game mechanics, art, language, and goals is how we enact our sovereignty. As a team of scholars, players, and developers we have attempted to help your ponderings as you play and develop indigenous games.

Works Cited

Adams, Dawn Hill, et al. 2015. *Ceremony at a Boundary Fire: a story of Indigenist Knowledge.* Sydney eScholarship Repository, 2015. http://hdl.handle.net/2123/13689

Bates, Dawn E., et. al. *Lushootseed Dictionary*. U of Washington P, 1994.

Bushnell, Jeanette. *"I Can Think of A Lot of Stories": Shared Knowledges, Indigenous Methodology and Purposeful Conversations with Sixteen Native Women.* U of Washington P, 2009.

Cajete, Gregory. *Spirit of the Game: An Indigenous Wellspring*. Kivaki P, 2005.

Deloria, Vine, Jr. *God is red*. Dell, 1972.

Desilets, P., et. al. *Assassin's Creed.* Ubisoft, Gameloft, and Akella, 2010.

Grayson, Donald K. and David J. Melt. "Revisiting Paleoindian Exploitation of Extinct North American Mammals." *Journal of Archaeological Science*, vol. 56, 2015, pp. 177-193.

Gross, Lawrence. Some Elements of American Indian Pedagogy from an Anishiniaabe Perspective. *American Indian Culture & Research Journal,* vol. 34, no. 2, 2010, pp. 11-26.

Gustafson, Carl E., Delbert W. Gilbow, and Richard D. Daugherty. 1979. "The Manis Mastodon Site: Early Man on the Olympic Peninsula." *Canadian Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 3, 1979, pp. 157-164.

Hester, Thurman Lee, Jr. "Choctaw conceptions of the excellence of the self, with implications for education." *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, edited by Anne Waters, Blackwell, 2004, pp. 182-187.

Hilbert, Vi. *Haboo: Lushootseed Literature in English*. Lushootseed P, 1908.

McLeod, Neal. *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary times*. Purich, 2007.

Prather, T., et. al. *Potlatch: A Game About Economics* . Players Research Group, 2016.

Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re- Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011.

Spender, Dale. *Man Made Language.* Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1980.

Half of Anything. Directed by Jonathan S. Tomhave, performances by Christina Entrekin, Deborah Bassett, Sherman Alexie, and John Trudell, 2005.

Upper One Games. *Never Alone.*E-Line Media, 2014.

Vizenor, Gerald. *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindain Survivance*. U of Nebraska P, 1994.

----. *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. U of Nebraska P, 1998.

----. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence.* U of Nebraska P, 2008.

Waters, Michael R., et. al. "Pre-Clovis Mastodon Hunting 13,800 Years Ago at the Manis Site, Washington." *Science*, vol. 334, no. 6054, 2011, pp. 351-53.

APPENDIX A: N.D.N. Players Indigenous Game Tags and Genres

Tags for Indigenous Games/ Games with Indigenous Content

1. Indigenous Game
2. Indigenous Developers
    a. Indigenous Artist
    b. Indigenous Writer
    c. Indigenous Programmer

3. Indigenous Collaboration
4. Indigenous Mechanics

Tags for Indigenous Characters/ Characters of Indigenous Games

1. Indigenous Characters
    a. Indigenous Protagonist
        i. Indigenous Protagonist Female
        ii. Indigenous Protagonist Male
        iii. Protagonist Non-human
    b. Indigenous Antagonist
        i. Indigenous Antagonist Female
        ii. Indigenous Antagonist Male
        iii. Antagonist Non-human
2. Non-binary Gender
    a. Indigenous Gender Concepts

Tags for Indigenous Stories

1. Indigenous Stories
    a. Indigenous Creation Stories
    b. Indigenized Stories
    c. Indigenous Migration Stories
    d. Indigenous Origin Stories
2. Indigenous Setting
    a. 'Skinned' with 'natural' environment
    b. Intergenerational
        i. Elders, children, etc.
    c. Specified by Region
    d. Specified by Nation
    e. Specified by Clan
    f. Specified by Ecosystem
    g. Specified by Habitat

    h. Specified by Language
3. Indigenous Fantasy / Steampunk
4. Indigenous Horror
5. Indigenous Science Fiction
6. Indigenous Futurism
7. Indigenous Clothing
8. Indigenous Artifacts
9. Indigenous Alternate Histories

Tags for Indigenous Knowledge

1. Indigenous Colonialism and Empire-building
2. Indigenous Philosophy
    a. Values
    b. Beliefs
    c. Practices
    d. Societal institutions
3. Indigenous Economy
4. Indigenous Culture
5. Indigenous Science
    a. Healing
    b. Nutrition
    c. Environment
6. Indigenous Music
    a. Instruments
    b. Vocals
    c. Songs
7. Indigenous Foods
    a. Subsistence
8. Indigenous Art
9. Indigenous Knowledge Systems
    a. Relational Epistemology

        i. Nature-culture relations
        ii. Mind-body relations
    b. Indigenous Pedagogy
    c. Indigenous Education
10. Indigenous Values
    a. Balance
11. Indigenous Politics
    a. Treaties

Tags for Indigenous Histories Past/ Contemporary

1. Contemporary Activism
2. Contemporary History
3. Genocide
4. Trauma
5. Assimilation
6. Acculturation
7. Indigenous Language
8. Colonial Histories
9. Indigenous Histories
10. Indigenous Colonialism and Empire-building
11. Indigenous Resistances
12. Indigenous Activisms
13. Post*indian* Gamer
14. Post*indian* Warrior
15. Indigenous Tribal Representation
    a. Specified by Region
    b. Specified by Nation
    c. Specified by Clan
    d. Specified by Ecosystem
    e. Specified by Habitat
    f. Specified by Language

Tags for Poor Representation of Indigenous People, Culture and Histories. (General)

1. Objectified Indigene
    a. Redfacing
    b. Whitewashing
    c. Eroticizied Indigene
    d. Exoticizied Indigene
    e. Skinned with Indigene
2. Romanticization of Indigeneity
3. White Man's Indian

APPENDIX B: Standard Game Genres

1 Action
- 1.1 Platform games
- 1.2 Shooter games
- 1.3 Fighting games and beat 'em ups

2 Action-adventure
- 2.1 Stealth game
- 2.2 Survival horror
- 2.3 Metroidvania

3 Adventure
- 3.1 Text adventures
- 3.2 Graphic adventures
- 3.3 Visual novels
- 3.4 Interactive movie
- 3.5 Real-time 3D adventures

4 Role-playing
- 4.1 Action RPG
- 4.2 MMORPG

8.4 Party game

8.5 Programming game

8.6 Logic game

8.7 Trivia game

Board game / Card game

"Please mom? Can you please download it at home?": Video Games as a Symbol of Linguistic Survivance

DAVID DENNISON LACHO & AARON LEON

Recently, there has been an increase in video games that are made by or in collaboration with Indigenous people, for example Elizabeth LaPensée's *Survivance*, Chelsea Vowel's *Idle No More: Blockade*, Minority Media's *Spirits of Spring*, and Upper One Games' *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* (*Never Alone*). Indigenous people's direct involvement in the development of these video games exemplifies how Indigenous people are in control of digital media that represents their own communities and identities. For example, *Survivance* asks players to create an expression of their own Indigeneity through lessons and quests. *Idle No More* is an RPG game that stresses cultural relevance and highlights issues that many Indigenous communities face, such as land expropriation and cultural stereotyping. *Spirits of Spring* explores an Indigenous boy's experiences of bullying. *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* invites players to explore Iñupiaq stories and life in the arctic. Within the context of the growing movement of Indigenous video games, the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn (Splatsin Teaching Centre) of the Splatsin First Nation have decided to create a video game in order to revitalize their language and culture. We are part of a research team including community members and academics who are working towards developing this video game. The video game is being developed as a platformer game that is based on Splatsin's oral stories.

As part of the game's development, a community meeting was held to discuss and play a wide range of video games in order to get the community's opinion on what makes a good video game. This meeting highlighted the importance of traditional storytelling in the community as well as the strength of story in videogames. In this paper, we examine Indigenous storytelling through the medium of video games, specifically through the game *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*. *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* exemplifies an impactful reimagining of Indigenous oral storytelling through the medium of video games. Also, using comments from the community meeting, we examine how

Indigenous video games support relationality and how technology is implicated in shaping, or shifting, iterations of traditional and ancestral ways of being of Indigenous communities, such as Splatsin. At the community meeting, the stsmamlt (children) and parents were engaged in the immersive Iñupiaq narrative of the video game *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*. During the meeting, stsmamlt, who were the players, played through the Iñupiaq narrative and interacted with the game world, while parents, who were observers, engaged with their stsmamlt and commented on the game's narrative and the reality it presented. Since the stsmamlt and parents came together and identified strongly with representations of an Indigenous group's language and culture in a videogame, we discuss how games can be a tool that supports cultural and language revitalization. In this way, a community developed video game for language revitalization can stand as a symbol of, as Leisy Thornton Wyman describes, linguistic survivance, which is "the use of language and/or translanguaging to creatively express, adapt and maintain identities under difficult or hostile circumstances" (2).

Kisima Inŋitchuŋa **and Storytelling**

Kisima Inŋitchuŋa is a game made by Upper One Games, an Indigenous-owned game studio of the Cook-Inlet Tribal Council. Several Alaska Elders contributed to building the video game. The game has single-player and cooperative functions. Throughout the gameplay, the player plays as Nuna, a young Iñupiaq girl, and also Fox, a creature that can communicate with spirits in the arctic of Alaska. Nuna and Fox must overcome many challenges together to save Nuna's village from a terrible winter storm. Players must either switch between Nuna and Fox or play cooperatively, embodying both characters to overcome various puzzles and challenges. Together, the player(s), Nuna, and the Fox encounter characters from Iñupiaq stories. The game is narrated in the Iñupiaq language with subtitles in English. Throughout the game, Nuna and Fox unlock cultural insights, which add intricate detail to the game world, and to the player(s)' understanding of Iñupiaq language, culture, and way of life. The narration of *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* is in the Iñupiaq language and recounted by James (Mumiġan) Nageak. The player enters the world of the Iñupiaq people through Nageak's words; a world that may be different from their own (Gaertner; Longboat, "Never Alone - Homepage").

In his analysis of *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, Warren Cariou brings to light the similarities between video games and Indigenous storytelling:

> I had often thought that Indigenous stories would make amazing video games, since they are filled with such drama, transformations, unseen dangers and unexpected gifts. They also contain teachings that tell us about how to survive in our contemporary world by giving us the wisdom of the generations that have come before. While video games don't necessarily undertake the pedagogical task that traditional oral stories do, there is definitely a potential for such teaching within the medium of gaming. (Cariou)

Video games in this sense are viewed for their potential to teach skills that are livable and pertinent to a community's survivance. Cariou sees video games as a medium for cultural transmission through storytelling and through the game's interactivity:

> I don't believe that video games can entirely *replace* storytelling as a means of cultural transmission and resurgence, but I do think they can supplement the work of oral stories in many ways, and I feel they can do so particularly through their staging of the player's performance within the world of the game. What is labeled as the "interactivity" of gaming is, for me, very similar to the relational aspects of storytelling. (Cariou)

Cariou sees the importance of storytelling as existing within lived human experience, and relinquishes the concept that video games can outright replace storytelling in communities. He understands video games, just like storytelling, as a medium that is "disruptive, sustaining, knowledge producing, and theory-in-action" (Sium and Ritskes 2). Cariou makes the link that cultural knowledge within communities can be transmitted across time and generations in mediums that are sometimes deemed less traditional. Cariou is correct in saying that video games can take on the role of teaching and learning as Frans Mäyrä argues that playing games can lead to teachings and finding commonalities between the player and the messages in games. He argues that:

> playing is a form of understanding. We can decode messages that carry information in unconventional forms by simple trial-and-error behaviors, as the feedback we derive from our interaction tells us whether we have understood each other or not. (Mäyrä 14)

While playing through the video game, the player encounters the way of life of the Iñupiaq. The video game "contains the teachings within an experience that is active, reciprocal (the technological term for this being 'interactive'), embodied and repeatable" (Cariou). These

repeatable actions are similar to how Indigenous stories exist through time and space. As stories are embodied and repeated through the act of storytelling they are transformed in present contexts. Video games, for example, could be considered one of these present contexts. David Gaertner sees video gaming as a way for Indigenous storytellers to "shift and adapt traditional narratives in new contexts and mediums without sacrificing meaning or faithfulness to the past." Although the medium between storytelling differs greatly, storytellers have always shifted between the "diverse memories of the visual past into the experiences and metaphors of the present" (Vizenor 7). Indigenous storytelling can be laden with nuanced teachings that must be interpreted by the listener and requires the listener to displace their current position in time and space. In many Indigenous communities, a "story is a living thing, an organic process, a way of life" (Graveline 66). Video games, as a medium of Indigenous storytelling, can exist as a way to tell stories that are "inclusive of the past, present, and future, as well as the current or contemporary moment and the story reality, without losing context and coherence while maintaining the drama" (Armstrong 194). In *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, the player discovers temporal and spatial aspects of storytelling, and through continuous gameplay (re)lives the community's stories. By playing the game, the story is reflected upon the player's non-digital world and in the player's present context. With *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, storytelling is presented through a new medium while the faithfulness to the Iñupiaq story is maintained.

Relationality, Survivance, and Linguistic Survivance

The use of technology in Indigenous communities is often tied to processes of reclaiming identity, decolonization, and self-determination. Technology is also implicated in shaping, or shifting, iterations of traditional and ancestral ways of being. In many communities Elders continue to teach cultural knowledge, and technology is complementing education and knowledge transfer. Use of technology is often aligned with these communities' goals of self-determination (Monroe 290-294). In Canada, Indigenous peoples are often "[drawing] on their resources as members of politically autonomous nations to assert control over digital infrastructure development" (McMahon 2003). To do so, Indigenous people must have a say in how media represents not only images of themselves but also ideological constructs that are rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. For example, in his discussion of *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, Maize Longboat highlights how the Iñupiaq community has taken control over digital

infrastructure that represents their community and "love for life in all of its forms", specifically in a medium that has historically portrayed Indigenous people negatively:

> The game is one of the most recent, movement-leading examples of how Indigenous communities are currently deconstructing the mainstream gaming industry's negative stereotypes to serve their own purposes of cultural revitalization, intra community education for younger generations, and the reeducation of the global gaming public… Considering the fact that the Iñupiat community has utilized the video game medium that is foreign to Indigenous community practices in many ways, their desire to represent themselves within a genre that has done so much to erase Indigenous peoples as a whole communicates how *Never Alone* has the capability of subverting dominant narratives in meaningful ways. (Longboat)

Longboat's comments are especially important considering the fact that many video games today reflect imperialistic attitudes that contribute to the othering of Indigenous people and represent territorial conquest in a positive way (Patel). Considering Longboat's statements, a video game can include an Indigenous community's values, which transforms the landscapes that are still dominated by colonial powers.

Shawn Wilson describes the importance of the relationships that lie "at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous" (80). Specifically, Wilson highlights the concept of relationality as the complex connections between people, land, the cosmos, and ideas. These relationships are sacred and critical to Indigenous knowledge production and acquisition, for informing other relationships, pedagogical approaches to sharing knowledges, methods of connecting people to place, understanding humanity, and understanding that knowledge is cultural (86-96). In a Canadian context, this relationality has been damaged by assimilation practices such as Indian Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop.[1] In line with various conventions and declarations such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Final Calls to Action, education is positioned as a critical site of resistance, reconciliation, and of transcending the past and present marginalization of Indigenous peoples through physically and culturally violent colonial processes. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms aims to grant Indigenous people of Canada the right to the use of their language, yet imperial colonial understandings of education "deny the use and development of [Indigenous peoples'] own world views and thought through the suppression of

Indigenous languages and cultures in schools, and confine education to Western methodologies and approaches" (Battiste 142). Many Indigenous peoples are struggling to negotiate a space for Indigenous pedagogical strategies, cultural education, and knowledge protection within a hostile social, political, and economic system founded on colonization. This negotiation is changing what it means to be Indigenous in Canada:

> Being Indigenous today means struggling to reclaim and regenerate one's relational, place-based existence by challenging the ongoing, destructive forces of colonization. Whether through ceremony or through other ways that Indigenous peoples (re)connect to the natural world, processes of resurgence are often contentious and reflect the spiritual, cultural, economic, social and political scope of the struggle. (Corntassel 88)

Resurgence, reclaiming relationality, and renewing connection to language and culture are all part of the process that Gerald Vizenor termed *survivance* (survival and resistance). Survivance reflects "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent" (Vizenor, *"Aesthetics of Survivance"* 1). This process foregrounds Indigenous ways of knowing and embodies lived resistance to colonial ideologies that privilege Western paradigms, epistemologies, and ontological constructs (Vizenor, *Manifest manners*). Extending on Vizenor's concept, Leisly Thornton Wyman terms *linguistic survivance* as the presence and continual use of a community's ancestral language despite oppressing colonial measures that contribute to its endangerment (54). These movements and resurgences are spiritual and are "a culturally rooted *social* movement that transforms the whole society and a political action that seeks to remake the entire landscape of power and relationship to reflect a truly liberated post-imperial vision" (Alfred 30).

Video games can be a medium for teaching and can be used for fostering individual and collective action, as a demonstration of survivance, and can be a space for the acknowledgement and discussion of social issues. Video games can be used to introduce players to differing, unfamiliar worldviews in a safe environment, where the risk, and price, of failure is low. For example, in *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, the risk of taking an action, such as confronting a polar bear head-on, is low since a player's death will revive them in a location nearby. The player learns that the only way to defeat the polar bear is to work cooperatively. Players are not discouraged by defeat but rather encouraged to try again by adopting novel strategies to defeating an enemy

or overcoming a challenge in a world that may seem unfamiliar. Mitigating the risk that might accompany these types of experiences in 'real-world' contexts allows players to learn new ways to look at the world and to explore ideas about the construction of identity, and potential to reimagine themselves in relation to the challenges presented in-game (Stokes et al. 4-7). Games also allow players to experiment with different ideologies and explore and challenge their own moral and ethical framework (Swain 806). For example, Elizabeth LaPensée's game *Survivance* allows players to represent themselves and create meaningful change in their life through their own acts:

> *Survivance* is a game in which Indigenous players are given the space to represent themselves as they see fit and to explore the representations that other players put out into the world in the form of acts of survivance. The quests encourage ethical behaviors in a way that is intrinsic—the game does not literally tell players "make ethical choices," but rather walks players through a process of exploring their communal wellbeing in a way that leads to culturally relevant ethics. This inherent design is what makes true change possible. (27)

A player's demonstration of survivance gives power to their own voices by creating their own change, as the player decides how to best represent themselves.

Video games that incorporate Indigenous narratives, a game such as *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, stand as a rupture of the ideas and values of colonial understandings of time and space. Just like oral stories, Indigenous narratives in video games "work to not only regenerate Indigenous traditions and knowledge production, but also work against the colonial epistemic frame to subvert and recreate possibilities and space for resistance" (Sium and Ritskes 2). Likewise, Indigenous stories stand as a form of colonial resistance and as acts of survivance, since they "affirm that the subjectivity of Indigenous peoples is both politically and intellectually valid. Indigenous stories also proclaim that Indigenous peoples still exist, that the colonial project has ultimately been unsuccessful in erasing Indigenous existence" (4).

Splatsin First Nation and Language Endangerment

The Splatsin First Nation is the southernmost member of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation. Some of the earliest ethnographic accounts of the Splatsin people can be found in the publication *The Shuswap*, published by James Alexander Teit in 1909 as part of the Jesup North Pacific

Expedition (JNPE) directed by anthropologist Franz Boas. The Splatsin live along the Eagle, Salmon, and Shuswap Rivers, and today practice traditional hunting, fishing, and often hold culture camps for sharing traditional knowledge along these waterways (Cooperman; Morrison). Their reserve lands are located next to Enderby, British Columbia, and along the Shuswap River (Shuswap Nation Tribal Council). The Shuswap River is central to the community members' lives as it:

> forms a Splatsin social hub during many months of the year. Splatsin people gather at the Enderby Bridge, on river beaches, and at camps along the river. The river is a travel corridor, a place of spiritual activities and cleansing rituals, and where horses are watered. The Shuswap River is the aesthetic centre of Splatsin culture for it forms a central component of traditional stories and oral histories. (McIlwraith 173)

The language of the Splatsin people is an eastern dialect of the Secwepemctsín (Shuswap) language of the Interior Salish language family. The Secwepemctsín dialects are endangered as a whole and have 1,190 semi-speakers (Ethnologue), although Splatsin's Secwepemctsín dialect is significantly more endangered. Less than 1% of over 800 band members are speakers (FirstVoices). According to the Language Needs Assessment of the First Peoples' Heritage Language & Culture Council, in 2014 there were 8 speakers that understood Secwepemctsín fluently, all of whom are over the age of 65. There were 14 speakers that understood and/or spoke Secwepemctsín somewhat, and there were 63 people that were learning Secwepemctsín. 835 band members at the time of the report did not speak or understand Secwepemctsín (First Peoples' Heritage Language & Culture Council). Since this report, some Elders who were fluent speakers of the language have passed away.

Although not the only criteria for assessing endangered languages, language researchers have suggested that in order for a language to be considered safe, it would require between 20,000 and 100,000 speakers (Ottenheimer; Krauss). In order to increase the number of fluent speakers, the Splatsin community has been in the process of revitalizing Secwepemctsín since the 1970s (FirstVoices). The Splatsin community has been affected greatly by the Indian Residential School act, as well as the Sixties Scoop (as mentioned above), and this has greatly accelerated the endangerment of the Splatsin's language and culture. In order to mitigate the age discrepancy between fluent speakers of the language and youth, the community has put in place initiatives to revitalize their language, such as a language nest at the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn (Cook

and Williams 6). A language nest program involves learning a language in immersion pre-schools. Internationally, these programs have been implemented within other indigenous communities, such as Maori and Manx Gaelic (Wilson; King). The Splatsin Child Care facility and the kikia7as (grandmothers) participate in immersion programs with the stsmamlt with the goals of teaching and documenting Secwepemctsín (Cook and Williams 6-8). Language learning in immersion occurs three days per week and there are programs that teach language and culture across age groups, such as singing, dancing, and drumming (Williams 2). The concentration on early childhood development is also an effort to heal and decolonize by supporting the Secwepemc culture and language from the beginning of a child's education (Legacy of Hope Foundation).

In view of Secwepemctsín's endangerment, we are participating in a hyperlocal project to develop a video game for the Splatsin First Nation community. We are engaging in dialogue, improving the livelihood of the local area, and fostering and reinforcing a sense of, and connection to, place and community at a grassroots level (Baines; Dungen and Genest; Hu et al.; Radcliffe). The grassroots approach and locality are also enabling us to foster language learning that is specific to the needs of the community. As such, we are considering the entire way of life of Secwepemctsín speakers, as Indigenous languages carry multiplicities of importance for those who speak them. They are the foundation of spiritual and cultural values:

> Indigenous peoples view their languages as forms of spiritual identity. Indigenous languages are thus sacred to Indigenous peoples. They provide the deep cognitive bonds that affect all aspects of Indigenous life. Through their shared language, Indigenous people create a shared belief in how the world works and what constitutes proper action. (Battiste and Henderson 49)

The goal of increasing the number of Secwepemctsín speakers is not only part of the efforts to minimize endangerment, but it also constitutes a shift in re-understanding the deeply rooted cultural and spiritual life of Splatsin. The goal of the video game is to be accessible on the most used devices in the community, and aims at revitalizing the Secwepemctsín language amongst youth. As Brittain and Mackenzie have written, youth "are the primary users and developers of technology. The language should be available in forms that are accessible and appealing to everyone, but the focus… should be on young people" (441). Video game development that aims

to teach the language and culture of Secwepemctsín, and that is aimed towards a younger audience, fits well within the goals of the Tsm7aksaltn immersion programs.

Playing Video Games and Community Meeting

A major part of our research project involves engaging with the community and ensuring that community members have a say in how the video game will be designed. The research team is doing this to ensure that the community retains control over the representation of their language and culture. Jason Edward Lewis points out that such a level of collaboration and engagement is important so that Indigenous people have a say in how new media is shaped and formed:

> By engaging in the conversation that is shaping new media systems and structures, Native people can claim an agency in how that shaping carries forward and, by acting as agents, not only can we help to expand the epistemological assumptions upon which those systems and structures are based but we can stake out our own territory in a common future. (63)

On April 11th 2016, we held a community meeting with gamer stsmamlt and parents. We placed three computers, a PlayStation 4, and a Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) around the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn for the gamers to play. We had various types of games, such as Mortal Kombat, Super Mario 3, and *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* for the gamers to play. We avoided overly violent games and first-person shooters because we felt as though these games were not appropriate and conducive to the learning environment of the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn. We provided pizza, pop, and healthy snacks to contribute to an atmosphere similar to a Local Area Network (LAN) party common in video game culture. Parents and their gamer stsmamlt took turns playing games, sharing strategies, and commenting on their favorite games past and present. Having several generations of consoles around the room provided an opportunity for parents to comment on how video games have changed and for gamers to question the graphics and mechanics of video games that they take for granted in modern consoles. As the gamers played, we asked questions about some of their favorite games. Parents also got involved in asking their gamer stsmamlt questions pertaining to the games that were being played. Parents would often question their gamer stsmamlt in-game decisions, and would have the gamers reflect on their gaming experience. Parents were often very surprised and impressed with how well their gamer stsmamlt adapted to the game mechanics and customization. Gamer stsmamlt were also

surprised that their parents knew how to play video games. Gamers stsmamlt would turn to their parents for in-game advice and opinions, such as which avatar would best represent their parents, who their favorite characters are, and for help to get through very difficult levels. Overall, the evening was inspiring for community members and researchers and it encouraged the gamer stsmamlt and parents to talk about the value of video games, video game culture over time, and Indigenous languages and culture. Parents were excited by the prospect of our project, and they were very happy with how we have engaged the community thus far, and the amount of responses we received for the community meeting. Parents commented on how video game nights were a good opportunity for the community to come together and share food and do something engaging, and that we should continue engaging the community in this way.[2] For example, one parent said,

> These kind of nights are really good for the kids and the families… sometimes space is kind of a problem, and for communities to get together, this was a really nice night. (So more nights like this in general?) Yeah, that would be really good. (18:15)

After an hour of gameplay, we broke off into a sharing circle to talk about our experiences with video games. Many of the gamers said that *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* was one of their favorite games:

> I know my favorite game (What game is that?) Never Alone. (Never Alone is your favorite game? Why's that?) It actually shows what happens in the Arctic. It's like you have to learn about how the [Iñupiaq] live and getting chased by a polar bear or something like that (So you like the cultural stuff in video games?) Mhm. (Do you wish you could see more cultural stuff in video games?) Yeah. (14:45)

Gamers commented that learning about the Iñupiaq people reflected what they were learning in school about the Inuit people:

> I'm starting to learn about the Inuit, and we're also reading a book about the Inuit [in school]. (20:35)

The players celebrated victories in the game, such as receiving the *bola,* the weapon that is used throughout the game*:*

> Me and Quintessa just got a weapon! Some blue thing! (2:30)

Kisima Inŋitchuŋa was very popular during the community meeting and gamer stsmamlt wanted to play the game at home:

> (Talking about Never Alone) Mom? (You can play that again sometime?) Can you download it at home? (We will have to get it but yeah, probably.) Please mom? Mommy? Can you please download it at home? (22:50)

Towards the end of the community meeting we projected *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* on a screen in the center of the room while the other gamers took turns playing the game. Parents and the other gamers watched, shared strategies, and even teased each other during a challenge where players had to defeat a polar bear. The players and the spectators embodied both characters of Nuna and Fox while overcoming a difficult part of the game:

> You have to jump over him! How do you attack? You gotta go the other way! Where's the other way? Run, Run! There you go! You gotta go the other way! Woah! Oh, I want to play. Well I know, you gotta wait until the fox comes [to play co-op mode]. I can probably play on that one. You've got to wait until the fox comes. Can me and you take turns?... I thought you understood it! Go go! Quick! Duck! Oh no you drowned! (32:55)

Kisima Inŋitchuŋa's co-operative play, whether it is players taking turns playing as the Iñupiaq girl, Nuna, or two players co-operatively playing both Nuna and Fox, encourages players to see themselves in relation to the reciprocal values of the Iñupiaq culture (Longboat). Stsmamlt understood this component of the game, and one stsmamlt commented on how it was her favorite part:

> (What's your favorite part of [*Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*]?) There's teamwork, you never just leave someone alone. (11:10)

The stsmamlt understood that the game is played cooperatively, and that the game requires the player to switch between two characters, Nuna and the Fox, to complete the game:

> That fox right there, he's going to help you! (31:50)

The community members took notice of how the game reflected the Iñupiaq language and culture and community members commented on how that contributed to the aesthetics of the game. Two parents discussed this fact:

> You can hear the wind, and then when the language comes on it's [in Iñupiaq] and it has video clips too (oh really?) yeah (cool, oh yeah okay). (3:25)

The community meeting was an opportunity for community members to play together and have fun. Jeroen Jansz and Lonneke Martens have examined player engagement with video

games at LAN parties. Their research found that LAN parties are social in nature and allowed participants to find out more about gaming and gaming culture. They found that gaming as a group is more enjoyable and rewarding than gaming in solitude. They show that video games are not just an "activity enjoyed by an isolated adolescent" (350). Similarly, Garry Crawford and Jason Rutter found that gaming serves many social functions including transmission of knowledge, which may have positive effects on the player beyond the video game interface. Crawford and Rutter argue:

> gameplay can also act as a resource for social performances that are not based exclusively on gaming. In particular, knowledge and information gained from digital gaming can be used to inform conversations or social interactions based around other subject matter (279).

The conversations that were had at the community meeting demonstrate this level of engagement, and how video games can play a role in bringing the community together in a positive way while teaching important values such as reciprocity.

Playing a video game such as *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, one that represents an Indigenous group's language and culture, engaged the Splatsin First Nation community. Gamers were happy to see Indigenous culture and language reflected in a game. Although the language and culture of the Iñupiaq people differs greatly from Splatsin's Secwepemc language and culture, gamers and their parents reflected on the potential to see representations of themselves in video games. Throughout the meeting, they offered suggestions that we should use traditional stories for the game that our team will develop. We will consider these suggestions and ask other community members for their input on how this could be done. Throughout gameplay, all attendees of the community meeting participated in the narrative of *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*; the stories of the Iñupiaq were retold in the context of the community meeting, and the community members displayed agency in the game world through playing, observing, and commenting on the game. The community meeting was critical in understanding how to best represent the values of the Splatsin community in a video game. It was also critical in understanding how a community may come together and learn about language and culture through a video game. The research team plans on hosting more meetings and these meetings will play a crucial role as the game itself is developed.

