PERFORMING RESISTANCE/NEGOTIATING SOVEREIGNTY: Indigenous Women’s Performance Art in Canada

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Art
In conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
August, 2011

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Abstract

Performing Resistance/ Negotiating Sovereignty: Indigenous Women’s Performance Art

In Canada investigates the contemporary production of Indigenous performance and video art in Canada in terms of cultural continuance, survivance and resistance. Drawing on critical Indigenous methodology, which foregrounds the necessity of privileging multiple Indigenous systems of knowledge, it explores these themes through the lenses of storytelling, decolonization, activism, and agency. With specific reference to performances by Rebecca Belmore, Lori Blondeau, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Skeena Reece and Dana Claxton, as well as others, it argues that Indigenous performance art should be understood in terms of i) its enduring relationship to activism and resistance ii) its ongoing use as a tool for interventions in colonially entrenched spaces, and iii) its longstanding role in maintaining self-determination and cultural sovereignty.
Acknowledgements

Many people have supported me during the research phase of this project and throughout the writing and preparation processes of completing this dissertation. I am extremely grateful for the support and council of my family, friends, and colleagues in Ottawa, Toronto, Kingston, and Vancouver. I will begin by thanking the artists whose works I explore in this study. Their art practices inspired me to research and develop this dissertation. Rebecca Belmore, Lori Blondeau, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Dana Claxton, Skeena Reece, Shelley Niro, Tanya Lukin Linklater, and Ursula Johnson, thank you for your generosity and for spending time discussing your work and sharing your stories with me. I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Lynda Jessup for her encouragement and suggestions that have informed the development of this work. Lynda’s ongoing guidance and mentorship have played an invaluable role in the development of my academic work and my confidence as a young scholar. She has challenged me to push my ideas, ask new questions, and take new directions. Lynda, words cannot express how appreciative I am for the support, advice, and generosity that you have given to me. Thank you for making my PhD such a positive and productive experience.

As a graduate student, I have also been mentored and nurtured by the Aboriginal arts community in Canada. I would like to take this opportunity to thank individuals as well as the community more broadly for being supportive and welcoming. I have had countless conversations with Indigenous scholars, artists, and curators about my work that have strengthened my understandings and analysis of Indigenous art and which have supported the development of my methodological approaches incorporated in this dissertation. Specifically, I would like to thank Steven Loft, Ryan Rice, Sherry Farrell Racette, Daina Warren, and Rachelle Dickenson. The opportunity to be in dialogue with each of you has enriched my study immensely.

My welcome to the Queen’s academic community was extremely warm and supportive. Throughout my PhD coursework, field exams, and research, members of the Art Department faculty, such as Susan Lord, Clive Robertson, and Janice Helland, have encouraged and fostered my academic, pedagogical, and curatorial development. After meeting Lynda, the first two graduate students (soon to be-colleagues) that I met at Queen’s, were Erin Morton and Andrea Terry, who both immediately made me feel a part of the department and graduate student community. From the beginning, they both generously assisted me with grants, conference proposals, class papers etc. and continue to mentor me through academic and professional
experiences that they have already gone through. I thank you both for sharing your insights and expertise with me. Your openness and guidance has contributed to my successes and also to my desire to share my own process and experience with other graduate students. During my time in Kingston (as well as many long distance phone calls from Ottawa and recently from Halifax) other colleagues from the Art Department, Sarah Smith, Emily Berg, Susan Cahill, Julia Skelly, and Bri Howard listened patiently as I talked excessively about my work, my life, and whatever else I might have been stressed about that day. Thank you each for your thoughtfulness and your friendship. Dana Olwan, Breanne Oryschak, Erin Milliken, and Gabrielle White, my extended-family in Kingston, were and continue to be there for me both academically and personally. Thank you each for your genuineness, kindness, vibrancy, and humour.

When I moved back to Ottawa towards the end of the third year of my PhD, I was reconnected with whom I see as life-long friends and colleagues, Catherine Hale, Heather Igloliorte, and Anne De Stetcher. They are (since my MA at Carleton) my ever-present advisors. Thank you each for our strong friendships and exciting collaborations, and thank you for sharing your passion and brilliance with me. Throughout my graduate work, Catherine has been my daily council and dose of reason. I have learned a lot from you over the years and continue to value your astute opinions and wise perspectives, but most of all I am grateful for your kindness and compassion.

Since my undergraduate studies at the University of Victoria I have been moving from city to city for academic and research opportunities. Throughout these transitions and experiences, I have been fortunate to have old and close friends to share my challenges and successes with. Thank you to Robyn Fenton, Nicole Perry, Heather Hansen, and Geny Heard for being there for me throughout my life and reminding me where I come from.

During the final years of my PhD, I was fortunate to be welcomed into my partner Bear’s Ottawa-based family. We often went for dinners and engaged in lively conversations. I loved our dinners so much, and always looked forward to talking about each others work, ideas, and life experiences. Jeff Thomas, thank you for talking with me about your work, for listening to me work through my ideas, and for sharing with me your extensive knowledge. Brenda LaFleur, thank you for everything (for sharing your dissertation process, for helping me paint the apartment ‘as a break from my thesis,’ for taking me to get my hair cut before my job interview, and specifically for all your work and time getting my bibliography and footnotes in order). Jeff and Brenda, thank you for making me feel part of your family, and for being so supportive of me.
I am fortunate to come from a very passionate, loving, and supportive family. Throughout my life, my parents Jack and Cheryl Taunton have been my number one advocates. Dad, thank you for your pep talks (and phone messages), sports analogies, and contagious enthusiasm. Our chats always brighten up my day and inspire me to keep pushing. Mum, thank you for being the best! Your dedication and support has enabled me to achieve my goals. You are the brightest and most selfless in our family, and I would like to acknowledge that part of my academic successes have been due to your professional compromises. My parents have lead by example, and my sister, Kristen and I, have benefited immeasurably from our mum and dad’s work ethic, tenacity, resilience, humbleness and generosity. My sister, Kristen Taunton is the most giving and kind person I know. Thank you for your unconditional support, encouragement, and sisterly concern. Your ability to balance personal drive and self-focus with kindheartedness and thoughtfulness continue to inspire me. To my family, thank you for believing in me.

And finally, I would like to thank my partner Bear Witness, who has been my major support system through the writing of this dissertation. One of his numerous acts of generosity and support was when I needed to get my major draft completed. Bear stayed up with me (for over two days) to encourage me to finish. He pretended that he also needed to continue to work ‘without sleep’ so as not to make me feel bad. Bear is one of the most patient and insightful people I know. Throughout the past three years we shared marathon conversations about our current projects and future ideas. These discussions challenged and inspired me as well as enriched my ways of thinking and conceiving of this project. Bear, your partnership and friendship is the most important of my life. Thank you for listening to me ramble, for valuing my work, for seeing (and making me see) the larger picture, and for believing in me. And most of all, thank you for making me laugh and dance my way through completing my dissertation. I love you.

The Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded the research, writing, and completion of this dissertation.
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Chapter 1

Indigenous Performance as Cultural Resistance and Continuance

My dissertation explores contemporary Indigenous performance and video art in the transnational and translocal contexts of Canada, with specific reference to work by Indigenous women. I explore how performance has been used and interpreted by Indigenous peoples as a method for both cultural survival/continuance and resistance. While I focus on the precontact, contact, and postcontact contexts in Canada, this study emphasizes the distinctiveness of global Indigenous performance and the international links between Indigenous performers. I consider histories and examples from other settler nations, specifically, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. The main question framing this thesis is: How have Indigenous women used performance to stage political interventions and cultural resistance?

I examine the art practices of Indigenous performance artists as working out of historical Aboriginal practices of performance. In other words, the study links current histories in contemporary art practices with historical examples of Indigenous performances on colonial settler stages. My decision to generate a diachronic study of Indigenous performance art draws on Aboriginal scholar Deborah Doxtator, who argues,

The past and present of Indian situations must be dealt with together because they are inextricably connected . . . In non-Indian art and history about Indians, the seventeenth and twentieth centuries are rarely connected. Academic studies deal with colonial history of the eighteenth century or with events of the twentieth century, not both. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries are both part of the stream of Indian experience. From Indian perspectives the fact that a value or a practice or an idea comes from the past does not render it irrelevant in the present. (In this way the past can exist in the present.) Emphasis is placed not on the point of division or disruption between time periods but on the continuity between eras.¹

In examining the performances of Indigenous women artists, and in establishing histories of Indigenous performance from pre-Imperial to the current global era, I explore the potential and limitations of performance art as a strategic decolonizing tool in the negotiation of new relationships, identities, and stories. I attempt to answer several questions: How have performance and politics intersected, and how do they continue to do so? What are the implications, as well as

the possibilities, of performance as political activism? The aim of my research is to interrogate i) performance art’s relationship to radical activism and Indigenous resistance historically and ii) the use of this medium by Indigenous artists to intervene in such colonially entrenched spaces as museums and archives, as well as governance structures. My methodological viewpoint considers Indigenous perspectives on performance, as well as the way Indigenous peoples and their acts of performance have been categorized and gendered historically by the academic disciplines of art history, anthropology, and museology. I investigate claims about performance art’s potential for radical reform and offer a critical exploration of the central motivations for the emergence of Aboriginal performance art.

This project considers a group of Indigenous women artists from Canada, linking them to Native American artists, Maori women artists in New Zealand, and Aboriginal women artists in Australia who use performance art to articulate personal, communal, and national social histories. These artists explore diverse subject matter, yet they are collectively linked through their performance process: the use of their bodies to tell Indigenous stories/histories. Considering the work of Indigenous artists Rebecca Belmore (Anishnabe), Cheryl L’Hirondelle (Cree), Lori Blondeau (Cree, Saulteaux, Metis), Skeena Reece (Tlinglit, Tsimshian, Cree), and Dana Claxton (Lakota), my dissertation explores the relationships between contemporary Aboriginal performance art, Indigenous customary practices of performance, and Indigenous social resistance.

New Zealand and Australia are included with Canada to elucidate similarities and differences in Indigenous experiences in the British Commonwealth and as a means to explore how these heterogeneous peoples negotiate histories of colonization and decolonization. This is an important connection to make, highlighting more pluralistic understandings of Indigenous-settler relationships and histories in these locales, and is informed by the work of such scholars as A. Fleras and J. Elliot, Donald Denoon, and Ann Curthoys, who have called for a greater integration of parallel scholarship on settler colonialism in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. The framework of this thesis has been influenced by Annie Coombes’s article, “Memory and History in Settler Colonialism,” which supports my claim regarding the importance of making political and cultural links between settler nations and their histories of immigrant-settler and

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Indigenous relations. My study aims to highlight the complexities of historical encounters and contemporary realities/relationships between Indigenous, migrant, and settler communities.

In this chapter, I first introduce my argument of Indigenous performance art as a vehicle for stagings of resistance and cultural continuance. Next, I establish my research methodologies that have shaped my approaches and informed my study. Then the artists whose works I investigate throughout the chapters of this dissertation introduce themselves. In the following section, I introduce myself as non-Indigenous antiracist and anticolonial scholar and my methodological approach of settler responsibility. Finally, I provide a brief introduction to each of the chapters and lay out the themes (discussed at length in Chapter two) that frame not only the analysis of the performances included in each chapter but also the examples of performances and histories that I explore.

**Indigenous Performance Art as Resistance and Cultural Continuance**

This doctoral research builds upon my master’s thesis, “Lori Blondeau: High-Tech Storytelling for Social Change.” In that work, I conclude that Blondeau’s performances contribute to the discourse of Aboriginal sovereignty by reclaiming Aboriginal women’s identities from Eurocentric colonial representations and popular culture’s stereotypes. Here, I continue to investigate Indigenous women’s performance art as a multifaceted artistic medium blending traditions of performance—such as dance, song, and storytelling—with practices drawn from mainstream performance art. My aim is to establish socio-political and cultural histories of Indigenous women performing Aboriginality as cultural resistance. I consider how Indigenous women have fused Aboriginal and European performative traditions as a form of socio-cultural and political resistance. By exploring how these artists participate in postcolonial discussions, negotiating stereotypical representations and colonial legacies, I make links between the performance practice of contemporary artists, the development of diverse performance venues by Indigenous peoples for Euro-Canadian audiences (world exhibitions, royal visits, and the theatre), and the establishment of Aboriginal sovereignty and self-determination.

My research also aims to respond to Ian McKay’s call for studies of Canada by postnationalist historians to critically re-examine the consequences of instituting a liberal political
order in northern North America. With this in mind, I address throughout this dissertation the specific effects that Canadian nationalism(s) has had on Indigenous nations and their peoples, and how artists and performers have employed art practice to respond, to intervene in, and resist colonial and national rhetoric. In this way, like those artists and performers, my thesis intends to disrupt Canadian national/ist narratives that have framed and marginalized Indigenous histories. In advancing my thesis as a process of challenging Canadian national/ist history, I hope to disrupt the silences and dispel the myths surrounding Indigenous histories. I also hope to highlight the ongoing impact of settler society’s ignorance and unawareness of, and at times apathy towards, colonial processes.

My research also follows performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood’s strategies and outlines for productive analysis of cultural performances. In “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” he argues, “Performance studies is uniquely suited for the challenge of braiding together disparate and stratified ways of knowing. We can think through performance along three crisscrossing lines of activity and analysis. We can think of performance as a work of as an of (1) imagination, as an object study; (2) as a pragmatics of inquiry (both as model and method), as an optic and operator of research; (3) as a tactics of intervention, an alternative space of struggle.” He acknowledges the commonly used alliterations in performance studies of the “three a’s of performance studies: artistry, analysis, activism,” and the significance of including a commitment to the three c’s when undertaking critical and moral studies of performance: creativity, critique, citizenship (civic struggles for social justice). The following points put forward by Conquergood and other performance studies scholars have been part of my research and writing process, informing my decisions and contextualizing my questions.

Conquergood’s discussion of the challenges of performance studies to bring together in powerful, radical, and respectful ways diverse and in many ways dichotomous forms of knowledge also posits the transformative possibility of the “unique and unifying mission [for performance studies] around the triangulations of [the] three [following] pivot points”:

1. Accomplishment: the making of art and remaking of culture; creativity; embodiment; artistic process and form; knowledge that comes from doing, participatory understanding, practical consciousness, performing as a way of

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knowing.

2. Analysis: the interpretation of art and culture; critical reflection; thinking about, through, and with performance; performance as a lens that illuminates the constructed creative, contingent, collaborative dimensions of human communication; knowledge that comes from contemplation and comparison; concentrated attention and contextualization as away of knowing.

3. Articulation: activism, outreach, connection to community; applications and interventions; action research; projects that reach outside the academy and are rooted in an ethic of reciprocity and exchange; knowledge that is tested by practice within a community; social commitment, collaboration, and contribution/intervention as a way of knowing: praxis.\(^5\)

In the following chapters, the triangulation between artistry, analysis, and activism are considered and woven together in relation to both the act of performance and the act of writing about performance. Throughout this work, I emphasize the significance of performance art in the production of knowledge: that is, I argue Indigenous performance as a way of knowing. To do so, I use performance as a lens to elucidate the complexities of Indigenous experiences, stories, and histories. In doing so, my analysis and the artist’s works taken together illuminate the history of Indigenous performance as a sophisticated practice of intervention, resistance, and cultural continuance.

Indigenous performance art is situated both within the larger context of contemporary Aboriginal art as well as in the context of performance studies, specifically performance art by marginalized and oppressed peoples. From the early 1970s onward, performance art experienced a shift in focus with the introduction of new participants from minority cultural ancestry, such as African, Chinese, Aboriginal and Latin-American, also known as “the others.” Settler white women also fall into this category of “otherness.” Aboriginal performance art did not emerge as an artistic medium until the mid-1980s, as contemporary Aboriginal art evolved in new directions. It was at this time that the politics of identity arose as a common theme in all mediums of contemporary Aboriginal art. Della Pollack argues that the field of performance art exploded in the mid-1980s due, in part to the “performative turn” across disciplines.\(^6\) The border confining performance expanded to include previously considered “low” forms of oral performance, such as personal and

\(^5\) Ibid.
life narratives and rites of resistance. Concurrently, performance studies saw the rise of performances that explored the processes of identity formation and social change. In her article “Oral Traditions in Performance,” Della Pollack observes that the “literary met the anthropological; the text collapsed into context—and a fury of debates over the nature, status, and value of performance ensued.” Pollack argues that the performance is a co-creative production that embodies and makes change. From this perspective, performance art can be viewed as an instrument for social change and a vehicle of transformation and activism.

In the recently published *Handbook for Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln assert the need for “morally informed and arts-based disciplines” in the current globalized and violent world (neo-liberalism’s version of democracy) to help both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to “recover meaning.” The authors write, “We need oppositional performance disciplines that will show us how to create radical utopian spaces within our public spaces.” As noted above, I examine both the possibilities and limitations of Aboriginal performance art in social redress and social transformation. Perhaps one way of looking at the performances is to acknowledge how they communicate hope and the possibility of social change, decolonization, and empowerment. The performances by Lori Blondeau and Rebecca Belmore, for example, participate in a larger project of Indigenous cultural, political, and economic activism, which is both locally and globally connected. Denzin and Lincoln argue that performance can have an impact on both personal and social levels. They argue, “These transformations shape processes of mobilization and collective action,” and note that these types of performances, or rather “actions[,] help persons realize a radical performative politics of possibility.”

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith addresses the role of listening and storytelling in the efforts towards social change, arguing that the act of listening to Indigenous stories can potentially create opportunities for learning new ways of being, understanding, and specifically sharing the world, based in a politics of morality and responsibility. In Denzin and Lincoln’s discussion of performance and critical pedagogy, they endorse a “performative model of

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7 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 15.
emancipatory decolonized Indigenous research” that supports the analysis of performances and performance events as struggles and interventions. They argue that with this type of politicized and decoloned lens, performances can become “gendered, transgressive achievements, political accomplishments” that challenge the status-quo, nationalist narratives that have been fixed in the imaginations of settlers, and that intervene with “normative traditions” of dominant society.

As Kagendo Mutua and Beth Blue Swadener argue in Decolonizing Research in Cross Cultural Contexts: Critical Personal Narratives, counter-narratives—that is, alternative Indigenous perspectives—participate in the decolonization of histories and of Indigenous personal experiences. In this way, and by means of Mutua and Swadener, Indigenous performance art, which performatively articulates both personal and communal stories, is a vehicle towards the disruption of erasures, and it exposes the complexities and contradictions of so-called official history. Mutua and Swadener discuss the strategy of decolonizing writing and the centrality of personal narrative in this creative political practice. They argue that decolonizing writing can be employed to challenge and resist “the prevailing structures and relationships of power and inequality.” By arguing that Indigenous performance participates in the practice of writing history, or rather the discourse of decolonizing writing by means of producing counter-narratives, this dissertation examines performances that explore “the intersections of gender and voice, border crossing, dual consciousness, multiple identities, and selfhood … in postcolonial and postmodern world.”

In this way, Indigenous performance can be seen and understood as a work of testimony, which is arguably another form of counter-narrative as well as a form of cultural continuance of oral-based customs (storytelling). In a politic of Indigenous activism and decolonization, the use of testimony or testimonial raises political consciousness and intervenes in the colonial erasures of Indigenous experience. Mutua and Swadener argue that the use of testimony for the act of decolonizing writing creates a space of witnessing, meaning that the writer/performer bears witness to social injustices and colonial racism experienced by diverse Aboriginal communities. Thus, as

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11 Ibid., 8.
12 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 18.
Denzin and Lincoln argue, decolonizing writing is always an Indigenous project, “for it presumes that the subaltern can speak, and does, with power, conviction, and firsthand experience.”18

To this end, I argue that Indigenous performance art is an art practice engaged in the resistance of colonial and neo-colonial occupations and in the articulation of Indigenous sovereignty, agency, and cultural autonomy. By discussing the complexity of strategies and the stories vocalized by means of Indigenous performance art we address its participation in utopian theatre politics—in that Aboriginal performance art reveals issues of Indigenous survivance, continuance, empowerment, agency, as well as “equity, healing and social justice.”19 As Denzin and Lincoln recognize,

Contemporary Indigenous playwrights and performers revisit and make a mockery of 19th-, 20th-, and 21st-century racist practices. They interrogate and turn the tables on blackface minstrelsy and the global colonial theatre that reproduces racist politics through cross-race and cross-gender performances. These performances reflexively use historical restagings, masquerade, ventriloquism, and doubly inverted performances involving male and female impersonators to create a subversive theatre that undermines colonial racial interpretations.20

In this way, and as this dissertation explores, Indigenous women’s performance art participates in this concept of utopian theatre: the artists incorporate key Indigenous issues using, among other things, cultural memory and storytelling to discuss issues of colonial violence, cultural loss, exploitation, and dislocation as well as survival, cultural continuance, and resistance histories.

The Artists

In this section I introduce the artists, Rebecca Belmore, Lori Blondeau, Dana Claxton, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, and Skeena Reece, by means of their individual biographies and personal statements. Throughout this study, I aim for these artists to claim space and for their perspectives to collaborate with, as well as at times resist and extend, my arguments.

Lori Blondeau is a performance artist based in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. She completed her MFA at the University of Saskatchewan. She is also a co-founder and the current director of Canada’s most innovative and exciting Aboriginal arts organization, TRIBE. Blondeau writes of her practice,

The images of the Indian Princess and Squaw have had a significant impact on

20 Ibid.
society’s perception of Indian women and serve as inspirations for most of my work. Surprisingly, we still see popularized images of the Indian Princess being created by both native and non-native people. You can find these products being sold in Indian Museums and souvenir shops across North America. These are testament to the general public’s idealized perception of beautiful Native women as being exotic and hard to find—virtually non-existent. The other side of the Indian Princess is, of course, the squaw—another of societies’ iconic scapegoats meant to desensitize both the general public’s view of Indian women (their political, historical and social issues as well), and the self-perception among Native women themselves. My work explores the influence of popular media and culture (contemporary and historical) on Aboriginal self-identity, self-image, and self-definition. I am currently exploring the impact of colonization on traditional and contemporary roles and lifestyles of aboriginal women. I deconstruct the images of the Indian Princess and the Squaw and reconstruct an image of absurdity and insert these hybrids into the mainstream. The performance personas I have created refer to the damage of colonialism and to the ironic pleasures of displacement and resistance. Rebecca Belmore “Rebecca Belmore is the Department of Visual Arts' inaugural Audain Professor of Contemporary Art Practice of the Pacific Northwest and will be working as a visiting artist and professor for the period of January 1 – May 31 of this year. Born is Upsala, Ontario, Rebecca Belmore is an artist currently living in Vancouver, British Columbia. She attended the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto and is internationally recognized for her performance and installation art. Since 1987, her multi-disciplinary work has addressed history, place and identity through the media of sculpture, installation, video and performance. Belmore was Canada's official representative at the 2005 Venice Biennale. Her work has appeared in numerous exhibitions both nationally and internationally including two solo touring exhibitions, The Named and the Unnamed, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver (2002); and 33 Pieces, Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto at Mississauga (2001). Her group exhibitions include, Houseguests, Art Gallery of Ontario (2001); Longing and Belonging: From the Faraway Nearby, SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, New Mexico (1995); Land, Spirit, Power, National Gallery of Canada (1992); and Creation or Death: We Will Win, at the Havana Biennial, Havana Cuba (1991).” Recently, The Vancouver Art Gallery exhibited a retrospective: Rebecca Belmore (2009), and Belmore performed as part of Nuit Blanche (2010). In an artist statement for a Canada Council news release 2004, Belmore wrote,

My way of working is largely based on immediate experience. The performances I have created over the years often directly responded to the place in which I found myself. Location and memory are key elements in my approach to making art. I have always had a strong interest in trying to imagine where we have been.

When I was a young girl, our mother took us to a tiny island in Northern Ontario to show us where she was born. About ten years ago, long after our mother's death, my sister and I went on a canoe trip with the intent of revisiting this island. Navigating by childhood memory we could not find the place. But, it was enough to be in the midst of a beautiful absence.

This journey driven by the desire to witness again had a profound effect on my creative process. I recall my mother taking us to a small clearing on this island and showing where the cabin had been. We looked at the ground and I could see where the foundation of her birthplace had rotted into the land. A square was drawn by time like a memory onto the earth.

I like to think that this entire experience illustrates how I work. I am aware of the elusive nature of memory. Creating in the presence of the absent makes me a witness. I believe I am just beginning to understand my role, particularly as an artist who has inherited an indigenous history.

**Dana Claxton** “is an interdisciplinary artist whose work includes film and video, installation, performance, and photography. Her work is held in public collections, including the Vancouver Art Gallery, Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Art Bank of Canada. Her work has been screened internationally, including at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Walker Art Centre (Minneapolis), and at the Sundance Film Festival and the Microwave International New Media Festival in Hong Kong. She taught at the Indigenous Media Arts Group and Emily Carr Institute of Art & Design in Vancouver and she was the 2003 Global Television Chair at the University of Regina in the School of Journalism, where she taught television and radio broadcasting from the perspective of critical thinking and experimentation with sound and images. Dana was awarded the prestigious VIVA Award from the Doris and Jack Shadbolt Foundation, and in 2007 she became an Eiteljorg Fellow sponsored by the Ford Foundation. She is an active member in the arts community and has participated in panel discussions, juries, curatorial projects,

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advisory committees, and mentoring youth and young artists.”

Claxton is of Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux ancestry and her family reserve is Wood Mountain. She writes,

I’m influenced by my own experience as a Lakota woman, as a Canadian, a mixed blood Canadian, and then my own relationship to the natural and supernatural world. So taking that whole bundle of experiences, it all goes in to the artwork, I think that’s where the multi-layering comes in because I’ve had a very multi-layered life. And it’s all those experiences that go in to the work.

Cheryl L’Hirondelle (aka Waynohtêw, Koprek) identifies herself as a halfbreed (Metis/Cree-non status/treaty, French, German, Polish) multi/interdisciplinary artist. In her artist statement, she states, writing in the third person,

Since the early 80's she has created, performed, collaborated and presented work in a variety of artistic disciplines: performance art, music (voice, percussion), theatre, performance poetry, storytelling, installation art, video and new media (net.art, pirate radio, audio art). Since the early 90's she has also worked as an arts programmer, cultural strategist/activist, arts consultant, facilitator/coordinator, administrator, assessor, workshop and sessional instructor and director/producer independently and within the national artist-run network, national independent music industry, various educational institutions, first nations bands, tribal councils and government agencies (provincial & federal) in this land now known as Canada.

Her practice is an investigation of the intersection of cree worldview (nêhiyawin) and the creative inter/multidisciplinarity inherent in indigenous, world and (so called) youth cultures. As part of this investigation, L’Hirondelle develops performative physical endurances, infiltrations and interventions, site-specific installations, interactive net.art projects and keeps singing, making rhythm, dancing and telling stories whenever and where ever she can.

L’Hirondelle explains the way she sees the role of her practice and the larger Indigenous artists community: “It’s like we have the antidote for some of what's going on in the world . . . there's insects in rain forests that have the properties of actually healing certain diseases . . . i think similarly as indigenous beings we also within our world views have that antidote.”


25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
multidisciplinary artist based on Vancouver Island. Her performance work includes music, spoken word, and videography. Founder of the Native Youth Artists Collective, she has worked in Arts Administration since 2005. A self-named “Sacred Clown” influenced by her ancestors, she is a storyteller. Her work has extended overseas at the 2010 Sydney Biennale: Festival of Contemporary Art in Australia and at the Beyond Gallery in Belfast, Ireland. Performing at community art shows, the main stage or at a cabaret look for her inaugural music cd in Winter 2010.”

In her artist statement for the Grunt Gallery on-line exhibition, 2 Worlds, curated by Tania Willard, Skeena states,

My art practice and performances are fashioned to contribute meaningful insight from my unique and special POV. My work has been fashioned for each focal point, each audience and each space that I have been invited to.

My influences have been so rich and I am so fortunate to know so many amazing artists, singers, performers and arts workers. My contributions have had some impact on my far reaching communities as I believe I have sought to engage subjects like cultural appropriation, abuse, justice, love, fear, power, patriarchy, racism, gender, alcoholism and paranoia.

People like my work because I appear fearless, brave, validating, open, honest and trustworthy. As an artist I wish to embody those elements that are missing in society, to make the invisible visible, the silent audible, the good better, the bad good and the ugly beautiful.

I wish to collaborate with a broad range of artists, workers and technicians to create valuable observations and new commentary on our environment. Through this I will learn and then propel myself into a better and more validating consciousness. Film, video, music, comedy, spoken word poetry, monologues and screenwriting have been my way through to the other side.

The artists introduced above are the producers of the primary performances and works that I explore. However, I also incorporate other artists’ works and perspectives throughout the following chapters. Again, I stress that this dissertation is a project conceived as a decolonizing act, an act of activism, an act of intervention and of socio-political redress. For these reasons, the interviews conducted with the artists are situated between chapters, claiming the space they inherently deserve. They create a conversation between my lenses, perspectives, and arguments and the artists’ perspectives and voices. This is a deliberate organizational decision framed by anticolonial politics and settler responsibility.

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30 Ibid.
My Positionality and Subjectivity: Politics of Setter-Responsibility

I am a non-Indigenous white-settler scholar committed to Indigenous solidarity and to working as an academic, curatorial, and activist ally invested in anticolonial antiracist politics. I draw on several scholars from Indigenous, postcolonial, and feminist studies—such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Scott Morgenson, and Avril Bell—to contextualize my position and to explore the imperative for settler scholars working on Indigenous studies to clearly state their positionality and contribute to settler politics of responsibility. I acknowledge the necessity of working within a politicized framework informed by practical and theoretical discussions of Indigenous solidarity and settler responsibility. In this way, my project joins the project of decolonization, ultimately contributing to decolonized Indigenous histories of colonial experiences and contemporary legacies of colonization—as well as disrupting and denaturalizing national/ist narratives and revealing colonial agendas and processes. In this section, I first address my own subjectivity and

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32 In my discussions of settler politics and colonialism, when using the term settler, for the purposes and scope of my study, I intend to refer to white settler populations. People of colour who have settled in Canada, and other settler nations, are also non-Indigenous settlers, however, marked and racialized by their difference and subjectivities have not benefited from the colonial project to the same capacity to white populations. This does not mean that settlers of colour are not implicated in the colonial project that is Canada. Due to the implications of racism and policies of multiculturalism in Canada, which ultimately maintain the status quo of white settler societies dominant position, the position of settlers of colour within the politics of responsibility are different. This does not mean to exclude settlers of colour from the conversation, but instead to recognize the histories of racist immigration policies in Canada and systemic marginalization experienced and endured by people of colour who have also settled in the nation-state of Canada. This conversation of settler responsibility and the range of roles of white and people of colour settlers necessitate further examination and critical analysis. However, at this time and for the purposes my study, I feel it is pertinent to address and make a formal call to white settlers. As Scott Morgenson argues, “the term non-Native can help mark how subjects outside Native communities incompletely fit the term settler — whether excluded from it categorically or asked to pass through or appeal to it—as they negotiate varied non-Native lives in a settler society. Differences among non-Native people of color, or between them and white people, thus will not be erased by marking their shared inheritance of settler colonialism; indeed, doing so will mark those differences, even as their distinctive relationships to settler colonialism and its naturalization become relevant to study.” Scott Morgenson, “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (2010): 120. In the future I hope to explore this discussion further in a collaborative discussion, like the critique put forward by Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence in their chapter “Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?” to contribute to discussions of Indigenous solidarity politics that incorporate both anti-colonial as well as anti-racist politics. Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence, “Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?” in *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada*, ed. Arlo Kempf (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009).

33 Scott Morgenson investigates queer politics and white-settler queer positionality in relation to settler colonialism and Indigenous studies. He discusses the necessity of queer settlers to denaturalize settler colonialism. His foundational work on queer politics and Indigenous rights has informed my research significantly. He writes, “Queers naturalize settler colonialism whenever conquest and the displacement of Native peoples are ignored or appear inevitable. They also do so whenever they produce sexuality and gender
positionality, then I explore the concept of settler responsibility in relation to the project of decolonization.

My conscious process of de-colonization, as well as politicization, has mediated the researching and writing of this study. I first prioritized my study of the process of colonization and nation-building as oppression, occupation and violence. In order for me to contribute to decolonized research, I first had to decolonize my own knowledge of Canada and Indigenous experiences, stories, and histories. The study of Indigenous performance and the histories of Indigenous resistance and cultural continuance supported my realized consciousness of white-settler privilege: that is, the privileged position white settlers hold in Canadian society. This discussion of settler responsibility responds to Mohawk Scholar Taiaiake Alfred’s address of white privilege:

The colonizers who refuse to acknowledge their privilege and inheritance of wrongs are practicing another form of selfishness and hypocrisy—they claim the right and privilege of indignation and the power to judge cruder colonizers among them and attempt to use this rhetorical posture to release themselves of their own responsibility for the colonial enterprise, both historically and in the way it has affected their own lives, their families’ privileges, and their communities’ formation.34

As Scott Morgenson has remarked, “Settler colonialism thus must be challenged not only in social and political spaces but also in the definition or experience of subjectivity.”35 I have come to the conclusion that in order to actualize and productively mobilize the politics of decolonization and reconciliation in settler nations, settlers (myself included) must take on positions and politics of responsibility and accountability. In Métis scholar Emma Larocque’s recent book *When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse 1850-1990*, she argues for that Indigenous peoples as well as non-Indigenous settler peoples have a necessary role in the project of decolonization and in the deconstruction of colonial histories and legacies:

But this task is not reserved for Native peoples. The onus to deconstruct and to rebuild cannot fall solely on the colonized. The responsibility to clean up colonial debris, whether in popular culture, historiography or in matters literary, lies first with the colonizer. Colonizer sons and daughters need, even more than us, to dismantle their colonial constructs. Some colonialists choose to harden and to

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from the desires of settler subjects for a home on Native land and relationship to Native histories and culture.” Morgenson, “Settler Homonationalism,” 121.


35 Morgenson, “Settler Homonationalism,” 121.
entrench themselves into the spaces fortified by their forefathers.³⁶

LaRocque’s statement calls for what I define as “settler responsibility.” This means a critical evaluation and recognition of white-settler privilege and colonial constructs/apparatus, as well as of the impact of legacies of Canadian nationhood and colonialism on Indigenous peoples, cultures, and epistemologies. As a settler, it is my responsibility, and ultimately my obligation, to partake in “cleaning up the colonial debris,” so to speak.

This being said, and before I get ahead of myself, a fundamental aspect in white settlers’ productive participation in the project of decolonization is their recognition of the complexities and contradictions in settler colonialism. Furthermore, white-settler scholars must recognize the histories and implications of certain of their methodological research approaches in the study of Indigenous cultures and peoples. For example, Inderpal Grewal and Sherene Razack discuss the occurrence of “the white woman as saviour of less fortunate woman” complex, which Grewal states is a centuries old narrative. This notion is connected to colonial rhetoric and agendas, such as the narratives perpetuated by missionaries and assimilist programs of residential schools to “save” and “civilize” Aboriginal peoples. Connected to these notions of saving is white societies’ shared belief in their superiority over Indigenous peoples in the imperial and colonial eras, which supported and legitimated conquest, genocide, and ethnocide. As Alfred argues,

Characteristic of colonial societies is the entrenchment in Settlers of irrational notions of racial and cultural superiority (especially among economic elites and the politicians and academics who serve them) … In terms of government and law, arrogance is manifested in strategies to pass off white people’s usurpation, and a feigned legitimacy is constructed to normalize the structure of racism built into notions of Indigenous peoples’ land tenure and political rights. As an intellectual project, imperial arrogance takes the form of literature, scholarship, and art to demonstrate the eminent merits and to replicate the simple fabricated facts and narratives needed to justify colonial privilege.³⁷

These colonial entities—the saviour and the superiority complexes—are linked to the development of the salvage paradigm and the intensification of collecting and documenting Indigenous cultural material and peoples.³⁸ In this way, salvaging, documenting, collecting, as well as “saving” and civilizing, all denote and privilege white-settler paternalistic ownership over Indigenous peoples and their cultures evident in colonizer-colonized binaries of power. A question that has challenged

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³⁶ Emma LaRocque, *When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse 1850–1990* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 162.
me throughout my research is this: Can I, as a white woman studying Indigenous women’s performance histories, move beyond this binary politics of colonizer-colonized?

This section attempts to present possible answers and to address this question. I argue for a methodology that would allow settler scholars to simultaneously recognize their subjectivity (in my case, my identity as what LaRocque calls “a daughter of colonials”) and to recognize their implication in the colonial project in order to participate in processes of decolonization. Additionally, settler scholars must learn the complexities of colonial histories and their own participation in settler colonialism, and at the same time unlearn colonial narratives that maintain silences and erasures of Indigenous lived experience and knowledge. Scott Morgenson explores the role of non-Native queers in challenging settler colonialism. Here, he asks a very similar question to the one I posed above and raises several important issues in relation to a methodology of settler responsibility. He asks, “What does it mean for non-Natives, located differently as they are by race and nationality, to study their formation in a settler society: knowing one’s home is not one’s own; knowing one feels at home only to the degree that others remain dispossessed; being accountable to histories of Native displacement by questioning one’s sense of place?”

These questions are imperative in this conversation of decolonization and reference, as they lead us to recognize, as Morgenson does later in his article, that for some settler scholars who study Indigenous histories, this engagement with colonialism and Native experience is a means to “absorb it as their own and legitimate their place on stolen land.” Morgenson then puts forward the argument for denaturalizing settler colonialisms as a means to begin a process of change, or rather being “open to change.” However, Morgenson also outlines the contradictions that can occur when settlers engage with Indigenous histories in their research:

These contradictions are informed by the knowledge, constantly displaced, of the genocidal histories of occupation. Working to stabilize settler subjectivity produces

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40 This quotation comes from a larger passage that is important to reference: “Denaturalizing settler colonialism will mark it as not a fait accompli but a process open to change. While settlement suggests the appropriation of land, that history was never fixed: even the violence of allotment failed to erase collective Native land claims, just as land expropriation is being countered by tribal governments reacquiring sovereign land. In turn, as Thomas King and Paul Carter suggest, settlement narrates the land, and, as storytelling, it remains open to debate, such as in Native activisms that sustain Indigenous narratives of land or tell new stories to denaturalize settler landscapes. The processes of settler colonialism produce contradictions, as settlers try to contain or erase Native difference in order that they may inhabit Native land as if it were their own. Doing so produces the contortions described by Deloria, as settler subjects argue that Native people or their land claims never existed, no longer exist, or if they do are trumped by the priority of settler claims. Yet at the same time settler subjects study Native history so that they may absorb it as their own and legitimate their place on stolen land.” In Morgenson, “Settler Homonationalism,” 122–123.
the bizarre result of people admitting to histories of terrorizing violence while basing their moral systems on continuing to benefit from them. The difference between conservative and liberal positions on settlement often breaks between whether non-Natives feel morally justified or conscionably implicated in a society based on violence. But while the first position embraces the status quo, the second does nothing necessarily to change it.  

What becomes very clear to me in this discussion of white settler’s claims to ownership of Indigenous land is that for a productive politics of settler responsibility, Indigenous self-determined sovereignty must be at the forefront. As I stated earlier, part of settler responsibility means that settlers recognize their location on Indigenous lands: that is, on stolen land. As Morgenson argues, with reference to Indigenous sovereignty politics put forward by Indigenous feminists, such as Andrea Smith and Kehaulani Kauanui, “Non-Natives who seek accountable alliance with Native people may align themselves with these stakes if they wish to commit to denaturalizing settler colonialism.” I return to Indigenous sovereignty later on in this dissertation.

A central strategy to promote social redress of colonial impact in settler nations, such as Canada, is to promote and participate in collective and collaborative writing, teaching, and curatorial projects. Paul Chaat Smith argues in *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong*: “It isn’t about us talking and you listening: it’s about an engagement that moves our collective understanding forward.” Collaborative approaches can be instrumental in developing dynamic and critical dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives. Also, it is imperative for settler scholars to critically engage with Indigenous scholars’ writing and Aboriginal perspectives, to actively listen and learn from the multidisciplinary and diverse Aboriginal perspectives on contemporary issues and colonial histories. Fundamental to a methodology of settler responsibility is to explore and reveal histories of Indigenous agency, autonomy, and resistance, and to expose ongoing one-dimensional accounts of Aboriginal experiences of colonization that can result in ongoing victimization and epistemic violence. In other words, conscious pronouncement of anticolonial politics that include a commitment to responsibility can support the production of constructive research and contribute to the project of decolonization.

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41 Ibid., 122.
42 Ibid., 124.
43 Paul Chaat Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 86.
My work deliberately attempts to understand and to expose the complexities of colonial histories and legacies. As Scott Morgenson argues, “Scholars must study the past and present activity of settler colonialism as a contradictory and contested process.” Learning about colonial structures and current settler colonialism made me realize how much colonization has informed my identity and education as a white-settler Canadian. Knowledge of national/ist policies of neoliberalism and multiculturalism and colonial histories is essential for a politics of settler responsibility, as is the ability to challenge and displace ongoing identification by white Canadians of being, as Eva McKay so acutely coined, “Canadian-Canadians”—the so-called true Canadians. Not knowing the complexities of colonial histories and ongoing neo-colonization in Canada risks the potential to re-inscribe colonial politics and colonial racist perspectives. This is why I think it is important for me to clearly acknowledge my privilege as a white-woman settler who, due to the ongoing systems of neo-liberalism in Canada, has the choice of whether or not to identify my positionality. In this way, my project responds to the ongoing debates put forward by women of colour and Indigenous feminists, who call for white women scholars to engage with their privileged positions and the positions of power that they hold in order to participate in decolonization and to practice politics of solidarity.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her critically situated discussions in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, urges white feminists to contribute to and participate in academic solidarity with feminists of colour, as well as with Third-World and Indigenous women. Based on this, I position my thesis as a work of Indigenous solidarity and an attempt to contribute to antiracist and anticolonial scholarship through my own settler responsibility. Mohanty defines solidarity “in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities.” My methodology and goal is to take up the call by feminist of colours like Mohanty. Barbara Smith writes, “It’s not white women’s fault that they have been raised, for the most part, not knowing how to talk to Black women, not knowing how to look us in the eye and laugh with us. What is your

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fault is making no serious effort to change old patterns of contempt.”

Smith’s words clearly demonstrated the need in the early 1980s for white women scholars to consider the intersections between gender and race, as well as to be accountable to their white privilege. Similarly, Judith Moschkovich writes, “I do not hold any individual American woman responsible for the roots of this ignorance about [Latin and] other cultures,” but “I do hold every woman responsible for the transformation of this ignorance.”

Although these scholars’ arguments are transnational in their locations and in their own positionalities, feminists discussions by women of colour are constructive in conversations of white privilege, responsibility, and productive anticolonial scholarship. Smith and Moschkovich’s arguments call on white feminists to be responsible for the silencings and erasures indicative of colonial processes.

Considerable shifts have been made by settler feminists since the 1980s; however, Audrey Thompson’s recent article “Listening and its Asymmetries” addresses the ongoing need for white feminist scholars to consider issues of race, as well as to incorporate tactics of listening and responsibility into their methodologies. She writes, “White feminists’ obliviousness to racism, our arrogant dismissal of questions of race and unwillingness to listen to women of color, our assumption that the category ‘race’ applies only to women of color, and our insistence on doing things the way we have always done them, are patterns of racial entitlement and racial contempt.”

From my experiences in the academy I have witnessed these types of dismissals and I wish to draw on Thompson’s words to highlight the urgency of the need for settler academics—whether they be located in feminist discourses or art history—to seriously consider the continued calls for critical engagement with race politics as well as Indigenous experience. I would go so far as to argue that unless scholars of white-settler ancestry take on these politics of settler responsibility (i.e., accountability and solidarity), their work on Indigenous topics (regardless of its rigour) could result in a further colonization of Indigenous peoples, cultures, knowledges, and experiences as well as perpetuating silences of colonial histories and contemporary legacies. These feminist scholars have been instrumental in my research and in my development of a consciousness of settler responsibility that includes a politics of listening.

Responsibility, accountability, and solidarity together bring forward a new framework for non-Indigenous scholars of Indigenous cultures and histories, as well as of Canadian and settler

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49 Ibid., 4.
nation histories. This framework of settler responsibility is connected to the politics of listening. I have a story of how my awareness of the significance of listening came about. It is an important one in my personal history: a moment in my life that contributed to my politicization and finalized my understanding of white privilege. Since this experience, listening has become a very important part of my research methodology. When I was a seventeen-year-old first-year student at University of Victoria, I attended a lecture given by Lee Maracle. I had just finished her pivotal book, *I Am Woman*, and brought my white guilt and my underlined copy of the book to the lecture. I spoke to Maracle after her powerful talk and reading. I was very emotional and had been deeply moved by her performance. I thanked her for the talk and expressed my interest and appreciation of her book. I asked what my role as a white woman in the postcolonial Indigenous project could be. I asked her how I could contribute towards change. While I was asking these questions, I had tears in my eyes. Maracle was patient with me and then looked me in the eye and said, “Stop crying, move beyond your white guilt and stop talking … You need to start listening.”

An issue that I have not yet addressed in relation to settler responsibility is “white guilt.” Without addressing individual feelings of guilt, productive listening and response are usually unattainable. As African-American feminist Audra Lorde argues in “The Uses of Anger,” “guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness deconstructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance … the ultimate protection for changelessness.” Similarly, Alfred discusses settler society’s ongoing refusal to acknowledge its privilege and the implications of white guilt in Indigenous frameworks of socio-political and cultural struggles, stating, “Their guilt renders them useless to our struggle and paradoxically makes them one of the strongest blocs of hard-core conservatism in Settler society.” Alfred argues that regardless of individual political progressiveness, in many cases settlers maintain a strong attachment to the colonial state and its institutions (both cultural and political) as well as to their own privilege. He writes, “They are effectively silenced by being caught in the squeeze between their intellectual deconstructions of power and their moral cowardice when it comes to doing something about injustice in a real sense.” As a result, by not acknowledging white privilege and moving beyond feelings of guilt, white settlers are ineffective in working in solidarity movements and in producing anticolonial

54 Ibid.
research. In other words, white guilt creates defensive responses and does not support opportunities to listen to and learn from Indigenous perspectives.

Listening plays a central role in my own research and participation in the Aboriginal arts community. The conscious inclusion of the politics of listening is a response to the historic denial of dominant society and its institutions to recognize Indigenous perspectives and to listen to Indigenous knowledge. My inclusion also stems from the fact that Indigenous peoples cannot be solely responsible for the work towards decolonization and social change. White settlers have an obligation given their positions of privilege to contribute to social redress in Canada; however, this participation must be contextualized and informed by notions of responsibility and tactics of committed listening.

My insertion here of a discussion of the politics of listening contributes to a conscious shift in power-relationships, which transfers some of the burden of responsibility away from on-going marginalized Aboriginal voices. This addresses the necessity for and role of white-privileged scholars and institutions in Indigenous redress, decolonization, and reconciliation. In other words, attention on the politics of listening can shift the responsibility for change from Aboriginal voices and to the institutions and individuals of dominant settler society. Susan Bickford provides one of the most productive explorations of the “politics of listening” in relation to power-relationships and tactics of social change. In *The Dissonance of Democracy*, Bickford argues that political theory has consistently focused on the politics of speaking (which is connected to voicing, recognition, and self-representation), without careful consideration of the possibilities of the politics of listening. Bickford offers an insightful and useful argument regarding critical race feminism and notions of responsibility and listening. She writes,

> Just as speakers must reflect on how to speak (and what to say), listeners must be


self-conscious about how they listen (and what they hear). Taking responsibility for
listening, as an active and creative process, might serve to undermine certain
hierarchies of language and voice. If feminist theorists are right that “silence and
silencing begins with the dominating enforcement of linguistic conventions”
(Alarcon 1990, 363)—that is, if oppression happens partly through not hearing
certain kinds of expressions from certain kinds of people—then perhaps the reverse
is true as well: a particular kind of listening can serve to break up linguistic
conventions and create a public realm where a plurality of voices, faces, and
languages can be heard and seen and spoken. 58

Audrey Thompson also engages debates within feminist discourse around issues of race and of
antiracism politics, arguing that “the call to listen is a radical call. It is a demand not just to register
or include the voices of women of color but to change how we as white women act and think. . . .
Inclusion without influence is not enough.” 59 She clearly addresses the need for the privileged to
“rethink patterns of listening.” 60 From listening to the work of scholars such as Larocque, because
of my positionality as a daughter of colonials I have a responsibility to dismantle my colonial
constructs and to dissemble the spaces fortified by my forefathers. A politics of settler
responsibility, combined with the significant work of Indigenous scholars, writers, activists and
artists voicing and recognizing Native experience, creates a possibility for systemic and epistemic
change.

The inclusion of deliberate politics of settler responsibility means to engage with the
ongoing denial of colonial impacts on Indigenous experience, which is linked to continued denial of
racism in both historic and contemporary Canada. As Philomena Essed states, “There are two levels
at which racism as ideology operates: at the level of daily actions and their interpretations and at
another level in the refusal to take responsibility for it.” 61 This notion of responsibility then moves
white-settler consciousness from a position of colonial-guilt to a space of productive action
(solidarity and ally work) due to being accountable for privilege and colonial histories.

Avril Bell’s research on Maori-Pakeha relations in New Zealand are extremely useful and
has played a significant role in my understanding and definition of “settler responsibility.” Bell
discusses the ongoing power-relationships between Indigenous and settler societies and the
complex relationship between white-guilt, innocence, and the maintenance of settler hegemony.
Bell has explored the central problems of the political forms to i) refuse to acknowledge

59 Thompson, “Listening and Its Asymmetries,” 89.
60 Ibid.
61 Phillomena Essed, Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory (Newbury Park, CA:
Sage, 1991), 44.
responsibility and to assert innocence (or rather to recognize colonial guilt) and ii) accept guilt and colonial histories. She argues that these types of politics rely on binary oppositions (feelings of innocence and/or guilt), which ultimately allow for “the avoidance of engagement and responsibility.” She writes, “Politically, the refusal of guilt works against the assumption of Pakeha responsibility for the injustices experiences by Maori, and thus also works to maintain the status quo of Pakeha hegemony. However, in the process of asserting Pakeha innocence, access to colonial history is blocked.” However, Bell argues that the acceptance of guilt “can work in ways synonymous with the politics of refusal.” She explains that the acceptance of guilt can involve an idealization of Maori experiences and involvements, and that this type of politics, as it has manifested, maintains Pakeha dominance. Both Bell and myself are concerned with the issue of ongoing silencings of injustices and perpetuation of colonial power-structures and relationships between settler and Indigenous peoples. In our discussions of notions of responsibility, we hope to propose a more complex framework that moves beyond the binary oppositions that result in ongoing settler hegemony in settler nations, such as Canada and New Zealand. Bell proposes an alternative framework—or, in her words, “orientation towards Maori-Pakeha relations that centres on rather than dismisses issues of responsibility and is characterized by engagement rather than polarisation.” In this orientation of responsibility, a cultural politics is put forward that supports and facilitates settler engagement with history.

Engagement with history is another key aspect of the concept of settler responsibility, and it is one that I have attempted to promote and present in the writing of this dissertation. Edward Said presents the idea of entanglement rather than binary oppositions between categories of peoples, cultures, genders, and religions. Said argues that binary oppositions “give rise to polarizations that absolve and forgive ignorance and demagogy more than they enable knowledge.” My aim has been to decolonize through engagement with the histories of performance that assert and articulate Indigenous experiences and stories, through recognizing the

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63 Bell, “Cultural Vandalism;” 90.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
entanglement of Indigenous histories with colonial agendas and assimilist projects, which in turn denaturalizes settler colonialism.

The engagement with history is also discussed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples as a strategy of decolonization. Smith talks about the notion of “coming to know the past,” which she acknowledges as being part of the “critical pedagogy of decolonization.” Her discussion asserts that history is about power; she notes that for Indigenous peoples, histories have been primarily writings about powerful people who maintain power-relationships and dominance; as a result of this, history, which tends to marginalize Indigenous experiences, is not important to them. She asks, “Why then has revisiting history been a significant part of decolonization? … The answer, I suggest, lies in the intersection of Indigenous approaches to the past, of the modernist history project itself and of the resistance strategies which have been employed.”

This question is also explored in the following chapters, and it frames my argument with regard to the urgency of the work of Indigenous performance artists, who articulate and also at times actualize Indigenous histories in the project of decolonization. Smith’s notion of coming to know the past, then, suggests a decolonization of histories of colonialism: creating and inserting alternative histories and revealing alternative knowledges. Smith in her work is addressing Indigenous researchers; however, her arguments provide a valuable frame for my discussion of settler politics in my own research on Indigenous performance art. She states, “Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. This in turn requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand and then act upon history.” It is in this sense that my dissertation attempts to come to know the entangled histories of colonialism connected both to Indigenous and to non-Indigenous peoples. My aim is to engage with histories and to revisit and reveal colonial events and legacies through the work of Indigenous women performance artists.

Introducing the Chapters and Themes

In Chapter 2, “Locating Indigenous Methodologies,” I outline the major themes and approaches that contextualize my arguments and performances. I delineate the prevailing gaps in the discourse

67 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 34. Italics in the original.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
of Indigenous arts, specifically the lack of methodological and theoretical approaches for study of and critical writing on contemporary Indigenous art. This chapter presents the lenses through which I explore Indigenous performance art and provides possible theoretical and methodological frameworks for the writing on Indigenous art. I include discussions of the major themes, which are also the main perspectives for critical analysis of performance histories in both the imperial and global eras. These themes, which are arguably also methodologies, include storytelling; decolonization; politics of sovereignty; self-determination; autonomy; globalization and Indigenous peoples; and Indigenous feminisms.

In Chapter 3, “Indigenous Performance Art: Performative Acts of Storytelling, Archiving, Remembrance and Cultural Continuance,” I explore the usefulness of Indigenous knowledge systems as frameworks for analysis and critical discussion of Indigenous culture. The Western tradition of classifying Indigenous material culture—exemplified in the academic disciplines of anthropology, ethnology, and art history—renders the current use of Western theory for discussions of Indigenous culture problematic. This chapter is organized into several sections. First, it introduces Indigenous storytelling and the possibilities of storytelling as a viable theoretical approach in interrogating Indigenous visual and performative culture. Here, I draw on the work of several scholars who contextualize the story as an integral component of Indigenous societies. For example, Lois Einhorn argues that “the oral tradition is not one of several parts of Native American culture, it is the culture, simultaneously reflecting and manifesting it.” Lee Maracle’s concept of “oratory” is introduced to map out a theoretical framework for “storytelling as a theory”. She advocates the use of storytelling for the rewriting of Indigenous histories and in the reclaiming of Indigenous voices. Margaret Kovach and Gerald Vizenor also consider the idea of “storytelling as theory,” attributing Indigenous survival, continuance, and resistance to both the presence of contemporary Native storytellers and the continued acts of telling stories.

Although I recognize the difficulty of discussing Indigenous performance in generalized terms, my intention here is to avoid treating this cultural production as homogenous. Instead, I aim to show Indigenous peoples’ use of oral-based traditions as a common thread that links distinct and diverse performative practices. Based on my engagement with studies of Indigenous traditions of

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ceremony, such as the pan-Indian powwow, I argue that a primary role of performance is storytelling. Performance in many Indigenous communities is a performative articulation that shares histories and acknowledges ownership rights, marriage, power, and authority. Following this discussion, I introduce and analyze several performances and performers using the concept of “storytelling as theory.”

In the next section of Chapter 3, I connect the concept of storytelling as theory to the concept of an Indigenous archive, which counters Western, or rather Euro-American, notions of archiving as a process of documenting and collecting material culture and written documents. Through this, I aim to address and extend the significance of performance for Indigenous communities and the limitations of written texts for Indigenous communities. The goal is to frame contemporary Indigenous performance art and historical performances by Indigenous performers in a new way, linking notions of oral traditions, storytelling, and performance to the concept of archiving information and cultural knowledge. I draw here on Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who warns, “Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of ‘civilized’ knowledge.” The archive can function as a structure of colonialism serving as a repository for racist, Eurocentric, and prejudiced policies imposed by colonial powers on colonized peoples. Referring to work of artist Jeff Thomas, I explore the indigenization of the archive.

In the next section, I explore how the performance of storytelling can be employed to interrupt and intervene in colonial histories, re-establish self-determined representations, and provoke political resistance. Performative storytelling is examined as a process of cultural continuance. I draw on the work of Indigenous scholars, such as Anishnaabe writer Kateri Aikiwenzie-Damm, to emphasize the power of telling stories and the use of storytelling as a strategic tool within the postcolonial project. My first example is the work of late 19th-century Mohawk poet/performer Pauline Johnson. Next, Cheryl L’Hirondelle’s performances cistemaw iyiniw ohci (for the tobacco being) (2007) and ekayapakhaki (the beauty within) (2008) and Skeena Reece’s recent performance, Poor Life of Dismay, Sacred Clown Show (2006) are introduced and contextualized in order to show how Indigenous performance archives Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems, producing visual and oral documents for specific local communities. Rebecca Belmore’s installation Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for Any Purpose (1992) and Dana Claxton’s video Buffalo Bone China (1997) are briefly discussed here to serve as examples of

73 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 45.
the use of artistic production to foreground occluded histories and silenced voices, thereby, advancing Indigenous perspectives.

Several performances are analyzed within this section to show how Indigenous performances can be understood as the documents contributing to an Indigenous archive. In this regard, the performances examined are viewed as present-day witnessing and, as such, as participating in a larger postcolonial project that foregrounds Indigenous perspectives and imagines past events to express present-day concerns. It is important to note that these perspectives are connected and intertwined with Indigenous knowledge systems, such as storytelling, and with personal and communal past and present experiences. Discussion of Rebecca Belmore’s performance *Bury My Heart* (2000) and Lori Blondeau’s performance *Sisters* (2004) is incorporated to extend my argument of performance as an Indigenous archiving process and to explore how Indigenous storytelling, archive and memory are intertwined. In *Bury My Heart*, for example, the performance references the 1890 Massacre of Wounded Knee. This performance recalls photographic evidence, specifically images of Wounded Knee, an event that has been crystallized in North American’s memory by the visual documentation provided by photographs. What this means in relation to Wounded Knee is that there are countless recordings of the events that took place, but most are based on Military reports and white-soldiers’ accounts. Advanced by the work of revisionist-historians and Native scholars, Indigenous perspectives of the massacre have complicated the settler narrative. Belmore’s performance is argued as participating in the indigenization of this history and the archiving of this massacre. The final section of this chapter explores several Indigenous storytelling festivals, such as the High-Tech Storytelling festival, organized by Lori Blondeau in 2003 in Saskatoon, and the annual Talking Stick Festival in Vancouver, established and organized by Native actress and playwright, Margo Kane. I do so to examine storytelling practices of contemporary women storytellers to show how performance art, video, film, theatre, poetry and literature intersect.

In Chapter 4, “Performance as Remembrance: Decolonizing Practices and the Making of Indigenous Memorialization,” I examine several performances by Belmore, Blondeau, Claxton and Reece through the lenses of remembrance, memory, and bearing witness. I draw extensively on Smith’s discussions of processes of decolonization, which I connect to the act of reclaiming, revoicing, and revisioning Indigenous histories through performance. The Indigenous women artists I discuss are viewed as performing Indigenous experiences and stories that have historically been silenced and marginalized by dominant colonial writings of history, fostering a forgetting in the cultural consciousness of settler societies. I examine their performances as acts of resistance and of

I divide the chapter into several sections, exploring individual performances and how they connect to theories of decolonization, remembrance, and bearing witness. I argue that live and video-based Indigenous performances offer local, national and international audiences sites at which to bear witness to the current realities of Indigenous peoples and to take notice of the trauma that marks the Aboriginal body. The purpose of this chapter is to reveal how contemporary Indigenous performances, such as *Bury My Heart* and *Are You My Mother?*, participate in Indigenous self-representation and contribute to the remembering of the past through the present.

In chapter 5, “Indigenous Performance as Resistance: Indigenizing Activism,” I introduce the concept of culture as resource. I argue that the production of Indigenous culture plays a significant role in Indigenous activism and resistance. I state that the production of art, media, and performance does not foster socio-political change but, instead, that cultural production can convey and represent ideas, such as Indigenous self-determination and activism, which in turn are passed on. In this sense, the coming together and the creation of a network can be seen as the force that facilitates social action. For example, dances and songs performed at a powwow are the reason for bringing people together, and powwows bring together thousands of Indigenous peoples, thus becoming a site where Indigenous activism can be organized and mobilized. I argue that coming together is the agent of social change, and that the creation of Indigenous networks fosters Indigenous social action.

This chapter focuses on the use of Indigenous performance for Indigenous activism. It explores the performative within Indigenous resistance movements, such as Red Power or the American Indian Movement. I analyze the concept of performative force to examine and contextualize Indigenous activisms in North America, Australia, and New Zealand. I include examples from the Aboriginal marches in Australia in the late 1970s and discuss the establishment of the Aboriginal Embassy on Australian Parliamentary lands, the Waitangi Day celebrations/resistances in Aotearoa, New Zealand, the Native Caravan across Canada, and the
Indian Pavilion of Canada at Expo 67. These inclusions are intended to frame and contextualize the political environments informing, influencing, and provoking the participation of Indigenous performance artists. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that the artists’ performances participate in Indigenous activist movements, contributing to potential social change and promoting awareness of Indigenous issues. The next section explores a performance by Belmore that received national attention, *Exhibit 671B* (1988). It constitutes her critical response to issues surrounding the exhibition, “The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples,” a show organized by the Glenbow Museum in conjunction with the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympic Games. I analyze *Exhibit 671B* as an act of political protest and as an early example of contemporary Aboriginal performance art. I also look at this performance as a provocative critique of museum practices based on the salvage paradigm and Eurocentric notions of representation.