Conclusion

From the engagement of Splatsin First Nation community members with the video game *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*, we found that by playing a video game, those that are engaged with video games are not only players, but also those that are watching the gameplay. In terms of the community-based project of developing a video game for Splatsin First Nation, we must consider the potential for a video game to be played in a group setting. Our observations confirm that when played in groups, games can create an environment for sharing language while talking about the game (Baltra 447). The video game we are developing for Splatsin First Nation and the Secwepemctsín language is in the early stages of development. The goal of the video game is to teach Secwepemctsín and will reflect values that are important to the community just as *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* does. It was first and foremost the community's choice to develop a game to teach the language. The video game, once developed, will have engaged as many community members as possible. Its development will stand as a community project, and as a symbol of how Secwepemctsín can occupy areas that have, in the past, represented Indigenous people poorly. Despite the colonial processes that have endangered Splatsin's Secwepemctsín dialect, the community is coming together to work on a project that represents their language and culture in a way that is relevant to the community's understandings and needs. They are building a game that will foster the relationships that are sacred and critical to the continuance of Splatsin's language and culture. Leisly Thornton Wyman builds on Vizenor's concept of Survivance to claim that linguistic survivance is the continuous use and presence of language in light of processes of globalization (54). Survivance of a community through language and cultural revitalization focuses not on "loss but renewal and continuity into the future rather than memorializing the past" (Kroeber 25). In this sense, the video game will stand as a symbol of both survivance and linguistic survivance. The video game will exist for current generations and generations to come and will demonstrate how a community has come together and determined how digital infrastructure represents their language and community.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the staff and community members of the Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn for their involvement in this community-based project. We would like to acknowledge the hard work of the kikia7as, the grandmothers and speakers, who work hard to teach Secwepemctsín to the stsmamlt. We are also thankful to Rosalind Williams and to future co-researchers who will join the video game project as it grows. We would also like to thank the participants of the community meeting, who were Erica Seymour, Harmony Killman-Williams, Justiz Beaudry-Duteau, Laurie Anderson, Logan Christian, Logan Twin, Orin Cardinal, Phoenix Cardinal, Quintessa Christian, Silas Christian, Stephanie Killman, and Vanessa Cardinal. We would also like to thank Ryan Le Roux, Karolina Bialkowska, and Dr. Christine Schreyer.

Notes

[1] The Sixties Scoop is a term first used by Johnston in *Native children and the child welfare system* to describe the government process of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their families and communities and placing them in the child welfare system and in the foster care of white families. The Splatsin community was particularly affected by this process and has launched a lawsuit in 2015 against the BC government for not upholding a community child welfare bylaw. This bylaw was passed in response to the Sixties Scoop to ensure that the Splatsin First Nation retains jurisdiction over the welfare of the community's children (Helston).
[2] The researchers decided to record the community meeting and consent was obtained from all participants. The evening was very exciting and it was difficult to discern the speakers of these quotes. However, all participants in the video game night participated and had a very enjoyable evening.

Video Games in this article

Kisima Inŋitchuŋa (Never Alone) – Upper One Games, http://neveralonegame.com/

Survivance – Elizabeth LaPensée, http://survivance.org/

Idle No More: Blockade – Chelsea Vowel, http://apihtawikosisan.com/tag/idle-no-more-game/

Spirits of Spring – Minority Media, http://www.weareminority.com/spirits-of-spring/

Mortal Kombat – Midway Games

Super Mario 3 – Nintendo

Works Cited

Alfred, Gerald R. Wasase. *Indigenous pathways of Action and Freedom*. Broadview Press, 2005.

Armstrong, Jeanette. "Land Speaking." *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing*, ed. Simon J. Ortiz. U of Arizona P. 1998, pp. 175–194.

Baines, David. "Hyper-local news: A glue to hold rural communities together?" *Local Economy*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2012, pp. 152–166.

Baltra, Armando. "Language learning through computer adventure games." *Simulation & Gaming*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1990, pp. 445–452.

Battiste, Marie. *Decolonizing education: nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich Publishing Limited, 2013.

---. and James Youngblood Henderson. *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: a Global Challenge*. Purich Publishing Limited, 2000.

Brittain, Julie, and Marguerite MacKenzie. "Language endangerment and revitalization strategies." *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by Nancy Bonvillain, Routledge, 2016, pp. 433–446.

Cook, Deanna, and Rosalind Williams. "B.C. First Nations Head Start: Wrap the Elders Around the Children." *Growing Together: News and Resources for BC First Nations Head Start On-Reserve Programme*, no. 8, Summer 2004, pp. 6–8.

Cooperman, Jim. "The Splatsin story | Shuswap Passion." *Shuswappassion*, 2015, http://shuswappassion.ca/shuswap/the-splatsin-story/. Accessed 4 May 2016.

Corntassel, Jeff. "Re-envisioning resurgence: Indigenous Pathways to Decolonization and Sustainable Self-Determination." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012.

Crawford, Garry, and Jason Rutter. "Playing the game: Performance in Digital Game Audiences." *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, NYU Press, 2007, pp. 271–281.

Dungen, Jeffrey, and Pier-Olivier Genest. "Hyperlocal Context to Facilitate an Internet of Things Understanding of the World." *Proceedings of the International Workshop on Identification, Information & Knowledge on the Internet of Things*, 2013, pp. 1–8.

Gaertner, David. "How Should I Play These?: Media and Remediation in Never Alone." *Never Alone: Resources and Reflections*, 21 May 2016, https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/21/how-should-i-play-these-media-and-remediation-in-never-alone/. Accessed 4 May 2016.

Graveline, Fyre Jean. *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric Consciousness*. Fernwood Publishing Co., 1998.

"Healing and Decolonization: Bridging Our Communities Toolkit." Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2011.

Helston, Charlotte. "Splatsin First Nation launches lawsuit against B.C. government." *Infotel*, http://infotel.ca/newsitem/splatsin-first-nation-launches-lawsuit-against-bc-government/it24009. Accessed 4 May 2016.

Hu, Yuheng, et al. "Whoo. ly: Facilitating information seeking for hyperlocal communities using social media." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, ACM*, 2013, pp. 3481–3490.

Jansz, Jeroen, and Lonneke Martens. "Gaming at a LAN Event: the Social Context of Playing Video Games." *New Media & Society*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2005, pp. 333–355.

Johnston, Patrick. *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*. Canadian Council on Social Development, 1983.

King, Jeanette. "Te Kohanga reo: Maori language revitalization." *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*, edited by Leanne Hinton and Ken Hale. Academic P, 2001, pp. 119–128.

Krauss, Michael E. "The World's Languages in Crisis." *Language*, vol. 68, no. 4, 1992, pp. 10.

Kroeber, Karl. "Why it's a good thing Gerald Vizenor is not an Indian." *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, edited by Gerald Robert Vizenor, U of Nebraska P, 2008. 25–39.

"Language Needs Assessment: Splatsin Tsm7aksaltn." *First Peoples' Heritage Language & Culture Council*, 2014, http://maps.fphlcc.ca/node/3391. Accessed 4 May 2016.

LaPensée, Elizabeth Aileen. *Survivance: An Indigenous Social Impact Game*. Communication, Art & Technology: School of Interactive Arts and Technology, 2014.

Lewis, Jason Edward. "A Better Dance and Better Prayers: Systems, Structures, and the Future Imaginary in Aboriginal New Media." *Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art,* edited by Steve Loft and Kerry Swanson. U of Calgary P, 2014, pp. 79–107.

Longboat, Maize. "Never Alone: Rendering Digital Gaming Spaces Open for Indigenization." *Never Alone: Resources and Reflections*, 28 May 2016, https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/28/never-alone-rendering-digital-gaming-spaces-open-for-indigenization/. Accessed 4 May 2016.

Mäyrä, Frans. *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*. SAGE, 2008.

McIlwraith, Thomas. "The Splatsin Cooke Creek Culture Camp and the Ironies of Access to the Shuswap River." *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2015, pp. 153–181.

McMahon, Rob. "From Digital Divides to the First Mile: Indigenous Peoples and the Network Society in Canada." *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 8, 2014, pp. 2002-2026.

Monroe, Barbara. "The Internet in Indian country." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2002, pp. 285–296.

Morrison, Dawn. "Splatsin Hunting Trip | Indigenous Food Systems Network." *IndigenousFoodSystem*, 2 Feb. 2010, http://www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/content/splatsin-hunting-trip. Accessed 4 May 2016.

"Never Alone - Homepage." *Never Alone*, http://neveralonegame.com/. Accessed 13 Oct. 2015.

Ottenheimer, Harriet. *The Anthropology of Language: an Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology*. 3rd ed., Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013.

Patel, Ash. "Imperialism in the Worlds and Mechanics of First-Person Shooters." *Journal of Games Criticism*, vol. 3 (A), July 2016, http://gamescriticism.org/articles/patel-3-a/. Accessed 4 May 2016.

Radcliffe, Damian. *Here and Now: UK Hyperlocal Media Today*. Nesta, 2012.

"Shuswap." *Ethnologue*, 2015, http://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/shs/. Accessed 4 May 2016.

Shuswap Nation Tribal Council. "Shuswap Nation Tribal Council | Formed in 1980 as an effort of the Secwepemc Chiefs to Advance the Issues of Aboriginal Rights." *ShuswapNation*, http://shuswapnation.org/. Accessed 20 Mar. 2016.

Sium, Aman, and Eric Ritskes. "Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2013.

"Splatsin (Eastern dialect) Community Portal." *FirstVoices*, 2016, http://www.firstvoices.com/en/Splatsin. Accessed 4 May 2016.

Stokes, Benjamin, Suzanne Seggerman, David Rejeski; Ed. Hsing Wei. *For a Better World: Digital Games and the Social Change Sector*. Games for Change & Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2010, pp. 1–10.

Swain, Chris. "Designing Games to Effect Social Change." *Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference*, Situated Play, 2007, pp. 24–28.

Teit, James Alexander. *The Shuswap*. AMS Press Inc., 1909.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. United Nations, Mar. 2008, pp. 1–18.

Vizenor, Gerald. "Aesthetics of Survivance." *Survivance Narratives of Native Presence*, edited by Gerald Robert Vizenor, U of Nebraska P, 2008, pp. 1–23.

----. *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. Wesleyan U P, 1994.

----. *The People Named the Chippewa: Narrative Histories*. U of Minnesota P, 1984.

Warren Cariou. "Performance, (Kin)aesthetic Memory, and Oral Traditions in Never Alone." *Never Alone: Resources and Reflections*, 26 May 2016, https://ilsaneveralone.wordpress.com/2016/05/26/performance-kinaesthetic-memory-and-oral-traditions-in-never-alone/. Accessed 26 May 2016.

Williams, Rosalind. "Grandmothers, Babies, and Immersion." *Growing Together: News and Resources for BC First Nations Head Start On-Reserve Programme*, vol. 21, Fall 2007, pp. 1–4.

Wilson, Gary N. "But the Language Has Got Children Now." *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, vol. 3, no. 21, 2009, pp. 15–31.

Wyman, Leisy Thornton. *Youth Culture, Language Endangerment and Linguistic Survivance*. Multilingual Matters, 2012.

Transformations and Remembrances in the Digital Game *We Sing for Healing*

ELIZABETH LAPENSEE

> *Métis earthdivers speak a new language, their experiences and dreams are metaphors, and in some urban places the earthdivers speak backwards to be better heard and understood on the earth.*
>
> – Gerald Vizenor

It's 2 A.M. I've kept myself awake for this moment. Now is the precious hour when Internet is no longer restricted. This is when I can freely stream audio on SoundCloud without worrying about passing the data limit and being punished by getting cut off for 48 hours. There are nights when I'm frustrated that I can't access downloadable content on my consoles and that, even when the data limit lifts, I have no hope of streaming video. None of that matters when I hear the fresh cut tracks from Exquisite Ghost while looking up at a sky of stars so bright that they light the path walking outside on my way from the house closer to the Internet satellite. We're collaborating on a game, despite our mutually limited Internet, and that's all there is.

These interactions resulted in the design and development of the musical choose-your-own adventure text *We Sing for Healing*. The game is played by visiting the website http://survivance.org/wesing/ and using single clicks to navigate through a journey much like a choose-your-own adventure text game but with a non-linear structure and a mechanic that calls on players to slow down their clicking and instead stay on a webpage to listen through music tracks. As expected of the text game genre, players are usually given a range of text options on each webpage and reach another webpage by clicking on the linked text of their choice. Uniquely, the journey options form a looping structure rather than the classic branching structure known in the genre. From development process to design to aesthetics, *We Sing for Healing* can be seen as an act of survivance.

Games as Acts of Survivance

Backup. It's 2007 at the Aboriginal History Media Arts Lab in Vancouver, British Columbia led by award-winning Cree filmmaker Loretta Todd. "We've always had Internet," she comments as she reflects on how creating in video games and virtual reality are natural spaces for Indigenous expression while we discuss an alternate reality game we're working on with Cease Wyss. We could be more accurately using "social impact game" to describe the plant medicines game during a phase in game development when the term is emerging. Terminology aside, our ongoing conversation weaves together stories of spacetime, quantum physics, and collective consciousness across Cree, Squamish, Anishinaabe, and Métis perspectives and how these can inform game design. We're inspired by the work of our families and vital scholars such as Dr. Leroy Little Bear in our understanding of how our communities have always had virtual communication and how this connectivity was disrupted by colonization (Todd). Our collaboration speaks to the ways in which games can create space for Indigenous teachings that reconnect players with the land utilizing gameplay involving websites, GPS, and physical rewards including paddle necklaces and the gift of medicinal plant knowledge. Games with an Indigenous emphasis can take many forms with exciting design possibilities.

Regardless of differences, digital games, including videogames, computer games, mobile games, and web games, share the same essential qualities—they are voluntary, interactive, and determined by play. While the term "game" has several definitions, ranging from Roger Caillois who suggests games are voluntary, uncertain, unproductive, and make-believe acts, to Jane McGonigal who emphasizes that all games are voluntary and have a goal, rules, and a feedback system (21), the musical choose-your-own adventure text game *We Sing for Healing* exemplifies qualities more akin to the viewpoint of Eric Zimmerman who defines games as interactive narrative systems of formal play (156-164).

Using a mix of code, design, art, and audio, games are a space for self-expression and thus can be art in and of themselves. In the context of Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous games can, like Indigenous art, work "against colonial erasure… [and mark] the space of a returned and enduring presence" (Martineau & Ritskes i). Thus, games in their entirety can be considered acts of survivance, meaning specific instances of the "active sense of native presence" (Vizenor 1). I first began using this phrase as a step in the social impact game *Survivance*, which is directly inspired by the work of Gerald Vizenor and developed in

collaboration with the Northwest Indian Storytellers Association and Wisdom of the Elders, Inc. (LaPensée 46). *Survivance* is played by choosing a quest at any point in a non-linear journey based on the Native life journey. The player watches a video of an elder storyteller, walks through the steps of a quest that is intended to help them address historical trauma, and then creates an act of survivance as a pathway to healing. In this context, an act of survivance is self-determined expression in any medium, such as oral stories, songs, poems, short stories, paintings, beadwork, weaving, photography, and films, just to name a few possibilities. Games, being a space of expression, can also be acts of survivance. Specifically, the foundation of survivance—merging survival with endurance in a way that recognizes Indigenous peoples as thriving rather than merely surviving—can inform how a game is developed, how a game is played, and what representations and aesthetics are found in a game. For example, the puzzle platformer *Never Alone/Kisima Ingitchuna* can be seen as an act of survivance because it is a retelling of an Iñupiaq family story made by E-Line Media in collaboration with the Cook Inlet Tribal Council and community members including storyteller Ishmael Hope. Specifically, video interviews with the community reflect survivance by relating how stories and traditional teachings are ongoing and actively present today while also embracing transformation.

We Sing for Healing is an act of survivance in regards to development process, game design, and aesthetics. The game was created with whatever technology was available from a place of limited Internet access; the gameplay expresses non-linear journeying patterned after Indigenous storytelling; and the art, music, and figures in the game echo remembrances and memories of traditional aesthetics which are then remixed [Fig. 1]. Furthermore, the reflective practice of revisiting the game and providing insight as a designer-researcher expands on survivance as an *active sense of presence* in research that merges Indigenous studies and game studies.

Figure 1. Battle, *We Sing for Healing*, 2015

Survivance Research

The revisiting, analyzing, and telling of *We Sing for Healing* is situated within survivance as a research approach. Survivance as it relates to Indigenous epistemology is the ongoing presence of Indigenous ways of knowing—the ontological understanding of "land, animals, plants, waters, skies, climate, and spiritual systems" of Indigenous peoples (Martin). This research upholds Indigenous epistemology by acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous worldviews while choosing to focus on my worldview as an Irish, Anishinaabe, and Métis game designer and researcher. It further emphasizes the ways in which the game development process and resulting game design reflect survivance. This framework is an active part in communicating the details about *We Sing for Healing*, which in turn guides future games for myself and other game developers, just as survivance is "a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or a theory" (Vizenor 11).

Biskaabiiyang Method

As an Irish, Anishinaabe, and Métis designer-researcher, this reflection is informed by understanding biskaabiiyang as a researcher reflection method. With gratitude to the work of

Leanne Simpson, biskaabiiyang can be seen as Anishinaabe survivance involving returning to and sharing teachings and ways of knowing through research. Biskaabiiyang, which in Anishinaabemowin means "to return to ourselves," involves returning to our teachings on a pathway of wellbeing. The phrase has been translated to "returning to our Teachings" (Seven Generations Education Institute 2), "returning to ourselves" (Simpson 49), and "we are making a round trip" (Gresczyk 53). The process of biskaabiiyang can occur for the researcher, the research itself, and those involved in the research. For example, Anishinaabe researchers return and pick up what was left during colonization such as language in order to be healthy and thrive (Gresczyk). During this study, I have returned to *We Sing for Healing* in order to share the development process, design, and aesthetics. This will certainly influence my future work in games and may also inform other game developers and researchers.

Notably, biskaabiiyang positions research as ceremony, an aspect in common with other Indigenous research methodologies (Wilson). The work of decolonizing involves learning our ways of knowing, learning our medicines, and learning our teachings through knowledgeable elders, ceremonies, and community members who can facilitate this learning (Debassige). For myself as Anishinaabekwe, this process involves seeking, doing, learning, and living a spirit-centered way known as mino-bimaadiziwin (Debassige). While developing *We Sing for Healing*, I was living with the land in a reciprocal way, for example, caretaking plants that I gathered medicines from. I tend to go back and forth between places with high speed Internet access and land. The way in which I develop, implement, and return to design in games is an ongoing journey of biskaabiiyang.

To elaborate, biskaabiiyang journeying begins by venturing out [Fig. 2]. Then, through iterative cycles of revisiting or returning, the journey becomes clearer and reveals its interconnectedness. Finally, the journey completes itself and maintains openness to continue infinite loops that further clarify and deepen our knowledge. In the context of games that are ongoing and forever iterating, such as the social impact game about traditional medicinal plants created with Loretta Todd and Cease Wyss, biskaabiiyang aligns with the process of iterative game development. Games can transform through the process of prototyping, playtesting, and revising (Macklin & Sharp). For example, the medicinal plants game with Cease Wyss continues on today with QR Codes and other technology that was not available at the point of its origin design as it continues to respond to the needs of players and changes in technology and access.

Iterative design can be mapped to research as inspired by the work of Eric Zimmerman, whose research process occurs through the practice of design. It is important to differentiate that this specific research about *We Sing for Healing* involves revisiting the process and design rather than data collection that occurred during design and development. The model of iterative design research parallels biskaabiiyang reflection in that both always consider the researcher to be a participant.

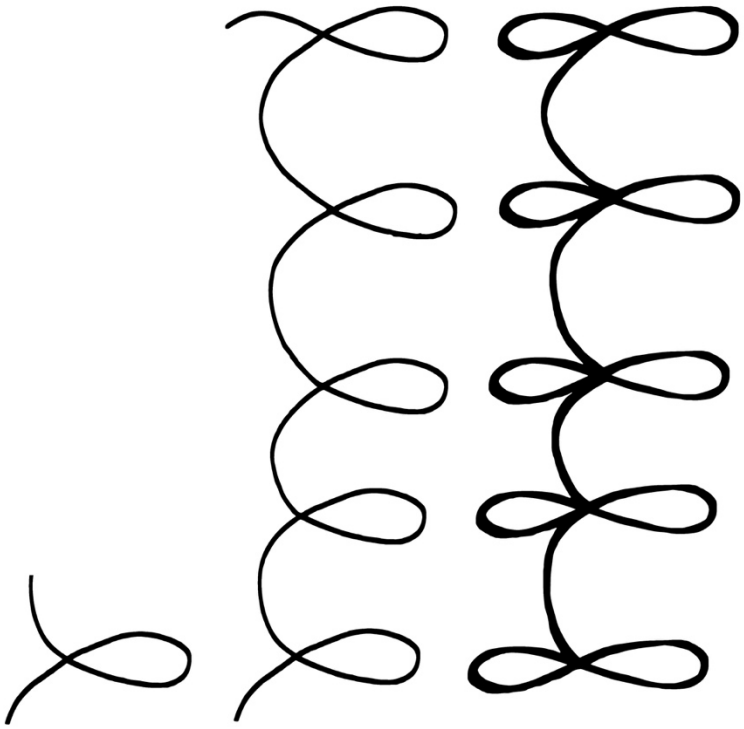


Figure 2. Biskaabiiyang, 2016

Researcher-Designer

Biskaabiiyang calls on Indigenous researchers to be active participants in their research. As both Anishinaabekwe and Michif through my mother Grace L. Dillon, I answer first and foremost to a strong woman whose scholarship uplifts Indigenous science fiction and who taught me about survivance and biskaabiiyang. She sees "we are making a round trip" as a passage into the woods that is intricately tied to coming back with something meaningful for the community when you return. As she explained the journey to me, I recalled our walks into the woods to see the trillium when it reveals itself in early spring. She has been my lifelong supporter and teacher. Alongside my mother, my Auntie Faith LaPonsie continuously contributes to my path in teachings. I am

grateful for storytellers and elders including Woodrow Morrison Jr. and Roger Fernandes who I've crossed paths with and who I've had the joy of developing games with.

From spacecanoes to bitwork beadwork, I hope for my work to reflect the interweaving of past/present/future. The stories I recall are remembrances of days when giant beavers built dams to destroy the people living where later my Anishinaabe and Métis family found refuge on Sugar Island and where they later maintained their borderlessness and self-determined sovereignty between Ontario and Michigan. In the Indigenous futurisms (Dillon) experimental animation *Returning*, created as a companion piece to *We Sing for Healing*, I walk in the stars on the path back home and dance in places where beaded vines telling stories of where our family is from grow and bloom into medicines we recognize again by name and story. In returning to *We Sing for Healing* as a designer-player to reflect on and describe the development process as well as the resulting design, I am again journeying outward to ultimately journey inward with hope for sharing the work with communities the reflection may benefit.

Data Analysis and Visualization

Revisiting and reflecting on *We Sing for Healing* is a story in the Indigenous sense—an open-ended narrative reflection (King). Data collection involved returning to emails during the game development process, recalling and verifying memories of the creation of the game with Peguis First Nation mix artist Exquisite Ghost a.k.a. Jordan Thomas, as well as replaying the game, sketching out the various possible paths of the journey, and then reflecting through written notes and drawing symbols.

Data analysis follows biskaabiiyang and builds from the work of Indigenous scholars who have created connections between Indigenous and Western research. The analysis takes a voice-centered approach (Martin) and interweaves open coding (Bird et al.). Grounded theory provided structure for an inductive process of analyzing the data that was grounded (Berg) in personal reflections and assets from the game. This is similar to a voice-centered approach that emphasizes giving participants the space to represent themselves in their own ways (Bogdan & Biklen). I looked to Vizenor's ever present poetics about survivance to inform the naming of codes that emerged inductively. This approach calls for patience as the researcher waits for interpretations and representations of patterns to emerge (Dana-Socco). In Indigenous research, this also means including interpretations that emerge during dreams or as words and images seen

in day-to-day life. Between each phase of open coding, I dreamt on the experiences of developing and playtesting *We Sing for Healing*. The patience needed when revisiting of *We Sing for Healing* thus felt parallel to the development process and researcher-as-player experience.

Data visualization involves symbol-based reflection. Anishinaabe symbol-based reflection, as described by Lynn Lavallée, is similar to arts-based research that includes the making of art by the participants and/or researchers as a pathway to understanding what we do within our practice (McNiff). This method sits within participatory action research involving participants of research in practical ways that empower people to contribute to both the research and change within their community (Park). In regards to revisiting *We Sing for Healing*, the game is presented as an act of survivance with symbol-based reflection visualizing the design.

Scope and Significance

The biskaabiiyang reflection of *We Sing for Healing* which speaks to the development process and resulting game design benefits game developers, researchers, and players interested in Indigenous game development and Indigenous game design. Development techniques, design mechanics, and narrative patterns can directly contribute to future Indigenous games.

Notably, the journey of biskaabiiyang as a researcher-participant is paralleled by the player in *We Sing for Healing* since they also venture, revisit, and transform during gameplay. A robust follow-up study could be conducted with diverse players to explore varying player experiences, identify self-determined interpretations, and determine patterns such as the frequency of choosing certain paths. Thus, the current research is intended as a grounding point for a future player-centered study.

Development Process

We Sing for Healing's development process activates survivance as practice. The work is situated within the context of the digital divide, meaning the gap in Internet and technology access experienced by communities (Varma). The tools and resources used to develop and distribute the game were essentially no cost because they were either previously purchased at low cost or previously downloaded and available for free. The collaboration was reciprocal—the

narrative journey and art were informed by Exquisite Ghost's music and vice versa. Thus, we both enacted survivance during creation and implementation of the game.

Both Exquisite Ghost and I were living in places with limited Internet when we started collaborating on *We Sing for Healing*. Our circumstances were different—I was living on land in a border town in Oregon that only had access to satellite Internet with speed and space limitations, while he was living in Winnipeg in the aftermath of a house fire. I too would later experience a fire that would leave me without a home and I would listen to his insight about not expecting the house to be rebuilt any time soon. This would propel me on a journey with very little in hand to the Great Lakes where I had only been in the summers and whose plant medicines and teachings came to me during youth thanks to my mother, my Auntie, and Anishinaabe elders living in Oregon. *We Sing for Healing* was a safe space to take risks in journeying, reflecting, and transforming before I went on a "real world" adventure. As I revisit the game now, I remember the incredible contentedness of only being responsible for caretaking honeybees and plants mixed with frustration about the lack of Internet access that put my ability to develop games into question. A text game with low bandwidth requirements came in part as a response to this divide I was experiencing as I simultaneously worked on the experimental animation "Returning." I encouraged myself: "I can make a game from anywhere."

But what kind of game? I had just finished designing and writing the board game *The Gift of Food* which was originally envisioned as a videogame but transformed into a board game because the community that the game was intended for lacked access to computers and Internet. The digital divide is a common experience for Indigenous communities and should be recognized and addressed by making sure the game that is being created with a community is truly about what meets their needs. At the heart of it all, I wanted to make a game that passes on teachings in ways that require players to either remember or seek out understanding within their own communities. Just as there are lessons woven in the mechanics as well as the symbols and materials in the art, Exquisite Ghost's music parallels my bitwork beadwork and digital demonstrations of flexible representation. The journey is the emphasis of the vision. The meaning is in the meaning the player makes. *We Sing for Healing* is a game that was made with and can be played with low bandwidth from a place where Google Maps can't zoom in beyond a brilliantly green arc of trees. It is a personal experience that relies on borrowed and open source tools. The open source tool Twine could have been a good fit to make an interactive story with

some tweaks to allow embedded audio, but it didn't work for me the way I needed at the moment because I couldn't download it from home. My children were asleep and couldn't wait through the night to yet again drive during the day after so recently hanging around outside the public library to catch open wifi and download Exquisite Ghost's latest track remixed with my voice. Instead, I booted up a trial of Dreamweaver and began laying out pages as I listened. *We Sing for Healing* is an example of how anyone can create a game, from wherever they are, with whatever they have.

I've been taught to use every scrap of whatever I have and if I don't use it then I better save it for another moment. I had a laptop with Photoshop, paper, and markers. I had some Internet while sometimes Exquisite Ghost had none. Most notably, I had textures from experimental animations while Exquisite Ghost had an archive of previous mixes and snippets of sound from his origin album.

I also carried with me teachings to share in ways that would not be so explicit as to potentially risk storytelling and ceremonial protocol. In the spring before working on *We Sing for Healing*, Woodrow Morrison Jr. told me that we are at a critical point in where life is headed. Elders had gathered and determined that certain stories need to be shared for the better of all people, because if the spirit of consumption continues to eat and eat and eat, we will all be swallowed whole. Survivance pushes us to do more than simply survive, we are to thrive.

Thriving is dependent on self-expression in whatever form that may take, whether it be beading, weaving, painting, singing, cooking, or even sharing good words with others. Along my journey I had stopped using my voice because of a relationship that was a result of (but not to be excused by) historical trauma. I found my own strength again by talking excitedly about games in the context of Indigenous futurisms (Dillon) and imagining the potential of games created with Indigenously-determined technology. I was asked to record audio of an article I wrote for *kimiwan zine* that was included in a mixed tape by spacetime travelers Jarrett Martineau and Lindsay Cornum. Thanks to their work, I crossed paths online with Exquisite Ghost, who had contributed beats to the immense compilation. We shared a mutual interest in remixing—visual art in my case and music in his—as a form of survivance.

Thus kicked off many trips back and forth from the land to town where I would send Exquisite Ghost recordings of traditional and new songs I would sing mostly in Anishinaabemowin. He would remix audio and then offhandedly tell me where it was going to

be played. Of course that it would be at a live public performance I had never imagined as a possibility. He was a trickster in this sense, one who helped me grow in my ability to not just sing publically but also to speak and share my perspectives overall.

Throughout the process, I would kick him some singing, he would kick me back a mix, and I would create art alongside poetic text and path choices informed by how the music resonated. The collaboration was truly reciprocal and ongoing, much like most of the paths in the game. We each inspired one another and discussed how to represent teachings about life, death, transformations, collective memories, naming, and spacetime through a musical text game.

Game Design and Aesthetics

> *"The ventures of imagination, shadow remembrances, survivance hermeneutics, comic turns of creation, tragic wisdom in the ruins of representation, transformations in trickster stories, and individual visions, were one and the same…"*
>
> – Gerald Vizenor

We Sing for Healing is an act of survivance in design as much as in development process. As game designer Brenda Romero states and shows through her games, *the mechanic is the message*. The messages in *We Sing for Healing* are sometimes clear and sometimes "elusive, obscure, and imprecise" much like the definition of survivance itself (Vizenor 1). The music, art, and poetic phrases that make up the description and choices in the journey are left open to the interpretation of the player, much in the way Indigenous storytelling relies on the listener to create meaning as it may pertain to that moment while acknowledging that the interpretation is malleable and may change if a story is revisited at another point in life. *We Sing for Healing* speaks to survivance ranging from a broad look at the genre to specific mechanics including slowing down, listening, making choices, revisiting paths, and interpreting the journey.

At its core, *We Sing for Healing* is played by visiting the website http://survivance.org/wesing/ and using single clicks to navigate through a non-linear journey much like a choose-your-own adventure text game. Players are usually given a range of text options on each webpage and reach the next webpage by clicking on the linked text of their choice.

However, even in the genre description itself, *We Sing for Healing* entertains "vital irony" characteristic of survivance stories (Vizenor 1). The game purports itself to be a musical choose-your-own adventure text game, which ironically puts the focus on the game being about the music first and foremost while simultaneously using the term "text game" as a genre indicator. Text games typically focus on text, although tools such as Twine make it possible to embed images. From a code perspective, embedding audio in Twine is more complicated and invites a trickster playfulness into the game when people who are accustomed to Twine games assume that *We Sing for Healing* was made in Twine and initially puzzle over how there is music at all. The access-based choice to initially skip over Twine ended up allowing flexibility and self-determination to focus on music and generate a non-linear journey moment to moment rather than with a top down perspective of the narrative points referred to as nodes.

The game begins: "Breathe. Listen." The player is challenged to physically slow down and more specifically to focus on the depth of their breathing, which has been interpreted as a way to honor yourself as a player during gameplay (Butet-Roch). Emphasis is placed on listening to the music, which could result in experiences such as visualizing the game story or the player's own story. This mechanic comes from land where I perceived spacetime to be slowed because the day-to-day pace of life allowed me to do nothing but breathe without any other thought. Now, living back in a city where there are work hours to adhere to and deadlines to meet, revisiting *We Sing for Healing* reminds me of the importance of focusing on breathing. In *We Sing for Healing*, survivance as Native presence goes beyond merely referring to being an Indigenous text game amongst text games. Rather, the fullness of survivance calls on us to *be present*.

Presence echoes our own interpretations back at us as players in the game. In acts of survivance, "metaphors create a sense of presence by imagination and natural reason" (Vizenor 13). One path ends with the node "You are home in the space/time you create" alongside a copper dragonfly against a copper background made of scratches created by sound vibrations [Fig. 3]. Dragonflies are the ultimate spacetime travelers who have transformed through many generations by constantly adapting. They are said to be the carriers of the original songs. This could be seen as a metaphor referring to their vibrational movement that has been continuous. From an Indigenous physics perspective, dragonflies were present to pick up vibrations as far back as origin frequencies up to traditional songs that they continue to echo today. The teaching

that unravels here is that presence, or the sensation of feeling home, are intricately woven with understanding and balancing vibrations.

Figure 3. Copper Home, *We Sing for Healing*, 2015

Along with presence, survivance stories "create a sense of … situational sentiments of chance" (Vizenor 11). *We Sing for Healing* first offers the player the choice to "listen, walk away, or look closer" [Fig. 4]. There is little indication of what might happen with any of the options, aside from what the player might guess from the presence of a web glistening with dew drops. They might assume there is a spider nearby, which would be a natural guess based on what happens in most games when a player chooses to get closer to a web, especially in the dark. However, Grandmother Spider, the weaver of stories, is away working on another part of the web of life and not overtly represented in the game. Instead, the journey takes players to space, to land, or to the height of a battle. The chances a player takes can be random. They can also be reflective of their interpretations and participation in being a storyteller in the game, which in turn furthers presence.

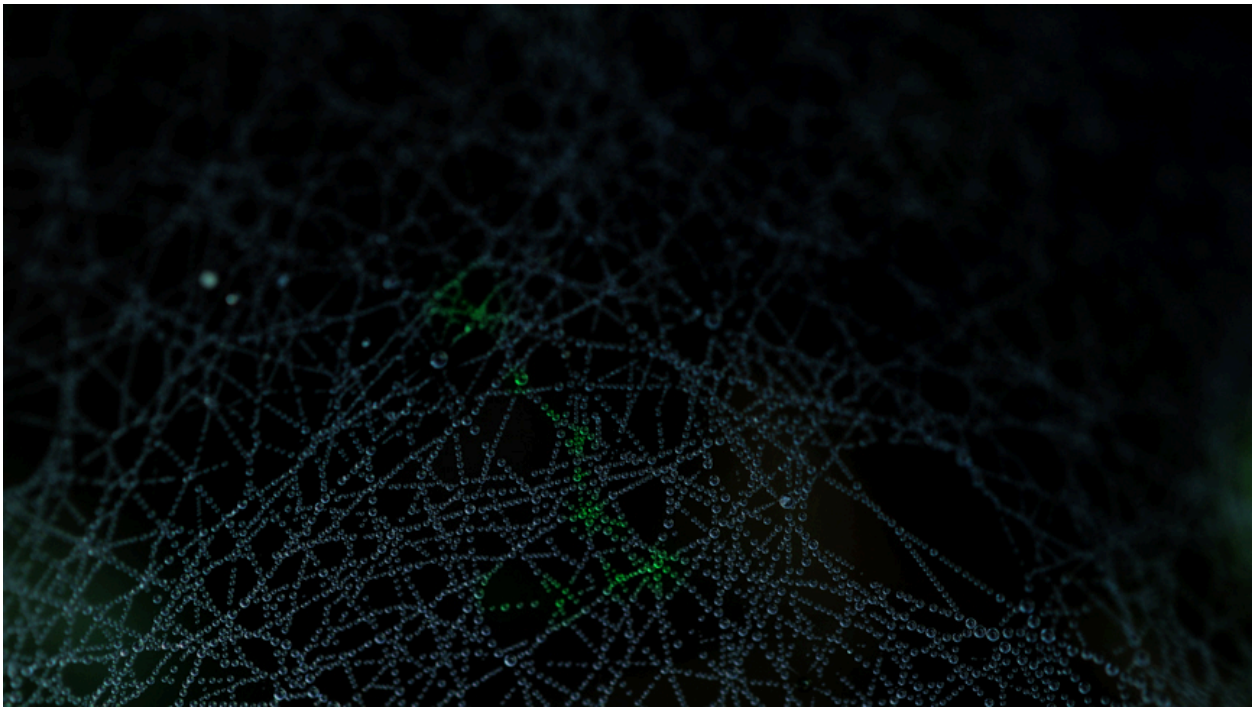


Figure 4. Web, *We Sing for Healing*, 2015

Regardless of the level of presence a player chooses during gameplay, the battle they are in the midst of in the game is one we also face in this reality. If the player chooses to look closer at the web, they see that "within, there is a world in battle as the notion of time as forward motion spins all imbalanced" [Fig. 5]. Teachings shared by Woodrow Morrison Jr. explain the differences in perceptions of time and spacetime beautifully. In Western perception, we are sitting in a canoe in the river of time. We can look behind us and in front of us, but we are always moving forward. In Indigenous perception, we walk alongside the river of spacetime. We can step in and out of the river at any point we choose. We are naturally and inherently spacetime travelers who walk dreams, stars, and dimensions. These teachings also accompany a warning. Linear thinking generates problematic structures of grabbing and taking rather than acceptance and gratitude, which continues to imbalance communities and risk all of our wellbeing. In alignment with Indigenous art of all forms, players in *We Sing for Healing* are encouraged to "[disrupt] colonialism's linear ordering of the world" (Martineau & Ritskes v).

Figure 5. Look, *We Sing for Healing*, 2015

The journey in *We Sing for Healing* challenges linearity in story as well as design. Overall, non-linear paths in the choose-your-own-adventure style replicate traditional storytelling structures (King). Thus, the genre is a natural fit for an Indigenously-determined game structure. The various paths in *We Sing for Healing* reveal teachings, battles, self-reflection, trickster traps, and transformations, while the entirety of all paths combined embody their own form. Since the journey was made step by step rather than in a tool such as Twine that would show the structure during the development process, the design of the paths was entirely intrinsic and only seen so clearly thanks to revisiting the game for this research. Looking back at the various paths and outlining connections reveals that the fullness of the journey is, in and of itself, a turtle constellation [Fig. 6]. The lines show the connections between the story nodes. The wide view of the path options shows the arced back of a turtle. At the left is the turtle's head and at the right is its tail and claws pushing through water or space. Intersecting points reveal triangles throughout the narrative design from the inner center where the heart leads to shell lines to the front claws that propel movement.

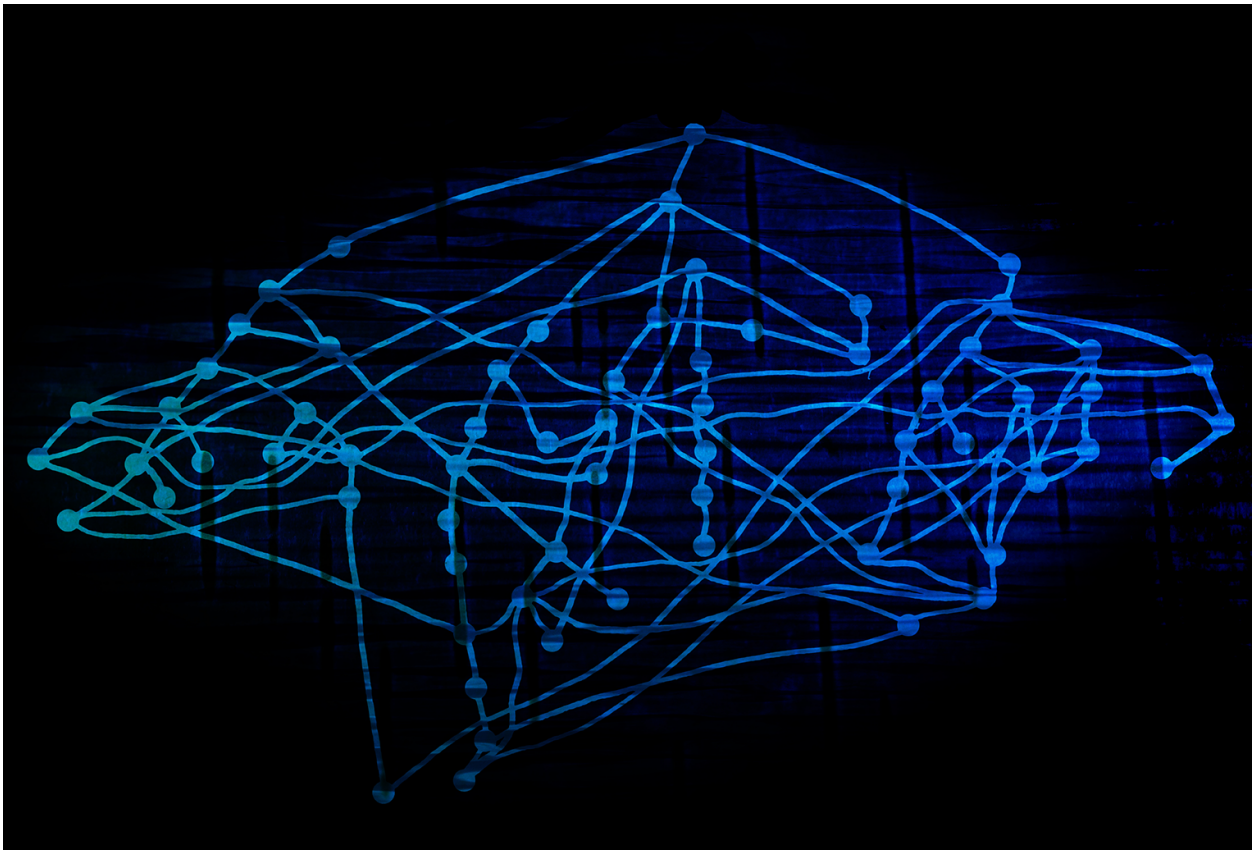


Figure 6. Narrative Design of *We Sing for Healing*, 2016

Notably, the node at the heart of the turtle represents a pair of thunderbird constellations looking over the world after following a central path where the player rides through space on a cowry turtle shell [Fig. 7]. Unlike any other path in *We Sing for Healing*, finding the turtle requires the player to engage directly by clicking on a stone formation stuck in tar sands oil. The player is gifted with seeing the turtle and adventuring through Turtle Island teachings. A geographically accurate top down view of Turtle Island, a.k.a. the Americas, reveals a turtle with one foot in the water. This form is echoed throughout teachings from physical land to perceptions of spacetime. The turtle shell includes thirteen inner scutes (moons or months) and twenty-eight outer scutes (days). Just as we stand on the back of Turtle Island, we also stand with the great turtle which is always in motion in space. With presence is ongoing movement and constant transformation, modeled for us by the great white sturgeon who continuously adapts.

Figure 7. Turtle Ride, *We Sing for Healing*, 2015

Enduring Presence

From game development process to design to aesthetics*, We Sing for Healing* is an act of survivance. Through an experimental process of collaboration followed by revisiting the work within the context of survivance implementing symbol-based reflection, I hope to expand awareness about the possibilities of Indigenous expression in digital games. The journey in *We Sing for Healing* opens pathways of story and spirals players to the heart of their choices. Whether or not the majority of players truly do slow down or follow through with paths is yet to be looked at in a study, but the existing reviews and researcher-designer reflection on the game development process and design offer insights.

We Sing for Healing calls on players slow down, listen, make choices, revisit paths, and reflect on their own worldview and relation to the teachings expressed and experienced during gameplay. I carry these lessons with me into the next works and hope to continue in ways that reflect the *shimmers of survivance*.

Works Cited

Berg, Bruce L. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Allyn and Bacon, 2001.

Bird, S., J. L. Wiles, L. Okalik, J. Kilabuk, and G. M. Egeland. "Methodological Consideration of Story Telling in Qualitative Research Involving Indigenous Peoples." *Global Health Promotion* Vol. 16 No. 4, 2009, pp.16-26.

Bogdan, Robert, and Sari Knopp. Biklen. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Allyn and Bacon, 1992.

Butet-Roch, Laurence. "In Praise of Slowness." *Playing Indians*, 10 April 2016, https://medium.com/playing-indians/in-praise-of-slowness-79281f13d8dc#.vbpg14r9y. Accessed 01 June 2016.

Byrd, Jodi. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. U of Minnesota P, 2011. .

Caillois, Roger. *Man, Play, and Games*. Free Press of Glencoe, 1961.

Dana-Sacco, Gail. "The Indigenous Researcher as Individual and Collective." *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 34 No. 1, 2010, pp.61-82. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/370587. Accessed 2 June 2016.

Debassige, Brent. "Re-conceptualizing Anishinaabe Mino-Bimaadiziwin (the Good Life) as Research Methodology: A Spirit-Centered Way in Anishinaabe Research." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* Vol. 33 No. 1, 2010, pp.11-28.

Dillon, Grace L. *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*. U of Arizona P, 2012.

E-Line Media. *Never Alone/Kisima Ingitchuna*. E-Line Media, 2014.

Elizabeth LaPensée. *We Sing for Healing*. Elizabeth LaPensée, 2015.

Goeman, Mishuana. *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*. U of Minnesota P, 2013.

Gresczyk, Richard A., Sr. "Language Warriors: Leaders in the Ojibwe Language Revitalization Movement." Diss. U of Minnesota, 2011.

King, Thomas. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. U of Minnesota P, 2003.

LaPensée, Elizabeth. *kimiwan zine Issue 8*: *Indigenous Futurisms*. Saskatoon: kimiwan zine, 2014.

LaPensée, Elizabeth. "Survivance Among Social Impact Games." *Loading… The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* Vol. 8 No. 13, 2014, pp.43-60. http://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/141/171. Accessed 02 June 2016.

Lavallée, Lynn. F. "Practical Application of an Indigenous Research Framework and Two Qualitative Indigenous Research Methods: Sharing Circles and Anishnaabe Symbol-based Reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* Vol. 8 No. 1, 2009, pp.21- 40.

Lewis, Jason Edward and Fragnito, Skawennati. "Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace." *Cultural Survival* Vol. 29 No. 2, 2005, http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/aboriginal-territories-cyberspace. Accessed 12 Nov. 2011.

Martineau, Jarrett and Lindsay Cornum. "Indigenous Futurisms Mixtape." SoundCloud. RMP.fm, 20 Nov. 2014, https://soundcloud.com/rpmfm/indigenous-futurisms-mixtape. Accessed 02 June 2016.

Martineau, Jarrett and Eric Ritskes. "Fugitive Indigeneity: Reclaiming the Terrain of Decolonial Struggle Through Indigenous Art." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol. 3 No. 1, 2014, pp.i-xii.

Macklin, Colleen and John Sharp. *Games, Design and Play: A Detailed Approach to Iterative Game Design*. Addison-Wesley, 2016.

McGonigal, Jane. *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. Penguin Books, 2011.

McNiff, Shaun. *Art-based Research*. Jessica Kingsley, 1998.

Park, Peter. *Voices of Change: Participatory Research in the United States and Canada*. Bergin & Garvey, 1993.

Romero, Brenda. "The Mechanic Is the Message." *The Mechanic Is the Message*. Brenda Romero, 7 May 2009, https://mechanicmessage.wordpress.com/. Accessed 02 June 2016.

Seven Generations Education Institute. Anishinaabe Mino Bimaadiziwin: Principles for Anishinaabe Education. http://www.7generations.org/testsite/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/AMB-Booklet-3.pdf. Accessed 02 June 2016.

Simpson, Leanne R. "Anti-Colonial Strategies for the Recovery and Maintenance of Indigenous Knowledge." *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 28 No. 3&4, 2004, pp.373-85.

Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011.

Simpson, Leanne. *Lighting the Eighth Fire*. Arbeiter Ring, 2008.

Shiwy, Freya. "Decolonizing the Technologies of Knowledge: Video and Indigenous Epistemology." Digital Decolonizations/Decolonizing the Digital Dossier, 2009, https://globalstudies.trinity.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/SCHIWY.DECOLONIZING.pdf. Accessed 01 June 2016.

Smith, Linda T. *Decolonizing Methodologies*. U of Otago P, 1999.

Todd, Loretta. "Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace." *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*. Mary Anne Moser and Douglas MacLeod. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996, pp.179-194.

Varma, Roli. "Attracting Native Americans to Computing." *Communications of the ACM* Vol. 52 No. 8, 2009, pp.137-140, http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1536650&dl=ACM&coll=DL&CFID=624454555&CFTOKEN=79095579. Accessed 01 June 2016.

Vizenor, Gerald Robert. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. U of Nebraska P, 2008.

Vizenor, Gerald Robert. *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. Wesleyan UP, 1994.

Wilson, Shawn. *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood Pub., 2008.

Zimmerman, Eric. "Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games: Four Naughty Concepts in Need of Discipline." *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. Ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, pp.154-64.

Zimmerman, Eric. "Play as Research: The Iterative Design Process." Eric Zimmerman, 8 July 2003, http://ericzimmerman.com/files/texts/Iterative_Design.htm. Accessed 02 June 2016.

Ahkii: A Woman is a Sovereign Land

GWENDOLYWN BENAWAY

Don't ask why of me
Don't ask how of me
Don't ask forever
Love me, love me now

This love of mine
had no beginning
It has no end

I was an oak
Now I'm a willow
Now I can bend
-Buffy Sainte Marie, *Until it's Time for You to Go*

Author's Note: *Waciye, Aaniin. I was asked to write a creative non-fiction piece around my writing practice. I couldn't imagine writing about my writing practice without writing about my relationship to gender and land, so I have woven these threads together. As a poet, I'm particularly interested in how Anishinaabe oral tradition moves between voices, mediums, and narratives in order to create a space for questioning. This is my intention within this piece, to not author truth but write a space where we can question and explore as a broader community of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Miikwec, ka'kina awiiyaak.*

Ahkii: A Woman is a Sovereign Land

Gwendolywn (*Mitikomis*[i]) Benaway,
Makwaa doodem[ii]*, Anishinaabe/ Métis, Niizh Ode*[iii]

i walk on dirt roads
in a nowhere land.

it is deep night,
the middle of summer

inside dreams my bones
remember river water.

once we had names
no one can say.

the land and i
hold a soft wonder

between us
as I would lift

water to my lips,
dust and the smell

of lilacs is how
I taste in this sleep-

a girl hunts
her wholeness,

underground my *gookum*[iv]
dissolves to memory,

i will find her grave
in me soon.

a black bear follows me,
she watches as i

come back to
what I lost.

this is how *ahkii*[v]
finds me now,

by spaces in my body
she has not surrendered.

My early memories of my gookum's farmhouse are rooted in the land. She lived at the end of an unpaved gravel road in Northern Michigan. The land around her farmhouse was sparsely populated, filled with giant stretches of bush, which seemed infinite. The boundary between the farmhouse and the land outside felt fragile. The house leaned into the bush during the day and the bush crept through open windows at night. I grew up caught between fascination and a quiet terror of the bush around my gookum's house. The wild in me has always warred with my desire to be safe.

My gookum kept a garden, planted with vegetables, which never grew as expected. There were nightly incursions by foraging deers. Snakes surrounded the house, often laying coiled in the pantry and traveling through holes in the hallway to the bedroom. Several pairs of eagles nested close by. My gookum left them scraps and waved whenever she saw them flying. When I think

of her and my father's family, I think of that land. When I imagine myself as a child, I am running through the back fields towards the dark border of the bush, alone and boundless.

I hesitate to name my gookum as a traditional or a non-traditional Anishinaabe woman. She was publicly Christian and prayed at her kitchen table. She listened to polka music on the radio. She had diabetes and a huge jar of pink Sweet n' Low packets. She walked her land every morning, leaving bread, chunks of lard, and meat scraps behind her. Her favorite route the trail beside the house, which ran towards the edge of the bush. On her walk, she would pause and speak to every living thing she encountered. Was this ceremony? Or simply her relationship to the place she was responsible for? Is there a difference between these two acts?

She remains complicated for me. I witnessed her abuse by my grandfather as a child. He would come home drunk and yell or hit her. We know some of her children were by products of her rapes in their marriage bed. She lived with him for most of her life until he died. She raised her children, including my father, in an atmosphere of continual violence. I am the product of the trauma, my father abusing me in a cycle that has flowed around my family as long as I have stories of us. I feel she let me down, gifting all of her children and grandchildren with her pain. She saved us also, working 3 jobs to cover my grandfather's debts and feed my uncle, aunts, and father. She gave love in balance to my grandfather's rage. She suffered while she triumphed. Victim, hero, Anishinaabe woman.

I remember talking to an Anishinaabe elder about my gookum. Like my grandmother, she had spent much of her life living in a very abusive relationship. I asked her why she stayed, raising her children in the middle of such violence. She answered me by speaking about how she tried to protect her children, taking a majority of the violence on her own body. She laughed while telling me about how her husband once broke a wooden broomstick over her back. "I must be some tough woman to survive that, eh?" she said, lifting her left hand to cover her mouth as she laughed. I've never forgotten what she said next because I felt like it was the first time I could accept my gookum's choices. She looked directly in my eyes, something we almost never do in Anishinaabe culture, and said "well, in that time, there was nowhere to go. No one would help an Indian woman, so you did what you had to do. I feel bad about what happened and what my kids saw, but that's how it was". Anishinaabe women accept, Anishinaabe women laugh in the face of violence. How long have we learned to survive on nothing?

When I remember my gookum, I don't think about the violence I witnessed or the bruises on her face when we buried her. I see her standing on the path to bush, whole in her blue floral apron. When I write, I travel in my mind to my gookum and that land. This is one of the landscapes I inhabit, the Great Lakes and the woods around our waters. One of the features of my work is the central relationship of land and water imagery to my body and sexuality. There are many reasons for my attachment to this particular landscape, including race, relationship, and the foundational nature of my childhood connection to it. For me, the strongest association between the land and my writing is the complicated and metaphysical way which the land connects to our bodies and spirits as Anishinaabe women.

~

I remember one of my elders teaching us the word for vagina in Anishinaabemowim (Ojibwe). He cautioned us that any word for vagina could never be used as an insult in Anishinaabe worldview. The word for vagina, Ahkiitan, he told us while lighting up a third cigarette, comes from the word, Ahkii, which means the land. Anishinaabe know that a woman is sacred because she comes from this earth. She is rooted in. She carries it within her and like the land sustains us, she sustains her community and family. This is why vagina can never be an insult to Anishinaabe, because a woman is the heart of our people. He continued on to tell us several different ways to insult people using variations of the word penis, including my favorite, piijakaans or little prick in English.

There are many gender-based teachings in my culture. Anishinaabe worldview does not include notions of identity construction or even free will. We come from creation. We carry responsibilities rooted in our clans, our names, and the ceremonies we participate in. This includes our gendered responsibilities as well. In the teachings I've heard, our spirits choose the families we will be born into. I've always struggled with this conception as an abuse survivor. My spirit chose to be abused? I'm not certain I can accept that, but I do accept the concept that we came to this land from spirit with specific responsibilities.

What are specific responsibilities I carry? Like all Anishinaabe women, I have a responsibility to the land and it's waters to guard their sacredness. I am meant to hold up the centre of my nation, to carry language, culture, governance, and our systems of knowledge forward to future

generations. As a niizh ode woman, I am responsible to facilitate between men and women in relationships and conflict, to protect and nurture other women around me, and to hold my sacredness in all my relationships. I am a Bear Clan woman, the ones who guard and protect our communities. We are supposed to be fearless in our love. Brave, defiant, stubborn, ready to sound the alarm at the first sign of danger. We call out violence within and without our communities. We challenge people who hold power and we question oppression. We nurture through plant and land medicines. We heal ourselves in private.

There is no way to separate my gender from my responsibilities in Anishinaabe worldview. One gives birth to the other in an infinite loop. Western culture is polarized between understandings of gender that either root it as determined by biological "sex" or a more feminist framing that sees gender as social performance. As a trans woman, I negotiate these conflicting perspectives. Most people, regardless of their ideological association, believe both of these viewpoints to some degree. I can be a woman to them but a different kind of woman because of my body. I am eligible for certain portions of femininity (activism, dress, expression) while denied access to other portions (desirability, heterosexuality, socialization). It is a complex landscape. No one tells me how they view my gender in explicit terms, so I read their positions by their behavior towards me. Does the pronoun "she" have an upper vocal inflection when they use it to describe me, as if they're making mental effort to remember my gender? Do men respond to my body and sexuality as if I am a woman or a man? How do the unspoken rules around my gender present themselves in my daily conversations with friends?

My race is rarely factored into how people perceive my gender. Because I am white passing (light skin, brown to blonde, blue eyes), I am often erased as an Indigenous woman. In ways similar to my erasure as a woman, I'm reduced to a lesser category of "Indianness". It's fine that I assert an identity as an Indigenous woman to others, but they never factor matters of race or history into their interactions with me. The public acceptance of my race and gender contrasts the inner erasure of my race and gender. People won't vocalize this discomfort or confusion because they don't want to wear the label of racist or transphobe, so I can't challenge or question how I'm read. I can only guess based on their responses.

This form of mind blindness, not knowing how I'm being read or the borders of my believability as myself, is a pervasive violence. It leaves me vulnerable to misreading people's responses to

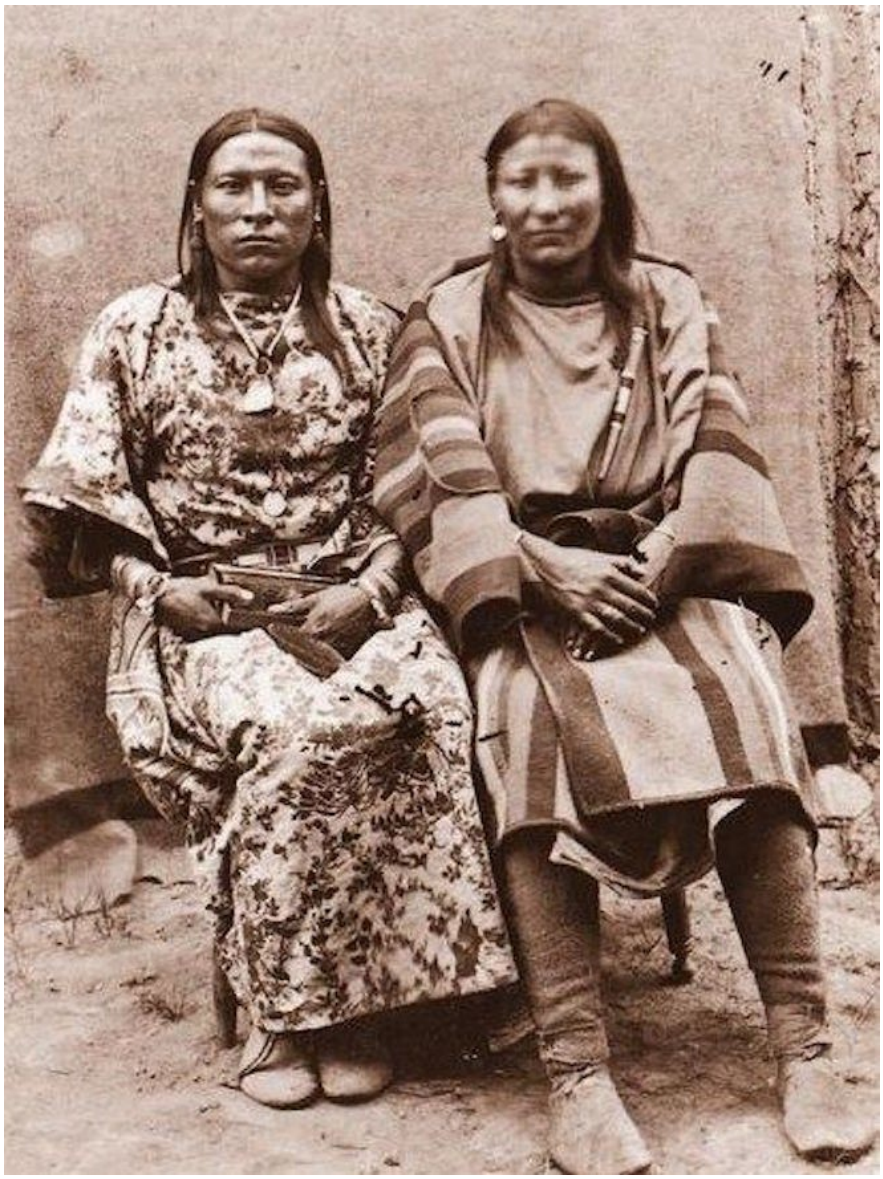
me as prejudice when they may not be. It prevents me from undertaking the vital work of education and engaging across difference. More importantly to this conversation, it covers my life in a shroud of nothingness. What is a woman if she is never touched nor seen? What am I if I have no language for my body? The tension of living caught between the constant reality of harassment in public and the careful neutrality of my intimate relations with friends and coworkers is the most disempowering force in my life.

Of course, I know what I am. A woman, a traditional and sometimes non-traditional Anishinaabe woman. What is missed in the arguments for self love and internal validation of your gender is that social agency is dependent on other human beings. My self-understanding matters, but it doesn't grant me access to positive sexual and romantic relations, the privilege to have meaningful engagements with other people where my gender and race isn't invalidated, or the shared benefits of emotional and material resources which come through relationships. Wholeness is shared and created in relationships between bodies.

Inside Anishinaabe worldview, I am whole and free of the contradictions of Western mentalities. Anishinaabe worldview does not exist within the social space I navigate. My friends are mostly non-Indigenous. My romantic partners are usually white men. I participate and engage within a Western social context in a majority of my life. Anishinaabe worldview only exists in little spaces within Toronto and across Ontario. We are cut off from intellectual engagement with each other and the dominant thought systems. Even within Anishinaabe spaces, trans women aren't always welcome. Western systems of gender and sexuality assert themselves. The only place I am free is within my writing. Within a conversation between land, my gookum and ancestors, and my body, I sew myself together. A half-life, a second truth, working with the only power I have, the same as every Indigenous woman I know.