The chapter is organized around several performances. For example, I examine Rebecca Belmore’s performance *Vigil* (2003) and its engagement with issues surrounding the missing Indigenous women of Canada. I argue that her performance, and the silenced histories of violence against Indigenous women she deals with, can be connected to both the Amnesty International report, “Stolen Sisters” (2004) and the recent Walk for Justice (Summer 2008). I argue that Belmore’s performances, *Vigil* and her installation *blood on snow*, can be viewed as examples of Indigenous activism. I also examine the recent film, *Stolen Sisters*, screened in autumn 2008 at the Amnesty International film festival in Vancouver in relation to this example. Belmore’s performative activism is contextualized by discussing several of her other performances, such as *for Dudley* (1997), which use physicality and the repetition of laborious motions to convey the affects of oppression and domination.

Next, I look at both issues of land and Indigenous activism. In this section, Shelley Niro’s video performance, *The Shirt* (2006) is explored. A third performance by Belmore, *Ayumeeoawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to their Mother Earth* (1991, 1992, 1996), is also connected to issues of land rights, land claims, and the historic displacement of Indigenous peoples from ancestral lands due to colonial expansion and settlement. Dana Claxton’s performance *Buffalo Bone China* (2000) is included in this discussion. This performance articulates and provocatively examines the impact on Plains Indigenous peoples of the buffalo’s extinction and the building of the railroads across North America. The analysis of these performances is framed by Indigenous scholars discussions of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. It leads into the next and final section, in which I explore the development of pan-Indigenous pow wow in relation to Indigenous activism in North America. Here, I explore the connections between powwow and
Indigenous activist movements such as AIM. I aim to connect Indigenous traditions of performance to Indigenous activism and cultural continuance.

In Chapter 6, “Staging Aboriginality in Colonial Spaces/Recontextualizing Indigenous Agency,” I investigate historic and contemporary examples of Indigenous performance. In many ways the Canadian government was successful in its efforts to isolate the colonized nations of Indigenous peoples and to manoeuvre them into a subordinate and marginalized position. Residential schools and ceremonial bans exemplify Canada’s strategies to eradicate Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being. This racist era of legislative domination and control over all aspects of Indian life, community, spirituality, health, education, family and movement was a deliberate campaign to foster ethnocide of Indigenous cultures. Yet, in this time of extreme oppression of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous performers, such as Pauline E. Johnson and those involved in Wild West Shows, were very popular, and Indigenous performance was among the events included in British Royal Tours. These entangled histories demonstrate a contradictory aspect of Canadian colonial policy. Indigenous peoples were permitted to perform for white audiences (permission for participation had to be officially granted by Indian Agents and the Department of Indian Affairs), but they were not permitted under law to pass traditions on to their children, to organize multi-community gathering, or to perform ceremonies, dance, or song for their own cultural purposes.

However, during this period of colonial oppression and legislative assimilation, there are also many examples of Indigenous negotiations of, and resistance to, domination, particularly in the field of the arts. This chapter is divided into several sections and is supported by many historic and contemporary examples. These scholars have explored Indigenous performance on colonial and settler stages for Euro-American consumption in relation to at least one of the following: spectacle, tourism, creation of national cultural identity, colonial domination or Indigenous resistance. The purpose of this chapter is to show connections between performances produced by Indigenous peoples in Canada’s colonial period and contemporary performances produced by Native North American artists Belmore, Blondeau, and Claxton.

First, I look at Royal Tours in Canada and the participation of Indigenous performance throughout these visits. Specifically, I look at the visit of Prince Albert to Upper and Lower Canada in 1860 and that of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V and Queen Mary), who toured Canada from coast to coast in 1901 as part of an Empire-wide tour. In this section, Belmore’s performances *Rising to the Occasion* (1987, 1991) is explored as a arts-based example of Indigenous responses to British imperialism and colonial expansions and oppressions.
In the following section I explore Indigenous performances in Wild West Shows. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indigenous performances on colonial stages are seen through the complex lens of settler entertainment at a time of restrictive and oppressive federal legislation, which deemed illegal the performance of Indigenous ceremony and spirituality and the gathering of Indigenous peoples. I analyze the sites of these performances, their political contexts, the audience receptions, and most significantly, the agency of the performers. Lori Blondeau’s performance, *Belle Sauvage*, and her co-produced performance with Adrian Stimson, *Bringing the Wild Back to the West*, are extensively analyzed and discussed in relation to the historical examples I have briefly introduced above. Belmore’s installation and performance at the Art Gallery of Ontario, *Wild* (2000), is also introduced to extend the discussion of intervention in such colonial entrenched spaces as museums, which have historically excluded Indigenous artists and Indigenous perspectives. Here, I develop my discussion of the exoticization of Indigenous peoples and of the stereotypical representations and production of Indigenous peoples at Wild West Shows, Indian Days and the like. However, I expand and complicate my discussion of the use of stereotypes by Indigenous performers in the 19th and early 20th centuries. I argue that historical and contemporary performances are argued as acts of Indigenous intervention and resistance.

In the next section of this chapter I examine Aboriginal representation at World Fairs in the mid- to late 19th and early 20th centuries. Here, I also explore the complexities of Indigenous peoples performing on international stages, specifically in London and Paris during the colonial era in North America. Briefly, I outline the history of Indigenous peoples on display at World’s Fairs, outlining the inclusion of Indigenous peoples from North America, Australia, and New Zealand. I discuss the reasons for the inclusion and Indigenous peoples’ experiences within these sites and I explore Skeena Reece’s performance *Do Not Disturb* in relation to the history of Indigenous peoples on display.

The performances of Pauline Johnson (Mohawk) and Maggie Papakura Makereti (Maori) are examined in relation to the larger context of Indigenous peoples performing on settler and international stages. I argue that these women use performance to resist colonial oppressions and to voice Indigenous perspectives. I analyze Pauline Johnson’s tours of Canada, United States, and Great Britain, but focus more extensively on another Indigenous woman in the Empire, Maggie Papakura, a famous Maori woman of the Aware iwi who, I argue, made a similar strategic use of performance and her body. She combined Maori performance and cultural knowledge with tourism as a method for the negotiation of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and resistance during New Zealand’s nation-building period. I also explore Makereti’s organization of the first tour of an
all-Maori performance troupe to travel abroad and her participation in hosting British Royal Tours. I discuss Blondeau’s performance personas, *CosmoSquaw* (1996) and *Lonely Surfer Squaw* (1997), to show the historical and contemporary use of performance as a form of artistic production, cultural continuance, and interventionist resistance. These performances by Belmore and Blondeau are examined as examples of Indigenous performance that resist the history of stereotypical representation of Aboriginal women, which I argue, has been perpetuated by Euro-American popular culture (films, literature, theatre, advertisements etc). However, once again, I connect Belmore’s and Blondeau’s uses of their bodies and of performance as a form of resistance to show a history of the strategic use of performance by Indigenous women, such as Johnson and Makareti. The final performance incorporated in this section is Belmore’s *high-tech teepee trauma mama* (1988), which was hosted by the Lake Head University Native Student Association, and performed as part of the University’s Indian Days Winter Carnival.
Chapter 2

Indigenous Performance Art: Locating Indigenous Methodologies

In this chapter, I introduce the multidisciplinary Indigenous methodologies and theories I use to contextualize and explore Indigenous performance. In the discussions that follow, I highlight the limited discussion of Indigenous methodologies in the writing and study of Aboriginal art and address the existing literature, attempting to map out several possible productive approaches for the critical study of Indigenous performance art. My research on Indigenous performance and political activism is framed by such scholars as Taiaiake Alfred, who has set an empowering agenda for Indigenous peoples’ decolonization—grounded not just in words but also in the decolonizing choices and actions of everyday life.¹ My methodological viewpoint considers Indigenous perspectives on performance, as well as how Indigenous peoples and their acts of performance have been categorized and gendered historically by the academic disciplines of art history, anthropology, and museology.

I first explore briefly the history of the marginalization of Indigenous women in Canada. I then connect the history of nation-state management of Indigenous women’s socio-political and cultural authority to the history of euro-Canadian society’s representation of Aboriginal women. I include this discussion of representational violence to contextualize the significance of the artists’ performance practices, which arguably reclaim, revoice, re-member, rewrite, and revision Indigenous women’s (as well as peoples’) identities, histories, and experiences. Here, I explore several examples of arts-based approaches towards indigenizing historical photographs, arguing that that the work of artists such as Jeff Thomas and KC Adams are plausible theoretical approaches to the writing of contemporary Aboriginal art criticism. In a way, this first section sets the stage, so to speak, for the rest of the chapters. Following this, I introduce several key texts to review the existing literature on contemporary Aboriginal art, and also to highlight the current void of critical theory and methods for Indigenous art criticism. Next, I introduce recent pedagogical approaches put forward by Indigenous and critical scholars for Indigenous research and inquiry. In this section, I explore what Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith define as critical Indigenous pedagogy and the concept of decolonizing research methods. I then explore one

of my primary thematic lenses: storytelling. Here, I investigate and introduce the concept of storywork, or rather storytelling, as theory. I then elucidate decolonization as both a thematic lens and a methodological approach for the researching and writing on Indigenous arts, and follow this with a section on the politics and lenses of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and autonomy. I go on to elucidate globalization theory and discuss the prevailing issues of Indigenous peoples and the impact of the global era, addressing Indigenous perspectives of globalization. The final section investigates recent scholarship on Indigenous feminism and explores how Indigenous feminist inquiry interconnects my thematic lenses of decolonization, storytelling, sovereignty, self-determination, autonomy, and globalization as a means to assert and mobilize Indigenous socio-political and cultural agency.

**Aboriginal Women: Identities, Representations, Marginalization, and Agency**

By looking to Indigenous women’s historical and contemporary performance as strategy of resistance and cultural continuance in settler nations, I can underscore issues of Aboriginal women’s experiences with imperialism, colonialism, and assimilation and highlight the intersections between racism, sexism, and colonialism. This is not to say Indigenous women’s histories and identities are framed, contextualized, and structured solely through colonial experience. However, looking to the colonial project elucidates the significance of Indigenous women’s histories of cultural continuance, resistances, and agency. These connections are introduced briefly here and explored later in this chapter in relation to recent conversations about Indigenous feminisms.

The historic attempts by the state and its colonial apparatus of power to control, regulate, define, undermine, and mediate Indigenous women’s bodies and identities, as well as their cultural and political authority gives urgency to self-determined acts by Indigenous women—and specifically in relation to this study of acts of performativity. As Julia Emberley argues, “From early on, colonial policies were implemented to regulate the bodies of Indigenous women by controlling their sexual, reproductive, and kinship relations.”

The institutionalization of identity defined, produced and maintained by the Indian Act (1876) exemplifies this hegemonic regulation of Aboriginal women’s bodies and political power. Yvonne Boyer addresses the impact of colonization on Indigenous women’s societal, cultural and political roles, stating, “When the

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colonizers arrived, they imposed their system of values and laws upon the inhabitants. For First Nations women, this meant that their traditional roles were obliterated through tools such as the Indian Act and residential schools.3

Prior to contact, Aboriginal women were politically, socially, and economically powerful and held positions of status in their communities; however, significant harm “against First Nations women resulted in the discriminatory legislation, laws, and policies. State-imposed physical harms have affected all women, but, because of their disadvantaged place in Canadian society … First Nations women have been especially affected.”4 For example, the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869 furthered the impositions of institutionalized Indian identity by the state, which began in 1850 with the Act for the Better Protection of the lands and Property of the Indians in Lower Canada. In this pre-confederate legislative act, issues of blood quanta, lines of descent, and intermarriages (between Indian men and non-Indian women, and Indian women and non-Indian men) were implemented to determine who was allowed to reside on reserve. As the first piece of legislation concerning Indians in post-confederate Canada, the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869, one of the precursors of the Indian Act, furthered the colonial project of assimilating Aboriginal peoples by marginalizing Indian women. For the first time, Indian women were accorded fewer legal rights than Indian men in their home communities.5 This act denied Aboriginal women the right to vote in band elections (which was an imposition of patriarchal Victorian political and social values), which ultimately stripped Indigenous women of their political roles and rendered women as property of their husbands and fathers. Also, the act stipulated that an Indian woman who married an Indian man from a different reserve lost her band status and became a member of her husband’s band, and Indian woman who married an non-Indian man lost her status completely and could be forced to leave the reserve.

Despite strong resistance and objections by Indigenous communities over this marginalization of Aboriginal women, which began in the 1850s, the Indian Act ultimately legislatively sanctioned their discrimination.6 As Emberley states, “The Indian Act (1876)


4 Ibid., 75.


6 “In the relatively short period between the 1850 Lower Canada legislation and the 1869 Gradual Enfranchisement Act, it seems apparent that Indian women were singled out for discriminatory treatment under a policy that made their identity as Indian people increasingly dependent on the identity of their
consolidated and expanded this previous legislation, putting into place patriarchal regulatory measures that went far beyond the determination of Indian descent and identity through the father/husband.”

As stated by the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples,

The colonial and post-Confederation legislation applied to Aboriginal people finds its conceptual origins in Victorian ideas of race and patriarchy. Its effect has been increasingly to marginalize women in Aboriginal society and to diminish their social and political roles in community life. For example, after 1876 and the passage of the Indian Act, Indian women were denied the right to vote in band elections or to participate in reserve land-surrender decisions, and, where their husbands died without leaving a will, they were required to be “of good moral character” in order to receive any of their husband’s property. An Indian woman could not even control her own cultural identity because it came to depend increasingly on the identity of her husband. A woman who married a man without Indian status lost her own status. Despite having been born into an Indian community, upon “marrying out” she was no longer considered an Indian in the eyes of the government or the law. The children of such a marriage would not be recognized as Indian either. But a non-Indian woman who married a man with Indian status immediately became an Indian, as did any children of that marriage. A double standard was at work.

In 1951 amendments to the Indian Act shifted the discourse of Indian identity from blood ties to a government-sanctioned institutionalization of status registration, which arguably further entrenched gender divisions and marginalization of Aboriginal women.

Since the 1970s, Aboriginal women’s organizations have challenged these paternalistic and patriarchal definitions of identity. Their resistance materialized in the passing of Bill C-31 in June 1985, which removed the gender discrimination from the Indian Act and reinstated band membership to many Aboriginal women (and their children). However, these amendments concerning the restoration of status and the return of band control of membership was and continues to “be a source of conflict when it came time to implement Bill C-31. There was concern that some bands might reject persons who had acquired or re-acquired Indian status through Bill C-
whether because of sex discrimination or because of concerns that resources needed to accommodate new members might not be forthcoming from the federal government.”9 The aftermath of Bill C-31 has been complex and challenging, as stated by the Report, “Despite its avowed intent of bringing about sexual equality in the status and membership provisions of the Indian Act, Bill C-31 is nonetheless seen by many Aboriginal women as a continuation of the sexist policies of the past.”10

The impact of colonial and assimilist attempts to control and subjugate Indigenous women is manifested in contemporary Aboriginal communities in the disproportionate levels of Aboriginal women who live in poverty, are incarcerated, have health issues, suffer from drug and alcohol abuse, and are harmed or killed through violent crimes. I include these bleak statistics on contemporary Aboriginal women here to highlight that Indigenous women’s issues are not considered pressing and urgent in Canadian society. Amnesty International’s Stolen Sisters report of 2004 revealed the appalling history of sexual and physical violence and murder of Aboriginal women in Canada since the 1970s. Since the writing of the report, over 3000 Aboriginal women across Canada have been identified as either missing or murdered since the 1970s. The Stolen Sisters gives evidence to the fact that Indigenous women are not seen as equal citizens in Canadian society; they remain marginalized and oppressed by the body politic and in many cases are stereotyped in public consciousness. The contemporary legacies of colonization have real and everyday consequences for Indigenous peoples: historic and legislative discrimination and marginalization of Aboriginal women in Canada is overtly revealed in the systemic racism and oppression they, as well as their communities, still endure and resist. These institutional governmental strategies of hegemonic paternalism are mirrored and replicated in how Indigenous women have been represented and documented by Euro-Canadian anthropologists, artists, writers, and the popular press.

The archives representing Indigenous peoples, produced largely in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reveal the Eurocentric misunderstandings of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and world views. For example, when searching the Library Archives Canada photographic collection, I came across over 500 images of Aboriginal women consisting of posed portraits of individuals, women with children, and family portraits in which the women are simply described as “wife” or “squaw.” For the most part these photographs of Aboriginal women are not named, which has established an

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9 Ibid., Chapter 2.
10 Ibid.
archive of nameless Aboriginal women. These images better represent Euro-Canadian society’s “imagined” and constructed Indian than “actual” Indigenous identities and subjectivities. Further, these visual and textual references reflected and worked alongside and within the colonial projects of conquest, domination, marginalization, and assimilation as representational tools of colonialism. In most cases, they are de-contextualized from Indigenous world views, knowledge, and lived experience. Without simultaneously acknowledging the attitudes and paradigms of their producers, who for the most part were white-settler men, and contextualizing Indigenous cultural knowledge, such imagery participates in the violent epistemic and representational aspect of the colonial project.

In her book *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal: Cultural Practices and Decolonization in Canada*, Julia Emberley explores film, photographs, and popular culture’s representations of Indigenous women and families as modes of representational violence, arguing that they created networks of images that served the interests of the colonial settler culture and formed a significant part of Canada’s national imaginary. Ultimately, as Edward Said notes in “The World, the Text, and the Critic,” it is disingenuous to ignore the roles played by cultural expression and production in the construction and maintenance of the idea and imagery of Empire. While not all Euro-North American cultural production (i.e., print, photograph and film) within the historical circumstances of imperialism and colonialism is related to colonial power and empire, settler cultural and popular culture productions “enabled, encouraged, and otherwise assured the West’s readiness to assume and enjoy their experience of empire.”

In this way, representations from colonial eras of both Aboriginal peoples and settler society are linked to the history of legitimating colonial violence and maintaining colonial power over Indigenous peoples. Emberley’s study of representation as “specific modes of colonial violence” is valuable when exploring the impacts and roles of anthropology and art history in the processes of colonialism in Canada. She argues that film, photograph and popular culture are “a sort of spectral violence … because such images would come to haunt the desires of a civilizing colonial consciousness.” Emberley defines “spectral violence” as constituting, “a specific form of cultural hegemony that may intercept and work with the organized militaristic violence of the state, but is neither supplemental nor tangential to it.” She argues that representational violence, or

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11 Emberley, *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal*, 3.
13 Emberley, *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal*, 11–12.
14 Ibid., 12.
rather spectral violence, “cannot be reduced to its merely symbolic component either as a reflection of ‘real’ violence or as textual instances of colonial ideology formalizing the actual violence that served to consolidate the state’s social, economic, or political interests.”¹⁵ In other words, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries during eras of aggressive colonization, technologies of representation, such as the photograph, “were strategically deployed as part of a complex web of colonial power which, in addition to political and economic violence, set out to constitute the colonial subject as Aboriginal, while simultaneously obliterating any trace of this ‘originary’ subject.”¹⁶ As Emberley stresses, representation violence in the Canadian context

fixed meanings and values, and bound and reduced the complexities of Indigenous lived experiences to a fixed set of images, a panoramic phantasmania of Aboriginality whose ghostly presence would haunt the apparent immortalizing technologies of re-reproduction. Thus, Aboriginality signifies both a semiotics of subjugation and a mode of colonial representational violence in which the subject is made to vanish from historical veracity and reappear as a simulacrum. What images propose as the truth of “Aboriginal peoples” is, ironically, a substitute for something that may never have existed to begin with. The figure of “Aboriginality” —ab origine (from the beginning)—belie the rupture that exists between the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples and the impoverished spectacle of colonial representation, the Aboriginal.¹⁷

In her article “Independent Identities,” Lucy Lippard contextualizes the need to decolonize representations of Indigenous women, arguably examples of colonial representations of the “Aboriginal woman,” presenting the urgency of contemporary Aboriginal women artists’ practices of reclaiming and playing with stereotypical images:

The historical identity of Indian women, as seen through the eyes of the paternalistic culture that has represented them for some 150 years, both resembles and differs from the image of western women. Indigenous women, like their male counterparts, were seen as amoral savages and children of nature; they were idealized as “Indian princesses” and tragic “maidens” paddling their canoes bravely over waterfalls, sending their men off to battle, stoically enduring terrible hardships … At the same time, even in today’s somewhat cleaned-up media, these Pocahontas images continue to conflict with the other image of the mute and submissive squaw … Stereotypes of the Indian woman as either “spiritual warrior/goddess” or “squaw” are western created counterparts of the Madonna-or-whore syndrome. They neatly bypass most realistic modern female identities.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ Ibid.
The artists’ performances that I explore in the following chapters, such as Lori Blondeau’s performative photograph *CosmoSquaw* (fig. 1), subvert and expose the constructed stereotypes of the Indian princess and squaw, exposing the constructed nature of colonial representational violence. These one-dimensional types of colonial imaginings reduce diverse Indigenous women and their lived experiences to iconic and in many cases homogenous prototypes. In “Four Skin,” Gerald Vizenor illuminates the construction or the invention of the Indian and the legacies of the Western constructions of Aboriginality:

> We were invented by missionaries and theologians and social scientists subsidized by the federal government, and now, in the cities, we are rewarded, praised, and programmed for validating the invention of the Indian. In that dialectic we are impressed to assume ownership of stranger experiences: imitate data, live out theories, pretend our lives in beads and feathers, hold their mirrors for portraits and photographs, and serve as models, wilderness brothers and sisters to campers and hunters and ecologists. We have even been taught to resist questions about ourselves, about the Indian invention, because the white world has invested too much in this invention.19

Aboriginal stereotypes situated and imagined by colonial discourse have, as the scholars above argue, posited Indigenous peoples and their distinct cultural contexts as “others.” Postcolonial theorist, Homi K. Bhabha argues that stereotypes are a central facet in colonial discourses. They are characterized by a fixity and a clarity that are closely associated with processes of visualization,

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meaning that the objective of colonial discourse is to produce “the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible.” Bhabha’s discussion of the stereotype in *The Location of Culture* is useful to keep in mind when exploring its relationship to colonial discourse. As Bhabha argues,

The stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objective but that we change the objects of analysis itself. The difference of other cultures is other than the excess of signification or the trajectory of desire. These are theoretical strategies that are necessary to combat “ethnocentricism” but they cannot, of themselves, unreconstructed, represent that otherness.

Bhabha’s discussion is useful when exploring the strategies of contemporary Aboriginal artists and when considering Indigenous performances as a cultural specific and political negotiation that attempts to dislodge stereotypical representations of the “Indian.” Bhabha’s theoretical trope of mimicry is integral, especially in discussions of historic performances of Indigenous women, such as Pauline Johnson’s, but also in relation to contemporary performance. Bhabha writes, “Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform.”

From this point of view, I argue that one of the methods these artists use to subvert the stereotypes of Aboriginal women is mimicry. Scholarly research on identity politics has been advanced and developed by cultural studies and theorists who suggest that the construction of self occurs through a process involving “individual identification” with the cultural signs, images, and narratives dominant in the ways of seeing and representing the world. In his article “The Spectacle of the Other,” Stuart Hall discusses the relationship between media representation, identity, and political struggle. This provides a framework through which to explore the construction of Aboriginal women’s stereotypes, allowing navigation of the political and theoretical methods contemporary performance artists incorporate into their performances to re-vision and decolonize representations of Aboriginal women. Hall suggests that identity is not formed through internal conceptions of the self, but through the influences and adoptions of ever-transforming narratives and representations. Consequently, identity is always being reconstructed and contested.

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22 Ibid.
24 Stuart Hall, “Spectacle of the Other,” in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Open University, 1999), 223–290. This is also discussed in Stuart Hall, “Signification,
Gail Guthrie Valaskakis’ study “Parallel Voices: Indians and Others—Narratives of Cultural Struggle,” employs Stuart Hall’s discussion of identity politics in the context of Indigenous identities and subjectivities in her exploration of the histories of representation of Aboriginality. However, she argues that Indigenous identity is a composition of social subjects, constructed through representations and narratives presented not only by the dominant society but also from within the Aboriginal community. Valaskakis intimates the importance of recognizing Indigenous world views and cultural knowledge in both historic and contemporary discussions of Aboriginal experience. Her argument then considers the colonial power-systems that have marginalized Indigenous peoples and cultures, and simultaneously recognizes the always already impact of Indigenous socio-political and cultural ways of knowing and being on Indigenous identities.

In The Predicament of Culture, James Clifford discusses the political nature of identity, which he posits as being embedded within systems of power based on race, class, and gender. The systems of power exemplified in colonial projects of conquest, ethnocide, and assimilation have regulated Indigenous identity, having a significant impact on the understanding of the contemporary and historical collective experience. Concurrently, Bonita Lawrence’s “Gender, Race, and Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States” situates the politics of Aboriginal identities specifically in relation to social, cultural, and political history. Lawrence reveals the process of colonization as a fundamental player in the regulation of Canadian Indigenous identity. She identifies systems of classification and control and how their central role in enabling the colonizer to define who and what is “Indian.” In this respect, Lawrence includes Foucault’s understanding of regulatory regimes as a discourse in which “a way of seeing life is produced and reproduced by various rules, systems, and procedures—forming an entire conceptual territory on which knowledge is produced and shaped.” My exploration of the ways in which Blondeau destabilizes stereotypes will embody Lawrence’s conclusion: “Understanding how

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27 Bonita Lawrence, “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States,” Hypatia: Native American Issue 18, no. 2 (2003): 3. This concept defines the Canadian Indian Act as a body of laws which have controlled every aspect of Indian life. On the same page, Lawrence argues, “As a regulatory regime, the Indian Act provides ways of understanding Native identity, organizing a conceptual framework that has shaped contemporary Native life in ways that are now so familiar as to almost seem ‘natural.’”
colonial governments have regulated Native identity is essential for Native people, in attempting to step away from the colonizing frameworks that have enmeshed our lives, and as we struggle to revive the identities and way of living that preceded colonization.”

This discussion of stereotypes and the systems of colonial and state regulation of Indigenous identities provides an explanation of how representations of Aboriginality are constructed. The combination of Lawrence’s call to decolonize Indigenous identities through engagement with colonial state legislations and Bhabha’s call to “change the objects of analysis itself” brings to the forefront the imperative of incorporating and acknowledging Indigenous agency and cultural autonomy in researching historical photographs of Indigenous peoples. In the following chapters, my investigation of the subversion of the archive of Eurocentric representations of Indigenous peoples by Aboriginal women artists is a strategy of resistance and decolonization and a means to assert Indigenous agency and cultural autonomy in both historic and contemporary contexts. I argue that the act of performing as Indigenous women situates the Aboriginal woman’s body as the site of cultural intervention and resistance. Contemporary Aboriginal artists disrupt these colonial representations of Aboriginality, simultaneously exposing the Eurocentric construction of the imagery of Indianness and elucidating always already agency by Aboriginal individual and group sitters.

Addressing agency and the cultural autonomy of Indigenous peoples complicates the colonial experience and the ongoing lived experiences of Aboriginal communities. Contemporary Aboriginal artists are not only mining the archive, so to speak, to reveal Indigenous resistance in the colonial era, they are also producing new self-determined imagery and, arguably, an Indigenous archive of Aboriginal representation. Jeff Thomas, for example, distinguishes himself as an Urban Iroquois artist equipped with strategies of displacement, re-contextualization, and self-representation. He writes, “My study of Indian-ness seeks to create an image bank of my urban-Iroquois experience, as well as re-contextualize historical images of First Nations people for a contemporary audience. Ultimately, I want to dismantle long entrenched stereotypes and inappropriate caricatures of First Nations people.” As a senior Aboriginal artist, Thomas has produced an extensive archive of new imagery exemplified in his Bear Portraits, Indians on Tour, and his ongoing series, Conversation with Edward S. Curtis. In these, he exemplifies his strategies

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28 Ibid., 4.
and frameworks through diptych photographs juxtaposing Curtis’ images with his own contemporary photographs. He writes,

> When American photographer Edward Curtis's 20-volume monumental study *The North American Indian* resurfaced in popular culture in the 1960s, the photogravure prints in the volumes were cut out and sold individually. If Curtis was still alive when this happened I’m sure it would have horrified him because he intended text and image as one. I imagined that if I had the opportunity to rebind the separated prints, would I order them as they were before, or would I intervene? I feel that Curtis did not see his work as a definitive study of Indian-ness. Based upon his experiences with the sitters, I believe that Curtis thought that there was potential for *The North American Indian* project to engage in a future dialogue with their descendents. Technology has allowed me to “rebind” Curtis’s images and bridge the void between myth and reality.

I would argue that the types of strategies employed by Thomas are decolonization methodologies, which displace erroneous misconceptions of Indigenous cultures through both artistic and curatorial redress (this concept of decolonizing methodologies are further defined and developed later in this chapter). Thomas’ work as an artist, curator, and researcher has supported my re-evaluation of historic and colonial photographs of Aboriginal peoples. Rather than reducing these images to mere examples of stereotypical representations and evidence of representational violence, Thomas’ artistic and curatorial practice has created a new lens that reveals Indigenous agency and autonomy and provides new meaning for historic images of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. For example, one image in the Library and Archives collection—*Portrait of Kitsipimi Otunna, a Sarcee woman on horseback* (fig. 2), photographed by William Hanson Boorne and later incorporated into the C.W. Mathers Studios collection—is a powerful image of Kitsipimi Otunna (*Kitsipimi Otukna*). The date

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31 Jeff Thomas’ research-based curatorial project at the National Archives of Canada, *Aboriginal Portraits from the National Archives of Canada*, was produced in conjunction with Edward Tompkins in 1996. As a guest curator, Thomas’ exhibition was designed to challenge as well as expose stereotypical understandings of Aboriginal peoples and cultures. A significant contribution to current dialogue about historic representations of Indigenous peoples, *Aboriginal Portraits from the National Archives of Canada* was a process-based project, which aimed to reveal “the humanity of the people in these portraits.” As such, outdated and racist descriptive words, such as squaw, papoose, half-breed, and Eskimo were changed both for the exhibition and in the permanent archive to include more appropriate words. As noted on the subsequent on-line exhibition *Pride and Dignity* (Library and Archives Canada) project description, this project also includes the original inscriptions in order to “provide an important comparison for the researcher and viewer.” Jeff Thomas, “Aboriginal Portraits,” accessed January 12, 2011, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/aboriginal-portraits/index-e.html.
32 William Hanson Boorne and his cousin Ernest Gundry May worked together as photographers and part owners of Boorne and May Co. Ltd. in Calgary, Alberta. Boorne worked as the photographer and May as the black room technician. Part of the Borne and May collection of photography comprises of images of portraits
of Sarcee peoples and the sun dance rituals (1887), as well as, Boorne’s trip along the Canadian Pacific Railway line through Banff (circa 1890). The company was sold to C. Mathers. As noted by the McCord Museum archives, “Boorne opened a branch studio in Banff in 1889, and one in Edmonton in 1891. The Calgary headquarters was located on 3rd Avenue SW and it was here that stock photographs, souvenir albums and magic lantern slides were produced. The portrait studio on 8th Avenue SW was also the retail outlet for the company’s products. The company was incorporated as Boorne and May Co. Ltd. in 1892, but by 1893 it was in financial trouble. Boorne sold the Edmonton studio to C. W. Mathers and the other studios folded.”

Boorne and May Collection, “Administrative History: Biographical Sketch,” accessed January 13, 2011, http://www.mccordmuseum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid18&tablename=fond&elementid=15_true. The image of Kitsipimi Otuuna was subsequently published in C. W. Mathers’ picture album, Picturesque Edmonton N. W. T, in 1903. This photograph is now part of many North American collections, such as the Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian, the Glenbow Archives, as well as the Library and Archives Canada. Kitsipimi Otuuna’s image was also reproduced as a postcard.

Figure 2: W. Mathers, Portrait of Kitsipimi Otuuna, a Sarcee woman on horseback. Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development/Library and Archives Canada/C-006933.
of production has been attributed to 1884-85, which was an era of heightened assimilative and 
hegemonic policies, such as the ceremonial ban (1884) and the pass and permit system in the 
prairies. At this time, as I discussed above, Aboriginal women experienced extensive 
marginalization and further control of their bodies. In this context of colonial expansion and 
occupation, the image of Kitsipimi Otukna could be seen as an example of documentation produced 
within the salvage paradigm and as evidence of anthropological study; however, it also asserts the 
agency of Kitsipimi Otukna as an Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee) woman, as well as her cultural autonomy in 
her chosen dress. Regardless of who decided (the photographer or the sitter) to pose Kitsipimi 
Otukna on horseback, in Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee) dress, and within the context of a Tsuu T’ina camp, 
the photograph represents Indigenous cultural knowledge.

In many instances, Aboriginal histories that have been mitigated by colonial erasures and 
agendas, such as residential schools, are being recovered through oral histories and remembered 
through the Indigenizing and re-contextualizing of the visual archive. For instance, Kitsipimi 
Otukna is represented on horseback in front of a canvas teepee, wearing beaded leggings, and 
wrapped in two trade blankets. In the background, a teepee-like structure, part of which appears to 
be several travois, is used for drying meat, with low grassy hills and horses grazing beyond. This 
image presents cultural knowledge and ways of being that were systemically eroded by aggressive 
state-sponsored assimilative agendas. She looks directly at the camera, which is not a common 
representation of Aboriginal women, arguably disrupting the stereotypical notions of the stoic and 
solemn Indian Maiden. The photograph of Kitsipimi Otukna depicts a strong and, I would argue, 
self-determined Tsuu T’ina woman.

When I first saw this image I was reminded of Jeff Thomas’ exhibition, *Aboriginal 
Portraits from the National Archives of Canada* at the National Archives of Canada (1996) and the 
conversations he put forward about the representation of Aboriginal women. In his section of the 
exhibition, *Portraits of Aboriginal Women*, which has been incorporated into the on-line exhibition 
on the Library and Archives Canada website, Thomas writes,

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33 After the 1885 Saskatchewan uprising, the Department of Indian Affairs developed tactics to control and 
prevent movement of Aboriginal peoples from and between reserves. This is an example of a colonial tactic 
of isolation. The pass and permit system required permission to be gained by individuals from the Indian 
Agent in order to leave the reserve; in many cases to entertain visiting dignitaries, such as Royal Tours. For 
more information see Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Tie that Binds: Government Repression of Indigenous 
Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies* (Winnipeg, The University of Manitoba Press, 1994). For first person 
testimonials on the pass and permit system and the impact the Department of Indian Affairs permit system 
had on Indigenous nations, specifically in the Prairies, see Walter Hildebrandt, Dorothy First Rider, and Sarah 
Throughout my research, one of the areas of concern that emerged was the representation of Aboriginal women. In general, photographers have shown Aboriginal women as subservient to a dominant male figure. The caption usually identifies the man and leaves the woman nameless, often referred to as a squaw or “wife of.” Many times, women are pictured sitting on the ground and looking away from the camera or in a pose of domestic activity. While this would not be an uncommon scene in the Aboriginal world, once the photographs were taken out of the community and displayed for a non-native audience, the voiceless domestic servant suffered the indignity of becoming a negative stereotype. This series of portraits reflects the strength of Aboriginal women.34

He makes a similar insightful argument for his on-line catalogue for the Luminace: Aboriginal Photographic Portraits exhibition:

Many times women have been pictured sitting on the ground and looking away from the camera. While neither would be uncommon in the Aboriginal world, when the portraits were taken out of the community and displayed, they were usually captioned as squaws, a dismissive term that robs women of their dignity, power and humanity. I wanted to present an image that spoke more accurately to the strength of Aboriginal women.35

One question that has been raised is what to do with the extensive visual and material archive on Aboriginal peoples. What are appropriate ways to re-dress these types of representations within the current politics of reconciliation and decolonization? Jeff Thomas’ practice—as well as that of other artists, such as the video work of Dana Claxton—provides an alternative Indigenous lens through which to view images like Portrait of Kitsipimi Otunna, A Sarcee Woman on Horseback. This lens reclaims and repatriates photographs, moving them from a national/ist and colonial archive (evidence of colonial violence and ethnographic specimens) into the realm of Indigenous agency and cultural autonomy, highlighting self determination, human dignity, and strength. This perspective also suggests the possibility of reclaiming these images into Indigenous family albums. Portrait of Kitsipimi Otunna is a stunning portrait of Kitsipimi Otunna, who was a performer in Buffalo Bill’s wildwest shows (her performances are further discussed in chapter 6) and can been dually viewed as a photograph of performer and one of an ancestor, elder, and grandmother for her Tsuu T’ina community and specifically her family.

Another artist who is both intervening in the archive of portraits of Aboriginal peoples and creating Aboriginal self-representation is Oji-Cree multidisciplinary artist KC Adams. Adams’ digital portrait series, Cyborg Hybrids, features artists of mixed European and Aboriginal descent in

34 Jeff Thomas, “Aboriginal Portraits.”
35 Ibid.
glossy prints. These images are examples of performative photography, which are active and self-determined representations of Indigenous artists and arts administrators. The criteria for modeling put forward by Adams requires one be forward thinking, plugged into technology, and involved in artistic production. The individuals photographed are simultaneously subversive activists asserting Indigenous rights and glamorous fashion models performing for the camera. This series offers a space within the gallery setting for conversations surrounding issues of reclaiming, resisting, and re-envisioning. Adam’s work references Donna Harroway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, which states that a cyborg is a creature in a technological, postgender world free of traditional Western stereotypes towards race and gender. This series of photographs presents the celebrities of the contemporary Canadian Indigenous art scene defiantly posing while wearing stereotypical slogans. In the Ottawa series, Inuit artist and curator Heather Igloliorte, whose beaded t-shirt reads “I Club Baby Seals,” has pointed out, “We put those slogan there ourselves” (fig. 3). The complexities of this series, such as the duality of using the construct of Western stereotypes to subvert those same stereotypes, is what makes this multicity series so powerful. These images conjure many different questions and challenge classifications of race, culture, and identity. They also offer an opportunity to reflect back on how Indigenous peoples and their cultures have been represented by Euro-Canadian society and Eurocentric disciplines, such as anthropology and ethnography, and institutions, such as the museum and popular media. The images in Cyborg Hybrids critically expose the ways the photograph has been used to document, record, produce, and construct Aboriginal peoples through the Western lens. Furthermore, they subvert the colonial ideology of the salvage paradigm and the concept of the vanishing Indian. The salvage paradigm was a late 19th- and early 20th-century attempt to collect and preserve Aboriginal material culture; to document cultural, social, and political practice; and to create a permanent record based on the Eurocentric belief that Aboriginal peoples were vanishing. Although these attitudes shifted in the academic and museological sense,
Marcia Crosby argues that much of the Aboriginal art produced today is an attempt to reclaim the image of the “Indian” from the ethnographic context of the salvage paradigm. The “Indian” was theoretically and physically collected; material and visual culture were “salvaged” and placed into museum collections. Colonial legacies remain embedded in Canadian culture. This is exemplified in the misplaced yet common belief that “authentic” Indigenous cultures were lost through contact with European society. The result of this feeling of loss in non-Aboriginal consciousness was the construction of a fixed, non-changing Aboriginal culture—which Indigenous peoples have resisted and subverted through the processes of colonization and decolonization. The Cyborg Hybrids series reveals a fundamental thread that connects heterogeneous Indigenous nations across the Americas: tradition as continuous change. The installation of the Winnipeg/Brandon series—featuring models dressed in the cyborg hybrid uniform of glossy red lips, white chokers, furs and beaded t-shirts and photographed in stoic poses (figs. 4, 5)—was called by curator Ryan Rice a virtual “front line” of artist-activists.

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In this sense, Adams’ strategically uses the cyborg hybrid type—dressing up her models—in order to resist and refuse the stereotypes given to Indigenous peoples. (fig. 6) Unifying the look for each individual subversively challenges historical ethnographic photographers’ use of props, regalia, and other strategies to create what was seen as the “authentic” Aboriginal subject. Often the props photographers such as Edward Curtis included were not culturally appropriate for the individual sitter, usually reflecting customs of dress from previous generations. Cyborg Hybrids thus tackles the front line issues faced by Aboriginal peoples, from stereotypes to cultural genocide. By inviting the leaders of the Aboriginal art-scene to pose with their personalized stereotypical slogans, Adams’ Cyborg Hybrids contributes to the self-determined Indigenous network. Each individual, including the artist, now forms a collaborative artistic force, a network of socio-political activism, which theoretically and practically challenges the legacies of colonization and contributes to Indigenous empowerment, sovereignty, and decolonization. The performance work explored in this dissertation engages with similar conversations about the intersections between Indigenous identity, representation, colonialism, and legacies of the colonial project and employs similar dynamic decolonizing tactics, such as the reclamation and subversion of language and stereotypes, to those put forward and investigated by both Thomas and Adams.
My project thus argues that due to historical and ongoing regulation of Indigenous women’s status and bodies by the nation-state, as well as the extensive archive of Euro-Candiancentric representations of Indigenous women, the act of performing the body by Indigenous women artists is a powerful decolonizing strategy of resistance, reclamation, and sovereignty. Looking to the art production of contemporary Indigenous artists elucidates the thematic approaches I use to frame and discuss the complexities of Indigenous women’s performance art.

In the following section, I address the overarching themes that frame my study. Each chapter is framed through a specific thematic focus in order to discuss the multifaceted histories of Indigenous performance art. This being said, the common themes of Indigenous storytelling, sovereignty, feminisms, decolonization, and globalization are also woven through the chapters and interconnected in my discussions. I have incorporated these lenses as trajectories from which to elucidate the multilayered performances that I investigate and to consider the entangled histories of Indigenous performance and Indigenous experience, stories, and contemporary issues. For example, my third chapter explores Indigenous storytelling as an Indigenous theoretical framework, and looks to the customary practice of telling stories and its connection to the performative body. I extend this discussion and link it to the use of performative storytelling by Aboriginal peoples from the modern period in Canadian history as a strategy for asserting Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty and a tool for activism and resistance. In other words, the performances I explore are multifaceted, connecting to and communicating with more than one of my thematic lenses. My
decision to use specific thematic lenses developed from my own interdisciplinary research methods and engagement with Indigenous art, feminisms, and Indigenous studies discourses. Interdisciplinary in scope, this dissertation is situated in the current wave of discussions in the contemporary Aboriginal art community in Canada and the ongoing challenges faced by writers and scholars to determine meaningful ways to write about Indigenous art practices and gain access to writing on Aboriginal arts.  

**Locating the Field: Aboriginal Art Discourses**

One of the key issues in my research is the dearth of literature on contemporary Indigenous art, specifically Indigenous methodologies for discussing Indigenous arts. Nancy Shoemaker writes in *Clearing a Path* about a similar issue in Indigenous studies with reference to postcolonial theory: “Even those theorists (Said, Fanon, Spivak, Bhabha) writing from the perspective of the colonized, or postcolonized, seem foreign and distant from North American Indian studies. The possibility of something called ‘Indigenous theory’ is in the air, but at the moment it is not clear what shape these discussions will take or what impact they will have (Smith 1999).”

Many significant publications, in the forms of catalogue essays and exhibition reviews, are in circulation; however, over the past decade very few books and anthologies on contemporary Aboriginal art have been published. Very important questions are currently being debated in the Aboriginal arts community: What is an Indigenous methodology, and what are appropriate methodologies for contemporary Indigenous art discourse? What is Indigenous art history(ies)? These conversations are not new, having been explored by scholars such as Deborah Doxtator in the mid-1990s and Gerald McMaster and Ruth Phillips in the late 1990s and early 2000s in edited anthologies such as *Native North American Art in the Twentieth Century* (1999) and *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery* (2002). However, 

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37 With these issues in mind, Heather Igloliorte and I co-organized and chaired a panel at the 2010 University Arts Association of Canada conference at Guelph University. This double session panel “Decolonizing Art Practices: Indigenous Arts” invited papers that explored potential methodological approaches for the writing and analysis of Indigenous arts. In conversation with one of the presenters, Sherry Farrell Racette, we discussed the issue of the lack of published material on contemporary Aboriginal art, as well as the fact that a large amount of the writing on Aboriginal art is produced in short run catalogues at galleries and artist-run-centres that are hard to access and are not widely distributed.


39 One of the foundational texts for my study is *Transference, Tradition and Technology: Native New Media Exploring Visual and Digital Culture*, edited by Melanie Townsend, Dana Claxton, and Steve Loft and published in 2005. This publication is a very important edited anthology that looks at contemporary Indigenous art practices, with specific reference to new media, video and film practices.
few published anthologies or resources have specifically looked at the Indigenous art discourses and theoretical frameworks.

I have returned to several pivotal texts that discuss issues concerning Indigenous art discourse and the concept of Indigenous art histories. Gerald McMaster, for example, in “Towards an Aboriginal Art History” puts forward “an insistence on the reality of an Aboriginal art history.” He notes, through the work of Carl Beam, specifically *The North American Iceberg* (1985), the necessity for “an Indian-made critical discourse, one that has an Aboriginal perspective with the possibility of convergence with other discourses.”  

McMaster’s article has supported my investigation of contemporary Aboriginal art to uncover Indigenous theoretical frameworks that could potentially be used in writing on Aboriginal art practices. Ruth Phillips, in her essay “Art History and Native-made objects: New Discourses, Old Difference?” addresses the radical reformations of art history and anthropology that occurred partly in response to criticism by Indigenous peoples, feminists and others of Western art’s historical methodological approaches and systems of classification. Phillips argues that the discipline of art history has suppressed and museumified indigenous cultures and calls for a rejection of privileging object-oriented histories of Aboriginal art, recommending instead, a turn towards ‘visual culture,’ which, she argues supports the unraveling of linkages between contemporary Indigenous artists and “earlier generations working in very different format and media.”

Phillips thoroughly maps out the developments of Aboriginal art discourse and productively incorporates Indigenous criticism of art historical discourse, concepts of postmodern inclusiveness, and the ongoing appropriation and control of Aboriginal visual culture by non-Indigenous theory, classification systems, dichotomous categories, and art criticism. For example

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41 In “Our (Inter) Related History,” Gerald McMaster shifted his previous argument and discussed the significance of the interrelated Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories. He argues that an interrelated history is fundamental to Canadian identity, and these histories can be intertwined through the visual arts. McMaster uses the double helix DNA molecule as a metaphorical model. In this model, the two strands of the double helix spiral upwards and are connected by rungs, like a ladder. McMaster argues, “In this model there is continuous dialogue, debate, and struggle. Like the DNA molecule this is the constituent part of who we are. This is how I see our interrelatedness.” McMaster’s methodological approach of interrelatedness does highlight the entanglements of Indigenous and settler histories, however, it does not necessarily address the power relations derived from the colonial project and the issues of exclusionary and Eurocentric art historical methodologies. Gerald McMaster, “Our (Inter) Related History,” in *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*, ed. Lynda Jessup with Shannon Bagg (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2002), 3, 7.
she incorporates Métis filmmaker Loretta Todd’s arguments in “What More do They Want?” to elucidate the issue of using Western cultural theory to contextualize Indigenous arts. Todd argues,

The theories seek to impose a world view, and to assimilate my view into theirs, even while they preach multiplicity … When we articulate the dichotomy of the traditional versus the contemporary, we are referencing the centre, acknowledging the authority of the ethnographer, the anthropologist, the art historian, the cultural critic, the art collector. We are caught in the grasp of neo-colonialism, in the gaze of the connoisseur or consumer, forever trapped in a process that divides and conquers.43

By drawing on and listening to Todd’s powerful argument, I began in the early stages of my research to map out a history of Indigenous performance, one that considered performance from the 19th century and made connections to recent examples, by artists such as Cheryl L’Hirondelle. Another challenge in writing this dissertation is the issue of language. How should I distinguish these diverse performances from different time periods? I was aware of my previous use of terms like “traditional” and “tradition,” and the dichotomous descriptors I was incorporating to analyze my diachronic study.

By returning to Todd’s arguments and listening to other leading Indigenous scholars, such as Steve Loft, I have attempted to change my terminology, for example, from “tradition” to “customary or cultural practice.” This simple yet strategic shift in language seems to better represent the performances I explore, as they are all part of a living history of performance situated in living Indigenous cultures. At times I feel that the language of the discourse is not appropriate, that it cannot encompass the complexities of Indigenous art practices and their multilayered and multivocal meanings. In “Basket, Bead, and Quill, and the Making of ‘Traditional’ Art,” Deborah Doxtator asserts the intricacies of Indigenous language, metaphor, and meaning in relation to Indigenous cultural practice. She argues,

Like picture writing on utilitarian objects, basketry, pottery, clothing, or in wampum belts or pictographs, these objects as metaphors are not transcriptions of word for word linear sentences but of concepts and processes. Each symbol does not correspond with an English phoneme which when connected to others forms a word or sentence which explicate a meaning. Like the words in our languages they emphasize movement, action, and mean not one thing but several.44

Similar to Todd’s cautionary statement above, Doxtator also discusses the distortion of Indigenous knowledge about art practice by Western art historical approaches, highlighting the historic

classifications of traditional and contemporary art. She writes, “The relatively recent categorization of art forms such as basket, bead, and quill as art objects within the hierarchical Euro-North American art aesthetics side-steps the recognition of Native aesthetics and conceptual systems as viable ways of understanding art.”

Although these foundational arguments examine object-based art forms, they are constructive for all discussions of Indigenous art, whether performance, video, weaving, or basket making. In her article “If Art is the Answer, What is the Question?” Charlotte Townsend-Gault presents a compelling argument for the need of greater awareness of the politics of Indigenous material culture. She argues that the politics of the object is a significant consideration when discussing Aboriginal visual culture, suggesting that objects can be understood as the counterpoint for identity politics, cultural debates, and confrontations based on their contested status as property, art, ethnographical symbols, and treasures. Furthermore, she asserts, “a large part of their present significance lies in a challenge to colonialist authority, the assertion of survival, the demand for response, and the provocation to action.” In other words, there is a relationship between the visual manifestations of Aboriginal cultures and contemporary socio-political relations.

Phillips conclusions, drawing from Todd and Doxtator, are significantly useful as a methodological approach:

Both Doxtator and Todd resist the dialectical structures that create such either/or situations, structures which they regard as continued unfolding of Eurocentric obsessions. They urge on us more holistic and community-based understandings of Native-made objects, both contemporary and historic, which will restore interlinkages with oral traditions, relationships to family, community, and land, and to transcendent realities.

My incorporation of both a diachronic study of Indigenous performance and a thematic exploration of the complexities of performance have been informed by these types of debates. In this way, the following sections introduce the threads that have been presented by scholars of Aboriginal art as well as of other disciplines, such as Indigenous feminisms and Indigenous studies. My aims are to build from these ideas and to contribute possible lenses through which Indigenous arts can be contextualized and critically analyzed. My decision to incorporate multiple lenses stems from my intention to show the complexities of Indigenous cultural production and to challenge the

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47 Ibid.
limitations of art historical methodology in discussions of Indigenous art practices. I draw on Indigenous criticism of art historical discourse by such Indigenous scholars as Loretta Todd. In her 1992 essay “What More do They Want?” mentioned above—which was part of the catalogue for the groundbreaking exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal art, Indigena (curated by Indigenous curators McMaster and Lee Ann Martin in response to the Columbus Quincentennial or rather 500 Years of Resistance)—she wrote: “By reducing our cultural expression to simply the question of modernism or postmodernism, art or anthropology, or whether we are contemporary or traditional, we are placed on the edges of dominant culture, while the dominant culture determines whether we are allowed to enter the realm of art.” To this end, the performances that I explore are centrally located and discussed through a framework of locally and culturally specific Indigenous perspectives and theoretical approaches, as well as by re-envisioning critical pedagogy.

**Defining and Activating Indigenous Methodologies: Critical Indigenous Pedagogy**

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna Lincoln have put forward critical pedagogy that merges Indigenous and critical methodologies, defined as *critical Indigenous pedagogy*. This borderland epistemology aims to move dialogue forward on Indigenous issues with the point of contributing research that benefits the needs of specific Aboriginal communities. Informed by these scholars, my framework incorporates critical Indigenous inquiry methods whereby I am accountable for the research I produce to both the artists individually and the Aboriginal arts community more broadly. In *The Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Denzin and Lincoln explain the concept of *critical Indigenous pedagogy* as the use of methods in a critical way for the mobilization of social justice, noting that this type of research methodology is both politically and ethically based. They write that critical Indigenous pedagogy “values the transformative power of Indigenous, subjugated knowledges. It values the pedagogical practices that produce these knowledges, and it seeks forms of praxis and inquiry that are emancipatory and empowering. It embraces the commitment by Indigenous scholars to decolonize Western methodologies.” Denzin and Lincoln argue that this type of framework challenges and critiques the historic research lenses used to explore Indigenous life, such as the positivist and postpositivist

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49 Todd, “What More Do They Want?,” 75.
approaches, which, they argue, merely address the interests and concerns of non-Indigenous scholars.\textsuperscript{51}

Tuhiwai Smith acknowledges that during the Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples (1994–2004), Indigenous scholars challenged and disrupted Western epistemologies and methodologies and at the same time developed “methodologies and approaches to research that privileged Indigenous knowledges, voices, and experiences.”\textsuperscript{52} To borrow Tuhiwai Smith’s distinction between methodology as a theory of research and a research method as a way of gathering empirical data, I define Indigenous methodology as a theory of inquiry that incorporates Indigenous methods, such as storytelling, drama, poetry, and critical personal narratives.\textsuperscript{53} In this way, Indigenous research methods are performative practices making Indigenous life visible—on Indigenous terms and represented through Indigenous lenses.\textsuperscript{54} Tuhiwai Smith’s “Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects” are fundamental strategic projects that merge Indigenous methodologies with critical inquiry. She argues, “Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and Indigenous practices.” It is worth quoting Tuhiwai Smith’s discussion of these projects at length:

The implications for Indigenous research which have been derived from the imperatives inside the struggles of the 1970s seems to be clear and straightforward: the survival of peoples, cultures and languages; the struggle to become self-determining, the need to take back control of our destinies. These imperatives have demanded more than rhetoric and acts of defiance. These acts of reclaiming, reformulating and reconstituting Indigenous cultures and languages have required the mounting of an ambitious research programme, one that is very strategic in its purpose and activities and relentless in its pursuit of social justice. … Themes such as cultural survival, self-determination, healing, restoration and social justice are engaging Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities in a diverse array of projects. The projects intersect with each other in various ways.\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Linda Tuhiwai Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples} (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999), 87.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies}, 1999.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies}, 125.
\end{itemize}
The projects outlined by Tuhiwai Smith are discussed further in Chapter 6, which focuses specifically on decolonization; however many are incorporated into my arguments and discussions of the performance works. The projects include claiming, testimonies, storytelling, celebrating survival, remembering, indigenizing, intervening, revitalizing, connecting, reading, writing, representing, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratizing, networking, naming, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering, and sharing. As Tuhiwai Smith concludes, these projects are not definitive, as they overlap and are connected. My research themes draw on this urgent list of Indigenous projects—utilizing claiming, remembering, networking, negotiating, gendering, intervening and storytelling, among others—as key lenses through which to address the complicated and multifaceted practices of Indigenous performance art. In this way, although Tuhiwai Smith’s projects are foregrounded as a basis of Indigenous inquiry, I, as a non-Indigenous scholar, aim to engage in solidarity with these projects in order to contribute decolonized research for the Aboriginal arts community.

Denzin and Lincoln argue that non-Indigenous scholars are currently also engaged with these types of decolonizing approaches, noting that they are “learning how to dismantle, deconstruct, and decolonize.” The authors outline several criteria that encompass critical Indigenous pedagogy. These are central concerns and considerations in both my research approach and the thematic lenses through which I explore Indigenous performance art. Denzin and Lincoln state, “Such inquiry should meet multiple criteria, it must be ethical, performative, healing, transformative, decolonizing, and participatory. It must be committed to dialogue, community, self-determination, and cultural autonomy.”

In the following sections of this chapter and the chapters to follow, these key words—such as decolonizing, self-determination and cultural autonomy—are integral components to my argument. I incorporate Denzin and Lincoln’s criteria as the lenses through which I investigate Indigenous women’s performance art as a vehicle for resistance, cultural continuance, and autonomy. What I find particularly insightful in their argument, and something I acknowledged above as challenge in locating an appropriate methodological approach, is that a key aspect of critical Indigenous pedagogy is to resist confining “inquiry to a single paradigm or interpretative strategy.” I thus apply multiple lenses and thematic approaches to argue that Indigenous performance art is multifaceted and multilayered. My dissertation and its organization takes up the

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
call put forward by Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith to produce research using a pedagogy that is “unruly, disruptive, critical, and dedicated to the goals of justice and equity.”

Researcher as Performer/Perform as Researcher: A Performative Pedagogical Approach

The performative research model noted in Denzin and Lincoln’s criteria for the production of ethically based and morally conscious research—in this case, on Indigenous art production—foregrounds my organization and framing of this dissertation’s discussion. The authors argue, “The researcher-as-performer moves from a view of performance as imitation, or dramaturgical staging (Goffman, 1959), to an emphasis on performance as liminality, construction (McLaren, 1999), to a view of performance as embodied struggle, as intervention, as breaking and remaking, and as kinesis, that is, a socio-political act.”

Dwight Conquergood’s account of the role of the researcher as performer—or the role of researcher as a co-performative witness, to draw on Johannes Fabian (1990)—is a valuable means to define my envisioned role as the researcher of this project. What this means, drawing on Fabian's call for a turn “from informative to performative ethnography,” is that my dissertation and methods resituate the position of outsider research to an actively and ethically engaged position to produce research as an act of co-performative witnessing. In this way, my performative strategy is centred in listening and in producing research—as Conquergood argues, “it is forged from solidarity with” the performances and the artists in which I explore.

For these reasons, most of the performances I discuss at length are performances I have witnessed in person. This is not to say that video documentation and re-productions are not useful ways to engage with the performances; but I have had a different level of experience through mise-en-scène interaction with the works. With this approach, I aim to move away from ethnographic modes of inquiry, such as Clifford Geertz’s concept of world-as texts, whereby the “culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over

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59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 8.
the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong.”64 My exploration of culturally specific Indigenous performances facilitates an opportunity to engage with the alternative ways of knowing, produced and actualized by the performances. As Conquergood contests, “Geertz figures culture as a stiff, awkward reading room. The ethnocentrism of this textualist metaphor is thrown into stark relief when applied to the countercultures of enslaved and other dispossessed people.”65

In “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” Conquergood contextualizes Geertz’s mode of inquiry by looking at a personal narrative by Frederick Douglass from the late 1800s (which was incorporated into Paul Gilroy’s study of the oppositional politics of black musical performance), argued by the author to be a “remarkable” contemporary discussion of the “improvisatory performance politics expressed in the singing of enslaved people.”66 As Paul Gilroy argues, enslaved peoples, regardless of their oppressed positions, created a culture of resistance, or rather a counter culture based in performance practices. In this, culture and politics were “played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about, because words [ . . . ] will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth.”67 Conquergood challenges Geertz notions of a detached analysis based on the reading and knowing of texts:

Instead of listening, absorbing, and standing in solidarity with the protest performances of the people, as Douglass recommended, the ethnographer, in Geertz's scene, stands above and behind the people and, uninvited, peers over their shoulders to read their texts, like an overseer or a spy. There is more than a hint of the improper in this scene: the asymmetrical power relations secure both the anthropologist's privilege to intrude and the people's silent acquiescence (although one can imagine what they would say about the anthropologist's manners and motives when they are outside his reading gaze). The strain and tension of this scene are not mediated by talk or interaction; both the researcher and the researched face the page as silent readers instead of turning to face one another and, perhaps, open a conversation.68

I include this critique of Geertz by Conquergood to recognize the history of Eurocentric ethnographic analysis of Indigenous cultural production and to engage with contemporary performance studies discourses that support a dissemination of decolonizing methods as well as dynamic and multifocal conversations and collaborative research.

Throughout my analysis of Indigenous performance art, I incorporate performance studies

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65 Conquergood, “Performance Studies,” 150.
66 Ibid., 148.
68 Conquergood, “Performance Studies,” 150.
scholars, such as Conquergood, who are invested in radical pedagogy—those who want to advance research that unravels and reveals the meaningful ways that performance intervenes and participates in activism. In many cases, my exploration in the following chapters infuses perspectives of critical performance studies with Denzin and Lincoln’s critical Indigenous pedagogy. These different modes of inquiry support a valuable analysis of Indigenous performance art that shows the performances as multifaceted acts. Conquergood argues, “The performance studies project makes its most radical intervention, I believe, by embracing both written scholarship and creative work, papers and performances.”

He extends this argument by including Jon McKenzie’s concept of the liminal-norm, identified by McKenzie as the calling card of performance studies. Conquergood states that this concept of the liminal norm manifests itself most powerfully in the struggle to live “betwixt and between theory and theatricality, paradigms and practices, critical reflection and creative accomplishment.” He then argues that performance studies practices bring together “a commingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing that unsettles the institutional organization of knowledge and disciplines. The constitutive liminality of performance studies lies in its capacity to bridge segregated and differently valued knowledges, drawing together legitimated as well as subjugated modes of inquiry.” When I first read Conquergood, I felt as if my mode of researching Indigenous performance art using a multidisciplinary lens was not only justified and supported, but clarified. In this dissertation I aim to put forward critical engagement with and approaches for the analysis of the performances and also to discuss the radical interventionist practices used by the artists.

Conquergood articulates a very important issue in relation of the constructed institutional separation of academics and artists, or rather the researcher as the intellectual producer of knowledge and the performer as simply the technical and manual labourer:

This configuration mirrors an entrenched social hierarchy of value based on the fundamental division between intellectual labor and manual labor. … The segregation of faculty and students who make art and perform from those who think about and study art and performance is based on a false dichotomy that represses the critical-intellectual component of any artistic work, and the imaginative-creative dimension of scholarship that makes a difference.

He argues instead that a performance studies agenda simultaneously supports the connection

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69 Ibid.
71 Conquergood, “Performance Studies,” 151.
72 Ibid., 151–2.
73 Ibid., 153.
between artistic accomplishment and academic research and the collapse of the hierarchical divide “between practical knowledge (knowing how), propositional knowledge (knowing that), and political savvy (knowing who, when, and where).” This type of epistemological approach, which adjoins processes of creativity and critique, supports a radical and powerful inquiry that challenges the ongoing divisions of the production of knowledge in the academy: it brings together “thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualizing and creating” as comparable and corresponding modes of knowledge-making. To this end, I aim to produce an entangled conversation, whereby I argue that the performances write, create, and produce alternative, culturally localized Indigenous histories of Aboriginal lived experiences. This dissertation then is a mapping of histories of Indigenous performance framed as a process of performative research and is simultaneously a space from which the performer/artist is acknowledged as a researcher. It is imperative to recognize the critical practices employed by the artists, who are contributing through the performative act in the writing of decolonized Indigenous stories/histories.

What I have uncovered in my research is that many Indigenous artists are visually and performatively advancing and generating methodologies, strategies, and languages through their practices that can be used as art criticism and discourse. To this end, their critical art practices create Indigenous histories that forge new ground for alternative narratives. Looking to artist practices as possible theoretical lenses, such as Jeff Thomas’ body of photography, offers possible examples of Indigenous methodological approaches for the writing of Indigenous art histories. This idea was briefly discussed above and is further contextualized, specifically in the case of Jeff Thomas, in Chapter 3. During the research for my master’s thesis, I began looking at artist-based approaches as a means for developing methodology for my analysis of Aboriginal performance art. James Luna’s practice and self-definition as a high-tech storyteller supported my research of concepts of story as theory and the incorporation by performance artists, such as Lori Blondeau and Rebecca Belmore, of oral customary practices. In an interview between Blondeau and Lynne Bell and Janice Williamson, “High Tech Storyteller: A Conversation with Performance Artist Lori Blondeau,” Blondeau shares a story about Luna and his performance storytelling strategy:

James Luna … calls himself a high-tech storyteller, which hits the nail on the head, because that’s what Aboriginal artists are. … He [Luna] told me a story about being at an Indian Studies Conference. He was sitting at a table with an old lady

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
who was about to receive an award for being a storyteller and she asked him what he did and he told her: I’m a high tech storyteller—I use all these props. And after he did his presentation, he came back to the table and she goes: Oh, you are a high tech storyteller!  

**Indigenous Storytelling: Story as Theory**

In this section I introduce and contextualize Aboriginal storytelling in relation to contemporary Indigenous performance art strategies. Throughout my dissertation and specifically in Chapter Three, I examine performance-based resistance and assertions of Indigenous lived experience and practices of Indigenous storytelling. My thematic focus on storytelling acknowledges the significance of oratory customary practices in Aboriginal communities. This inclusion and thematic lens builds on existing literature on Indigenous storytelling that addresses it as an integral component of Aboriginal knowledge and culture. Julie Cruikshank’s work on oral histories and storytelling, which focuses on Aboriginal communities in the Northwest Territories, acknowledges among other things that stories in Indigenous cultures, as with other oral cultures, function as a way to transfer intergenerational knowledge. Chippewa storyteller Lenore Keeshig-Tobias asserts the significance of stories in Aboriginal knowledge systems and historic and contemporary cultural life: “Stories are not just entertainment. Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture thinks.”

By drawing on Keeshig-Tobias’ and other Indigenous scholars’ discussions of stories, I allude to the possibilities storytelling offers in relation to cultural continuance, staging resistance to assimilist campaigns, and asserting Indigenous self-determination and cultural and political sovereignty. I conclude that Indigenous performance, by incorporating the use of storytelling, is a medium that contributes to the discourse of Aboriginal sovereignty and activism in Canada.

Part of my reason for highlighting storytelling is that colonial processes worked towards delegitimizing oral histories—that is, the act of storytelling—as a legitimate means of writing and documenting histories in Aboriginal communities. Furthermore, historic and contemporary colonialism in Canada marginalizes and has tended to ignore and erase Indigenous experiences, voices, and stories. The result is that Indigenous stories, until recently, have not been recognized as legitimate histories, and therefore are not incorporated into the writing of Canadian histories or

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77 Ibid., 34.
acknowledged as documents of history. Due to the ongoing unwillingness to acknowledge Indigenous experiences, perspectives, and voices, Aboriginal communities and individuals have used storytelling as a strategy of cultural and political resistance by asserting Indigenous histories that are not part of national consciousness. In this way, Indigenous stories address such erasures, simultaneously complicating and revealing colonial histories, while voicing Indigenous lived experience and world views.

My research responds to the calls of Indigenous scholars, such as Margaret Kovach’s in her chapter “Story as Theory” in her recently published Indigenous Methodologies, where she states, “there must be commentary on the utility of how story works as a decolonizing action that gives voice to the misinterpreted and the marginalized.” The concept of story as theory discussed by Kovach and similarly by Salish writer, storyteller, and scholar Lee Maracle is used as a framework to explore contemporary forms of storytelling—such as performance art—and to elucidate the use of oral customary practices by contemporary artists as a strategy of Indigenous cultural continuance. Also, I aim to contribute to discussions of the histories of Indigenous performance, highlighting the historic use of performance and storytelling by Indigenous peoples to assert cultural, political, and land sovereignty. Story as theory is a useful lens to incorporate into the analysis of Aboriginal performance art.

In my discussion and contextualization of the performances, I draw on Maracle’s concept of oratory, which introduces a theoretical framework that privileges Indigenous customary practices and cultural knowledge decimated through the act of telling stories. She argues that oratory—or, as Kovach defines it, “story as theory”—is an Indigenous framework that Aboriginal scholars, writers, and artists can incorporate into and as part of their processes of decolonization. Maracle advocates the use of storytelling to reclaim the voices and to assert lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples. In a similar way, Kovach considers story as both method and meaning and presents story “as a culturally nuanced way of knowing” Sto:lo scholar, storyteller, and educator Jo-ann Archibald, Q’um Q;um Xiiem has introduced the term storywork as a way to define the “Synergistic interaction between storyteller, listener and story,” noting that key principles as being

79 Margaret Kovach, Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 98.
81 Kovach, Indigenous Methodologies, 94.
respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Maracle, of the Sto:lo/Coast Salish Nation, argues,

Oratory: place of prayer, to persuade. This is a word we can work with … Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus, story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and ideas of a people.

Indigenous knowledge systems can be useful strategic frameworks for analysis and critical discussion of Indigenous culture and contemporary Indigenous arts. The Western tradition of classifying Indigenous material culture, exemplified in the academic disciplines of anthropology, ethnology and art history, makes the current use of Western theory for discussions of Indigenous culture problematic. This use is argued by some to constitute the re-inscription of racist, colonial, and Eurocentric interpretations. Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips explain in their book, Native North American Art, that the categorizations and status assigned to Aboriginal aesthetic expressions, relative to their European counterparts, was always one of inferiority. Since the advent of postmodernism, such exclusionary definitions have been challenged and rendered obsolete by critics, art historians, and artists. Instead, storytelling is one possible Indigenous theoretical framework that can be used to interpret Indigenous performance.

I recognize the difficulty in discussing Indigenous performance in generalized terms and, in the abstract, my intention here is not to homogenize the cultural production. Instead, I aim to show Indigenous peoples’ use of oral-based traditions as a common thread that links distinct and diverse performative practices. Indigenous performance relies on verbal and performative modes of communication, rather than on European uses of text. Simon Ortiz reminds us that oral traditions reflect, represent, and communicate the complex belief and knowledge systems and the unconscious of Indigenous peoples. Ortiz states, “The oral tradition of Native American people is based upon spoken language, but it is more than that too. Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions,

behaviors, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of people. In this respect, the oral tradition is the consciousness of the people.”

With this in mind, then, I aim by drawing on Ortiz to stress the significance of oral transmission of knowledge and stories within Indigenous communities. However, in this conversation it is also important to acknowledge how Euro-North American society has misunderstood Indigenous stories and oral customary practices. Because the performances I explore have been witnessed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience members, the implications of reception and the possibility of misunderstanding are always already part of the process. Kovach states that to attempt to understand Indigenous stories “from a Western perspective (or any other cultural perspective) is likely to miss the point, possibly causing harm. This has been a significant finding since the dark years of anthropological research on Indigenous culture.” She adds, “The anthropological focus on the rich oral traditions within tribal societies has tended to relegate story to a historic cultural method that lacks currency within contemporary knowledge centres. The underlying assumption is that oral tradition is of pre-literate tribal groups that no longer has the same application in a literate and technological world.” The discussion of contemporary Indigenous performance art in relation to storytelling elucidates the urgency of Indigenous stories within contemporary socio-political and cultural Aboriginal issues. Kovach contests the universalist argument that Indigenous stories have no political or cultural function or relevance, she writes that “the notion that everyone understands story and that it is an effective means for gaining insight and making sense of the world is not contested. What is contested, however, is that story is an apolitical, acultural method that can be applied without consideration of the knowledge system that sustains it.”

Based on my engagement with studies of Indigenous customary practices of ceremony and performance, such as the Maori Haka, the Northwest Coast Potlatch, the Plains Sun Dance, and the pan-Indian powwow, I would argue that a primary role of performance is storytelling. I am not suggesting here that it is the only, but that within the context of performance for, within, and witnessed by Indigenous communities, telling stories/histories is integral to cultural continuance, autonomy, and identity. To look at Indigenous performance as a form of storytelling means seeing the performance of a dance or song as the action of telling—through the music and/or the body—a

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86 Kovach, Indigenous Methodologies, 97.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
social, cultural and political story (history). Performance in many Indigenous communities is a performative articulation that shares histories and that acknowledges ownership rights, spiritual practice, marriage, power, and authority. However, in the discussion of performative storytelling, it is important, as Jo-Ann Archibald writes, “to appreciate the diversity among Indigenous cultures and to recognize that there are different story genres, purposes, protocols, and ways to make story meaning.” The link between performance and oral communication is emphasized in *South Pacific Oral Traditions* by Ruth Finnegan and Margaret Orbell, who discuss South Pacific oral traditions as a verbal style, performance-based communication. In this way, Indigenous performance, like storytelling, works towards creating cultural knowledge and memory and fostering remembrance.

Indigenous performance is connected to the process of storytelling insofar as it is a method of transferring knowledge from one generation to the next – a means of cultural continuance. This means that Indigenous dance, theatre, music, and art that present Indigenous ways of knowing are linked to story. In *The Native America in Oral Tradition: Voices of the Spirit and Soul*, Lois Einhorn argues that “the oral tradition is not one of several parts of Native American culture, it is the culture, simultaneously reflecting and manifesting it.” Because stories and oral customary practices are integral to Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing, it is important to recognize, as Archibald notes, that

> [e]ach Aboriginal nation has particular traditions, protocols, and rules concerning stories and the way that stories are to be told for teaching and learning purposes. The types of stories can vary from the sacred to the historical, from cultural traditions to personal life experiences and testimonials. Some stories are just for fun, while others have powerful “teachings.” Some stories may be “owned,” those that are the responsibility of individuals, clans, or families; some belong to the “public domain,” being available for anyone to tell.

Kovach, like Archibald, also discusses the range and diversity of stories in Indigenous communities, noting, “Within Indigenous epistemologies, there are two general forms of stories. There are stories that hold mythical elements, such as creation and teaching stories, and there are personal narratives of place, happenings, and experiences as the kokoms and mosoms (Aunties and uncles) experienced them and passed them along to the next generation through oral tradition.”

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Along these lines, the artists whose dynamic performances are investigated share a combination of stories, reflecting their own cultural heritage and personal experiences, as well as their relationship to Indigenous experiences within settler nations and colonial projects.

I argue for the use of “storytelling as a theory” for exploring Indigenous visual culture and performance by drawing on Thomas King’s primary argument in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. King explores the complexities of meaning and the functions of the story for Indigenous peoples, noting as he does that “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”[^94] His argument agrees with that of Gerald Vizenor, who writes, “you can’t understand the world without telling a story. There isn’t any center to the world but story.”[^95] Maracle’s concept of oratory introduces a theoretical framework of “storytelling as a theory,”[^96] advocating the use of storytelling for the re-writing of Indigenous histories and for reclaiming Indigenous voices. Vizenor also looks at the idea of “storytelling as theory,” attributing Indigenous survival, continuance, and resistance to both the presence of contemporary Native storytellers and the continued acts of telling stories. In *Manifest Manners: Post-Indian Warriors of Survivance*, he states of Native American Indians that the individuals themselves are “stories of presence, the chronicles in the histories of this continent,” and that “Native stories are the traces of natural reason, not the spoils of surveillance. Native stories are communicative, autonomous creations.”[^97] I draw here on Vizenor to argue that “storytelling as theory” includes recognition of Indigenous autonomy and agency. Vizenor argues that Native stories are stories of Native survivance, which he defines as being “more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence.”[^98] In other words, in Vizenor’s view, Native stories are the traces of Native experiences and the evidence of Native survivance.

The concept that I have briefly introduced here is explored more extensively in Aboriginal curator and performance artist Guy Sioui Durand’s essay “Ak8a-Enton8hi of Saliva And Quill.” In this, he considers the structure of Aboriginal orality as foundational to the exercise of writing about Aboriginal art and as a method to fight against “soft censorship” (a term related to Martin’s idea of “soft inclusions”). Durand makes links between Indigenous feasts, potlatches, and dances to ideas of

[^95]: Laura Coltelli, *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 156.
happenings, event zones, metissages, and inter-nation networks. He also acknowledges the role Native playwrights and actors have had in the continuation of storytelling. He writes, “all these types of works, in my opinion, have this whisper of Aboriginal orality.” He argues that orality “is the reservoir and the method of crossing into an affirmation with identity. Rhythms and sounds, languages and gestures, orality is the bearer of our founding myths, stories, legends of our chants, dances, and other ‘communication acts’ seeking to transform the daily life of our communities.”

In this sense, stories depend on memory, and the events presented and the moments performed are traces in the memories of those who witnessed the telling of the story. Thus, story as Indigenous theory highlights the significance of Indigenous performance for the building and affirming of community and identity, as well as for cultural and political resistance.

In a discussion of Indigenous performance, it is significant to see the story (the dance, song, or performance) as a sovereign agent of reclamation, resistance, and decolonization. In relation to employing Indigenous performance as a tactic for Indigenous resistance, Steven Loft’s argument is very insightful: “[T]he strength lies not in the telling of the story, but in its power to assert meaning.” In this sense, the performance of storytelling is a process that can be used to interrupt and intervene in colonial histories, to re-establish self-determined representations, and to provoke political resistance. Anishnaabe writer Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm emphasizes the power of telling stories:

> When we express ourselves and we listen to the creative and cultural expressions of others, we must do so from an informed position so that we do not contribute to the confusion and oppression but instead bring into sharper focus who we are. By freeing ourselves of the constricting bounds of stereotypes and imposed labels of identity we empower ourselves and our communities.

Aboriginal performance art is a practice that is deeply resonant with the practice of storytelling. At the same time, the storyteller now creates new, innovative forms of oral and visual

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100 Durand, “Ak8a-Enton8hi,” 139.
101 Ibid., 140.
Blondeau affirms this in her interview with art historians Lynne Bell and Janice Williamson:

It’s really important for me to tell my own stories in my work. A lot of Aboriginal artists are telling our ancestor’s stories. I think that is scary because we have to start telling our stories in order to have an accurate history a hundred years from now. In telling my own stories I am leaving something for my own children. My stories are being recorded in slides, video, and photographs, and maybe my kids will pass them on. That’s why it’s important to tell your own stories.105

Similarly, Aiyanna Maracle in “Performance Art and the Native Artist: a Revolutionary Re-mix” suggests that the primary elements of Indigenous performance remain the same.106 Maracle is alluding to the existence of a similar element in both performance art and Aboriginal storytelling: the presentation of a story as a performance or the performance as a story. The presentation of both traditions, in consequence, remains fundamentally linked to the storyteller/artist, the audience, the purpose of telling the story, and the story itself. From her observations, Maracle concludes that “it is understood within the contemporary literature on Aboriginal theatre that the premise of contemporary Native theatre is an evolution of traditional performance forms, where music/sound, text/oratory, and dance/movement all integrally contribute to creating the story, then its evolved form [performance art] should likewise embody that sensibility.”107 Maracle’s argument is that performance art, dance, theatre and music are contemporary forms of traditional storytelling. The act of storytelling was, and continues to be, a performative experience. Luna calls artists who include Indigenous knowledge of cultural traditions in their art practice “Contemporary Traditionalists.” Blondeau agrees with the idea that tradition is part of her performance practice, stating, “I believe every culture has traditions, but they evolve. Although, my ancestors have always done performance, I do it differently because this is the time I live in … I’m carrying on the tradition of performance but I don’t have to wear feathers or beads to be authentic.”108

In the 1980s, when individuals such as Rebecca Belmore and James Luna emerged onto the art scene, equipped with a performance practice defined in many cases by its potential to generate conversations around social and political change, Canadian art witnessed a revolutionary transformation of performance art. Maracle was compelled to ask “Why are so many Native artists

107 Ibid., 100.
embracing performance as the vehicle for their stories and imagery?"\textsuperscript{109} As Maracle points out, performance art is a revolutionary artistic medium for the Aboriginal artist.\textsuperscript{110} It enables Aboriginal artists to assert their voices and perspectives while being present, which gives them more control over the reception of their art. They are also witness to this engagement as their body is the focal point of the experience.

Noteworthy within this conversation of the relationship between Indigenous performance and storytelling to social action, resistance, and cultural continuance is the work of Paulo Freire and other antiracist and anticolonial scholars, such as Sherene Razack. Freire argues in \textit{The Pedagogy of the Oppressed} that language has transformative possibilities. In this sense, social change requires the re-naming of the world, the displacement of nationalist narratives by telling stories from the vantage point of the “oppressed,” which is an act that has the power to radically transform reality and potentially dominant societies. This goes back to Maracle’s point about the potential of performance as a revolutionary artistic medium, or rather a radical art practice whereby Indigenous artists re-name, displace, and voice their stories (meaning experiences, histories).

But what does storytelling for social change mean? And how can stories support social change? Sherene Razack addresses these questions in \textit{Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms}. She suggests that “whenever storytelling is used, that it should never be used uncritically, and that its potential for as a tool for social change is remarkable, providing we pay attention to the interpretative structures that underpin how we hear and we take up the stories of the oppressed.”\textsuperscript{111} Although she focuses on storytelling practices in education and law, Razack’s arguments are very insightful in the context of my argument that Indigenous performance art’s incorporation of storytelling practices are strategies for cultural resistance.

A key issue in the concept of storytelling for social change is reception: that is, the ability to listen and to address personal subject positionings, such as privilege, as I addressed in Chapter 1 in my discussion of white-settler politics. Razack speaks to this issue: “when we depend on storytelling, either to reach each other across differences or to resist patriarchal and racist constructs, we must overcome at least one difficulty: the difference in position between teller and

\textsuperscript{109} Maracle, “Performance Art,” 100.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{111} Sherene Razack, \textit{Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 37.
listener, between telling the tale and hearing it.” In this way, challenges emerge in the telling and reception of Indigenous stories within a gallery space or art space, where audiences are from varied and diverse cultural backgrounds. Razack calls for a critical language, or rather a methodology of storytelling, to speak about stories in order to support critiques of dominant discourses through the act of telling stories. Part of this project considers the implication of the different ways of hearing—that is, the diverse ways of knowing. The potential of stories to make social change lies in both the telling and also in the ability to hear. As Vizenor argues, “The story doesn’t work without a participant … there has to be a participant and someone has to listen. I don’t mean listening in the passive sense. You can even listen by contradiction … So that’s really critical in storytelling.”

Here lies the challenge of using storytelling as a tool for social action within dominant society, having the dominant privileged audience engage and listen. However, at the same time, the incorporation of stories in gallery spaces for Indigenous audience members can create a powerful opportunity for recognition and voicing of Indigenous experience. I would argue from witnessing the performance by artists like Lori Blondeau, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Skeena Reece, and Rebecca Belmore that these artists’ strategies of telling stories through both their voices and their bodies engage audiences to actively listen and to ask themselves questions.

In the early 1990s, Rebecca Belmore re-evaluated her position as a storyteller, which resulted in a shifting in her performance and installation practice. It was during this time that Belmore felt she was being asked to tell all. As Dot Tuer comments, “She wondered if she was telling too much, and decided to gather stories around her through gestures and objects rather than through words.” As a result, Belmore’s Victorious and Vigil vocalize through performance Indigenous stories of life experience, mediated and self-determined by the artist. The performances that I address in the following chapters present diverse stories of Indigenous histories, contemporary experiences, legacies of colonialism, realities of neo-colonialism. They allow audiences to witness, among other things, perspectives that challenge understandings of Canadian national//ist histories and Indigenous identities. Stories have the powerful potential to incorporate information about the past, and as Julie Cruikshank notes, “the act of storytelling provides a way of

112 Razack, Looking White People in the Eye, 36.
114 Dot Tuer, Mining the Media Archives: Selected Writings on Technology, History and Cultural Resistance (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2006), 167.
making historical changes understandable.”115 By acknowledging as Kovach has that “stories as vessels for teachings,”116 and arguing as Razack and other scholars that stories have the potential for oppressed peoples to stage social redress and challenge dominant societies silencings and erasures of racism and colonialism, “Story, then, is a means to give voice to the marginalized.”117

In this way, I aim to create space for the sharing of Indigenous perspectives, specifically Indigenous women’s voices. I do so by incorporating the artists’ voices and the scholarly and creative writings of Indigenous women, such as the poetry of Okanagon storyteller Jeanette Armstrong. These inclusions are informed by and follow Indigenous methodologies of intervention and decolonization. Oklahoma Choctaw scholar Devon Abbot Mihesuah addresses in Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism the ongoing exclusion of oral testimony and oral histories in research methodologies, and also how

> [e]ven fewer writers use literature and poetry as resources. Because many Native women writers possess empirical data that cannot find acceptance in historical or anthropological works, literature is one effective outlet for their stories … Works written by culturally aware Native women are derived from their consciousness, filled with experience and knowledge … Indeed, it is through their writings that we can learn that Native women were and are powerful; they were and are as complex as their cultures are diverse. Their works are worth a look at.118

The project at hand in this dissertation, then, is a decolonizing project in which Indigenous self-determined perspectives are informed by analysis of the performances of Indigenous women artists of diverse historical and contemporary Aboriginal perspectives, voices, stories and histories. These

115 Julie Cruikshank “Oral History, Narrative Strategies, and Native American Historiography: Perspective from the Yukon Territory, Canada,” in Clearing a Path: Theorizing The Past in Native American Studies, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5. Delegaamukw v. British Columbia is a court case where two hereditary chiefs of two First Nations, the Gitskan and Wet’suet’en from Northern British Columbia, brought to the Supreme Court of British Columbia a petition for a settlement of land claims. In this case, the First Nations used oral stories as the foundation of their argument, incorporating the performance of songs, dances, and narratives. As Cruikshank notes, “They argued that these ancient traditions demonstrated linkages between people and place…” Cruikshank “Oral History,” 22. The Supreme Court ruling in 1991 rejected their arguments and dismissed their oral traditions as simply being beliefs not facts, such as archival documents. However, in 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada reversed this ruling using the constitution of Canada, whereby Aboriginal peoples and rights are protected “the laws of evidence must be adapted in order that this kind of evidence can be accommodated and placed on equal footing with the types of historical evidence that courts are familiar with, which largely consists of historical records.” (Delegaamukw v. British Columbia [1997] para.87). As Kovach states, “the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that oral testimony has the same weight as written evidence in land entitlement cases.” 95. This case reflects the powerful implications of storytelling and the potential and possibility of using storytelling for social action and radical social change.

116 Kovach, Indigenous Methodologies, 95.
117 Ibid., 100.
118 Devon Abbott Mihesuah, Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 5.
are acts of social change and resistance; these are acts of decolonization. As Margaret Kovach insightfully argues, “Story as methodology is decolonizing research. Stories of resistance inspire generations about the strength of the culture.”

**Decolonization: Definitions, Strategies, and Processes**

In this section, I introduce the methodology of decolonization and decolonization as a methodology to contextualize and analyze Indigenous performance art. One of my main arguments is that Indigenous performance contributes to the project of decolonization. My dissertation project as a whole—meaning my research and writing process, my arguments, and the performances—is framed by decolonizing methodologies and works to promote decolonization. First, I discuss the definition of decolonization and what this project entails, drawing on the work of such scholars as Maori Linda Tuhiwai Smith. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Tuhiwai Smith provides a specific Indigenous decolonizing analysis that exposes the extent to which Indigenous knowledges have been marginalized by Western research processes. Employing Tuhiwai Smith as a point of departure highlights the necessity of developing constructive methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks for the writing of Indigenous arts discourses that privilege Indigenous knowledge and lived experience.

Currently, decolonization is a primary project being investigated in the discourse of Indigenous studies that is argued to be a means of supporting and mobilizing Indigenous rights, cultural autonomy, self-determination, and sovereignty. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define decolonization as

a process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. This includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained colonialist power and that remain even after political independence is achieved. Initially, in many places in the colonized world, the process of resistance was conducted in terms or institutions appropriated from the colonizing culture itself.\(^{120}\)

A question that I explore throughout this research is what the possibilities as well as the limitations of art are in mobilizing social change and resistance. This question is raised also by Tuhiwai Smith, as she states, “taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are

often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions.” Similarly, Oklahoma Choctaw scholar Devon Abbott Mihesuah asks the following question: “Despite the increasing awareness among scholars that one must be sensitive to tribal secrets and that many writers are using Native voices in their works, one must ask what good all this historical, anthropological, and creative writing does.” Fundamental components identified as part of decolonizing processes are, among other things, the voicing, remembering, and recognition of Indigenous experiences, histories, and perspectives. Accordingly, Indigenous scholars perspectives, as well as the Indigenous women artists whose works I explore, have primarily informed the methodologies and discussions of this dissertation.

The definitions of decolonization and decolonizing projects are varied, speaking to the contemporary implications of 19th-century imperialism and the global impacts of colonization on diverse Indigenous peoples. I look in this discussion to Indigenous scholarship that addresses settler nations (such as Canada, New Zealand and the United States) and the implications of Indigenous cultural and political sovereignty in relation to decolonization. Margaret Kovach argues, “No matter how it is positioned, a decolonizing agenda must be incorporated within contemporary explorations of Indigenous inquiry because of the persisting colonial influence on Indigenous representation and voice in research.” Denzin and Lincoln define part of the decolonizing project as the critique of Western systems of knowledge: “Indigenous knowledge systems are too frequently made into objects of study, treated as if they were instances of quaint folk theory held by the members of primitive culture. The decolonizing project reverses this equation.” Similarly, Mutua and Swadener point to the current need to challenge, deconstruct, and decolonize structures and institutions within the Western academy, which consistently privilege Western knowledge systems. A fundamental component in the mobilization of processes of decolonization is for settler societies to engage in, commit to, and take responsibility for learning colonial histories and understanding contemporary legacies that support and maintain white-settler privilege on stolen Indigenous lands. Recognition of Indigenous nationhood and territories is essential.

M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who have explored the significance of decolonization to feminist anticolonial and anticapitalist struggle, define decolonization “as central

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121 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 3.
to the practice of democracy."^{126} State-governments and individuals in settler nations states, like Canada, that lay claim to democracy and social equality by means of charters of rights and freedoms are thus obligated to commit to decolonization. Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred, in *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, addresses the historic and ongoing denial of settler societies’ inherent participation in both colonial and neo-colonial projects:

How do we make their history and their country mean something different to people who feel entitled to the symbolic and real monopoly they enjoy on the social dynamics of our relationship and on the cultural landscape? It seems that if we are to move beyond the charitable racism of current politics or paternalist progressivism of liberal reconciliation models, justice must become a duty of, not a gift from, the Settler. And for this to happen, Settler society must be forced into a reckoning with its past, its present, and its future, and itself. White people who are not yet decolonized must come to admit they were and are wrong.^{127}

My research and teaching experiences as a non-Indigenous white settler exploring Indigenous arts and social change have led me to the following conclusion: Indigenous scholars, artists, writers and activists have been working towards achieving Indigenous cultural, political, and economic sovereignty rights, and it is now time for settlers (scholars, politicians, artists, writers, educators, etc.) to participate, without encroachment or cooption of Indigenous initiatives, within the project of decolonizing dominant Canadian society, its institutions, myths, narratives, and governments. Unfortunately, as recognized by Alfred, obscurantism is a central cultural and psychological process in colonial societies and within ongoing neo-colonial projects. Alfred notes,

> Among Settlers speaking of their own countries and situations, decolonization is not admitted as a necessity, at least not in terms of true decolonization has been mandated morally and politically in Africa and Asia. Their own countries are considered special cases, different in a fundamental way from the colonialism that occurred in Africa and Asia … The implication of this obscurantism (historical and moral) is that what is happening *here* in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand is not as serious as what happened *there* is South Africa and India; and, of course, we Americans, Canadians, and Australians are not as bad as they were in Indochina and the Congo. The larger implications of this attitude is that contemporary Settlers and their situations (i.e., their property and power) are shielded from the full logic of colonization/decolonization as it has been and is understood elsewhere.^{128}

As I stated in Chapter 1 in the context of settler responsibility, it is not and should not be the burden of Indigenous peoples to decolonize white-settler consciousness: settler responsibility

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^128 Ibid., 106–7.
requires that the histories of occupation, violence, ethnocide, and genocide be brought to the forefront. This dissertation is a means to explore the simultaneous projects of i) Indigenous methodologies of decolonization and the roles of Indigenous artists in this effort and ii) decolonizing white-settler conceptions of Canadian history, national/ist narratives, and their legitimate claims to Indigenous lands and cultures. In other words, this study is a collaborative decolonizing project, a conversation between myself, the artists, and Indigenous scholars. It is a discussion that acknowledges colonial impact on Indigenous peoples and cultures while privileging discussions of diverse Indigenous lived experiences. In such a conversation of decolonizing methodologies, it is important to address that colonization and its histories are not the only points of reference. Highlighting and making space for the articulation of Indigenous lived experiences and stories is an integral element within the framework of decolonization in settler nations. I thus draw my argument from Indigenous scholars, who emphasize more complex discussions of Indigenous experiences, cultures, and political struggles, rather than one-dimensional accounts of Aboriginal histories and contemporary issues that do not acknowledge cultural autonomy, self-determination, and agency. For example, Alfred writes, “Take the word, ‘colonization,’ which is actually a way of seeing and explaining what has happened to us. We cannot allow the word to be the story of lives, because it is a narrative that in its use privileges the colonizer’s power and inherently limits our freedom, logically and mentally imposing a perpetual colonized victim way of life and view on the world.”

By exploring Aboriginal performance histories of Indigenous resistance, this dissertation moves beyond the rhetoric of Indigenous victimization and the defining of Indigenous identities, experiences and histories solely by means of colonization—to conversations of Indigenous strength, empowerment, resistance, and sovereignty.

Indigenous autonomy and self-determination are central to the process of economic, political, cultural, as well as academic liberation in relation to decolonization. Chandra Mohanty, in Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity, draws on Franz Fanon’s classic and pivotal text on colonization The Wretched of the Earth (1963) to define the politics and processes of decolonization, which she argues,

involves profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures. It can only be engaged through active withdrawal of consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination. It is a historical and collective process, and as such can only be understood within these contexts. The end result of decolonization is not only the creation of new kinds of self-governance but also

129 Ibid., 25.
130 Mohanty, Feminism without Borders, 8.
“the creation of new men” (and women).\textsuperscript{131}

Important in my definition of decolonization is the idea of a creation of new people that encompasses both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and consciousness. With this idea I do not mean to suggest that decolonization is a process that brings people back to a way of life prior to contact and histories of colonialism, as this is arguably not a realistic goal. Instead, decolonizing supports the recognition of the dualisms and complexities of lived experiences and reveals the always already presence of Indigenous agency and cultural continuance.

In their recent article, “Decolonizing Performance: Deconstructing the Postcolonial,” Kagendo Mutua and Beth Blue Swadener define decolonization as a both a research and a performative process that foregrounds the value and strategy of reclaiming Indigenous voices and epistemologies. As Denzin and Lincoln note, “Their emphasis on the performative and on critical personal narratives opens up a space for cross-cultural partnerships between and among Indigenous researchers and allied others.”\textsuperscript{132} Mutua and Swadener argue that within the decolonizing paradigm, research should be done for Indigenous communities and persons, and it should be analyzed by means of Indigenous political and cultural methodological and theoretical perspectives and move away from simplistic binaries and dichotomies. They also call for a central position of Indigenous voices, narratives, and customary cultural practices. Their definition of decolonizing research stresses the necessity of incorporating Indigenous scholars and critical postcolonial scholars to showcase their involvement. Decolonizing methodologies are argued as embodying “activist agendas working toward social justice, sovereignty, self-determination, and emancipatory goals.”\textsuperscript{133}

I have chosen to define my project as a project of decolonization rather than of postcolonialism to indicate the ongoing process of revealing, exposing, and challenging colonial institutions and frameworks that are entrenched in Canadian and other settler-nation societies. In other words, settler societies are far from being postcolonial in terms of their governance structures and cultural institutions. I define decolonization as a project of remembrance, a process in which the past is recognized as being present, and critical historical analysis is central. Kovach addresses

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 7–8. In Franz Fanon’s classic text on colonization \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} (1963), he argues that the success of decolonization lies in a “whole social structure being changed from the bottom up” and that such change is “willed, called for, demanded” by the colonized. “decolonization is the veritable creation of new men.” Franz Fanon, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 36.

\textsuperscript{132} Denzin and Lincoln, “Locating the Field,” 23.

this in her chapter “Applying a Decolonizing Lens within Indigenous Research Frameworks” arguing, “In focusing on the ‘post’ perspective, it frees one from historical analysis. Within a Canadian Aboriginal context, this is problematic because the non-Indigenous majority are adept in forgetting this country’s long colonial history, thus maintaining its reproduction.”

Historical analysis of colonial projects and Indigenous lived experiences and the remembering of histories and memories, as well as the act of bringing history to the present, are key aspects of the performance practices of the artists explored in the following chapters. My interactions with Kovach’s argument led me to revisit and research my own history as a colonial daughter. Knowing and understanding my family’s history of colonialism and the economic gains of immigrating to Canada has contributed to decolonizing my consciousness. Emberley in Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal: Cultural Practices and Decolonization in Canada writes about the early 20th-century cultural representation of “the family” as an institution of colonial power and how film and print representations contributed to “the imposition of the bourgeois European and patriarchal family on Indigenous societies.” She states, “I choose to use the term ‘decolonization’ (rather than the more popular ‘postcolonialism’) in order to signify such an on going process of colonial critique beyond the legislated emergence of postcolonial nation states.” This argument and critique of postcolonialism is echoed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who challenges the use of “post” in post-colonialism and suggests that “naming the worlds as ‘post-colonial’ is, from Indigenous perspectives, to name colonialism as finished business.” As such, I incorporate decolonizing methodologies, and the term decolonization, in order to assert the ongoing marginalization and occupations of Indigenous peoples, their cultures, lands, and bodies and simultaneously to assert Indigenous political and cultural agency.

I utilize the perspectives put forward by Maori scholar Graham Smith, who argues that a decolonizing approach developed with critical theory is useful in analyzing power relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Kovach argues, “Critical theory and a decolonizing approach have assisted in providing an analysis for making visible the power dynamics within society, as well as developing the tools to think, write, and be in a way that furthers social justice.” Particularly insightful is Smith’s discussion of a decolonizing approach as a method of transformation, as well as its ability and role in structural change and addressing

134 Kovach, Indigenous Methodologies, 76.
135 Emberley, Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal, 3.
136 Ibid., 21.
137 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 99.
138 Kovach, Indigenous Methodologies, 92.
resistance and cultural agency. I draw on Smith to argue that although performance art on its own may not generate radical socio-economic change, the performance practice of both historic and contemporary artists are stagings of resistance. They create moments of socio-political redress and make challenges towards social change.

This argument supports recognition, making space for acknowledging small victories of Indigenous resistance—meaning resistances and interventions of the every day. Graham Smith incorporates Habermas’ notion of finding victories in small struggles into his decolonizing lens. Kovach argues that this is a way “to resist a purist tendency towards an all-or-nothing approach to social transformation.”

Smith foregrounds how decolonization was once understood as “a formal process of handing over the instruments of government”; however, currently it is “recognized as a long term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power.” This conceptual imagining acknowledges the changes experienced by Indigenous peoples as a result of colonialism: “Indigenous peoples have changed too, but they have regrouped, learned from past experiences, and mobilized strategically around new alliances. The elders, the women and various dissenting voices within Indigenous communities maintain a collective memory and critical consciousness of past experiences. Many Indigenous communities are spaces of hope and possibilities.” I refer to Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies* and Marie Battiste’s *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* throughout this study as touchstones in exploring the decolonizing strategies employed by artists and elucidating the processes of colonization negotiated by Indigenous peoples throughout various periods of contact with white-settler society.

I find Hawaiian scholar Poka Laenui’s definition of decolonization useful to substantiate the participation of artists Belmore, Blondeau, Claxton, L’Hirondelle, and Reece within the larger process of Indigenous decolonization. Laenui observes,

True decolonization is more than simply placing Indigenous or previously colonized people into the positions held by colonizers. Decolonization includes the re-evaluation of the political, social, economic, and judicial structures themselves and the development, if appropriate, of new structures that can hold and house the values and aspiration of the colonized people.

139 Ibid., 80.
140 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 98.
141 Ibid.
Laenui’s article “Processes of Decolonization” asserts that colonization and therefore decolonization are social processes. Laenui offers great insight into the potential of decolonized spaces and challenges the definitions instituted by the colonial process. He argues that the process of decolonization can be organized into five distinct phases: rediscovery/recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action. Rediscovery and recovery “sets the foundation for the eventual decolonization of the society.”

Mourning is a time for lamentation over victimization and for discussing the trauma of colonization; it is an occasion to remember community histories and familial stories in order to move on. Dreaming is the most crucial phase for decolonization, as it is within this space that the “full panorama of possibilities” is expressed through exploration of culture, knowledge, and identities; this is a time for empowerment. As Buffy Saint Marie phrases it, “We’ll sing our historical truth songs so never again will anyone be able to sweep it under the rug. But we will not be victims of it anymore. We’ll sing out songs of joy in being Indian.”

Commitment is connected to the process of dreaming, and offers a time and space for the sharing of voices previously silenced. Commitment is a communally made decision towards community rediscovery and recovery—and, I would argue, social redress. This process calls for constant questioning in order to maintain self-determined decision making and enable movement towards sovereignty. In other words, it is a plan of where to go next. The last phase is action. This phase is proactive not reactive in the processes of colonization. The weapons of choice are the communication vehicles of contemporary society, such as the internet, television, radio, newspaper, and, I would argue, the arts.

The process of decolonization based on strategic phases is a theoretical framework that in reality may not be possible; however, it offers potential methods for movement towards decolonized, and therefore Indigenized, Indigenous bodies, stories, histories, identities, and spaces. My study of Indigenous performance and political activism is framed by such scholars as Taiaiake Alfred, who has set an empowering agenda for Indigenous peoples’ decolonization, grounded not

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143 Laenui, “Process of Decolonization,” 152–53. His discussion of decolonization is based on the late Virgilio Enriques arguments of the process of colonization. His steps are the following: denial and withdrawal, destruction and eradication, denigration and belittlement, tokenism and transformation/exploitation.
144 Ibid., 154–55.
145 Ibid., 155–57.
just in words but also in the decolonizing choices and actions of everyday life. To this end, I argue that Indigenous performance art promotes and contributes to the decolonization of Indigenous experience and national/ist narratives and the assertion of self-determined cultural sovereignty.

**Indigenous Nations within Nations: Politics of Sovereignty and Self-Determination**

Indigenous nations occupied within the borders of North American nation states are and have always been sovereign communities. Indigenous nations are nations now living within a nation. Throughout colonial and current neo-colonial projects, Indigenous peoples have resisted the land occupations, political encroachments, and cultural assimilist agendas of settler nation states. In this way, sovereignty politics are significant in mobilizing Indigenous activism, negotiating decolonization, and asserting self-determination. A theoretical lens of sovereignty reveals the historic and ongoing agency and autonomy of Indigenous nations and peoples. Despite aggressive colonial attempts to eradicate Indigenous knowledge and political systems, Aboriginal peoples persist in their fight to control land and cultural territories. The concept of sovereignty for Indigenous nations differs from the Western legal notion, and reflects local cultural and political frameworks. Within an Indigenous framework, for example, sovereignty needs to be understood as encompassing community and personal connections to land in relation to identities. My use of sovereignty means to assert active and action-based politics that are culturally specific.

There are current debates around the term sovereignty in relation to Indigenous methodologies and social activism. Some argue that the term is Eurocentric and does not represent the systems of governance and socio-political structures of Indigenous nations. At this time, for lack of a better word, I use sovereignty to signify Indigenous cultural and political autonomy and agency and to assert the inherent right of Indigenous nations to self-determination. Indigenous sovereignty also denotes the ongoing relationships Indigenous peoples continue to negotiate due to being nations within a settler nation. Jo-Anne Pemberton highlights these issues of sovereignty, noting that some scholars argue “the sovereignty paradigm is inappropriate when applied to Indigenous people now and in the past because it fails to capture the particularity or characters of Indigenous nations.”

For example, Taiaiake Alfred challenges the concept of sovereignty, arguing that sovereignty is related with the notion of dominion, which does not represent or express “Indigenous

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concepts of political relations—rooted in notions of freedom, respect and autonomy” 150 and that sovereignty denies the opportunity for “self-determining sovereignty-free regimes …[with] no absolute authority, no coercive enforcement of decisions, no hierarchy, and no separate ruling entity.” 151 Alfred argues that sovereignty is “not Sioux, Salish or Iroquoian in origin,” 152 and, as Pemberton remarks, he “questions how the European notion came to be so entrenched in and significant to the discourses of societies and cultures that had managed to establish their own political and legal systems ‘since the time before the term sovereignty was invented.’” 153 Ultimately, Alfred insists that tribal sovereignty is not a path to freedom but instead a grant that Indigenous nations have received in exchange for abandoning their autonomy and entering the state’s legal political framework. Thus, he calls on “scholars and activists to renounce the ‘assimilitive’ pattern of thought with the rejection of the term and notion of Indigenous sovereignty.” 154 Alfred does however state that one of the main issues of sovereignty is how it is currently understood. He argues:

The challenge before us is to detach the notion of sovereignty from its current legal meaning and use in the context of Western understanding of power and relationships. We need to create meaning for sovereignty that respects the understanding of power in Indigenous cultures, one that reflects more of the sense embodied in such Western notions as “personal sovereignty” and “public sovereignty.” 155

Drawing on Alfred then, the definition of sovereignty in this conversation implies personal and public sovereignty and not power over individuals by means of governance structures. Indigenous cultural sovereignty, as I employ it, means to assert personal autonomy and control of cultural knowledge and experience—and not control over others.

These issues are clearly addressed by Craig S. Womack in “A Single Decade: Book-Length Literary Criticism between 1986-1997.” Womack discusses the scepticism about terminology of sovereignty:

Tribal critics who formerly endorsed the concept of sovereignty (and perhaps still do in spite of their recent scepticism about terminology) have jumped into the fray by claiming that it is a European, not an Indian, concept, that the modern nation-

153 Pemberton, Sovereignty, 162.
155 Alfred, Peace, Power, Righteousness, 78.
sate is inconsistent with Native cultures. Sometimes they suggest an alternate terminology, or, in other cases, simply protest without articulating what might replace sovereignty or the language used to describe it. The positive aspect of these objections is that alternative definitions suggest that sovereignty is an ongoing, dynamic process, that Native people can hope for more than the way sovereignty is often limited by courts, that sovereignty can be opened up to other arenas—the personal, artistic, and communal lives of American Indians, for instance—than the legal one. Sovereignty, for all its problems and contradictions, is a reality in Indian country, embedded in the U.S. Constitution and two centuries of federal Indian law. In short, it is what Native people have to work with, the hand has been dealt us. This of course, does not mean native people should not dream of more, or even advocate for more, but present realities must also be acknowledged. Some make strong cases that sovereignty does not work for their particular community, but this hardly provides an argument that it should be dismissed for all of Indian country. 156

I aim to address how Indigenous performance artists claim sovereign spaces and in doing so assert personal and communal self-determination and cultural autonomy. In this way, the lens through which I frame these acts of performativity is cultural sovereignty.

The production of contemporary Indigenous art reflects the socio-political and economic climates within which it is exhibited and received. For this reason, my discussion encompasses both i) Indigenous issues and ii) relations between the Canadian governments (both federal and provincial) and reserve and urban native communities. Currently, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples are continuously re-framing their experiences and relationships with Canada. For example, Canada has recently made a formal apology to the survivors of residential schools; in doing this, it has acknowledged the assimilist institutional agendas of past Canadian governments that fostered Aboriginal ethnocide and genocide. This significant moment, I argue, offers the potential for reconciliation and recognition. Canada is currently in a new era of reconciliation politics, as evidenced through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s national meeting in Winnipeg, May 2010. This moment has the potential to be an opportunity for radical change, or could result in broken promises, the maintenance of the status-quo, and cooption of Indigenous initiatives. At the same time, this act of apology, made by the Conservative Canadian government in June 2008, must be seen alongside the same government’s refusal—along with those of New Zealand, Australia, and the United States—to sign the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights in September 2007. I explore how Indigenous artists have responded, and continue to respond, to the actions and ambivalences of the nation-state and the current political climate in Canada.

Indigenous sovereignty is a relevant political framework for arguments directed by Indigenous groups to nation-state governments. Pemberton states that in relation to sovereignty, there is the question of the condition of pre-invasion Indigenous societies which … some argue in the contemporary context were wholly sovereignty entities. This does not amount to a claim that all such communities had developed state organs or that the European concept of sovereignty was a part of the Indigenous conceptual environment, although this is not to deny there were in many instances instinctual and conceptual approximations. What it does mean, at least to begin with, is that they were societies with independent modes of existence and who, as their resistance to conquest showed, valued that independence.157

She concludes that the use of the term sovereignty was incorporated into Indigenous activist movements in order to “render comprehensible to European audiences, the serious injustice of denying free peoples their autonomy, their land and way of life.”158

This strategic choice to translate Indigenous understandings of societal and political structures grounded in personal autonomy presents an ongoing issue: the lack of appropriate English language terms to encompass diverse concepts of Indigenous experience and socio-political structures. This highlights Alfred’s point that there is a need to define and re-frame the conception of sovereignty to indigenize the term. As Doug Sanders notes in “Self-Determination and Indigenous Peoples,” the use of the word sovereignty as well as the assertion of inherent right of self-determination by Indigenous peoples and their allies, has resulted in the refusal of many nation-states to recognize Indigenous rights and in anxiety about the development of internationally recognized rights of Indigenous peoples.159 Indigenous sovereignty is a powerful and explosive term, as it delegitimizes nations, such as Canada’s claim to sovereign borders, and it undermines the maintenance of colonial settler societies. I think it is useful to recognize aspects of the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights in relation to ongoing issues experienced by Indigenous communities and vocalized and performed through the work of the artists. Articles 2, 4, 5 of the declaration state the following:

Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs,

157 Pemberton, Sovereignty, 161–2.
158 Pemberton, 162.
as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the States (UN General Assembly 2007)

Although this declaration exists and is recognized as international law, Indigenous struggles for the right of self-determination, autonomy, and cultural agency continue, and in many cases are coopted and encroached upon by state-governments and cultural institutions. As Jo-Anne Pemberton states in *Sovereignty Interpretations*:

> the recognition of Indigenous self-determination has a significance rather different from the recognition of minority rights as what is at stake is not simply cultural distinctiveness. What is additionally at stake in the case of the recognition of Indigenous self-determination is the partial decolonization of a people “on the basis of ‘ancestral’ occupation”. It is the matter of prior occupation.\(^{160}\)

Though I am discussing self-determination and sovereignty together, it is important to note that they differ; however, they can be useful strategies of Indigenous activism and lenses through which to discuss tactics of resistance and assertions of nationhood and cultural identities.

The following is part of a conversation between Taiaiake Alfred and Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson, included in *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, that explores the issues of sovereignty for Aboriginal nations.

**Alfred:** Is there a difference between the Native concept of “nationhood” and “sovereignty” in the legal sense, or as you understand it?

**Simpson:** These concepts are quite different. I find it hard to isolate, define, and then generalize what a “Native” concept of nationhood would be without it sounding contrived. This is a tired point: We are all different people, different nations, and would have different ideas about what nationhood is and what it means to us. The Sechelt conception or Northern Cree conception will certainly depart from Mohawk ideas about who we are. Each people will have a term in their own language that will mean “us.” I think that is what our concept of nationhood is.

My opinion is that “Mohawk” and “nationhood” are inseparable. Both are simply about being. Being is who we are, and a sense of who you are is arrived at through your relationship with other people—your people. So who we are is tied with what we are: a nation.

Now, sovereignty—the authority to exercise power over life, affairs,

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\(^{160}\) Pemberton, *Sovereignty*, 125.
territory—this is not inherited. It’s not a part of being, the way our form of nationhood is. It has to be conferred, or granted—it’s a thing that can be given and thus can be taken away. It’s clearly a foreign concept, because it occurs through an exercise of power—power over another.

This is not to say that the valuing of sovereignty, of having control over territory, has not been indigenized. We’ve used it in a rhetorical and political way time and time again. But I think there is a difference between the being of who we are—Mohawk—and the defence mechanisms that we have to adopt in the neo-colonial context—sovereignty.161

Indigenous struggles for sovereignty (both individual and communal) and self-determination are the lenses through which I attempt to contextualize Indigenous performance and Indigenous resistance. By examining Indigenous issues within the framework of sovereignty rather than that of dependence or victimization, I recognize the importance both of Indigenous experiences and of colonial histories in charting Indigenous peoples’ negotiation of the local, national, and global spheres. In so doing, I explore the complexities of using performance art as a strategy for cultural and political resistance and as a resource in the continuing negotiation of the postcolonial world. I draw on the work of Mohawk scholar Steve Loft and Tuscarora scholar Jolene Rickard to argue for the use of self-determination as a politicized theoretical framework for discussion of Indigenous issues. Loft, in Transference, Tradition, Technology: Native New Media: Exploring Visual and Digital Culture, has proposed that articulation and establishment of Indigenous sovereignty can be upheld through artistic and cultural practices:

> When members of a community assert control over their own lives and culture, politically, socially, and artistically, they go beyond oppression. Thus, control of “our” image becomes not only an act of subversion, but of resistance, and ultimately, liberation […] What is at stake here is not how the image is presented (aesthetics aside) but who controls it. This is the fundamental challenge to Aboriginal artists and cultural producers.162

And Rickard writes, “The work of Indigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization, and identity politics. Sovereignty is the border that shifts Indigenous experience from a victimized

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161 Alfred, Peace, Power, Righteousness, 89–90.
stance to a strategic one.” Loft’s and Rickard’s powerful and provoking words contribute a possible perspective from which to investigate the complexities of Aboriginal art and contribute decolonized art-based histories. Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice argues in “‘Go Away Water!’: Kinship Criticism and Decolonization Imperative” that “though related, the decolonization imperative is not the root of Indigenous peoplehood or self-determining sovereignty.” This important distinction is also discussed by Chickasaw scholar Amanda Cobb, who argues:

> Although the journey of sovereignty moves from survival to continuance, taking into account the colonization experience and providing for decolonization, it is important to note that sovereignty and decolonization are not synonymous terms. Tribal sovereignty existed before colonization and does (or will depending on your point of view) exist after colonization. Sovereignty is the going on of life—the living. The path to survival and the path to continuance each consist of more than a “step” or what I choose to call, “action,” a term I use to underscore Native agency in a given moment or context.

For Cobb, creative expression of sovereignty is an expression of possibility towards mobilizing Indigenous political and cultural rights. As Justice notes “The decolonization imperative gives fuel to sovereignty and continuity, but without “the going on” that Cobb addresses, it runs the risk of being merely reactionary, not creative or transformative.” Drawing on Indigenous scholars such as Loft, Rickard, Justice, and Cobb, I argue for a methodological approach to Indigenous arts that incorporates lenses of sovereignty and decolonization simultaneously. I see the politics of sovereignty and the project of decolonization as working in tandem to support the mobilization of Indigenous self-determination and to reveal the always already presence of Aboriginal political agency and cultural autonomy.

**Indigenizing Experience: Indigenous Autonomy and Agency**

In many accounts of Indigenous performances, the depiction of the power dynamics between Indigenous performers and their settler audiences is one-dimensional. The Native performer is portrayed as victim and voiceless, occupying the position of the colonized and oppressed, while the

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white audience member is discussed as occupying a position of power, as the colonizer and oppressor. This type of analysis disregards Indigenous peoples’ agency. I discuss Indigenous agency and autonomy with specific reference to Indigenous performers, building on the scholarship of non-Indigenous scholars Ruth Phillips (2007, 2005), Paige Raibmon (2000), Paul Diamond (2007), Conol McCarthy (2007) and others who complicate understandings of Indigenous performance and Indigenous experiences of performing. Specifically, their work makes room for discussion of Indigenous agency in historic and contemporary performance, while revealing the exploitations and abuses of Indigenous bodies. I explore performance as a deliberate strategy of the simultaneous projects of cultural continuance and political resistance. Building on George Yúdice’s *The Expediency of Culture*, which maps the changing role of culture in the globalized world, I consider the limitations and possibilities performance offers in Indigenous negotiations of empowerment, self-determination, and sovereignty as well as assertions of cultural autonomy and agency.

In *Indigenous Peoples and Autonomy: Insights for the Global Age*, editors Mario Blaser, Ravi de Costa, and Deborah McGregor discuss the importance of Indigenous autonomy as resistance. They raise very provocative questions about autonomy in Indigenous nations and communities in the current globalized world, noting first that “[i]n a sense, invoking autonomy without qualification speaks to a way of living that is foreign to the experience of Indigenous peoples. For this reason, Indigenous people throw our research objectives and questions back at us; they push us to ask how these questions are part of the process that have undermined, if not destroyed, their epistemologies, languages, and ways of living.”

Recognizing the problems of the concept of autonomy then raises an important issue that might be stated by Indigenous peoples, “We only became concerned with autonomy after meeting you.” Like the term sovereignty, autonomy has been debated by Indigenous scholars concerned with the use of a Western concept for mobilizing Indigenous rights and self-determination. This being said, autonomy politics are commonly employed as an important praxis, meaning the process by which a theory or project is enacted, embodied, or mobilized in the struggles for Aboriginal rights. My use of autonomy is connected to cultural production and performance: to elucidate performance as a means of asserting and embodying the control of one’s body, culture, and knowledge.

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Autonomy in the Western sense is connected both to individual and to collective notions of autonomy and freedom, which emerged during the onset of modernity. Autonomy, and specifically the notion of individual freedom, was conceived of in reaction to societal oppression of the Middle Ages. Individual autonomy implies a person’s ability to make decisions, hold beliefs, and achieve personal aims and choices. As Held argues, autonomy refers to a way of living whereby individuals shape and decide upon the conditions under which they live. Blaser, de Costa, and McGregor note that autonomy is also used in reference to a collective or group or, they write, “connected to collective bodies, nation-states, minority groups within states, Indigenous peoples … In this collective sense, the meaning of autonomy is usually close to the Greek roots autos (self) and nomos (law): the capacity of a community to give itself laws or self-government.”

Charles Taylor states, in reference to Western conceptions of autonomy, that individuals “have a right to choose for themselves their own pattern of life, to decide in conscious what convictions to espouse, to determine the shape of their lives in a whole host of ways that their ancestors could not control.” In the face of the affects of colonization and globalization (which is arguably a form of neo-colonialism), Indigenous peoples have invested in Western notions of autonomy and other legal and political language in order to assert their sovereign right to territories and cultural knowledge. Ronald Niezen notes that in contrast to the struggles of minority groups for equal social status in liberal nation-states like Canada that hold policies of multiculturalism, Indigenous peoples and organizations have different aspirations. He stresses Indigenous rights is not a question of equality: instead Indigenous nations, individuals, and organizations are making “demands for respect, restorative justice, and protection of distinctive ways of viewing and living in the world.” These distinct Indigenous agendas and politics are “accompanied by more far-reaching demands for self-determination and autonomy that transcends, in various ways, legal arrangements based on equal rights of equal citizens.” Niezen also addresses the political role of Indigenism as an international Indigenous movement that is made up of international networks.

169 Ibid., 6.
working towards mobilizing rights of self-determination and autonomy, locally and globally. He argues,

Indigenism looks for ways that conceptualize and pursue the good that may or may not harmonize with state constitutions. This is because Indigenous struggles for recognition and actualization of collective goals are taking place largely at the suprastate level, through international networks and within international organizations. Indigenism is a social movement with a strategic focus outside of states that seeks to activate rights to autonomy within states. In doing so, it imparts a new meaning to pluralism and a new challenge to the liberal project of recognizing differences.\textsuperscript{175}

I include Niezen here to foreground some of the discussions that I put forward in the following chapters addressing the specific and diverse Indigenous political and cultural strategies, actions, and responses in settler nations to affects of both colonization and globalization.

Drawing on Indigenous conceptions of individual and communal identities and how those identities are produced within Indigenous communities supports a more pluralistic understanding of Indigenous autonomy politics. I attempt to put forward a conversation of Indigenous autonomy that makes linkages to i) Indigenous conceptions of self, community, and nation (i.e., language, knowledge, cultural practice); ii) affects of colonization on Indigenous world views and knowledge; iii) the responses, resistances, and interventions to assert Indigenous identities, autonomy, and agency in the face of colonial and neo-colonialism; and iv) the role of the artist in these struggles. By making these connections, I aim to highlight the significance of Indigenous women’s performance in both the imperial and global eras as vehicles of memory, resistance, cultural continuity, and continuance, and as agents of actualizing Indigenous experience (histories/stories), survivance, and presence. Aileen Moreton-Robison argues, “In Indigenous cultural domains relationality means that one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation, and social memory.”\textsuperscript{176}

With this in mind, I argue that Indigenous performance art participates in the assertion of autonomy over Indigenous identities, personal and collective memories, histories, stories, cultural and spiritual knowledge as well as in claiming autonomy of lands, territories, and spaces (such as the gallery and archive). Erich Fox Tree’s discussion of Indigenous language and the cultivation of autonomy are useful in extending my point. He writes, “As simultaneous symbols, tools, and

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Aileen Moreton-Robinson, \textit{Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism} (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 16.
mediums of identities that are distinct, complete, and primordially rooted in place, Indigenous languages are metonymic embodiments of autonomy: sustainable political-economic self-sufficiency and cultural distinctiveness.\(^{177}\) Indigenous performance art can be seen as ‘embodiments of autonomy’ connected to the artists’ personal and communal experiences.

In an interview-conversation published in *Wasase*, Taiaiake Alfred engages Teyowisonte, an Iroquois activist, teacher, artist and member of the Mohawk Warrior Society and Konwatsi’ta:wi, in discussions of political autonomy and “autonomous responsibility.” Their conversation highlights Mohawk understandings of “autonomy” as well as the possibility of this term in Indigenous political and cultural resistance.

_Teyowisonte:_ This is the traditional concept of “autonomous responsibility”. This idea is a big part of our traditional culture; it means that you lead your life consciously aware of how your actions affect the Nation. In my own career, I do artwork. I could be trying to get a job in the city, in a marketing firm, or whatever. I could probably do that, since I have the training and the talent. But instead, I work in a school here in Kahnawake … But the thing is, I’m using my talents and the gifts that I have for the good of the Nation.

_Konwatsi’ta:wi:_ “Autonomous responsibility” is a big-picture for of respect. It’s not really so much like a responsibility if you have that respect to begin with.

_Teyowisonte:_ It’s self-discipline. Like they say in our language, we’re Rotishenhrakete, “they’re carrying the bones.” It means that we are carrying the legacy of our ancestors. That’s what autonomous responsibility is: carrying that burden. It comes out in everything that you do. For me, when I do my artwork, I’m fulfilling my autonomous responsibility to the Nation.\(^{178}\)

Later in this conversation, Teyowisonte states in discussing Indigenous struggles and the affects of colonial projects, “Victory to me means everybody having political autonomy, economic independence, and a way of life that they choose, including white people.”\(^{179}\) In my discussions of Aboriginal arts-based, specifically performance-based, activism, the lenses of autonomy and agency are integral in making space to complicate the experiences of colonization, as well as in the argument that throughout colonization, Indigenous peoples have negotiated and resisted state


\(^{178}\) Alfred, *Wasase*, 275.

\(^{179}\) Ibid., 277.
politics and legislations, while continuing to live (in varying degrees) connected to Indigenous world-views.