We're the ones who hold the circle of our nations together but no one holds us together as whole women. We're seen and loved in pieces.

~



Two Spirit women, Cree, date and subject unknown

wiindigo[vi] looks
for my heart

i’m hidden in
folds of land

i carry her
in my mind

a prayer
is longing

for this sweet
earth breaking

open in hands
like the budding

of my body,
I am here

and not here,
I am holy

and not holy
in equal measure.

to love is to know
loon call by

blood memory,
ancestors sing

at dusk to dawn
in every breath-

i breathe stars,

exhale truth.

this is a gift
to be born

inside two hearts
to believe in

the moon rising
as if I am

a heron lifting
up from clear water.

this is how *ahkii*[vii]
births me.

As a transgender 2 Spirit Anishinaabe woman, I do not have a vagina yet. I plan on undergoing surgery to create one within my body in the next 8 months, but in this moment, I am Ahkiitan less. In Anishinaabe worldview, this does not negate my role as a woman. Often when we speak about being 2 Spirited, we are talking about being gay or lesbian. My understanding of the 2 Spirit teachings I've received are mainly focused on gender, not sexuality. What we think of as trans women in the Western world seems like a close parallel for conceptions of 2 Spirit in the Anishinaabe world of my ancestors. We were born into male identified bodies, perceived by our grandmothers as carrying a special set of responsibilities, and were raised from a young age as women within our communities. We carried the responsibilities of any other Anishinaabe women, but had some additional ones related to our unique attributes.

We raised children who had lost their parents or kin. We often worked for the community directly in a variety of roles, including political and ceremonial. We usually had several husbands. We were the last line of defense in our communities if we were attacked while our

men were hunting. We were celebrated as orators and storytellers. We cared for other women during pregnancy and menstruation. Some ceremonies are centered around our participation and leadership. We were as sacred as any Anishinaabe women is. We did not have vaginas, but we always had our responsibility and relationship to land.

~

One of my favourite traditional stories is about Nanabush or Aayash, our first ancestor and the being who populates many of our legends. He often reflects our humanity back to us, making mistakes or illustrating worldviews though his behavior. Our stories are not moral parables but were often recorded by Western anthropologists as such. They usually stripped the sexual content from our legends due to their bias or discomfort. The original stories, told through our worldview and language, are rich depositories of knowledge and sites of inquiry. Storytelling was our version of Anishinaabe university, the space we constructed and discussed the complex frameworks of belief and insight.

In this story of Nanabush, he is wandering through the bush when he sees a young Anishiinabe man in the distance. He finds the man very desirable and decides to seek sexual contact with the man. To achieve this desire, Nanabush feminizes himself, taking on the dress and mannerism of a woman. He makes himself into the form of what he imagines the man will find sexually pleasing. Once she is changed, Nanabush approaches the young man and solicits him for sex. She is successful and after some foreplay, they begin intercourse. Within the story, Nanabush participates as the receptive anal partner to the man. She lets him penetrate her.

The story changes once the young man is penetrating Nanabush. She finds the sex uncomfortable. She realizes this isn't what she wants and for whatever reason, she becomes afraid of her sexual contact with the man. She breaks away from him and runs off into the bush. She returns to her male body as Nanabush. The story ends there and is often told in a humorous structure. I have many questions about this story and what it illustrates about my worldview.

Gender is performance in the story or a fluid state. Nanabush moves between gendered embodied within the narrative. He alters his gender in response to desire, becoming what he thinks the man wants. She initiates sex very directly and her partner is responsive. There doesn't appear to be any mismatch between their desires, but their sexual contact is still relational to their bodies.

Nanabush doesn't grow a vagina. It's highly probable that she could, as a being of immense spiritual power, but she doesn't need a vagina to elicit sexual desire in her partner.

Why does the story centre Nanabush's gender in relation to sexuality and desire? What about her partner draws her to him? What changes in her desire once she begins intercourse? Is the humor because she is "crossdressing" or because she doesn't know what she wants? We can observe that Anishinaabe worldview has different comforts with sex, about a woman initiating sexual contact or about a man having sexual contact with a woman who possesses a penis. Gender is clearly not rooted in biology in this story, but it does not also position their sexual practice as homosexual. What's the lesson here? Is it wrong to become a woman or that understanding what you desire is complex?

I don't think it's useful to look for simple moral teachings from the story. The traditional use of stories was to generate questions, not answers. The value is that it shows Nanabush, our most significant legendary being who often represents us as Anishinaabe people, moving between gender states and sexual practice. It is profoundly sex positive. If Nanabush represents our ancestor, we are directly implicated in her desire and sexuality. To Indigenous people who suggest transgender and same sex relations are a Western corruption, Nanabush isn't a foreigner.

She is literally our humanity, questioning and exploring herself within sexual practice and gender. I perceive the story as a message coded within our worldview: yes, it is normal to question your gender, to move between gendered expressions, to have desire and seek sexual fulfillment, to decide what you thought you wanted is not what you want, to experiment, to have sexual partners who possess bodies different from your other sexual partners, and that anal sex is not something outside of our culture. I also wonder if the story is a form of sexual education, a way of our ancestors saying "hey if you're going to take a dick anally, it might be painful the first time. Practice first?".

~

I have spent
half my life

denying the girl

I carry inside.

now I spend
my life being

denied as her,
double talk

wiindigo[viii] white boys think
I'm not whole,

tell what I'm worth,
half a woman

not meant to be
held like other girls,

here in the bush
I move like rivers

across a land
which wants

me as I am,
as close and deep

as starfall over
the spruce trees.

no one tells me
who I can be,

denies me
the love

I hold like breath
inside hollow bones.

windigo[ix] boys
can't hurt me

under the light
of my grandmother's moon,

nothing is denied,
no artificial boundaries

white boys make
around my body's land

can survive the wonder
of this new earth.

I am the girl
the wild made me.

ahkii desires me
as much as I desire her,

together we sing
this sky *apane*[x].

Colonization, Christianity, and Residential Schools have eroded much, if not all, of our responsibilities and stories as Anishinaabe trans women. We are the most vulnerable and stigmatized members of our communities. 2 Spirit identified youth have the highest rates of suicide and harm in our communities. We suffer unparalleled violence and are often forced into sex work as a means of survival. I have never heard any Anishinaabe public figure speak about transphobia or Anishinaabe trans women. Despite this separation of culture and spirit, we remain holy.

While the Canadian government was stripping us of our humanity and responsibilities as 2 Spirit Trans women, they were also stealing and appropriating our traditional lands. We come from two distinct violations, the degradation of our gender and the separation from our land. Like other Anishinaabe women, we carry responsibilities for our waterways and stewardship of our environment. When an Indigenous woman is forcibly relocated from her land or denied basic governance of her territory, it is a spiritual rape of our bodies. Land sovereignty is directly linked to body sovereignty. You cannot break apart Anishinaabe womanhood from our land. We are connected by spirit into a web of relationships, which stretches back through time to our first ancestors. We carry those relations into the future in our bodies.

I lack the fundamental power to reclaim my lands. Most of us as Anishinaabe women lack the fundamental power to reclaim our lands. The Indian Act was designed to disenfranchise Indigenous women and their descendants from traditional territories and community governance. We have been caught in a cycle of violence, murder, and poverty for generations. We have resisted in profound ways. We fought the government of Canada in court and forced modifications to the Indian Act. Any moment of Indigenous resistance in Canada and the United States has been fueled and powered by Indigenous women. We broke academic barriers. We wrote books and made art. We forged new nations. Still we suffer from a profound separation from our bodies and land.

This is why I write to and from my land. My writing is a response to the violence I have experienced. I centre my body in my land. I approach my sexuality and gender in the same way I used to run towards my gookum's bush. I lean into my land by day and at night, my land leans into me. The connection is not broken. My womanhood is whole. By situating my writing and

poetry within a bed of sweetgrass, I call my ancestors to me. This is not a metaphor, but a daily practice.

One of the best pieces of writing advice I ever received was from my elder. He looked at me and said "it's not wrong to long for your ancestors". I take this as permission to reach back to them, to draw them into my life and my work. Every time I write, I ask for help. This is not like Joseph Boyden's recent claims to author his stories from the ancestral voices in blood. I do not use my ancestors to deny responsibility. I am more responsible because I write with and to them. It is not a refusal of my agency as a writer, but embracing the ways I am situated in a profound set of responsibilities and relations. I remember the same elder asking a group of Anishinaabe youth what being Anishinaabe means. People had great answers about our art, our spirituality, and our history as warriors. He waited until everyone offered an opinion and replied, "To me, being Anishinaabe means being responsible".

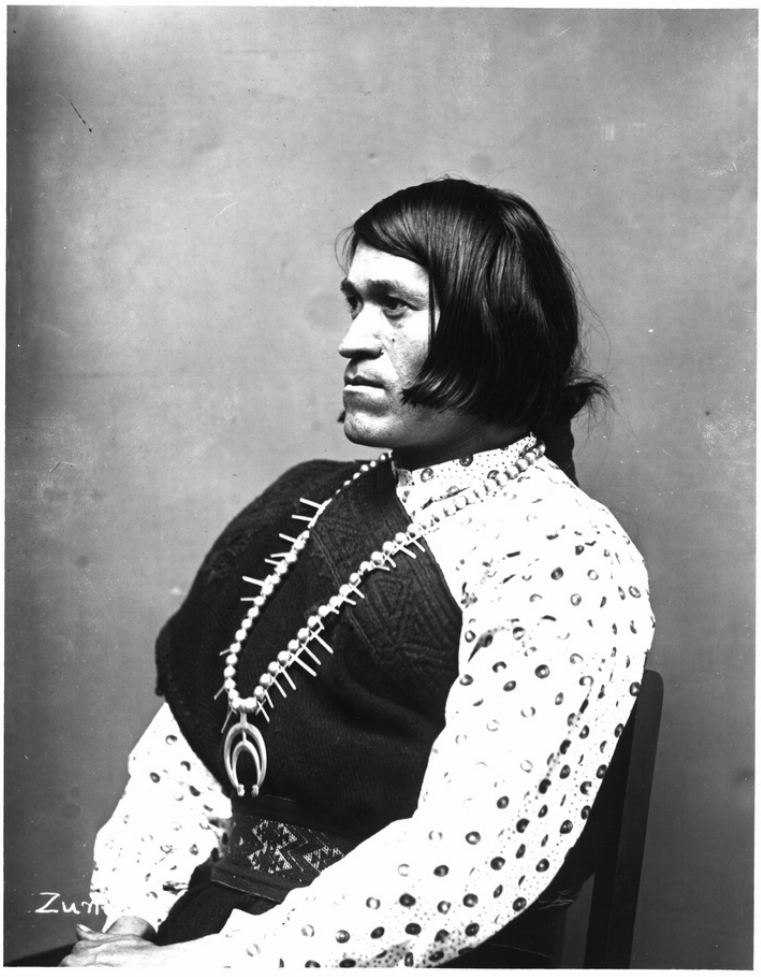
Writing is responsibility. Being an Anishinaabe woman is responsibility. Being a trans Anishinaabe woman is a greater responsibility. The land sits beneath me. I carry life within me. I am connected to the whole. This is what makes Indigenous trans women sacred. Not our vaginas or our sexual practice, but our relationships to our ancestors and the many diverse beings who inhabit the world we walk in. One of the many things taken from us by state violence is the understanding of our bodies as holy and the vital need for our men to reflect that sacredness in their relationship to us.

~

I remember when I began my transition. I expected difficulties, but I assume my natural resilience would overcome them. I trusted in the relationships that populated my life. I naively believed that I knew what would come as I went through hormone treatment and into my womanhood. I didn't plan my transition as many other women I know did. I blurted out I was transitioning in a staff meeting at work. A few days later, I announced it on Facebook even though I had no idea what it meant for me. The day after I told the wider public world my transition, I came home from work defeated. There was a new intensity of fear around me, which I had never felt before. Was I making the right decision? What would my life become? Did I want hormones knowing the medical risks?

I walked into my apartment that day and lay on my bed. I started crying, something I rarely do, and felt as far away from myself as I've ever come. There was a sudden sense of presence in the room, a weight of energy moving towards me. I had the sensation of women singing, a warmth which enveloped me in the uncanny feeling of my gookum's personality. I don't frame this as mystical experience in a Western sense, but in that moment, I knew I was walking a path which my grandmothers had set before me since I was born. Blood memory and spirit pulls me. This is my connection.

~



We'wha, Zuni 2 Spirit, 1849–1896

There are almost no visible Indigenous trans women in the wider public. To my knowledge, I am one of the only published Indigenous trans woman authors in North America. I know of two other Indigenous trans women in the city I live in. All of us are disconnected in some way from our communities, often moving in white or other racialized trans spaces without an inherent recognition of our Indigenous nationship. The phrase 2 Spirit is almost always applied to gay or lesbian Indigenous writers. They are well represented in our literature and art. Recently, there was a special Indigenous centered issue of a major Canadian literary magazine and none of the published writers were transgender. Indigenous and transgender are not allowed to be connected in our communities or in mainstream Canadian society. We are the invisible descendants of the 2 Spirit women I only know through historical photographs.

I am enriched by the work of many gay and lesbian Indigenous writers and thinkers. I am not arguing for their exclusion from the label of 2 Spirit nor am I disputing the space they've built through their activism. The work of 2 Spirit writers and artists is central to our regeneration as Indigenous peoples, but so is the recognition of Indigenous trans women. We need to remember that Western understandings of sexuality and sexual practice do not define our understandings as Anishinaabe. Homosexuality and heterosexuality are recent inventions of Western society rooted in economic and social distinctions. We did not have the same framework for naming the relationship between gender and sexual practice. The disruption of our cultures and language makes it difficult to identify what our understandings were, but there are some values that we know from oral tradition and Jesuit writings.

We did not have a system of monogamous marriage in Anishinaabe culture. We had flexible extended family systems and often had romantic triads. Sister wives, multiple husbands, a summer and a winter partner, a relatively uncomplicated system of decoupling from romantic partnerships, and ardent intolerance for sexual violence or abuse are some characteristics of traditional Anishinaabe sexual and gender based relations. We were perceived by Western audiences as immoral because of open and often public sexual practice. We lived in very close proximity to each other and often with several generations together. Sexuality was not seen as shameful, functioning as key plot element of our traditional stories. In other words, our system of sexual practices and relations did not bear much, if any, resemblance to Western societies.

2 Spirit Women, Nation and date unknown

Gender remains a more complicated facet of our culture. We know through teachings and traditional stories that gender based responsibilities were central to our governance and spirituality. Gender appears to function separate from our physical bodies in Anishinaabe culture, at least in regards to 2 Spirit women. We take on gender-based responsibilities because of our spirits in Anishinaabe worldview, not our genitals. There is agency involved and a wider community recognition of our unique embodiment. From all the teachings I have heard in my life, 2 Spirit Anishinaabe women were not perceived as different from other Anishinaabe women. We had the same opportunities for sexual and romantic partners. We were not paired

with other 2 Spirit women as our romantic partners, but men from within our communities. What does this mean in terms of sexuality and gender in Anishinaabe culture? We weren't queer in a Western sense, but naming what our role was complicated.

Why does it matter to identify a cultural framework for 2 Spirit women in relation to contemporary transgender identity? It doesn't to non-Indigenous people and perhaps to the wider Indigenous 2 Spirit community. For women like me, embodied as Indigenous and transgender, it is an attempt to connect the pieces of our identities into the bodies we currently possess. I see my gender as an extension of my nation. My body is a literal descendant of my Indigenous ancestors. How do I connect these parts of myself within the heart of my culture without disconnecting myself from the land I come from? Not possessing a language to name your gender and body is to be dehumanized. This is what colonization has always sought to do to Indigenous nations, to kill our ability to speak and understand ourselves within our own worldviews.

This is the space I write to. I take the pieces of culture and language I have and weave them into my writing. I hold my land around me. In my mind, I see the 2 Spirit women before me, the ones I only know through archival research and academic theorizing. Often they do not have names. Often they are described by non-2 Spirit Indigenous writers or claimed by gay or lesbian Indigenous communities. They look like the Indigenous trans women I know. They have our faces, our complicated bodies, and above all else, they have our souls. We know from historical records that the first ones killed by the European invaders were 2 Spirit women. Out of the many aspects of Indigenous nations that terrified them, we represented the deepest threat.

~

The most famous 2 Spirit Anishinaabe trans woman is Ozaawindib or "Yellowhead". She is often represented by white and Indigenous academics as a gay Anishinaabe man, but it's clear from the description of her attributes that she was analogous to being a trans woman today. The language used to describe her by the white observers is eerily similar to how many transphobes describe trans women today, "one of those men who make themselves women."[xi] She was a war chief, responsible for leading incursions against rival communities and defending her community. This is principally a male gendered role in Anishinaabe community, so it is an interesting example of how complex our traditional embodiments were. Why does no Indigenous

scholar claim her as a trans woman? It seems unusual to argue that transgender bodies are not part of Anishinaabe worldviews by asserting that gay men are. Who are her descendants, the gay men who identity and present as male or the trans woman who present as female within society? She is as much our ancestors as theirs.

We know of her because she was romantically interested in John Tanner, a white settler who writes about her in his diary. He is apparently horrified and disgusted by her, claiming to reject her romantic advances. Throughout the recorded details of their interaction, it becomes clear that Tanner may be recording her as disgusting in order to placate his sense of self about their likely romantic and sexual contact. In essence, the most famous Anishinaabe trans woman in history is only known because of her romantic engagement with a white man, a white man who goes to great length to defame and deny his desire for her and their connection. I find this parallel to modern narratives of trans dating and sexuality uncanny. How many times in my romantic life have I been Ozaawindib, visible only through my partner's public denial of my gender, desirability, and sexuality. They are ashamed to love or sleep with us but drawn to our unique power. Holy, defiled.

When I look at the rates of murder and sexual violence against Indigenous trans women in Canada, I see we still terrify them. I think of how many times since I've transitioned that my life has been in danger. How many times I've come close to rape. How many times someone has mocked me or told me I'm not a real woman. How many times a man rejected my femininity as real. The violence we are surrounded by is a direct extension of the violence brought against our lands. When a society lacks a fundamental respect for women and their bodies, they lose connection to respecting the world that sustains us. Indigenous trans women stand in front of so much hate. Racism, sexism, colonization, misogyny, transphobia, and homophobia define the scope and shape of our lives.

~

How do we respond? How do we survive? More importantly, how do we reclaim our bodies and relationship to creation? The answer is returning to a profound love. As author Junot Diaz states in an interview with the Boston Review (2012), "The kind of love that I was interested in, that my characters long for intuitively, is the only kind of love that could liberate them from that

horrible legacy of colonial violence. I am speaking about decolonial love". This is a conception of love that resonates with me as an Indigenous trans women. I want to return to a space in my intimate and sexual relations where my body is approached as sacred and complete, where my Anishinaabe heart can rest with my partner's whiteness and not be consumed, where the love I give and receive is open to possibilities and my relationships are not defined by heterosexuality or Western monogamy.

I like Leanne Simpson's simple framing of Decolonial Love best in her poetic song about cultural reclamation, "under her always light". She instructs her listener, "get two husbands and a wife. Make them insane with good love". This is closest to the relational space I want to inhabit in my body. If my body is holy as an Anishinaabe niizh ode, then I don't need to hide the parts of my body that move outside Western binaries of being female. If my love is an extension of creation, then it must be given freely to those in my life without shame, jealousy, or price. If my sex and pleasure are celebrated within my culture, then it is central to my wholeness. I can't change how others see me, the lines of their erasure and desire, which write my body out of the story of womanhood, but I can write myself into the world as sacred.

I see decolonial love as an answer to the separation of Indigenous trans women from our communities and land. Much of the burden of living within this body is rooted in fundamental absence of love, which surrounds me. When I transitioned, I realized no one touched me anymore. Soon after starting hormones, I stopped having sex with men because I felt a pervasive othering of my body in sexual relations. I feel the violence of desirability as an intimate weapon. Sometimes it overwhelms me. Sometimes I long for a love that is given freely, that I don't earn through my gender performance or the fetishization of my body. I want to be free from a world that doesn't see or value me, so I build within myself a lodge of my culture, a space where the words and hostility directed at me is met with a fierce love. I imagine Makwaa embracing me. I seek every small love in any opening in the borders of whiteness and gender I can find. This is what my ancestors taught me to do, surviving for generations in a cold and changing land by being adaptable and brave.

A decolonial love flows from creation and through the land to our bodies. This is not a platitude but a spiritual reality. In Anishinaabe culture, an orphaned child is considered very powerful. Because they have been severed from their kin relations, the spirits come closer to them. The

land reaches out as our original mother to hold them up. I think the same relationship exists for Indigenous trans women. Severed from our community role, in danger and under attack, the ancestors walk with us. Our land responds to our need. We become more holy in our pain, not less.

This what I work to do in my writing. Author us as Indigenous trans women as powerful and connected to creation. Write over the slurs and shame surrounding our bodies. Transmit what I know of my culture and our value into words to carry across the land. Reconnect us back to where we come from. Imagine our lives as filled with love and trust. Challenge and question masculinity, threaten Western conceptions of sexuality and gender, and demand our communities stand with us. Lee Maracle, a celebrated Sto'lo author, says that Indigenous poetry is prayer. I am praying in every line I write.

In ceremony, we name the forces of creation and call those beings to sit with us. Every poem is a ceremony. Every image of land is a request for those ones to join us again. I write the way back to my gookum's farmhouse. I am longing for my ancestors. My life is difficult, but I am not broken in this work because I carry the waters of my grandmothers with me. I imagine a new future for my people, a space where we return to our bodies as whole beings. I see us standing together, interwoven with stars and cedar, as a vibrant circle of light around this land. This is not mythology, but prophecy.

I come back
to every bush

I've lost,
as if promise

is my destiny,
as if nothing

they have done
is great enough

to take this
woman

from me,
she rests

in kiizhik[xii] groves,
she dreams

her spirit
home.

she dreams
all our spirits

through lakes
inside storms

she is singing
and the sound

of her voice
travels to echo

in me as if
I am the shape

of her entire dreaming.

~

I remember an elder telling me I was contaminated. He looked at my blue eyes and said I was infected by the enemy. This is how I often feel as a trans woman. Filthy, corrupted, inviolate, a woman who hides a sickness. When I'm intimate with men, I often try to hide the parts of my body which don't conform to what they expect of a woman. I am paying a surgeon to erase the male parts of my face. I'm training my voice to fall into female ranges. This fall, I will be booking a surgery date to change my genitals. I never told any of my casual partners that I was native. I let them assume whiteness. I pretend to be always female.

Of course, I used to be a man. Of course, I am Anishinaabe. Who we are is often who we are allowed to be. I keep the dangerous parts of me a secret. I learned men's medicines from many of the elders I worked with. For several years, I was a regular firekeeper, making and maintaining the sacred fire which sits at centre of many of our ceremonies. I moved through the world of men without ever feeling part of them. I still hold both parts of me somewhere.

I learned quickly in my transition that any signs of masculinity would erase you to the world. Display masculinity in any context as a trans woman and you will be thought of as a pervert. I have to always be feminine or risk retribution and shame. I remember wearing a sweatshirt to work one day. A female coworker stopped me in the hall and said "Well you don't look very feminine today, do you?". Her scorn followed me for weeks. I realized the only way to be desirable to my male partners was to inhabit my femininity as deeply as I could. Hide what couldn't yet be changed, disguise what wasn't right. Highlight my eyes to draw attention away from my nose.

This is where Anishinaabe worldviews differs from Western understandings of being a trans women. 2 Spirit women were allowed to pick up male medicines and responsibilities when they chose to. Sometimes, we picked them up because there was no men around and it was needed. If our women and children were attacked when the men were away hunting, it was the 2 Spirit women who went first to battle against the invaders. We needed to know both sides of gender, to kill and to give life. I have some of him in me still, as much as he feels like someone I knew a long time ago.

I find this imbalance relational to my perceived whiteness. I am read as white by the world so I hide the Anishinaabe in me. Other half breed women have tricks to make their race visible, beaded jewelry, dying their hair black, or heavy black eyeliner. I've watched these racial modifications play out in many ways. Sometimes pride, sometimes shame. How similar am I in my transness? Playing with presentation, looking for way to blend in. Do you celebrate your unique humanity or carefully disguise the parts no one wants?

I find my body fascinating in its current state. I like the shifts between male and female in its form. A woman's breasts, a man's ribcage, a woman's hips, a man's penis. There is something soft in my body. There is something hard in my body. I am both, leaning slowly towards the feminine but holding on to the masculine. Why is this not beautiful? Why is this not desirable? Why must everything be simple for white people to value it? Why can't I be as complicated my 2 Spirit ancestors? Why do I have erase myself in order for men to see me as real? I miss Anishinaabe worldview. I am contaminated, but not by my white ancestor's skin colour or eyes. I am infected by their dreams, what they are willing to embrace.

I imagine a love where I am a girl who becomes a boy when she wants to. I imagine a love where I am an Anishinaabe who takes the parts of whiteness which are useful. I refuse to be loved in pieces. I am already whole.

~

2 Spirit/ Trans educational posters, Native Youth Sexual Health Network, Toronto

When I received my Anishinaabe name, I was wearing long floral dress. I was introduced to creation as a woman. This is one part of my identity, which has not changed since I transitioned. I remember my gookum teaching me to make bread in her kitchen. She did not make go outside to play with my male cousins. She let me stay with her, learning the borders of her world. We never spoke of it before she died, but I think she knew what I was before anyone else did. I come to my body through her body. I pass through every woman in my family to return to myself. This is what is sacred in me.

There many fears and misunderstandings of what it is to be a trans woman. Everyone I meet carries some of these misconceptions. I often feel like an educator, explaining and naming my body to the world. Despite the increased visibility, we are not known as ourselves to the wider world. Similar to how the non-Indigenous world mythologizes Indigenous peoples as savage and primordial, trans women are demonized and misunderstood by the cis world we walk in. To live between both of these erasures, as a woman and as an Indigenous citizen, is a strange and lonely

path. Being Indigenous separates me from the non-Indigenous world and being trans often separates me from the Indigenous world.

One of the great traumas of colonization is the separation of Indigenous peoples from our worldviews. By breaking apart our families and repressing our languages, colonization deprived us of our intellectual inheritance from our ancestors. My ancestors spent thousands of years learning and theorizing what gender and sexuality meant to them. They built profound systems of kinship and sexual practice designed to create loving and health family units. They must have made mistakes as well, insights we could have learned from now. I cannot reconnect all of the threads which have been severed.

My elder told us that nothing is lost. To him, our languages and worldviews were living beings that inhabited a space separate from time. He wasn't worried about appropriation or language loss. I remember him saying, "If Anishinaabe needs those things, they only need to ask for them and they'll be here". At the time, I didn't believe him. Now, having walked through this transition to come back to myself, I understand the power in seeking wholeness. When you ask, they answer. We need to, as Indigenous writers and communities, ask for those 2 Spirit teachings to return to us. We need to find new ways to form romantic and sexual bonds between and within our genders. We must hold up Indigenous trans women if we are to come back to ourselves.

In the heart of my writing, I am standing on a lakeshore watching a heron dive. I am walking through a low brush of cedars by a swamp bank. I am drifting through an estuary towards a wide muskeg. I am standing in the dark of spruce trees in winter. I am building a lodge out of willow branches. I am peeling layers of birch bark off my skin. I placing tobacco alongside a river while thunders move overhead. This is not mystical. This is not imagining a spiritual destiny. This is the only way I know to be a woman: on my land, in my waters, through my grandmothers, working on behalf of my relations, and sustaining my worldview one metaphor at a time. This has always been the responsibility of an Anishinaabe 2 Spirit woman. I am responsible.

some day
I will return

to the land
I carry.

some day
my sisters

the murdered
the raped

all of us
Indian women

will return
to the holy earth.

until then
I sleep inside

the softness
of my land

I will speak
us whole,

kill *wiindigo*[xiii]
with truth,

be a girl rooted
in *ahkii*[xiv] like

an oak tree.

Acknowledgement:

I am grateful to the Anishinaabe elders, traditional knowledge keepers, and 2 Spirit women who have passed these teachings onto to future generations. I am especially grateful to Alex Mckay, Doug Williams, Shirley Williams, Edna Manitowabi, and Pauline Shirt. Any mistakes in language or representation are mine. All interpretations are a reflection of my own learnings and perspective, not a definitive guide for all Indigenous nations or even other Anishinaabe people. I likely get as much wrong as I get it right, but I think it's important for us to as Indigenous peoples to work collectively to revitalize our narratives of gender, sexuality, and relationships. I am also grateful to the work of Leanne Simpson in this regard.

I am also grateful to Wesley Brunson (University of Toronto, M.A Candidate in Anthropology, Zhaaganash, Minnesota) for his help in the development of this work and his editorial feedback.

[i] Oak Tree
[ii] Bear Clan
[iii] Two Hearts (2 Spirit)
[iv] Grandmother
[v] Earth
[vi] Legendary being, a cannibal, one who is hungry/consumes others to feed self, the spirit of starvation (whiteness)
[vii] Earth
[viii] Legendary being, a cannibal, one who is hungry/consumes others to feed self, the spirit of starvation (whiteness)
[ix] Legendary being, a cannibal, one who is hungry/consumes others to feed self, the spirit of starvation (whiteness)
[x] Forever, always
[xi] A narrative of the captivity and adventures of John Tanner, (U.S. interpreter at the Saut de Ste. Marie,) during thirty years residence among the Indians in the interior of North America, ed. Edwin James (New York, 1830; repr., intro. N. M. Loomis, Minneapolis, Minn., 1956)
[xii] Cedar
[xiii] Legendary being, cannibal, a spirit of hunger, (whiteness)
[xiv] Earth

No Takebacks

STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES

1.

We didn't build the app to kill anybody.

It wasn't even our idea to build it, exactly. One day RJ's dad was just standing there in the kitchen with us after his work, and he pretty much foisted the idea on us. His tie was two-fingers loose and he was digging in the refrigerator for a beer. RJ and me were sitting on the island (me) and the counter (him), texting. Or, if I'm going to be honest here, for the first time in somewhat-recorded history, we were *pretending* to text.

That beer, RJ's dad was sure, had been there this morning?

Yeah.

Anyway, he finally settled on some orange juice straight from the carton, and then he was just standing there with us like I said, doing that thing where he thinks we're all hanging out, being cool. At least he tries, though, right? More than I can say for my dad, who runs the house like a military barracks, telling us when we can and can't be at ease, soldiers. Interrogating me about my plans for the future if he ever finds me just sitting on the counter one fine lazy summer day.

To be specific, and blip back to RJ's kitchen, the *last* fine lazy summer day before senior year started.

"So . . . " RJ's dad said, wiping the extra-pulpy orange juice from his top lip, "what are you two troublemakers brewing up this particular afternoon, now?"

I didn't look up, couldn't, was too busy processing his 'brewing' and what it might or might not mean. Whether it was some kind of coded approval or explicit accusation or what.

"You know," RJ answered for both of us, shrugging to make it stick.

RJ's dad nodded, took another deep glug, and then asked if we had that red light, green light one yet?

We looked up to him with reptile eyes.

"That *app*," he said, about the phones we were still working, and his eyes, they were all glittery with possibility.

I did a short little mental groan, here. Kind of squinted in anticipation. Talking software outside your age group always feels like trying to use sign language through the bars of the gorilla cage.

"It's free, see," RJ's dad went on, "this computer kid from Palmdale, he made it for his little sister one afternoon, because he was supposed to be babysitting her but wanted to play online or something. There's an article in the paper today, yeah?"

"The paper," RJ repeated, his sentence the blade on some construction tractor, scraping bottom.

His dad was impervious, though. Had too much momentum. Was probably going to say 'computer kid' again, even.

"All you do is stop moving the phone when the light goes red, then on green light you—"

"Cool," I said, sliding down from the island. "Red light, green light, right?"

I pretended to be calling it up on my phone. On the way out.

"Not really," RJ's dad said, his tone downshifting a bit. "But that's not the point. The point is that that app, it's the new babysitter. All the parents are downloading it for their babies now. Three hundred thousand so far. And counting."

He let that hang.

"Dollars?" RJ finally asked.

"Downloads," his dad said, licking his lips, excited. "And you know what? Each one of those downloads has his name on it. That afternoon watching his little sister, it got him into MIT, yeah? *Full ride*."

"Ah, the Ride . . . " RJ said, sliding down from the counter now as well.

This was where all of his dad's casual just-hanging-out stories always ended up: some kid getting a full ride to college.

But still.

Three hundred thousand downloads? With how many screen refreshes per session?

Probably a million impressions, easy.

And even at a tenth of a cent per—you could do some serious bank that way.

All we needed now was the app.

#

RJ's great idea was "Naked Leapfrog." I wasn't against it, especially as it involved asking Lindsay from Chem to help, but when my mom found our storyboards on the kitchen table that night, we had to have another sit-down with my dad when his shift was up at ten.

It went the usual way.

The only reason I got to keep my phone was by arguing that I was testing code on it, for my college applications.

RJ chimed in too, and threw in a Corvette if the app really took off, if my dad was interested in looking cool.

"A *sports* car," my dad said, and leaned back in what he called his Spartan chair. His no-nonsense chair.

RJ shrugged, the left side of his mouth eeking over a bit, and, as it turned out for the next twenty minutes, my dad actually had a thought or two about sports cars. Complete with anecdotes and horror stories and statistics. There was maybe even some kind of insurance quote in there.

I apologized to RJ with what of my face I could—we've been friends since third grade, so he got it—and then, slouching across the dark driveway to recompose ourselves in the bushes (one cigarette, maybe two), ash out on RJ's old dog's real headstone again, RJ said, "Dude, if only we could have seen *that* one in the rearview," and I kind of looked behind us, had to agree.

People have gotten rich on worse ideas.

#

Most of what we needed for the app we could scavenge from stuff already on the market, though a couple of those took enough hours to crack that night that we probably should have just written them ourselves.

"And we can't ask Lindsay?" RJ said, his game keyboard glowing up his face like this was a campfire story we were telling to each other, conditional by conditional, curly bracket by curly bracket.

"She'll be all over us once the cash is rolling in," I told him.

We hunched back to the coding.

The app we were building was going to be the definition of elegance. Just because it was so simple, or could be, if we wrote it straight. Not a game, not some stupid trivia, no overlooked system utility or navigation aid for amateur seamstresses, and definitely not another porn scrubber or privacy screen.

A camera.

Just that.

It wasn't supposed to kill us.

#

What our app would have going for it was what RJ called the 'chill factor.' It was what he'd wanted to call the thing, even—nobody else was using it for an app yet—but I talked him down from that particular ledge, pulled us back to the realm of the sane: 'No Takebacks.' Even though takebacks was pretty much exactly what our app was about.

RJ's complaint about wishing we'd seen my dad's Corvette lecture coming? We were marrying that to a handheld device, then, if everything panned out, amping it up into a portable haunted house.

The idea was that, when you had that feeling somebody was behind you, just kind of lurking, waiting—Simms in Marketing taught us this last year: find something everybody alive shares, then winnow that down to a product they can buy—when you had that feeling, you could just 'check your messages' or whatever (this is you, calling the app up) then lower your hand back down, the phone still palmed there, and snap a pic of the world directly behind you.

Which you could already do, sure—the problem with global anxieties is that there's usually a global fix already in place—especially if you had the know-how to re-assign your shutter to a mechanical button. But, as we tested and found, it took some pretty serious skill and no small amount of dumb luck to keep that camera straight up and down. Pushing that mech button, it turned out it wasn't just your finger muscles that got involved. Your whole hand tensed up, whether you told it to or not, and right at the wrong moment: when you were pushing the button.

If you hack into the image stabilization routines and crank them up, they can scrub most of that motion out, yeah. But that just leaves you with a fairly clear shot of whatever you've got in the frame. Which is to say that, when you're not looking, your aim tends to be off. Big surprise, I know. It turned out we were real good at snapping pics of the floor or the ceiling or our own asses, but hardly ever got what was behind us lined up properly.

Our revolutionary solution, then, was to hook a line or two of code between the phone's gyroscope and the camera's shutter, so that the image would only capture when the phone was straight up and down, perfectly vertical, giving it a straight look back.

As for lateral, though, the side-to-side—well, the app was going to be free, right? The only thing that could correct for that would be . . . a bluetooth tie-in with a near-eye device strung up like a periscope? some infrared sensor to square the phone with the room? a fisheye lens? We could fake the fish-eye trick anyway, just stretch the image, let it distort out, but that wouldn't change the original field of view, would just suggest it had been wider than it was, and the market was already spilling over with this kind of sleight-of-hand tomfoolery.

Finally we just stole another of RJ's dad's garage beers, smuggled it to the bushes, toasted Cedric (the dead, headstoned dog), and started in with the field trials.

The app worked perfectly. Better than we could have dreamed. A thousand people should have thought of this already.

We took turns trying to sneak up on each other, caught ourselves on film each time, without having to look back. And it was good we ran the tests, too, or we never would have figured out to make the flash optional, and, in case there were some legacy phones out there not playing the game (ours did), we fiddled with the autorotate, to keep the image from getting flipped, because, when you're trying to catch some slender dude ghosting up behind you, you don't need to be worried about if you're phone's upside down or not.

The lateral still sucked, of course, but what we'd lucked into there was that, when the washed-out, black-and-whited image of us playing backdoor ninja was only *half* in the image, it was approximately eighty-*five* times creepier.

Score one for the good guys.

So we went back to the drawing board (RJ's basement room, the door locked), put a fat-fingered toggle on the flash, dialed up the contrast some, and then spent the rest of our last before-school weekend trancing on how to layer in random pics from the phone's gallery, the same way those 'zombie yourself' apps stenciled gore over your face.

The difference there, though, was that those apps were more participatory, always asked you to position your face in the dotted green lines, please, and, even with that kind of help, still, the final image kind of sucked.

The other problem was the random pics being sucked from the phone's gallery. What if, instead of a snap of your mom cooking hamburgers—we'd just copy her outline over, fill the rest with textured shadow—what if what the app sucked across to pretend was sneaking up behind you, what if it was a pretty sunset, an idyllic windmill?

So we killed hours and many many braincells coming up with just five stock images to bundle in with the app: a girl crawling on the 'wall,' a guy just standing there, a hand starting to reach around some corner, a pair of floating eye smudges, and a simple wisp of smoke you could take to be whatever you wanted, or didn't want. And we figured how to fade them into these 'takeback' shots like they'd been there all along. It was spooky as hell.

Except.

One thing you learn, coding, is that there's always an 'except.'

It was RJ who stumbled onto it: when you download those stupid rotating wallpaper apps or one of those 'innocent maze with a jack-in-the-box zombie' numbers, there's always that download lag, where the server's sneaking those hidden images across. It wasn't so much that we were worried about people watching the progress bar, keeping a close eye on the running printout right above it—we *would*, but that was us—it was that, sneaking stuff into somebody's memory like that, caching it they-don't-know where, that was a porn move. And even if it was just a machine reviewing our app, not a real person, still, that kind of underhandedness, even if it was all in good fun: we were going to get filtered.

Never mind that, after our app cycled through all five *sneak_up* images, the joke's tired, the app deleted, only rated on how it ended, not how it was.

We stole another beer, considered things.

No, a windmill wasn't scary, even if it was three foot high and sneaking up behind you in the hall.

No, it wasn't scary to see that same girl crawling along the side of the hall.

What we finally settled on, though it was going to slow the process down, was upping the array of stock images from five to a cool hundred, and rigging the recursion such that it would iterate through however many images we made available, really. We were in it for the long haul, after all, and RJ was a serious whiz with fake randomnocity, and me, my job was to strip each of these images down to the bare bones. My goal was to get each down to about five kilobytes, but the wall I ran into was, of course, pixelation, which, unless you're somehow in the game, isn't all that scary. So what I finally lucked onto was letting the images swell back up to a whole fifteen kilobytes—they were all greyscale, had some definite blur built-in—but *then* just scaling them down to micro. Bam: seven kilobytes per, about. We had to dial the smoothing up a bit to compensate, but all in all, it was working.

All that was left was to push these little *sneak_up* images into some buried directory online, .htaccess it for all time (though 'Lindsay' could probably break in . . .), and we were on to the second round of trials.

The app was light, it didn't glitch, it had a hooky name, some promised fun, and we'd left some space at the bottom of each image for all the banners that were going to run.

"So?" RJ said, standing up from his bed.

"It's Sunday night," I told him.

Our eyes were bloodshot, our fingertips raw, our pores were exhaling cheese puffs—another weekend gone, lost forever between two curly brackets no one would ever properly appreciate.

But it had been worth it, too.

Screw college, right?

RJ walked me across his driveway, my dad's security light popping on as soon as we stepped up onto the concrete.

The app was on both our phones, of course, and our laptops too.

"Don't take any pictures I wouldn't," RJ said, stopping at the free-throw line to sail an imaginary one in, and I saluted him, spun slow and fake-drunk on my heels—just another sailor, looking for my gangplank home—and leaned into whatever my dad had waiting for me after not checking in all weekend again.

Tomorrow was the first day of senior year, though.

There was nothing he could do to me that would matter.

2.

By Wednesday, RJ was a ghost.

Not literally (not yet), but that was kind of just his place in the cafeteria, in the halls, in the parking lot.

Usually, I'd be right there with him, but somehow the Life Sciences I was having to make up from sophomore year, it had taken off. Mostly because I wasn't the only one having to make it up.

Lindsay was in there too. My new lab partner.

It was taking me longer and longer to get ready each morning. My dad would grumble over the breakfast table about the girl I was becoming, and how pretty I was getting, and I'd just chew, swallow, and float to second period again.

I'd like to say I had no illusions about Lindsay and me, about homecoming and prom and life, but it went way past that. I was neck-deep in that particular fantasy, and sinking fast.

At lunch I found RJ, leaned in, told him my plan.

"*Her?*" he said back.

Her phone was newer, brighter, better, was supposed to be harder to hack. I wanted to try the app there, if she was game.

"Maybe we'll play some Naked Leapfrog too," I told him, shrugging, trying to come off more lecherous than I was.

"I put a text button on it," RJ said back.

"Link-with-attachment, right?" I said, suddenly concerned.

He didn't dignify that.

Of course it would be link-with-attachment. Trying to build our own cute little text program *inside* our app, we'd have to be poring through different carriers' protocols, asking permission for this, not stepping on that.

"What about the Lonely Brigade?" I asked.

It was our code for the social networks.

"You think?" he said, kind of doing his sneer thing.

We were really talking now. Like it had always been.

"Why not?" I said. "That's where we want the pics to show up, don't we?"

"There's no revenue for second-hand impressions," he said. "You know that, right?"

Because there would be no real way to track them.

"But we can brand them, anyway," I said. "Just clear-letter, discrete. Directing them back to the app, keeping it part of the chain, all that."

RJ shrugged one shoulder, was watching somebody across the cafeteria.

It was Lindsay. I could tell by the way he let his eyes keep skating past her.

"Remember that toddler game?" he said, coming back to me. "That my dad said?"

"Red light, green light. Go directly to college."

"That's all he could use it for, wasn't it? For his MIT application. Because—putting banners on it would be stupid, wouldn't it? Who advertises to babies?"

I blinked, focused.

He was right again.

"But we're not like that," I said.

He shook his head no, agreeing with me.

But still.

That guy, that app, he was our origin story. And now it was hollow. Now he was somebody we'd make fun of.

"Think the app'll scare her?" he asked then, catching my eyes for a flash.

"You sleeping, man?" I asked back.

"Jump right out of her pants, right?" he went on, then lifted his chin to get me to look.

It was Lindsay, maybe two steps from us, balancing her water-with-lemon, her salad.

She smiled, twirled past, biting her lip in hello and doing something impossible with her eyebrows.

"Life Science," RJ said, *not* watching her walk away. "What's homework going to be like for that, you think?"

"Exactly," I said, and brushed past him, my eyes glued.

#

Two days later, RJ started texting me some of the new takeback images he was generating.

I was in the library with Lindsay and two of her friends. But mostly with Lindsay. At least in my head.

So far I'd agreed to show her where she could nab papers online, places the faculty didn't know about. I was going to show her where all the good music and movies were, too, but was going to space it out some. Surprise her on Thursday with what wasn't in the theatres until Friday, that kind of stuff.

You use what you've got, I mean. This was my one chance.

And now RJ was helping.

I looked at the image he'd flashed across, then lowered it under the table, scanned both ways to see if any teachers were close.

"What?" Lindsay said.

Her dad wouldn't let her load any apps he didn't scan first, as it turned out. The human virus checker, as it were.

But when you've got a daughter like that.

"Give me your number," I said to her—that easy—and bankshot the image off a tower two miles a way, drilled it back under the table, to her phone, balanced right there on her thighs.

It was a takeback pic, sure, but RJ had done something different, had twisted the code back on itself somehow.

Behind the washed-out version of his long hallway was the crawling girl. She wasn't on the wall anymore, though, but the floor. And not floating two feet above it like

could happen, but right on the surface of the carpet, reaching forward along it like a cat, her face just blank.

Lindsay dropped her phone. It rattled under the table.

More, I texted back to RJ.

We were going to be so rich.

I thought that was the only way things could go, yeah. There's going to be an empty seat at graduation now, though.

Maybe two.

#

By the beginning of the next week, RJ was a star, at least on the cell networks. Instead of a ghost, now he was dragging a fuse. Like he'd weighed his options, studied the landscape of his life, considered the future, and made the measured decision that senior year, we were all going to know his name. One way or the other.

Let me say here that I never took credit for the images he was getting the app to produce.

I'd had a hand in the initial program, had spent a hurried two hours parsing through the code with him on Saturday, his dad grilling steaks for us in the backyard, but that was just maintenance and bugkilling, trying to get it all to spec before we took it live.

Before we could do that, though, we had to nab a domain—it was actually available, and, because it was for 'college,' his dad floated us twenty-four months on his card, base package—we had to stake out some freebie bulletin board, complete with set-up and faq threads, each of us set up as boss moderators. We were also supposed to write up little backstories for ourselves, to attach faces to the app.

"If you have time, I mean," RJ had said from behind his laptop, about that.

It was like we were playing battleship.

"Ha ha," I said back, and never looked up.

"So is this the end of our summer romance?" he said back, and this stopped me.

I looked around my screen, was about to say something back—no idea what, but I could feel the words in my throat—when his dad ducked in with news about those steaks, how if you don't pay at least glancing attention to the corporeal, then you risk getting lost forever in the abstract—his usual out-loud bumpersticker—and I forgot what RJ had said.

That night it came back, though.

Two-thirty in the morning found me at our living room window, no lights on behind me, to give away that I was there.

In the bushes there was the cherry of a cigarette, rhythmic like a heartbeat. Except slower. More deliberate. And at the wrong height for RJ.

Unless he was breaking his own rules, using Cedric's custom little headstone as a bench

He was.

I hugged my arms to my sides, felt the coldness of my phone press into my bare skin.

Without looking back, I glowed the phone on, opened the app, and lowered my hand, the picture snapping once the phone was straight up-and-down enough.

The picture was empty, of course.

Just our couch, that stupid floor lamp I used to think was a robber. The doorway to the left of it, black and yawning.

I deleted it.

#

Probably the scariest image RJ sent to me that week, that he fully knew I had to show to Lindsay, who was going to cc the whole class, it was one of his dad that he'd doctored.

It was in the hall again, like the rest—my guess is he was using his mom's tall mirror at the turn into the living room to orient, keep the lateral in check—but it was different in that it was just static.

Over our cheese-puffed, brainstormy weekend, we'd agreed that the suggestion of motion, of something approaching the phone, that that was all *kinds* of scary. Better than something you were walking away from, anyway.

But this one, this time, it was what he was walking away from.

It was his dad, way back by his bedroom—RJ's mom's long gone, of course; I don't even remember her, so much—and he was just sitting against that wall, his legs splayed out in front of him, his head cocked over, an obvious kind of stain on the wall.

Lindsay looked up to me in Life Science when she saw it, and I looked away, wasn't thinking about money so much anymore.

That afternoon, I found reasons to be outside, stayed there just piddling until RJ's dad pulled up, lifted his briefcase to me on his way in.

I waved back, looked back to my house, and went inside to check if RJ had uploaded that particular shot to the hidden directory.

He hadn't.

It was just the stock hundred we'd come up with together. They seemed so tame now.

I was about to back out of that terminal—already had, really, had to key back in—when I caught the tail-end of that list of files I'd just called up.

The count was a hundred, like I'd been expecting, and they were named sequentially after the *sneak_up* lead-ins—clever clever—but there was another directory there now. *Inside* the protected directory.

I tried "Lindsay" as password, but it wasn't her this time.

I tabbed up, then, went root to try to at least see how many characters this password might have, but I suck in the shell, and the architecture, it was all different now, was some kind of chutes and ladders game, a labyrinth, one with dead-ends and bottomless wells and something that, when I tried to open it, locked up my system.

What had RJ done?

I rebooted, was about to just rush that file system, hit it with everything I had, but then that image of RJ's dad was in my head again.

The bedroom door. The door to RJ's dad's bedroom.

I pulled my phone, called the picture up.

The doorway was on the wrong side.

Wasn't it?

Yes. I'd practically grown up over there. RJ's dad had encouraged it, even, after his last encounter with my dad.

But how could it be on the wrong side?

I stood, walked out into our own hall. It wasn't as long as RJ's, and had tables and junk all cluttered in it, but still.

I stood at the end, right by my doorway, closed my eyes and took a takeback pic.

Just normal.

I looked through the walls, to the memory of RJ's house, and then to this hall.

The mirror.

He had the mirror.

I dragged my mom's in from her closet—she was out walking, like always, 'because it was daylight'—set it up against the turn into the living room.

Already I didn't like this.

I could see myself too well. Like I was at the end of the hall, waiting for myself.

But screw it.

This wasn't for me, this was for the app. This was for RJ.

I walked up to my reflection, held my phone down and backwards, snapped another pic.

Nothing. Just the usual.

I turned around, sure I was missing something—did RJ's dad have some old brown-and-white photographs framed on the wall on the left side?—and lowered my phone, didn't realize the app was still on until I felt the camera burr, the image processing.

I held it up.

It was my hall, reversed.

Except I was standing there right in the middle of it.

"What are you doing?" I said out loud, to RJ, and just then my dad stepped into the hall in his workshirt, looked from the mirror to me and didn't even say anything. Just brushed past, shut his door behind him.

#

The day Lindsay gave me a ride home was the day RJ had to spend in the main office. There were counselors and principals and even a city police.

It wasn't for the takeback shot in circulation today—a benign old image of Cedric he'd blacked-out, let bleed at the edges, like he was loping up behind, his mouth glittering—but for the one of his dad, shot in the head.

"What do you think they'll do to him?" Lindsay said, both hands on the wheel.

"He's just screwing around," I told her.

Still, the support forum on our site had a few members now. From school, mostly, because he'd put the brand on the bottom of the images he was texting.

When Lindsay pulled up to my curb, I didn't get out at first.

I turned to her, was in some level of prep for asking her to maybe hold back on forwarding any more of the messages, that I needed to talk to RJ first, but then her face was right there.

I bumped into her, pulled back smiling.

And then we sort of kissed.

I rose from the car, drifted across the lawn, and, once the front door was closed my dad clapped me on the shoulder and then shook my whole body. It was in congratulations.

"A real piece," he said, my mom standing right there in the kitchen doorway, "you need any, you know, any—" but I was already in my room by then.

That night I trolled through our hidden directory again, was going to crack into that Area 51 if I had to use a crowbar, but then there was a new version of the app waiting right there, shuffled in with the images.

I put it on my phone, laid back on my bed so there'd be nothing behind me, and clicked through.

All that was different was the theme. We'd had it just standard silver and blue, tried and true, but now all the backgrounds were shades of black, and all the words—there weren't many—were a deep maroon.

The update log in the readme said that it had been blacked out for night use. So that glow from the screen wouldn't give you away.

I looked to the front of the house. To me, standing in the window, looking into my phone's bright display, having to squint from it after studying RJ in the bushes for so long.

The next day he was back in the halls, no problem.

The first text he sent explained that he was having to throttle back for the moment. So it was going to be dead dog pictures for the foreseeable future.

That's a complicated word to text, too, 'foreseeable.'

The attached image was another Cedric snap, in the same backwards hall, his toothless old mouth glinting in the washed-out sixty-watt.

He was closer now.

#

“How are you cloaking yourself?” I asked him, finally.

We were in the bushes, standing on a bed of cigarette butts.

Our beers were balanced on the headstone. RJ had carried them right out the front door.

“How am I what?” he asked back, squinting through the smoke.

“You’re using the mirror,” I told him.

He cocked his head over, said, “That one?”

We stepped out of the bushes and he hit his flashlight widget.

His mom’s ancient old mirror was leaned up against the side of the house.

“It was sucking the light away,” he said, then leaned back to the headstone.

“Your dad throw a fit?” I asked. Because his dad always did, when it came to his mom’s things.

“I told him it was scaring me,” RJ said, pinching his cigarette away like a tough guy, grinding it out on the bottom of his shoe. “Why, you want it?”

I looked out to the black monolith of his house, not a single light on.

Four hours ago, his dad had got back from work for the ten-thousandth time.

I shook my head no, I didn’t want it.

“So we ready to go live then?” he said.

“Sure,” I told him. “Whatever.”

He nodded cool, we touched beer cans, and then he was gone, back to it, and I was still standing there when my phone got a text.

Lindsay, probably. Test tomorrow.

I was half right.

It was a long shot, blurry, from a made-up number, but still, you could just make out the two of us in her car, her mouth pressed against mine in the daylight, right there by the trashcans and the mailboxes, where RJ and me had used to build big complicated ramps to launch our bikes up into the sky.

Only one of us came down, though.

I'm sorry, RJ.

#

Two days later, two days before it happened, Lindsay edged down beside me before Life Science, tipped her laptop over so I could scope it.

It was the bulletin board site. Mine and RJ's support thread, the faq, the bio of the app, all our best guesses at marketing.

"It's just for college," I told her.

"No, look," she said.

There was a new thread. It was the series of Cedric pics, like, if you glued them to the corner of a tablet of paper then flipped through them, you could see him creaking along again.

It was the next step.

Our pie-in-the-sky idea with the app, it had been to take not one shot, but five or six in a burst, then plant the same *sneak_up* image into each, a little closer, a little bigger, and *then*, when the user opened that file, thinking they were just getting a static pic, they'd instead get an image that all of the sudden stuttered ahead, so much closer to them.

That was the pay version, of course. Because you've got to have a pay version.

But now RJ was giving it away for free.

"No, this," Lindsay said, and scrolled down.

It was some kind of blog, or a long post.

No: the bios we were supposed to be attaching. The faces behind the app.

I don't remember RJ's exactly, word-for-word, and it's gone now, of course, is evidence in some file cabinet, has been scrubbed from the net, but I wouldn't want to remember it in that much detail, either.

Because RJ couldn't scare us with pictures anymore, what with everybody watching, he was using words, now. Trying to come up with a story to explain why Cedric was dogging him like that.

It wasn't even close to how it went down, though, the Cedric thing.

I mean, I had been there for it, kind of. It was right after RJ had moved in beside us, when his mom was still around.

Then one day, maybe after they'd unpacked their last box, she just wasn't. Even though her car keys were on the hook, her shoes in their place, her sunglasses (it was summer) by the sink. There was never any note, any ATM photo, any goodbyes.

In the middle of it all, too, when everybody in the neighborhood was volunteering their house to be searched—except my dad, of course, who knew his rights, and didn't so much need the law knowing about his gun collection—in the middle of all that, Cedric had turned up dead.

It was bad timing, but he was old, so it made a sort of sense, everybody guessed. Especially if he was grieving.

What didn't make sense—to my dad, at least—was the granite mini-headstone RJ's dad came home with. For the *dog*. After his wife had already obviously split with the vacuum cleaner salesman. But—this is still my dad—anybody who'd commemorate an animal like that, maybe his wife was just being reasonable, right?

And I'd never even once seen a vacuum cleaner salesman.

And, the whole thing—Cedric, RJ's mom—that whole first impossible year of craziness, of running to the door every time it rang, of buying longer and longer cords for the phone, it was never something RJ and me talked about. How do you, right? Still, that was where we met, right there at that dog funeral, so it's not like we could forget it either. My mom had walked me across to stand there with the new kid while RJ's dad droned on and on about the dog, really talking about his wife. Finally, I'd even cried, and RJ had edged over, stood close enough to me that we were kind of touching.

Ever since then, you know. Joined at the hip, all that. Battleship combatants for life.

But friendships forged over a dead pet, I guess they've got a built-in expiration date. This re-do RJ had spun up of what happened to Cedric, and just to sell a piece of software, just to make everybody in senior class finally notice him—it had to be over, me and him.

And Cedric was the tame part, too.

The real story was what had really happened to his mom that day, what the neighborhood had been waiting to find out for years. But RJ and his dad didn't even *have* a garbage disposal back then, I don't think. Maybe a therapist would see some kind of

call or plea in what-all RJ made happen to her in his fake bio, I don't know. That doesn't mean he'd turn his back on RJ for even a moment, though.

According to the post, Cedric hadn't died of old age or, as RJ's dad wanted, of sadness either. His spirit wasn't out wherever RJ's mom was now, keeping her safe.

The way RJ had it, it was the rings that had killed Cedric. And the necklaces. The earrings. Three brooches, a handful of bracelets, because garbage disposals can't chew metal.

But neither could Cedric, so it had to be forced down with this little mini-Louisville Slugger he had. Piece after piece, all RJ's mom's jewelry. *A little internal bleeding for the family hound*—I remember that part. And not on purpose.

When I was done with it that first time, that only time, I shook my head no, my eyes wet, and pulled Lindsay's laptop shut as gently as I could, like I didn't want everybody to hear.

"Do you want to just sleep at my house?" she said, the worry there in her eyes. "My parents are, you know. This weekend."

I swallowed, tested my voice in my head before using it, asking if she wanted me to bring a movie, something like that.

"Can you get any, like, anything to drink, you think?" she said.

"You like beer?" I asked back, still not looking right at her but into the future.

Anything was possible.

3.

That afternoon—this was Friday, the Friday before the rest of my life—RJ opened their utility door, caught me at his dad's refrigerator, my arms clinking with garage beer.

"I'll pay you back," I told him.

"Remember Zelda?" he said back, not even a little concerned about the beer, or his dad.

"Which one?" I asked.

We'd raced through them all.

"Fourth grade," he said.

NES. His dad had insisted we start there, even though it had already been a serious antique by our third grade.

He was right, too. It was the right place to begin.

I got the last beer I could carry, balanced it on top and eased the refrigerator door shut with my calf.

"Gannon with two n's . . . " I said, then looked all the way up the steps to him. "So, this mean you're back, man?"

"Where have I been?" he said, something mocking in his voice.

"We need to take it live," I said, catching a beer, and he heard the goodbye in my tone, opened his hand for me to waltz out into whatever this night held for me, and started the garage door down before I was halfway across the drive.

Because I was suddenly sure that if I looked back, I'd see Cedric trotting up out of the past, barely going to make it under the door, I looked back, fumbled the one bottle that kept getting away. It shattered at my feet, the door sealed itself to the concrete, and I wanted so bad to scrape that brown glass over, into the little gutter RJ's dad always edged between the drive and the grass, then maybe get the hose to take care of the guilty smell. But Lindsay. Lindsay Lindsay Lindsay. And RJ's dad knew we were into that beer anyway, didn't he? He had to. It was understood.

Just before she picked me up, my dad surely driving home from his shift, his face grim as ever, his talk radio whispering to him—I was having to time this so perfect—my phone buzzed with a text.

It was the lamp in my living room, the image I'd deleted. It was just standing there. Different anonymous number.

I looked to RJ's house and the one light that was on, it went off.

Pulling away with Lindsay, then, we passed RJ's dad, and, right before she turned right for her house, I caught RJ's dad's brake lights flaring. So he wouldn't run over that shattered bottle on his concrete. So he could get out, be sure he was seeing what he was seeing. So he could walk inside, ask RJ what he knew about this, RJ looking up at him from his laptop, a tolerant grin already pasted on his face.

I shut my eyes, rubbed a cold beer against my face, and I'm sure it goes without saying here that, when we got to her place, her parents were gone like she'd said—that

was never the part anybody lied about—but four of her friends *were* there, and they *had* brought movies.

They held their hands over the back of the couch for the beer, laughed and giggled, and I slept in Lindsay's little brother's bedroom, could at least say now that I had spent the night at Lindsay's, even if it was in dinosaur sheets. But I walked home the next morning without waking any of them, telling myself in my head that this was part of it, that this is how you grow up, that you can't be a complete adult until you've acquired the requisite amount of shame, and all I was doing was placing one foot in front of the other, so that I heard that distinct little *pop* at nearly the exact moment I realized I'd just stepped up onto my driveway.

That pop, that shot, it had come from next door. From RJ's. It was the sound the counselors and principals and police had all seen coming, that they were probably all ready for.

I stepped back to the middle of our yard, could feel the parentheses forming around my eyes, the hole starting in my chest, in my life, and then, like he'd been listening for this to happen for nine years now, like he could already see RJ's dad slumping down against the wall by his bedroom, my dad straight-armed our door out, was walking down our flagstones with purpose.

Down along his right leg was the revolver he kept tucked into the seat of his no-nonsense chair.

In the bushes then, I heard something, a rustling, and my face prickled, my eyes caught on fire, and I knew as true as I've ever known anything that Cedric was about to push through, that his mouth was going to be bright with jewelry, and for a moment I even saw just that—the gold, splintering the early morning light—but then it was RJ, half his face dark with blown-back blood, his chest rising and falling, his dad's small pistol already raised, his pace quick behind it, like he'd told himself he couldn't do this, but maybe he could if he just walked really fast and pretended it was all a movie.

He was already pulling the trigger too, and it was soundless, or, all I could hear, it was all the women's rings he was wearing, clacking against the trigger guard.

The first shot hit our brick wall where the roses used to grow, and the second whipped into the grass by my right foot, and the third slapped into my dad's shoulder,

spun him around a little, this sideways red plume hanging behind him now, just like a paintball that had gone all the way through somehow.