Rebeka Tabobondung is “a mixed-blood urban Aboriginal woman” who has “strong ties to [her] Indigenous community, Wasauksing First Nations” and is a community activist, poet, videographer “who is personally, political, and academically invested in a project of decolonization.”180 In her chapter “Indigenous Perspectives on Globalization: Self-Determination Through Autonomous Media Production,” she writes, “Simply being Indigenous makes us subversive, whether we are speaking, re-learning our languages, or maintaining our connection to the land and to our way of life.”181 This is an important statement in relation to performance as a strategy of resistance, and in the historic interventions Indigenous peoples have had to make to maintain cultural and political autonomy and to assert political and cultural agency despite colonial legislations such as the ceremonial ban (1884-1951). Tabobondung addresses the significance of autonomy in the projects of decolonization and self-determination in her discussion of Indigenous media production, arguing, “To continue to be Indigenous and autonomous, we draw on our rights to self-determination, our ancestral title to territories and resources, and our traditional knowledge. These components of being Indigenous place us at the core of the struggles against neoliberal globalization, and are integral to maintaining our cultural and political identities.”182

Globalization and Indigenous Peoples

I introduce and expand on globalization theory in order to examine the affects of geopolitical neoliberal globalization on contemporary Indigenous peoples and their cultures in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. I incorporate a global context by bringing in art production, resistance movements, and Indigenous experiences of imperial and global eras in these settler nations. I consider the relationship between globalization and Indigenous rights and cultural autonomy, linking discussion of the shifting meanings of culture to discussions of Indigenous resistance and struggles for sovereignty. The production, distribution, and reception of culture are significantly affected by globalization.

182 Ibid.
According to globalization theorists Arjun Appadurai and Wimal Dissanayake, the development of current global dynamics, which has been termed globalization, is the product of a combination of factors, including the growth of global capitalism and transnational corporations, new divisions of labour, and the increase in the power of information technologies.\textsuperscript{183} Globalization is an ambiguous term, with diverse and varied definitions. I aim to locate Indigenous perspectives and nuance the multiple Indigenous concepts of globalization in order to explore the conceptual and real implications on Indigenous communities. For example, in many Indigenous accounts of globalization, structures and forms are argued as merely being extensions of imperial and colonial projects, the goals of both are market and resource driven. As Rebeka Tabobondung argues, colonization is a project of globalization and vice versa,

indeed this type of globalization reflects the extension of power and domination of a hegemonic value system imposed on other societies and cultures. Globalization is the systemic exploitation of land and people (resources) for financial profit. Environmental costs were never considered in this project, in the view of the majority of settlers, the land was empty and in need of labour to produce wealth. In this sense, globalization is not a new social reality for Indigenous peoples, for they have already experienced over five hundred years of hegemonic power over their cultures. Globalization is new to non-Indigenous societies, which are now also faced with the degradation of their lifestyles in ecological, economic, and social terms, as exemplified by growing environmental problems, resource depletion, and increasing inequalities.\textsuperscript{184}

Looking to global contexts supports a cross-cultural and more dynamic understanding of colonization and of how Indigenous peoples have negotiated the prevailing economic, political, and economic implications of the globalized world. A prevalent argument among theorists of globalization is that products of culture (music, film, ideas, art) from the local level of production to the global level of distribution move at a higher and more rapid rate due to the development of new technologies such as the internet.\textsuperscript{185} I argue that within Indigenous contexts, globalization has generated increased cross-cultural exchange, and that such exchanges have had varied affects on Indigenous communities. To this end, I examine globalization both as a dangerous outside force


\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{185} Dissanayake, “Globalization.”
and as fostering celebratory possibilities for Indigenous peoples. For example, Rebeka Tabobondung suggests the potential of the globalized world: “Combined with the forces of globalization, Indigenous media production is a medium that can facilitate autonomous media representation and carries the potential to open up spaces for one to imagine different world views.”

Due to histories of ethnocide and genocide, Indigenous experiences of globalization are distinct, reflecting some of the issues of marginalized peoples from diasporic and subaltern locales, while remaining distinct from them in other important ways. In other words, global culture has affected Indigenous traditions/cultural productions in contemporary ways.

Exploring the relationships between local and global contexts is a strategy I employ to disrupt limiting binaries within the study of globalization, which point only to the dangerous affects of global processes on Indigenous peoples and Fourth world communities. However, recent important global developments with regard to indigeneity have emerged—such as global identity and international declarations of Indigenous rights, etc. As Ravi De Costa argues,

> These new global processes, in turn, have important implications for the autonomy of Indigenous peoples. … it is not only in global institutional encounters that Indigenous peoples’ autonomy is pursued: the richness and complexity of Indigenous peoples’ autonomous projects are visible in interpersonal relations, struggles at the community level, regional arrangements regarding resource development, and the symbolic meanings that others attach to Indigenous struggles. The eclipse of the nation-state envisaged by some early theorists of globalization, however, has plainly not come to pass: all over the world, states remain both crucial obstacles to Indigenous autonomy and potential participants in dialogues with them about rights, including collective autonomy in the form of self-government … Indigenous peoples’ success in creating new international institutional arrangements may bring about a new framework for relations between Indigenous peoples and states.

I aim to complicate the effects of globalization on Indigenous peoples and cultural production. My strategy is to disrupt the silencing of Indigenous experiences and agency, and to contribute to the small body of literature dealing specifically with Indigenous relationships to global politics. In this context, I situate the local as a potential site for Indigenous decolonization, resistance, and activism.

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“Making Space for Indigenous Feminism”: Politics, Activism, and Culture

This final section on methodology connects all the previous discussions of themes—such as storytelling, decolonization, sovereignty, and autonomy—in a discussion of the multifaceted theoretical conceptions of Indigenous feminisms. I draw on three recent publications that explore the development of Indigenous feminisms and the contested history of the establishment of the discourse: *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* edited by Joyce Green, *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture* edited by Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Madeleine Dion Stout, and Eric Guimond, and *Indigenous women and feminism: politics, activism, and culture* edited by Cheryl Suzack, Shari M. Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman. The chapters in these critical and productive anthologies are diverse, expressing the multivocality of Indigenous feminism and presenting the range of issues experienced and actions taken—as well as the varied cultural and geographical locations of Indigenous women in North America. These publications have been instrumental in my understanding and engagement with Indigenous feminism and in locating my discussions of Indigenous women’s performance practices. I briefly introduce the arguments proposed in these works here, which are incorporated throughout my discussions of the performances. This is not to say that I am asserting the artists’ practices as feminist art approaches, but that the lens of Indigenous feminism supports a productive analysis of Indigenous women’s performance art. The perspectives put forward by Indigenous women scholars such as Kim Anderson and Cheryl Suzack allow me to integrate Indigenous feminism into my exploration of performance art practices.

Indigenous feminism is a neglected discourse and a contentious theoretical and thematic approach. Indigenous women scholars and their allies have recently made a strong argument for the urgency of Indigenous feminisms in the mobilization of Indigenous women’s rights and Indigenous cultural, land, and political sovereignty. Jean Barman argues in support of Indigenous feminism in her chapter, “Indigenous Women and Feminism on the Cusp of Contact,” suggesting that Indigenous women’s roles, behaviours and relationships prior to and at the time of contact are consistent and mirror feminist principles. Indigenous feminist Kim Anderson argues that

Indigenous feminism is “linked to a foundational principle of Indigenous societies—that is the profound reverence for life.”\textsuperscript{190}

The current scholarship on Indigenous feminism acknowledges the fraught historical relationship between Indigenous women and feminism, and supports advancing inquiry based on Indigenous women’s interests and perspectives.\textsuperscript{191} As Huhndorf and Suzack argue, “Although presumed to fall within normative definitions of women of colour and postcolonial feminism, Indigenous feminism remains an important site of gender struggle that engages the crucial issues of cultural identity, nationalism, and decolonization particular to Indigenous contexts.”\textsuperscript{192} Indigenous feminism is a recent field of inquiry, connected to and developed from the histories of Indigenous women’s activism and cultural projects. These diverse projects of resistance and intervention have and continue to address gender-based discrimination and to establish social justice for Indigenous women, as they aim to “counter their social erasure and marginalization—endeavours that fall under the rubric of feminism, despite Indigenous women’s fraught relationship with the term and with mainstream feminist movements.”\textsuperscript{193} Indigenous feminism has been criticized as being entrenched in white and or colonial forms of critique and inquiry. For example, in “Savage Hegemony: From Endangered Species to Feminist Indigenism,” M.A. Jaimes Guerrero states, Many Native women have argued that the priorities and socio-political agendas of the predominantly white women’s movement are not necessarily constitutive of the same liberation agenda for Native women in their Indigenous struggles for decolonization. As community based women, Native women cannot afford to participate in what often appears to them to be an individually oriented Euro-American middle class women’s sociopolitical agenda.\textsuperscript{194}

To this end, Joyce Green argues, “Aboriginal feminists counter that they use feminist analysis as a tool for challenging racism and colonialism.”\textsuperscript{195}

Métis/Cree scholar Kim Anderson in “Affirmations of an Indigenous Feminist” raises some of the contentious issues voiced by Indigenous women and communities about feminism, such as


\textsuperscript{191} Huhndorf and Suzack, “Indigenous Feminism,” 4.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 1–2.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 3–4.


the focus of feminist inquiry on rights and individual autonomy, rather than on responsibilities and collective autonomy, and the potential exclusion of Indigenous men within a feminist framework in struggles for Indigenous wellness and empowerment. She writes, “These sentiments make it hard for an Indigenous woman such as myself to identify as a feminist …. Yet there are many kinds of feminism, and … Indigenous feminism in my own thought and practice is anything but negative or exclusionary.” In this way, Indigenous self-definitions of feminism are inclusive and engage with collective and communal Indigenous concepts of autonomy and responsibility. Another issue raised against feminism is that as a political and academic practice, the feminist movement originates within and addresses white middle-class socio-political issues, which have consistently marginalized issues of race. Women of colour feminists have challenged the white-centredness of feminism in current feminist scholarship; however, for Indigenous women, as noted by Huhndorf and Suzack, “the marginalization of their issues is compounded by the fact that a critical component of colonialism throughout the Americas involved the imposition of Western gender roles and patriarchal social structures.”

Joyce Green argues that Indigenous feminism brings together feminist and anti-colonial critique, taking account of Indigenous women’s experiences with both the imperial and patriarchal projects of colonization. This raises the ongoing issues and challenges faced by Indigenous societies and peoples caused by colonialism and patriarchal societal frameworks. For example, as many Indigenous women scholars and feminist argue, colonization has marginalized Indigenous women both within dominant Euro-Canadian society and also within Indigenous communities due to its impact on Indigenous socio-political and cultural frameworks. Indigenous women are currently struggling to gain recognition, reclaim political authority, and assert their inherent roles within their communities/nations as well as within Canadian society at large. Green, in “Taking Account of Aboriginal Feminism,” argues that “contemporary Aboriginal women are subjected to patriarchal and colonial oppression within settler society and, in some contexts, in Aboriginal communities.” Fay Blaney discusses the implications of patriarchy in Indigenous communities: “patriarchy is so ingrained in our communities that it is now seen as a ‘traditional trait.’” Gail Stacey-Moore, a Mohawk woman writes, “The Indian Act abolished the traditional matriarchal

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197 Huhndorf and Suzack, “Indigenous Feminism,” 2.
199 Ibid., 22.
society for a patriarchal one. Our men turned to the Indian Act to get back into a position of strength, and they still use it today.”

Here lies the reason for Indigenous feminism and the potential power and strength of Indigenous feminism, which is not only to “make visible the internal oppression’ against women within … Indigenous communities,” but also to expose marginalization and oppression within dominant society.

However, feminism continues to be challenged and is often deemed irrelevant for Indigenous struggles of autonomy, sovereignty, and human rights: “Those who struggle for gender equality are often seen, sometimes erroneously, as opposing traditional Indigenous practices and forms of social organization. Thus, Indigenous feminism frequently elicits accusations that it fractures communities and undermines more pressing struggles for Indigenous autonomy.”

This argument of fracturing and undermining community is echoed in Green’s statement that a common rejection of Aboriginal feminism is based on the erroneous misconception that feminism is un- or anti-traditional. Green argues Indigenous feminism “is not a man-hating ideology nor a unilateral rejection of cultures, traditions or personal and political relationship with men.”

Anderson confronts the argument that Indigenous peoples activism and political actions should not engage with feminism and gender based movements or frameworks. She writes,

Decolonization, healing, sovereignty, and nation building are areas of priority. If we work in these areas, so the logic goes, then the dire conditions in which many Native women find themselves will improve. Yet, in spite of our efforts to achieve self-determination since the middle of the twentieth century, the lives of Indigenous women continue to be plagued by violence and poverty. Going back to my mother’s heart, I am disturbed to think that a staggering number of Native children are being raised in situations of violence and poverty by women who are not supported by the body politic. Contrary to the trickle-down logic that says Indigenous women’s lives will improve when we address the bigger issues, I would argue that until we seriously address the political, social, and economic inequities faced by Indigenous women, we will never achieve full healing, decolonization, and healthy nation building.

Anderson’s argument acknowledges what Indigenous feminism is: a multifaceted framework made up of antiracist, anticolonial, and antisexist politics centred in Indigenous contexts and world views.

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203 Huhndorf and Suzack, “Indigenous Feminism,” 2.
Aboriginal feminism, then, is a tool that supports and can potentially mobilize decolonizing projects.

A framework of Indigenous feminism recognizes the impact of colonization on Indigenous women’s social, cultural, and political roles and simultaneously creates space for the recognition of agency and autonomy. The colonial project systemically removed and subjugated women’s political and cultural authority and power in Aboriginal social frameworks. The assimilist project experienced by Indigenous peoples in North America attempted to erode Indigenous ways of living, knowing and being by aggressively incorporating patriarchal societal structures and paternalistic legislative policies, and marginalizing Indigenous women’s roles in their nations. As previously mentioned, this process was mirrored in how Indigenous women were represented by Euro-North American society. By addressing the impact of colonization on Indigenous women can bring to light the connections between political marginalization and colonial violence. Indigenous women have experienced both representational and sexual violence throughout the colonial and neo-colonial projects. As Shari Huhndorf and Cheryl Suzack argue in “Indigenous Feminism: Theorizing Issues,”

For Indigenous women, colonization has involved their removal from positions of power, the replacement of traditional gender roles with Western patriarchal practices, the exertion of control over Indigenous communities through the management of women’s bodies, and sexual violence. As gender has begun to reshape Indigenous politics, the growing legal recognition of settler-colony countries of the rights of Indigenous peoples to cultural and political autonomy has brought to the fore questions about Indigenous women’s access to civil rights and sovereignty claims.

Many of the performances I explore in the following chapters—such as Belmore’s Vigil, which commemorates among other things the missing and murdered women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside—address these connections and the diverse experiences of Aboriginal women. Huhndorf and Suzack suggest a series of interrelated questions that foreground Indigenous feminist inquiry:

What are the stakes and controversies in conceptualizing Indigenous feminism? How do feminist endeavours relate to Indigenous politics centred on land and sovereignty? Is it possible to recover the obscured historical presence and agency of Indigenous women, and if so, how might we go about the task? What lessons does the past carry for contemporary situations? How do Indigenous women

In the chapters that address both historical and contemporary performances, I aim to engage with these questions, arguing that Indigenous performance has a long standing history of being employed to stage cultural and political agency, resistance, and continuance and to assert Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. Addressing performances from the 19th and early 20th centuries, I argue, “recovers” and reveals “obscured historical presence and agency.” I contend that Indigenous women performance artists activate their bodily artistic practices as a means to resist, intervene and “confront” marginalization of both Indigenous women and men. In so doing, their performances connect and explore issues of Indigenous politics, cultural production, and activism.

Huhndorf and Suzack argue that “Indigenous women’s cultural production has also played a key but neglected role in the development of feminism,” noting that while “activism aims to accomplish material change, culture fosters critical consciousness by attending to the meanings of history and social relationships and imagining political possibilities.” In this way, they suggest, Indigenous women’s cultural products, such as film, art, literature, and performance have a history of addressing issues similar to those advocated by activists. Huhndorf and Suzack state that politics, activism, and culture are “interrelated components of Indigenous feminism as it now exists,” noting however that they are not attempting to “create a singular or unified definition of Indigenous feminism but rather [to] explore the myriad, sometimes conflicting questions that result from Indigenous feminist inquiry.”

This being said, Indigenous feminism is an anticolonial, antiracist, and antisexist theoretical approach that engages with Indigenous histories, cultural memories, politics, and contemporary socio-political and cultural realities and issues. Indigenous feminism creates space for “Indigenous Women” and the unified and inter-connectiveness of these two identifiers. As Green argues, Indigenous feminism provides a philosophical and political way of conceptualizing, and or resisting, the oppressions that many Aboriginal peoples experience. It provides analysis of Aboriginal women’s particular experiences of oppression … It is anti-oppressive in its intellectual and political foundations. It is not the only way of understanding the

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207 Ibid., 4.
208 Ibid., 9.
209 Ibid., 9.
210 Ibid., 11.
world, but it is valuable, valid conceptual tool.\textsuperscript{212}

Prior to engaging with the perspectives put forward in these recent publications, I was uncertain about incorporating Indigenous feminism as one of my thematic threads. My hesitations were based on the authors’ claims in my preceding discussions of Indigenous feminism: Although I see Indigenous feminism as a valuable approach, I re-iterate that I am not arguing that Blondeau, Belmore, Reece, Claxton, L’Hirondelle, and Johnson are feminist artists. They do, however, engage with many of the conceptual and theoretical practices of Indigenous women feminist scholars.

Blondeau publically and performatively acknowledged her ambivalent and fraught relationship with feminism during her public lecture/performance at the MAWA: Women’s Art Symposium, \textit{Locating Feminism} in October 2001 in Winnipeg. She was scheduled to present a paper entitled “Search for Feminism”; however, one of Blondeau’s performance personas, Betty Daybird, sauntered in—sporting a red negligee, sunglasses, and beehive hairdo—and stated that Blondeau “hadn’t wanted to come and had sent” Daybird in her place (fig. 7).\textsuperscript{213} Parodying the academic lecture format, “the eccentric Daybird piled numerous stacks of blank paper (hauled in on a wagon by her assistant) onto a table, jokingly inviting anyone to read her dissertation on feminism.”\textsuperscript{214} Daybird proceeded to give a slide presentation on her search for feminism, a long journey that began in a bar with an interview of the waitresses on the subject of feminism. At the end of Daybird’s account, she stated that her “search provided few answers and she concluded that feminism was inside herself.” Blondeau’s performance of Daybird’s presentation—to a predominantly white audience and at an academic conference on feminism—seems an attempt to voice frustrations with a largely white, middle-class, academic feminism that excludes her Indigenous identity, histories, contexts, cultures, memories, and stories. Through this tongue-in-cheek performance, Blondeau pointedly expressed the apprehension she felt towards feminism as an Aboriginal, specifically Cree, Saulteaux woman.\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{213} Heather Marie Anderson, “Contemporary Canadian Women’s Performance Art: Reading Postfeminism and Third-Wave Feminism” (master’s thesis, Dalhousie University, 2003), 83.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 83.
\textsuperscript{215} That being said, I am aware of Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua’s \textit{This Bridge Called My Back} and Ella Shohat’s \textit{Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age} which address alternatives and ways in which feminism exceeds narrow boundaries.
In an interview with Blondeau in 2006, I asked her what her relationship was with feminism; she answered, “I understand how my work is put into the category, but I don’t think of myself as a feminist. This doesn’t mean I don’t support feminism, but I would like to ask you a question, where is feminism these days?” This question highlights the significant development of Indigenous feminism in the past few years, which I have briefly introduced above. Referring to Indigenous feminist scholarship is productive in a discussion of Indigenous women’s issues, histories, experiences, as well as Indigenous peoples and nations. Indigenous feminism, as mentioned above, creates space for the assertion of diverse Indigenous perspectives and stories/histories and focuses on Indigenous concepts of storytelling, cultural memory, collective autonomy and responsibility. In this way, Indigenous feminism incorporates into its political framework notions of sovereignty, self-determination, autonomy, agency, and decolonization.

Afterthoughts: Locating Indigenous Performance Art Discourse

In this chapter I have explored the multiple themes and lenses that I argue are possible approaches in the study, research and critical writing on contemporary Indigenous art. Given the current void in literature on critical theory and methods for Aboriginal art, I have deliberately woven together many threads of inquiry. Fundamental in my aim is deploying appropriate and productive lenses through which to contextualize the dynamic performances by the artists. As a decolonizing project, this thesis attempts to produce possible ways, a mapping of sorts, for the critical analysis of

Indigenous performance art. To this end, I employ Indigenous frameworks from diverse fields of inquiry to indigenize art historical approaches. Framing my work as a process of activism, I also hope to convey the strength, beauty, and hope of the performances as well as the current scholarship by Indigenous writers.

As previously mentioned, I see this dissertation as a collaborative project, a conversation with the artists and Indigenous scholars who have made this work possible. In the following chapters, I explore the practices of Indigenous women performance artists and ultimately argue that their performances are vehicles and embodiments of memory, cultural resistance, storytelling, decolonization, remembrance, activism, autonomy, agency, sovereignty, and self-determination. Rebecca Belmore, Lori Blondeau, Skeena Reece, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, and Dana Claxton are diverse and multifaceted Aboriginal women performance artists who, in their own distinct ways, are performatively writing and actualizing Indigenous perspectives, experiences, and histories. Their works are powerful, self-determined decolonizing acts.
Chapter 3


In this chapter, I explore Indigenous knowledge systems as frameworks for analysis and critical discussion of Indigenous culture, particularly contemporary Aboriginal art. More specifically, I explore storytelling as a lens through which to study contemporary Indigenous performance art. As a conceptual Indigenous framework, storytelling supports and privileges Aboriginal knowledge and ways of being. Studying Indigenous performance supports more pluralistic understandings of Indigenous art and material culture, histories, and identities as Indigenous cultural production and knowledge are rooted in performative oral traditions—meaning storytelling.

Historically, the material culture and art of Indigenous peoples have been framed by colonial Eurocentric systems of classification and placed within museum and gallery collections, ultimately disconnecting them from their living cultural (and performative) contexts. Colonial processes worked towards delegitimizing Indigenous oral histories—that is, the act of storytelling—as a legitimate means of producing histories. The result is that Indigenous stories, until recently, have not been recognized as legitimate histories and therefore have not been acknowledged as history. However, studying the role of performance within Indigenous cultures can potentially reconnect the multifaceted meanings of Aboriginal cultural production, as well as other archive collections. Addressing performative storytelling as a key component of Indigenous ways of knowing and being elucidates Indigenous performance art as a distinct Indigenous practice and illuminates contemporary performance art’s relationship to a larger history of Aboriginal performance traditions and to Indigenous histories.

Cherokee scholar Craig Womack remarks that stories not only preserve Aboriginal cultural knowledge and histories, they illustrate “that our cultures are largely intact because our stories tell us how we are adapting to the challenges we are continually encountering in our communities.”¹ Similarly, Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham argues that one of the key traditions of Indigenous cultures is dynamism and continual change, stating that “Constant change-adaptability, the

¹ Craig Womack, Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11–12.
inclusion of new ways and new materials—is a tradition that our artists have particularly celebrated and have used to move and strengthen our societies.”

I examine the art practices of Indigenous performance artists as working out of historical Aboriginal practices of performance. In other words, I link current histories in contemporary art practices with historical examples of Indigenous performances on colonial settler stages.

Several performances and performers are discussed using the concept of “storytelling as theory,” which was introduced in the Chapter 2. Through the lens of story, the significance of the practice performance-based art as an act of cultural continuance is illuminated. In Chapter 2, I introduced the potential of Indigenous storytelling as a viable theoretical approach in the interrogation of Indigenous visual and performative culture. For example, I referred to Lois Einhorn argument to foreground the significant role of oral-transmission of knowledge (that is, storytelling) within Aboriginal communities. Einhorn writes, “[T]he oral tradition is not one of several parts of Native American culture, it is the culture, simultaneously reflecting and manifesting it.”

Lee Maracle’s concept of “oratory” is re-introduced here (first discussed in Chapter 2) to map out a theoretical framework for “storytelling as a theory.” Like Maracle, Margaret Kovach and Joane Archibald advocate the use of storytelling as a method for rewriting Indigenous histories and reclaiming Indigenous voices. Annishnabe scholar Gerald Vizenor also attributes Indigenous survival, continuance, and resistance to both the presence of contemporary Aboriginal storytellers and the continued act of telling stories. This chapter responds to and converses with these Indigenous scholars, working towards decolonizing the discounting of the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge systems—such as oral-based history practices—by the academy and non-Indigenous scholars. I argue that contemporary artists use storytelling as an Indigenous strategy of cultural and political resistance. I thus analyze the performances to show how they relate to ideas of storytelling, and to explore the interconnections between story, the archive, memory and resistance.

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Storytelling as Theory: Indigenous Stories as Cultural Continuities, Memory and Resistance

Indigenous knowledge systems can be useful strategic frameworks for analysis and critical discussion of Indigenous culture. The use of Western theory is argued by some to constitute the re-inscription of racist, colonial, and Eurocentric interpretations—assigning a status of inferiority onto Aboriginal aesthetic expressions relative to their European counterparts. Since the advent of postmodernism, such exclusionary definitions have been challenged and rendered obsolete by critics, art historians, and artists. Storytelling as theory, on the other hand, emphasizes Indigenous methodology as a supportive and constructive framework that privileges Indigenous experiences, histories, and stories.

I am not suggesting here that storytelling is the only role of Indigenous performance; however, within the context of performance for, within, and witnessed by Indigenous communities, the role of performance in telling stories/histories is integral to cultural continuance, autonomy, and identity. Indigenous performance/storytelling acknowledges performances of the body—dance and/or song as an action of telling—that tell a social, cultural and political story (history). One clear connection between Indigenous performance and the process of storytelling is the transferring of knowledge from one generation to the next: in this way, both work in the realm of cultural continuance. This means that Indigenous dance, theatre, music, and art that present Indigenous ways of knowing can be linked to the story and the practice of oral and performative transmission of cultural knowledge. My use of storytelling as a lens for writing about contemporary Aboriginal art draws from Aboriginal curator and performance artist Guy Sioui Durand’s essay, “Ak8a-Enton8hi of Saliva And Quill.” In this, he considers Indigenous orality, or the practice of storytelling, as a theoretical framework that supports the complexities of Indigenous experience. Durand argues that orality “is the reservoir and the method of crossing into an affirmation with identity. Rhythms and sounds, languages and gestures, orality is the bearer of our founding myths, stories, legends of our chants, dances, and other ‘communication acts’ seeking to transform the daily life of our communities.” In this sense, stories depend on memory, and the events presented and the moments performed are traces in the memories of those who witnessed the telling of the

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7 Guy Sioui Durand, “Ak8a-Enton8hi of Saliva And Quill,” in Making a Noise!: Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community, ed. Lee Ann Martin (Banff: Banff International Curatorial Institute, 2005), 140.
story. Thus, story as Indigenous theory highlights the significance of Indigenous performance for the building of community and identity, as well as for cultural and political resistance.8

In *The Native America in Oral Tradition: Voices of the Spirit and Soul*, Lois Einhorn argues that “the oral tradition is not one of several parts of Native American culture, it is the culture, simultaneously reflecting and manifesting it.” In this sense, stories and the act of storytelling are methods that have been continuously employed—despite contact, colonization, and assimilation—by Indigenous cultures to create cultural cohesion, as well as to educate and to entertain.9 To refer back to Thomas King’s primary argument in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*: “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are.”10 His argument agrees with that of Vizenor, who writes, “you can’t understand the world without telling a story. There isn’t any center to the world but story.”11 In *Manifest Manners: Post-Indian Warriors of Survivance*, Vizenor states that Indigenous individuals themselves are “stories of presence, the chronicles in the histories of this continent,” and that “Native stories are the traces of natural reason, not the spoils of surveillance. Native stories are communicative, autonomous creations.”12 I draw here on Vizenor to argue that “storytelling as theory” includes recognition of Indigenous autonomy and agency. Further, Vizenor highlights the significance of storytelling within both urban and reserve Indigenous communities, arguing that Native stories are stories of Native survivance: “more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence.”13 In other words, in Vizenor’s view, Native stories are the traces of Native experiences and the evidence of Native survivance. Barbara Godard argues that performative storytelling can negotiate a neutral space for Aboriginal culture and create a space for critical reflection.14 In a discussion of Indigenous performance, then, the story (the dance, the song, or performance) can be seen as a sovereign agent of reclamation and decolonization.

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8 “The story never stops beginning or ending. It appears headless and bottomless for it is built on differences...The story circulates like a gift; an empty gift that anybody can lay claim to by filling it to taste, yet can never truly possess. A gift built on multiplicities. One that stays inexhaustible within its own limits. Its departures and arrivals. Its quietness.” Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 2.


11 Laura Coltelli, *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 156.


13 Ibid., 15.

Although, performance artists such as Belmore, Blondeau and L’Hirondelle incorporate aspects of storytelling and present Indigenous histories through their performative actions, this is not to say that these customary practices are the only influence on their practices. What I mean here, is that they participate within the larger context of Indigenous storytelling as well as contemporary art practices. This fusion results in a contemporary aesthetic; however, as Aayanne Maracle suggests, the primary elements of Indigenous performance remain the same.\(^\text{15}\) Maracle is alluding to the existence of a similar element in both performance art and Aboriginal storytelling: the presentation of a story as a performance or the performance as a story. The presentation of both traditions, consequently, remains fundamentally linked to the storyteller/artist, the audience, the purpose of telling the story, and the story itself. Maracle’s argument is that performance art, dance, theatre, and music are contemporary forms and adaptations of as well as responses to traditions of Indigenous storytelling. The act of storytelling was, and continues to be, a performative experience.

**Acts of Cultural Continuance and Resistance**

In this next section, performances by Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Rebecca Belmore and Tanya Lukin Linklater are explored as performative acts of storytelling. I examine the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and languages as strategies of cultural continuance and cultural resistance. By linking the works of contemporary Aboriginal women performers to the work of Pauline E. Johnson, I elucidate the history and continuity of using performance as a method of intervention and a tool for cultural resilience and survivance.

**Give me an “A”: Tanya Lukin Linklater**

In Kingston on March 17, 2011, as part of *Acting Out: Claiming Space: Aboriginal Performance Art Series*,\(^\text{16}\) Alutiiq performance artist Tanya Lukin Linklater presented her new work, *Give me an “A”* (fig. 8). For this series, the artist engaged with the question: How does an Indigenous

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\(^{16}\) Four artists—Jordan Bennett, Terrance Houle, Tanya Lukin-Linklater, and Skeena Reece—intervened in Kingston’s public and private spaces from March 15th to 19th, 2011. Co-curated by Daina Warren and Carla Taunton and hosted by Modern Fuel Artist Run Centre.
voice contend with overarching colonial histories and the extreme social conditions that have formed the urban space of the city of Kingston? The curatorial intent behind the Acting Out, Claiming Space: Aboriginal Performance Art Series was the larger question: What constitutes an Indigenous space? Tanya Lukin Linklater’s performance, which launched the series on the corner of University Avenue and Union Street on Queen’s University campus, is an overt act of cultural continuance.

Dressed in a modified cheerleading costume with fur detailing, the artist performed a traditionally based song she composed for her community in her own Alutiiq language, incorporating her spoken words with a choreographed dance of slow fluid movement. Through gesture and voice, she abstracted her song, slowing the words into brief spoken sounds. This breaking down of the language revealed the history of attempted destruction and eradication of Indigenous languages. The act of deconstructing or displacing her own Aboriginal language and traditional songs was a deliberate strategy, alluding to her lived Northern experience and connections to Alutiiq territory and her brief southern experience while studying in the United States. Throughout her performance, she incorporated spoken words into her song:

From the island we come. From the land and the ocean we come. The land on one side. The ocean on the other
This is our land, this is our village, this is our home. Lukin Linklater’s abstraction of Alutiiq language also brings to the surface the loss of Indigenous cultural knowledge due to colonial processes and assimilist agendas. At the same time, however, it asserts the continuance of Aboriginal language despite North American settler-society’s impact on many Native nations. Her props—a snare drum, megaphones, a cheerleading dress—all refer to Lukin Linklater’s past experiences with national sports games and her awareness of the fanatical following of these teams in the United States.

Her performance occurred on the same day as St. Patrick’s Day, a holiday coopted by Canadians as a free-for-all day of inebriation. This aggressive situation led to a collective experience of claiming and protecting the corner for Lukin Linklater’s performance. Over fifty audience members assisted in fending off young revelers celebrating St. Patrick’s Day, who not only tried to walk through the established performance area but also attempted to take her megaphones, play her drum, use her equipment; they ended up drunkenly taunting her from across the street. But this claiming was then reversed through the artist’s own response to the students: In an assertive voice, Lukin Linklater used her Alutiiq language to challenge the youth to participate in a more meaningful dialogue. She turned to them and, through her megaphone, repeated in Alutiiq, “This is our land, this is our village, this is our home.” The artist not only claimed her immediate space, but claimed a space for Indigenous students and their experiences on the Queen’s campus.

As an audience member, I witnessed through these incidents the ongoing apathy, disrespect, and disregard for Indigenous peoples and their stories. However, the power of Lukin Linklater’s voice created a site for acknowledging the experiences and presence of the many Indigenous students attending: the story of both the song and the performer’s body prevailed to claim and assert Indigenous survivance and cultural continuance.

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17 In an email correspondence with the artist, Lukin Linklater wrote, “These words I composed & they were translated into Alutiiq by Florence Pestrikoff, Sophie Katelnikoff, Nick Alokli with April Laktonen Counsellor of the Alutiiq Language Project in 2005. I composed melodies to fit the rhythm & cadence of the Alutiiq language. I spoke the words though in this performance rather than sang them . . .” Lukin Linklater, e-mail message to author, April 26, 2011.
Pauline Johnson: Performative Stories for Social Change and Resistance

In this section, I explore the performances of 19th-century poet Pauline E. Johnson (1861-1913) to highlight the use of performative storytelling as a tool for socio-political and cultural resistance. In doing so, it is possible to argue that Johnson occupies a place in the history of women artists’ production in Canada as important as that already assigned to her in Canada’s literary history. In this sense, Pauline Johnson was a performance artist, she used the stage and the performative to address to her settler-audience’s colonial experiences of oppression and violence, as well as Eurocentric misunderstanding of Aboriginal cultural and political histories.

The work of 19th-century Mohawk poet Pauline Johnson (fig. 9), arguably one of the original Aboriginal storyteller/performance artists, illustrates a history of Indigenous acts of intervention against colonial domination through the medium of performance.

Figure 9: Pauline Johnson (1861-1913), “Mohawk poet and performer” photograph c.1904. Provincial Archives of British Columbia, A-09684.

I explored Johnson’s connection to this history of Aboriginal women performing Indigeneity in my Master’s thesis, Lori Blondeau: Hightech Storytelling for Social Change (2006), in which I linked Johnson’s practice to contemporary Aboriginal performance artists. Veronica Strong-Boag has made a similar connection:

Pauline Johnson articulates a racialized femininity that embodied and unsettled many of the middle-class conventions of late nineteenth century Canada … Like
today’s performance artists, Johnson “wore” gender, race, and class in ways that could be both transgressive and reinscriptive.¹⁸

My discussion here is based on my previous research and draws on the critical writings of Strong-Boag and Carol Gerson, who have published extensively on Johnson’s life, writings, and performances. It is important to note that the subtle political voices of individuals like Johnson differ greatly from the overt vocal and visual expressions of many contemporary Indigenous performance artists. This being said, Johnson was among the first women of Indigenous descent to publicly perform her stories and poems for settler Canada during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

My analysis of Johnson’s practice as performance art and as successful stagings of socio-political and cultural resistance is supported by archival newspaper articles and recital sources that clearly outline her extensive performance and literary career. Canadian and American newspapers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as the Globe, The Toronto Star, and The Times, document Johnson’s performance career, starting in 1892 and ending in 1906. The newspaper articles and reviews celebrate Johnson as a Canadian writer and Indian performer. They also reveal her presence amongst some of the nation’s elites. One of the first articles in which Johnson appears is the Globe’s 1866 article on the unveiling of the Joseph Brant Memorial in Brantford Ontario: Johnson was listed in the ceremonial program as reading a poem written about Brant.¹⁹

The analysis of Johnson’s performances are informed by the Canadian historical context in which she was performing. The history highlights the complexities of her political negotiations and her acts of Indigenous agency and resistance, as well as the larger context of Indigenous activism during this era of extensive Canadian nation-building. In many ways the Canadian government was successful in its colonial efforts to isolate the colonized nations of Indigenous peoples and manoeuvre them into a subordinate and marginalized position. Residential schools and ceremonial bans are examples of Canada’s strategies to eradicate Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being. This racist era of legislative domination and control over all aspects of Indian life, community, spirituality, health, education, family, and movement was a deliberate campaign to

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¹⁹ Pauline Johnson was a Mohawk-Anglo woman grew up on her parents estate, Chiefswood, now a National Historic Site located along the Grand River outside Brantford, Ontario. Johnson’s father, Onwanonsyshon (G. H. M Johnson), was a leading chief of the Six Nations and part of the Loyalist Haudenousaune who moved to the Grand River region with General Joseph Brant.
foster ethnocide of Indigenous cultures. Yet, in a seeming paradox, Indigenous performers—such as Johnson and those involved in Wild West Shows, burlesque shows and vaudeville theatre—were very popular: Indigenous performances were among the events included in British royal tours.

These entangled histories demonstrate a contradictory aspect of Canadian colonial policy. Indigenous peoples were permitted to perform for white audiences (permission for participation had to be officially granted by Indian Agents and the Department of Indian Affairs), but they were not permitted under law to continue to pass on traditions to their children, to organize multi-community gathering, or to perform ceremonies, dance, or song for their own cultural purposes. They were permitted to perform and dress for anthropologist’s active pursuit of documentation and collection of Indigenous cultural practices for the Canadian archive, but not for their own communities. I explore the two sides of this contradiction, the oppression of Aboriginal culture and its display through public performance.

However, during this period of colonial oppression and legislative assimilation there are also many histories of Indigenous negotiations and resistance, particularly in the field of the arts. Pauline Johnson is an example. Ruth Phillips argues that during the modernist century, which lasted from the 1860s to the 1960s, “performance, not graphic or plastic art, was the available space for Native art production, and further, that performance offered the most favourable site for Native negotiations of the dominant culture’s images of Indianess as pre-modern, degenerate and vanishing.” As Carole Gerson and Veronica Strong-Boag have argued, “In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while some Native women defied their detractors, few public voices on the national stage challenged the distortions that were so useful to conquerors. One exemption, … was the Anglo-Mohawk writer and performer Pauline Johnson.”

Johnson personifies this negotiation. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, she was the first woman of Aboriginal descent to publicly perform her stories for settler society in Canada. There are numerous newspaper accounts of sold out auditoriums and reviews celebrating the dramatic performances by Johnson, Canada’s Indian Princess. In the 1890s and early 1900s, Johnson adopted her grandfather’s name, Tekahionwake, and travelled across Canada, the United

States, and to England performing her stories. Her narratives examined the complicated issues surrounding race and gender; her voice illuminated Aboriginal histories and their relationship to contemporary colonial discourse. Johnson’s poems, essays, and stories substantiate her identification as an advocate for Aboriginal and women’s rights. In *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson*, Strong-Boag and Gerson give a thorough account of Johnson’s life history and career and use her poetry as evidence to prove her position as a social-activist. For example, in “The Re-interment of Red Jacket,” she celebrated her Mohawk ancestry, and in “The Cattle Thief,” she accused British settlers of participating in the genocide of Aboriginal peoples through tactics such as starvation. That Johnson communicated an Indigenous point of view to the general public was radical; these were acts of resistance and intervention. In her day, the discussion of history from an Aboriginal perspective was not common practice. As Gerson and Strong-Boag argue,

In her life and her publications, Johnson struggled to orchestrate a dramatically different vision. Through her own person as well as the characters presented in her writings and her stage performances, she portrayed Native women as not only the equals of white women, but at time their superiors. Virtuous, hard-working, and dignified, they were never ‘squaws,’ a derogatory but commonplace term that signaled sexual license, indolence, and disrespect. Performing primarily for settler audiences, Johnson’s performances participate in a contemporary attempt to write history and create an archive of Indigenous experiences through her own writing and performative storytelling practice. This was an era in which nationalist narratives were being written to solidify white-Canadian identity—Johnson was performing experiences that were omitted and silenced from such narratives. This era of nationalism is thus an important backdrop for understanding her performances as resistance and activism.

Pauline Johnson is commonly described as Canada’s Indian Poetess. She has been studied as part of many articles on the development of the distinct field of Canadian Literature. Here, she is defined through her poetry writing and the interconnectedness of her work to her Mohawk heritage,

22 Maria Tippett, “Review of *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson* by Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson,” *Canadian Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (March 2002): 140. Tippett agrees with Strong-Boag and Gerson’s use of Johnson’s poetry as evidence to prove her position as a social-activist. It was from my own reading of Johnson’s poetry that I began to consider her as part of the history of performative storytelling. It was her words that made me explore further her role as storyteller.

23 Strong-Boag and Gerson discuss Pauline Johnson’s work from a Euro-Canadian feminist perspective in *Paddling Her Own Canoe* and, as Tippett argues in her review of their book, the poems act as evidence for their claims of her being an advocate for socio-political and cultural rights of both Aboriginal peoples and women living in Canada.

24 Gerson and Strong-Boag, “Championing the Native,” 47.
which is usually homogenized as simply “Indian.” For example, in 1910, W.A. Craick of the *New York Times* wrote an article entitled “Canadian Literature,” which notes Johnson among the most recognized writers of Canada—as the Indian Poet.\(^{25}\) In a short article “Canadian Women Who Are Poets,” Johnson is recognized for her “Indian compositions making her famous from Atlantic to Pacific.”\(^{26}\) However, a review of her collection, “Canadian Born” in 1903 reveals that, while settler Canada desired Johnson’s “Indian poetry,” it was not interested in her writing which expressed her Canadian identity and patriotism for the nation-state. This is explicit in a review of her collection, which is noted as being

an interesting full-length portrait of the Indian girl whose talent has been recognized in two continents. We had looked, however, to seeing the level of her work sustained, if not heightened, by the passing years and must confess to a genuine feeling of disappointment that the collection at hand gives so little evidence of a finer imaginative vision and more cultivated poetic diction. There is nothing here comparable to in passion with the “Cry of an Indian Wife,” “The Song my Paddle Sings,” and “Shadow River,” and it would be unfair to the poet to say otherwise. There are about thirty poems in the book, in subject and emotion, for the greater part, in keeping with the patriotic title.\(^{27}\)

This review of Johnson’s poems focuses on her participation in the nation-building project of Canada and the development of Canadian nationalism, and the reviewer does not laud Johnson’s overt celebration of Canadian patriotism nor the non-Indian subject matter. The desire of white-settler societies to encounter “real” Indians supported Johnson’s successful career but at the same time mediated and contained her art practice.

This being said, during her career and even after her death, Johnson’s collections of published poems—such as *Flint and Feather* and *Canadian Born*—were publicized as ideal gifts to send abroad as they represented Canada and Canadian literature.\(^{28}\) It is interesting to note in the archival records of Johnson’s literary and performance career that her poems are also recited by white-settler performers, such as Mr. W.F. Cockshutt who read “Made in Canada” at the 1903 Manufacturers Association of Canada Banquet in Brantford.\(^{29}\) Although her patriotic poems were incorporated into settler society, it was her “Indian poems” that gained her recognition within the

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\(^{26}\) “Canadian Women Poets: Who Are They?” *Globe (Toronto)*, December 4, 1910, 9.

\(^{27}\) “New Poems by Pauline Johnson,” *Globe (Toronto)*, July 11, 1903, 15.


Canadian populace. Johnson was even incorporated in the 1895 Toronto Arts Students League annual calendar, which included sketched portraits of Canadian writers, as Canada’s Indian poet; and in 1900 at Beeton, Johnson was invited to participate at the Queen Victoria weekend celebrations, where she was named the “Indian Queen reader” and performed in what was remarked on as “a grand concert in the evening.” Another example of her inclusion and participation with white-Canadian society is her presence among the elite in Canadian culture and politics. A May 18th, 1895, Globe article, “Social Life at the Capital,” in discussing the social functions and events in Ottawa at the beginning of the year’s political session, noted Johnson four times in the page long article, which recounts the attendees of functions, such as Lord Laurier. She is noted for her recitals, her dress, and her appearance with other women at a session of the house. These examples reveal that Johnson moved easily between the then segregated Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies in Canada.

Throughout her performance career, Johnson was described as a popular entertainer in Canada. These namings, reviews, and moments also reveal the contradictions of the period: that is, the attempt by settler society to own, experience, appropriate, and co-opt Indigenous cultures and peoples as part of Canadian national rhetoric and iconography, while at the same time governmental policies attempted to assimilate and eradicate Aboriginal cultural knowledge and governance structures. Recognition of the historical context of Johnson’s performance career (and many of her stories’/poems’ subject matter) also exposes the epistemic, systemic, and physical violence endured and resisted by Indigenous peoples, and in doing so elucidates Johnson’s movements, mediations, and negotiations between the spaces offered by Victorian Canadian society for Aboriginal peoples, which tended to be either isolated reserve locations or the imagined narratives of popular culture. Johnson’s performances and published works brought Indigenous perspectives and histories to dominant society, and, as Strong-Boag argues, they “orchestrated” new visions of Aboriginal experience.

30 T. J. Murphy, “Canadian Poems,” Globe (Toronto), March 6, 1897, 11.
31 “An Art Calendar,” Globe (Toronto), November 22, 1894, 10. In a 1897 article on Canadian writing and the upcoming Victoria Jubilee of 1897, T. J Murphy, states in relation to a competition among the talented Canadian writers and poets, such as Pauline Johnson, “would no doubt result in a selection of poems that would not only embalm in song her gracious Majesty’s diamond jubilee, but engrave upon the heart of young Canada something of the greatness and splendour of our national heritage.” Murphy, “Canadian Poems,” 11.
33 In one review, after her Hamilton performance in December of 1893, she is named “One of the most popular of Canadian entertainers.” “Laurier Button,” The Globe, December 26, 1893, 4.
Johnson’s 1892 performance in the Gallery of Art at Toronto’s Academy of Music, is among her first strategic performances. At that evening of Canadian poetry, Johnson made a bold decision to recite a poem unlike others of its time. Her “A Cry From an Indian Wife” was the story of an Aboriginal woman whose husband was going off to fight on the side of the Métis in the 1885 Northwest Resistance (commonly known as the Rebellion). This poem recognizes issues of Indigenous sovereignty over lands recently claimed as part of the Canadian Nation. For example, her poem reads, “They but forget we Indians owned the land. From ocean to ocean; that they stand. Upon a soil that centuries ago. Was our sole kingdom and our right alone.” These words denote the legitimate claim of the Indigenous nations fighting for land and political sovereignty. This was the first time Johnson performed for a large audience at such a prestigious venue. Her tone and new perspectives captured the attention of her settler audience, who, according to Frank Yeigh, went “wild with applause” at the end. Strong-Boag’s analysis of this performance is persuasive: Johnson’s performance “electrified her listeners with … a passionate indictment of the crushing of the Prairie tribes in 1885, an encounter still fresh in memory and one that had sharply divided the country.”

A question that arises here is: Why did this settler audience appreciate, engage with, and applaud Johnson, who was presenting a very different account of the Northwest Rebellion—from an Aboriginal perspective—merely six years after the resistance? Her stories did not present the popular understanding of the resistance her audiences would have identified with. If it was her Aboriginality that was marketable to settler society, she capitalized on her appeal as a Mohawk women—in her presentation of an Indian Princess like a Pocahontas. This archetypical was easily recognizable to settler society due to the countless representations of Aboriginal peoples in popular culture. Because Johnson was dependent on settler-society’s patronage—meaning, her economic reliance on a settler audience (through ticket sales and the publishing of her stories and poems)—

34 Prior to Pauline Johnson’s performance debut in 1892, she had become a familiar name in local press and national magazines, publishing in Canadian Magazine and Dominion Illustrated. Her first publication was in 1889. Two of her love poems were included in W. D. Lighthall’s Songs of the Great Dominion.
35 “They but forget we Indians owned the land. From ocean to ocean; that they stand. Upon a soil that centuries ago. Was our sole kingdom and our right alone. They never think how they would feel to-day. If some great nation came from far away. Wresting their country from their hapless braves.” Pauline Johnson, “A Cry From An Indian Wife,” in Gerson and Strong-Boag Paddling Her Own Canoe, 14.
36 Frank Yeigh was a close friend of Johnson’s and was her first professional manager. He invited her to the 1892 Canadian Literary Evening at the Young Liberal Club of Toronto in 1892, which was the debut of her “professional” performance career. “Association Hall” (Recital Advertisement) The Globe, February 13, 1892, 15.
she negotiated her own physical and oral representation of the Indian Princess as a means to present Indigenous perspective, resistances, and experiences. As Strong-Boag writes,

It’s such a counter-discourse, essentially feminist and postcolonialist, that Johnson was to articulate on platforms in theatres, schools, and churches across the country after she entered the uncertain world of the paid recitalist in 1892. In these performances, she staged femininity that was simultaneously and ambiguously raced. … Johnson’s ultimate dependence on the patronage of the dominant society required this ambiguity. 38

Johnson’s performances and stories personify this negotiation and use of words as a strategy to intervene with colonial Canada’s consistent and systemic racist treatment and oppression of Indigenous peoples. She resisted the colonial discourse, while captivating her audiences with the “Indianness” of her verses. A contradiction lay at the heart of Johnson’s performances: from one poem or story to the next, she alternated words of resistance with words saturated in the romanticism of the “Indian.”

Johnson’s performance in 1893 on Wolf Island, near Kingston, Ontario, is another example of her performative political negotiations and staged interventions, whereby she simultaneously performed the iconic Indian Princess and the respectable Victorian woman. A New York Times article, “Around the Pine Camp Fire,” describes this performance, which took place at the annual American Canoe Association camp:

The Cataraqui boys called out in chorus, “Miss Pauline-Johnson will now recite.” The Indian girl, daughter of a Mohawk chief stepped into the glare of red lights dressed in the ornamental garb of a Mohawk maiden. She tossed back her long black hair, clinched her hands and recited her own poem, wherein an Indian wife bids her warrior husband go to war with the whites. It was all very stirring and tragic, and the gentle American girls shivered with something more than the chill of the night air. For an encore Miss Johnson recited another of her poems, likewise full of dramatic tire and tragic motive. Miss Johnson’s mother, a dear old English lady who mourns her dead Indian husband as deeply as woman ever mourned man, was in the circle of listeners. She is very proud of her talented daughter. Miss Johnson is an Indian poet of wide reputation in Canada and she has lately taken up prose to tell the story of her red forefathers. Mrs. Johnson, although English, is down on the census as an Indian, and she is rather proud of it. The daughter is very well educated and highly cultured. She handles a canoe like one of her red brethren, but she is fond of leaning back on a cushion and letting some amiable American paddle her canoe in the shade of the overhanging trees along shore. 39

38 Ibid., 374.
This article reports on the celebratory reviews of Johnson’s performative storytelling. At the same time, the article is an illustration of how settler North American society viewed and mediated Johnson because of her mixed ancestry. In my analysis, Johnson as “Indian poet” was potentially acceptable because she was linked to settler society by her mother’s English ancestry. In this turn-of-the-century account of her performance, Johnson’s identity as Mohawk is clearly acknowledged. Descriptions of her Indian costume, long black hair, canoeing skills, and tragic and dramatic performance reflect the iconic image of the Indian Princess and noble savage. The most “unusual” and “noteworthy” feature of the campfire weekend was noted as the appearance of the Mohawk Indian Princess in full Indian costume. The article describes her performance

Johnson’s reception by settler Canada and in the larger North American context is revealed in the positive reviews of both her writing and performances. In 1892, for example, after her first performance, a review of the third issue of the newly founded Dominion Illustrated Monthly describes one of Johnson’s articles as clever, referring to her establishing reputation as a performer. The review reads, “Miss Pauline Johnson, the rising young Indian poetess, contributes a clever article on “Indian Medicine Men and Their Magic.” 40 In an article in the music and drama section of Globe, Johnson’s performance at the Parliament Street Methodist Church was described as a success. The tone of this review is echoed in reviews of her recitals from the 1890s through to the early 1900s. Pauline Johnson is named as the “Indian Poetess” and as having performed four original poems, which all received “recalls” after each performance. 41 Other examples of celebratory reviews describe the audiences’ enjoyment of Johnson’s recitals. In the 1 November 1893 issue of Globe, Johnson is described as participating in a program whose “unstinted applause and many encores” were stated as “evidence of appreciation and pleasure.” Johnson is named “the Indian poet- elocutionist.” The review then goes on to explain Johnson’s performance:

Miss Johnson’s four numbers were new to the audience. The first “At Half-Mast,” showed her power in dialect, as did “Stepping Stones,” reveal a dainty humor, as unique in its way as the poetical conceit, “The Icicle Maiden,” given as one of her encores. The audience gave her a fresh welcome when she appeared in her handsome and striking Indian costume. In which she rendered a most powerful and graphic Indian poem, entitled, “The Cattle Thief.” One cannot comprehend the moving strength of such a composition until an Indian woman, who lives its words, while she speaks recites them. The same remark applies to “The White Wampum,” written by Miss Johnson, another tragic poem. In all her works she exhibited a

40 “Dominion Illustrated,” Globe (Toronto), March 30, 1892, 8.
41 Music and the Drama section, Globe (Toronto), April 13, 1892, 8.
A further example of her fame and national success is presented in Globe in 1893, in which a large half-page photogravure of many popular photographs of Johnson is presented with a short article introducing Johnson as a Mohawk Indian as well as a poet, writer, and performer. The article reads:

Since her initial appearance in January of 1891, when she won instant success at the “Canadian Literature Evening” the subject of the illustration has had an unusual degree in recitals of her own prose and poetic compositions. During last fall and winter she gave no less than 125 recitals throughout Canada, and already her services are being secured for the approaching season. During the month of December she will fill a number of engagements under the auspices of Indian associations in Boston, New York and other American cities. It must be gratifying to this clever Canadian Indian that her talents have been so fully recognized both at home and abroad. We believe it is her intention to visit England at the close of the present season where, no doubt, she will have the same degree of success she has enjoyed on this side of the Atlantic.

Similar reviews are present in the newspaper articles throughout her career. Her Indian Princess dress is often commented on, such as in regards to her January 1900 performance at the Massey Music Hall, where Johnson is described as reciting in “Indian costume” and her two performances as very well received. In April 1894, Johnson’s tour in the United States (many of the performances supported by Indian and Historical Societies) and upcoming debut in England were publicly announced in an article in Globe that not only praised Johnson’s successful Canadian tours, but discussed her recent recitals in New York and New Jersey. This article conveys the Canadian public’s positive view of Johnson—which is extremely different in tone and appraisal than the majority of articles on Aboriginal peoples at that time:

Miss Pauline Johnson gave recitals this week in New York and New Jersey, and is engaged for several cities in Connecticut and Massachusetts this and next week, under the auspices of Indian and Historical Societies. She will sail for the old country on April 28, after giving a few farewell recitals in Canada … and while in England will make her first appearance there as a poet- elocutionist, and will also publish a volume of poems. She will return by the first of August to fill some engagements with American Chautauqua Assemblies and also, being under

42 Music and the Drama section, The Globe, November 1, 1893, 3. Another example of a positive review is from 1894, a review of a recital given by both Johnson and Mr. Owen E. Smily at West Association Hall in Toronto reads, “Every seat was filled, and many persons were standing at the recital given at West Association hall last evening… The audience were greatly pleased with the original and versatile selections of these two talented artists.” Globe (Toronto), December 15, 1894, 32.
43 “Miss Pauline Johnson,” Globe (Toronto), September 23, 1893, 2.
44 “Chit Chat,” Globe (Toronto), January 11 1900, 8.
contract for an extended tour in company with Mr. Smily and other artists, to the Pacific coast via the Canadian Northwest. Her many friends will thus be pleased to see Miss Johnson’s fame spreading, both in the States and England.45

Throughout her career, her performance tours were announced to the public in the local and national newspapers. For example, in 1894, during her tour of Western Canada and the Pacific Coast with Owen Smily, a dispatch from Winnipeg reviewed her performances during her stay in the city: “An audience of 1500 people assembled at their opening night at Grace Methodist Church. The press of the city is unanimous in its verdict that these two artists present one of the most satisfactory programmes that has ever been before a Winnipeg audience. At their last engagement in North Presbyterian Church many were turned away unable to find even standing room.”46

Together with costumes reflecting notions of the romantic Indian, Johnson was able to make a space to share her provocative stories, voicing Aboriginal reality from an Indigenous point of view. Through my exploration of Johnson’s dynamic acts of performativity, I have come to understand her performances as a historical precedent for contemporary Aboriginal performance art as political intervention. This link underscores the continuing relevance of her work to contemporary Indigenous performance art and to the use of stories in Native literature, theatre, music, and art to resist and to re-voice. Johnson’s literary work, which was subsequently performed for settler audiences, participates then in the larger context of Indigenous resistance and self-determined political activism. As Emma LaRocque argues, “in Canada, as elsewhere much of Native writing, whether blunt or subtle, is protest literature in that it speaks to the process of our colonization: dispossession, objectification, marginalization, and that constant struggle for cultural survival expressed in the movement for structural and psychological self-determination.”47

Johnson’s work is acknowledged by contemporary Aboriginal women writers and performance artists as, in Gerson and Strong-Boag’s words, “an enabling foremother.”48 In a recent

45 Music and the Drama section, Globe (Toronto), April 2, 1894, 8.
46 Music and the Drama section, Globe (Toronto), September 17, 1894, 8. Yet another example of her closely followed national tours appears in 1895, where Johnson’s second-cross continent tour, opening in Montreal at Windsor Hall is discussed. It also reads that despite the fact that the current entertainment season’s economic lull, both she and Mr. Smily has over 200 recitals, stating these performance evenings as evidence of their continued popularity in Canada. It also states, that “they will extend their field into the United States upon this trip, as, after filling dates in the lower Provinces and Eastern States, they will go via the Union Pacific to San Francisco.” Music and the Drama section, Globe (Toronto), June 6, 1895, 8.
performance by Blondeau for example, in Montreal at the MAI gallery, which was her persona
Cosmosquaw’s final performance, Blondeau used Johnson’s voice in the concluding scene (fig. 10).

Figure 10: Lori Blondeau, Cosmosquaw, Hochelaga Revisited, 2008. Photo Credit: Carla Taunton.

Blondeau acknowledged Johnson’s legacy as both an Aboriginal woman writer and performer on her ancestral Mohawk land. Cosmosquaw was introduced in Montreal/Hochelaga in 1996, and as Ryan Rice, curator of the show Hochelaga Revisited, writes, “After 13 years, Blondeau returned to Montreal to respectfully retire Cosmosquaw to her place of origin.” At the end of her performance, Blondeau incorporated Pauline Johnson’s “Ojistoh,” a poem about a faithful Mohawk woman who has been captured by enemy Hurons. Ryan states, “Cosmosquaw invokes the power of the heroine Ojistoh to reflect upon a women’s sense of pride, passion, and power in love as well as in life, all of which she herself represents. ‘Ojistoh’ is Cosmosquaw’s tribute to the local, acknowledging an Iroquoian soul at the heart of Hochelaga [Montreal]. She has returned to this place as an
Blondeau’s inclusion of Johnson’s poems is arguably a tribute to Johnson’s performance legacy of resistance, intervention, and cultural continuance.

As mentioned above, my analysis of Pauline Johnson’s performative storytelling as socio-cultural political resistance draws on Vizenor’s concept of survivance. In this sense, performative storytelling is a process that can be used to interrupt and intervene in colonial histories, to re-establish self-determined representations, and to provoke political resistance. Indigenous peoples have always understood that continual change and adaptation is a fundamental element of their culture. Recognition of this supports the argument that Pauline Johnson’s theatrical performances on stage participate within the traditions of both Indigenous performance and storytelling. Although Johnson is widely celebrated for her writing, for the purposes of this discussion her work as performance artist is the central focus. Reading her written words prompted me to explore her role as storyteller—her choices of dress, body postures, and poses suggest that she was a performer and a performance artist. In fact, I would argue that she was a product of her historical moment and cultural, gendered, and racial contexts.

Her poems and essays substantiate her identification as an advocate for Indigenous and women’s rights. In an 1892 article in The Toronto Star, which she entitled “A Strong Race Opinion on the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction,” Johnson wrote,

The term ‘Indian’ signifies about as much as the term ‘European’ but I cannot recall ever having read a story where the heroine was described as a ‘European’. The Indian girl we meet in cold type, however, is rarely distressed by having to belong to any tribe, or to reflect any tribal characteristics. She is merely a wholesale sort of admixture of any band existing between the MicMacs of Gaspé and the Kwaw-Kwilth of British Columbia.