This had been coming too long for that to slow him down, though.

He was walking and shooting as well, pointing his gun like a finger at RJ, like it was some hard-earned truth he was telling him here. Like this lecture wasn't over yet, son.

They met on the oil-stained concrete of our driveway, almost gun-to-gun, and neither stopped until they were empty, and just before RJ slumped over, back into the bushes, the best parts of him spread all over my yard, he looked over to me like he was seeing me over Cedric's grave for the first time, seeing that he wasn't going to have do this alone after all, and I could see in his eyes that he was saving me, with this. From my dad. That our summer romance wasn't over yet.

And then the rest.

Our app, dead. Our web page, dead. RJ and my dad, dead. Cedric's grave empty. The school in mourning, extra counselors bussing in, news vans lurking. My mom getting a triangle flag she just put in the top of the closet. Somebody down at the grocery store saluting me so that I had to duck down an aisle I didn't even want.

Over, done with, gone, end of program, reboot.

Except.

Three days ago, thumbing through my app drawer, I lucked onto ours. The last version RJ had rigged, the black-backgrounded one, with the maroon letters so faint you had to kind of just trust they were there.

It was a terrible design. The old people would hate it.

It was going to go viral.

I'd never even tried it, though.

I hovered the pad of my thumb over it, knew I was going to light it up, that I had to, for RJ, that I owed him that, but then made the command decision that if I could see the scaffolding first, the haunted house wouldn't get to me.

I sucked the app onto my laptop, scrolled through the code, lost myself in the elegance again, the simplicity. The innocence, right? All it was was a camera with a different trigger, then a bit of post-capture image processing, a harmless call out to a

hidden directory. It might get us into some school for marketing, but, as far as programming went, it was practically juvenile.

It might get *me* into marketing school, I meant.

And then I found RJ's last fix.

He'd commented it out, even, in case we wanted to go back. Our routine was, when combing each other's lines, the second one through would erase the notations as he went.

It meant this version, technically, it wasn't complete yet.

I arrowed my cursor up to his trailing escape slash, highlighted the whole note, inverting the text of the last thing he'd said in here . . . what? Two weeks ago? I unpacked his cryptic timestamp in my head. The first week of school, yeah. When I was in Life Science, getting a lab partner. I bit my lower lip in, shook my head. Who even timestamps their comments, right? RJ, that's who. He always did it, for—his words—*his* posterity's sake. And then he'd reach back into his pants, for his ass, and try to slap me on the shoulder, really rub his hand in.

I backspaced the comment, left the cursor blinking there at his new line, his last innovation.

All it did was pull a horizontal flip on the image. The easiest thing in the world.

It was why his hall had started turning up backwards. It was software, not the mirror, not the hardware.

I saved it, then saved it again to make it stick. The cursor just blinking up at me like I was being stupid here.

It was right.

But still—something didn't fit. It wasn't Area 51, either. Area 51 had been hidden in the *hidden* directory, and the hidden directory was gone, burned down by the police to keep sickos from leaving digital roses on its stoop.

At first I thought it was that one line of code—code that was explicitly just reversing whatever the camera had captured—it wasn't nearly enough to scrub RJ from the image, from the reflection he was backed up against to reverse his hall, but then I had to thump my temples with the heels of my hands: there *was* no mirror, idiot. Get off that horse already.

And then one of those moments of calmness hit me, where I could feel myself breathing, could feel the rasp of all those air molecules diving down my throat.

Yes.

I fumbled my phone up, my fingers shaking, and peeled through the texts he'd sent. The images. They were all in our forever-long thread. I snapped it off to give me a useable scrollbar and paged through, holding all those air molecules in now.

It couldn't be, though.

Each image, each snap he'd taken of that long hall behind him, each time, the lateral was perfect. The center of focus, the bullseye, it was that back wall where they'd found his dad. In every image, there was the exact same amount of wall on each side, like the perspective, it had to be perfect to tunnel through this.

Had he—had he cropped all the images, then loaded them back on his phone to blast to me and the rest of the senior class? But, he would know that the same angle, the same positioning, that would kill the scare just the same as using the same five stock images.

Then it must mean he'd masking-taped around his feet on the carpet, stood in the exact same place each time, and, I don't know, used a magic marker on his mom's mirror, one that would match up with the back of his hand to get the phone in the same place time after time.

Except there was no mirror.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

And even if he'd done that, still, it would take fifty images to get one that had the exact same angle as last time.

I was breathing hard now. Too hard.

Was he using one shot of the empty hall as backdrop to them all?

It was the only thing that made any kind of sense.

I dove into the code again, deeper than deep, looking for any routine that would allow sampling from the same background.

Nothing.

Of course he could have done it all on his laptop, right? To what purpose, though? He was more careful than that, would never make a background come off re-used and tired.

Then there was only one other option.

He'd cracked the side-to-side thing, just not commented it out. Or he'd lucked into it, maybe pasted one algorithm before instead of after another, so that it got first bite at the variables, and that had made all the difference.

There was nothing in the code, though, even when I used some ancient Perl to compare the old app to the new one.

Except for that one line, and the style junk with the colors, which was in the stylesheet anyway, they were the same.

I slammed the laptop, paced my room, pushed my phone against my forehead like I could force myself to think, here.

If you've never cried a bit from coding, then you've never really coded.

It goes the other way too, though.

The rush of cracking it, of cueing into the Beauty, the Truth, it's all the heroin any junkie could ever need.

And I was so close.

And RJ, he'd been there already, I could see that now. It was where all his calmness had come from. Take my dad's beer, it doesn't matter. Go with her. Let's take it live, infect the world with it.

I stopped pacing, stared into my phone.

That was it.

I was just looking at the scaffolding, was stuck behind the curtain. Maybe the key was in the product, though.

I touched the app, breathed life into it, and was going for the living room, to snap a takeback pic from the front window, see if it would lateral up with the one I'd taken before, but of course that one was gone, deleted once and then deleted again, when it showed back up, ha ha, RJ.

And the living room would probably be too big anyway.

Instead, I just stepped out of my bedroom, into the hall. It wasn't as long as RJ's, but it had to be the standard width. There had to *be* a standard width. Maybe that mattered.

I pulled my door shut, turned around to face it, lowered my phone to vertical and let the shutter snap.

Then I cocked my wrist forward, disturbing the gyroscope, and dropped it down straight again, the camera burring completion in my palm.

Of course.

I did it again, to be sure, and again.

We'd never built in a kill switch. I was going to have to go back in, release the gyroscope after the first pic. If I didn't, the processor would lag, trying to run post-production on a stack of polaroids.

You can't think of everything, though.

Before opening my door again, I checked behind me. Just to be sure.

Nothing.

I crashed on my bed, my back wedged into the corner like always, headphones cupping my ears, and checked the images.

They were empty.

I mean, my hall was there, and there was a smudge of disturbance at about chest-level, telling me something had tried to load in there. But it had aborted.

This is the way it goes, yeah. You duck in for a quick-fix, just to see how something works, and then nothing's working.

It was probably the banner's feed slot that was jacking with the fade-in, too. I was strict with always using all jpeg or all png or all gif in whatever I wrote, but RJ always said he could keep it straight, it's not like he was going to do something global with them all at once, right?

Except the app *was* doing something global with the array it was pulling from the hidden directory.

Oh, wait: the hidden directory that *wasn't there*.

Of course it couldn't load the images.

Still, the way we'd written it, there should have been a big distortion in the hall, not a small, unenlarged one. And, if this app was going to work, if it was going to generate revenue, then that banner needed to quit jacking with things.

And, because we didn't have sponsors yet, the banner RJ had dummied in, just to make sure it fit, it was Zelda. The old one.

It made me lean over, see if my NES console was still in the corner somewhere, tangled in its cords. Maybe one last turn through Hyrule would be the right send-off for RJ. The right thank you. Because—it's stupid, but we'd never really left it behind. That first day RJ's dad had mentioned red light, green light to us in the kitchen? Why I'd been the one sitting on the island, not RJ, it was because of Zelda. In the NES version he'd introduced me to in third grade, he'd always been fascinated with the boulders, with how, if you walked around some of them three times, then came back the other way, a door would open up.

For us in elementary, the same way the floor lamp in my living room had always been the robber, come to take me away, his kitchen island had always been our boulder. One time, spending the night, he even told me that's where his mom had really gone, he was pretty sure. That he had walked wrong to the refrigerator, gone back for the butter he'd forgot by the toaster, then gone back the other way around the island, made some secret door swing open in her closet, and she had just reached through, fallen the rest of the way.

It's stupid, but it's real. Or, it was to us.

"You shit," I said to him, just out loud, for making me think of all that again, but then . . . could that be it? This app *had* lived on RJ's rig at the end, after all. What if the little image-reverse he'd built in, what if that was Link, turning back to go the opposite way around the boulder now? What if the doubletwist plus one necessary to open whatever door, what if it was just holding your phone upside down (1), backwards (2), and *then* flipping that image (3), which was already under so much strain just to stay straight?

That was just three things, though.

The boulders always required a fourth.

I checked my phone just before it shook in my hand, reminding me the images were ready—RJ's idea.

I scrolled through them, still empty, and then the phone shook again, which was one more time than we'd coded for. Had RJ sneaked a *reminder* vibration in as well? But where? It would be scary, though, like the app was insisting, was trying to warn the user.

But one thing at a time.

I slammed the pics onto my laptop to try to figure if that distortion in the air could help me diagnose things.

It didn't.

The scaled-back pictures that shouldn't have been there, as their directory had been burned—there they were, stacked on my desktop. I clicked the top one, had a bigger screen now, and could zoom, see that it was just the crawling girl, scaled back to bug-size, hanging there in the air of the hall, not even remotely scary.

"Are you local or what?" I asked the top one, and thumbed through my phone's cache.

No.

I wheeled the crawling girl close then far, close then far, like she was coming for me.

It wasn't scary.

Still, before getting back to the real work of the night—it was completely possible my phone had cached those hundred images in some way I was too tired to lock onto—I decided to make sure the sampling was truly random, anyway, wasn't just the first few from the array. Because that wouldn't be nearly so easy a fix. Cracking RJ's fake randomness, the 128 bit keys he liked to paste in, pretend he was hinging stuff on—it would be easier to just start over.

And maybe those keys were the source of the problem, even. Or the secret to keeping the lateral straight.

The top pic I'd already been seeing, of course. Crawling girl. Next was the shadow fingers we'd rigged reaching around a corner, but, just like all the *sneak_up* images in RJ's hall, the app had placed them perfectly somehow, right on the edge of the doorway opening onto the living room.

Maybe the width of the hall did matter.

I nodded, went to the next.

It was the smoke. Like a progression.

Maybe that was a good idea, too, if we ever did that fake animation on the paid version: sequence the stock images, build some logic in that wouldn't let this one pop unless that one had.

I clicked ahead, looking at my door instead of the screen for no real reason, and, when I came back to the laptop I felt a new hollowness in the deadspace behind my jaws, pushed the screen away so hard it shut.

My lungs were trying to hyperventilate or something.

No, my head, my *head* was doing that.

Same difference.

I looked to the door again. It was still shut.

I came back to the laptop, its side-light telling me it wasn't asleep yet, no. That it was waiting for me.

What I'd seen, what was there, it was—but it couldn't be.

A boy, about twelve. Washed-out and black and white. Skinny, shirtless, his pants just hanging off him.

RJ in sixth grade?

I wanted it be him, yes, because our summer romance wasn't over. Then *he* could be the fourth time around the boulder, right? The app only hits hyperdrive or whatever after satisfying 1, 2, 3, and a strange fourth, which, like Cedric had been for him, could be somebody close to you, dead. A blood sacrifice, to lubricate those doors that shouldn't open.

But it wasn't RJ.

RJ would never pull a lampshade over his head and stand there like that, just waiting for me to see him.

It was my dad when he was a kid. I knew. All his anger, his rules, his haircuts and talks, it was all there in the empty spaces between his ribs. The muscles that hadn't grown in. The bruises, the white lines of old cuts, burns above the sleeve lines.

I shook my head no, please, not him, not this.

Anybody but him.

But it couldn't be, either.

I was still being stupid, like with the mirror. Had to be.

I breathed down to a rate that didn't scream panic, watched my hand cross that bedspread space between me and the laptop, and opened it.

The image was gone, the hall empty again.

Was that worse or better, though?

"Mom?" I called out, then called again, louder, and then my phone shook in my hand again, stiffening that whole side of my body.

"No, no," I said to the phone, and only opened it because I was afraid it was going to ring if I didn't, which would definitely set me screaming, kickstart the kind of feedback loop I could never claw my way back from.

There was no image on my screen, no lamp-headed boy.

Just the app, waiting, primed. Insisting.

I turned the phone around, to see the lens—maybe RJ had figured out how to sonar the flash to control the lateral?—and just when it got vertical enough, it snapped a takeback pic of me.

I dropped it again, but it was still plugged into my laptop.

The image resolved on my screen.

It was me, like it should have been, but behind me, instead of the glare of my wall, my posters, my bulletin board, there was all this open space. Years and years of emptiness to fall through.

And then the light on my ceiling fan sucked back into itself.

I opened my mouth to scream but before I could the bulb flashed back, dying, bathing the room in its fast blue light.

Standing at the end of my bed was the lampshade boy.

I straightened my legs, pushed back, away from him, and my phone rang. It was the single loudest thing ever.

I fumbled it up before its ringer could split the world in two, slammed it to the side of my head and, in her sleep voice, my mom asked if I'd been calling her, if I needed anything, where was I?

I tried to say something, to tell her, to tell her all of it, but, in the glow of my laptop screen, in the light from my phone, the room was empty again.

For now.

Reset and Redefine: *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)* and the Rise of Indigenous Games

> "One of things I think a lot of people need to understand is we aren't a museum piece. The Iñupiat people are a living people, and a living culture. Even though we're in Northern Alaska, which covers this vast area from Nome all the way over to the Canadian border, there is this extreme value of interconnectedness and interdependence."
>
> —Amy Fredeen (Iñupiat),
> "A Living People: A Living Culture" Cultural Insight,
> *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)*, 2014

Indigenous storytelling within video games forces players to immerse themselves within ancestral worlds that have existed since time immemorial. Coming straight from community members, youth and elders alike, the videogame landscape has witnessed an explosion of Indigenous-centred narratives in games produced over the last decade. *Never Alone* (*Kisima Ingitchuna)* (2014) is but one example of Indigenous storytelling in videogames, but it is certainly a visually stunning and narratively riveting piece of oral tradition. As an integral part of the fluid social landscapes that make up Turtle Island, Indigenous communities are proving to be frontrunners within the development and execution of the ground-breaking digital experiences that videogaming provides its players. *Never Alone* is a two-player cooperative, 3D platformer[1] video game published by the Indigenous owned and operated Upper One Games, a subsidiary of E-Line Media. Released on 18 November 2014 to the Steam Store for both Windows and Mac OS X operating systems, *Never Alone* is a game developed in collaboration with the Iñupiat, an Indigenous peoples native to what is now known as northern Alaska. Close to 40 Iñupiat elders, storytellers, and community members contributed to the development of the piece, which is as much a game for entertainment as it is a tool for teaching and learning. This review sets out to unpack the narrative and presentation of *Never Alone* to give rich cultural context into Iñupiat life. The game insists on showing players how the Iñupiat of Cook Inlet are choosing to promote their distinct cultural expressions through self-representation and self-articulation for the benefit of all members of their community. As both a video game and representative documentary of Iñupiat lifeworlds, *Never Alone* demonstrates the potential that videogames hold in creating digital spaces for redefining damaging Indigenous stereotypes found in gaming narratives and resetting the cross-cultural capacities of videogaming as a medium of social sharing and adventure.

Redefining Indigeneity through Storytelling in *Never Alone*

On its ice-covered surface, the virtual setting and narrative of *Never Alone* could be considered by many to be quite ordinary: marketed with an easily-understood plotline that features a hero on an adventure with their trusted (and very cute) companion. However, the game disrupts its own marketed simplicity even before you take your first steps as the narrative's heroine, Nuna. *Never Alone* opens with a simple menu that prompts players to begin their journey with the option of watching the first two of twenty-four "Cultural Insights" available for viewing as part of the game. Titled "A Living People, a Living Culture" and "It Would Be Really Nice to Hear a Story" respectively, these Cultural Insights of *Never Alone* centre the voices and reflections of Iñupiat community members to communicate their culture's reliance on their traditional knowledge of the interconnectedness of humanity's relationship to the natural

world. These Insights show the prevalence of storytelling and the ongoing transmission of Iñupiat cultural knowledge through oral tradition. The story of Nuna and Fox are foundational to how the community sees themselves. Right away, players are strongly encouraged to engage with a video game in a way that does not only require them to simply run and jump through the challenges presented by the game design itself, but to also watch and engage with a living Iñupiat community.

When players first enter the game world, they are first greeted by the melodic voice of Iñupiat storyteller and narrator, Leo Oktollik, who begins the narrative in the traditional language of his community though a cut scene where he shares: "I will tell you a very old story. I heard it from Nasruk when I was very young" (Walkthrough Part 1, 0:18-0:26). From this acknowledgement of the story's retelling, players are introduced to Nuna, the narrative's protagonist, who sets off to find the cause of a supernatural blizzard that has plunged her community into immobility and despair. Nuna is faced with the brutal challenges of the Alaskan Arctic and when hope is all but lost she is rescued by Fox; both characters become each other's companion and most treasured friend during the first stages of their adventure. Because both Nuna and Fox are meant to each be played by a different player with their own set of controls, players learn very early that the relationship between Nuna and Fox is a truly reciprocal one. There are several key elements to the game mechanics that point to the concept of reciprocity that is shared by Iñupiat cultural traditions and highlighted through the previous Cultural Insights. Each playable character has a unique skillset that requires players (playing both solo and cooperatively) to value both characters equally. Nuna harnesses the power of a Bola, one of the traditional hunting weapons of the Iñupiat people, to open pathways so that the two may progress. The nimble-bodied Fox is able to scale tall obstacles that Nuna is unable to climb herself by using his claws in order to reach higher places and open alternate routes for Nuna to follow. This key concept of interconnectedness is one that I wish to highlight in both *Never Alone*'s narrative and its mechanics because the game's story immerses players within the characters' relationship, while also requiring players to control both characters equally in order to progress. Players of *Never Alone* are encouraged to balance Nuna and Fox's heroic identities while also coordinating the character's puzzle-solving abilities.

Much like the two characters' reciprocal interdependence on one another extends to the presentations of player success within the narrative, so too are they seen through the possibilities for player failure in the game's practical sense. The Alaskan Arctic setting is shown to be as hauntingly beautiful as it is perilous for Nuna and Fox, as one wrong move and a chilly gust of the Arctic winds can easily sweep the characters to their demise. Upon failure resulting in either of the characters' death, players are forced to start the segment over again until they get it right and are able to successfully move on. Because both characters must be played to each of their strengths to compensate for their individual weaknesses, the life of the human protagonist, Nuna, cannot be valued more than the life of Fox due to his status as a representative of the animal world. *Never Alone* blurs the lines of what is commonly understood in Western renderings of the natural world order, as Fox cannot be read of as a one-dimensional character whose only purpose within the story is to serve the bidding of his "master" and solve puzzles so that she can move on with her quest. There is no master-slave narrative within *Never Alone*, only the love for life in all of its forms. The game makes sure to spotlight the exceptional actions of the seemingly ordinary

characters of Nuna and Fox who persevere onward when constantly faced with near certain death.

Nuna and Fox meet for the first time (Upper One Games LLC, 2014).

It is important to note the prevalence of the more-than-physical world within the story and game mechanics of *Never Alone*. Once Nuna and Fox set out on their journey to put an end to the eternal blizzard in order to ensure the survival of their community, players are introduced to the various spirits that appear throughout the narrative. Some of these spectral characters within the game are "helping spirits" that take on the visual identity associated with several beings like loons and trees, who then help Nuna and Fox to access pathways they would not normally be able to reach on their own. Fox acts as a liaison between the physical world of humanity and the spirit world that seamlessly co-exist in the breathtaking visual graphics of *Never Alone*. As a storytelling element of the narrative specifically, the idea that Fox acts as a physical bridge between Nuna and the spirits themselves is openly presented by the voice of the game's storyteller, stating that "the girl understood that helping spirits are among us. Being different, that fox revealed to the girl just how beautiful those helpers were" (Walkthrough Part 1, 6:54-7:04). *Never Alone* also upholds the relevance of the spiritual world in a practical sense when players control Fox, as they must learn how to lead many of the helping spirits in different directions so that Nuna may actually reach them herself. The spirits that do appear in the game are also not one-dimensional in their relationships to Fox and Nuna. During one sequence of the game, players are presented with the challenge of dodging the Northern Lights which are depicted as green, phantom-like spirits that swoop down from the sky and snatch up the heroes if players are not careful enough to observe their movement patterns. Furthermore, it is eventually revealed that the unrelenting blizzard that is plaguing their community is being caused by the smashing and shoveling work of a giant ice man: a supernatural figure that signifies yet another representation of the cross-over between physical and spiritual worlds. Not only are players introduced to the Iñupiat cultural traditions that conceive of the human and the animal worlds as sharing complete interdependence with one another, but they are also shown the all-pervasiveness and diversity of spirituality that exists in Arctic landscapes as seen through the game's portrayal of the Northern Lights and the giant ice man. The game's narrative requires

players to engage with a certain kind of worldview that the Iñupiat conceptualize through oral traditions that form the very foundation of their Arctic lifeworld.

Extending my summary and analysis of *Never Alone* from the specific to the general, the game does a commendable job at breaking down typical or common tropes often found within adventure narratives; especially in the medium of mainstream video games and other interactive media. Although the game may be marketed as such a narrative, Nuna cannot be so simply understood as prototypical hero in this story. For one, she is female, and an incredibly young one at that, appearing to be no more than twelve years old. This sharply contrasts the various adventure-hero identities that players are used to connecting with in other games in the platformer genre. Nintendo's *Super Mario Brothers*, being the most well-known example of a platform game, centres the narrative on working-class, mature men (Mario and his brother/sidekick Luigi) who are out to save a kidnapped princess from a one-dimensional villain character. Nintendo's Mario character, and the platform games he is featured in, set the bar for independently-published titles like *Never Alone*. In contrast to *Mario* however, *Never Alone*'s protagonist Nuna is not only a young girl, but also a woman of colour from northern Alaska who lives a life that is centred on upholding the well-being of her personal community as well as the balance of the natural world to which she and her family are connected with. The reasoning behind her choice to embark on a perilous adventure into the Arctic tundra is not to find a potential lover, but as a necessary responsibility to keeping the physical and spiritual worlds from falling out of balance. Unlike many other typical adventure narratives similar to *Super Mario Brothers*, the story and game mechanics of *Never Alone* also rely on the cooperative utilization of two playable characters' skills in order to complete the game. This foundational component of the game, along with the often-occurring Cultural Insights throughout, strongly encourage players to critically engage with Iñupiat values, gender systems, and worldviews to deconstruct and intervene from within the framework of videogaming as a genre. More of this kind of work is sorely needed in a genre that has been geared toward a white, hetero-patriarchal mainstream culture since video games were popularized in the late 1980s. Nuna and Fox are truly exceptional characters, communicating in many ways including their physical actions, facial expressions, and vocal explanations. Their unbreakable bond is something tangible that all players are able to experience for themselves, in one way or another.

Resetting Cultural Contact Zones with Indigenous Game-Making

By no means does *Never Alone* as experiential and consumable media exist within a vacuum of relevancy that stays strict to the Iñupiat of Cook Inlet. As a contemporary method of passing down oral tradition within Iñupiat communities, it is also a globally-commercialized game. The game's global influence is clearly shown in the multitude of reviews by game critics and the distribution of its license to buyers from all over the world. Renisa Mawani's writings on the racially-diverse and heterogeneous "Contact Zone" of British Columbia in her book titled *Colonial Proximities: Crossracial Encounters and Juridical Truths in British Columbia, 1871-1921* can help to further unpack what it means to now have an Indigenous-made video game that exists to be accessed and critiqued by a mainstream gaming audience. In her conception, the colonial contact zone acts "as a space of racial intermixture – a place where Europeans, aboriginal peoples, and racial migrants came into frequent contact" in conceptual and physical geographies (Mawani 5). Cyberspace occupies a somewhat paradoxical position in Mawani's conception of what a contact zone is, as it is neither solely a conceptual framework or a physical

location that can be touched barring server infrastructure. The digital seems to exist as if from nothing. It appears to just be there, on your computer monitor. This all-new digital contact zone that *Never Alone* belongs to is created in the digital marketplace where the game is sold, as well as in its physical grounding in the North Alaskan roots of Iñupiat oral tradition. Furthermore, Mawani asserts that contact zones also exist "as a variegated site that was generative of multiple racial identities" (Mawani 5). Knowing that video games have held presences within Indigenous communities since they were first marketed to public consumers, it is important to note that the intercultural aspect of videogaming has also existed through portrayals of culture within those games. These kinds of cross-cultural connections are incredibly relevant when trying to understand the history of video gaming in Indigenous communities today, as Indigenous people are also engaging with video game narratives that communicate stereotypical representations of Indigenous cultures as monolithic and undeveloped. What happens when the opposite occurs and the Indigenous voices contained within video games, like they are in *Never Alone*, engage with players that are not only from Iñupiat communities, but from all over the world? Cultural contact zones found within video games are now being reformed in order to centre Indigenous voices in a way that has been done only limitedly thus far; giving us a glimpse of what is yet to come for Indigenous gaming as a genre.

Analyzing the digital platform where *Never Alone* is both marketed and reviewed helps to conceptualize the ongoing formation of digital contact zones sparked by Indigenous-made games. The Steam Store is an online marketplace that carries over sixty-four hundred different video games and is the primary platform for Windows and Mac OS X users to purchase a digital copy of *Never Alone*. Steam lists that the game carries sixteen supported languages (for the game's interface and subtitles) that range from French to Japanese, and Swedish to Korean. With such a wealth of supported languages, the story of Nuna and Fox is being featured on a truly international and multicultural platform. Additionally, eighty-four percent of over two thousand user reviews of the game left positive recommendations about their experience playing it. As the user "Burn" states in their review of *Never Alone* on the Steam Store:

> At first I complained 'this isn't a game, it's a short documentary,' but once I finished the game I joyfully realized 'this isn't a game, it's a short documentary.' There should be more educational games like this on the market! Stop the dragon slaying, mercenary heroes, revenge and love stories and give me more games about real people, their lives and their culture ("Burn" 2015)

Albeit one-dimensional in its analysis of *Never Alone* as strictly an "educational game," user Burn highlights something that many other reviewers, both positive and negative, fail to address in their criticisms about their experience with the game. Statements like those made by user "ForestLily418" who states: "I was so excited when my friend bought me this game… However, I cannot recommend this game as it is hardly what I'd call playable. The glitches are rampant and the controls are terrible," and user "vladeck2204" who echoes "[b]eautiful idea let down by unresponsive controls. At one point the game turns from pure enjoyment to pure frustration," simply focusing on the game's mechanical shortcomings and not on the exceptional narrative of the game itself (ForestLily418 2015) (vladeck2204 2015). When talking about the global culture of videogaming today, it is so important to consider the reception that games get in a multinational market. With an eighty-four percent positivity score, *Never Alone* succeeds in

immersing the living culture of the Iñupiat directly into the homes of gamers from all over the world.

Both Nuna and Fox evade the Northern Lights together (Upper One Games LLC, 2014).

So why is there so much praise for a game that has its fair share of mechanical bugs and a simple story? Although *Never Alone* is indeed gorgeous in its visual effects and riveting in its various educational aspects, the game helps to break down real life barriers that tropes of Indigenous peoples have created and that have existed in video game narratives since their popularization. As of right now, the centres for video game development and creation for mainstream consumers exist in metropolitan Japan and the continental United States. Like the popular depictions of "Indians" through the medium of film and Hollywood culture, damaging and stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous peoples, primarily young women, have contributed to building a tumultuous history in mainstream video game culture. The most infamous of these games was published by Mistique in 1982, entitled *Custer's Revenge*, where "the goal of the game is to guide the mostly naked general and his erect penis through an onslaught of arrows toward a Native American woman named Revenge who is tied to a post on the far side of the screen" to "even up an old score" by raping her (Shaw 20-21). As conceptually heinous and unacceptable as this so-called "game" is, *Custer's Revenge* serves as an example of the lengths that global video game culture has had to come in the past several decades. Certainly, the climate of Indigenous presences in video gaming has steadily become more representative of actual living and breathing Indigenous communities by featuring Indigenous identities as the protagonists of blockbuster titles such as Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed III* (2012) and Sucker Punch's *inFamous: Second Son* (2014), but the overall trend of these one-dimensional, masculine heroes in gaming does nothing but tokenize their identities as simple plot devices. Through the active work of Indigenous-lead production companies like Upper One Games, video games that centre the voices of Indigenous peoples and their cultures move past what is portrayed by mainstream gaming companies to show precisely how Indigenous communities are actively engaging with new media to further their own peoples' needs and interests. Prevalent examples of the important work that is currently being done by Indigenous game designers include games like *Otsì: Rise of the Kanien'kehá:ka Legends* (2009), a first-person perspective game with a Mohawk protagonist that was developed by students at the Kahnawake Survival School, as well as Minority Media's

empathy game[2] titled *Spirits of Spring* (2014) that tells the story of an Indigenous boy's journey to take a stand against bullying. Still, *Never Alone* separates itself by featuring the young, female protagonist character of Nuna. The game is one of the most recent, movement-leading examples of how Indigenous communities are currently deconstructing the mainstream gaming industry's negative stereotypes to serve their own purposes of cultural revitalization, intra-community education for younger generations, and the re-education of the global gaming public.

As we have previously found through the close reading and subsequent analysis of *Never Alone*, it is hard to define its scope of influence as both an aesthetically amazing, visually-based video game and a documentary through its inclusion of the Cultural Insights portion of the project. It seems as though both aspects have had varying impacts on the gaming community in that the documentary-style Cultural Insights are trivialized as a backdrop to the artistic quality of the in-game narrative, imagery, and characters. I propose that this sort of mental separation between player reactions to the game are problematic because it fails to see that *Never Alone* is truly interconnected in its entirety. If this game is truly meant to bring about an increased global awareness of Indigenous cultures from Indigenous peoples themselves, the playable game and the Cultural Insights cannot be judged separately. Ludology and Narratology are relatively new academic fields that engage with the contention of mechanics and narrative within videogaming.[3] Harsha Walia's writings on art as activism in her book *Undoing Border Imperialism* rings true for this particular debate, as *Never Alone* as a whole can be thought of as one of the "creative tactics" she credits as holding incredible power in social justice movements (Walia 177). Walia notes that "moving beyond the regurgitation of dogma or circulation of petitions, the tactics of vibrant social movements have included flash mobs, murals, performance, art, social media," and other forms of nuanced creative work (Walia 177). Considering the fact that the Iñupiat community has utilized the video game medium, foreign to Indigenous community practices in many ways, their desire to represent themselves within a genre that has done so much to erase Indigenous peoples as a whole communicates how *Never Alone* has the capability of subverting dominant narratives in meaningful ways. As it is stated on the publishing company's website itself:

> At Upper One Games, we weave timeless, living stories into dynamic, engaging and fun games that encourage discovery and exploration. We are confident our products will excite, inspire and connect people throughout the world (Upper One Games 2014).

Certainly, the purpose that *Never Alone* has been meant to serve is embodied by the company's statement. But as a piece of visual, interactive, educational, and narrative art, *Never Alone* also exists as a creative tactic for Iñupiat activist work to be upheld in rewriting the script of damaging Indigenous representations in video games.

Indigenous communities only just beginning to explore the potential for video games to communicate their teachings, worldviews, and issues relating to the concept of Indigenous authenticity within this digital medium are often questioned. If Indigenous literature has difficulty being duly recognized within a global canon, how can forms of digital storytelling within video games like *Never Alone* be fully recognized as Indigenous knowledge? Much like the debates of Indigenous authenticity within literary discourse as exemplified by Jace Weaver

(Cherokee), Craig Womack (Creek-Cherokee), and Robert Warrior (Osage) in their book titled *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, the written works of Indigenous peoples continue to be discredited of their relevancy in expanding the global literary canon. I see much of the same rhetoric happening in the production of *Never Alone* in its contributions to the canon of videogaming today and the boundaries its presentation oversteps in the preexisting definition of what Indigenous peoples are supposed to look like when confined to a simple portrayal within a video game. The remarks of Simon J. Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo) in the closing chapter of the book deconstructs the idea of authenticity in Indigenous literary expression as follows:

> Along with their native languages, Indian women and men have carried on their lives and expressions through the use of the newer languages… it is entirely possible for people to retain and maintain their lives through the use of any language. There is not a question of authenticity here; rather, it is the way that Indian people have creatively responded to forced colonization. And this response has been one of resistance (Ortiz 257).

The two heroes brave the frigid arctic waters (Upper One Games LLC, 2014).

Parallels between literary and video game discourses are certainly bridged by the presentation of oral history that is a living part of *Never Alone*'s Iñupiat community. Not only is the story of Nuna and Fox relevant in representing Indigenous peoples on their own terms for their own motives, the entirety of *Never Alone* serves as a foundational building block in cementing Indigenous presences within video gaming on the terms of Indigenous communities themselves. The discussion of Indigenous literary nationalism can be applied to further encompass Indigenous oral histories that are not relegated to a sequence of words on paper. *Never Alone* does its storytelling through the actions, expressions, and exclamations of the story's characters alongside the game's breathtaking visuals, soundscape, narration, and Cultural Insights strategically placed throughout. More spaces can and must be made for Indigenous communities to engage and experiment in creative media to tell their stories for the world to hear.

Reimaging Indigenous Futures in Videogaming

Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna) is a game that holds a very near and dear place to my heart. It is my hope that I have been able to communicate some of the most significant aspects of its narrative as Iñupiat oral tradition through my close reading and analysis, as well as its presentation as a globally-marketed video game through my additional reflections on its position within the discourse of Indigenous videogaming. As an Indigenous gamer myself, I recognize the need for games like this to exist in other communities and it fills me with joy knowing that this is only one of the very significant first steps in getting more Indigenous storytellings into the hands of gamers worldwide. I also recognize the value in now having something tangible that the Iñupiat community can take back to their youth to spark opportunities for educating the next generation that will immerse themselves in and learn from video game narratives. Growing up, I was only able to access the stereotypical portrayals of Indigenous peoples through mainstream video games while also being heavily influenced by American and Japanese cultural motifs found within those games. Through a recent discussion with a colleague I was asked the following question that has stuck in my mind ever since: "What would you think of this game if you played it growing up?" I wish that I could have an answer to that right now, but all I know is what I am aware of in the here and now. What I know is that the significance of *Never Alone* in its ability to carry on Indigenous knowledge through a digital medium is an invitation for further cross-cultural sharing between Indigenous game creators and players from all walks of life. There is profound power that has only recently become unlocked through the work of communities like the Iñupiat of Northern Alaska; allowing more potential for cultural education, cultural tolerance, and cultural revitalization.

Maize Longboat, University of British Columbia

Notes

[1] A platformer (or platform game) is a genre of video game which requires players to guide an avatar along suspended platforms, over obstacles, or both to advance within the game. Learn more about platformers here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platform_game

[2] Empathy games are an emerging genre of videogame storytelling that works to elicit empathic reactions from their players. This type of videogame almost always employs rules that do not empower the player, making in-game choices matter. Learn more about empathy games here: http://www.iac.gatech.edu/news-events/stories/2015/5/empathy-big-thing-video-games/407491

[3] Narratology refers to both the theory and the study of narrative and narrative structure and the ways that these affect our perception. Learn more about narratology here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narratology. Ludology is a discipline that deals with the critical study of games and gaming. More specifically, it focuses on game design, players, and their role in society and culture. Learn more about ludology here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Game_studies

Works Cited

"A Great Story Has the Ability to Move the Audience in Many Ways." *Upper One Games*. Upper One Games, LLC, 2014. 10 Dec. 2015. <http://www.upperonegames.citci.org/>.

"Burn." "Review for Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)." *Steam Community*. Valve Corporation, 23 June 2015. 10 Dec. 2015. <https://steamcommunity.com/id/Burn86/recommended/295790/>.

"ForestLily418." "Review for Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)." *Steam Community*. Valve Corporation, 23 September 2015. 10 Dec. 2015. <https://steamcommunity.com/profiles/76561198141815402/recommended/295790/>.

Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna). Version 4.3.7. Unity Technologies ApS, 2014.

Mawani, Renisa. *Colonial Proximities: Crossracial Encounters and Juridical Truths in British Columbia, 1871-1921*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009.

Shaw, Adrienne. *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

"vladeck2204." "Review for Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)." *Steam Community*. Valve Corporation, 23 June 2015. 10 Dec. 2015. <https://steamcommunity.com/id/vladeck2204/recommended/295790/>

Walia, Harsha. *Undoing Border Imperialism*. Edinburgh: AK Press, 2013.

Weaver, Jace, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Allen Warrior. *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.

Groulx, David A. *Wabigoon River Poems*. Neyaashiinigmiing, ON: Kegedonce Press, 2015. 58 pp. 978-1-928120-01-8.

https://kegedonce.com/bookstore/item/65-wabigoon-river-poems.html

> [I]t was 1967-69 when I was asking around for Indian poets. Indian poets? You mean poetry written by Indians, right?... Well, I knew of the young poets at the Institute of American Indian Art (IAIA) beginning to barely surface in the modern world… [such as] James McGrath and his wife, T.D. Allen… [There was] Joy Harjo… Leslie Marmon Silko… But other than that, there were no poets. Nothing. I mean literally nothing. (Ortiz 39)

Half a century after the era described by Simon Ortiz, Indian poets are no longer an endemic curiosity of the literary world. Contemporary Indigenous North America boasts not only an abundant and multifarious poetic production[1] but also a growing number of publishers dedicated to its development and dissemination, both of which strive to (re)define Native literary aesthetics in the increasingly dynamic and relational global context. One such publishing house is *Kegedonce Press*, a Native-owned and operated independent press based in the traditional territory of the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation at Neyaashiinigmiing Indian Reserve in Ontario, which is one of the three established Canadian Aboriginal publishers and the only Aboriginal publishing company committed to publishing Indigenous poetry and promoting it both nationally and internationally (*Kegedonce Press*).

One of *Kegedonce's* latest titles, *Wabigoon River Poems* (2015) by award-winning author, David A. Groulx, comprises 39 poems, some of which were previously published in *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, *Ricepaper*, *About Place Journal*, *The Trillium*, *One Throne Magazine*, and *Black Heart Magazine*. Like Groulx' previous *Kegedonce* collections, *The Long Dance* (2000) and *Under God's Pale Bones* (2010), from the very first page *Wabigoon River Poems* absorbs its reader in a unique poetic architecture that masterfully integrates the vehement force of the living word with a compact *in medias res* style. The poems, largely unified by mood, tone, and the free verse form, are arranged into two sections—*Part One: Pallor Mortis* and *Part Two: Wabigoon River Poem(s)*.

Pallor Mortis is braided from three dominant structural-thematic strands—poems charged with personal emotion, such as the beautiful poem "Food for Moths" and "On Seeing a Photograph of My Mother at St. Joseph Residential School for Girls," decolonization poems, and epigrammatic environmental verse. Ironically titled "Higher Intelligence," "Global Warning," and "Blind Man's Eye," poems from the last group sharply warn of impeding ecological cataclysm and humanity's self-destruction:

> We are so smart
> we've learned how to
> melt the great ice
> above and below the world
> to flood it again
> and rid it of ourselves ("Higher Intelligence" 3)

They paint an apocalyptic vision of a wasteland in which "rusted razors" carve the burning land that has been raped by a people convinced of their preordained destiny "to make / life into a commodity / to make earth into / property" ("Blind Man's Eye" 12) whose "perverted life" and false sense of superiority continues to entrap them in their "repulsive imagination" ("Blind Man's Eye" 12).

The same vision resurfaces in the poem "Kiss," which replaces the "rusted razor" metaphor with that of "the abortionist's hook"—"an inhospitable kiss" that "stuffed us back into the womb" ("Kiss" 14)—invoking the horror of coercive sterilization practices, a method of systemic annihilation of Indigenous peoples used by colonial powers all over the world. The dehumanization of Aboriginal people, historical amnesia, and the omnipresent residue of institutional racism are further addressed in "Sketch of a Small Town." Both the poem's language and its imagery shatter the illusion of homeliness evoked by the title as from a remote Whiteman's gaze perspective the speaker imparts the news that a Native boy was hanged by his playmates during a cowboys and Indians game in his small town in Ontario: ". . . The police cut down / the body / and he kicked a bit / like a pony" ("Sketch of a Small Town" 8).

In piercing, precise strokes, several poems in the first section foreground the question: *What are Indians?*:

> We are the aftermath of
> an apocalypse
>
> the remnants of a holocaust
> that began in 1492
>
> We are the dust of a great storm
> that has not yet settled
>
> We are soldiers after the war
>
> Survivors of a death camp… ("What are Indians?" 1)

The same question reappears in the poem "I Know What an Indian Is." Repeatedly referred to in inanimate terms, "the Indian" is identified as a dehumanized, colonially imposed configuration:

> An Indian is the creation
> of a subhuman
> by an act
> of government ("I Know What an Indian Is" 15)

Satirically subverting the imperial paradigm of civilization, the poems "Hobbesian Notions" and "Why Are They Called White People" answer the same question by deconstructing the concept of Whiteness:

> If the Whiteman thinks
> Indian lives were
> "nasty brutish and short"
> before he came
>
> He should see them now ("Hobbesian Notions" 2)

> Why are they called White people
> and not immigrants
> colonists
> settlers
> or
> killers
> or
> kidnappers
> or
> thieves ("Why Are They Called White People" 9)

The second section, *Wabigoon River Poem(s)*, introduces a different, albeit thematically related, set of poems. Supplemented by as many as 126 endnotes, it explores the topics of oppression, freedom, and injustice through densely intertextual, opaque verse, revealing the author's admirable erudition and acute awareness of imperial practices across space and time. This part of the collection maps a comprehensive diachronic geography of oppression perpetrated by "people [with] hell in [their] hand and heaven in [their] mouth" ("Wretched Red: I" 20) on all parts of the planet—from the Congo, South Africa, Ghana, Somalia, Nigeria, Haiti, Guinea, Argentina, Guatemala, Venezuela, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Palestine, Qatar, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Bosnia, Croatia, Hungary, Greece, and Spain to the small Sagamok reserve in Western Ontario. As a result, it provides a broad platform for rumination, targeting not only Native or Anglo-American/Canadian readers—as is confirmed by the Endnotes, which also explain terms such as Tecumseh (52), Custer (52), Pontiac (54), Geronimo (54), and Métis (55)—but also an eclectic worldwide audience that subsumes both cosmopolitan intellectuals and a simply curious, semi-informed readership. Poems in this section are not (just) exclusively Indigenous, or postcolonial, or protest poetry; they are above all human. Groulx's creative imagination leads us through abysses of suffering and despair, as it breaks down the concepts of race, religion, and nation, testifies to a universal experience of entrapment in Western civilization's materialistic

overtures, and upholds a shared strife for liberation from the confines of historical injustice. It echoes the cry of the subjugated and the dispossessed whose lives have been torn apart by bigotry, structural violence, and ethnocide ("Wretched Red: III" 26). In a centrifugal sweep, it fuses the fate of Ontario Aboriginal communities ravaged by mercury poisoning with victims of Oświęcim concentration camp and Wounded Knee massacre. Transcending the boundaries of space and time, it crafts a space in which Ho Chi Minh, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, Che, Pontiac, Leonard Peltier, and Simon Bolivar stand together in fight against a man-eating war god fed by Western scientific and philosophical ideas of Heidegger, Nietzsche, Hegel, Rousseau, Hayek, Tocqueville, Ploetz, and Gobineau.

Yet, despite the macabre mood, some poems of this section weave a thread of hope. The persona in "Wretched Red: II" is not only the one who perceives the horrors of oppression but also the "one who remembers" ("Wretched Red: II" 24) and nourishes the healing power of word. Simultaneously, using paratextual tools, the poet positions himself as a dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants, the one whose work merely follows in the footsteps set by intellectual bards of liberation such as Fanon and Achebe, whom he often credits at the beginning of his collections.[2] Groulx' "celebration of influence" (see Blaeser 144) further extends to memorable resistance heroes and dissidents—Ojibwa warrior and poet, Waubojeeg, Tecumseh, Pontiac, Pope, Toussaint L'Ouverture, José Rizal, Larbi Ben M'Hidi, Breyten Breytenbach, Warsame Shire Awale, Daniel Varoujan, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Miklós Radnóti, Dennis Brutus, Mohammed al-Ajami, and many others who are referred to in the poems and the Notes. Even though the last poem, "Reckoner (Addenda)," condemns the possibility of humanity's regeneration on its present civilizational foundations, it also calls for change, as do the poems "Wretched Red IV" and "V": "… *Rise / Rise / The world is waiting*" ("Wretched Red: IV" 27); "… howl / to be free men / *Amen*" ("Wretched Red: V" 29). One of the final poems of the second section, "Ceremony," shares the same tone, as it repeats not only the title but also the closing *Blessingway* pattern of Leslie Marmon Silko's famous novel. Whereas in *Ceremony* the "witchery" returns "into its belly" and vanishes by coming back on itself (Silko 261), "Ceremony" celebrates the return of the ancestors, ancient prophets, the buffalo, and the traditional ways, discarding settler civilization's disposable customs: "Our men will return / eat from bowels / and bowls to be thrown away / they will return, *blessingway*" ("Ceremony" 42).

Except for some minor typographical and factual errors, *Wabigoon River Poems* is a superbly crafted collection of verse. Its powerful, relatable imagery proves not only that in this time and day Native poetic voice is alive and thriving but also that the perspective it conveys, received with interest and appreciated worldwide (Croatia, in my case), is invaluable to understanding and envisioning our world.

Sanja Runtić, University of Osijek, Croatia

Notes

[1] As recent scholarship has demonstrated, written evidence to the rich tradition of American Indian poetry goes as far back as the 1670s (see Parker 4).

[2] This volume is framed with a famous quote from *Things Fall Apart*: "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."

Works Cited

Blaeser, Kimberly, M. "Song Buried in the Muscle of Urgency." *Transmotion* 2.1&2 (2016): 144–154. 22 Apr. 2017.

Groulx, David A. *The Long Dance*. Neyaashiinigmiing, ON: Kegedonce Press, 2000.

---. *Under God's Pale Bones*. Ed. Gregory Scofield. Neyaashiinigmiing, ON: Kegedonce Press, 2010.

Kegedonce Press. Web. 20 Apr. 2017 <http://kegedonce.com>.

Ortiz, Simon. "Finding an Indian Poet." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 18.3 (2006): 39–40.

Parker, Robert Dale. *Changing Is Not Vanishing*: *A Collection of American Indian Poetry to 1930*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2011.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin, 1986.

Gerald Vizenor. *Treaty Shirts: October 2034—A Familiar Treatise on the White Earth Nation*. Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2016. 125 pp. 978-0-8195-7628-6

http://www.upne.com/0819576286.html

On the companion website for his new novel, *Treaty Shirts*, Gerald Vizenor notes that the book's subtitle is intended to signal that each of its linked narratives offers a distinct view of Native politics and governance. In suggesting further that the novel is at least partly an allegory (one that alludes to what would be his own one hundredth birthday in 2034), Vizenor also hints at other, more personal connotations. To be "familiar" with something is know it through long association, to be in intimate or in close relationship with it. For Vizenor, of course, a key index of the closeness of any relationship or the significance of any subject or story, is one's willingness and ability to "tease" it, to test its limits and expand its possibilities. There is probably no recent subject that Vizenor is more invested in and better positioned to tease than the White Earth Constitution, with its vexed (and currently thwarted) progress toward implementation. Taking up this theme, *Treaty Shirts* is part roman à clef, part satire, and part political treatise, emerging in the context of profound uncertainty about the current direction of tribal governance. In a novel that embeds complex political theorization in a narrative displaying his characteristic spirit of invention, intertextuality, and play, Vizenor probes the very meaning of constitutionalism, not just for White Earth, but for other contemporary indigenous communities as well.

Readers familiar with the text of the White Earth Constitution, and with Vizenor's earlier writings on that text (both fictional and non-fictional), will recognize that heterogeneity and heteroglossia are central to his views regarding ideal forms of contemporary native polities. Reflecting this core commitment, Vizenor structures *Treaty Shirts* as a sequence of recursive meditations by seven different narrators, all of whom have been exiled from White Earth after the termination of the nation through an act of congressional plenary power. In each chapter of the book we circle back temporally and repeat the moment of treaty abrogation and constitutional dissolution, rehearsing the build up to moment of exile. Only at end of book do we move forward a bit, in narrative terms. In this respect, it becomes clear that the novel is a vehicle for thinking about different strategies for ensuring the survivance of an indigenous polity, and about moments of transition and transformation of that polity into new forms. The book challenges us, in this regard, to look beyond the apparent failure of particular decolonizing strategies and consider the imaginative possibilities revealed, or perhaps engendered, by those setbacks. As one of the exiles, Savage Love, notes "You can't be exiled from liberty, from motion. Resuming a state of motion is what makes exile into a presence, rather than an absence—an assertion of liberty in motion" (52.

While the use of an episodic and circular plot and a rapidly shifting cast of characters is hardly an unusual technique in Vizenor's fiction, the level of commitment here to the gaps produced through the use of shifting third person limited point of view is perhaps a bit of a departure. Through this narrative approach, Vizenor signals to the reader that he is not necessarily trying to reconcile the theoretical tensions regarding the legacy of the White Earth Constitution and the fate of the White Earth polity that emerge through the varied reflections of his point of view characters. Rather he seems to be promoting what Richard Rorty (who is referenced in the text)

has characterized as the central importance of irony in contemporary political thought. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty defines an ironist as someone who fulfills the following three conditions: "(1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that arguments phrased in her current vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve those doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself " (Rorty 73). Unwilling to invest in a priori conceptual certainty or absolutes, Rorty's ironist therefore uses dialectics as a preferred form of argument. The ironist sets about re-describing objects or events, often in neologistic terms, "with the hope that by the time she has finished using old words new senses or introducing brand-new words, people will no longer ask questions in the old words" (78). In this respect, Rorty's understanding of irony (one shared in certain ways by Vizenor) is as an open-ended process of linguistic and conceptual transformation.

Vizenor's protagonists embody many of the characteristics of Rorty's ironist, always resisting "terminal creeds" and consistently reworking their discourses and revisiting their memories of political experiences. Where Vizenor departs from Rorty, perhaps, is in extending the ironic mode from the private and into the public sphere, or rather, in denying the existence of such a split. Vizenor's work has always attended to the important implications of irony in the realms of law and politics; this is one reason that irony stands as a explicitly protected form of expression in the White Earth Constitution. Not surprisingly, then, a significant part Vizenor's project in *Treaty Shirts* is to "ironize" the White Earth Constitution, imagining its paradoxical ability to continue functioning both after having been abrogated unilaterally by the U.S. government and becoming deterritorialized, transformed into the charter of a diasporic group of Anishinaabeg exiles. Suggesting the absurdity and contradiction of the idea of being exiled from a terminated nation is just one facet of the Vizenor's subtle examination of these complex political ideas. On the novel's companion site, Vizenor describes *Treaty Shirts* as an "ironic declaration" that the ethos of the White Earth Constitution "is not determined by territorial boundaries." In this respect, he signals that the book can be read as an ironist's attempt to indigenize the very meaning of a *constitution* and to re-frame the present impass over the ratification and implementation of a particular, political document as part of a much longer historical process of transformation.

The seven exiles/point of view characters of *Treaty Shirts* (identified through their nicknames) are Archive, Moby Dick, Savage Love, Gichi Noodin, Hole in the Storm, Waasese, and Justice Molly Crèche. Together, they embody a range of potential imaginative strategies for resisting colonial power structures, critiquing what Vizenor terms "casino corruption," and ensuring that the ethos of White Earth Constitution will continue to serve its utopian function in shaping a living polity. The first and last narrator, a poet, novelist, and the great nephew of Clement Beaulieu (Vizenor's alter ego in other works), Archive is a repository of memory (historical, political, legal, and literary), all of which he constantly reworks in a spirit of Derridean play. Bearing a nickname given to him by the "tradition fascists" (Vizenor's critical term for those tribal nationalists caught up in their own orthodoxies and reductive forms of identity politics), Moby Dick espouses a form of indigenous modernism, which he articulates while teasing the memories of famous explorers. Moby Dick's other primary distinguishing characteristic is his

great compassion, which he pointedly extends towards other "deformed fish," despite the fact that this ethos renders him the target of shaming by other members of the community. Savage Love, an unpublished, experimental novelist linked to Samuel Beckett, trains mongrel irony dogs, thus recalling facets of Vizenor's "postindian" trickster discourse and its resistance problematic identity poses. And filling out our list, we have Gichi Noodin (the popular voice of Panic Radio), Hole in the Storm (an avant-garde painter and blood relative of Dogroy Beaulieu, the protagonist of Vizenor's earlier novel *Shrouds of White Earth*), Waasese (a laser holographer whose aesthetic recalls in some ways the Anishinaabe painter David Bradley's biting form of indigenous pop art), and an innovative legal thinker, Justice Molly Crèche (whose courtroom becomes a space for the recognition of new totems and totemic relationships, and the critique of various forms of repression or subversion of those relationships—particularly on the part of the tradition fascists).

Through the series of chapters exploring the perspectives of these exiles, we encounter varied assertions of the importance of art and the central role of stories in the survivance of indigenous forms of governance. This, too, represents an implicit argument structuring the novel, one that is tied to its suggestive re-definition of indigenous constitutionalism. As the book progresses, the exiles' stories suggest a number of key political insights: (1) the idea that sovereignty exists only in its assertion--in other words, that sovereignty is real only insofar as it is "performed"; (2) that a pivot to transnational, and transmotional, models is an important tactic in face of the nation-state centered structures of U.S. colonialism; and (3) that indigenous governance must blend contemporary structures with traditional systems of knowledge, in the way the White Earth Constitution engages with the Anishinaabe concept of *mino-bimaadiziwin*. These ideas underpin some of the most provocative arguments voiced by characters in the novel, arguments that often seems to suggest that the "people" we perform ourselves to be, through things like written constitutions, cannot truly be bound either by territory or the legal forms/structures of the colonizer. In this respect, some might argue that the White Earth Constitution itself was/is simply an initial step (though perhaps a necessary one) toward the realization of what Vizenor likes to call "continental liberty," and a limited and provisional instantiation of a native political presence that U.S. settler colonialism only believes it can erase.

In the spirit of ironic provisionality and open reflection, and also in the spirit of traditional storytelling, Vizenor does not take a clear position on the competing political claims running through the novel. Savage Love, for example, seems somewhat dismissive of the White Earth Constitution, viewing it as compromised from the very start:

> The constitution was never a presence, only a collection of promissory notes and abstract articles, but those ratified egalitarian words have always been an absence, beholden to the territorial borders and jurisdiction provided by the treaty of 1867, and continued with the plenary power favors of the United States Congress.
>
> The abrogation of the constitution was the start, not the end, not the absence and not the creation of a fake presence. The actual story of the constitution started with termination, the abrogration, not the delegate ratification or referendum by native citizens…The actual story of the constitution started with the exiles. (51).

In contrast to this view, we have Archive, the only character who is given two chapters in which he is the focal point (and thus perhaps is the figure who comes closest to expressing an authorial viewpoint). Archive emphasizes the continuity of indigenous peoplehood, a spirit of relationship and governance that makes itself manifest in different forms—treaties, constitutions, and other forms of stories--over historical time. It is Archive who introduces the 1701 Great Peace of Montreal (between the governor of New France and 1300 representatives of over forty tribal nations) as a recurrent motif in the novel. That treaty (both a text and event) is an embodiment of continental liberty that led to sixty years of peace. Even if it stands as a positive example of the potential for the kind of mutual recognition that we sometime index through the concept of sovereignty, however, the Great Peace remains provisional and equivocal. Tied to the history of the Beaver Wars and the dissemination of the fur trade throughout the lifeways of indigenous communities, this treaty also validated the "decimation of totemic animals," something not to be forgiven or erased (18). Archive insinuates that the ongoing stories of Anishinaabe governance and sovereignty must come to grips with the full, problematic nature of the colonial past, and with the native role in that past. New totems may emerge, but they cannot overwrite this history entirely.

Archive also introduces us to the eponymous treaty shirts, which function both as allegorical symbols within the book and as vehicles for metafictive reflection. Initially created by some of the delegates to the White Earth constitutional convention, these unwashed shirts, worn at conferences and legislative sessions, are intended to serve as a kind of talismanic ward. In much the same way that the protective power of the Ghost Shirts worn by the Lakota in the nineteenth century was revealed to be partial, however, the treaty shirts function in an equivocal way, particularly to the extent that they come to embody for some a static faith in fixed legal forms (forms which the novel suggests can be undone or abrogated). One detects complex irony in Archive's comment that "stories of the exiles in *Treaty Shirts* were eternal" in the way articles in constitutions always have meaning (14). This is, of course, true in certain respects, but only when one penetrates through the fixed forms of governance to the deeper stories defining the people that flesh out these forms. Creation stories are visionary, Archive notes, and thus are not concerned with "metes and bounds" (14). A naïve faith in the permanence and stability of time-bound expressions of indigenous peoplehood (expressions like the White Earth Constitution itself), become in Archive's perspective, precarious. If, on the other hand, one invests in the idea that stories are the most fundamental and enduring form of government, one can work with and through a specific constitutional text without ever losing sight of the centrality of the political presence that is made manifest through it. An awareness of that presence, a faith in its persistence, and a willingness to work for its survivance, is, perhaps, the kind of "treaty shirt" that can provide the most effective shield in difficult times. It may be with this in mind that Archive emphasizes the (fictional) creation of the White Earth Continental Congress at the same moment when the White Earth Constitution was (fictionally) certified. Why create a body whose typical purpose would be to *create* a constitution at precisely the point when a constitution would appear to many people to be complete? Perhaps, through Archive, Vizenor is suggesting that the goal of indigenous politics (in contrast with the politics of settler-colonial states like the U.S.) isn't to write and deploy stable governing documents, but rather to continually realize a spirit of self-constitution and engage in ongoing nation building. Perhaps, to produce a full discourse of what many would today call sovereignty (but which another generation may name differently), the best approach is to celebrate and draw upon the full content of the indigenous political

archive, an archive that now includes an innovative novel of ideas by the inimitable storier, Gerald Vizenor.

David J. Carlson, California State University, San Bernardino

Works Cited

Rorty, Richard. Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

http://geraldvizenor.site.wesleyan.edu/papers/gerald-vizenor-on-the-constitution/

Review of Bill Anthes, *Edgar Heap of Birds*, Duke University Press, 2015. 232pp. 978-0-8223-5994-4

https://www.dukeupress.edu/edgar-heap-of-birds

Having completed a book about contemporary indigenous art within a few months of reviewing Bill Anthes's *Edgar Heap of Birds*, I appreciate certain shared challenges. In writing the first monograph on the multidisciplinary practice of the accomplished living Cheyenne artist (b. 1954), Anthes must answer to a vast image archive predicated on the opposite meanings of "indigenous" and "contemporary," narrate a tide of dispossession without resorting to victimisation, foreground Native epistemology while critiquing cultural essentialism, craft sentences to satisfy tribal elders, biennial curators, and academic reviewers, and cast an art historical net wide enough to include Barbara Kruger and the Bighorn Medicine Wheel. While Anthes does justice to the overt political dimensions of Heap of Birds's oeuvre, more surprising is his treatment of its subtle ceremonial grounding. While spiritual practices linked to sacred homelands are a central concern in interdisciplinary Native Studies, "ceremony" has no comparable standing in conversations about global contemporary art. In selecting it as a key theoretical term and organising principle for the text, Anthes invites consideration of how an embodied Cheyenne understanding of renewal may enter and alter the sprawling and largely secular institutions of contemporary art, even—or especially—when it goes unseen.

Indeed, a quick scan across four decades of Heap of Birds' practice does not immediately reveal the sacred as a priority. The artist is best known for his outdoor installations of metal signs that mimic the spare and authoritative aesthetics of government bureaucracies. Anthes opens with the controversy surrounding *Beyond the Chief*, a public artwork that Heap of Birds temporarily installed on the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign campus in 2009. Two years earlier, the university retired a stereotypical Indian mascot, Chief Illiniwek, from their sports fields in response to mounting criticism from Native activists and peer institutions, while retaining their teams' name, the Fighting Ilini. Twelve commercially printed steel panels greeted visitors with "FIGHTING ILLINI" in disorienting backward-facing type, followed by the affirmative "TODAY YOUR HOST IS" and the name of a tribal nation. While the Peoria, Kickapoo, Meskwaki, and nine others listed by Heap of Birds were displaced from their traditional Illinois territories by colonisation, the signs highlight ongoing Native claims to this cleared ground and in doing so, unsettle the foundations of US property and law. As Anthes emphasises, *Beyond the Chief* characteristically makes hidden histories of dispossession visible in order to generate public debate, while asserting a symbolic form of indigenous sovereignty in the present tense.

While the installation is but one instance of the artist's repetitive use of signs—it belongs to the *Native Hosts* series begun in 1988—Anthes takes care to underscore the distinctive formal qualities and historical engagements of individual works, as well as the unique contexts in which they are erected and received. In the case of *Beyond the Chief*, instances of vandalism and theft indicate the particular potency of Heap of Birds' intervention on a divided campus and alert us to audiences' roles in constructing and contesting meaning. Analogous methods of detailed description, contextualisation, and attention to the dialogical nature of artworks characterise all high-level art criticism today. Nonetheless, art historian Jane Blocker's endorsement on the back of the book rings true: "So often we fail to look carefully at or describe the works of Native

American artists in depth, but tend instead to look *through* them to some plane of political meaning to which they presumably grant passage." Anthes effectively reverses this approach by unpacking Heap of Birds' practice at the directive of the artworks, rather than usurping their specificity within catch-all truisms about colonial injustice and reconciliation. This task is made easier by how loudly and clearly the signs proclaim their political commitments, bolstered by the artist's own eloquent commentary.