Clearly, Johnson was critical of the homogeneous representation of Aboriginal women in popular culture. She also criticized Euro-Canadian authors who wrote about Aboriginal culture without knowledge of it, who have “never been on an Indian reserve in their lives, have never met a ‘real live’ redman. What wonder that their conception of a people they are ignorant of is dwarfed, erroneous, and delusive.” Another provocative example of her resistance and political writing is her short story collection The Moccasin Maker, published after her death in 1913. Her story As It

49 Ryan Rice, “Viva Tiohtiaga or Hochelaga Revisited,” in Hochelaga Revisited (Montreal: MAI. 2009), 16.
50 Sheila Johnston, Buckskin and BroADCLOTH: A Celebration of E. Pauline Johnson Tekahionwake (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History, 1997), 110. The Toronto Star, May 22, 1892. It is interesting to note that Johnson is also one of the included authors of the first encyclopaedia on Canada, writing the section on the history of the Iroquois people. “Great Canadian Work,” Globe (Toronto), March 8, 1897, cover-page.
51 Johnston, Buckskin and BroADCLOTH, 110. The Toronto Star, May 22, 1892.
Was in the Beginning includes a contemporary reference to residential schools/mission schools in the plains, where she writes of the experiences of children taken away from their families and the punishments they experienced for continuing their cultural knowledge—such as language. She writes,

The first grief of my life was when we reached the mission. They took my buckskin dress off, saying I was now a little Christian girl and must dress like all the white people at the mission. Oh, how I hated that stiff new calico dress and those leather shoes! But, little as I was, I said nothing, only thought of the time when I should be grown, and do as my mother did, and wear the buckskins and the blanket. My next serious grief was when I began to speak the English, that they forbade me to use any Cree words whatever. The rule of the school was that any child heard using its native tongue must get a slight punishment. I never understood it, I cannot understand it now, why the use of my dear Cree tongue could be a matter for correction or an action deserving punishment.

Similar stories are now being shared by survivors of residential schools and being archived through National and local meetings organized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In recent years since the formal apology by the Canadian Government in 2008, the general public has repeatedly expressed shock and shame for the treatment and abuse endured by Aboriginal children. Reading Johnson’s prose provokes the question: What was the reception of her stories by her contemporary society? Johnson communicated an Indigenous point of view to the general non-Indigenous public—in many cases, presenting experiences she had not had, but nonetheless perspectives of the pan-Indian experience in North America. This was a radical act. These were acts of resistance and intervention. In her day, the discussion of history from an Aboriginal perspective was not common practice, especially from a Native woman. Her short stories, opinion pieces and poems were published in mainstream newspapers and women’s daily’s, and her performances and tours were consistently advertised and reviewed in popular press, such as Globe and the Toronto Star. These facts highlight several questions about Johnson: For instance, how did she negotiate such spaces for her performative political interventions? I examine possible answers to this question in the next chapter, looking to her strategies of dress and performance.

The stories Johnson performed examined the complex issues of race and gender while illuminating Indigenous histories and their relationship to colonial narratives. Her performances of her poems played into the legacy of exoticism and romanticism affixed to Aboriginal representation; at the same time, they criticized assimilation and land loss and challenged the

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audience’s understanding of what constitutes an “Indian” woman. Her performances were complex and strategic stagings, sites from which she offered verses that captured the beauty of the Canadian landscape that reflected notions of Canada as Wilderness, distinct from the identities of the United States. But sites from which she also shared the complexities and richness of Aboriginal cultures and the experiences of colonization for Aboriginal peoples. In this sense, her performances had a duality: on the one hand, they participated in the larger attempt to create and perpetuate a national “Canadian” consciousness and identity, one that included aspects of Indigenous iconography; and on the other, they intervened in this national narrative that excluded Indigenous peoples and did not recognize Indigenous sovereignty over Aboriginal land, bodies, and cultures.

Pauline Johnson thus subversively appropriated the Eurocentric misunderstandings and stereotypical representations of Indigenous culture into her performances. In other words, her performative storytelling presented resistance to colonial stereotypes and assimilation, while at the same time captivating her audiences with Eurocentric representations of “Indianness.” Strong-Boag has critically examined Johnson’s relationship with Canada and the British Empire, as an Aboriginal woman whose family were members of the Mohawk United Empire Loyalists. She acutely characterizes Johnson’s family’s experiences and position as hybrid, due to her English mother and activist Mohawk father, George Johnson. Strong-Boag argues,

While endeavoursing to chart her course as a Native and as a woman, Pauline Johnson had to locate and define herself as a Canadian at a time when this identity was far from sure. This preoccupation, which is central to her writings, also revealed how far she had moved from the insistence of other Christian Iroquois on their status as allies of Great Britain rather than as citizens of Canada. Nationalisms in various forms competed for adherents and legitimacy (Berger). As the first post-Confederation collection of Canadian verse, *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889), indicates, poets were among those who sought to capture the essence of what it meant to grow up in the northern half of the continent. A contributor to that influential volume, Pauline Johnson never gave up the effort to articulate a founding tradition of narrative and metaphor in the wider context of British cultural and political imperialism. Her championship of a cultural and racial “hybridity” rooted in the northern landscape recalls her own family’s efforts on the Grand River. Although Johnson has little to say about French Canada, she shifts the question of racial partnership away from the prevailing Eurocentrism to include Natives.53

This is exemplified in her famous work, “The Song My Paddle Sings,” in which Johnson describes paddling a canoe. This is a stereotypical and iconic image prominent in representations of Indigenous women within popular culture but also of Canadian identity, which she orally performs

to her non-Indigenous audience. The inclusion of images of Indigenous cultures through the lens of the “mainstream” settler society enabled a negotiation of a space for her acts of socio-political intervention. Arguably, the result of her performances could be interpreted as reaffirming notions of romanticism. However, I would argue that it was Johnson’s understanding of the social climate within which she was situated that enabled her to play with images such as the romantic “Indian Princess,” to subvert them and intervene within the discourse of colonial representations. The socio-cultural and economic climate within which Johnson made such negotiations explains the popularity of both her performances and her writing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A period of rapid urbanization and industrialization, this modern era of Canadian history was marked by settler society’s longing for a so-called simpler life—for a state of being reflecting notions of the primitive, imagined as existing in nature and connected to Indigenous peoples and their culture. As Strong-Boag argues, “She had to sell to the very society she critiqued, her need for respectability and sympathy juxtaposed with a message that potentially unsettled conventions of race and gender.”

Her successful stagings of activism were facilitated by her sensitivity to this socio-cultural and political climate and her engagement with the developing narrative of Canadian identity. In Chapter 5, I revisit Johnson’s strategies of performing resistance through her body. Through Pauline Johnson’s prose and dramatic performances, we can today recognize an intention to use performative storytelling as a means for intervention. She is arguably one of the first Indigenous modern storyteller/activist/performance artists. By acknowledging her dynamic acts of performativity, we can locate her performative practice as a historical precedent for contemporary Aboriginal performance art and for Aboriginal interventionist theatre. Johnson’s writing also suggests that, inasmuch as she linked herself with both Native and non-Native heritages, she was an “interpreter” in Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s more recent, now well-known, sense of the term. Interpreters always come from the colonized culture, and since the role entails two antithetical tasks in a colonial setting—“to acquire the power of the new language and culture in order to preserve the old, even whilst [interpretation] assists the invaders in the overwhelming of that culture”—interpreters cannot (and realize they cannot) ever again “live completely through either discourse.”

At the height of colonial assimilation, Johnson is but one example of Indigenous resistance through cultural practice. Johnson employed Indigenous performative storytelling as a strategy to

54 Ibid., 374.
gain mobility, leadership, and respect. She exploited and manipulated settler-colonial fascination with the exotic other—the Indian Princess—and their rejection of the Squaw. In doing this, she staged acts of resistance in an era that focused on silencing and eradicating Indigenous histories. This performative countering of colonization is continued today by Indigenous artists, such as Cree-Saulteaux performance artist Lori Blondeau, who continue the tradition of self-determined political expression by means of story. This is exemplified in Blondeau’s performance *Are You My Mother?* (fig. 11) (which I explore in the next chapter), an exploration of the artists’ family histories and survival of residential schools. By performing this work in the midst of the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (IRSRC) tribunal, Blondeau contributed to the personal stories of the survivors interviewed by federal representatives and lawyers. Gillian Whitlock argues that the work of the IRSRC was an act of reconciliation and demanded the government bear witness to atrocities committed on Indigenous children in its name. She argues that the autobiographical acts in part with the work of reconciliation, and she stresses the effectiveness of reconciliation for bringing about socio-political change. In this regard, Blondeau’s inclusion of her family’s stories of residential school can be seen as testimonials of their experiences and, when performed, call for a bearing of witness by her audience. Contemporary performance art, exemplified here by Blondeau, emulates and is connected to Johnson’s turn-of-the-century poetry performances, as they both

address contemporary politics to reveal histories and stage Indigenous cultural and political resistance.

In this sense, Johnson together with contemporary artists Belmore and Blondeau can be situated within the discourse of Aboriginal performance art, their methods and tools of engagement reflecting the socio-political climates of their time. They are linked by their practice of performative storytelling for Indigenous empowerment. Pauline Johnson has left a powerful legacy—she was an Aboriginal artist who performed stories to voice Indigenous histories, presence, and identities in the context of colonial Canada.

**Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for Any Purpose—Rebecca Belmore**

*Mawu-che-hitoowin* is a site for sharing stories. Belmore’s installation *Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for Any Purpose* (1992) (fig. 12) was created for the National Gallery of Canada’s Land, Spirit, Power exhibition. The installation consisted of a painted plywood platform suggesting old linoleum and a circle of eight chairs taken from her own kitchen and from homes of her women friends and family. Earphones were placed on each chair, enabling the viewer to participate in the circle, to listen to the stories being shared. In place of Belmore’s performative body, the audience was called upon to participate performatively. Sitting on these women’s chairs and listening to their stories, the viewer listened to life experiences of Aboriginal women. The women’s circle introduced the viewer to Belmore’s community of women—learning the sources

![Image of installation](image_url)

of their struggles, joys, and strength. These are voices and stories that have been neglected, ignored, and discarded by the Canadian mainstream, or rather settler society. Belmore’s audience is called upon to bear witness both to the colonial experience and, more importantly, to Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. From this point of view, her deployment of narrative pulls into public circulation traces of memory, knowledge, and stories that have been discarded, camouflaged, or silenced by dominant discourses, and subsequently “contaminates them with a dissonant beat.”

In essence, Belmore’s installation—as are other performances and videos that I discuss by Belmore, Blondeau, Claxton, and L’Hirondelle—is a site of Indigenous testimony; it is a storytelling circle. Shoshana Felman, a scholar of comparative literature who specializes in issues of trauma and testimony, suggests that

as a relation to events [a witness’ testimony] seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrence that have to settle into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference … Texts that testify do not simply report facts but, in different ways, encounter—and make us encounter—strangeness.

Although Felman is talking about the affect that text can have in recounting trauma, her argument can be applied to the visual and oral narratives of Belmore’s performance practice. The reception of art, similar to the reception of knowledge, is highly subjective, meaning that audience is a key element in performative art. The knowledge thus bequeathed will ultimately engender discoveries of both new and old histories/stories. Belmore’s sharing of these diverse stories creates an opportunity for viewers to take this knowledge, share it with others within their community, and reflect on their understanding of Aboriginal culture and history. In addition, her act of storytelling opens the door to cross-cultural exchanges while offering more narratives from an empowered Indigenous perspective.

Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips note that Belmore’s piece creates a space for listening, talking, and reaching understanding. As Phillips suggests, Belmore welcomed her viewers into the circle and used traditional Aboriginal tactics for conflict resolution: seeking understanding through

talking circles and counsel of elders. Robert Houle discusses the interactive aspect of the installation, making connection between the listening of the women’s stories and the witnessing of Native theatre. He writes, “Their voice brought an authority to the stories that recalls the eminent Cree playwright Thomson Highway’s play The Rez Sisters (1988). As brother to eight sisters, I can imagine Rebecca’s borrowed chairs being occupied by Thomson’s characters.” Mawu-che-hitoowin: A Gathering of People for Any Purpose participates in the discourse of Indigenous self-determined representation by incorporating Indigenous women’s stories that have historically not been recognized or listened to, stories that have been forgotten. These absent voices of Aboriginal women claim a space within a national local. Jessica Bradley notes in her essay “Art and the Object of Performance” that this work shares individual women’s lives, including Belmore’s, through stories, “the way they might have when sitting together around the warmth of a kitchen stove.” In this way, Belmore incorporates into her installation distinct traditions of Aboriginal cultures and everyday experiences of Aboriginal women while negotiating a space for the sharing of Indigenous lived experience.

This inclusion of Indigenous storytelling distinguishes Belmore’s art performative practice in terms of her individuality as an artist, but also in terms of her identity as an Anishnaabe woman. Jean Fisher argues that the act of positioning art work within a tradition is not a form of silent protest but rather a form of intervention. Belmore’s performances utilize traditions of storytelling to destabilize colonial agendas embedded in settler Canada. Many of the ritual and traditional actions of Aboriginal culture she recalls have been displaced through processes of colonization. In an interview with Belmore, Scott Watson asked her about a previous statement she had made that noted bodily presence and absence as a constantly loaded metaphor for the condition of Aboriginal people in Canada. Belmore responded,

I would like to say something about absence and the loss of my own language. In me, the reality is that my own aboriginal tongue is gone. I grew up in a strange lingual space where I spent childhood summer on the periphery of the Anishinabe language and where I was silently encouraged to fully embrace the English language. One has to keep in mind that there was a serious attempt by governments

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to destroy aboriginal languages. I am part of that plan. In retrospect, I can understand my mother’s motive to keep me away from my own language as a way of preparing me for the future. As a youth, I was witness to a traditional way of life that I would eventually leave behind. But it was never about leaving something behind; it was about taking something into the future. At least that is how I see it at this point in my life.  

Belmore’s strategy of removing her body and including her voice, along with other Aboriginal women’s stories, encourages the witness to consider the absence of Indigenous perspectives in national histories. The chair is an ongoing inclusion in Belmore’s performative work, evoking the absence of Indigenous bodies and memories, as I discuss later in this chapter in relation to her *Bury My Heart*, in which the story is conveyed through bodily gestures rather than voice.

**Cistemaw iyiniw ohci (for the tobacco being)—Cheryl L’Hirondelle**

Cheryl L’Hirondelle’s (*waynohtêw*) performances embody the concept of “nêhiyawîhcikêwin” (Cree teachings) and examine the place of tradition, or rather cultural continuities and continuance, in a post-industrial, postcolonial contemporary world. Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew, Huron-Wendat new media artist and curator, comments on L’Hirondelle’s art practice:

> In a manner more aligned with tradition, from a critical distance but certainly not isolated from academia, *waynohtêw’s* devotion to “nêhiyawîhcikêwin” (Cree teachings) is precisely that—a practice of the Cree way, of Cree culture. She grounds it in face-to-face relationships with discussions both “trivial and sublime,” visiting and learning from Elders, close relationships with friends and family, inscribing her experience within creative projects and, ‘always, the ceremonial life’. 

L’Hirondelle’s key strategies in her 2001 performance of *Cistemaw Iyiniw Ohci* (fig. 13), meaning for the tobacco being, performed on the Makwa Sahgaiehcan reserve in northern Saskatchewan,


include cultural continuance/practice, storytelling, and memory. *Cistemaw Iyiniw*  


*Ohci* is arguably a performance of history through the acts of continuing cultural practice, sharing stories, and remembering both the artist and the community. In her article, “Interventions in Traditional Territories: “Cistemaw Iyiniw Ohci,”” A Performance by Cheryl L’Hirondelle,” Candice Hopkins states that this performance re-enacted “running done two generations earlier by Cistemaw Iyiniw, a Cree man who delivered tobacco from community to community to ask for their attendance and support at ceremonies,” bringing performance art to Makwa Sahgaiehcan, a remote reserve in northern Saskatchewan. In this ongoing conversation within the Aboriginal arts community, artists and curators are challenged by the concept of audience and the question of who makes up that gallery audience. Performance and video artist Archer Pechawis writes, “In this performance L’Hirondelle illuminates the themes that run through her work: *nêhiyawîhcîkêwin*, intervention in ‘public’ space and disregard for accepted notions of audience.” In other words, L’Hirondelle’s act of bringing performance art to Makwa Sahgaiehcan reserve, a remote location whose community members would have had little exposure to performance and contemporary art, is an act of intervention and also of inclusion (fig. 14).

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67 Pechawis, “Cheryl L’Hirondelle.”
In a recent interview published in _FUSE_, Anishnawbe-kwe curator Wanda Nanibush asked L’Hirondelle, “Is there a difference in the meaning of your work in the context of an Aboriginal audience? We rarely get to travel our art to our own people. Have you found that to be true?” L’Hirondelle, referring to her experiences at the Development of Performance gathering organized by Tanya Mars and Johanna Householder, stated that she “was moved by the interventionist work …, but some of it was kind of like an inside joke”:

If you did not get the joke, it was meant to be an abrasive piece, meant to irritate the audience. I just have so much love for people that I do not want to irritate people in that community. You do not want to irritate people who have been traumatized or who have been left on the outside. So I wanted to subvert that in some way. I asked instead how you could go onto a reserve and do work that just embraced people. That’s where _cistemaw iyiniw ohci_ came from. I wanted to start doing these homages. The run was 21km and began on Crown land, where Big Bear fought the North West Mounted Police during the North West Resistance, and ended at the residence of an Elder at Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation. I did it as an homage to honour the community’s ceremonial runner, Cistemaw Iyiniw. The old ladies on the reserve were phoning each other, saying “she’s running for our ancestors.” People would drive by and yell out their truck windows, “ahlkameyimew” (keep going).68

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This work is about community engagement, which is arguably an act of acknowledgment and an arts-based approach of recognition. L’Hirondelle’s describes one of her “most poignant moments,” experienced at a Tribe Inc. sponsored artist talk the day before her run:

We held it at the school. When you are working with youth, if they do not leave the room that’s a standing ovation. The standing “O” on a reserve is when everyone comes up afterwards and shakes hands with you. At the end of my talk, this youth who was at the back looking disinterested, legs stretched out, asked a question. I had been talking about how I would stop at people’s houses who tagged their doors. I would know I could go there for water on my run. This youth asked what he would have to write on his house to get me to stop and visit the next day. I almost wept.\(^69\)

L’Hirondelle’s conversation with Nanibush reveals the artist’s intentions for her performance to interact with the community, as well as her use of the performative for socio-cultural continuance and resistance. In other words, she was performing and acknowledging cultural knowledge and histories/stories of the people, specifically for a local community, the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation. Reserves and other more rural and remote locations tend not to be included and incorporated into gallery programming and travelling exhibition schedules. So, from the art-world perspective, this performance intervenes in entrenched colonial spaces—such as the gallery and the museum—by using the reserve as the site of performance.

However, perhaps more importantly, *Cistemaw Iyiniw Ohci* creates a site for multi-generational exchanges, recalling the community’s cultural knowledge. In Hopkin’s astute analysis of this performance, L’Hirondelle’s “goal was to engage another kind of viewer”— audience members from Makwa Sahgaiehcan—and in order to do this she has to “negotiate a new set of rules and develop a different set of cultural strategies.” Hopkin’s also quotes a pre-performance remark by the artist: “[T]he activity has to somehow engage people instead of alienate them. It has to occur where people live and where performance has survived for many years—in people’s camps, homes and at the kitchen table.” Hopkin’s concludes, “Her task of engaging people instead of alienating them was determined from the outset. Her strategy was to stage the performance in the local, engaging the community by performing a part of their history\(^70\) L’Hirondelle’s comment that performance has survived in the homes, camps, and the kitchen’s of Indigenous peoples is very insightful. The artists’ words evoke and allude to Indigenous peoples struggles with colonialism tactics of oppression, marginalization, and assimilation (seen in such government legislations as the

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 30.

\(^{70}\) Hopkins, “Interventions,” 5.
Ceremonial ban of 1894-1951). Despite such oppressive agendas, diverse and sophisticated socio-political, spiritual, and cultural practices continue.

I make this connection here to highlight the significance of L’Hirondelle’s performance. It is a performative act of cultural continuance that combines an homage to the local practice of delivering sacred medicine (tobacco) through the action of running with the transmission of Cree cultural knowledge/language via syllabics and language. In this way, Cistemaw Iyiniw Ohci is a multivocal site of storytelling, one that is centered in Cree knowledge, stories, and memories of the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nations and the artist. Through her act of running, stopping along her 21km route at local homes and meeting with local people, she uses performance art as a site for engaging with a local community (fig. 15).


In Ahasiw Maskegon Iskwew’s article “Waynohtew and the Apihtawikosisan,” L’Hirondelle’s words express her impetus for her performance:

In June of 2000, I visited Mr. Happy Blackbird of Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation in Saskatchewan to ask him to say certain technological terms in cree, as the terms included words such as radio, television, electricity, telephone—it reminded Mr. Blackbird of how information was transmitted prior to electricity. He hold the story of his grandfather, Cistemaw iyiniw who travelled between makwas sahgaiehcan, onion lake, joseph bigead, Chitik Lake, Thunderchild, Waterhen lake, and Flying Dust First Nations—inviting people to upcoming ceremonies. A few weeks later I had a strong dream about process and running. I was immediately compelled to start running daily and in the process shed 50 pounds over the course of the next year, the story of cistemaw iyiniw stayed with me and I felt both a connection to
him and his story, as well as a deep sense of gratitude that such a person and a story could change my life in such a profound way. I knew I would have to somehow honour him and started to imagine what kind of project I could create.\textsuperscript{71}

These words clearly reveal \textit{Cistemaw iyiniw ohci}'s connections to \textit{nehiyawihcikewin} (Cree teachings), Cree language, oral memory, as well as the role of storytelling in transmitting knowledge and in Indigenous concepts of memory. She further discusses her act of running, prior to the performance, as actions that leading her to remember stories:

As I continued running, I one day found myself doing my daily hour runs through a remote northern cree/dene/metis community and noticed how my actions and presence caused a stir. Dogs ran with me, kids came outside to say hi, cars slowed to observe my journey. I thought about the many elders I had met and listened to, told stories of how we as Aboriginal people were once very physically active. I also thought about stories told to me about our inherent friendliness and how a long time ago strangers were always welcomed and fed [(fig. 16)].\textsuperscript{72}


The meanings of the multifaceted performance shift from the local site of the performance, a performance for the community, to my positioning of writing about it after the fact not as a member of the community but as a white-settler woman.


\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 311.
I would argue that this work participates, in a similar way to the other performances I discuss in this chapter, to the project of decolonization. *Cistemaw Iyiwi Ohni* accomplishes a multivocality that engages the artist’s experience of stories and the community’s memory of cultural practice and both the specific life of their ancestor, Cistemaw, and ancestors in general. As several women of the community stated, L’Hirondelle “was running for our ancestors.” She participated as a performance artist and a woman of Cree heritage with the histories and stories of the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nations, and simultaneously reveals Indigenous oral histories and perspectives that have historically been ignored, silenced, and marginalized in settler Canada. In this way, L’Hirondelle’s art practice, exemplified in *Cistemwa Iyiwi Ohni*, privileges stories and oral knowledge performing histories and memories. In doing this, she contributes to an Indigenous archive of cultural knowledge by transmitting knowledge through the performance of her body. Performance art can participate in the indigenization of archives, creating new memories and stories from Indigenous perspectives about Indigenous experiences.

êkâyapâhkaci (the beauty within/don’t freeze up)—Cheryl L’Hirondelle

*Êkâyapâhkaci* (don’t freeze up) is another example of L’Hirondelle’s performative storytelling practice (fig. 17). This performance has adapted over time and is site specific—which could be conceptually seen as a reference to Indigenous cultural and customary practices, which have always changed and adapted over time. *Êkâyapâhkaci* was first performed at the Banff Centre in 2005 and was most recently installed at Modern Fuel Artist Run Centre in Kingston, Ontario in

![Figure 17: Cheryl L’Hirondelle, êkâyapâhkaci (the beauty within/don’t freeze up). First Vision on-line exhibition, Grunt Gallery. Accessed March 11, 2011.](http://www.firstvisionart.com/archer/cheryl.html)
Chronotopic Village, an exhibition curated by Wanda Nanibush. In October 2008, she performed this work, but with some differences from the 2005 performance, as part of the Imagine Native programming organized by FADO Performance Art Centre. In the curatorial statement for L’Hirondelle’s recent 2008 performance êkâyapâhkaci is described as operating through an intersection of nomadic site-specificity, visual patterning, language, narrative, movement and rhythm. In this work the artist stages a performance presented under an adaptable traveling tent from where she relates and offers information to the audience using her body, voice and graffiti/tagging. The audience, by proximity and in accepting her invitation to witness her activities “comes in from the cold” and becomes part of her “camp.”

In her 2005 performance, L’Hirondelle dances and sings and writes graffiti on the walls behind the white tent (fig. 18). The audience is separated from the performer and can see her reflection through back lighting. They are witnesses to her shadows and can hear and listen to her voice. Towards the end of the performance, L’Hirondelle cuts an opening into the tent, revealing herself, and the inside of her performance space (fig. 19). The audience is then witness to the traces of her performative gestures, the circle of tealights on the floor within which she has been dancing, and the Cree syllabics graffitied on the wall behind her (fig. 20). She is wearing underwear, a bra, and a headset microphone. At this point in the performance she starts dancing, and then sings in Cree to a hip hop beat (fig. 21). The last words she shares with the audience, once again in Cree, are


“Peace Out,” which she repeats in English, exiting the tent/performance space.

Tanya Willard in her curatorial essay for the Beat Nation exhibition in Vancouver (at the Grunt Gallery) states, “In Cheryl L’Hirondelle’s work, ekayapâhkaci, inspired by the conscious hip hop movement, Cree syllabics are tagged onto the urbanscape. Cheryl’s engagement with this work is about empowerment, about writing Cree culture back onto the land and cityscape.”


**Ekayaphakaci**, like other of L’Hirondelle’s works, exemplifies the intersection and investigation of nehiyawin and Indigenous peoples’ historical and contemporary experiences. Many of her works are physically demanding. Her body’s endurance in site-specific performances interconnects with Indigenous histories, representing cultural continuity, the Indigenous history of resistance, and intervention. Her body is her site for telling stories through dancing, storytelling, and rhythm. As Archer Pewachis writes,

> Her practice is an investigation of the intersection of Cree worldview (nêhiyawin) and the creative inter/multidisciplinary inherent in indigenous, world and (so called) youth cultures. As part of this investigation, L’Hirondelle develops performative physical endurances, infiltrations and interventions, site-specific installations, interactive net. art projects and keeps singing, making rhythm, dancing and telling stories whenever and where ever she can.74

The 2008 performance of *êkáya-pâhkaci* [ee-guy-uh-puck-a-chee] differs slightly in its performative elements. In this performance the artist once again dances and speaks in Cree to the audience behind the tent. The audience is seated on carpets in the gallery space, with baskets of berries and food to share. In spite of the disconnect for many audience members who do not understand Cree, the shadow reflections of the artist remind the witnesses to listen to what is not understandable and to bear witness to the movement of L’Hirondelle’s body. After a physically challenging dance, she cuts through the tent and exits, wandering through the crowd of seated

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74 Pechawis, “Cheryl L’Hirondelle.”
audience members talking to individuals and to the collective. She is wearing a nude-coloured undergarment with red tassels attached to her nipples. ̀Ékāya-pāhkaci is a powerful performance. L’Hirondelle uses the Cree language and rhythm to create a sensually provocative, humourous, and thoughtful performance that combines stories and the artist’s experience of learning Cree with Cree cultural knowledge and lived experiences.

**Sacred Clown—Skeena Reece**

As part the Vancouver-based Tomorrow Collective’s sixth edition of its experimental exhibition Brief Encounters in 2007, Skeena Reece created *Sacred Clown*, a collaborative performance with Jesse Scott (fig. 22). She writes,

> Building on our strengths and intersecting our styles, Jesse Scott and I decided to do a live performance with “v-jaying.” I wrote and performed for the pre-recorded video used as a component of the live performance, as well as writing and directing my live performance. Jesse Scott shot the video and directed his own live performance as the video jockey or “VJ.” The script was largely improvisational with loose themes of child sexual abuse, domestic violence and other preconceived concepts of the taboo (that is, the lateral violence aforementioned). The purpose was to communicate through these media and build our performance in this way.\(^{75}\)

*Sacred Clown* employs concepts and traditional stories of Raven the Trickster and the Sacred Clown. As Reece writes in her essay “Raven the Trickster and the Sacred Clown”,

> Raven is well known by the Tribes of the Northwest Coast of Canada as a Trickster. There are traditional roles in society for real-life Tricksters, who either take on the role or are appointed by peers, and there are ancient stories of Tricksters of which their teachings are shared for generations. A Trickster’s ultimate role is to act as a conduit, to gently and safely remind us of the beliefs we hold so passionately, for right or wrong, to illuminate our human weakness, and to give us a chance to change our direction.

> Raven can be compared to the Pueblo Sacred Clown of the Hopi, Backwards People or Heyoka; the Trickster Coyote, Trickster Spider or Iktomi of the Lakota; and the Wiisagejaak or Crane Manitou of the Cree and other Tribes. My understanding of Sacred Clowns comes from the Hopi Indians in the south of Turtle Island (North America). Despite being a Tsimshian (Coastal) Cree (Plains) performer who is far from these official and historic clown troupes, I still know

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these entities well.\textsuperscript{76}


In this article, Reece also discusses her performance \textit{Sacred Clown}. My witnessing of the video documentation of the performance and reading of Reece’s performative essay elucidated for me her role as a performer/researcher. Her performance connects the act of storytelling to the act of cultural continuance and political resistance; her written article mirrors these connections. Below, I am creating a site for the reader (and myself) to listen to Reece’s words without interjections or interruptions. Her writing is an extension of her art practice, which creates an opportunity to experience her performance and her role as Sacred Clown through her own voice and experience. I have included several sections from her performative essay, the first two paragraphs explain the art of sacred clowning, and the other sections concurrently describe her experience as performer.

In my experience, the art of ‘sacred clowning’ is not simply being uncouth and saying rude things, but is meant to be a direct provocation of common belief systems, to discover that which is sacred and true. Put simply, confronting ‘truth’ is achieved by making contrary statements or alluding to commonly known falsehoods. In this process, common beliefs are presented to audience members in a contrary tone. Often their reaction is defensive, prompting quick rebuttals about why ‘in fact, that is not true’. This is usually followed by debate that leaves the audience with more to examine, rather than simply concluding something is or isn’t ‘true’. It is through this process that beliefs can be identified, questioned, and perhaps rebuilt or even strengthened.\textsuperscript{77}

Sacred clowning is not something that can be easily described. Intentions vary, but

\textsuperscript{76} Reece, “‘Raven the Trickster,’” 116.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 116–7.
Clowns almost always seek to provoke others. Not to be confused, Tricksters employ every deceit to achieve their goal, which is not always noble. Often their intention of self-preservation backfires and everyone learns from the bungle. Contrary entities like Sacred Clowns may live counter to the dominant groups within society and make no apology or pretense in doing so. I believe that these characters simultaneously elicit both respect and fear from their actions. On one hand, Clowns are honoured for holding a unique sensibility and bearing a burden to identify and challenge cultural norms in society; on the other, they are feared for saying and doing things that demand that those around them see and feel things not normally expressed. In this context, clowning is understood to be more than a communication of harmless satire; in fact, here, a dichotomy of safety and danger can be articulated. Similarly, the Trickster is often demonised for his selfish ways, but it is a mistake to construe him as an evil entity who is simply disruptive and whose unprovoked rudeness is intolerable. Consequently, the Trickster holds powerful gifts and medicines that can be used in our collective healing – even if it is completely unintentional.  

After the introductions, the performance begins with a large projection of my face close-up, filling the entire back wall of the performance space. As our cue, Scott employs the pre-recorded video: ‘I’m sorry, I’m really sorry, please forgive me’. Scott plays this video knowing that I will be entering at the back of the room and walking through the crowd whispering prayers. My hair in misshapen braids sticking out on all sides, I walked around the room speaking softly and making my way to the stage. The audience doesn’t know what to expect. I am nude, except for a covering of painted black-and-white stripes, in the style of Hopi Sacred Clown regalia [(fig. 23)]. The opening introduction, based on my brief ‘bio’, identified me as Tahltan, which is an entirely different tribal affiliation. I began to wonder how important this project is and what it meant to my body of work.

The video projection is glitchy, jumping between shots of me looking down and to my right. We recorded it so it would look like I was having a conversation with myself on stage. The microphone and stand was placed stage left and in the video I speak down and towards myself. As I ascend the stage, the video jumps around to different sequences and interacts with my spoken word. As I stand there delivering statements that make people gasp and squirm, Scott and I find our rhythm. At first, Scott admitted he was stunned. He had no idea that I planned to join him nude until five minutes before the performance began. My script was only vaguely explained—he knew about the concept of the Sacred Clown, but the exact content was not discussed. Both unsure of our synchronicity and of what our impact would be, we began our dance [(fig. 24)].

The next night the performance had an entirely different vibe. They expected the naked, fat clown girl to walk around with her huge, hanging tits. The packed club was standing room only. I didn’t want to perform. I felt out of control. I felt unsafe. I’m sure that this performance was much shorter than the first. I am relieved when I

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78 Ibid., 117.
say the words, ‘Purple is a healing colour’, and wrap purple cloth around myself ceremonially and conclusively as a sign for protection and resolution. I rushed my exit, walking through the audience whispering, ‘Please Creator God, hear me, see me . . . don’t let me go . . . I beg you . . . hold me in your loving arms . . . ’ As I passed a medium-sized man who looked like an alcoholic Jesus in mountain climbing clothes, I made eye contact in the dark. ‘You are valuable,’ he said to me from his place near the wall, tucked away from the swarming crowds. ‘you, are valuable.’ Do I do this kind of work for this? Am I seeking to discern my value as an artist or as a person through the comparative process of tolerance? Perhaps, but one thing is certain—I risk my integrity for the artistic practice. As an Indigenous artist, I have nothing to lose. Perhaps I am expected to be rude and uncouth. Certainly, I am rarely assumed to be of high value. I appreciate the moment when those who witness my work, those who care enough to watch, first turn their heads like dogs hearing strange sounds coming from an unknown place.

Sacred Clown was an exercise. It was a test for me to acknowledge and follow through with my visions. As an Indigenous woman who grew up in cities far removed from the traditional dances and cultural protocols of my ancestors, I have questioned my intention. After two years I have accepted that I am contrary. I am backwards. I am a Trickster. I have no motive other than to contribute to the communication process in a way that demands illumination and an explanation of your beliefs. Now, unorthodox behaviours follow strict social laws, both written and unwritten. These laws are like IQ tests, they are highly racially biased and so intrinsically flawed. The ritual dancing and singing of ‘tongues’ in the Pentecostal Church, the bar-room brawls, the government-sanctioned holidays and the malicious floors of Parliament help to quell the need to burst out, to scream and to dress like your alter ego. The Sacred Clown does not accept these boundaries. The places that we extend to our Tricksters in society are not like in the past, where they were given food, accommodations and valuable space to do their work. Now, we are found in institutions, isolated from our families, scorned, arrested and killed. I can protect this art with my art practice, the way we understand it now. By admitting myself into the socially accepted art institutions and trading isolation for sabbaticals. These are some ways Sacred Clowns can survive. However, Sacred Clowns and Tricksters are not the moral harbingers of truth and justice. The banality of life can be the object of their mirroring reflections, and the simple gestures of day-to-day life can be amply lit for the individual to consider.

I learned that Sacred Clowning was not just a new term for my way of life, but an old way and a responsibility with important rules. Distinguishing a Sacred Clown from a jerk is subjective, but rarely do we leave you without some kind of medicine that you can use for healing. I find egos and rigid belief systems are most often the objects of our criticisms. Throughout the nations of Indigenous peoples, the roles of Sacred Clowns vary depending on society’s acceptance of them. Historically, there were Sacred Clown troupes that were expected to break up energies and compel a gathering of people to look deeper into their intention. In my own culture, the Tsimshian, we still have Settlement feasts to commemorate the one-year anniversary of someone’s death. People make presentations full of humour because it is a time to acknowledge and celebrate life and the living. Before, there must have been a stronger sense in us as human beings to differentiate real and perceived
danger. Indeed, the accuracy of this analysis ensured our survival. Now it seems as though the dominant cultures, with their laws and their beliefs, are pushing dissention toward the outer circle to further the indoctrination of their ‘truth’. A Sacred Clown would be able to engage with the offending behaviour and this would be acknowledged and may be acted upon. Even if we are not welcome, we still do our work—perhaps that is the burden of the unwelcome. The labour is only for those willing to listen, especially when it hurts. 79
Indigenous Performance Art: Storytelling as Intervention

In her article “Performance Art and The Native Artist: an Evolutionary Mix?” Aiyyana Maracle was compelled to ask, “Why are so many Native artists embracing performance as the vehicle for their stories and imagery?” As Maracle points out, performance art is a revolutionary artistic medium for the Aboriginal artist. It enables them to assert their voices and perspectives while being present, which gives them more control over the reception of their art. They are also witness to this engagement as their body is the focal point of the experience. Unpacking Maracle’s discussion further, I would argue that performance art offers Aboriginal artists a vehicle to physically make space for themselves, their stories, and Indigenous perspectives in places once segregated and controlled by settler society. Contemporary performance by Indigenous performance artists and troupes in museum spaces is also linked to colonial histories of exhibiting Indigenous peoples in “living displays” in both museums and world fairs. This history of display and intervention is further examined in Chapter 6, and is always already connected to the significance and potency of Indigenous performance art, whereby Indigenous body and story are reclaimed and asserted by means of self-determination.

Aboriginal cultures have long been the object of Western fascination, a curiosity that led to the development of academic fields and museums. Annie Coombes notes that, during the late 19th century, the museum housed Aboriginal cultural material collected and categorized for ethnological and anthropological study. The collections were used as visual “evidence” of racial inferiority in comparative studies with European “civilization” to justify colonial expansion and domination of Aboriginal lands and peoples. These collections have also been encoded as objects of aesthetic and exotic pleasure and spectacle for the Euro-settler gaze. In this discussion, the archive and the museum collection act as a visual metaphor of imperial histories and colonialism’s conquests. In Making Representations: Museum in the Post-Colonial Era, scholar of museum studies Moira G. Simpson writes,

80 Maracle, “Performance Art,” 100.
82 An example of an Indigenous performance is the Maori Cultural Performance by the Ngati Whatua O Orakei performance company at the Auckland War Memorial Museum, which is recognized as being one of the leading Maori cultural experiences in New Zealand. I attended one of their daily performances, where the all-Maori performance introduced its audience to Maori language, music, dance, and warfare training. This performance was obviously and overtly a staging of Maori self-determination. Auckland Museum, “Maori Cultural Performance,” accessed March 24, 2001, http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/?t=188.
In Europe, the tradition of museums as institutions both reflecting and serving a cultural elite has been long established and, in many, is still maintained. The museum, the “cabinet of curiosities”, is the storeroom of a nation’s treasures, providing a mirror in which are reflected the views and attitudes of dominant cultures, and the material evidence of the colonial achievements of the European cultures in which museums are rooted.\textsuperscript{84}

In this sense, recent Indigenous performances in the museum can be seen as intervening in these exploitative histories, while at the same time revealing Indigenous acts of agency and involvement in contemporary Indigenous self-determination and resistance. The work of Thomson Highway (Cree playwright), Spiderwoman Theatre, Jeanette Armstrong (Okanagan writer and poet), Ningali Crawford (Wangkatjungka dancer and performer), Upper Hutt Posse (Maori Hip Hop collective) and other Indigenous writers, playwrights, and actors operate in a similar way. Indigenous perspectives are circulated in spaces that historically have excluded Indigenous peoples and their voices. In “Exhibiting Maori,” Conol McCarthy argues that an exploration of Maori exhibitions and presence in museums and World Fairs reveals the story of Maori resistance to, involvement in, and eventual capture of the culture of display, resulting in the indigenization of the museum.\textsuperscript{85}

McCarthy concludes,

While the museum was itself a colonial artifact, it was never an unchallenged tool of settler rule and Maori always attempted to steer it towards their own ends. Maori responses to museums may not always have been enthusiastic but museum going has recently become a popular activity. Maori now go to museums because museums are more Maori. This may very well be an exception but it is a reminder that post-settler states should listen out for Indigenous voices even when they are drowned out. It is a reminder, too, that social institutions are not impermeable, that power is fluid and contestable, and the process of colonization far from inevitable. If the museum, and indeed modernity itself, can be indigenized, then it should not be so difficult to envision an Indigenous future.\textsuperscript{86}

What McCarthy acknowledges here is that the indigenizing of museums has been a continuous process throughout colonial history and continues today. Although the museum and the archive can act as visual manifestations of colonial processes, they can also mirror the current postcolonial era,

\textsuperscript{86} McCarthy, \textit{Exhibiting Maori}, 202.
or rather participate in an attempt to mobilize anticolonial agendas and act as spaces for intervention and resistance, illustrated by collaborative projects with source communities.  

In Canadian institutions, progressive and inclusive practices have emerged, reflecting the socio-political shift towards more positive Aboriginal relations in the country’s politics. Ruth Phillips has extensively examined these dynamics in national and international museums. In some cases, the museum is undergoing radical shifts, fostering rewritings and re-evaluating its relationships with the cultures represented in their collections. However, in many cases, token gestures, or “soft inclusions” consistently undermine the postcolonial project. This type of so-called institutional and national inclusion can also be considered a form of perpetual assimilation. In a presentation at the New Sun Conference in March of 2009, Steve Loft highlighted the difference of such institutional practices and called for integration not assimilation of Indigenous visual and material culture at National and regional art galleries. Moira Simpson notes that the radical changes in museums reflect “shifts in the relationship between dominant Western cultures and those of Indigenous, minority, and suppressed cultures everywhere.” However, alongside the theoretical shiftings and rewritings of museological practice remain the atrocious histories of unauthorized removals of material culture and sacred material of Indigenous communities throughout North America.

This discussion is applicable not only to the gallery and archive but to national/ist narratives and histories. Performance artist Coco Fusco has argued that during the North American Columbus Quincentennial, in the case of the United States, settler Indigenous histories that had previously been silenced and deemed illegitimate were strategically inscribed into the national/ist rhetoric, such as histories of violence of contact and conquest. She argues, “Resurrecting the collective memory of colonial violence in America that has been strategically erased from the dominant culture was described consistently throughout 1992 by cultural conservatives as a recipe

87 See Simpson, Making Representations; and Laura Pearce and Alison K. Brown, Museums and Source Communities (London: Routledge, 2003). The inclusion of community collaboration and consultation reflects a shift in authorship, meaning in the inclusion of Native voices in the Gallery and Museum space.
89 Simpson, Making Representation, 1–2. For more information on Indigenous communities relationships with museums and Aboriginal representation in the gallery, see Pearce and Brown, Museums and Source Communities; Trudi Nicks, “Partnerships in Developing Cultural Resources: Lessons from the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples,” Culture 12, no. 1 (1992): 87–93; Jessup and Bagg, ed., On Aboriginal Representation.
for chaos." These types of national/ist inclusions can be dangerous and re-inscribe colonial power-structures by not recognizing Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and histories from Indigenous perspectives. This type of insertion recalls and perpetuates systems of colonialism, which silence Indigenous voices and experiences and undermine Indigenous agency.

This discussion of the role of the archive, and in turn the museum, highlights the significance and urgency of Indigenous acts of reclaiming histories. Further, it points to the role that performances by Indigenous Aboriginal women constitute in asserting colonial historical trauma, histories of violence, and, importantly, Aboriginal sovereignty of Indigenous lands, minds, cultures, and bodies. As Coco Fusco suggests,

Aesthetic engagement with the historical trauma of colonialism … is simply not comparable with the insipid narcissism of talk-show confessions. The refusal to forget that history and the insistence on returning to it in order to perceive the parallels between old and new forms of dehumanization … [is] the postcolonial’s strategic means of debunking the triumphalist narratives of modernism and postmodernism.\(^{91}\)

Indigenous artists and their practices significantly generate rewritings and retelling, contributing to an Indigenous and/or Indigenization of the archive. Belmore and Blondeau’s performances create new sites for “aesthetic unsettlement”\(^{92}\) and the establishment of a decolonizing pedagogy. The choice of performance art, a medium that cannot be collected, is arguably an act of resistance to museological acquisition practices. In a recent artist-talk in Kingston, Ontario, for the Acting Out, Claiming Space: Aboriginal Performance Art Series, Skeena Reece made a similar pronouncement: “My art, my performances, you cannot buy or collect.” Blondeau participates in the decolonization of Aboriginal representation in the gallery by means of TRIBE, an arts organization for evolving Aboriginal media, visual, and performing arts. Blondeau is the co-founder and the current director of TRIBE,\(^{93}\) whose mandate is to foster and support Aboriginal contemporary arts. This is a gallery without walls, without a permanent space, and it crosses boundaries while exploring the limitations offered by traditional gallery spaces.\(^{94}\) As a gallery without borders, TRIBE negotiates and


\(^{91}\) Coco Fusco, The Bodies That Were Not Ours: And Other Writings (London: Routledge, 2001), xvi.


\(^{94}\) This organization’s mission statement is the following: “TRIBE is dedicated to the development of independent venues where Aboriginal media, visual and performing artists can develop, create and present a
promotes the inclusion of Aboriginal arts in the mainstream, but maintains its Indigenous autonomy.

The relationship between the museum/gallery with Aboriginal cultural material is predicated on the histories of colonial hegemony, but it is also a reflection of the current political shiftings that signal a new era of Aboriginal autonomy. Indigenous performative interventions in cultural institutions and Indigenous artists’ inclusions in exhibition and programming schedules illuminate performance as a strategy for Indigenous self-determination. Works such as Belmore’s *Exhibit 671b* (fig. 25) and Luna’s *Artifact Piece* (fig. 26) are deliberate commentary on the histories of collecting Indigenous material culture, stories, and bodies documented and housed in museums, as well as exhibiting practices of representing Aboriginal cultures. As this these contends,


95 In the January 13th, 1988 issue of *Northwest Times News*, Ross Longbottom wrote, “Protest to coincide with the arrival of the Olympic torch in Thunder Bay and the Shell sponsorship of the native culture exhibit, the Spirit Sings (followed a call by Alberta’s Lubicon Indian Band for a boycott of the Olympics and the exhibit). Shell Canada is one of several oil companies extracting oil from their land.” Longbottom includes a description of the performance by written by the artist. Belmore states, “In a display case set up by the roadside I sat with a Shell logo pinned to my chest, and a Canadian flag pinned to my back. Above my head is a sign: ‘The Glenbow Museum presents’ and leaning against my display is another sign which reads “The Spirit Sings” Directly in front of me is a number which discreetly labels this exhibit: Artifact #671b.” An interesting side note is the fact that the number 671b is an inside joke incorporated by Belmore. The number is the Ontario Liquor Control Board’s number for a favourite local brand of cheap wine. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, “Rebecca Belmore,” in *Land, Spirit, Power*, ed., Robert Houle, Diana Nemiroff, and Charlotte Townsend-Gault (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992), 117.
Indigenous performance is a vehicle of cultural and political persistence, survivance and resistance. In addition to acting as a method in the revelation of silenced and hidden colonial legacies, Indigenous performance can also be seen as anticolonial and decolonizing pedagogy for settler nations, educating non-Indigenous peoples about Indigenous issues.

**Indigenous Performance Art: Indigenizing the Archive**

In this section, I argue that Aboriginal performance art, like contemporary Aboriginal photography and video art, can contribute to the decolonization and indigenization of the archive. At the same time, like the other two media, it also continues Indigenous practices of Aboriginal remembrance through storytelling and performing memories. Here, I connect the processes of the creation of Indigenous archives with the production of memory with Indigenous performance art and storytelling. In other words, I argue Indigenous performance art as an archiving process that draws on and incorporates pre-contact, colonial, and contemporary memories and stories. In this way, I explore and introduce the connections between the concept of storytelling as theory and the concept of Indigenous archives. I examine performance art as a possible vehicle to displace, discuss, and negotiate colonial histories and Aboriginal stories, and I explore the multiple roles story and memory play in the performance art of Saulteaux, Cree artist Lori Blondeau, Anishnabe artist Rebecca Belmore, and Hunkapapa Lakota video-based artist Dana Claxton.
Specifically, I examine Blondeau’s *Sisters*, Belmore’s *Bury My Heart*, and Claxton’s *Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux* as a continuum of performative storytelling that incorporates a hybrid or rather multifaceted and multilayered performative process/practice to incite resistance, intervention, and political activism for reclaiming Aboriginal identities, subjectivities, and histories. I also critically analyze these three works as evidence of performance as an Indigenous archiving or remembrance process, discussing the artists’ presentation of colonial histories as well as how they use Indigenous experiences and stories to re-contextualize and complicate the archive of such histories. I argue that the work of these three women can be seen as an Indigenous history lesson—as a method to present and actualize silenced histories and claim space for Indigenous methodologies and experience.

Recent scholarship has seen the development in settler nations on the archive and the concept of mining the archive—meaning to link archives with history and the writing of histories—in relation to theories of postcolonialism, decolonization, and anticolonialism. Here, I explore several scholars’ investigations of the archive and how art practice, specifically of Indigenous artists, has the potential to reveal the structures of history writing and to rewrite and displace settler narratives. For example, in Dot Tuer’s *Mining the media archives: selected writings on technology, history and cultural resistance*, she explores and addresses the legacy of colonial contact zones between European and Indigenous belief systems. Tuer states that these essays and the histories in which they reveal both past and present weave “together, theory, and history to unsettle the conceptual boundaries of art technology.”

Her framework is significantly useful in my analysis of Aboriginal performance art and in discussion of the multifaceted happenings during a performance. She states that her book is an attempt to mine the archive and that the archives in which she mines “are image repositories of the global media and of local remembrance that straddle both chronological time and a north/south divide.”

The focus of Tuer’s investigations is how the body is integral to making art practice a site of social intervention and cultural resistance. The body is thus a cipher of memory. In relation to performance art by artists’ like L’Hirondelle, Belmore, and Blondeau, the body can be seen as a cipher of storytelling, highlighting the significant recognition of the body as a site of witness to history. In this way, Tuer explores the body’s connection to history, remembrance, and bearing witness. Her work has been integral in the development of my frameworks, through which I

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97 Ibid., ix.
investigate the complexities of Indigenous performance art and the potential of performance as a 
tool for social redress, resistance, and sovereignty. Tuer’s “binding threads”—which reveal the 
significant connections between memory, history, the archive, and art practices of resistance—are 
cultural politics, historical context, and the mimetic function of technology in art. Art, she argues, 
produces “an unsettling mirroring of identity and memory.”

Pierre Nora’s pivotal study, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” also 
informs my discussion of Indigenous performance art and its relationship to memory, history, 
testimony, and bearing witness. In his work, he discusses the role of the monument as “lieux de 
memoire” and states that monuments become sites of memory because “there are no longer milieux 
de memoire, real environments of memory.” He argues that the act of remembering—meaning the 
act of creating and practicing memory—has been separated from the recording of history and the 
significant role that the archive plays in the production of memory. As Nora states, “modern 
memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the 
recording, the visibility of the image.” This understanding of memory and monuments is related 
to a Western concept of writing memory and history writing, whereas the Indigenous concept of 
memory and history writing is connected to oral and performative transmissions of events and 
stories. The monuments/documents within Indigenous communities—which have been largely de-
legitimated through colonial processes—are stories and the performance of stories and memories. 
As Joy Harjo argues, “I see memory as not just associated with past history, past events, past 
stories, but nonlinear, as in future and ongoing history, events, and stories.” This concept of 
Indigenous memory and memorialization of Indigenous stories through performance is further 
examined in the next chapter.

Individual and collective memory of the stories could be argued, using Western and settler-
based language, as the Indigenous archive. This being said, colonialism and assimilation and 
colonial projects of ethnocide (such as residential schools) have had a radical impact on Indigenous 
knowledge systems—which in some instances has resulted in the loss of cultural knowledge and 
language. Colonialism has thus influenced how Indigenous histories have been written and 
remembered. As Diana Taylor argues in her article “Performance and/as History,” history as a 
discipline has been a strategic tool for colonialism’s project of conquest, extermination, expansion,

98 Ibid., x.
Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989): 7.
100 Ibid., 13.
101 Coltelli, Winged Words, 57.
and assimilation:

History-as-discipline has long served colonial masters throughout the Americas, trumping the historical memory of native and marginalized communities who relied primarily on formed practices, genealogies, and stories to sustain their sense of self- and communal identity. The process of entering into history becomes the meaning-making act reserved for the literate.102

But the oral traditions and storytelling of Indigenous knowledge systems have endured and continue to endure, and these are currently being decolonized through acts of reclaiming and retelling. These acts reveal the impact of colonization on Indigenous memory-making (such as through storytelling and oral traditions of history writing) and how settler society constructs memory (through monuments, archives, and museum collections, etc.). Further, they bring to light the project of decolonization of Indigenous cultural knowledge. These revelations thus complicate the history and function of the colonial archive in settler nations—such as Canada—and highlight the significance of acknowledging the legitimacy of orality for Indigenous communities. Diana Taylor’s arguments in “Performance and/as History” supports this analysis:

In the Americas … European conquerors and colonizers used written documentation to dispossess native communities of their lands, belief systems, customs, and livelihoods. With the Conquest, (certain) forms of embodied practice were denied validity. Performance practices were forcibly expelled from colonial meaning-making systems when they threatened to transmit native history, values, and claims.103

Taylor states that by exploring the role of Indigenous performance in history-writing, or, as she states, “the tension between performance and history, it becomes clearer that performance is not un or anti-historical. On the contrary: it has been strategically positioned outside of history, rendered invalid as a form of cultural transmission, in short made un- and anti-historical by conquerors and colonialists who wanted to monopolize power.”104

Nora’s conceptualization of the archive as a site for history-writing is important in this conversation, elucidating the colonial archives’ relationship with memory and settler consciousness. Historically, the archive and the writing of history are methods of constructing national identity and narratives of place and ownership. Nora’s arguments critique of contemporary society’s lack of recognition in personal experiences and memories is insightful, bringing to light the exclusion of Aboriginal knowledge and personal experiences. In Taylor’s pivotal study of performance in the

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
Americas and its relationships to memory and knowledge, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, she defines “archival” as memory that exists as documents, maps, letters, literary texts, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, “all those items supposedly resistant to change … The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory – performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-producible knowledge.”

The recognition of performance as a continued site for transmitting Indigenous experiences, fostering memory, and history-making lends urgency to the act of performance art (as well as other forms of Indigenous performance, such as theatre, dance, and music) as a viable and contributing medium for Indigenous cultural continuance. The act of performance by Aboriginal artists can arguably displace colonial and settler narratives, which have throughout colonization attempted to systemically render such types of meaning and history making/writing invalid. My discussion here responds to Taylor’s call for a continued re-examination of the relationships between embodied performance and the production of knowledge. She argues,

> Embodied performance have always played a central role in conversing memory and consolidating identities in literate, semiliterate, and digital societies. Not everyone comes to “culture” or modernity through writing … We might look to past practices considered by some to have disappeared. We might look to contemporary practices by populations usually dismissed as “backward” (Indigenous and marginalized communities).

The archive, like all colonial structures, is currently being decolonized, through not only engagement with its settler colonial-based structures, as Taylor suggests, by also through cultural continuities and continuance of Indigenous storytellers and artists.

The work of contemporary Aboriginal photographer and curator Jeff Thomas extends this point by emphasizing the act of displacing colonial histories—in many cases perpetuated by collections and systems of classification in archives and museums—through art practice. He states that the “historical image is [a] catalyst for telling new stories, stories that really deal with the contemporary world that we are a part of.” In this way, Thomas’ practice also creates a new archive of images and histories that focus on Indigenous peoples and histories from an Indigenous

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perspective. His art practice moves between the archive and the repertoire in a decolonizing process that considers the impact of the colonial archive and acknowledges Indigenous memory and knowledge systems. His art practice works as a bridge connecting the gaps, silences, and erasures between the representations of Aboriginal peoples in museum/archive collections and Aboriginal experiences, stories, and histories. Although archives and museums contain large collections of Aboriginal material and visual culture, for the most part, these records, photographs, transcriptions, and objects have been collected, classified, and exhibited through the problematic lens of Euro-Canadian museum and archive practices. These ways of knowing and seeing are saturated in colonial rhetoric and national/ist narratives that have framed Aboriginal history in a way that perpetuates notions of Canada and legitimates the nation-states very existence. Thomas—and similarly Claxton, Blondeau, and Belmore—are aware of these processes and incorporate their own voices and Aboriginal bodies into their art practices as a strategic method for retelling and rewriting.

In a recent catalogue for the exhibition, Drive By: A Road Trip with Jeff Thomas, Andrea Walsh’s essay “Creating a New Archive: The Aboriginal Body and Identity, History and Sense of Place in the Photography of Jeff Thomas” explores the relationship between the collections of photographs (or rather the visual records that inform and create national/ist narratives) and Thomas’ photographic practice. Walsh notes that photographs from Thomas’ archive play as dynamic documents of personal experience and memory [and] … also as documents that bring to bear larger discussion of cultural critique focused on colonialism and its continuing legacy. To accept the photographs as such critical visual texts, we also accept that we are all engaged in post and neo colonial contexts and economies to greater and lesser degrees as residents of present-day Canada, and as global citizens.

Thomas’ photographs, such as the Bear Portraits (fig. 27 and fig. 28) the Scouting for Indians

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109 Andrea N. Walsh, “Creating a New Archive: The Aboriginal Body and Identity, History and Sense of Place in the Photography of Jeff Thomas,” in Drive By: A Road Trip with Jeff Thomas (Toronto: University of Toronto Art Gallery, 2008), 28–29.


series (fig. 29 and fig. 30), and the Delegate series (fig. 31), can be deployed as a theoretical framework that reveals the colonial archive and simultaneously creates and contributes to an
Indigenous archive or repertoire. His work creates new ways for understanding representations of Aboriginal people in the city—such as on monuments (i.e., the Champlain Monument at Nepean Point in Ottawa) and buildings (i.e., 19th-century Bank of Montreal buildings across Canada). As Richard W. Hill argues in relation to Thomas’ practice:

monuments are one way in which the state appropriates history to serve its own agenda. Monuments function in a peculiar way in public spaces, their presence being both highly visible and so entrenched, so much a part of the urban landscape,
that they often recede from visibility right under our noses. From this oddly covert position, monuments instruct us on the ideology of the state. Thomas is interested in the absence of Aboriginal people from so many of these monuments, but he has also worked on ones that make statements about Aboriginal people and our place in history. He meets the narrow didacticism of the monuments with a pedagogy of his own, turning the monument into a vehicle for a process of critically engaged thinking about power and representation.  

![Image of The Delegate @ Brandon, The Delegate Series, Manitoba, “Canada Day”](http://www.scoutingforindians.com/tour.html#)


Exploring the work of Jeff Thomas has fostered my own critical understanding of the outcomes of work produced by artists like Belmore, Blondeau, Reece, and L’Hirondelle, who through performance create Indigenous histories and unravel colonial legacies in written and monumentalized histories. Hill makes a similar statement in “Jeff Thomas: Working Histories” in the catalogue *Jeff Thomas: A Study of Indian-ness*:

> Thomas has found more productive ways into history … He digs into historical representations of Aboriginal people until “us” and “them” is no longer the only way to see the issue. The results of this process end up in the gallery, where Thomas thoughtfully and meticulously shows us why history matters and how it can be put to creative use. In fact, it was Thomas’ work that taught me how to engage with mainstream representations of Aboriginal people at a time when I simply wanted to look the other way.

Thomas’ archive of photographs creates new representations and understandings of colonial representations of Aboriginal peoples, such as the extensive ethnographic collection of photographs.

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111 Ibid., 8.
of Indigenous peoples by photographers like Edward Curtis and those hired by the Geological Survey of Canada in the mid- to late 19th century. The latter were intended to survey, document, collect, and capture not only the lands of the newly founded nation of Canada, but also the Indigenous peoples whose lands were stolen and incorporated. Thomas’ photographs unravel, reveal, and challenge the archive and national/ist and colonial narratives, asking questions about national memory, monuments, and the ways in which Indigenous histories, cultures, and representations have been included and also erased from Canadian identity. Hill remarks, “When he tunnels into archives and museum collections he isn’t harvesting historical representations of ‘Indians’ in the service of an art practice, but putting his art practice into the service of his own curiosity and his own desire to share his process of discovery.”

The photograph and other material culture that make up colonial archives are repositories of histories/memories that had a powerful role in creating settler consciousness—or rather a national/ist and Canadian identity—that marginalized and perpetuated oppression of Indigenous peoples and their cultures. Acknowledgement of this can lead us to recognize the significant and strategic role Aboriginal artists, writers, actors, etc. play in the Indigenization of colonial archives and also in shifting settler consciousness. For instance, Thomas’ photographs critique the representation of Aboriginal peoples as a collective, not as individuals, shifting the stereotyped image to that of an individual with a personal and communal history. His work displaces conceptions of Indigenous identity from the outside and creates a self-determined Indigenous archive of images of the diversity of identities.

This is evident in his Bear portraits, an on-going series of his son, Bear Witness. These images of Bear affirm Indigenous individuality, presence, and contemporary urban presence (fig. 27 and fig. 28). They challenge the categorizations inscribed onto Indigenous peoples by colonial structures and discourses and academic disciplines such as art history and anthropology, which have served the colonial project by collecting and documenting Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. As Walsh states, Thomas’ Bear portraits “avoid being placed into categories of traditional versus contemporary, urban versus reserve, elder versus youth. These photographs depict Bear’s identity as existing between such categories, indeed creating new ones of his own design, to reveal

112 Ibid., 11.
113 As Walsh notes, “By offering the critique that Aboriginal people have been represented not as individuals in photographs, on monumental sculpture, he asks all his viewers to consider the role of the individual First Nations person in the colonial and post/neo colonial context of Canada.” Walsh, “Creating a New Archive,” 31.
a highly negotiated reality fuelled by Bear’s interaction with his father in their depiction of urban Indianness.”114 FBI, Ottawa, 1997 (fig. 32) is a photograph of Bear in front of

![Image of Champlain Monument juxtaposed with Bear]


the Champlain Monument, juxtaposing a representation of the Indian scout as imagined by settler-Canadian society with Bear, a Haudenosaunee/Iroquois urban youth. Thomas writes,

A lot of my work explores the loss of male role models using photographs of my son Bear. I use Bear as a marker of Indian-ness by posing him in cities where it does not exist. What I want to do is show that Indian people live in the city as well. And to play with the irony of juxtaposing him with an urban landscape, because most white photographers—such as Edward Curtis—deleted any signs of modernity from their photographs. I see these works as a way to collaborate with my son and stay connected to him. These photographs reflect an Indian-ness that anthropologists would not see as authentic, yet it is real to me.115

Thomas’ photographs offer an accessible way for viewers to explore history, and how history, memory, and their repositories—such as the archive, museum collections, monuments, and photographs—represent statehood and national/ist histories. They also strategically reveal how to unravel stereotypical representations of Aboriginal peoples. Such engagement with the archive, national/ist history, and memory from Indigenous perspectives can create new and more complicated understandings of Indigenous identities, cultures, and the experiences and legacies of

114 Ibid., 31–32.
colonization in North America. The artists studied in this thesis, like Thomas and his photo-based strategies, participate and contribute to the postcolonial project—and to the Indigenization of the archive.

**Sisters: Performing Cultural Remembrance**

Lori Blondeau’s performance *Sisters* (fig. 32) is a performance of history. Its interaction with colonial and settler archives results in a contribution both to Indigenizing the archive and to a contemporary Indigenous archive or repertoire. I also explore this performance as an act of storytelling, examining how performing histories through performance art is an act of reclaiming and retelling that displaces settler-based narratives about Aboriginal peoples and their cultural practices. This performance, like Thomas’ photographs, asserts Indigenous presence and cultural continuance and continuities in sites and within histories that have excluded Indigenous knowledge, experience, memory, history, identity, and stories.


In Blondeau’s performance, the grounding act of storytelling is transmitted through her body. Throughout *Sisters*, Blondeau uses her actions and her body as her voice. Lynne Bell
observes, “Rooted in childhood memories and family stories, *Sisters*, speaks to the impact of colonialism on the traditional Plains lifestyle and food culture of Blondeau’s family.” Blondeau’s performance makes connections between traditional Indigenous lifestyle—specifically, Plains Aboriginal traditions—and the impact of the loss of such a lifestyle due to colonialism, such as the present epidemic of diabetes in Indigenous communities. Blondeau says, “My great-great-grandfather lived on a diet of pemmican, wild roots, berries, and wild game. The demise of the buffalo meant that in one generation our traditional lifestyle was changed forever. Today’s fast food is killing Native people with diabetes, obesity, and other diseases.”

*Sisters*, like other works of Blondeau, has been performed in many different venues across Canada and internationally. Its first presentation was at the international exhibition Americas Remixed in 2002 in Milan, Italy (fig. 34). The video recording that I have watched is from her

![Image](https://www.fabbricadelvapore.org/it/foto.show.php2?k=75)


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117 Ibid.
November 2002 performance for the Indian Acts: Aboriginal Performance Art symposium at the Emily Carr Institute of Fine Art, organized by Grunt Gallery, and from her participation in the Shubox Theatre exhibition at the University of Saskatchewan. She also performed *Sisters* at the Ontario College of Art (OCAD) in March 2008 in a collaborative performance with James Luna. These are merely a handful of the many venues Blondeau has performed the piece over the past eight years, and it is significant to note that this performance has changed over time.

*Sisters* is a performance made up of a sequence of four scenes of physical actions, which, in some cases, lead to a double-twist ending. These scenes are linked to each other through the ritualization of actions. Each is a physical act connected with the concept of food as both sustenance and poison, as well as the transmission of memory and story through physical actions. From the perspective of the audience, Blondeau’s claimed Indigenous space comprises a hand-sized stone that rests on a larger, rougher rock. To the right of the rock and stone, a fish and a neatly folded piece of red cloth await Blondeau. Blondeau walks in to the space wearing a simple off-white cloth dress cut above the knees. She carries a basket of Saskatoon berries or, as in the OCAD performance, a basket of blueberries. David Garneau’s description of *Sisters* recounts an experience from the perspective of the audience: “For the next fifteen minutes, she crushes the berries (fig. 35), guts the fish (fig. 36), and tears the cloth into strips (fig. 37). She remains straight faced and silent throughout. The unfolding events are reproduced as a video projection on a screen in the middle of the stage.”

While witnessing Blondeau’s performance, the audience encounters the sounds of crushing berries against a rock and the ripping of cloth, the smell of the berry juice and of fish. The length of Blondeau’s actions depends on several variables, such as venue, audience, her own mood, and time restrictions. Blondeau has noted that the live-feed projection is incorporated into her performance space to create a focus on her bodily actions. She writes, “They [the audience members] have the option of watching the projection, which zooms in on my hands as I crush the berries, or they can watch me as the piece unfolds—my facial expressions, body gestures, and the way I occupy space.”

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118 David Garneau, “Lori Blondeau: ShuBox Theatre, University of Regina,” *Vie des Art* 48, no. 190 (Spring 2003): 86.
119 Bell, “Scandalous Personas,” 52.
120 Garneau, “Lori Blondeau,” 86.
Figure 35: (Left) Lori Blondeau, *Sisters*. Performance still, 2002. Gordon Shelgrove Gallery Archive, University of Saskatchewan.

Figure 36: (Right) Lori Blondeau, *Sisters*, Performance still, 2002. Gordon Shelgrove Gallery Archive, University of Saskatchewan.

Her inclusion re-asserts her presence as an Aboriginal woman in the gallery space, once again asserting and claiming this often exclusionary space: a space encoded in settler power dynamics that have continuously ignored transmissions of Indigenous cultural and historical knowledge due to the gallery’s history and relationship to colonial attitudes and national/ist exclusion. In other words, Blondeau’s use of her body as her art practice asserts and claims spaces as Indigenous sites of sovereignty and self-determination, connecting histories of exclusion with contemporary moments of resistance.
The live-feed projection adds to Blondeau’s assertion and intension of occupying the space of the gallery. Scholar Andrea Smith suggests that Aboriginal bodies, and especially Aboriginal women’s bodies, due to colonial histories of physical, sexual and representational violence, are encoded in the legacies of colonial oppression, marginalization, and occupation. Unpacking these histories of stereotypical representations and colonial violence and making connections with performance art, theatre, and other body- and performance-based art practices highlights the significance of Indigenous artists use of performance art as a strategy of decolonization. In this way, *Sisters* multilayered performance is an act of commentary on colonial legacies on Indigenous knowledge/lifestyles as well as an act of asserting such erased knowledges from national/ist narratives and institutions and within Aboriginal communities. This performance is a performance of history and remembrance.

*Sisters* is a beautiful performative act of ritual, ceremony, memory, and story, communicated not through words but through repetitive actions. Blondeau’s body is the site of the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous experience of colonialism, and the site of asserting Indigenous resistance, survivance, and self-determination. Blondeau utilizes her memories to perform her ritual actions, once part of the daily lives of Aboriginal women: “The piece is about my memories of watching my mother and her sisters at our house cleaning ducks. I remember the awful smell of singed feathers. Another memory is of watching my mother and all the other women

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in my family gut fish.” Through the repetition of these actions, Blondeau links herself to the women of her family and to ancestral women’s practices. The act of cleaning ducks or gutting fish was a communal experience, bringing the women in Blondeau’s family together; it was a time to connect and share stories of daily life. Her performance also speaks to the relearning of Aboriginal traditions, gesturing at traditions lost because of colonialism, assimilation, and governmental policies. Blondeau writes, “One of the reasons I wanted to do this performance was to teach myself the skills that the women in my family have known for generations.” She is locating traces of Aboriginal history, bringing to the surface stories and practices once camouflaged, silenced, and forced underground. Through the act of re-enacting Indigenous practices and skills Aboriginal women used on a daily basis, Blondeau comments on the contemporary reality of Aboriginal peoples. In some families, these “common practices” continue, while in others, women have lost this knowledge. This performance is a recalling of the roles of Aboriginal women in their communities. In this way, the familial stories that were the impetus for Sisters mirror the larger Aboriginal, and specifically Plains Cree and Saulteaux, experience of colonial history. Blondeau writes,

My grandmother told me a story about the late 1930s when they had no food. They were starving, and my grandfather was too proud to hunt small game like pheasants and prairie chickens, which were traditionally the preserve of the women. So my grandmother snared all these partridges. (She claims there are no partridges on the prairies because she snared them all.) But she stopped snaring them when she cut one open to gut it and maggots came out. She read this as a sign, and that was the last partridge she snared. Although Blondeau is verbally silent throughout the performance of Sisters, her repetitive actions tell numerous stories and share multiple Indigenous experiences. Blondeau’s repetitive actions recall, redress, and reclaim Indigenous knowledges, as she writes, “After I perform Sisters, audience members often come up to me and talk about their own memories, and experiences: as if my action somehow triggers their memories.” Witnessing Blondeau’s repetitive and laborious physical actions made me acutely aware of the impact of colonization and the legacies of ethnocide, genocide, and assimilation. It also made me think of the continuation of colonization, or rather the traces of the project of colonialism in Canadian society and in gallery spaces. Blondeau’s actions also allude to the resilience of Indigenous peoples and cultures. This performance creates an

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124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
opportunity for witnessing and creates a space of dialogue and remembrance. This work brings attention to Blondeau’s presence as an Aboriginal woman and her commitment to transmitting an Indigenous perspective and to the resilience of her physicality. By emphasizing the shiftings that occur through interpretation and result in meaning, Jones and Stephenson argue “that interpretation itself is worked out as performance between artists and spectators (whether professional or non-specialist).”

Blondeau acknowledges that the interpretation of her performances depends on the “type” of audience in her performative space:

I’ve had different responses while performing this work to Native and non-Native audiences. I’ve come to realize that when the audience is mixed, the reaction from the Native people is different from that of the White people. Native viewers appear to use humour as a relief for the seriousness of the piece, and having Native people in the room seems to give White audience members permission to laugh. If I have no Native people in the room, my audience takes the pieces very seriously and rarely laughs.

Furthermore, focusing on interpretation as an exchange or negotiation between performer and her audience, she emphasizes the reciprocal relationship present in both performance art and Aboriginal storytelling.

Watching Blondeau work with her hands and the preparation of food and cloth also bring to mind the impacts of colonization and oppressive legislative actions, such as the development of reserves, relocations of Indigenous peoples off their ancestral lands, the institution of Indian Agents as governmental agents of control, residential schools, ceremonial bans and other projects that made Indigenous life illegal and undermined Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Her actions recall memories, some personal and other communal, which she generously presents to her audience to engage them into recalling their own personal and communal memories and histories. Those witnessing from a non-Indigenous settler lens can begin asking questions about the legacies of colonization on Indigenous life.

Blondeau’s first action is crushing berries. She uses the smaller rock to render the Saskatoons into a liquid soup (fig. 35 and 38). Blondeau writes, “For me this piece is visually beautiful because all you see is this red, red liquid, which runs down the stone like blood. All you hear is the hypnotic sound of rocks colliding against each other.”

As Blondeau crushes the

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berries, evoking Indigenous knowledges of food preparation skills and diet, the bloody image of the berries evokes a violent reference. It also recalls the Indigenous concept of blood memory, the intergenerational transmission of memory through the body. There are many ways of interpreting this, such as the relationship between Indigenous ways of life, the collection of Indigenous knowledge, the assimilation of Indigenous peoples, or ethnocide. The blood reference evokes a clear message of the violence of colonization. Documentation practices of anthropologists go hand in hand with colonial projects of assimilation, just as residential schools go hand in hand in governmental attempts to eradicate Indigenous knowledge—to render such knowledge as the practice of food preparation into an archive, a state that is collected, maintained, and controlled rather than active, living and continuously changing. Blondeau’s incorporation of memory and stories overtly presents Indigenous practices of remembrance that differ from Euro-Canadian conceptualizations of the archive.

The second action is the gutting a fish (fig. 36), which Blondeau notes as being “beautiful but unsettling at the same time. It makes me gag.”

This again references Indigenous diet and practices as well as the loss due to colonial impact. David Garneau’s description of this scene connects themes of cultural continuance with cultural loss: “Initially, the activities seem authentic, a theatrical presentation of Aboriginal ‘women’s work’ of a century or more ago. But soon, things look a little off. For example, the crushing is sloppy. The lower stone should be flatter, more like a...”

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130 Ibid., 26.
bowl to keep in the pulp and juices.” He continues, “The way the rich purple mush oozes over the rock like a messy sacrifice is evocative, but not efficient pemmican making.”

In other words, the connection between the act of berry crushing and the act of gutting fish connects Blondeau’s act of cultural continuance and survivance through the act of performance art, with feelings of cultural loss and the longing for knowledge and skills. These connections are finalized when she starts to rip cloth.

The ripping of red cloth (fig. 37) is Blondeau’s third performative action. Blondeau incorporates, once again, Cree and Saulteaux cultural ritual and ceremonial tradition. She states that the “cloth is an offering for the fish and the berries.” As noted in Koozma Tarasoff’s study of Plains Cree and Saulteaux ceremonialism, “Material offerings of cloth are made whenever the Spirit Powers are asked to exert their influence toward some particular end.” Blondeau remarks that “the sound of ripping of cloth takes me back to being a child and going to feasts and ceremonies and watching my grandmother rip cloth for offerings. I find myself longing for a way of life that doesn’t exist anymore.” From Blondeau’s statement it is clear that Sisters also acknowledges feelings of loss and displacement, emotions of longing for a way of life and practices that due to systemic policies made by the Canadian state are not always present or easily practiced. Many of the ritual and traditional actions of Aboriginal culture she recalls, have been displaced through the processes of colonization.

S.J. Tambiah defines ritual as “a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and act, often expressed in multiple media.” Blondeau’s performance practice can be considered a form of “ritual action”: political ritual, a rite of exchange and communication, and rites of affliction and commemoration. Ritualizing, in this case, means “both a social process involving an audience and an act of cultural assertion.” In relating the ceremony to post-Oka Aboriginal performance art, Archer Pechawis observes,

In traditional forms of ceremonial performance there is an enactment of collective

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131 Garneau, “Lori Blondeau,” 86.
135 Catherine Bell identifies six categories of ritual action: rites of passage or life crisis rituals; calendrical and commemorative rites; rites of exchange and communion; rites of affliction; rites of feasting, fasting, and festival; and political rituals. Catherine Bell, Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 94.
unconscious, a reflection of communal dreams. Culture and community are
reinforced. In contemporary First Nations performance art there is a continuation of this legacy. Artists from different nations address the concerns of equally diverse Urban Indian communities, re-inventing tradition.  

Charlotte Townsend-Gault argues that some contemporary Aboriginal art employs “efficacy of ceremony, or ritual, as a vehicle for personal and social negotiation. The meaning and values are rooted in a way of life that has been drastically modified … these ritualized markers of a recovered power, exercised in a new way draw on old sources of power but do not depend on them alone.”

Blondeau works within the “traditional” concepts of Aboriginal performance, while situating herself within her contemporary reality.

The final action is unexpected and diverts from Aboriginal customary practice, alluding to contemporary experience. Blondeau removes herself from the space, where “evidence” or traces of berry crushing, fish gutting, and cloth ripping remain (fig. 39). “I step out of the picture, so to speak, and move into a space separate from the three actions of the performance.”

In doing so, she shifts the performance in a new direction. No longer preparing fresh berries or fish,


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139 Blondeau, “Some Kinda Princess,” 26. In some performances, such as the OCAD enactment, this final act was not included; instead James Luna began his performance of telling stories and cooking food and gave himself an insulin shot.
Blondeau reaches into a large lunch box or a large McDonald’s paper bag and proceeds to eat as many McDonald’s hamburgers as possible to the song *Hello Dolly!* (fig. 40). She continues this action of repetitive and excessive eating, forcing hamburgers into herself for the duration of the song. During her performance at the IndianActs symposium, as the audience watched her eat they listened to the sounds and images of rocks crushing berries, fish scales being scraped off, and cloth being ripped into pieces (fig. 41). She went on forcing the hamburgers into her mouth until the big paper bag was empty. Each time she finished a hamburger, she would crumple the
packaging and place it with the others to her right, making a pile of McDonald’s food wrappings, leaving only traces of her actions (fig. 42). Whenever Blondeau picked up another hamburger, her facial expression shared pain and nausea with her audience. Blondeau admits that, “This action makes me sick to my stomach”140 (fig. 43). Lynne Bell remarks that this vignette is a “painful, and not quite funny action … And, for the first time, Blondeau looks her audience in the eye, challenging us to meet her gaze.”141 (fig. 44)


140 Ibid.
141 Bell, “Scandalous Personas,” 52.
From this act of excessive eating, many meanings unfold. This twist in the performance scene promotes a reconsidering of her previous acts of ritual food preparation and ceremonial act of offering cloth. Her previous actions seemed awkward, as if she was playing at being a traditional ‘Indian’ woman. Her gestures had been slow, careful, and incomplete, not the hands of a woman who is comfortable with these actions. Was Blondeau merely playing with her audience? Perhaps the scene is meant to express the disconnection and or displacement an urban Aboriginal woman has between her lived contemporary experience and the traditional daily lives of her ancestors.142 Or does it comment on the loss of Aboriginal knowledge due to colonization? Blondeau is clearly making reference to today’s processed foods, symbolizing extreme diet changes in the Aboriginal community, which have led to health issues such as obesity, poor nutrition, and diabetes.143 She could also be commenting on European colonization’s relationship with greed and excessive behaviours, as well as Western society’s exploitation of natural resources.144

Multiple interpretative readings are possible in Blondeau’s performative storytelling and ritualized actions. She engages with her audience, provoking them and enticing them to recognize the histories she has offered. They participate in the reciprocal relationship between storyteller and listener. Although the audience is not obligated to listen to these stories, since they have chosen to come to watch/interpret/witness the performance, they most likely are there with some level of

142 Garneau, “Lori Blondeau,” 86.
143 Ibid.
144 For example, it is well known to Canadians that McDonald’s and other giant food corporations have had a large part in the destruction of rainforests in South America, promoting the clearing of forests for farming of cattle.
engagement. The artist cannot control how her audience interprets the work, or determine their level of commitment to listening to the piece. Nevertheless, she can negotiate and manipulate active and critical engagement through the power of live performance, or as Blondeau puts it,

The audience looks at me, and I return their gaze while gagging. The audience is uncomfortable because it is the first time in the work that I return their gaze. The projected traces of the performance still play on the wall, giving the audience members a place of refuge, a place to avoid my gaze. In this way, the viewer become an active part of the performance, selecting and editing what she chooses to see.  

Blondeau’s performance is unsettling. *Sisters* is a powerful piece that lures the audience to actively engage with the memories triggered by her repetitive ritual actions and also with the feelings stirred by her disturbing act of bingeing. The performance participates in a larger discussion highlighting the importance of the decolonization of Aboriginal cultural, historical, and social knowledge for Indigenous sovereignty.

**Bury My Heart: Remembering Indigenous Experience and Displacing Colonial Memory**

Vancouver-based Anishnabe artist Rebecca Belmore’s performances are rememberings of Indigenous experiences and traumas. They expose legacies of colonial expansion, legislation, and oppression while commenting on the contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples in North America. Belmore’s performances voice, in many instances, otherwise silenced and marginalized histories. She thus privileges Indigenous perspectives and experiences. This analysis of Belmore’s *Bury My Heart* (2000), explores a performance that commemorates the history of past and continuing genocide and violence in North America against Indigenous peoples. Her work can be seen as a vehicle towards indigenizing social memory, exposing the damaging impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities. Here, I explore how Belmore writes an Indigenous history of the Wounded Knee Massacre and later in the following chapter I explore how her works is an act of memorialization. In *Bury My Heart* (fig. 45), Belmore’s performance, honouring the lives of the over three-hundred murdered Oglala Sioux men, women and children in the 1890 massacre of Wounded Knee, can be seen as an act of mourning, healing,

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remembrance, and commemoration. Dot Tuer writes, “Through her conceptual embodiment of storytelling, Belmore has produced over the past ten years a powerful testimony to art as a process of concretizing acts of remembering and resistance, dreaming and mourning.”

Although Belmore’s performance addresses an event in US history, I argue that Belmore’s *Bury My Heart* connects Indigenous struggles across colonial political, historic, and geographic borders. The importance and contemporary relevance of Belmore’s performance is emphasized through exploring her work as (re)memory and resistance. Contemporary Indigenous performances, such as *Bury My Heart*, can thus be seen to participate in Indigenous activism by contributing to the remembering of the past through the present.

As an Aboriginal person, Belmore’s homeland is now the modern nation state of Canada; yet, the art world is reluctant to recognize this condition as a continuous form of cultural and political exile. Jolene Rickard’s argues “The inclusion of the First Nations political base is not meant to marginalize Belmore’s work, but rather to add depth to it. People think of Belmore as both Canadian and Anishinabe—but she argues that she thinks of herself as an Anishinabe living in the continuously colonial space of the Americas.” I draw here on Rickard again to substantiate the importance of recognizing Indigenous contexts when discussing the work of contemporary

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Aboriginal artists, such as Rebecca Belmore, to highlight the use of Indigenous art as a vehicle of resistance and a tactic of re-memory for the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty within the current moment of continued colonial occupations of Indigenous lands.

*Bury My Heart* begins with Belmore in a white dress sitting on a wood chair in a muddy field. Laid before her is a circle of one hundred white carnations with a hole in the ground at its centre, filled with blood and earth (fig. 46). The one hundred flowers represent the initial number of Sioux killed counted by the US military. A prepared mound with fifty red carnations placed upright sit behind Belmore, representing the number of Sioux who crawled away wounded, who died shortly after. Throughout the performance a violist off to Belmore’s left plays a mournful and dramatic melody. During the performance, Belmore walks around the circle, her bare-feet marking and claiming the space (fig. 47). Then kneeling, using her hands, she starts to dig a hole in the mud (fig. 48). Dipping the white flower heads in the red mixture of water, earth, and blood that gathers at the bottom of the hole, she lays them back in the circle. This could be seen as an


act of mourning and of honouring the dead. The dyeing of the white carnations red could also be a symbolic act of Indigenizing the history of the massacre, which has been described in many historical accounts by American government and military officials as a battle—not a massacre of unarmed and surrendered Sioux people. She then brings the chair to the edge of the hole and begins to cover it with the bloodied mud (fig. 49). She carefully covers the entirety of the chair with the bloodstain, marking the chair with this violent history (fig. 50). After cleansing her body by washing her hands and feet in a nearby stream (fig. 51), Belmore widens and deepens the mound where the red flowers stand using a long-handled shovel (fig. 52), and places the chair in it. Then she proceeds to bury the bloodstained chair by hand (fig. 53).
This burial is a physically laborious task, as concentrated as the attempted burial of Indigenous cultures through systemic campaigns of ethnocide and strategic violent acts of genocide, which have been denied and silenced through the writings and memorializing of colonial history (fig. 54). In this way, Belmore’s performance participates in the writing and telling of Indigenous histories. Her performance creates an ephemeral monument rooted in Indigenous frameworks: performative storytelling and oral cultural knowledge.


Indigenous sovereignty and activism are closely linked to the history of Wounded Knee—the late 19th century was a period of warfare against the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, who were relocated or eradicated to enable western expansion and settlement of North America. In other words, the assimilist legislation, exemplified in the banning of ceremony and the removal of children into residential school and military campaigns, were confronted with resistance by the western Indigenous peoples, which in turn was met with military aggressions resulting in numerous massacres of Indigenous peoples. The bodies of hundreds of Oglala Sioux—most of them women and children—were massacred by the US Army at Wounded Knee, Montana, and left as they lay for days—without burial and exposed to the winter elements. This is the traumatic history Belmore recalls in her performance *Bury My Heart*.

Belmore’s commemorative performance of the Wounded Knee Massacre, performed in August of 2000 at the Paris Gibson Square Museum in Great Falls Montana, exemplifies Belmore consistent use of her body and other props to tell her story to share Indigenous histories. Belmore’s art, whether it is installation, video or photograph, has its basis in performance, which she, in turn, sees as a medium shared by Indigenous traditions and modern art expressions—a medium both Indigenous and international. Belmore’s performance art almost always features her body. Her physical presence in the work calls forth a sense of loss, of something absent, while creating an
energy of resistance. Tuer explores Belmore’s performance practiced as a practice of testimony. She argues that Belmore uses her body as a cipher for the telling of traumatic histories—"the scars of history are remembered." Tuer writes about Bury my heart and AyumelOaawach Oomama-mowan (1991), among others performances, “The condition of historical amnesia in which landscape has been de-peopled is a traumatic one. It is the condition, this trauma, that Belmore addresses in her performances and installations.” She also states that backbones of Belmore’s works as a collective are historical moments, such as Oka, Burnt Church, Ipperwash, Saskatoon—where Indigenous bodies have been violated by violence, trauma, silence etc. Tuer writes, “Each piece also references elements used by Belmore in previous performances, linking questions of who tells stories to a conjoining of body and memory.” She concludes, “her artistic process of fusing body and earth, her endings are always the beginnings of other stories, her stories are gifts of memory, and her memory becomes a repository of history.”

Belmore thus performs Indigenous experiences and stories that have historically been silenced and marginalized by dominant colonial writings of history which have fostered a forgetting in the cultural consciousness of settler societies. Belmore’s performances can be seen as acts of remembrance that privilege Indigenous perspectives while displacing national/ist narratives. Her performative acts make reference to the massacre, echoing the photographs taken by George Trager documenting the dead frozen bodies and the mass gravesite. While I am uncomfortable showing these images here of the murdered Sioux bodies—feeling it would only perpetuate colonial trauma and violence against Indigenous bodies—at the same time it is important, especially for settler societies, to bear witness to the brutalities of colonial violence, trauma, and occupations. In this way, both Belmore’s performance and my exploration of Bury My Heart present the paradoxical condition of raising awareness of colonial histories in settler consciousness—the dilemma of inclusions and possibilities of retraumatization of Indigenous peoples. Belmore’s performative actions allude to the imagery in social memory of the Wounded Knee Massacre, while simultaneously creating a space for respectful remembrance and mourning and Indigenous memories of the massacre. The event that took place in December of 1890 at Wounded Knee must

149 Tuer, “Performing Memory,” 167.
150 Ibid., 170.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., 171.
be remembered but from an Indigenous viewpoint, due to the fact that colonial violence has been both erased, perpetuated, and maintained by national/ist narratives, monuments, and archiving processes. What this means in relation to the Wounded Knee Massacre is that there are countless accounts of the events that took place, many of which are based on military reports and white soldiers’ perspectives. Due to the work of revisionist-historians and Native scholars, Indigenous perspectives of the massacre have complicated the original one-dimensional and one-sided narrative by incorporating Indigenous stories and survivor testimonies. Belmore performance highlights this, as does as the Big Foot Memorial erected by survivors of the massacre, countering the narrative presented on plaques written by the Historical National Landmark and State Parks. Ruth Phillips has noted, “The postcolonial Indigenous project moves us towards an imaginary that extends beyond what the eye can see, and it requires investigative approaches that resist rather than reinforce the Western hierarchy of the senses.” ¹⁵³ In this regard, Belmore’s performance participates within the postcolonial project; she places Indigenous perspectives at the forefront and imagines performatively an event from the past to reveal Indigenous realities for present-day witnessing. As Jessica Bradley notes, Belmore’s performances, “bring to the fore the complexity of associations and issues with remarkable incisiveness, penetrating the surface of complacency like a sharp knife slipped under soft flesh. Belmore’s considered materiality, and attention to the meaning of place make the hidden real.”¹⁵⁴ Her work can therefore, be seen as a vehicle towards Indigenizing social memory, thereby exposing the impacts of colonization on Indigenous communities.

In the early 1990s, Belmore re-evaluated her position as a storyteller, which resulted in a shifting in her performance and installation practice. It was during this time that Belmore felt she was being asked to tell all. Belmore’s body became the site of her stories. Her use of her body as a form of storytelling offers new ways of seeing and new frames of reference for understanding colonial legacies and Indigenous self-determined positions. The writing of history, the significance of the story for Indigenous cultures, the link between memory and bearing witness, the link between trauma and remembrance: these key elements are brought together to reveal the complexities and multifaceted meanings of Belmore’s performance in Bury My Heart. I see Belmore’s performance as participating in the larger Indigenous activism movement and as contributing to Indigenous political resistance. I have also argued that these performances give

voice to the silenced experiences of Aboriginal peoples. In essence, Indigenous performance is a site of Indigenous testimony; it is a site of storytelling.

**Dana Claxton: Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux**

In this next section, the video works of Dana Claxton are explored in relation to Indigenous remembrance strategies and the subversion and mining of the colonial archive. The multifaceted art practice of Hunkpapa Lakota artist Claxton intertwines her Indigenous world views with contemporary Aboriginal realities to create a visual language that exposes legacies of colonization, critiques settler histories, and asserts previously silenced Indigenous perspectives. Although her vast body of work includes films, installations, performances, and photography, the most salient examples of her activist practices are arguably her intricately layered video pieces. In this section I explore the ways that Claxton re/frames archival photographs and film, personal interviews, contemporary music samples, and iconic images to simultaneously critique and create. A key aspect of her decolonization project is the sharing of Indigenous stories, a strategy that foregrounds post-(re)memory and resistance. She incorporates Indigenous bodies for the sharing of Indigenous perspectives and mines the archive to assert Indigenous histories. Taken together, I argue that Claxton’s videos function as vehicles toward indigenizing social memory—a role that is rooted in sovereignty, self-determination, and survivance.\(^\text{155}\)

When viewing Claxton’s video and performance works, it is very important to recognize her artistic strategies and viewpoint as a Lakota woman. As Claxton states,

> I’m influenced by my own experience as a Lakota woman, as a Canadian, a mixed blood Canadian, and then my own relationship to the natural and supernatural world. So taking that whole bundle of experiences, it all goes in to the artwork, I think that’s where the multilayering comes in because I’ve had a very multi-layered life. And it’s all those experiences that go in to the work.\(^\text{156}\)

Claxton’s extensive video practice combines strategies of voicing, reclaiming, and re-visioning. In other words, she presents visually Indigenous histories, stories, and experiences from her Lakota perspectives. In a recent on-line retrospective of Claxton’s work, curator Tanya Willard writes,

\(^{155}\) In *Manifest Manners: Post-Indian Warriors of Survivance*, Gerald Vizenor argues that Native stories are stories of Native survivance, which he defines as being “more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence.” In other words, in Vizenor’s view, Native stories are the traces of Native experiences and are the evidence of Native survivance. Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 15.


Many of Claxton’s works, such as *I Want to Know Why* (1994), and *Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux* (2004), mine the archive for traces and recorded documents of Indigenous experiences. In her later work, Claxton incorporates live-feed images of the stacks of archival newspapers and other documents that she uncovered during her research. *Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux* (2003), one of Claxton’s more recent works, is a four-channel video installation that was commissioned by the Moose Jaw Art Gallery (fig. 55).

![Figure 55: Dana Claxton, Sitting Bull and Moose Jaw Sioux, 2004, Montreal, Centre International d'Art Contemporain de Montreal/La Biennale de Montreal. Photo: Don Hall.](image)

The video is described as “A contemporary view of a historical story” comprising interviews, landscape imagery, live-feed images of archival newspapers, stills of historic photographs, and appropriated film footage (fig. 56). The history Claxton explores and reveals is
Figure 56: Dana Claxton, *Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux* video installation still-detail of archival photograph of Chief Sitting Bull and historic newspaper articles from the *Moose Jaw Times*. Image courtesy of the artist, Dana Claxton.

personal as well as communal. Claxton’s great-great grandmother, as asserted in her film *I Want to Know Why* (1994), fled the United States, her ancestral lands, during the Indian wars of the 1880s, which was a period of heightened American land expansion and significant colonial violence against Indigenous peoples. In Ward Churchill’s work on the political history of the Lakota and the Lakota peoples historic relationship with the United States, he discusses the history of the US federal governments deceptions. He highlights the breaking of the Fort Laramie treaty—a legal document giving the Lakota nation jurisdiction of the Black Hills in 1868—due to the discovery of gold in 1874. Claxton intimately explores this history, along with the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876, in the storytelling voice-overs and through the visual imagery of photographs of Sitting Bull and other Lakota men and women who experienced the violence and occupation of the establishing American-state. In an interview, Claxton recalls the mass hanging of Dakota men in Minnesota, which remains one of the largest mass hangings in US history. She says, “When the people saw that—if you can imagine seeing 39 men being hung—you just knew it was no longer safe for you and your homeland.”*Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux* vocalizes this period in American history and the subsequent re-settlement of Lakota and Sioux in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. As Willard states, “Dana’s family reserve in Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan is an area

159 Willard, “Starting from Home.”
of Lakota settlement; her family traces its roots to the migration of Sitting Bull and Dana’s great-great grandmother’s journey.\footnote{Ibid.}

On the central screen, a black and white image of Sitting Bull is flanked by images of Claxton’s archival research: piles of newspaper clippings from the \textit{Moose Jaw Times}. Lynne Bell’s account of this video installation in “The Post/Colonial Photographic Archive and the Work of Memory” describes in detail several opening scenes of the video:

As the camera sifts through piles of yellowed newspapers in the side channels, I watch glimpses of banner headlines proclaiming “Custer massacre refugees given aid by Moose Jaw” and “Kingsway Park once site of Hundreds of Wigwams.” The grainy news photos depict Lakota men, women, and children. In a voice-over conversation, two Sioux storytellers recall family stories, accounts, and legends of Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux. An English translation runs across the bottom of the screens. As the camera pans over a photograph of Sitting Bull on the centre screen, images of the land of the Black Hills of Dakota flash past on the side screens: the voice-over states: “They owned that land of the Black Hills … They called that the heart of the earth. That was their homeland … But gold was discovered … and they broke the treaties.\footnote{Lynne Bell, “The Post/Colonial Photographic Archive and the Work of Memory,” in \textit{Image and Inscription: An Anthology of Contemporary Canadian Photography}, ed. Robert Bean (Toronto: YYZ, 2005), 160–61.}“

In \textit{Sitting Bull and Moose Jaw Sioux} Claxton makes public the histories of the Moose Jaw Sioux and their migration and subsequent settlement of the Wood Mountain Reserve, as well as the experiences of the Sioux people during the late 19th century in the United States. The focus of this video is on Sioux experience from Sioux perspectives, which counters the commonly known narratives of this era of North American History.

In David Garneau’s review, “Dana Claxton: Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux,” he explores Claxton’s video strategies in complicating social memory of the Lakota’s migration to Moose Jaw:

Claxton’s strategy is both good historical storytelling and creative art. The narrative is layered rather than linear, dialogic rather than authoritarian, and open-ended rather than contained. At least four accounts unspool at any one time. While they always complement each other and advance the story, the gentle polyphony encourages repeated viewings and the sense that we can gather only glimpses and should not imagine ourselves completely informed. Unlike conventional documentaries, there is no narrative arc, rising tension, climax, and denouement. In fact, the initiating event, the Battle at Little Bighorn, does not get told until near the end, and its central antagonist, Custer, is barely mentioned. This is the Sioux account of the battle and their subsequent lives. It is eventful, but, until now, only a
footnote to settler history.\textsuperscript{162}

Claxton achieves this telling of Lakota histories of colonization and their contemporary relevance through her inclusions of contemporary imagery from Moose Jaw with story voice-overs. In one section of the video, film footage of the original Sioux campsite in Moose Jaw in the centre panel is juxtaposed with images of moose, buffalo, and the iconic architectural details of “Indian heads” which decorate the Fourth Avenue bridge in Moose Jaw. The voice-over states,

They went and saw Father Bernard in Lebret. He gave them food. The RCMP went there and told them not to give them food. Sitting Bull’s tribe came back to Moose Jaw … Father Bernard brought some food to them. The RCMP went there and said, “You’re not going to give this tribe anything.”

The following scene incorporates yet another contemporary image of Moose Jaw: in the side screens, Claxton’s camera shows a close-up view of a city street sign—“Sioux Crescent”—which is juxtaposed to the centre panel’s images of the Saskatchewan landscape and antelope (fig. 57). These images are further contextualized through Claxton’s strategic inclusion of the voice-over: stories from interviews that the artist has conducted. As Bell writes, “the Lakota people’s migration south in the summer to hunt antelope in the hills and of the close and peaceful relations existing between the Sioux and the early settlers in Moose Jaw.”\textsuperscript{163}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure57.png}
\caption{Dana Claxton, Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux“Sioux Crescent” still-detail of Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux video installation. Image courtesy of the artist.}
\end{figure}

One of the key sites of Claxton’s search for documents to re-tell and remember the history of the Sioux in Saskatchewan, as argued by Lynn Bell, is an archive of late 19th- and early 20th-century photojournalism from the *Moose Jaw Times*. Bell writes,

This media archive clearly reveals the epistemic violence at the heart of the colonial encounter. In the *Moose Jaw Times* archive, we see how the captioned photograph was used at the turn of the last century to give tangible form to a proliferating set of stereotypes that marked the Sioux as the racialized “other” of the white settler community in Moose Jaw.\(^\text{164}\)

Claxton’s exploration of the archive and subsequent inclusion of her found records with Indigenous-based interviews/oral histories contextualizes the representations of archival photographs and newspaper articles, thereby indigenizing the historical record of the Moose Jaw Sioux (fig. 58). *Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux* complicates understanding and social memory of Sioux experiences by incorporating stories of Moose Jaw Sioux people. The oral memories of the history of violence in the United States, the resulting migration, and the subsequent oppressions, marginalizations, and systemic violence endured in settlement in Canada create a history that is not commonly known. Claxton’s engagement with and inclusions of archival film footage and other material documents inserts her art practice into the larger project of Indigenizing the archive. She combines tactics inherent to the archive in creating and maintaining

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\(^{164}\) Ibid.
social memory with those of Lakota storytelling. In an interview with curator Tanya Willard, Claxton and Willard discussed the role of the artist as historian within the context of the postcolonial project of decolonization. Willard writes, “In discussing the amount of research needed to create Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux, Dana comments on the way many Aboriginal artists become historians in some capacity, uncovering the truths of Aboriginal experience that are buried under layers of colonial histories.”

Jason St. Laurent’s curatorial essay “History in Parts: The Work of Dana Claxton” draws similar attention to Claxton’s art aesthetic and her use of art practice to voice histories that are not nationally remembered, writing that “Dana Claxton’s work is esthetically innovative, brilliantly written and expertly paced. The thrust of her practice is political, spiritual and social, making it an essential contribution not only to the field of media art, but generally, to a more honest sense of history.

Her video works, therefore, visually create history, displacing national narratives, while simultaneously creating Indigenous re/memory. As described in the preceding example, for Claxton the archive is an important tool to reconfigure social memory from Indigenous vantage points. Her videos subvert colonial representation tactics by employing similar strategies in new ways. Both film and photographs were frequently used by colonizers to document, record, produce, and construct Aboriginal peoples according to preconceived Western ideas about identity and race. Marcia Crosby argued over fifteen years ago that much contemporary Aboriginal art is produced as an attempt to reclaim the image of the “Indian” from the ethnographic context of the salvage paradigm. She explained that Indigenous peoples have been collected theoretically and physically by Europeans who “salvaged” their material and visual culture and placed it in museum collections. A number of contemporary Indigenous communities are now mining these archives and using photographs, film, newspaper articles, and objects to critique the past, reclaim histories, and emphasize cultural continuity.

Claxton’s works, such as Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux, and I Want to Know Why (2003) (which is explored in the next chapter), reveal the many silenced histories of violence and systemic racism in relation to North American colonization and its ongoing legacies. Claxton’s videos thus contribute to the decolonization of Indigenous social memory as well as national social memory through strategic use of Indigenous stories.

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165 Willard, “Starting from Home.”
**Performance as Activism: Storytelling as Resistance and Intervention**

The performances explored in this chapter are acts of resistance and interpellation to mainstream representations of Aboriginal stories. Performance art has a long history of radical activism, wherein it is employed in many cases to attempt to dislodge and/or rupture fixed systems of knowledge. The practices of these women performance artists fit within the discourse of art activism, as they use their stories as a means for culture and political protest. Edward Said in *Culture and Resistance* discusses this concept of storytelling for social action, speaking about the significance of storytelling as a vehicle through which to navigate a counterpoint to official public memory. Said argues, “One has to keep telling the story in as many new ways as possible, as insistently as possible, and in as compelling a way as possible, to keep attention on it.”

Blondeau’s repetition of her performance *Sisters* and Belmore’s repetitive inclusion of the chair in her works exemplify this strategy of continued and repetitive telling and retelling of stories. With respect to performance art theory, the essence of these performance artists’ performativity lies in the renaming of bodies, spaces, landscapes, and histories through an act of storytelling. They claim colonized spaces, such as the gallery, in order to negotiate and instigate the process of decolonization. In this sense, their performance practice removes the overwritings of colonial discourse layered upon the Indigenous body, landscape, history, and space. Their bodies and voices act as the traces left on the palimpsest. Aboriginal performance art employs lived experience for the process of resignifying languages, bodies, and texts. As Judith Butler observes, “We do things with language, produce effects with language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is the name for our doing: both ‘what’ we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences.”

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The performances examined here are situated within the process of storytelling as an act of survivance and resistance. Moreover, the art practices clearly tell the “hard stories” in order to decolonize the histories/stories of Aboriginal peoples, specifically women. Belmore, Blondeau, Claxton, L’Hirondelle, Johnson, and Reece thus use art practice as political agency, challenging and confronting dominant society’s version of diverse Indigenous culture, story, and identity. Augusto Boal, founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Brazil in the late 1970s, explains that artists can actively challenge the dominant arts, culture, and writings through sharing and placing authority in their story. Interventions through the arts can therefore stimulate new perspectives and negotiate new spaces for interaction. The recognition of performance—or in the case of Claxton’s work, video-narratives, or Belmore’s, performance art—as a continued site for transmitting Indigenous experiences, fostering memory, and history-making lends urgency to acts of Indigenous art practice as a viable and contributing medium for Indigenous cultural continuance. In this way, contemporary Indigenous art that uses strategies of storytelling can be vehicles towards displacing colonial and settler narratives, thereby contributing to the Indigenization of the archive and social memory/ies.

Claiming Indigenous Spaces: Indigenous Storytelling Festivals

Since the 1980s, storytelling festivals in Canada have been sites for interdisciplinary artists to share stories and develop story-based practices. I argue that Indigenous storytelling festivals can be seen as sites for cultural continuance and survivance, and examine the practices of contemporary women storytellers to reveal how performance art, video, film, theatre, poetry and literature intersect. I explore two Canadian festivals—High-Tech Storytellers (Saskatoon, 2000) and Stalking Stick Festival (Vancouver, 2001-Present)—to reveal how these storytelling festivals claim, negotiate, and reveal their host cities as a historic and contemporary Indigenous space.

The High Tech Storytellers Festival: Interdisciplinary Arts Festival hosted in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in 2000 was organized by TRIBE: A Centre for the Evolving Aboriginal Media, Visual and Performing Arts Inc. and AKA (Artist-Run-Centre). It was an interdisciplinary and

172 The concept of Aboriginal cultural “survivance” was introduced by Gerald Vizenor. See Vizenor, Manifest Manners, 53; and Gerald Vizenor, Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1998), 15.

cross-cultural festival featuring artists concurrently in four different venues across the city, including Indigenous artists Edward Poitras at the Kenderdine Gallery, James Luna at the Snelgrove Gallery, and Rebecca Belmore at AKA Gallery; and non-Indigenous artists, such as Lori Wiedenhammer (Mendel Art Gallery) and Steven Heimbecker (AKA). This event explored the fusion of traditional storytelling with contemporary technology, and materialized Tribe’s mandate to “not only strengthen the local arts community, but also bring together the aboriginal and non-aboriginal community in all their programs.”

174 High Tech Storytellers was a four-month long (February to June 2000) festival showcasing performance and contemporary art that explored the impact of contemporary technology and art on oral traditions. 175 Rebecca Belmore performed *The Indian Factory* (2000) at the AKA Artist Run Centre. This site-specific performance-turned-installation claimed an Indigenous space for the articulation of Indigenous experience, and also addressed local histories and contemporary lived-experiences. Lee Ann Martin describes the performance: “Belmore entered the space carrying a bucket of plaster, which she then applied to several men’s jackets hanging from hooks on the wall. The hollow and hardened plaster forms were an acknowledgement of Aboriginal victims of ongoing racial violence in the prairie city.”

176 Towards the end of the performance, Belmore then curls up on the floor on a thick layer of plaster, thereby creating a cast of an ‘Indian’ body (fig. 59). *The Indian Factory* reveals a silenced urban...
Aboriginal experience and calls for remembrance of the violence experienced by Indigenous bodies across Canada. A strategic take-over of the city, the festival presented diverse perspectives and voices to the multicultural arts community of Saskatoon.

Talking Stick Festival, founded and presented by Full Circle First Nations Performance based in Vancouver, hosted its ninth annual festival 21-28 February 2010. The event is described by the organization as a citywide festival that provides a stage for a diverse range of Indigenous artists—established and emerging, national and international—who perform dance, music, theatre, storytelling, and multimedia and performance art. The name of the festival alludes to Aboriginal gatherings, in which a talking stick, stone, or eagle feather is passed around the circle, creating a space so that anyone who wants to speak has a chance to be heard, with respect and without interruption.177 Established in 2001 by Full Circle: First Nations Performance, the annually run Talking Stick Festival aims to provide a unique showcase and forum for talented Aboriginal artists and to introduce both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences to contemporary Aboriginal artistic practice. Since its inception, the festival has become a place to honour Aboriginal tradition in contemporary forms, the artistic wealth of the

177 Full Circle: First Nations Performance, Talking Stick Festival: For the Media, accessed May 24, 2011, http://www.fullcircleperformance.ca/content.asp?chapterID=12&subchapterID=42&pageID=131&Year=2005&NewsID=3. The 2010 festival is sited to have been co-presented by the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad, and “thrilled to be able to introduce the Aboriginal culture and arts to the many visitors here during the Olympics.”
people, and the promise of their future in Canada.178

Talking Stick Festival has also incorporated international Indigenous artists into its programming. In 2005, Fiona Doyle, one of Australia’s pre-eminent Aboriginal artists—a Torres Strait artist of Mbaiwun and Austrian decent and raised in Weipa’s Napranum community on Western Cape York Peninsula—performed her autobiographical work, A Bastard’s Tale. This is a powerful and emotional piece that traces her family’s histories and her search for her father, whom she had grown up without knowing. Doyle’s performance, the opening act for the Stories in Motion program, began with her addressing her audience, “I want to tell you a story, but I want you to listen not just with your ears, but with your mind, your heart, and your spirit.” A review of the Stories in Motion in the Georgia Straight newspaper by a local Vancouver journalist Kelsey Dunton describes Doyle’s interdisciplinary performance: “It is not until after she tells of her father’s death that the older Doyle really begins to dance, moving gracefully in a way that blends contemporary and traditional Aboriginal forms. Doyle articulates her sorrow through her movements, expressing a grief that transcends words.”179 Doyle’s solo performance (which included her young daughter Ebony in several scenes) combined storytelling through dance, voice, and body. In this way, her performance, along with many other examples of artists at Talking Stick Festival embodies the festival mandate, “Since its inception, the festival has become a place to honour Aboriginal tradition in contemporary forms, the artistic wealth of the people, and the promise of their future in Canada. The festival is a smorgasbord of Aboriginal artistic expression including, but not limited to music, dance, and spoken word and provides a stage for emerging and established artists.”180

Several of the artists explored in this thesis have performed at the Talking Stick Festival. In 2009, Reece and L’Hirondelle participated in the program, “A Tribute to the Coast Salish Jazz Legend Mildred Bailey” (a foremost musician in the early 1920’s). L’Hirondelle and Reece, along with Gillian Thomson, Renae Morriseau, and Full Spirit and Talking Stick director, Margo Kane, performed with one of Vancouver’s premier guitar players, Johannes Grames.181 At the 2008 festival, L’Hirondelle participated with M’Girl (pronounced ma-girl), an award-winning Aboriginal

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178 Ibid.
Women’s Ensemble (Renae Morriseau, Sheila Maracle, and L’Hirondelle). M’Girl states that it “incorporate[s] the sounds of R & B, blues, folk/roots, house and world beat with traditional Aboriginal melodic phrasing, song forms and rhythms. The message in the music is an emergence of cultural ideals and world views from the perspectives of their Metis/Cree (NÃ’hiyawin), Ojibway and Mohawk backgrounds.”

During the 2002 Talking Stick Festival, Rebecca Belmore performed *Vigil* on the streets of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, revealing the history of missing/murdered Indigenous women in both local Vancouver and national contexts (this performance is discussed and explored in Chapter 5). Talking Stick Festival thus has become a site not only for cultural continuities and continuance through Indigenous storytelling, but also for the assertion of Indigenous self-determination, sovereignty, survivance, and activism.

The artists incorporated into the programming of these festivals highlight the diverse cultural ancestry and nations from across North America and posit the city of Saskatoon and Vancouver as sites for transnational Indigenous gathering. It is significant to acknowledge the fact that Indigenous nations are diverse nations living within the borders of nation-states, such as Canada and the United States. Indigenous territories transcend the constructed boundaries of these states and have always already engaged in cross-cultural dialogue and exchange. The powerful and dynamic performances create an opportunity for the sharing of multiple Indigenous perspectives, histories, and identities, which ultimately claims a space for the recognition of both historic and contemporary Aboriginal issues and the subversion of popular stereotypical narratives and iconic representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures. In this way, the performances, through the artists’ site-specific works, resist the erasure of Indigenous presence in the urban spaces and Indigenous relationships to the surrounding lands in the region. These storytelling festivals negotiate space for asserting Indigenous cultural, political, and land sovereignty by vocalizing, through performative story-based strategies, Aboriginal self-determination and cultural continuance.

Afterthoughts

This chapter has explored the use of Indigenous storytelling in performance art practices, making links between storytelling, cultural continuance, activism and assertions of self determination and sovereignty. An aspect of the artistic strategies of artists Lori Blondeau, Rebecca Belmore, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Dana Claxton, and Skeena Reece is the use of stories. Their use of stories is also connected to the strategy of mining the archive—or, in other words, indigenizing colonial archives and documentation of Indigenous peoples and cultures. I focused on the concept of storytelling to elucidate the significance of these Indigenous women performance artists in the act of revealing Indigenous experiences and silenced histories. In this way, as a collective of distinct Indigenous voices, they weave traditions of Aboriginal oratory with performance art strategy to articulate protest and intervention within Canadian colonial/settler and national/ist discourses and narratives. Pauline Johnson was incorporated into this discussion to highlight the history of Indigenous women using performance as a strategy of socio-political and cultural resistance. In this sense, the contemporary performance artists participate in a continuum, or rather history, of Aboriginal resistance and survivance, contributing to the discourse of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. The ideas explored in this chapter connect Indigenous storytelling to living histories, memories, and experiences and to the concept of Indigenizing the archive. I have argued that the strategies of the artists participate in resistance and intervention; in this way, Indigenous performance art can and does participate in Indigenous activism and political protest.

According to Susan Brill de Ramirez, “There is a certain power that is compelling in the oral narrative as spoken by a storyteller simply because the spoken word is so immediate and intimate.” With the “ritual” of the storytelling practice, the audience, or rather the listener, participates or is given an opportunity to participate in a reciprocal relationship. In this way, storytelling is a simultaneous process of witnessing and giving testimony. Brill de Ramirez argues, “the storyteller and listener interact throughout the process in a conversation that reflects the inherent interrelationality of storytelling.” What this means is that the listener is an “active participant whose presence is necessary to the telling-creation of the story.” Blondeau writes, for example, “With all my work, the audience is an integral part of the performance.” Audience politics play a significant role in performance art’s reception and the production of meaning.

183 Berry Brill de Ramirez, Contemporary American Indian, 4.
184 Ibid., 6.
185 Ibid.
This is exemplified by Blondeau’s remarks about her performance practice, “This work has taught me that when I am working in this medium, my performance is never the same twice, the venue, the audience, and my own state of mind inform the outcome of the piece.” The interpretations made by audience members will, obviously, differ based on their individual experiences, cultural identities, education, and decided level of participation as a witness.

Performances, like Belmore’s *Bury My Heart*, are not offering one story or meaning to her audience, as her performance is multifaceted and evokes and connects to long-standing Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural traditions and over five hundred years of contact. In this way, meaning is negotiated between the performer and the audience. The thematic focus of the performance, such as in the case of Belmore’s and Blondeau’s performance work, stems from and explores Indigenous histories, identities, and subjectivities as well as personal experiences and current Aboriginal realities—revealing the multifaceted layers of meanings. The production of such meanings is dependent on the audiences’ knowledge base and engagement with popular media and current affairs, as well as their personal experiences. The ephemeral nature of performance art as an art practice offers to its audience members a live and expedient experience—creating a site, in the case of the performance work explored in this chapter, for witnessing testimonies and stories about contemporary Aboriginal experiences, colonial histories, and their legacies. In their performance, they present and perform colonial histories, such as the Canadian government’s ethnocidal project of the residential school system in Blondeau’s *Are You My Mother?* and Belmore’s *Victorious* (2009) (both of these performances are further explored in the following chapter). Some of their audience members could be survivors of this traumatic history, while others, such as academics, may have studied it. Certain members of the audience will be unaware of the episode and may recognize the gaps in their understanding of Aboriginal history. The individual experiences and knowledge of each member of the audience will affect how the performances are received.

Playing with history and Aboriginal knowledge is a strategy used by these Indigenous women performance artists. This practice of “playing with history”—or rather Indigenizing histories and archives—reveals the complexities of histories and the erasure of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge in settler histories and narratives. In a recent review of the National Museum of the American Indian and the potential use of exhibitions as sites for asserting Indigenous historical memory, Myla V. Carpio recognizes that “many Indigenous scholars, community members, activists, and others have called for reclaiming and rewriting of Indigenous

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187 Ibid.
history, history that not only reclaims but also critiques imperialism and colonialism and their impacts on Indigenous world views, cultures, and existences.”

I include Carpio’s statement to reveal the larger discourse these artists respond to and work within. These artists, like Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Margaret Kovach, are participating in the project of decolonizing Indigenous histories that have been either erased or appropriated by mainstream settler society. They use their bodies and performance to reclaim and write and assert Indigenous history. Drawing upon Luna’s (among other artists and scholars of performance art) understanding of body politics, we can see the human body as a “social instrument” to articulate critical discourse. With reference to the performances in this chapter, they intertwine their personal, familial, and community stories with colonial histories and their legacies to displace settler-centric Canadian national/ist narratives that undermine Indigenous experiences and cultural knowledge. In the next chapter, I explore the use of Indigenous performance art as a means to enact remembrance and to memorialize specific experiences, extending my discussions here of the use of Indigenous notions of memory to assert Indigenous cultural sovereignty and continuance.

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188 Myla Vicenti Carpio, “(Un)disturbing Exhibitions: Indigenous Historical Memory at the NMAI,” *The American Indian Quarterly* 30, no. 3–4 (Summer/Fall 2006): 628.
Interview

Storytelling

**Carla Taunton:**
What role does storytelling play in your video/performance practice? Do you feel that story/storytelling is an important aspect of your work?

**Tanya Lukin Linklater:**
First and foremost, I experience my artistic practice as a process of investigation or research. The practice is unfolding as I more deeply investigate, and I pose questions through the process. I am working out the ideas through the practice....

In my performance art works, I engage with fragments of stories, or language, fragments of cosmology. In a way, my work is a kind of putting together these parts or pieces of narratives, which is an act of re-membering.

The narratives include the ruptures of colonization. The work is not centred on colonization, it is not the focus of the work. Yet, I’m working with the effects or recovery from loss.

I’m an Alutiiq woman living, working in non-Alutiiq spaces. So sometimes the work is about me being away from home, and mapping these non-Alutiiq spaces with Alutiiq cosmology and performance, yet I feel that metaphorically, our people are collectively away from home in that we have experienced a violent past of cultural erasure. This is only my reading. Many Alutiit will speak of our current economic success with Alaska Native Corporations as a strength and tribute this strength to our ability as Alutiit to adapt, which is a key word for Alutiit in anthropological literature, for example. I see adaptation as (sometimes) code for loss.

I am in conversation with my community first and foremost, yet mostly, I perform in non-Alutiiq spaces.
In my contemporary dance work, I am engaged with deciphering the telling of stories as a prominent aspect of traditional Alaska Native dance. The song structure, and hand motions of the dances tell stories. Community members familiar with the dances understand their meanings. For a wider audience, the movements become abstracted. It is this place of not understanding the language or abstract movements, yet a desire to understand, that I also create work. I leave space for others to make meaning, to decipher the potential narratives that exist in the work.

Cheryl L’Hirondelle:
Storytelling has been an important aspect of my work. I think that a person’s life and practice consists of many strands, which are woven together to create a whole. And, for me, storytelling is one of those strands. Any work I’ve ever done in all the various art genres I’ve worked in, from performance to music, incorporates storytelling.

I was a storyteller in residence for four years for a tribal council. It was a huge honour for me. The late Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew used to say that those years that I got to spend up in northern Saskatchewan, working for Meadow Lake Tribal Council as the co-storyteller for the nine bands up there, was my masters thesis. I did my masters in the bush and at the kitchen tables of many elders.

So, I think that this experience of being a storyteller in residence, and having the opportunity to sit with old people and to listen to them tell stories to me has had a profound impact on my art practice and on my own life. My position—was that of an amplifier, a transmitter and a gatherer of stories. I found different places to broadcast the stories to reach broader audiences, specifically to the kids on the reserve, the next generation.

There was so much that I learned sitting at those kitchen tables. I learned about language and Cree worldview...I learned so much about performance. I learned so much about the whole notion of the body through small though potent and encoded gestures they made with their hands and arms or through facial gestures and this is when storytelling became such a profound thing for me, especially in terms of cultural memory. From these opportunities and experiences I started to think about where stories live in our beings. I thought about where in the body stories are lodged.
Stories actually live in our muscles, in our tissues, and in our sinews. Stories live in our bones. When you get to listen to a really good storyteller, you know that they are experiencing an internal journey before they utter a word. What I mean here is that they are finding the place in their body that the story needs to come out of, and this journey is connected to the relationship between the storyteller and the audience and the storyteller’s ability to sense or ‘read’ their audience. This idea of ‘reading’ or ‘sensing’ is connected to my understanding of Cree worldview and Cree peoples’ ability to read a landscape. This is also the basis of my songlines songwriting project – reading the contours, rhythms of the land and her beings.
Chapter 4

Performance as Remembrance: Decolonizing Practices and the Making of Indigenous Memorialization

In this chapter, I examine performative practices of three Indigenous women artists. *Bury My Heart* (2000) and *Victorious* (2009) by Rebecca Belmore; *Grace* (2007) and *Asiniy Iskwew* (2009) by Lori Blondeau; and *I Want to Know Why* (1991) by Dana Claxton are all performances that commemorate, among several things, the histories of genocide and of physical, emotional, and psychological violence experienced by Aboriginal peoples during colonial expansion in North America. Examining these through the lenses of remembrance, memory, and bearing witness, I also draw extensively on Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s discussions of processes of decolonization, which I connect to the act of reclaiming, revoicing, and revisioning excluded Indigenous histories through performance.

The Indigenous artists I discuss perform Indigenous experiences and stories that have historically been silenced and marginalized by dominant colonial writings of history, fostering a forgetting of Indigenous memory in the cultural consciousness of settler societies. Indigenous performance, then, can be seen as participating in the creation of Indigenous memorialization—that is, performative memory-sites of sharing memories/stories and of commemorating Indigenous knowledge and experience. The performative acts I explore in this chapter make reference to historical events, personal and familial stories and experiences, and cultural knowledge. In this way, I examine (re)memory, bearing witness, colonial trauma, and resistance in relation to Indigenous performance to reveal the performative practice of Indigenous memorialization.

I divide this chapter into several sections exploring individual performances. Each performance raises specific issues, histories, and contexts that I contextualize through theories of memory, trauma, and remembrance. My analysis incorporates discussion of the relationship of performance to acts of remembrance and resistance—how, potentially, through bearing witness performance participates in decolonizing, anticolonial, and anti-oppression projects. I also explore the effect on social consciousness when audience members become witnesses, arguing that they take on the role of active listeners, publicly recognizing performed stories/experiences/histories. I draw on the work of scholars who study performance, such as Jean Fisher, who has contextualized
performance storytelling practices as sites where the act of witness may enable audiences to “rediscover [their] potential as agents of change.” I argue that live and video-based Indigenous performances offer local, national, and international audiences sites where they can bear witness to the current realities of Indigenous peoples and take notice of the trauma that marks the Aboriginal body. At the same time, I explore these performances for evidence of their contribution to the discourse of Indigenous decolonization, whereby self-determined Aboriginal voices indigenize spaces. I see the result as a reclaiming of once victimized bodies, lands, and stories marked by colonial history to an active and self-determined position of Indigenous sovereignty. The purpose of this chapter then is to reveal how contemporary Indigenous performances, such as Bury My Heart and Asinìy Iskwew: Rock Woman, participate in Indigenous activism and contribute to the remembering of the past through the present.

Memory, Trauma, and the Colonial Experience

In the following sections I explore and discuss Indigenous women’s performance art in connection to the performance of remembrance. In this way, I connect the performances by Belmore, and Blondeau, and the video work by Claxton to the concepts of Indigenous memory, colonial memory, and Indigenous trauma. My focus here is to highlight the multilayered performances by these artists and their contributions and participation within Indigenous decolonization of Aboriginal experiences, memories and stories. I argue that Aboriginal performance art can participate in an actualization of Indigenous memories and, simultaneously in some instances, performatively act out Indigenous trauma. Before I analyze the performances, however, I identify several concepts and questions: What is Indigenous memory and colonial memory? What is Indigenous trauma? How are these concepts different from dominant Western notions of trauma and memory? What are the implications of colonial experiences and ongoing power relations for Indigenous peoples?