Anthes takes additional steps to position Heap of Birds's practice in distinction to other artists' and critics' tendency to value "relational" artworks for initiating open-ended and nonhierarchical dialogue with audiences presumed to be "equals." Especially instructive is a comparison of Heap of Birds's admonishments to "remember" and "honor" with the passive voice and inclusive "we" of Lawrence Weiner's (b. 1942) well-known sign works, embodying the latter artist's conviction to use the imperative amounts to a form of linguistic tyranny. Likening Heap of Birds's work to "sharp rocks," Anthes argues that they reconfigure a Cheyenne warrior's responsibility to protect his community by engaging in semiotic, rather than physical, warfare—an approach that reasserts indigenous social and political priorities in the face of colonial assimilation. Here and elsewhere, Anthes makes good on his promise to emphasise Heap of Birds's challenge to the discourses and institutions of contemporary art in a manner allied with the strongest feminist and decolonial work, rather than "lobbying for [his] inclusion in a familiar history" (127). Even more could be done to unpack the relationship of this warrior tradition—one that could easily slide into popular stereotypes about Plains masculinity—to the presumed moral authority of the "artist-as-outsider" that scholars such as Grant Kester, Claire Bishop, and others have discussed within broader debates about contemporary relational art.[1]

Beyond mapping the artworks' clear political preoccupations, the book's deeper argument centres on the role of Cheyenne ceremony in quietly shaping Heap of Birds approach to the contested ownership of land and history. Anthes anchors this thread of inquiry in a succinct yet moving description of his attendance, at Heap of Birds's invitation, of an Earth Renewal ceremony (popularly known as the Sun Dance) on the artist's home Cheyenne-Arapaho reservation in Oklahoma. During the four-day-long ceremony at midsummer, Heap of Birds and other participants sacrifice themselves through feats of physical endurance in order to "make the world new again each year" (19). Yet the Earth Renewal is rarely referenced in any direct manner in the artist's work. Following Anthes description of this event, which occupies a mere two-and-a-half pages of the introduction, he engages with ceremony less as content than as a theoretical preoccupation and an organising principle for the text. Ceremony, we might conclude, is not an *object* in Heap of Bird's practice—nor Anthes' book—so much as a structuring logic that remains for the most part invisible. (One notable exception is Heap of Birds's *Wheel*, an outdoor sculpture that takes the form of a Plains medicine wheel addressing the trauma of the Sand Creek Massacre, which was permanently installed at the Denver Art Museum in 2005 and discussed at length in chapter three).

Anthes focuses on the non-progressive temporal-spatial order of the Earth Renewal, which takes the form of a "spiral that reaches outward and back to the center simultaneously" (28). He argues that returning to an Oklahoma hilltop each summer grants Heap of Birds a unique vantage point on the much-debated "temporal turn" in global contemporary art. The latter is sometimes discussed as the critical cancellation of canonical modernists' preoccupations with progressive

forward movement, or as the sense of a perpetual present engendered by the spread of neoliberalism and the promise of technological instantaneity. Heap of Birds's practice rather attests to the uneasy coexistence of pluralistic "habits of thought" that refuse to resolve into a singular, shared cosmology—a possibility theorised by scholars such as Terry Smith and Keith Moxey, who Anthes names as allies. The artist's use of the present-tense to access indigenous histories unique to particular places, patterning of words and forms according to the ceremonially significant number four, and use of global travel as an opportunity to symbolically repatriate the stories of indigenous travelers before him, are examples that locate particular times, places, and peoples along the spiral formation introduced in the first pages of the book. Subsequently, Anthes eschews a chronological structure in favor of four distinct yet interconnected essays. Respectively titled "land," "words," "histories," and "generations," each chapter takes a journey that ultimately circles back to the enduring themes of Heap of Birds's life work.

The "spiral" approach shared between artist and author is subtly transformative. As many before me have noted, the reduction of indigenous spirituality to symbols and objects renders it divisible, exchangeable, and hence, commodifiable. Likewise, sacred materials can become severed from political and historical forces and pushed into the premodern mist. These dual processes have informed an enduring cultural complex in which antimodernists, new age religionists, fashionistas, and many a non-Native artist have sought access to indigenous secrets in search of "universal" truths, redemption from capitalist alienation, saleable symbols of the exotic, or sympathetic associations with the oppressed (as was the case when French-Moroccan artist Latifa Laâbissi recently performed *Self Portrait Camouflage* at MoMA PS1 wearing only a faux Plains-style headdress, drawing outrage from Native critics).[2] It would be all too easy for Heap of Birds to use his own heritage to reclaim profit from the circulation of ceremonial signifiers—and who would blame him, given the vast history of cultural appropriation? Anthes, for his part, might adopt a classic ethnographic approach, offering cultural interpretations of this or that symbol or event. Such an approach might secure the superficial acceptance of artist and author in the annuls of contemporary art (which boasts an "anthropological turn" among others), but would leave its basic institutions untouched.

It does not follow that Heap of Birds—or for that matter, anyone writing about him—can avoid participating in the cultural and economic logic of capitalism, given how thoroughly this system has permeated the history of colonisation and the globalisation of contemporary art alike. There are no "outsiders" here. Yet by treating ceremony as a model for intellectual and embodied ways of inhabiting the world, making art, and producing allied scholarship, rather than announcing it as consumable content, Heap of Birds and Anthes join forces to demonstrate that the much-discussed market is not the *only* logic structuring relationships between subjects and objects, places and histories. Capitalist cosmologies sit alongside, and in irreducible entanglement with, surviving and adaptive indigenous worldviews. In the uneasy dance between them we find "the crux of [Heap of Birds's] contemporaneity" (21).

Jessica L. Horton, University of Delaware

Notes

[1] For a succinct summary and critique of this literature, see John Byrnes, "The Yes Men: Art and the Culture of Corporate Capitalism" in *Keep It Slick: Infiltrating Capitalism with The Yes Men*, edited by Astria Suparak, Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University, 2009, pp. 19–22.
[2] The literature on appropriations of Native spirituality and culture is vast. See, for example, Michael Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?* Harvard University Press, 2004. See also *Native Appropriations*, a popular blog by indigenous scholar Adrienne Keene, focused on contemporary popular culture and the fashion industry, http://nativeappropriations.com/. For detailed analyses of the controversy surrounding Latifa Laâbissi's performance, see Christopher Green, "Against a Feathered Headdress: A Tale of Two Performance Festivals and Native American Voices," *Hyperallergic*, Jan. 17, 2017, https://hyperallergic.com/352026/against-a-feathered-headdress-two-performance-festivals-native-american-voices/; Crystal Migwans, "The Violence of Cultural Appropriation," *Canadian Art*, Feb. 7, 2017, http://canadianart.ca/features/violence-cultural-appropriation/.

***Reading the Wampum: Essays on Hodinöhsö:ni' Visual Code and Epistemological Recovery.* Penelope Myrtle Kelsey. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014. 152 pp. 978-0-8156-3366-2.**

http://www.syracuseuniversitypress.syr.edu/fall-2014/reading-the-wampum.html

In the summer of 2013, the Hodinöhsö:ni' Confederacy celebrated the 400th anniversary of the Two Row Wampum, the first treaty belt marking a precedent-setting agreement between the Iroquois and the Dutch. Many subsequent treaties cite that foundational wampum belt as it provides legally binding terms for the relationship between the Confederacy and settlers along with a process for future negotiations.

Travelling by canoe from Albany to New York City, descendants came together in 2013 as part of the Two Row Wampum Campaign to reaffirm the historial, political, cultural, and philosophical importance of the Two Row. The significance of this particular belt cannot be overstated. Like the Magna Carta it is "a great humanitarian document because it recognizes equality in spite of the small size of the White colony and insures safety, peace, and friendship forever, and sets up the process for all of our ensuing treaties up to this moment" (3). Yet few political scientists and legal scholars have ever heard of the Two Row and other wampum belts, literary scholars remain largely ignorant about wampum literacy, and post-colonialist are mostly unaware of the relevance and resurgence of wampum theory.

Penelope Myrtle Kelsey's new book *Reading the Wampum: Essays on Hodinöhsö:ni' Visual Code and Epistemological Recovery* could be a game changer. Kelsey's groundbreaking book answers the call of scholars like Craig Womack to center tribal literatures, languages, stories, and theories in Native American studies. Despite her Seneca descent, Kelsey explicitly locates herself outside the Longhouse, noting that she stands "outside this circle of tribal sovereignty, as a non-Hodinöhsö:ni' citizen" (xxvi). Her methodology is informed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith's influential treatise *Decolonizing Methodologies* which calls for scholarship that is useful and accountable to indigenous communities. For non-native scholars who stand at a far greater distance in these concentric circles, Kelsey's words evoke the possibility of a ripple effect. Her innovative analysis demonstrates how scholars can engage the relationship between alphabetism, new media, visual culture, and indigenous literacies like wampum, pictography, and quipus in order to understand the transformative potential of these indigenous bodies of knowledge.

Focusing on four contemporary Iroquois intellectuals, James Thomas Stevens, Eric Gansworth, Shelley Niro, and Tracey Deer, *Reading the Wampum* is the first book-length study of Hodinöhsö:ni' visual, material, print, and multimedia culture through the lens of wampum imagery and narrative. It begins by grounding readers in the literary and political history of wampum and then explicating six classic and influential belts. The two Row Wampum, the Canandaigua Treaty Belt, and the Wolf Belt record political agreements while the Three Sisters Belt, the Everlasting Tree Belt, and the Adoption Belt transmit cultural knowledge. In the chapters that follow, Kelsey offers innovative critical readings of the ways in which these belts inform contemporary literature, film, and visual art and in the process "extends the rafters in our epistemological practices to bring forth the coming generations of Hodinöhsö:ni' citizens and descendants" and, possibly, their allies (xii).

The introduction usefully situates the project in relation to Kelsey's first book, *Tribal Theory in Native American Literature,* as another sustained inquiry into "wampum's centrality in Hodinöhsö:ni' intellectual practices" (105). While her first book offers a comparative study of Dakota and Hodinöhsö:ni' writing, *Reading the Wampum* offers the "first study of Hodinöhsö:ni' visuality, aesthetics, material culture, and print culture to focus on these subjects through the lens of wampum imagery in the literary and creative works of four contemporary Iroqois intellectuals" (xviii). While investigating the relationship between wampum and Hodinöhsö:ni' epistemology, narrative, political history, aesthetics, philosophy, and of course treaty rights, Kelsey notes that Hodinöhsö:ni' visual code is part of a larger literacy repertoire that includes traditional and new media such as beadwork, pottery, sculpture, film, photography.

Leaving aside the spiritual properties of wampum as the domain of properly appointed Faithkeepers, Kelsey offers a secular analysis of wampum teachings in classic belts and contemporary narrative, nothing that "wampum belts are fundamentally related to other records of Iroquois visual code, and they have an intrinsically politically-charged content, as wampum belts were the method that Hodinöhsö:ni' chiefs and clan mothers used to record international diplomacy and treaty agreements initially with tribal nations and thereafter with settler governments as well" (xiii).

Aimed first and foremost at the Hodinöhsö:ni' themselves, Kelsey's book assumes some knowledge from her readers, yet offers an accessible grounding in Hodinöhsö:ni' wampum culture, history, and philosophy along with a brief history of the destruction and theft of wampum by settler-colonists. *Reading the Wampum* appropriately locates this history in the context of Spanish destruction of indigenous literacies in Mexico, Central America, and the Andes during the early colonial era and also in the context of cultural genocide targeting languages, knowledges, and literacies with the aim of destroying indigenous intellectual traditions and their transmission. Museums and archives, residential and boarding schools in the US and Canada have played a historic role in this epistemic warfare and Kelsey makes a vital argument for the importance of rematriation of wampum belts and other cultural patrimony, seeing "the engagement of wampum imagery and narrative by contemporary Hodinöhsö:ni' authors" as part of the movement to repatriate "their wisdom and their epistemic record" (xvii).

The first chapter of *Reading the Wampum* focuses on the Two Row belt, or *Gaswënta',* the first treaty belt recording a groundbreaking and precedent-setting agreement between the Iroquois and the Dutch in 1613. As Kelsey notes, "nearly every treaty proceeding from the seventeenth century until the late nineteentch century begins with the European and Six Nations delegates reciting the principles of the Two Row" (4). The Two Row carries not only legally binding international agreements, but also the knowledge, the epistemology, the history, the philosophy, and the literary theory of the Hodinöhsö:ni' into the present. Despite sustained campaigns of destruction, theft, and repression, wampum and other indigenous literary forms remain and persist. As Kelsey demonstrates convincingly, Hodinöhsö:ni' intellectuals continue to explore and revitalize this tradition and the work of contemporary artists and activists become her methodological entry point enabling scholars outside the Longhouse to engage this important, centuries-old, medium collaboratively and respectfully.

Kelsey opens with an explication of the Two Row by Leroy (Jock) Hill, Cayuga Nation Sub-Chief of the Bear Clan. The chapter then analyses the intertextual relationship between the Two Row and the poetry of James Thomas Stevens (Akwesasne Mohawk) in two collections: *A Bridge Dead in the Water* and *Tokinish.* Kelsey approaches Stevens as a poet-intellectual who effectively (dis)Orients readers from Western episteme and then (re)Orients them towards Hodinöhsö:ni' "political thought and wampum teachings" (7).

Of particular interest to Kelsey is Stevens' use of a "LGBTQ2 lens to lay bare the colonial epistemic impulses that contest Hodinöhsö:ni' peoples' ability to enforce this treaty" (8). She argues that Stevens explorations of sexuality and ethnicity instantiate a Two Row episteme that can explore sameness, difference, and equality in contemporary lived experience and thus speak to decolonization movements more broadly, despite its insider address to a Mohawk audience. Kelsey's readings of Stevens' stunning poetic intertwining of English and Mohawk language, words, records, and concepts as a violation of the principles of side-by-side existence embodied in the Two Row convinces this reader that not only Kelsey, but also Stevens deserves a broad and global audience.

Kelsey's second chapter, "The Covenant Chain in Eric Gansworth's Fiction, Poetry, Memoir, and Paintings: The Canandaigua Treaty Belt as Critical Indigenous Economic Critique" explores the 1794 treaty in relationship to Gansworth's poetry, prose, and visual artwork. Here, as in other chapters, Kelsey offers clues to the ways in which wampum iconography operates so that readers gain a real sense of the ways in which this medium records and signifies, without losing sight of its unique nature. The Canandaigua Treaty, like other wampum belts, "participates as a living entity and agent in an ongoing process of Indigenous-settler alliance and diplomacy" but "unlike alphabetic writing, wampum belts do not reproduce speech, rather they signal a different set of communicative values rooted in community. For the message of a wampum belt to continue, that message must be remembered in living, human community" (33). Kelsey's readings of Gansworth's use of wampum imagery (in artwork that accompanies his written alphabetic words) reveal a stunning, intriguing, and vital system of signification across media, substantiating her early claim that wampum is part of a Hodinöhsö:ni' visual code that links and traverses wampum belts, literature, painting, beadwork, sculpture, pottery, photography, multimedia works, film and more. She argues convincingly that "Gansworth's renditions of the Canandaigua Treaty Belt provide a map for navigating this new ecogeospatial relationship between settler and Indigene" by offering a transformative "cartography in which a Hodinöhsö:ni' worldview is still normative" (63).

Following these queer and political economy analyses of alphabetic texts and visual art, Kelsey moves to consider tribal feminism in contemporary film. Her third chapter focuses on Shelley Niro's work in multiple media including photography, film, beadwork, painting, sculpture, and storytelling" with an emphasis on Niro's film *Kissed by Lightning* from 1992. This chapter explores the ways in which the Three Sisters Belt informs Niro's work and returns to the healing capacities of wampum for those who are griving and for a world that needs to recover the balanced embodied by the Three Sisters Corn, Squash, and Beans which balance the nitrogen count of the soil when planted together. Central to the chapter is the Women's Nomination Belt, which "records the clanmothers' authority to select, install, and dehorn chiefs" (71). The colonial clash between native and settler populations targeted not only indigenous literacies and

knowledges, but also the authority of women which is central to Hodinöhsö:ni' political culture. Women owned the land and women appointed the chiefs. According to Kelsey, there is "little one could say to overestimate the importance of clan-mothers in Hodinöhsö:ni' society" (69). Her beautiful reading of Niro's contemporary retelling of the establishment of the Great Peace and her reaffirmation of the role of clanmothers and the women's council sets the stage for the final chapter on "Kahnawake's Reclamation of Adoption Practices in Tracey Deer's Documentary and Fiction Films: Reading the Adoption Belt in a Post-Indian Act Era."

The final chapter in this eminently readably study focuses on the fraught issue of identity in Kahnawake, offering the Adoption Belt as a foundational text that can supersede colonizing and heteropatriarchal legislation like the Indian Act. Enacted in 1876, this law revoked legal status from women who married non-Mohawk men and conferred legal status on white women who married Mohawk men. Like other colonial measures of native identity such as blood quantum, this law has caused internal conflict and displaced indigenous ways of understanding identity with devastating consequences for women in particular.

Chapter four explores how award-winning filmmaker Tracey Deer's 2008 film, *Club Native,* confronts this legacy and its contemporary complications. According to Kelsey, the film instantiates a decolonizing collective reading of the Adoption Belt as "a record of the process by which Hodinöhsö:ni' people determine what constitutes individual community membership and national identity" in contrast to the "Euro-Canadian principles of separation and exclusion as embodied in the Indian Act, which first worked to detribalize First Nations women on patriarchal grounds, and the Kahnawake Membership Law, which as rearticulated some of those same philosophies" (83-4).

At this point, the reader has benefitted from successive readings of belts, texts, images, and film, along with a well-paced historical and philosophical explication of wampum and Hodinöhsö:ni' history and political structures. Although each chapter stands alone and can be read and assigned as such, the sum is vastly greater than the parts because it allows Kelsey to chart a vibrant field of wampum knowledge and theory. Kelsey's also makes a powerful, if subtle, case for the urgency of "rematriation," a term she uses alternately with "repatriation" to refer to the return of all wampum belts to Hodinöhsö:ni' communities and those properly trained to read and care for the belts.

Despite the alluring title, *Reading the Wampum* will not teach readers how to "read wampum" although it explores the iconography and visual code of wampum at length. What Audra Simpson has called "ethnographic refusal" here functions to block colonial appropriation, even as Kelsey offers her readers a sophisticated understanding of "the ways in which wampum teachings are still relevant to the challenges faced by Hodinöhsö:ni' peoples in the present" and to "larger decolonization movements" (106). Indeed, *Reading the Wampum*, and the work of Stevens, Gansworth, Niro and Deer, deserves the careful attention of literary, media, rhetoric, post-colonial and theory scholars around the world.

Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Binghampton University

Sarah Deer. *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. Xxiv + 207 pp. 978-0-8166-9633-8.

Until fairly recently, the sexual violence endured by Native American communities was downplayed or not mentioned at all. The 2007 Amnesty International report *Maze of Injustice*, though hardly the first attempt to catalogue and combat systemic rape of Indigenous women in the United States, was nonetheless crucial both in quantifying the phenomenon on a national level and in bringing the statistics to national attention. Today there is no doubt that Native American women are raped at a significantly higher rate than other ethnic groups. The statistic of "one in three" is well known, but may well be an underestimate: a 2010 CDC report suggests that just under *half* of all Native women report a history of sexual violence (Deer 4). What is more, there are other factors which aggravate the injury even further. Violence is significantly more likely to play a part in the rape of Native American women, and, uniquely to American Indians, it is more likely to be perpetrated by someone of a different race to the perpetrator. This is, in other words, a reality that permeates Indigenous communities and lives.

For these reasons alone, Sarah Deer's new monograph should be essential reading for anyone working in Native American Studies. The data sets that she lays out in her opening chapter are devastating in the sheer volume of criminal actions concealed behind the numbers, as they lay clear just how much of burden of colonial fallout falls excessively on women's shoulders. It is characteristic of Deer's thinking, however, that she refuses to rely on simple statistics to prove her point, arguing that "National numbers are flat; they lack dimension and stifle future exploration" (15). National statistics gathered by federal agencies or other US nation state level organisations, can only empower national solutions. But the issue of sexual violence, for all its prevalence, is not ultimately a national problem, and will only be very partially solved through the use of federal agencies and one-size-fits-all solutions. Although many people have pointed both to the complications caused by overlapping federal, state, and tribal policing, and also to restrictions on tribal prosecutions of non-Natives, as being primary causes of the rape epidemic, Deer forcefully notes that urban Native women are just as disproportionately likely to suffer sexual assault. Hence there are far more, and more deeply buried, factors at work here. Indeed, one thing Deer immediately points to in her opening pages is the prevalent use of a word such as "epidemic" to describe this issue. Epidemics, she argues, raise images of short-term, biological infections that originate outside the social set up. Instead, we need to understand that rape is a direct consequence of ongoing and specifically colonial realities.

The next four chapters are staged so as to take the reader on a journey into the development of colonist rape culture. Deer begins by providing clear historical evidence that precolonial Indigenous societies did not use rape as a weapon of war, and that although rape was not unknown it was regarded with particular abhorrence. More, there is reason to believe that in many societies women had particular rights over the punishment of their rapists, indicating that

the crime was seen as one of interpersonal violation rather than, as in English law, a violation of a husband or father's property rights. Though this section is brief – Deer is clearly primarily dealing with contemporary reality – it nonetheless gives great force to what follows, as she traces the ways that the deliberate withholding of sovereignty from Native courts over major crimes committed on reservations, and the continued failure of federal agencies to prosecute these same crimes, has created a vacuum in which neither traditional nor US law function at all. Returning to the historical archive, she shows that again and again rape has been a weapon in the colonial effort, whether in fur trade marriages of convenience, on the multiple Trails of Tears, or in the actions of Indian Agents on reservations.

All of this leads to what may be the centrally important chapter of this book, "Relocation Revisited." Here Deer takes us into studies of modern prostitution, drawing on her experience in helping to compile the 2011 report *Garden of Truth: The Prostitution and Trafficking of Native Women in Minnesota* (pdf here). She begins with the story of "a young, blind Coos woman" known as Amanda, who was forced by the US cavalry to undertake a nearly 100 mile walk barefoot as part of the ethnic cleansing of the territory now known as Oregon, then takes the reader through a fast-paced pocket history of commercial sexual exploitation of Native women in the past couple of centuries – in boarding schools, as means to Osage oil wealth, as exploitation of their control of commodities by reservation Indian Agents. All of this leads to the fact that Native women are significantly over-represented among street prostitutes, a result of their historically induced vulnerability to exploitation. Deer argues that Native women taken across state lines and/or from reservations should be treated as having been trafficked internationally, a crime that occasions more resources and more co-ordination from police forces. While this is technically feasible, it seems unlikely to pass. More, this short chapter is missing a lot of detail on the interrelationship between poverty and prostitution, and only briefly gestures here at the effects of a family history of abuse. Trafficking is a useful word because it creates a situation of bad guy pimps who can be pursued by the law: here it seems not fully to cover a far more systemic oppression.

Chapter Six, "Punishing the Victim," highlights the only real lack in this study. It tells the story of Dana Deegan, a Fort Berthold mother and a victim of physical and sexual abuse, who ended up taking her own infant's life in desperately sad circumstances. Deer was brought to Deegan's case after reading a dissent by an appellate judge who stated that Deegan's ten-year sentence for this crime "represents the most clear sentencing error that this dissenting judge has ever seen" (81), and it is particularly hard to disagree after reading the particulars. Indeed, this sort of close dive into the material circumstances of one crime is so impactful that it suggests that Deer should have replicated this approach elsewhere in the text. Of course there are many difficulties with such an approach: Deer has come across many of the stories she knows through work with sexual assault survivors, who may prefer that their stories are not told. Still, there are more than enough people speaking up, and more stories of the type that she presents in this anomalous chapter would have maybe served to make the study seem less abstract and more urgent.

The second half of the book is devoted to Indigenous theories of jurisprudence over rape. As Deer has shown that rape prosecutions founder in the disjunctive zones of tribal, state and federal law enforcement, she is clear that rape prosecution should be a tribal responsibility. This makes sense, but what if tribes wish to utilise norms other than contemporary Western ones for dealing with sexual assault? Deer gives examples of traditional stories as being the source of juridical decisions, but does not always seem to take the most obvious lesson from them. Here I am particularly thinking of her reading of the Gwichi'in Athanbascan story of "Taa'ii' Ti' and the Russians" (120-121), a story that seems to call pretty unambiguously for the death penalty for rapists, while Deer interprets it merely as showing the need for jurisdiction over non-Indians. In a later chapter, she takes issue with the Navajo Peacemaking system (and other forms of indigenous peacemaking such as Hollow Water), for being primarily male-dominated and open to various forms of abuse, including victim-blaming and over-lenient treatment of offenders. Again, this sits slightly uncomfortably with a demand for the strongest possible restoration of sovereignty: surely sovereignty includes the right to different processes and outcomes? Should a tribal outsider like Deer be picking apart systems that have been evolved from specific tribes' traditions? These are uncomfortable questions, to be sure, but they do seem to illustrate the difficulty with concretising abstract notions of sovereignty and culture.

Deer finishes with a chapter of strong proposals for federal and tribal law reforms to deal with sexual assault. As she recognises, "There is no such thing as the perfect rape law" (142): nonetheless, the recommendations she makes here are both sensible and flexible enough to form the basis for intra-tribal discussion. Banishment, imprisonment, re-education, protection orders and incarceration are all considered and the advantages and disadvantages of each weighed up. Finally, a set of question are given that would form the basis for activists and tribal governments to work together to assess sovereign tribes' ability and willingness to deal with rape. These last two chapters are essential reading. I did not end this book confident that the damage done by colonisation and genocide, manifesting in the form of rape, can be undone any time soon, so the book's title maybe be a little optimistic. Nonetheless, this is a powerful and thoughtful study of the topic, the best in a Native American context thus far.

James Mackay, European University Cyprus

Contributor Biographies

GWEN BENAWAY is of Anishinaabe and Métis descent. Her first collection of poetry, *Ceremonies for the Dead*, was published in 2013 and her second collection of poetry, *Passage*, was published by Kegedonce Press in Fall 2016. As emerging Two-Spirited Trans poet, she has been described as the spiritual love child of Tomson Highway and Anne Sexton. In 2015, she was the recipient of the inaugural Speaker's Award for a Young Author and in 2016 she received a Dayne Ogilvie Honour of Distinction for Emerging Queer Authors from the Writer's Trust of Canada. Her work has been published and anthologized internationally. She and her many vintage dresses can be found on Instagram @gwenbenaway

MICHELLE LEE BROWN is a doctoral student in the subfields of Indigenous Politics and Futures within the Political Science Department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her areas of focus are indigenous video games and oceanic mobility. Euskaldun, her ancestral land/waters region is Lapurdi, the Bidart/Plage D'Erretegia area. Currently in Hawai'i nei, she strives to uphold her relational commitments to 'ohana and the 'āina that supports them.

JEANETTE BUSHNELL, is a semi-retired Anishinaabe university professor who has played games for nearly six decades. Her gaming interests have followed the technology trajectory beginning in the 1950's with card games, board games, role-playing, puzzles, neighborhood games such as Kick The Can, and pick-up ball games. Video gaming moved through Pong, Asteroids, Tetris, Zelda, Mario, Carmen Sandiego, Prince of Persia, and Gizmos. She entered the MMORPG world when WoW came out of beta to spend time with her children who are gamers. By the time first person shooters on contemporary consoles made it big, her physical response times had aged beyond competitive play ability. Since her PhD years, game playing for entertainment has diminished while it has increased as an academic interest.

STEPHEN GRAHAM JONES is the author of sixteen novels and six story collections. Most recent are *Mapping the Interior*, from Tor.com and the comic book *My Hero*, from Hex Publishers, and Stephen lives and teaches in Boulder, Colorado.

DAVID DENNISON LACHO is a Unity 3D AR Developer. He has a research background that looks at understanding the relationships that people have towards technology, including software, hardware, and social media. His research focus is on using emerging technology for learning and promoting minority/endangered languages within communities.

AARON LEON grew up in Armstrong/ Enderby, in rural British Columbia and is a proud member of the Splatsin Band. Leon graduated from Concordia University in 2013 with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts, major in photography. Leon focuses on two separate trains of thought in his work: the first is exploring his identity and Splatsin First Nations background, and the second involves explorations of perception and colour.

ELIZABETH LAPENSEE, Ph.D. is an award-winning writer, designer, and artist of games**,** comics**,** transmedia, and animation. She is Anishinaabe, Métis, and Irish, living near the Great Lakes as an Assistant Professor of Media & Information and Writing, Rhetoric & American Cultures at Michigan State University.

Most recently, she designed and created art for *Manoominike* (2016), a motion game about practices of wild ricing, as well as *Honour Water* (2016), an Anishinaabe singing game for healing the water. She designed and programmed *Invaders* (2015), a remix of the arcade classic *Space Invaders*. She also designed *The Gift of Food* (2014), a board game about Northwest Native traditional foods. She is currently working on *Thunderbird Strike*, a side-scrolling lightning-searing attack on oil operations.

Early on, she was a Research Assistant for Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace and continues to contribute as a Research Affiliate in the Initiative for Indigenous Futures. Her dissertation in Interactive Arts and Technology from Simon Fraser University in British Columbia shares experiences from the Indigenous social impact game *Survivance* (2011). Soon after, she was a Postdoctoral Associate for the University of Minnesota's Research for Indigenous Community Health Center**.** Her ongoing work was recognized with the Serious Games Community Leadership Award (2017).

KATHERINE MELOCHE is a settler from eastern Canada who is now a guest in Treaty 6 Territory in Edmonton Alberta. She is a PhD Candidate in English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. Her dissertation is on Indigenous crime fiction in Canada focusing on the intersections between Indigenous legal structures, storytelling, and genre fiction.

TYLOR PRATHER has a BA in American Indian Studies from the University of Washington. He writes: “First and foremost, I am a geek, I have gamed on consoles that are older than me and have played D&D since I was 6. My geek family spans generations from trading card enthusiasts, to tabletop, miniature wargaming, to playing on consoles and PCs. I am interested in all things that surround gaming, from play and creating worlds from nothing but imagination with some pens and paper, to constructing both arms and armor. Second, after discovering the joy of research, I have also become an academic. It is with this joy that I have developed an eye to critically analyze games and gamification. In addition, I have worked in Minority outreach under the Banner of M.E.S.A (Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement) at the University of Washington as program assistant for 6 years and 3 years before that as a math tutor. My work in outreach brought me to the conclusion that creativity especially in STEM cannot be given room to grow if it is not explored. In that exposure of the sciences and the activities that go beyond textbook reading reveal to students an interest that may have never been explored without that initial exposure.”

JONATHAN TOMHAVE is a lecturer in American Indian Studies at the University of Washington. While his work has focused on issues of identity, power relationships and acts of performative resistance by Indigenous actors in both mainstream and alternative productions, he has always held a deep, passionate interest in games. It is this passion that

has led him to my current work, both in game development and gamification of communication practices.