Following my exploration of these complex concepts, I briefly introduce colonial and Indigenous memory and Indigenous trauma I then link the concept of performing memory and trauma to the tactics and politics of Indigenous decolonization. Throughout this chapter, the performance of remembrance, Indigenous memory and trauma, and decolonizing politics are interwoven to reveal possible implications of Indigenous performance. Fundamental to my argument is to recognize the

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presence of Indigenous resilience and agency, thereby acknowledging these performances as potential sites for Indigenous power, strength, and healing.

Looking at concepts of Indigenous performance art as a form of remembrance and rememory raises, as noted above, numerous questions in relation to specific Indigenous frameworks and knowledges: What is colonial memory? Indigenous memory? What do blood memory and racial memory have to do with Indigenous memory? In many accounts of memory, Indigenous experiences are not thoughtfully and consistently discussed, but are rather nuanced and alluded to. However, in “The Anthropology of Collective Memory,” a short essay by U. Linke, Neil Smelser, and Paul Baltes, Indigenous collective memory is specifically connected to the trauma of colonialism. The authors’ account of collective memory is constructed as a means to define “memory” and to consider how remembrances are created. They argue, “A remembrance, a social understanding of events that is represented as 'memory,' can be constructed by sharing with others sets of images that have been passed down to them through the media of memory—through paintings, architecture, monuments, ritual performances, storytelling, language, music, photos, and film.”

In addition to how remembrance operates, Linke et al. also argue that memory is political and can therefore be politicized. They write,

> Memory is therefore not a generic term of analysis, but itself an object appropriated, transformed, and politicized. Or, put differently, memory can be nationalized, medicalized, aestheticized, gendered, bought, and sold. Historical consciousness shaped by states, elites, political rivalry, scientific ideology, and global capitalism plays a significant role in the formation of national and social identities. The anthropology of collective remembrance is not only concerned with affirmation and heritage, but with processes of contestation, the aftermath of trauma, war, genocide, and revolution, and the emergence of counter memories.

What I find important here, perhaps reading between the lines so to speak, is the assertion of the opportunity for Indigenous resistance and vocalization of Indigenous experiences, histories, and stories through the performance of Indigenous memory. In this way, the act of performing Indigenous collective memory is a political one; performative sites of remembrance create opportunity for the sharing of Indigenous self-determination for the decolonization of Indigenous histories from settler erasures, silences, misunderstandings, and dominations.

Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” is a useful trope to consider aspects of the works of Belmore, Blondeau, and Claxton and also as a means to discuss concepts of Indigenous

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3 Ibid.
collective memory. This is not to say that all the experiences evoked and alluded to in these performances are postmemory, but that in several examples one layer of meaning can be understood and connected to the conceptualization of postmemory. In other words, the ways in which these Indigenous women artists recall, remember, and perform histories of Indigenous trauma and colonial experiences can be understood through the lens of postmemory. Hirsch defines postmemory as distinguishned from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.”

In relation to Indigenous forms of postmemory performed and imagined by contemporary Indigenous artists—such as their individual and collective memories of contact violence, residential schools, and the Indian Wars in the United States—postmemory asserts the intergenerational trauma that marks the Indigenous body and mental consciousness of Indigenous peoples. Postmemory acknowledges the potential traumas carried by the individual. Hirsch developed the notion of postmemory in relation to children of Holocaust survivors and also as a useful way to “describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences.” In “Generation of Postmemory”, she describes postmemory as “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.”

My reading then of Indigenous postmemory, following Hirsch and other scholars of memory and cultural trauma, is that the past five hundred years of occupation, colonial violence, marginalization, racism, and ongoing systemic and physical subordination in North America encompasses aspects of collective Indigenous memory and trauma. Indigenous postmemory is the contemporary implications of colonization and neocolonization, whereby past traumas are remembered and experienced partly due to ongoing epistemological, systemic, and physical

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5 Ibid.

violence. This understanding of postmemory is connected to the concept of what Kiowa writer Scott Momaday calls “blood-memory,” meaning Indigenous remembering, recollecting, and collective knowing and memory. Momaday’s trope of memory in the blood or blood memory, first presented in his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel House Made of Dawn and later developed and incorporated throughout his writing, discloses the differences of understandings—specifically in terms of memory, history, and identities—between Indigenous and white-settler cultures. The trope reveals the presence of intergenerational memory among Indigenous peoples based on Indigenous ancestry.

Chadwick Allen, in Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity, puts forward the blood/land/memory complex, which he states is an expansion of “Momaday’s controversial trope blood memory that makes explicit the central role that land plays when in the specific project of defining Indigenous minority personal, familial, and communal identities (blood) and in the larger project of reclaiming and reimagining Indigenous minority histories (memories).” Allen argues that this complex clearly states the ongoing project of Indigenous “recuperation,” or rather, as I conceive of it, acts of Indigenous decolonization. He writes that such a methodological understanding can be employed as an “attempt to seize control of the symbolic and metaphorical meanings of Indigenous ‘blood,’ ‘land,’ and ‘memory’ and that seek to liberate Indigenous minority identities from definitions of authenticity imposed by dominant settler cultures, including those definitions imposed by well-meaning academics.” In other words, notions of blood memory articulate the concept of “racial memory,” and in relation to Indigenous memory they convey the

9 This concept of “blood memory” has been both celebrated and criticized and connected to ongoing debates of Indigenous identity and concepts of authentic Indian identities in the United States. Chadwick Allen argues, “Momaday’s trope seems an obvious appropriation and redeployment of the U.S. government’s attempt to systematize and regulate American Indian personal and political identities through tabulations of ‘blood quantum’ or ‘degree of Indian blood.’ The trope’s provocative juxtaposition of blood and memory transforms that taxonomy of delegitimization through genetic mixing into an authenticating genealogy of stories and storytelling.” Allen, “Blood (and) Memory,” 94. Whereas Arnold Krupat argues that “there is no gene for perception, no such thing of memory in the blood.” Krupat argues that blood memory or memory in the blood takes away from individual talent of Native American authors and puts forward a critical stance against what he deems an essentialist theoretical concept. Arnold Krupat, The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 13. Thomas King however has argued that this concept is not essentialist in his introduction to All My Relations: An Anthology of Native American Literature, ed. Thomas King (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), ix-xvi.
10 Chadwick Allen, Blood Narrative, 16.
11 Ibid.
fact that memory within Indigenous frameworks is understood as being connected to lands, territories, histories, family connections, cultural, and political nationhood, as well as the struggles to determine identities and cultural continuity.

For example, Lee Maracle discusses notions of Aboriginal time as being directly connected to memory and memory of community and defines Indigenous memory as “lineage memory.” She writes, “To claim lineage memory and juxtapose it with current memory is to articulate the most sacred of one’s entire thought from the beginning to the present and it is intended as future memory.” Maracle’s assertion differs from more commonly understood notions of memory, whereby memory as an Indigenous experience and cultural entity does not only encompass individual or personal but includes collective and communal histories, experiences, and memories. She is calling for the articulation and imaginings of memory as a means to create memory for the future. The works of the artists in this chapter embody Maracle’s concept of lineage memory and work to performatively enact and actualize through the body Indigenous memory, connecting the past to the present and transmitting historical experiences to contemporary ones. As Jeanne Perreault suggests in relation to Maracle,

the word lineage suggests bloodlines, a heritage of the body that leaves its traces in mental effects and memories. For Maracle, the personal and immediate past (which is how I read current memory) and the collective past available through the lineage memory of a people coalesce, but this phenomenon is not simply a given … Maracle emphasizes the necessity of claiming that communal memory—actively, purposefully, and imaginatively—of juxtaposing it with current memory.

Momaday’s trope of blood memory and Maracle’s conception of lineage memory along with Hirsch’s postmemory are useful theoretical approaches to define Indigenous concepts of memory, in that postmemory also conveys the ideas of intergenerational memory and collective Indigenous memories (which are of course distinct in terms of local experiences). Regardless of the controversies around intergenerational memory or memory in the blood, these conceptions are valuable means to distinguish the performance of enacting Indigenous memories and experiences. The blood/land/memory or lineage memory trope raises the history of colonial displacement of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands and the connection between Indigenous memory,

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blood memory, and colonial trauma. The works I examine reveal these Indigenous writers’ understanding of memory, as they use their bodies rather than words to express and create sites for the memorialization of Indigenous past and current experiences.

The useful conceptualizations of Indigenous notions of memory—whether blood memory, postmemory, or lineage memory—are connected to Native American and Canadian author Joy Harjo’s discussion of memory, whereby past, present, and future memory are interconnected and intergenerational. In de Certeau’s *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, he explores the connections between visceral, performative, and collective Indigenous memory and the history of Indigenous resistance. Drawing on Russell Means, de Certeau argues that body memory is linked to the everyday modes of expression, including social actions and performative resistance. His argument is also linked to Paul Connerton’s argument that memory is created, mediated, and constructed through bodily actions and gestural repetitions, among other things. In this sense, performative actions and performance practices are transferred as gestures that generate power through the social, cultural, and political force. In relation to Indigenous memory, de Certeau argues,

“You know,” said Russell Means, “Indians have a long memory.” They do not forget their fallen heroes and their land under occupation by “foreigners.” In their villages, Indians preserve a painful recognition of four and a half centuries of colonization. Dominated but not vanquished, they keep alive the memory of what the Europeans have “forgotten”—a continuous series of uprisings and awakenings which have left hardly a trace in the occupiers historical literature. This history of resistance punctuated by cruel repression is marked on the Indian’s body as much as it is recorded in transmitted accounts—or more so … “In this sense, the body is memory.”

By looking to Aboriginal theorists like Maracle in connection to the issues raised in the performances—such as *Bury My Heart* (fig. 48) and the Wounded Knee Massacre—we can also expose how memory has been used as a tactic of colonialism, meaning that dominant societies’ memories have been remembered whereas Indigenous memories have been systemically forgotten within settler culture’s consciousness.

The relationship between memory and history as a tactic of colonization in settler nations is addressed by Annie Coombes, who in “Memory and History in Settler Colonialism” argues that the complex histories of contact between Indigenous peoples and heterogeneous white colonial peoples in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa has been obscured, narrated, and embodied in

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public culture and historical memory. In a discussion of Indigenous memory—especially collective or social Indigenous memory—linkages must be made between memory and history due to the connections of the writing of histories and collective memory to power relationships of colonization. In colonial contexts and contemporary legacies’ “struggles for domination over remembrance and tradition, the manipulation of retrievable historical consciousness and collective forgetting takes place.” Anthropologists Link, Smelser, and Baltes discuss the differing Western understandings of history and memory, noting,  

The term “history” is often used to describe representations of the past that appear in written or narrative form, a primary medium through which states, elites, or dominant descent groups confiscate linear time and proclaim official chronologies as “master narratives.” The term “memory,” by contrast, is conventionally applied to those oral, visual, ritual, and local cultural practices through which a community’s collective remembrance of the past is produced or sustained.

Link et al. also address how anthropological study of Indigenous and other non-Western peoples resulted largely in erasures and disregard of Indigenous histories. With regard to 19th- and early 20th-century anthropology, they write, “as its central theme 'the unlettered and forgotten peoples,' the anthropological endeavor was inclined to disregard the existence of Indigenous histories, which included, in particular, the trauma of the colonial encounter. The erasure of such a universe of time and being must be understood as a figuration of power. The effacement of historicity is a political operation.” In reading Aboriginal literature and poetry and witnessing performance art, it becomes clear that such articulations of Indigenous experience and memories are acts of resistance towards the hegemonic process of history, and, significantly, are a method of asserting and claiming Indigenous histories and memories. I argue that the performances bring together memory productively and imaginatively with history as a process of bringing forward past Indigenous stories. In other words, personal and communal memories are connected in order to retrace and map out Indigenous histories or past experiences. Muskogee Creek poet and writer Joy Harjo discusses her use of memory in relation to her work as a means “to retrace the past not as an inducement to curl inwards on oneself, as if it were a point in time without escape route, but rather as a dynamic

16 Linke, Smelser, and Baltes, “Anthropology,” 2219.  
17 Ibid.
process to reaffirm ancient heritages and proceed forward on a path of constant renewal.”18 In this way, the act of creatively expressing Indigenous memory can be seen as a method of mobilizing cultural sovereignty that resists the historic exclusion and disregard of Aboriginal experiences within settler nations.

Susan Crane’s exploration of memory and its relationship to museums in *Museums and Memory* is useful in the discussion of the performance of Indigenous memories by Indigenous women. Crane argues, “The mental process of memory takes on corporeal form in the brain, but this physical form is invisible to the naked eye: memory becomes sensible and visible through imaginative recollection and representation.”19 In the contexts of settler nations, the imaginative recollection and representation has tended towards a national/ist remembrance that has omitted and rendered Indigenous memory subordinate and, in many instances, invisible. However, the performance of Indigenous memories by artists like Belmore and Blondeau create sites from which the invisible and silenced Indigenous experiences become visible and vocalized. She states that memory is not a passive process, but that it evokes emotions and desires, positively and negatively charged, and that memory is also driven by a desire to remember and forget.20 In this regard, Crane notes, “Memory is not static, but it can be made to seem so through the creation of forms of representation that attempt to solidify memories’ meanings.”21 Crane’s argument, although connected to the institution of the museum, can be applied to this exploration of Indigenous performances of remembrance, as they are acts of representation of Indigenous experiences, memories, histories, and stories that have been forgotten by dominant Canadian society and in many cases have not been represented (consistently) by Canadian cultural institutions, such as the museum. The performance of Indigenous memories calls attention to Canada’s culture of forgetting Indigenous experiences and bears witness to such memories/histories/stories. The inclusion of performances such as Rebecca Belmore’s *Victorious*—an ephemeral monument to residential school survivors that was performed as part of the National Capital Commissions’ festival BC Scene—can potentially mediate and resist this culture of forgetting by foregrounding and privileging self-represented Indigenous experiences.

This discussion on notions of Indigenous memory highlights the necessity when considering Indigenous memory to incorporate not only Indigenous understandings of memory

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 1–2.
(such as oral memory/history and blood memory) but also how Indigenous memories have historically in settler nations been silenced, hidden, erased, and forgotten. In addition, the ways in which Indigenous peoples have remembered and continue to represent their memories (in storytelling, dance, literature, visual and performance art) despite colonial tactics of ethnocide and assimilation, must also be part of the exploration of Indigenous memory. By making these connections, we call attention to the significance and importance of the work of Indigenous remembrance—thereby making Indigenous performances of Indigenous memory, trauma, and colonial experiences participants in the project of decolonization. Okanagan poet and storyteller Jeanette Armstrong articulates a similar message in her poem “Threads of Old Memory,” in which she conceptualizes Indigenous memory and the role of the artist in the act of Indigenous remembrance:

I speak and powerfully become actions
become memory in someone.
I become different memories to different people
different stories in the retelling of my place.
I speak in a language of words
formed of the actions of the past
words that become the sharing
the collective knowing
the links that become a people
the dreaming that becomes a history
the calling forth of voices
the sending forward of memory
I am the weaver of memory thread
twining past to future
I am the artist
the storyteller…


Indigenous (Re)memory: Indigenous Video as Remembrance

Dana Claxton’s works—such as Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux, I Want to Know Why (1991), Buffalo Bone China (1997), and 10 (2003)—reveal the many silenced histories of violence and systemic racism of North American colonization and its ongoing legacies. Her performative video works, I Want to Know Why (1991) and Buffalo Bone China (1997), are evidence of the process of connecting past Indigenous memories with contemporary ones. I see Claxton’s work as a
visual articulation of Maracle’s lineage memory. Violence against Indigenous peoples and their bodies is a theme that Claxton explores and gives voice to in both explicit and implicit ways. The visual exploration of violence against Indigenous bodies, minds, cultures, and knowledge is closely connected to the tactics of colonization. Many of these histories of violence are not part of North American social memory and national narratives of nationhood. For example, 10, a 7.20-minute video, showcases and complicates, Agatha Christie’s novel and the film adaptations, 10 Little Indians. Agatha Christie’s best selling novel, first published in the United States in 1940 under the title And Then There Were None, is a mystery that follows the experiences of ten guests who have been invited to an isolated location only to find that an unseen person is killing them one by one. This video implicates Christie’s novel and the commonly known nursery rhyme, after which her book is named, in the violence against Indigenous peoples and the ongoing silencings around these histories and contemporary experiences. Claxton incorporates the technique of jump cutting between three different versions of the 10 Little Indian films from three different periods of American film history. During this short experimental work, the nursery rhyme is repeated over and over again. The words of the nursery rhyme become more aggressive through the rhyme’s repetition. Claxton thus exposes the power of language and images and the way in which popular culture and stereotypes are a form of systemic racism and violence.

Her identity as a Lakota woman and her family’s and community’s past and present experiences with social injustices inform her art practice: in particular her strategies of unraveling and revealing silenced histories. Tania Willard extends this point in her description of Claxton’s 1994 video, I Want to Know Why, in which the artists’ voice is a fundamental part of work’s sound, creating a rhythm that contextualizes of the imagery (fig. 60). Willard writes,

her heritage is linked to an important historical injustice spanning the US and Canadian colonial borders: the migration of Sitting Bull and his people to Canada. The effects of colonization, discrimination, and systemic racism on Aboriginal people and on the artist's own family history fueled her early work. In an early single-channel video work, I Want to Know Why (1994), Dana screams, “I want to know why!” In her cry for answers, the injustice and colonial foundation of Canada and the US is revealed within the personal tragedy of her mother's and maternal grandmother's early deaths and her great grandmother's migration to Canada. Dana frames the suffering of her grandmothers and her mother within the context of Canadian colonialism and the injustice of American history.\(^{23}\)

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Through the artist’s voice, she commemorates and mourns the violent experiences of the women in her family. Claxton reveals the urban violence endured by Indigenous women through her mother’s and grandmother’s experiences. In this way, *I Want to Know Why* works simultaneously as an arts-based act of activism and a memorialization to the women in her family as well as to Indigenous women who have and continue to experience daily violence. Her family’s story of migration across the Canada/US border in the late 1890s to Moose Jaw in response to the US government’s aggressive encroachment on Western Plains territories—a walk during which many died of starvation—is connected to her family’s more recent experiences of violence. In this way, she reveals the contemporary relevance of colonial histories and the legacies that affect the daily lived experience of Aboriginal peoples today.

Claxton’s *Buffalo Bone China* (1997) (fig. 61), a video, performance, and installation, recalls the infinite impact of the extermination of the buffalo on Indigenous life and the historical use of buffalo bone to make fine china. Through the telling of this story of the buffalo, Claxton’s work reveals the genocide and ethnocide of Aboriginal peoples in North America. A dynamic interweaving of artistic media, *Buffalo Bone China* is an example of Claxton’s use of art production to reveal and challenge nationalist narratives and foreground occluded histories and silenced voices. At the same time, it functions as a site for mourning and remembrance—not only of the loss of the buffalo, but of the way of life the buffalo supported and generated for Plains
Aboriginal peoples. The images of buffalo embody the colonizing experiences of Plains Indigenous nations and their legacies on Indigenous ways of being. This multitude of meanings and messages is made possible through the use of the archive and the body, tools Claxton strategically employs throughout her work. By juxtaposing imagery from archival film footage with live-feed imagery of the Aboriginal body, Claxton’s approach brings the past into the present, complicating settler histories and asserting Indigenous perspectives.

In the video component of Buffalo Bone China (12 mins), Claxton presents archival footage of running buffalo herds intersected with looped and interspaced film images of a white man with a gun, a falling buffalo, and an Indigenous man yelling (fig. 62). These scenes are followed by a photograph of a buffalo skull overlaid on the moving image of stacks of pink, gold, and white china on a table (fig. 63). Later in the work, hands touch and caress the stacks of china, and the scene shifts to an Aboriginal man seated at the table with the china laid out in front of him. Actor, Anthony McNab Favell, yells at the table of china and then sits mournfully looking at the evidence of the Buffalo extermination. After this, the camera follows the long black hair of an unidentified individual as it is slowly swept over the stacks of china on the table. Slow-motion images of running Buffalo then return to the screen (fig. 61).
Willard describes the interconnections between politics, spirituality, memory, and anger in this performance/video installation and in Claxton’s work more generally:

Dana smashes pieces of China and later makes four bundles and places them in a sanctified circle while an experimental video of buffalo plays. Feeling the loss of the buffalo, the backbone of Plains spirituality and sustenance, the artist uses a rubber mallet to destroy plates and bowls. The breaking of the china refers to the use of buffalo bones in the making of bone china during the period of exploitation and decimation of the buffalo. This rage can be seen to ebb and flow in Dana's
The presence of the china and the Buffalo imagery function as documents that allude to colonial histories. Their inclusion introduces audience members to lesser known events that are then interrogated by the artist through the insertion of individual Indigenous bodies—her own, and Favell’s. Screaming and breaking of china is set in contrast with more subdued forms of mourning, a juxtaposition that highlights the complexity of individual responses to colonial impact. This pairing of the archive and the contemporary Indigenous body opens up a conversation that complicates existing discussions and asserts Aboriginal self-determination. As a result, Claxton’s work calls for the remembrance of the past and the creation of new stories in the present. These works are not reactionary but instead promote Indigenous perspectives and reframe settler/Indigenous histories in North America.

Dana Claxton’s re/memory or remembrance and memorialization work is intrinsically connected to acts of reclaiming and revoicing. In this way, her video can be seen as vehicle for privileging Indigenous memories and bringing the past into the present. The exhibition and screening of videos by Claxton and her contemporaries create public sites for listening and witnessing contemporary implications of nation-building projects in North America. Shelley Niro’s video The Shirt (2003, NGC Collection) (fig. 64), a live-feed video that explores Indigenous sovereignty and the impacts of colonialism, is yet another example that contextualizes the larger discourse of Aboriginal performative video art. In this work, frames of renowned Native North American photographer Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie, wearing a white t-shirt and American flag bandana standing in a grassy North American landscape, are interspersed with scenes of the Grand River. The Shirt powerfully articulates the history of Indigenous genocide and ethnocide as well as continued resistances and struggles over Indigenous lands. The narrative of the short video is overtly presented to the viewer by screened text—sentences telling the story of colonization—incorporated onto the t-shirt on the body of Tsinhnahjinnie, an Aboriginal woman who stands strong asserting her agency and self-determination in defiance of colonialism and its legacies on the contemporary realities of Aboriginal peoples. Niro uses Tsinhnahjinnie’s

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24 Willard, “Starting from Home.”
body to assert Indigenous resistance and survivance in North America—proclaiming Indigenous sovereignty over North American land by placing her body on the land and showing the connections between Indigenous identities, cultures, and land. The concluding scene of *The Shirt* (Tsinhnahjinnie is stripped of her t-shirt, which is appropriated by a white woman who stands in place of the Aboriginal woman in the North American landscape) comments on continued Euro-American/Canadian colonization and cultural appropriations. These concluding frames, like the earlier ones, represent survivance and resilience. *The Shirt*, along with Claxton’s *Buffalo Bone China* and *I Want to Know Why* challenge the silencings of colonial histories and neo-colonial experiences by asserting Indigenous perspectives and memories of colonial trauma that mark both Indigenous bodies, as well as lands.

**Indigenous Trauma: Performative Embodiment of Indigenous Experience**

Before discussing the works in this section, several questions arise: What is Indigenous trauma? And, drawing from Jill Bennet’s work, “What does art tell us about trauma?” 25 Further, how is Indigenous trauma connected to Indigenous memory? I introduce a lens of collective and intergenerational Indigenous trauma here to explore how Indigenous women performance artists

actualize Indigenous memories of colonial trauma and experiences. This is not to say that all
Indigenous peoples in Canada or in other settler nations, such as Australia and New Zealand, have
experienced the same trauma. Nor that individuals carry such trauma in the same way. But the
colonial experience and the subsequent systemic physical and psychological violence that
Indigenous peoples experience is collectively embodied. In this way, the performance of
Indigenous memories of trauma are acts of embodied survival. It is also important to stress that the
memories and experiences represented in the performances are not necessarily personal survival
testimony, but rather are performances that transmit and vocalize both historic and contemporary
Indigenous memories and traumas.

In a similar way to the discussion of memory, the field of trauma theory tends to focus
more specifically on Western experiences of trauma in the 20th century, and although this discourse
ranges in geographic location, events, and experiences of trauma, these studies have a tendency to
ignore the implications of Indigenous trauma in settler nations.26 This being said, some arguments
add to the understanding of Indigenous performance art’s engagement with memory and trauma.
Jill Bennet’s discussions of trauma art are useful as a means of departure; however, my aim here is
not to discuss Indigenous performance art as examples of trauma art, but rather of art performances
that evoke, recall, and transmit memories of current and colonial traumas. I draw on Bennet’s
discussion of art and trauma and the ways in which she problematizes the discourses of trauma
theory and art history’s analysis of trauma art. Her argument of reception is also extremely valuable
for the discussion of Indigenous performance art, as it looks to the process of transmitting trauma
within the realm of the arts:

I present a range of practices that address the fluid boundary between “insides” and
“outsides” manifesting trauma not simply as an interior condition but as a
transformative process that impacts on the world as much as on bodies. Trauma, in
this sense, is conceptualized as having a presence, a force. Thus, I argue that visual
art presents trauma as a political rather than a subjective phenomenon. It does not
offer us a privileged view of the inner subject; rather, by giving trauma extension in
space or lived place, it invites an awareness of different modes of inhabitation.27

Bennett’s connection between the visualization of trauma and its political implications as a “force”
highlights the opportunities performance art offers in creating sites, places of affect, meaning both
spaces that create emotional responses and those that effect possible change. Her analysis of several
works by Doris Salcedo, a Columbia artist, and Sandra Johnson from Belfast, whose works respond

26 That being said, the work of several scholars has made me think of the problems of discussing trauma in
relation to artistic production and the limitations of art to address extreme traumatic experiences.
27 Bennett, Empathetic Vision, 12.
to political violence and murder, looks to the strategies of these artists and their attention to audience reception. Bennett writes that “emotions and feelings are not simply manipulated or redirected in the works of these artists; affect is revealed to flow through bodies and spaces, rather than residing within a single subject.”

Although she is not speaking to Indigenous artists practices and their memories of trauma, her argument can be applied to the Aboriginal women artists to address how they are creating sites from which trauma is both embodied and imagined and from which it can be witnessed and encountered. Bennet’s incorporation of affect is useful when tracing and exploring the work by artists such as Belmore and Blondeau who use their bodies to highlight their presence and connection to place, history, memory, and trauma and also their absence and dislocation in historical accounts. Perhaps then in the exploration of Indigenous performance art, Bennet’s concept of regarding trauma-related art as “not simply illustrating certain clinical, psychological, or psychoanalytic propositions, but as engendering new languages of trauma that proceed from lived experience” is productive. I argue that the work of Indigenous performance artists that engages with such experiences of colonial and neo-colonial trauma create a new body-based language to talk about and actualize these memories. In this way, performances as experiential and ephemeral also reveal the at times incomprehensibleness of histories of genocide, sexual violence, and war. I aim in my discussions of these powerful and often haunting performances to show the strength and resilience of Indigenous peoples through the performative embodiments of trauma by these artists, rather than to re-encode Aboriginal experience to a victimized stance. The framing of Indigenous performance art as creating or contributing “new languages of trauma” calls attention to the discussion of representation within trauma studies.

Within the field of trauma studies, the issue of representation has been extensively debated. This conversation is connected to the idea, put forward by Pierre Janet, that traumatic memory is not representational for the survivor because the extraordinary nature of traumatic experiences are not cognitively processed in the same way as other experiences, thus rendering them unintelligible. Bessel van der Kolk, influenced by Janet, argues that traumatic memory is of a “non declarative” type, which involves bodily responses that are outside of verbal-semantic-linguistic representations. Jill Bennett notes that in the humanities during the 1990s, trauma studies engaged in a revaluation of modernist literary texts—in particular forms of war or Holocaust testimony—that characterized

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28 Ibid., 13.
29 Ibid., 24.
such texts as narrativizing traumatic experiences. They were seen as “bearing the imprint of trauma” not as representations of such experiences.\(^{30}\) This discussion of representation seems to be connected to a concept of the text and to literate-based societies, which utilize the written word as means for communication and history-writing. How then does this concept of trauma being nonrepresentational play out in relation to Indigenous oral based societies? Does the large body of Indigenous writing, poetry, and screenplays function in the same way—as narrative of traumatic experiences—or are they representations of such memories? How does Indigenous performance art participate and does it differ due to its connection to customary practices of transmitting Indigenous memories, stories, and histories through the voice and body?

A significant aspect in the discussion of Indigenous performance art is that it is connected to a history of Indigenous performance and oral traditions. Recognition of the survival of oral traditions of transmission, which are performatively based, reveals that Indigenous memories, and also experiences of trauma, have historically been performed vocally and through the body. In this way, Indigenous performances—such as *States of Grace*, *Bury my Heart*, and *Asiniy Iskwew*—engender Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding, as well as Indigenous understandings of memory. Indigenous communities have always already had a language and ritualized traditions in which to conceive of and transmit mourning, commemoration, and conceivably stories/histories of trauma. In this way, the performances of Indigenous lineage/post/blood/re-memory create opportunities for both commemoration and remembrance for Indigenous audiences. They also create sites from which non-Indigenous people bear witness to Indigenous experiences of colonial trauma, as well as Indigenous survivance and self-determination. Later in this chapter, I look at the implications of reception and the possibility that Indigenous performance art contributes to the decolonization project. To do so, I incorporate tropes of testimony, bearing witness, and other reception theories alongside race and body politics to nuance the differing implications on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience members.

**States of Grace: Requickening Project Venice**

Lori Blondeau’s performance *States of Grace* (2007) is one that highlights, recalls, performs, and decolonizes Indigenous memory and trauma (fig. 65). Her body functions as a trace of collective Indigenous memory and acts to suggest Indigenous survival and cultural continuity. This work is a

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 23.
performative intervention alluding to the ongoing invisibility of Indigenous peoples and issues in global contexts.\textsuperscript{31} \textit{States of Grace} was performed as part of the Requickening Project, which

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{figure65.jpg}
\caption{Lori Blondeau, \textit{States of Grace}, Performance Still, Venice, 2007.}
\end{figure}

\begin{quote}
was curated by Ryan Rice and Nancy Mithlo in partnership with the University of Venice’s Department of Postcolonial Literature in July 2007, at the same time as the 52nd Venice Biennale. This collaborative project combined the work of Blondeau and Mohawk artist, Shelley Niro. The collaborative performance by Blondeau and Niro’s video screening of \textit{Tree} were presented over five days at dawn and dusk at the public thoroughfare of the Zattere.\textsuperscript{32} As co-curated Nancy Mithlo notes, “The artists adeptly conveyed the beauty and wisdom of indigenous women's truths, evoking the personal to speak of cultural survival and resistance in a time of social despair and environmental destruction.”\textsuperscript{33} Co-curators Ryan Rice and Nancy Mithlo describe the project in the following curatorial statement, addressing Requickening’s thematic focus and highlighting both Blondeau’s and Niro’s artistic commentary on concepts of Indigenous memory and trauma,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} This invisibility also speaks to recognition and incorporation of Indigenous contemporary arts within the International art market, biennales etc., as well as considerations of Indigenous arts in the writings of art histories. Currently, Indigenous curators, scholars, artists and their allies are working towards more consistent visibility and the positive developments are exemplified by Rebecca Belmore and James Luna’s presence at the 2005 Venice Biennale and the creation of an Indigenous Arts Department at the National Gallery of Canada.


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
What is Requickening? Requickening is an aspect of traditional Iroquois condolence ceremonies where human relationships are negotiated and brought back into balance after death or trauma. This cycle of grief and restoration speaks to larger concerns of global warfare and peace, colonial histories, memory, and importantly, healing. The REQUICKENING PROJECT agenda calls upon Indigenous knowledge to contribute to the conversation initiated by the Biennale curator Robert Storr. In response to Storr’s curatorial reference “the fragility of culture in violent times,” our statement speaks to Indigenous concepts of resilience; acknowledging spirituality, memory and the essence of life.34

*States of Grace* calls attention to the distinct connectiveness of colonial histories and experiences to Indigenous memory with loss, displacement and remembrance. Blondeau’s performance re-creates and draws from her 2006 performance *Grace*, performed at the Mendel Gallery (fig. 66). *Grace* as described by Dan Ring, curator at the Mendel Gallery, connects to Blondeau’s larger art practice of exploring the “agency of memory and the power of minimal repetitive gestures.” In *Grace*, she continues to explore her interest in displacement and decolonization, using a lyrical and elegiac mode to reflect the influence of family, friends, and artists she was working with. The concept of the performance is to sustain a heightened tension and produce a slow, cathartic unfolding of experiences released through repeated gestures, symbolic actions, spoken narratives … Through these actions, Blondeau reveals a persona that moves between a personal and collective understanding of racism and loss.35

*Figure 66: Lori Blondeau, Grace, Mendel Art Gallery.*

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The significance of Blondeau’s performance persona Grace is multifaceted, as she reveals and recalls Indigenous perspectives that have historically been erased and silenced. In this way, both *Grace* and *States of Grace* are works of Indigenous re-memory and postmemory which make visible Indigenous memories and traumas and experiences of colonialism and racism. For *Grace*, the remnants of the Blondeau’s performance, such as a dress on the floor and the chair in which she was sitting, are left on display—traces of the emotional performance and potential triggers for remembrance. In the Mendel Gallery space, these remnants are situated with a series of digital photographs of Blondeau’s hands turned both inward and outward over her face. Dan Ring states that these images of the artist are “representations of alternating acceptance and rejection, remembrance and loss.”

*States of Grace* conceptually draws attention to the passage of time, the stages of life from birth to death. Blondeau’s daily performances over the course of ten days, at sunrise (5:30 a.m.) (fig. 67) and at sunset (8:15 p.m.) (fig. 68) allude to concepts of beginnings and endings and also of the ongoing circular concepts of Indigenous time. During the performance, dressed in a bronze-coloured satin shirt with a very large skirt draped in a semi-circle in front of her, Blondeau sat during the rising and setting of the sun (fig. 69). Her hands were raised, covering her face, indicating the beginning of the performance. Rice describes the experience of witnessing Blondeau’s repetitive hand gestures and actions, “Her hands covered her face and created a barrier—a space between her and us. The space between was personal, vulnerable, and private.

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36 Ibid.
Figure 67: Lori Blondeau, States of Grace, Performance still, Venice, 2007.

Figure 68: Lori Blondeau, States of Grace, Performance still, Venice, 2007.
As she lay her hands down upon her lap, she opened the space to all. Through such a delicate move, Blondeau exposed everyone to his or her own vulnerabilities that the human conditions grants. Over the course of States of Grace, Blondeau’s marked and claimed her performance space using a semi-circle of devotional candles. These candles were lit for the performance, and rather than images of saints or the Virgin Mary, Blondeau’s used her own image, with her hands covering her face, and a video still from Niro’s Tree (fig. 70). The inclusion of the candles with images of Indigenous women on them calls attention to Indigenous women’s experiences—their individual and collective memories and their traumas, pains, suffering. In this way, States of Grace is a site for remembering and honouring Indigenous memories, creating a space for healing, commemoration, and remembrance. The combination of Blondeau’s body with the candles also alludes to the history of erasure of Indigenous memories through colonial domination, marking the performance space as a site not just of mourning (i.e., of the loss of Indigenous stories/histories) but also one that commemorates the act of remembering personal and collective Indigenous experience. As Link, Smelser, and Baltes argue in “Anthropology of Collective Memory,”

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38 Niro’s film Tree, presents a young Earth Mother who is witness to the impacts and travesties of western society, such as consumerism, capitalism, warfare and spiritual trauma. “We experience her loss, her reverberations of grief and ultimately, her ability to manifest life.” Nancy Marie Mithlo, Requickening Project, Exhibition brochure (Venice: University of Venice, 2007), accessed July 22, 2011, http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org/PDF/Requick.pdf.
A social history of remembering must take account of the mechanisms that make unsanctioned remembrance possible under repressive political regimes. In asking how people remember what is meant to be forgotten, matters of transmission—the mechanisms of shared memory and hidden histories—take center stage. Interpersonal and shared memories, commemorations, theater and drama, and secret and oppositional histories are the venues within which alternative remembrances, unauthorized and unapproved memories of the past, can be located and analyzed. Collective memory practices are not only linked to sites of domination that attempt to legitimate a given social order, but also to unsanctioned sites of struggle, opposition, and transformation.  

In relation to States of Grace, the act of performing Indigenous collective memory creates a site that highlights ongoing Indigenous struggles and simultaneously opposes the erasure of Indigenous histories from settler-based national/ist narratives and consciousness. Her work reveals traces of Indigenous memories, disrupting the silences—meaning that despite colonial and assimilist tactics, Indigenous memories/stories survived. William Booth argues that traces of memory, or tracers, “are those markers that point to or bring to light, however, incompletely, a past that dwells in the hollows of the forgotten.” In this regard, traces are what evoke memory and tell the story of place, person, or event. States of Grace is a performance that reveals the invisibility of Indigenous

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experiences, memories, and traumas, and through Blondeau’s body makes Indigenous survival, resilience, and continuance visible and real.

Blondeau’s physical actions and inclusion of the devotional candles embody rituals of mourning and of spirituality. Concepts of ritual, prayer, and spirituality are also invoked through the repetition of gestures, the assembling and disassembling of the performance, and the presence of the lit devotional candles. Rice writes that the performance “invokes forms of prayer, ritual and habit in which forms of thanksgiving can be (or need to be) addressed. *States of Grace* is also a process in which Indigenous traditions, and notions of community and home are presented as narratives with passionate subtle gestures that expose suffering and pain, healing and hope.”

The implications of a performance such as *States of Grace*—whereby Blondeau asks her audience to bear witness to notions of Indigenous memory, trauma, healing etc.—work within the current decolonizing project. This reclaiming, revisioning, remembering, and recalling of Indigenous experiences, stories, histories evokes the concept of the Iroquois condolence ceremony—Requickening. This ceremony reinstates balance during a time of fragility to ensure the flourishing of life. Blondeau’s performance renders the Indigenous woman’s body visible. She presents herself in a self-determined way that also decolonizes the Eurocentric representations of Indigenous women. In other words, as Rice notes, *States of Grace* “acts as an empowering decolonizing mechanism to balance fate and the disrupting tensions that continue to shift the Native North America diaspora.”

Blondeau’s *States of Grace* calls her audience to witness not only the loss and suffering endured by Indigenous peoples and to remember the colonial trauma that marks Indigenous peoples, but also to acknowledge the “relevance and criticality in which traditional knowledge has upon global issues and the human condition.” By performing Indigenous (post) and (re)memory, and trauma, *States of Grace* contributes to the project of Indigenous decolonization and highlights the significance of using Indigenous knowledge as a foundation for Indigenous art practices. In other words, Blondeau’s performance tactic of creating acts of remembrance is a decolonizing strategy.

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41 Ryan Rice, *Requickening Project.*
42 Ibid.
43 Rice and Mithlo, “Requickening Project.”
Performing Decolonization: Remembrance, Memorialization, and Resistance

Throughout the chapters of this thesis, I discuss the participation of Indigenous art in the project of decolonization. I would like to engage with the question: How does art contribute? In the next chapter, I argue that art does not necessarily cause political change or create social justice, but it does participate in the projects of Indigenous social activism and justice in that it can raise awareness, give voice, represent, commemorate, and remember Indigenous experiences, stories, histories. Performance-based activism can also challenge silencings and resist the legacies of colonization and the ongoing occupations and oppressions. Indigenous women performance artists participate in the project of decolonization through their tactics of performance, using their bodies as a means to present Indigenous perspectives and to claim space for Indigenous stories/histories and memories. By connecting the history of imperialism and colonialism to the remembrance of Indigenous histories, we stress the fact that these acts of performing Indigenous memories are tactics of resistance, intervention, and decolonization. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, “[the] collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about Indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized.”

A project of decolonization, exemplified by Smith’s Decolonizing Methodologies, involves “knowing of the colonizer and a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination.” She defines decolonization as “a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels.” I introduced in the first chapter of this thesis the many ways that decolonization can be defined and how this project of anticolonialism and self-determination is a possible framework to explore the works by Indigenous women performance artists. I would like to reiterate the focus of my discussion of decolonization, which is a multifaceted project that includes the re-envisioning of Indigenous cultural and political democracy outside the capital market, and the reclaiming of Indigenous governance, lands, and knowledges. The practice of decolonization is also a process of reconceptualizations, revoicings, and re-representations of the self and community and of cultural and political mobilization. Also, as Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Monhanty argue, the engagement with history, memory, and emotion are significant facets

44 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999), 1.
46 Ibid., 20.
in this project as these cognitive elements participate in the construction of the self and self-reflexive collective practices:

    decolonization coupled with emancipatory collective practice leads to a rethinking of patriarchal, heterosexual, colonial, racial, and capitalist legacies in the project of feminism and, thus, toward envisioning democracy and democratic collective practice such that issues of sexual politics in governance are fundamental to thinking through questions of resistance anchored in the daily lives of women, that these issues are an integral aspect of the epistemology of feminist struggle.  

Monhanty writes in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* “a formulation of decolonization in which autonomy and self determination are central to the process of liberation can only be achieved through “self reflexive collective practice.”

An additional question that is raised from both the preceding and proceeding discussions is this: How does performing memory, meaning acts of remembrance, contribute to decolonization? One of the projects of decolonization is the act of remembering. From an Indigenous perspective remembrance is a political act and can also be a very painful act. Despite the pain connected to remembrance, the recalling of Indigenous memories and vocalizing recent memories can also be a strategic tactic of political activism and resistance as well as a powerful act of healing. Smith argues that remembering is a decolonizing methodology, noting,

    The remembering of a people relates not so much to an idealized remembering of a golden past but more specifically to the remembering of a painful past, and importantly, the people’s responses to that pain. While collectively Indigenous communities can talk through the history of painful events, there are frequent silences and intervals in the stories about what happened after the event.

She addresses the fact that for many Indigenous communities, there are no collective rememberings due to affects of colonization—such as forced removals of children to government schools (residential schools in Canada, Indian boarding schools in the United States, and boarding schools in Australia) and for adoptions, the separation of extended families across reserves, national borders, etc. For the purposes of my discussion, however, collective Indigenous remembrance or memories are argued as being present, meaning commonalities of experiences of both historic colonialism and ongoing neo-colonialism. This is not meant to downplay the affects of colonization.

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49 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 146.
and assimilist tactics on Indigenous memory, but rather the opposite: I put forward that colonialism has had great affects on Indigenous peoples across North America and specifically throughout the British Empire. Smith writes,

Communities often turned inward and let their suffering give way to a desire to be dead. Violence and family abuse became entrenched in communities which had no hope. White society did not see and did not care. This form of remembering is painful because it involves remembering not just what colonization was about but what being dehumanized meant for our own cultural practices. Both healing and transformation become crucial strategies in any approach which asks a community to remember what they may have decided unconsciously or consciously to forget.\(^50\)

Her comment on the remembering of colonization and how it affected cultural practices points to the significance of the work of Indigenous women performance artists, who recall and perform Indigenous memories that in some Indigenous communities have been forgotten and within national consciousness have in most cases been deliberately erased. Because Indigenous histories and memories have been, for the most part, excluded from Canadian social memory, the performance of Indigenous memories contributes not only to Indigenous remembrance but also to a more comprehensive and complex history in the Canadian context. I argue that Indigenous performance as remembrance participates in the indigenization of histories in Canada and also in the decolonization of national/ist narratives. Performative Indigenous memory-sites, then, act to trace Indigenous experiences and memories, presenting the legacies of colonization while simultaneously articulating Indigenous self-determined perspectives and ways of being.

**Liberation from History: Subverting Colonial History**

In this section, I discuss briefly the role of history. Throughout this thesis I discuss the significance of the role of Indigenous performance art in asserting Indigenous lived experiences, memories, and stories that have not been acknowledged (in many instances) or incorporated into the writings of histories of North America. I connect the implications of works like Blondeau’s *Asiniy Iskwew* to postnationalist scholarship that reveals nationalist narratives that perpetuate the hegemony of the nation-state. Analyzing the histories of colonization in Canada and the consistent absence of Indigenous perspectives and stories, we see the lack of Indigenous frameworks within Canadian society. Indigenous knowledge has been historically marginalized, just as Indigenous peoples have been relegated and relocated to reserves. The performances explored, both in this chapter and

\(^{50}\) Ibid.,

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throughout this thesis, relocate Indigenous cultural practices, ways of being, and knowing from the periphery. This is what I mean when I argue that they assert Indigenous cultural sovereignty.

Through the performative act, artists like Claxton, Belmore and Blondeau simultaneously dismantle the colonial writing of histories, reveal the erasures of Indigenous presence in North American society, and privilege Indigenous lived experience. These artists are researchers and activists.

However, Indigenous performance artists continuously contend with the embedded nature of nationalist memory and amnesia. Edward Said, in “Invention, Memory, and Place,” writes that “the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in school and university, is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider’s understanding of one’s country, tradition, and faith.” In this sense, based on Said, memory is a social, political, and historical enterprise constructed into a nationalist narrative in order to connect and make collective memories. Said argues,

In other words, the invention of tradition was a practice very much used by authorities as an instrument of rule in mass societies when the bonds of small social units like village and family were dissolving and authorities needed to find other ways of connecting a large number of people to each other. The invention of tradition is a method of using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way. Thus memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful.

He argues that collective memory—meaning in the Canadian or settler nation contexts, the settler-dominant or national collective memory—is not a passive thing but a field of activity, where past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning. Blondeau and Belmore’s incorporation of cultural knowledge acts as cultural and political currency transmitted through their bodies and their bodies’ actions to share stories within the open and dynamic parameters of performance art. The act of using their bodies as the site for transmitted knowledge and Indigenous histories (both historical and contemporary) can result in a political shifting of power and is arguably a significant method for empowering silenced, marginalized, colonized, and oppressed peoples.

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52 Said, “Invention, Memory, and Place,” 258.
53 Ibid., 259.
54 Ibid., 263.
This described method recalls Pierre Bourdieu’s theory that knowledge is interconnected with mainstream social consciousness (meaning settler-liberal society in Canada) that maintains the power of settler histories. These have consistently erased Indigenous experience from these histories, as a result of the fact that the symbolic power imposed to construct and control social frameworks “is a major dimension of political power.” Indigenous women’s performance art reveals the complexities of the Aboriginal woman’s body and how it has been inscribed into settler narrative—a colonial history of not only physical and cultural violence (genocide and ethnocide) but the violence of exclusion and erasure in colonial structures of writing history. The multifaceted outcome of their performances obviously depends on a number of factors—but, based on my own personal witnessing and extensive research, a persistent result is their reclaiming of the voice and stories of their immediate Indigenous community as well as transnational North American and International Indigenous peoples. They can result in shifting colonial dimensions of domination and power and revealing the at times incomprehensible Indigenous memories of trauma. By creating memory-sites, these artists undermine the nationalist agendas that attempt to keep colonial events in the past and maintain the hegemonic oppressions of Indigenous peoples, lands, and histories.

**Indigenous Performance as Remembrance: Rebecca Belmore and Lori Blondeau**

Indigenous memory is consistently and continuously connected to Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practice, and lived experiences. Stories are passed from generation to generation, linking grandparents to grandchildren, and are the documents of history. In this sense, stories are the threads of memories that are woven into the consciousness, connecting through knowledge the members of communities. It is imperative to recognize that Indigenous memory and the remembrance of Indigenous histories have been and are transmitted through performative storytelling.

On 21 April 2009, at the National Art Centre in Ottawa, Rebecca Belmore performed *Victorious*, a performance that commemorates the experiences of survivors of residential schools (fig. 71). In this powerful and provocative performance, she re-created and subverted the late 19th-

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the first props the audience encounters. Her queen, Cree curator Daina Warren, was throned and sculpted into a replicate monument; however, unlike Western representations, in *Victorious* the statue was made not of bronze or stone, but of newsprint and honey. Wearing the date 11 June 2008—the historic day of Prime Minister Harper’s apology for residential schools—on her body, Belmore meticulously sculpted Warren into the Aboriginal matriarch. At the end of this multilayered performance, after the playing of “God Save the Queen,” the Indigenous queen stepped out of the monument. This act challenged Western notions of monuments and their relationships with the creation and maintenance of collective public memory and asserted Indigenous memory as performative, dynamic, and intrinsically linked to Indigenous storytelling practices.

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Works such as *Grace, I Want to Know Why, Bury My Heart*, and *Victorious* create memory-sites, or sites of performative memorialization. Indigenous memory-sites are diverse, connected to histories, memories, and locations. The performances explored throughout this chapter create such memory-sites, from which Indigenous experiences and stories are actualized through performative acts. Linke, Smelser, and Baltes argue,

In every society, we can identify such an array of “memory-sites” or places of commemorative record and practice, where remembrance anchors the past: topographical places; monumental places; symbolic places; functional places; and places of power, which constitute their historical archives in relation to the different uses they make of memory. These memory-sites furnish a series of locations where recollected knowledges of the past are conveyed and sustained by a circulation of signs that calls attention to its own logic of inclusion, exclusion, and selective in completeness. In all societies, there exist distinct moments when new representations of the past are forged, contested, and put to cultural and ideological use.58

Belmore’s subversion of the Queen Victoria monument raises many questions: What is an Indigenous monument or memory-site? What would or does this look like in relation to diverse Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural continuance and continuities? How do we understand the function of memorializing Indigeneity within the structures of both Indigenous cultural and colonial frameworks? Perhaps one possible understanding of Indigenous monuments and acts of Indigenous memory with reference to *Victorious* and other performances by Indigenous artists is that Indigenous “monuments” are actually the performance of memories, stories, histories and experiences, thereby creating ephemeral memory-sites.

This concept of performing Indigenous memory is linked to the historical silencing and marginalization of Indigenous experience by dominant writings of Canadian history. The performance of Indigenous memory decolonizes Indigenous histories and experiences. Historically, Indigenous perspectives have been absent from those tools of the Canadian national institutions, such as the archive, that forge Canadian national/ist identity and public memory. This has fostered a forgetting of colonial violence, trauma, and Indigenous experiences in the cultural consciousness of settler society. Because of the colonial agendas of occupation, oppression and assimilation, contemporary Indigenous memory in settler nations is interrelated not only with heterogeneous Indigenous ways of knowing and seeing but also with Indigenous experiences of colonization. Several performances by Belmore and Blondeau can be viewed as acts of remembrance, memory, and testimony. Belmore and Blondeau’s strategies of performing Indigenous histories, memories

58 Linke, Smelser, and Baltes, “Anthropology,” 2219.
and experiences—that is, their acts of remembrance—are rooted in Indigenous frameworks of sovereignty and self-determination. Their performances are acts of resistance and of re/claiming space for remembering such excluded histories and memories. *Bury My Heart* (2000) and *Victorious* (2009) by Belmore; and *Asiniy Iskwew* (2009) by Blondeau, are performances that commemorate—among other things, such as cultural survival, continuance and resistance—the genocide and physical, emotional, and psychological violence experienced by Aboriginal peoples during colonial expansion and occupation in North America. These performative acts make reference to and call attention to colonial trauma, histories and legacies of colonialism, personal and familial stories and experiences, and cultural knowledge. Belmore’s and Blondeau’s performance tactics, such as the use of their bodies and Indigenous storytelling, can be seen as strategies of decolonization. In the following section, then, I reveal how contemporary Indigenous performances, such as *Bury My Heart* and *Asiniy Iskwew*, participate in Indigenous sovereignty, the creation of Indigenous memory-sites (or performative memorialization), and contribute to the remembering of the past through the present.

Although Belmore and Blondeau come from very different cultural traditions and distinct individual experiences they are connected by their use of Indigenous telling stories in their performance art—personal, familial, communal and national—to vocalize Aboriginal lived experience. I investigate these performance of Indigenous memories through the lens of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, shifting, as Jolene Rickard notes, “Indigenous experience from a victimized stance to a strategic one.” Arguably, Belmore and Blondeau’s voicing of Indigenous memory, experiences and histories are acts of self-determination, representatives of initiatives towards Indigenous sovereignty. Witnessing these diverse performance strategies through, as Rickard argues, the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination—rather than simply through a lens of colonization (meaning victimization)—is a useful approach. Marie Battiste’s discussion of the significant impact Indigenous scholars on the processes of decolonization can be applied to the contemporary work of many Indigenous artists, who arguably participate in the same process of urging their communities to exercise their inherent rights to determine political status and pursue their cultural identity. The use of Indigenous stories, memories, and experiences in performance art is a way to resist ongoing silencings within settler society and transfer understanding in order to foster social memory.

**Bury My Heart: A Performative Indigenous Memorialization**

Belmore’s *Bury My Heart* honours the lives of the over three-hundred and fifty murdered Minneconjou Sioux men, women, and children on 29 December 1890, at the massacre of Wounded Knee. Belmore’s performance does not necessarily generate closure in terms of colonial trauma, but instead creates symbolic sites for introspection, questioning, recall, and remembrances. The chosen title of *Bury My Heart* (fig. 51) alludes both to Dee Brown’s 1971 pivotal rewriting of the Wounded Knee Massacre, which incorporated Native American perspective and survivor stories, and to Buffy Saint Marie’s popular song, “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” (1990), which references Brown’s book title. These accounts of the massacre, including Belmore’s, participate in the rewriting of Wounded Knee based on Indigenous memories and the vocalizing of Aboriginal experiences that have been silenced.

The Big Foot Massacre Memorial, honouring the lives of Chief Big Foot and his people, was erected in 1903 by a delegation of Cheyenne River Sioux Indians and placed at the edge of the mass grave, whereas the State historical society has placed a series of signs marking where the massacre took place, where the Indian camp was, the positioning of the guns, etc.61 The memorial, like Belmore’s performance, acts as a mnemonic trace in the larger project of remembrance of the Indian Wars and the violence of colonial expansion in North America. They are Indigenous initiatives and examples of Indigenous self-determination that declare Indigenous autonomy and agency over the remembrance of the lives lost. In 1965, the Wounded Knee Massacre site was officially designated a Historic National Landmark by the federal government, and it has now, like other massacre sites—such as Bear River (1863)—in the American Northwest, become a tourist destination for both Native and non-Native Americans. That a site of colonial violence participates in contemporary tourism raises complex issues. While it is important for these histories of genocide to be remembered, there is the potential for such histories to be coopted by the state and dominant settler culture in order to depoliticize their significance. Non-Indigenous witnesses (of the performance) and tourists (to the sites) could colonize these memories—or rather participate in the colonization of experiences—whereby dominant society will claim such traumas as their own, partaking in colonial guilt and shame rather than relocating them in a position of settler

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responsibility. In light of these complexities, Bury My Heart contributes to an Indigenization of how the Wounded Knee Massacre is and has been remembered by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Bury My Heart was performed in August of 2000 at the Paris Gibson Square Museum in Great Falls Montana. Belmore’s performance recalls the traumatic history of the massacre of hundreds of Minneconjou Sioux, most of them women and children, by the US Seventh Calvary at Wounded Knee just miles away from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota. Bury My Heart exemplifies Belmore’s recurring use of her body and other props to share Indigenous histories and to stage memorials, connecting Indigenous struggles across the colonial, political, historic, imagined, and geographic borders between the United States and Canada. Her identity itself highlights the interconnections between Indigenous peoples across imagined nation-state borders: she is an Anishnabe woman from Thunder Bay, now living in Vancouver, performing and recalling a history of violence against Indigenous peoples, the Sioux, in South Dakota.

The symbolic acts and physical actions throughout Bury My Heart attest to the ritual of mourning the dead, remembering and honouring an unrecognized part of North American history. Belmore’s performance created a mourning-like scene, a site of witnessing the ongoing trauma of colonization. As Marcia Crosby notes,

Trauma in Aboriginal performance art practice implicitly reveals the precariousness of any established Aboriginal history. In the re-enactment of trauma—individual pain confronting collective pain—performance art does not make meaning or create closure. Instead, it invites its audience “to keep watch over the absent meaning that continues to distress us all.”

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63 The numbers of killed Sioux is contested by different accounts and records of the federal government, scholars and survivors and descendent of survivors of the Wounded Knee Massacre. In the late 1960s the Wounded Knee Survivor Association asked for a formal apology from the federal government and amendments of the historical record. The Indigenous record of dead is 426 and in 1990 an amendment was made to recognize that 350–375 Sioux were killed. For more information on the Wounded Knee Massacre see Dee Brown, Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Renee Sansom Flood, Lost Bird of Wounded Knee: Spirit of the Lakota (New York: Scribner, 1995); William S. E. Coleman, Voices of Wounded Knee (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); and Heather Cox Richardson, Wounded Knee: Party Politics and the Road to an American Massacre (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

64 Marcia Crosby, “Humble Materials and Powerful Signs: Remembering the Suffering of Others,” in Rebecca Belmore: Rising to the Occasion, ed. Daina Augaitis and Kathleen Ritter (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2008), 81. Crosby is referencing Maurice Blanchot in Lawrence Langer’s “Memory’s Time:
Belmore juxtaposes this “re-enactment of trauma” with a performance of mourning by marking the land with flowers and by her own hands—digging in the soil to bury a symbolic body (the chair), creating bloodied mud, and then marking her own body with blood and earth (fig. 53). This performance serves as a sovereign Indigenous site of symbolic respectful and honourable burial. The chair and flowers represent the absence of the lives lost and highlight the lack of respect given to the murdered Sioux, whose bodies were thrown into a mass grave. Perhaps Belmore’s chair represents the body of Chief Big Foot; the photographic image of his dead frozen body has acted as an agent of memory for those who did not witness the event, but was also used by the American government as evidence of the end of the Indian Wars and the defeat of the Western Tribes. Instead of re-inscribing the memory of Wounded Knee with such images, Belmore’s used of her body, the chair, and the flowers to symbolically reference the violence and traumas experienced by the Sioux people. In this way, she creates a new memory of Wounded Knee in her memorial performance, each flower representing a memory, a name, and a body. Belmore’s body bears witness; her body calls for remembrance; her body serves as the instrument of memory.

In Belmore’s performance, artist and audience experienced and witnessed the void of the hundreds of Sioux bodies, and the calling of attention to the impact of colonial violence and trauma. Bury My Heart can thus be seen as a performative memorial. Crosby has remarked that Belmore’s work “redeem[s] legacies of great loss with significance.” At the conclusion of Bury My Heart, similar to her performance of Victorious, Belmore’s audience is left with the destabilizing force of traumatic memory, despite the desire to restore balance.65 Lee-Ann Martin has framed Belmore’s work in a similar way, noting them as “performances and installations that reveal sensitivities to history and place, memory and absence.”66 This performance, I argue, asks the audiences to question the ways in which colonial events/histories have been remembered and also forgotten. Her physical gestures and the emphasis on her body demands the attention of her audience, bringing the invisible into the visible. Belmore’s symbolic actions cannot represent the actual experiences of the massacre, but they can imagine and foster awareness of the brutality of that day. Her bodily acts of commemoration are the force that reclaims the Wounded Knee Massacre from the colonial archive and narrative and brings the events of the murders into an Indigenous space of remembrance. An analysis of Belmore’s Bury My Heart, then, elucidates the interconnected relationship of

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66 Lee-Ann Martin “The Waters of Venice: Rebecca Belmore at the 51st Biennale” Canadian Art Magazine 22, no. 2 (Summer 2005).
Indigenous memory to performative storytelling practices and reveals the legacies of colonialism in the absence of Indigenous perspectives in settler collective memory. In a similar way, Lakota filmmaker Dana Claxton produces video works—such as *Sitting Bull and the Moose Jaw Sioux* (2003) and *I Want to Know Why*—that explore the histories of the Sioux peoples and engage with the violent legacy of the Wounded Knee Massacre.67 *Bury My Heart* and Claxton's video works thus participate in the remembering of colonial trauma in manner similar to the annual Big Foot Memorial Ride—a three hundred mile horse ride that follows Chief Big Foot and his people’s walk from Sitting Bull’s grave to Wounded Knee Creek. All of these—the ride, Claxton’s video works, and Belmore’s *Bury My Heart*—are performances of decolonization, significantly participating in an Indigenous memorial project for the remembrance of Wounded Knee.

In *Bury My Heart* Belmore is telling a traumatic story that is linked to colonial violence against Indigenous bodies. Here, Belmore employs her body for the telling of multiple stories; however, she performs to vocalize the trauma of loss and mourning—in doing so she creates a contemporary record of this history. Lee Ann Martin notes that in *Bury my Heart* Belmore’s repetitive smearing of blood on a chair and of mud on her thrift-shop dress addresses the history of violence against Aboriginal peoples and specifically of Aboriginal women. Belmore's installation *blood on the snow*, created in 2002 for the exhibition The Named and the Unnamed organized by the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, also referenced Wounded Knee Massacre, along with the 2002 discovery of the remains of dozens of missing women, many of them Aboriginal, at a pig farm outside Vancouver. The work, which toured Canada, presents a pristine white blanket of snow stained by the blood of the dispossessed. Blood running down a white chair at the centre of the blanket seems to stand for pain and violence in the midst of cold, white indifference. For Belmore, the performance of *Bury my Heart* and the installation *blood on the snow* (fig. 72) are both visual and performative rememberings and recognitions. Her body-based language voices the ongoing violence against Indigenous peoples.

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This discussion thus explores the idea of history being present. Belmore’s performance *Bury My Heart* and installation *Blood in Snow* link contemporary legacies of colonization with histories of massacres and other acts of colonial physical and symbolic violence. My aim here is to reveal how such contemporary Indigenous performances participate in a larger Indigenous activism; they are performative commemorations, or rather symbolic and ephemeral monuments, of Indigenous lived experiences that move between locations and spaces. Belmore’s performance and the commemorations of Wounded Knee and other acts of violence against the Indigenous body can be connected to contemporary realities of violence against Indigenous peoples. For example, *Bury My Heart* (as well as Belmore’s *Vigil*, which I discuss in the next chapter) participates in bringing to light the disproportionate levels of violence against Native women in Canada. It exposes the whitewashing of the missing women in the downtown Eastside of Vancouver and the Highway of Tears in Northern British Columbia. Her performances work in conjunction with initiatives such as the Amnesty International Stolen Sisters report (see my discussion of this in Chapter 2). Her performances thus work in momentum with other Indigenous scholars, artists, and activists and their allies to reveal the silencings and biased histories that attempt to cover up North America’s shameful and brutal colonial past.
Asiniy Iskwew: Performative Memorial to the Stolen Sisters

Lori Blondeau’s performance *Asiniy Iskwew*, presented in the fall of 2009 at Ottawa’s Natural Disaster, is a performative response to the stolen Indigenous women in Canada (fig. 73). Blondeau tells a contemporary story all too familiar in Aboriginal urban and reserve communities that until very recently has been a public secret: the thousands of Aboriginal women who have gone missing and have been murdered in recent decades across Canada. This multilayered performance vocalizes the ongoing history of Indigenous genocide in Canada. As Anishnabe curator Wanda Nanibush writes,

This performance piece comes out of a knowledge that Aboriginal women are most likely to experience violence based on how they are stereotyped. This performance memorializes all the missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, a contemporary colonial legacy. There is an estimated 500 First Nations women reported missing in Canada, largely from our western Provinces. Serial Killers who target Aboriginal Women are not often brought to justice until it’s much too late. Media events like the Pickton trial and the arrest of John Martin Crawford make us realize that the police are not apt to follow up when its First Nations women being murdered. A 20-kilometre stretch of highway between Prince Rupert and Prince George in the northern interior of British Columbia has come to be known as the “Highway of Tears” after a number of Indigenous women and girls were assaulted, disappeared or were found murdered in communities on or near the highway in the 1990s. This is a disaster, daily and unnatural.68

Figure 73: Lori Blondeau, *Asiniy Iskwew*, Performance Still, 2009, Ottawa, Natural Disaster Performance Series. Photograph courtesy of Elaina Martin.

Blondeau’s performance is an act not only of grieving and remembering but of social action—of protest and resistance. Through this performance, Blondeau becomes part of the current Indigenous political movement to expose the ongoing murders of Indigenous women and the lack of justice surrounding their violent deaths and disappearances. *Asiniy Iskwew*, and other performances like it, works as a participant, an agent within the larger context of Indigenous activism, highlighted by *Sisters in Spirit*, a five-year, federally funded initiative launched in 2005 by the Native Women's Association of Canada; the Walk4Justice; and Amnesty International’s *Stolen Sisters* report. This Amnesty International report (2004) accused Canadian authorities of “turning a blind eye to the disproportionate level of violence against Indigenous women.”69 In 2008, a walk across Canada, from Vancouver to Ottawa, was organized to raise awareness of this traumatic issue. During the Walk4Justice, 3000 names of Indigenous women were gathered and the Indigenous walkers met the families of murdered or missing women and listened to stories and memories of grandmothers, mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends. The Walk4Justice participated as well in healing circles with the communities that have lost women. Amnesty International put out a subsequent report and international news release in 2009, *No More Stolen Sisters*, which stated a “piecemeal government response has denied Indigenous women in Canada adequate protection from violence and other human rights abuses.”70 Amnesty International Secretary General Alex Neve publically stated, “Violence and discrimination against Indigenous women is a human rights concern that is national in scope and tragic in scale. The positive measures taken in a number of communities and jurisdictions across the country highlight the shocking failure of the federal government to ensure an effective national response.”71 Like the performance of *Bury My Heart* and the Big Foot Memorial Drive, *Asiniy Iskwew* participates with other performative acts of mourning to create monumental Indigenous memorial projects. Although these examples of violence against Indigenous bodies differ in terms of geographical location and time period, the massacre of Wounded Knee and the Stolen Sisters are evidence of ethnocide and genocide across North America. *Asiniy Iskwew* vocalizes an Indigenous collective memory of loss and trauma. In this way,


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it can be seen as an Indigenous monument: it commemorates, honours, and names Indigenous women murdered in Canada since the 1970s through performative and storytelling practices.

Asiniy Iskwew centres around a question asked by Blondeau: “How can all these women just disappear? They don't do they? If the rocks could tell a story, they would tell you where a person has been.” At first glance, the performance space of Asiniy Iskwes is reminiscent of Blondeau’s Sisters performance. A rock with berries resting on it is the focal, defining feature. However, an additional prop is present: A skirt with large rocks attached to it lies waiting (fig. 73). The performance starts with Blondeau walking into her performance space wearing a burgundy knee-length satin dress. She then attaches the large train-like skirt to herself. Blondeau begins to drags the rock-skirt, she moves one foot at a time, and then places her feet back together. Her movements are slow and physically taxing. Witnessing the physical effort Blondeau endures—the weight of the train evident in her laborious actions—challenges the witness, such as myself, to engage with her body and the train of the dress. She then removes the skirt, kneels down, and takes a rock into her hand. As soon as she kneels and begins to aggressively crush the berries against the larger rock, the haunting funerary march song of Queen Mary begins to play (fig. 74). The juice of the berries runs down the large rock, like blood (fig. 75).

This visual effect is extremely powerful, emotionally haunting and traumatic to witness. Viewer’s eyes can shift between witnessing Blondeau’s body laboriously crushing the berries, watching her hands in a close-up live-feed perspective on a screen to her left, and looking at the skirt of rocks which lies on the ground. Blondeau’s crushing is a violent act of anger, protest and outrage, while also alluding to the violence experienced by the murdered Indigenous women. The blood-like berry juice on the rock also alludes to the concept of blood-memory and bloodlines, representing the intergenerational trauma of genocide in North America. Blondeau’s performance, the visual imagery, and the audible and sensory ephemera create an environment for memorium and a space for asserting outrage over the devaluation of Indigenous women’s bodies in North American society.
The repetitive rock imagery in *Asiniy Iskwew* has multilayered meanings. The rocks on the dress seem to signify the bodies, stories, and memories of the Stolen Sisters. At the same time, and drawing from Blondeau’s question, the rocks represent the absence of human witnesses of the women’s traumatic and violent deaths, and the absence of the women’s bodies, which have never been recovered. The rocks rest hauntingly, attached to the dress, silent and unable to give testimony. Blondeau’s use of the rock also alludes to Western notions of monuments, which until
the late 19th century were traditionally made from stone—to commemorate and solidify collective memories of events, histories, and people. However, in Blondeau’s performative memorial, she wears the stone on her body, making herself the site from which to bear witness, and remember and mourn the lives of the Stolen Sisters. Asiniy Iskwew is Cree for “rock woman”—in this way, Blondeau’s performance redefines the concept of the monument or memory-site in relation to frameworks of Indigenous knowledge. The translated title refers to her playing with the concept of monument as a receptor of collective memory and as a site for encoded memorialization and remembrance.\textsuperscript{72} However, her performance also calls attention to Indigenous concept of memory, which is based on the performative oral traditions of storytelling. Blondeau creates a performative narrative that is not publically recognized, using her racially marked body to ask her audience: Why does the murder of Aboriginal women continue without national outcry? Would this be the case if the women murdered were of white-settler ancestry? 

Asiniy Iskwew participates within the larger project of social action, made up of artistic interventions and initiatives, that has revealed the silencings of the Stolen Sisters and has and continues to demand the end of violence against Indigenous women. Rebecca Belmore’s Vigil (fig. 76), for example—presented at the Talk Stick Festival (2002) and subsequently adapted into the video installation, Named and Unnamed)—was performed on the streets of Vancouver where hundreds of women have gone missing.\textsuperscript{73} By using their bodies as their vehicle for transmitting knowledge, Belmore and Blondeau mark themselves as symbolic participants within this history of violence committed against the Indigenous body. Asiniy Iskwew asks audience members to participate in remembrance of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women. In this way, Asiniy Iskwew is a performance that inserts into public memory a silenced human rights violation that

\textsuperscript{72} There is a large body of work that discusses, explores, and critiques the role of the monument in Western societies as a vehicle for creating and maintaining collective memory and national/ist consciousness. For further reading see: Nelson and Olin, Monument and Memory; Bodnar, Remaking America; Kammen, Mystic Chords; Nora, Between Memory and History.

\textsuperscript{73} In Vigil, Belmore writes the names of the murdered women on her arms and yells out their name after lighting candles for them and ripping a dried rose through her lips. She names the women and calls for remembrance, inscribing on her body the stories and memories of these women. Since this staging of this performance in 2002, pig farmer William Robert Pickton has admitted to killing 49 women from Vancouver’s downtown eastside. Pickton faced a total of 26 counts of first-degree murder. In January 2007 Pickton was sentenced to life in prison with no parole for at least 25 years. He was convicted in the murders of six women, and was also charged for twenty other deaths. For more information on Belmore’s Vigil see Charlotte Townsend-Gault, The Named and the UnNamed, and Daina Augaitas and Kathleen Ritter, eds., Rebecca Belmore: Rising to the Occasion, Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2008.
the state has ignored for decades. As Lynne Bell suggests, Blondeau utilizes the medium of performance art to clear a new space for “the enunciation of difficult knowledge”74 These new spaces Blondeau generates from her introspective and painful performances enable negotiations of colonial histories and offer resistance to silenced stories. Her stories assert sovereignty and participate in attempts to indigenize public memory, and thereby demand remembrance of, in many cases, non-remembered, difficult, and silenced colonial histories of violence. Blondeau’s recent performative works, like Asiniy Iskwew, tackle the terrain of violence, testimony, and mourning.75 In this way, this work is a performative memorial and plays with conceptualizations of Indigenous remembrance and monuments.

Victorious: Indigenous Performative Monument to the Residential Schools Legacy

Until recently, the legislative project of residential schools as a strategic system of ethnocide and assimilation was not part of Canadian collective public memory. Numerous initiatives spearheaded by Indigenous activists, leaders, scholars, and artists have participated in voicing silenced histories of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse endured by Aboriginal children at the federally funded

75 Wanda Nanibush, “Lori Blondeau: Asiniy Iskwew.”
residential Schools. Victorious is a commemorative performance and is a response to Prime Minister Harper’s nationally broadcasted 11 June 2008, apology to residential schools survivors (fig. 71). This was the first official apology made by the Canadian government for its institutional role in the legislation of Indian residential schools Belmore’s performative stories assert Indigenous sovereignty by participating in Indigenizing public memory, thereby demanding remembrance of, in many cases, very difficult colonial histories of violence. Victorious asks us to consider: What is the role of the artist in the project of decolonization? Can performance art institute social change and reconciliation? Belmore’s creation of an Indigenous ephemeral monument also raises questions about how residential schools and survivors will be remembered in Canadian collective memory. What would an Indigenous monument to residential schools look like? How can such experiences be embodied through art practice?

There has been great debate around the concept of national apologies and the implications of such governmental acts in relation to systemic change and national responsibility—more specifically, the question is whether these are token gestures or actualized social action? In the context of recent truth and reconciliation commissions, such as in South Africa, Australia, Rwanda, and currently in Canada, the notion of an apology for genocide, ethnocide, and ongoing systemic and epistemological violence seems lacking. Rather than being seen as the solution for historic trauma and intergenerational legacies of racism, the act of apology perhaps should be seen, rather, as a point of departure for national change. As Winona LaDuke states in a discussion of the Wounded Knee Massacre: How can there be reconciliation or healing without recognition or apology for such brutality and violence? 

Recent scholarship in postcolonial and cultural theory has problematized and raised questions about the legitimacy and implications of such apologies. A contextualization and problematization of Harper’s apology reveals the ongoing power-relationships that are entrenched in settler societies, and how a project of reconciliation should be harnessing reciprocal actions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, not simply placing the responsibility of reconciliation on the survivors of residential schools. This statement seems obvious, but given the history of national apathy towards and silencing of survivors, settler responsibility may not actualize in the current process of reconciliation. Canada’s first National Truth and Reconciliation Meeting was hosted in Winnipeg in June 2010. Ongoing local and national meetings will continue in the coming years, creating opportunities for survivors to share their memories and calling on non-Indigenous Canadians to bear witness to the histories of residential schools. Participating in this goal, performances like Belmore’s 2009 Victorious at the National Ats Centre can raise awareness of the history of residential schools. She can spur settler audience members to question the validity of Harper’s apology and not simply take it at face value. And, through her powerful and effective performance practice, she can ask audiences to take an active role within the national process of reconciliation.

Rebecca Belmore’s Victorious—which I describe above in the context of Indigenous performance as remembrance—honours and memorializes the experiences of survivors of Indian residential schools. In this performance, Belmore re-creates and subverts Sir George Frampton’s Jubilee Monument for Queen Victoria (1897-1901). Daina Warren (Cree), an Aboriginal curator and close friend of the artist, is incorporated into Belmore’s performance as the living-statue, while Belmore—wearing the date, 11 June 2008, on her body—meticulously sculpts her into the Aboriginal matriarch (fig. 77).
The performance starts with Belmore crumpling newspapers. She quickly engages the audience by gesturing that they assist her. Soon the performance space around a chair on a platform is covered with papers. She then begins to pour honey into the metal pails. Warren enters the performance space and sits on the chair, staring fiercely ahead. Her hair is pulled back tightly in a bun and she is wearing a crown of white, black, and grey feathers. She does not seem to looking at anyone, but rather through them and off into the distance. Belmore places a rock in Warren’s left hand and a white feathered fan in her right. Belmore then starts to move the paper, dipping it in a coating of honey, under and around the chair. Her only tools of construction are masking tape, honey, and newsprint. Every so often, Belmore returns to the stand exhibiting the image of the Queen Victoria Jubilee Monument, she also passes it around for the audience to look at it. It becomes very clear as the action progresses that she is re-creating with newspaper print the dress and throne seen in the 19th-century monument of the Queen.

Belmore’s subversion of the image of Victoria is a multilayered action. For example, it can be interpreted as an act of indigenization of static settler-based history and understandings of monuments, which have historically silenced Indigenous experiences and stories. Belmore continues to laboriously and methodically mold the paper onto Warren’s body, simultaneously transforming the chair into a throne. At the end of the performance, Belmore has sculpted a very convincing representation of the Queen Victoria statue. The honey-coated paper falls and bellows like the monarch’s gown. The concluding actions of *Victorious* are emotionally charged. As Belmore finishes her sculptural installation—which presents a performative monument of an Indigenous Queen, a subversion of the Queen Victoria monument—the artist places a paper sash...
across Warren. The words on the newsprint read, “The Power to Kill Human Beings.” She then pours honey all over Warren’s face, body, and paper dress. During the last moments of this performance, “God Save the Queen” begins to play and Belmore stands in front of her ephemeral monument, holding the image of the Queen Victoria above her head (fig. 78).

![Figure 78: Rebecca Belmore, Victorious, Performance Still, NAC, Ottawa. Photo Credit: Carla Taunton.](image)

Belmore thus stands strong and victorious; Warren sits in the throne, also victorious. As the music fades, Warren walks out of the performative monument—a performative statue of an Aboriginal Queen—and, with Belmore, leaves the performance space (fig. 79). The audience is left with the remnants of Belmore’s physically and artistically demanding performance. The sash, fallen onto the side of the chair-throne, is a trace, a memory, a reminder of the history of residential schools. Worn across the Aboriginal body of Warren as a provocative exposure, it tells of the physical and emotional violence endured by Indigenous survivors of residential schools and the violence experienced by those who died at the schools. The wording of the newsprint sash encapsulates the prevailing attitude of this period towards Aboriginal peoples and the project of residential schools, conveyed in the famous pronouncement by Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, in 1920: “Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian
Belmore and Warren’s performative body clearly asserts the survival of Indigenous peoples and their cultures in Canada, despite these aggressive assimilist and ethnocide policies. The residential school system was officially established in 1892 and was in effect until 1969. Although the Canadian government withdrew from official responsibility, several schools continued operation through the 1970s into the 1980s. However, the last federally-run residential school closed in Saskatchewan in 1996.

Victorious, as an Indigenous performative monument, or memorial, uses the bodies of both Belmore and Warren to assert Indigenous self-determination and autonomy over histories of residential schools. Belmore’s inclusion of the Jubilee Monument for Queen Victoria references survivor’s memories of the framed portrait of her in all residential school classrooms. The policy of residential schools began during Queen’s Victoria’s rule, and thus the imagery of Queen Victoria conveys messages of colonial power-relationships and colonial systems of domination and occupation, evident in the residential school system. Victorious is an Indigenous recontextualization of the history of residential schools and the ongoing effects of colonization, revealing that these

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histories have been forgotten in Canadian public memory. Her performance can be seen as monumentalizing, or rather giving space for, the recognition of testimony of the traumas experienced in residential schools.

The performance audience at the National Arts Centre was made up of hundreds of people attending the BC Scene opening night events. Some of those in attendance were Indigenous, but most were from settler ancestry. The re-production of this performance at a national arts institution minutes from Parliament Hill was a powerful political intervention. As a non-Indigenous audience member, for me this performance spoke to settler responsibility towards histories of colonial atrocities. It also served as a reminder of the devastating impacts of colonial conquest and subsequent colonial victory. I was moved by this performance, as were many of the audience members seated around me. But after the performance several of my Indigenous colleagues discussed the power Belmore’s performative installation as an act of Indigenous self-determination, resistance, and provocation. When working with such violent histories, there is always a danger of re-traumatizing those already burdened with histories of violence and colonial occupation and oppression. One colleague spoke to this and said that this performance was not a re-victimization but an act of Indigenous sovereignty and agency. *Victorious* thus can be understood through the lens of Indigenous resistance and decolonization. Working from an image of Queen Victoria, Belmore reworks her “monarch” into an Indigenous Queen, subverting the histories of colonial imperial British rule over Indigenous peoples in Canada.

**Aboriginal Performance Art and the Role of Witnessing**

The relationship between Indigenous performance art and Indigenous decolonization and remembrance generates many questions. Can performance art be a vehicle towards social change in terms of indigenizing Canadian social-memory? Can art be a significant player in the postcolonial project of decolonization? Extending the work of Ruth Phillips, who argues that the decolonizing role of the museum is to disrupt tired ways of knowing and seeing, I would like to include the Indigenous performance art by Belmore, Claxton, and Blondeau. I argue that their work can and does strategically disrupt tired national/ist narratives, stereotypes, and ways of remembering and thinking that have led to the perpetuation of exclusions and erasures. They stimulate the witnessing
audience to think critically about contemporary Indigenous issues and national/ist narratives. These Indigenous women artists use lived experience and individual and collective memory as a means to connect past and present.

The role of the audience is a significant point of contemplation when exploring the meanings and possibilities of Aboriginal performance art as a vehicle for social change, cultural continuance, and resistance. These performances create sites for bearing witness. When audience members become witnesses, they take on the role of active listeners, publicly giving recognition to stories. Jean Fisher discusses Coco Fusco’s storytelling practice as a site where the act of witness may enable audiences to “rediscover [their] potential as agents of change.” Fisher argues that storytelling “has special poignancy for those peoples for whom the trauma of racial violence has yet to be healed and adequately narrativized.” In *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice*, William Booth argues, “To bear witness, then, is to remember, to be living memory, to guard the past, to ask others to do likewise, and to illuminate the traces of the past and their meaning.” Furthermore, Booth examines the act of bearing witness as a gesture of defiance and resistance: “It is an act of resistance related to an absence.” He addresses the fact that words, silence, and remembrance have a tripartite relationship—that is, words that are spoken, inscribed, or performed are bound up with the political, personal, and communal memory. In this sense, words, language, and performance can be argued as being more than vehicles of memory: they are tools for the reclaiming, revoicing, and re-envisioning. The work of bearing witness, noted by Edward Said, is a powerful historical practice. It is an act of acknowledgement and recognition, which engenders understanding and, potentially, intervention. It’s power lies in its offering the potential for social change and preventing the repetition of past atrocities. As Homi Bhabha states, “Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of disembodied past to make sense of the trauma of the present.”

Given this work of bearing witness, what then are the implications of audience reception? To approach this and the questions above, I explore ideas of testimony and witnessing from the

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83 Ibid.
84 William J. Booth, *Communities of Memory*, 73.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 79.
performances discussions in the preceding sections. The urgency of Indigenous performance of memories and traumas is explained by Ruth Leys: “[it is] because personal testimony concerning the past is inherently political and collective that the narration of the remembered trauma is so important.” As seen above, the audience as witness becomes an active listener, one that can give public give recognition to testimonies. This role of the audience is thus a significant point of contemplation when Aboriginal performance art is explored as a vehicle for social change, cultural continuance, and resistance.

Interpretations made by audience members will, obviously, differ based on their individual experiences, cultural identities, education, and level of participation as witnesses. Performances like Belmore’s *Bury My Heart* do not offer a single story or meaning to the audience: the performance is multifaceted, it evokes and connects to long-standing Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural traditions and over five hundred years of contact/occupation/ resistance. The themes stem from and explore Indigenous histories, identities, and subjectivities, as well as personal experiences and current Aboriginal realities. Meaning is thus negotiated between the performer and the audience. It depends on the audience members’ knowledge base, their engagement with popular media and current affairs, and their own personal experiences. The ephemeral nature of performance art offers its audience members a live and expedient experience. The performance work of such artists as Blondeau, Belmore, and Claxton in this way create sites for witnessing testimonies. They tell and perform stories about contemporary Aboriginal experiences, colonial histories, and their legacies. Some of their audience members could be survivors of this traumatic history; others, such as academics, may have studied it. Certain members of the audience will be unaware of the episode, and may recognize the gaps in their understanding of Aboriginal and Canadian histories. The individual experiences and knowledge of each member of the audience will affect how these performances are received and interpreted. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson argue that “meaning comes to be understood as a negotiated domain, in flux and contingent on social and personal investment and contexts.” In this way, gallery spaces become public sites of learning, creating interactive and reciprocal learning environments.

Within the fields of trauma and memory theory and performance art, a considerable amount of work has been done on the implications of performing trauma and memory, as well as on the role

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of testimony and witnessing. Indigenous performance is not considered in most of these accounts. Gillian Whitlock, for example, discusses Indigenous experiences, exploring the trauma of Aboriginal child removal in Canada and Australia in her work on concepts of testimony and reconciliation. Whitlock writes,

> Testimony always needs to be understood as a constrained autobiographical performance rather than a moment of free speech. Testimony cannot be discussed without attention to the conditions that allow it to circulate and be witnessed in the dominant culture. In post-colonial contexts in particular, testimony is characteristically the genre of the subaltern witnessing to oppression to a less oppressed other, and in a form which the other can recognize as culturally and socially appropriate.\(^{91}\)

She connects performative history to notions of bearing witness and asks the question, “Can acts of remembrance initiate a new ethics for living in the contact zone of settler colonialism? Are we witnessing a process of cleansing and healing through apology which will forgive us our trespasses and produce a meaningful reconciliation?”\(^{92}\) Although I am not addressing politics of reconciliation here, her question elucidates a similar conversation in relation to and reception of these performances of remembrance by settler audiences. Does Indigenous performance art that raises questions, reveals memories, gives testimony of traumas and asserts survival initiate shifts and socio-political change in settler-Indigenous politics? Does this place the burden of change onto Indigenous communities and exempt settler responsibility? Or can art facilitate sites from which engagement and inquiry as well as recognition and acknowledgment transpire?

Whitlock argues that testimony about child removal is a powerful recourse in the construction of Indigenous cultural memory.\(^{93}\) Drawing on Whitlock’s discussion of performative history and testimony highlights the ways in which works such as, *Victorious* and *Are You My Mother?* participate in creating, revealing, and contributing to Indigenous cultural memory. A predicament in the concept of bearing witness and giving testimony arises in relation to non-Indigenous reception. Despite the fact that many Indigenous artist state that their intended audience is the Indigenous community, their works are encountered and received by many non-Indigenous people. Due to the politics of silence and apathy supported by neo-liberal national/ist agendas, the reception of Indigenous performances of memory and trauma for many settler audiences could

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\(^{92}\) Ibid., 42.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 24.
result in creating colonial/white guilt, rather than a feeling of responsibility of colonial histories. Whitlock states, “It is apparent also, however, that these testimonies impact on non-Indigenous cultural and individual memory in ways that are deeply troubling, producing ‘glimpses of a past that no longer seems to be ours.’”

In this way, there is a risk that Indigenous histories, stories, memories will be coopted and further colonized by settler-audience members—and then placed in a space of guilt, denial, and anger rather a place of responsibility and acknowledgement. The idea that histories or memories can no longer be conceived as part of settler understanding is an important aspect of displacement politics. However, the feeling of being uncomfortable does not negate the possibility of bearing witness, but can offer an opportunity for settler audiences to be part of the decolonization project. This type of witnessing depends on the type of testimony that is performed. As Ann Kaplan states,

> I explore how people can move beyond sharing trauma and engage in witnessing, which is a new level of responsibility. It differs from vicarious trauma, from voyeurism/sensationalism, and from melodramatic attempts to close the wound as in Hollywood treatments of historical trauma. Rather, I suggest that “witnessing” happens when a text aims to move the viewer emotionally but without sensationalizing or overwhelming her with feeling that makes understanding impossible. “Witnessing” involves not just empathy and motivation to help, but understanding the structure of justice—that an injustice has taken place—rather than focusing on a specific case.\(^95\)

Kaplan argues that art that invites bearing witness to injustices moves beyond creating the desire to identify with and help. Instead, such works prepare the viewer to take responsibility for preventing future occurrences. I argue that the performances of Indigenous memory and trauma exemplified by Blondeau and Belmore work in this way; they are not examples of what Brian Massumi calls “a shock to thought”\(^96\)—meaning a jolt that does not necessary reveal truths—but rather they thrust the audience, involuntarily, into a mode of critical inquiry. They are acts of commemoration, mourning, and remembrance, not triggers of “traumatic realism.”\(^97\) Their works create sites from which non-Indigenous witnessing can occur and from which Indigenous memory can manifest. Jill Bennett’s

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\(^{94}\) Ibid.


\(^{97}\) Bennett, *Empathetic Vision*, 11.
explorations of contemporary art that engages with trauma highlights the workings of affect and argues that art does not “merely assault us, or conversely, offer a corrective interpretation.”

Conclusions and Questions

This chapter has explored notions of performing Indigenous memory and trauma. I raised several questions about the definitions of Indigenous memory and trauma to address the role of Indigenous performance of remembrance in relation to decolonizing politics. The purpose of this chapter was to reveal how contemporary Indigenous performances participate in decolonization through the remembering of the past through the present. I explored the idea that Indigenous performances create memory-sites, or rather that Indigenous performance art (those that perform memory, history, trauma) are Indigenous monuments. I investigated Indigenous monuments, or memory-sites, as performative and connected to Indigenous oral-based traditions. I discussed the recalling and reframing of Indigenous stories, memories and histories as participating within the displacement of national/ist histories and as contributing to Indigenous collective memory.

Many questions were raised throughout this chapter, some of which remain unanswered—such as the potential implications of the reception of these performances and videos. I explored the potential risks of performing remembrance and the possibility of settler audiences’ cooption and also colonization of Indigenous memories. But perhaps a more important question raised by this chapter is how settler nations, such as Canada, can learn from these performative sites of Indigenous memory and trauma and move towards politics of decolonization.

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98 Ibid.
Interview

Indigenous Memory

Carla Taunton:
How does memory play out in your work? Do you see an aspect of your art practice as a process of Indigenous memory? Do you see Aboriginal performance art as contributing to Indigenous remembrance and as a method of intervening in colonial archives and actualizing Indigenous histories?

Tanya Lukin Linklater:

This is a complex question. On the one hand, I’ve considered performance as an act or process that deals with memory explicitly as the performance happens, and then once it is done, it becomes scattered, and can only exist in memory. The act of remembering the performance, re-activates it, but it is changed through this process. Only a fragment still exists in the minds of those present during the performance.

Memory as a process is present in my work. Conceptually, I consider memory to extend beyond history to a time before, and it is also connected to the future, far into the future. I consider memory to be generational, and it is activated and embodied in the present moment.

For the past year, I have been dealing with memory explicitly in performance art and dance works for live performance and video.

I am engaging with the memory of trauma, in specific historical events that affected the Alutiit on Kodiak Island. I am excavating memory that perhaps, lives in the body, or is investigated through the body. Perhaps because of my distance from my island, I feel this investigation is possible. I know from speaking to other Alutiiq artists from my village, trauma is often silenced or forgotten. It is not that I want anyone to return to or re-visit these painful histories. However, I think that our
cultural losses are related to these histories. As someone engaged with Alutiiq cultural work, I am engaging with these histories. I feel that part of my work is to understand why Alutiit are faced with this deep work to recover our memories of old ways. This is a collective process, and I am one person in the community of many who is looking at one part of who we are. However, I engage with the cultural work from the perspective of a contemporary artist.

I am also creating works that deal with Alutiiq language and song and becomes an embodied investigation of the language, deconstructed, from my perspective as a non-speaker.

This investigation of Alutiiq culture extends to traditional dance. I have researched the meanings of the dances through anthropological text and interviews with elders from different regions in Alaska. The Alutiiq community is engaged with a process of cultural revitalization through song and dance (since the 1980’s). I am but one voice in that process. In the past year, I’ve been directing movement studies of traditional dances from my perspective as a contemporary experimental choreographer invested in this collective movement of cultural revitalization. There are specific elements and qualities of my own movement vocabulary that I am discovering in these studies: suspension, release, repetition, percussiveness, and the connection with the natural world: the element of water in the body, and a relationship to the land of Alaska. I believe these movement qualities can be read metaphorically, perhaps tracing memory or history in the body. The body itself can be read.

There is also an aspect of the work about recovery of the body and connection to the body. The dance work activates a relationship to the body, one of sensual engagement.

These projects activate Alutiiq language, song, and traditional dance in new spaces, and they are acts of re-membering.

In the last year, I have begun to create performative work for video because I am concerned that my performance work will disappear. I believe that this is a concern for performance in general and also for feminist work. I am concerned about the loss of the work. The potential for the work to be transported more easily to Alaska and elsewhere, to be distributed to more audiences, is a kind of activation of the work in a different way.
To me, this work is vital. It’s crucial. I don’t know how many people are doing this kind of work from Alaska, and elsewhere.

**Cheryl L’Hirondelle:**

*In relation to Cree worldview, an aspect of cultural memory is understood as memory living within our bodies. Meaning that cultural memory is transmitted genetically and imbued within us. Memories are in our make-up as Cree people. We do these actions, we do these movements, we use our bodies, and at times, it is not until later that we realize how these stories, actions, and performances, fit together. These memories and pieces of things that we just know fit together like a puzzle. I joke that I do the research after the work, meaning that I don’t research prior to producing a performance. And then through reading and doing research afterwards, I realize why I created the work. I realize why the work was important. I have an intuitive sense in my body to do these things.*

*In some of the strong recent [Indigenous art] work I’ve seen there is a real sense of ‘being present’. In relation to some of these works that we are currently witnessing, I think what is happening is that we artists are changing the terms of history. I remember hearing Maria Campbell talking about the next generation of artists. She was hypothesizing and said that the next generation would not be talking about the same issues as the previous generation, such as residential schools and other very painful histories. She said, that this next generation, will assert something else, and what they imagine will allow us to change and see things differently. This shift is not to negate our history, but on some realm, it changes the ways we view history, it changes the ways we see ourselves individually and collectively and the way we engage with the terms of history. I think this is what can happen when you witness really amazing and profound performances, which can be such definitive moments that shift things inside you and impact you molecularly…In relation to performance art, music and contemporary Aboriginal art, more broadly, there is this idea that history is being made.*
Chapter 5

Indigenous Performance as Resistance: Indigenizing Activism

In this chapter, I introduce the concept of culture as resource in relation to Indigenous performance. I argue that the production of Indigenous culture plays a significant role in Indigenous activism and resistance. The production of art, media, and performance does not foster socio-political change on its own; but, instead, cultural production can represent and actualize ideas, such as Indigenous self-determination and activism, which in turn are passed on and potentially mobilized. In this sense, the coming together and the creation of a network can be seen as the force that facilitates social action. The witnessing of histories and memories, for example, performed by Indigenous women artists, as discussed in the preceding chapters, creates active sites for listening and gaining awareness. Also, performance spaces, whether they be in the gallery, on the street, on Parliament Hill, or on a powwow ground, are important sites of gathering whereby diverse peoples come together. These performative sites generate potentially potent opportunities for staging and actualizing Indigenous political activism, self-representation, and cultural continuance. For example, dances and songs performed at a powwow are the reason for bringing people together, and powwows bring together thousands of Indigenous peoples, thus becoming a site where Indigenous activism can be organized and mobilized. I argue that coming together is the agent of social change, and that the creation of Indigenous networks fosters Indigenous social action.

In this chapter I focus on the use of Indigenous performance for Indigenous activism, exploring the performative within Indigenous resistance movements, such as Red Power or the American Indian Movement. I analyze the concept of performative force put forward by George Yúdice to examine and contextualize Indigenous activisms in North America, Australia, and New Zealand. I include examples from the Aboriginal marches in Australia in the late 1970s and discuss the establishment of the Aboriginal Embassy on Australian parliamentary lands; the Waitangi Day celebrations/resistances in Aotearoa, New Zealand; and the Stolen Sisters march, Walk4 Justice across Canada. These inclusions frame and contextualize the political environments that inform, influence, and provoke the participation of Indigenous performance artists. The main argument of this chapter is that artists’ performances participate in Indigenous activist movements, contributing to potential social change and promoting awareness of Indigenous issues.
The chapter is organized around several performances. Rebecca Belmore’s *Vigil* (2003), for example, engages with issues surrounding the missing Indigenous women of Canada. I argue that her performance, and the silenced histories of violence against Indigenous women she deals with, can be connected to both the Amnesty International’s 2004 report, *Stolen Sisters* and the 2008 Walk for Justice. Belmore’s performance *back to the garden* and her installation *blood on snow* can also be viewed as examples Indigenous activism. I also explore Lori Blondeau’s *Are You My Mother?* as an act of social activism that reveals and actualizes Indigenous experiences of residential schools. I contextualize Belmore’s performative activism by discussing several of her other performances, such as *for Dudley* (1997), that use physicality and the repetition of laborious motions to convey the affects of oppression and domination.


The next section explores *Exhibit 671B* (1988), a performance by Belmore that received national attention. This work constitutes her critical response to issues surrounding The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples, an exhibition organized by the Glenbow Museum in conjunction with the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympic Games. I analyze *Exhibit 671B* as an act of political protest and an early example of contemporary Aboriginal performance art. I also look at this performance as a provocative critique of museum practices based on the salvage paradigm and Eurocentric notions of representation. This leads into the next and final section of this chapter, in which I examine the development of pan-Indigenous powwow in relation to Indigenous activism in North America. Here, I explore the connections between powwow and Indigenous activist movements such as the American Indian Movement (AIM), connecting Indigenous practices of performance to Indigenous activism and cultural continuance.
Indigenous Performative Acts: “Culture as Resource”

Although the following is not a new question, it remains significant and relevant to my discussion of contemporary Indigenous experience: Can art or performance be employed as a tool for socio-political action and activism and as a vehicle for social change? To address this, I draw on Bryant Alexander’s call for engagement in critical cultural dialogue as a form of resistance against cultural hegemony. He calls for a performative intervention through the vehicle of the classroom and education. Alexander points out that in the educational context performing pedagogies of resistance engages what Henry Giroux has called a border pedagogy. He argues that an understanding of Giroux’s performative border pedagogy means “not simply opening diverse cultural histories and spaces to students, it also means understanding how fragile identity is as it moves into borderlands crisscrossed with a variety of language, experiences, and voices.” The classroom is thus argued by Alexander (drawing on Giroux) as a performance arena, where critical educators assist in the direction and staging of strategically improvisational dialogue with students. Drawing on this position, we can see artists, curators, and the gallery or performance site as venues for the staging of resistance, where the “effects of such critical dialogues bleed into the everydayness of their existence, out of school [or gallery] and into society.”

This discussion of a performance pedagogy to negotiate and resist processes of colonization is explored further by Norman Denzin, who calls for the development of a radical critical performance pedagogy—argued as pedagogy of hope. Denzin calls for a critical pedagogy that encourages resistance to the “discourses of privatization, consumerism, the methodologies of standardization and accountability, and the new disciplinary techniques of surveillance.”

What does this all mean for contemporary Indigenous performance artists, such as Rebecca Belmore? How can performance practices of Indigenous artists be contextualized within the discourse of resistance in the decolonizing context? One of the key elements to Denzin’s performance pedagogy draws from Indigenous theories of ritual performance. By grounding performative resistance in the discourses of Indigenous peoples’ performance practices, he argues,

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3 Ibid., 177.
this resistance can “blend and blur with performative acts that critique, transgress, and bring dignity to human practices.”5 Postcolonial Indigenous participatory theatre and performance art is central to this discourse; it acknowledges contemporary Indigenous playwrights and performers’ strategic revisitings and uses of mockery to expose 19th-century colonial and racist practices. Denzin’s argument for the inclusion of North American Indigenous theatre strategies is based on the belief that “they interrogate and turn the tables on blackface minstrelsy and the global colonial theatre that reproduced racist politics through specific cross-race and cross-gender performances.”6 He argues that Indigenous theatre nurtures critical transnational and historically specific critical race and class-consciousness and uses Indigenous performance as a means of political representation and critique. He states that this type of theatre incorporates traditional Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural texts into frameworks that disrupt colonial models of race and class relations.7 By extending Indigenous initiatives to include performance art, he is calling for a committed form of revolutionary, catalytic political theatre/performance.

In Impure Acts, Giroux calls for a practical, performative view of pedagogy, politics, and cultural studies. The project he advances, he argues, anchors itself on an ethic of respect; it rejects the traditional denial by the West of respect, humanity, self-determination, citizenship, and human rights to Indigenous peoples.8 Denzin’s discussions are useful for examining the role of Indigenous performance artists in this, offering a theoretical framework for advancing their strategies. Denzin writes, “Following [Linda Tuhiwai] Smiths’ (1999) lead, participatory performance work honors and respects local knowledge and customs and practices and incorporates those values and beliefs into participatory performance action inquiry.”9 This project as a performative practice interrogates and criticizes the cultural narratives that make victims responsible for cultural and interpersonal violence; however, performance narratives do more than celebrate the lives and struggles of persons enduring violence and abuse:

These narratives must always be directed back to the structures that shape and produce the violence in question. Pedagogically, the performative is political and focused on power. Performances are located within their historical moment, with attention given to the play of power and ideology. The performative becomes a way of critiquing the political, a way of analyzing how culture operates.

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 241.
9 Ibid., 242.
pedagogically to produce and reproduce victims.\textsuperscript{10}

In this sense, although artists and cultural theorists may not be the ones to solve the problems of the postcolonial world, they offer a re-visioning of the local, national, and international to better make sense of the issues and new meanings arising from processes of colonization.

The increased use within the current globalized world of Indigenous culture as a resource for socio-political and economic change is fundamental to my argument. I attempt, through the use of the concept of culture as resource, to tie together the multiple threads discussed in this paper. In \textit{The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era}, George Yúdice elucidates what he has identified as the current global deployment of culture as a bottom-up and top-down problem solver. Yúdice also brings to light the implications and possibilities of Indigenous political action and politicized resistance mediated through the arts. As argued by Yúdice, government support of culture is based on the idea that culture can reduce social conflict and lead to economic development.\textsuperscript{11} His discussion explores the role of culture and how it has expanded in an unprecedented way into the political and economical realm while traditional notions of culture have largely been emptied out.\textsuperscript{12} In the globalized world, Yúdice argues, culture is explored as a resource for socio-political and economic development, growth, and amelioration. The argument that culture can replace social programming and social services has been used by nation-state governments to alleviate their responsibility to support civil societies by burdening cultural producers and administrators with the task of being social problem solvers. It exploits and coopts grassroots activism’s use of cultural production to expose socio-political and cultural oppressions.

The production of art that exposes social problems can be a useful strategy for social change, but only in collaboration with social programming. Cultural productions—such as political art installation interventions, hip hop music, and documentary film—can expose social problems and contribute to the empowerment and self-determination of marginalized and silenced peoples; but cultural products are not agents for social change. My argument builds on Yúdice, who argues that the “increasing share of world trade by symbolic goods, such as movies, TV programs, music, tourism have given the cultural sphere greater protagonism than any other moment in modern

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 243.
\textsuperscript{12} Such as, Bourdieu’s model of culture in terms of distinction and Williams’ anthropological notion of culture as a whole way of life.
history.” What this means is that the notion of culture and what we do in its name has changed, as it is now deployed for socio-economic and political means by local and Indigenous cultures, development projects, UNESCO, the World Bank, and NGOs.

The relationship between culture and the economic and political spheres is not new, and is exemplified in the 19th-century role of the museum as an instrument for teaching social behaviour. What is new here is the turn to legitimate the economic support of culture based on its utility, conceived as its success as a problem solver. In recent years, the reduction of state expenditure on social welfare has fostered the claims of arts organizations that arts and culture can solve problems, that it can enhance education, resolve racial tensions, reduce crime, reverse urban blight, and empower Indigenous communities through cultural tourism. In this sense, arts administrators have played a significant part in advancing the expanded role of culture as resource; artists have been employed to manage social problems in hopes of gaining government and corporate support. At the same time, the claim that art can act as panacea for social problems endorses governments’ continued withdrawal of funding for social programs dealing with issues such as crime, substance abuse, and poverty.

By highlighting this discussion of culture as resource as a double-edged sword, I bring to light the following questions: How does the use of culture as resource affect local Indigenous communities? How does the use of Indigenous culture by Indigenous communities differ from the use or cooption of Indigenous cultures by nation-states and global corporations? What are the effects of using culture as a cure for socio-political issues by a marginalized community, such as the Indigenous world? In many ways, being Indigenous in the colonial contexts of settler societies, is an act of resistance. This act of “being” brought forward by Indigenous women performance artists reveals the always already presence of cultural autonomy and agency of Indigenous nations.

Building Alliances: Indigenous Culture as a Resource for Networking

The use of culture as resource in the Indigenous context offers a possibility for the negotiation of the local and the global. The production of culture, art, or media as an agent for generating social change can be a convincing argument for Indigenous communities, NGOs, governments, and corporations. However, it is imperative to recognize, as Stewart-Harawira argues, that globalization

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
is a double-edged sword for Indigenous people—that globalization has brought about new situations that undermine Indigenous achievements and aspirations, while simultaneously creating transformative possibilities.\(^\text{16}\) It is also important to keep in mind what Aboriginal artist and curator Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew describes as the positive effects of using cultural production as a resource for Indigenous communities: that is, the impact of cyberspace and digital media on Indigenous resistance strategies and the significant new developments in digital media, tools, and networks in the fields of Indigenous governance, education, health, social services, cultural preservation, languages, business, and industry.\(^\text{17}\) In this way, and by drawing on Yúdice, it is possible to see that using Indigenous culture as resource can build platforms for sharing Indigenous experiences and for developing a global Indigenous network. I argue, therefore, that the use of culture as resource can foster global transnational Indigenous alliance, and that as a result these networks and alliances can generate social change through political action. For example, the post–World War II development of the powwow trail throughout North America, which arguably supported the dissemination of Red Power ideals and the growth of the Indian Brotherhood Movement, created sites for Indigenous peoples from across North America to celebrate Indian identity.\(^\text{18}\)

Such gatherings of diverse First Nations and Métis peoples for the purpose of dancing, singing, drumming, and storytelling has had, and continues to have, positive effects (among them, socio-cultural empowerment) within the Indigenous rights movement in Canada and the United States. This is due to the fact that dancing has brought many together, offering a space in which Indigenous rights and political issues could be developed, shared, and put into action. In other words, the production of culture or cultural event, such as powwow dancing, is the connecting force for Indigenous peoples. Other examples of gathering spaces include storytelling festivals (discussed in Chapter 3), whereby Indigenous artists come together and share their culturally diverse and individually distinct stories, perspectives, and voices. The Aboriginal performing art series Acting Out, Claiming Space, recently co-curated by Daina Warren and myself in Kingston, Ontario, also created a site for claiming Indigenous space and vocalizing politicized actions. Importantly, these


sites also create opportunity for mentorship, the sharing of Indigenous mobilizing actions, and workshopping and planning new projects and initiatives. I examine the annual ImagineNative: Indigenous Film and Media Festival in Toronto later in this dissertation as a globalized and transnational Indigenous site for networking. These are but a few examples focusing solely on festivals and performance venues and events—thus privileging cultural production. However, the same could be argued for academic and political conferences, or the recent World Indigenous Games hosted on Coast Salish, Cowichan Territory (Summer 2009). It is the coming together that is the performative force behind the Indigenous resistance movement, offering potential for social action, radical change, and empowerment for global Indigenous nations.

Put another way, the use of culture, specifically Indigenous culture, as a resource for socio-political action has complicated effects and results. What, for instance, are the implications of employing culture as a problem solver? How can Indigenous art and culture resist socio-political power structures? What does it mean to label culture a “resource” for Indigenous communities? The aim of drawing on Yúdice’s disclosure of the socio-political and economic uses of culture is to provide a new understanding of culture as resource and how current positioning of culture as expedient has gained legitimacy for culture while also displacing and absorbing other notions of it. This strategy of using culture as a resource has not only been adopted by arts administrators and local Indigenous communities, who employ culture as a vehicle for socio-political action, development, and amelioration; global corporations have also adopted culture as a resource—and herein lies the risk. Global corporations, which arguably do not have the best interests of local peoples as a priority, can move into a managerial position in relation to Indigenous peoples through economic support of the production of Indigenous culture for their own economic and political gain. This new use of culture as resource shifts the emphasis from cultural productions to the outcomes of using culture as a resource.

However, in relation to Indigenous culture as resource, is this really a “new” use? As I put forward in Chapter 2, globalization is commonly described by Indigenous scholars as simply an extension of imperial and colonial processes. With this in mind, throughout imperialism and colonialism in settler nations such as Canada and New Zealand, Indigenous peoples have consistently used cultural production, specifically material culture and performance for social, political, and economic gain. Here, I am referencing Indigenous tourism, such as seen in Rotorua, New Zealand; Indian Days at Banff; Hiawatha Pageants; vaudeville theatre, and so on. By making connections between imperial and global eras, we elucidate the long-standing and historical negotiation made by Indigenous peoples in use of their cultural practices and productions as a
socio-political, economic, and cultural resources (both in community and outside). In Yúdice’s argument, he emphasizes the notion that culture can foster political and economic development based on the belief that investment in cultural production is both gender and race sensitive and that inclusion will “strengthen the fiber of civil society.” Yúdice clarifies how global labeling of culture as resource facilitates the management of culture by external corporations and other organizations, thereby facilitating the increased administration of culture by state and corporate government. Some would argue that the inclusion of Aboriginal art and cultural production in the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games would exemplify this type of mediation and cultural brokerage, extending the historic cooption of Indigenous cultural signifiers, representations, and cultural production as part of Canadian national identity. The possible implications or risks for Indigenous communities involve increased loss of control over cultural autonomy and cooption or appropriation by global market systems. However, again, I raise a question. In this discussion of culture as resource and the potential cooption and management of Indigenous culture by outside global and national markets, where does Indigenous agency, sovereignty, and autonomy come in?

The use of cultural strategies by Indigenous artists, organizations, and communities is also important for my exploration of Indigenous negotiations of the impacts of globalization. Central to discussion of the relationship of Indigenous cultures to globalization is Yúdice’s critique of the notion that the marginalized and so-called powerless can draw strength from their cultures as a form of intervention, meaning that the content of culture itself is almost irrelevant; what matters is that it can support political change or politics of change. Yúdice states that while this view is compelling, cultural expression is not enough; he argues that struggle fundamentally depends on a thorough understanding of and engagement with the systems and machinations involved. In other words, Yúdice positions his argument against other cultural studies scholars who argue that cultural agency alone, such as the expression of identity, can lead to social change.

This brings me back to my argument: cultural agency and the production of culture can be a force that brings together Indigenous voices or that facilitates the organizing of an event (such as an exhibition or a conference), which, in turn, can act as a platform from which diverse Indigenous issues and perspectives gather strength and give rise to Indigenous networks. The initiatives of such networks, in relation to the global Indigenous context and social movements, include the establishment of counter colonial narratives, and the development of local decolonizing agendas,

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20 Ibid., 3.
21 Ibid., 10.
and conversations. Furthermore, art production, such as the compelling and provocative work of Ursula Johnson and Rebecca Belmore, create opportunities for impacting and shifting individual and collective consciousness through, as previously explored, the sharing and performing of Indigenous memories, stories, histories, and issues. This brings me to the notion of *performative force*

Mi’kmaq multimedia artist Ursula Johnson’s recent performance of *Elmiet* at Nocturne 2010 in Halifax elucidates the relationship between contemporary Indigenous performance art and *performative force* (fig. 80). As an endurance performance, which took the audience on a walking tour of Halifax, Johnson’s work clearly made connections between historical and contemporary issues for Aboriginal peoples in both the local context of Nova Scotia and the national contexts across Canada. The artist distributed invitations for the performance that stated that she was “hosting” an event downtown at which a selected participant could be eligible for a cash prize. Johnson’s harsh irony was that the cash prize denoted the bounty of 25 pounds sterling for the scalps of Mi’kmaq men, women and children. *Elmiet*, a Mi’kmaq verb meaning “to go home,” was a two-part performance starting with Johnson’s parade throughout downtown. She wore a hand-woven headpiece made of strands and bands of sweet grass, maple, black and white ash, and cane reeds, which served to represent her hair, covering her eyes and falling down her back like a cape (fig. 81). The performance concluded at Grand Parade with a violent performative scalping ceremony (fig. 82). This ritualized performance was intended to be, both symbolically and literally, the last scalping of an Indigenous person. Prior to the ceremonial removal of Johnson’s

![Figure 80: Ursula Johnson, *Elmiet*, 2010. Festival Promotional Photograph. Nocturne Festival, Halifax. Photo Credit: Krista Comeau.](image-url)
headgear, or rather the act of being scalped by a volunteer audience member, Nathan Sack performed a traditional Mi’kmaq song (fig. 83). The inclusion of the woven headpiece and Sack’s performance can be seen as powerful acts of cultural continuance and of claiming the Mi’kmaq territories now known as Halifax.

*Elmiet* is a multifaceted performance revealing violent histories of colonialism; scalping was a strategy of conquest and resistance for the French, English, and Mi'kmaq. However, British governors Edward Cornwallis and Charles Lawrence perpetuated and legislated bounty laws against Indigenous peoples, and in 1756, Lawrence added into the law “not just warrior scalps, but men, women and children.” Although the Nova Scotia government made a formal apology for

![Image of Urusula Johnson's Elmiet](image)

the scalping bounty against Mi’kmaq people, as Johnson notes, “it's still on the books and it's going to stay on the books until the federal government says we're going to take it off. And that hasn't happened.”

endured violence and marginalization. In an interview before the performance Johnson remarked, “The selected participant, whoever that may be, would be asked to step up to the podium and participate in a scalping ceremony. They're going to be told how it needs to be done, what it symbolizes, how significant it is [as a] last moment of history: it'll be the last Mi’kmaq scalp taken. And then we'll try to make change to have it removed from the books.”

A review of Elmiet suggested that the reaction by some audience members to Johnson’s performance highlighted the ongoing “unease of facing racial issues concerning the treatment of Aboriginals in the past and present” in dominant Canadian society. Johnson’s performative scalping was said to have “left many festival-goers uncomfortable and even angered: a reaction Johnson attributes to people being afraid to ask questions.” As a performance artist who is pushing boundaries and creating space for the recognizing of Indigenous experiences, Johnson through Elmiet arguably participates in the larger Indigenous activism project of decolonization. The fact that Johnson’s performance received such reactions elucidates the urgency and the need for education on Indigenous knowledge and histories as well as on contemporary realities. Johnson’s radical act of indigenizing space and history revealed a traumatic history of violence against Indigenous peoples. It was also a moment of resistance, a powerful moment of healing in Mi’kmaq history and a potential transformative moment for settler–Indigenous relations. Elmiet created a performative site of exchange and dialogue; Johnson asked her audience to consider taking action along with the artist in recognizing the scalping bounty against Indigenous peoples and in mobilizing action against its ongoing place in legislative law.

**Performative Indigenous Activism: Marches, Protest, Takeovers**

In this section, I connect the ideas put forth above regarding culture as resource and the use of performance and performativity as a tool for political activism. The examples I refer to are from Australia, New Zealand and Canada. They span diverse settler nations and time periods, from the 1970s to present. The civil rights movement of the 1960s spearheaded and ignited Indigenous activism in these three settler nations, similar to events and mobilizations in the United States. Anti-war sentiments and human rights activism—such as Black and Red power and women’s rights

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24 Lypny, “The Urban Aboriginal.”
movements—encompass this era of social and political change. Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues in relation to Indigenous activism and rights movements,

For most of the past 500 years the Indigenous peoples’ project has had one major focus: survival. This has entailed survival from the effects of a sustained war with the colonizers, from the devastation of diseases, from the dislocation from lands and territories, from the oppression of living under unjust regimes; survival at a sheer basic physical level and as peoples with our own distinctive languages and cultures. Whilst for many Indigenous people across the world survival at a basic human level is still the priority concern, the Indigenous peoples’ project was reformulated around a much wider platform of concerns following the Second World War and more particularly from the 1960s. Some of these concerns were struggled through violent revolution or armed resistance, other have been born out of the “decolonization of the mind” strategies and still others have been nurtured and sustained within the cultural systems of every Indigenous community. The significance of this period and the reformulation of the Indigenous peoples’ project that unfolded during this era is that a new agenda for Indigenous activity has been framed that goes beyond the decolonization aspirations of a particular Indigenous community towards the development of global Indigenous strategic alliances.25

The examples explored here are connected to Indigenous activism, which can be defined as Indigenous resistance to colonialism and the prevailing white-settler hegemony. Indigenous resistance movements have persisted throughout colonization, from the moment of contact to today. The inclusion of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, the protests on Waitangi Day, the response to the Columbus Quincentenary in 1991, and Stolen Sisters walk are intended to contextualize the connections between Indigenous activism and the use of the performative to resist. They emphasize the relationship between historical and contemporary Indigenous activism and the work of Indigenous performance artists. The purpose of this section then is to argue that the artists’ performances participate in Indigenous activist movements, promoting awareness of Indigenous issues and contributing to potential social change.

The first example I explore is the political mobilizations in Australia in the 1970s. Prior to this era of engaged and creative activism by Indigenous peoples in Australia, Indigenous activism had always already been mobilized. However, this period was a catalyst for systemic change, a heightened social awareness of Indigenous human rights violations, and the beginnings of settler-Australia’s recognition of Australia’s role in the occupation of Indigenous lands and peoples. The formation of the Aboriginal Embassy on Australian Parliamentary lands, the establishment of 14 July National Aborigines Day, and Australia-wide strikes and marches by Aboriginal people and

their allies are but three of many significant actions made by Aboriginal peoples in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These distinctive performative actions used Indigenous bodies to claim lands and spaces that had historically excluded and marginalized Aboriginal presence.

Scott Robinson published a pivotal study, “The Aboriginal Embassy: An Account of the Protests of 1972,” of the events and momentum prior to and during the development of the Tent Embassy. He states,

By 1972, Australian Aboriginal people had developed a form of political consciousness which embraced the idea of land rights, and had for the most part adopted protest as their means of political expression. The Aboriginal Embassy of 1972 was the result of a decade of debate within the Aboriginal community over means and goals. It involved both the adaptation of exogenous notions of Black Power, and the political expression of a traditional awareness of original dispossession.26

On 26 January 1972, four young urban Aboriginal men from Sydney—Billy Craigie, Tony Coorey, Michael Anderson, and Bert Williams—(with the support of the Communist Party of Australia) erected a beach umbrella in front of Parliament House, in Canberra, the Australian capital, with cardboard placards reading, “ Aboriginal Embassy.” This action was in direct response to the Australia Day Statement by Prime Minister William McMahon on 26 January, 1972, in which he directly stated that Indigenous peoples would have to lease land from the Crown—meaning that they would have to lease their own lands. The text of the Prime Minister’s speech was released on 25 January, the day before Australia Day on the radio. Aboriginal activists in Redfern, a suburb of Sydney, understood the words of the Prime Minister as a complete rejection of the idea of Aboriginal title to land and decided on immediate action (fig. 84).27 On 26 January, Michael Anderson told the press, “The land was taken from us by force . . .


We shouldn't have to lease it . . . Our spiritual beliefs are connected with the land."^{28}

The historical background of the Aboriginal Embassy is extensive and has direct correlation to Indigenous land rights and the referendum of 1967, through which the Australian people voted in a large majority to recognize Aboriginal peoples as members of one Australian society. In 1971 several events occurred in addition to the January 26th speech that were catalysts for the activist actions in 1972. One of these events is closely linked to the political mobilization of Indigenous communities in the 1970s: On 27 April 1971, Mr. Justice Blackburn ruled against the Yirrkala people in their case against Nabalco and the Commonwealth of Australia. In a 263-page judgment Blackburn concluded that

the relationship between clan and land did not amount to proprietorship as that is understood in our law; and that the clans had not sustained the burden of proof that they were linked with the same land in 1788 as now; that no doctrine of common law ever required or now requires a British government to recognise land rights under Aboriginal law which may have existed prior to the 1788 occupation; that Aboriginal land rights in Australia were never expressly recognised; and that if the clans had had any rights they would have been effectually terminated by the mining.^{29}

This result—and the fact that the government did not rule in favour of repatriating Yirrkala people’s lands—shocked Indigenous peoples across Australia. In response, on 6 May 1971,

^{28} Michael Anderson quoted in Canberra Times, 26 January 1972.
representatives of the Yirrkala people went to Canberra to present a statement to the Prime Minister. It read,

The people of Yirrkala have asked us to speak to you on their behalf. They are deeply shocked at the result of the recent Court case. We cannot be satisfied with anything less than ownership of the land. The land and law, the sacred places, songs, dances and language were given to our ancestors by spirits Djangkawu and Barama. We are worried that without the land future generations could not maintain our culture. We have the right to say to anybody not to come to our country. We gave permission for one mining company but we did not give away the land. The Australian law has said that the land is not ours. This is not so. It might be right legally but morally it's wrong. The law must be changed. The place does not belong to white man. They only want it for the money they can make. They will destroy plants, animal life and the culture of the people. The people of Yirrkala want: 1 Title to our land. 2 A direct share of all royalties paid by Nabalco. 3. Royalties from all other businesses on the Aboriginal Reserves. 4. No other industries to be started without consent of the Yirrkala Council. 5. Land to be included in our title after mining is finished. (English Translation) Signed R. Marika, Daymbalipu Mununggurr, W. Wunungmurra.

According to historian Tim Rowse, the government responded by assuring that the newly established Ministerial Committee, an investigating body for Aboriginal issues, would consider how to protect reserve lands for Aboriginal people's ceremonial, religious, and recreational use; to give residents the tenure necessary for their commercial enterprises; and to orchestrate purchasing land for Aboriginal people. Peter Howson, Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, and Ralph Hunt, Minister for the Interior, both members of the Ministerial Committee, were also firmly opposed to the idea of an Aboriginal right to land. The Council for Aboriginal Affairs, chaired by Dr. H.C. Coombs, presented the Yirrkala people's case to Prime Minister McMahon, with little success. During the Yirrkala peoples’ fight for cultural sovereignty and land rights, the Gurindji people had been constantly fighting the federal government for the right to their traditional lands at Wattie Creek. On May Day of 1971, trade unionists and students showed their support and marched in a political protest known as the May Day March of 1971. These events, then, highlight Indigenous political mobilizations and also show how they developed in chorus with the media coverage of the Aboriginal Embassy in 1972, revealing instances of settler-solidarity in Indigenous activism for land title, sovereignty, and human rights.

30 This document can be found in Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, eds., The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1999), 236–237.
32 Ibid.
The political actions of 1971 (marches, strikes, walkouts, representation at government), however, were disregarded by the Australian government. The 1972 Australia Day announcement that there would be no Aboriginal title to land shows a complete disregard of Indigenous knowledge, and of the statement made by the Yirrkala representatives on the land rights of Aboriginal peoples. Instead, under Northern Territory legislation, which came into operation at the end of 1970, Aboriginal people would be encouraged to apply for leases, which would only be considered if the land was put to “reasonable” economic or social use.33 The McMahon government’s paternalistic actions not only displayed a racist and Eurocentric attitude towards Aboriginal peoples, but also illustrated the colonial and assimilist agenda that persisted in Australia at this time. This is not dissimilar to the situation in Canada. In 1969, the Canadian government attempted to pass the White Paper, which would have eradicated the Indian Act and simultaneously assimilated Aboriginal people into Canada. Thereby, Aboriginal people would lose their rights to land and cultural distinction. As Harold Cardinal wrote in his seminal book, Unjust Society, in 1969, “The federal government, instead of acknowledging its legal and moral responsibilities to the Indian of Canada and honouring the treaties that the Indian signed in good faith, now proposes to wash its hands of Indians entirely.”34 The 1969 White Paper, legislation designed to eliminate the special status of Indigenous peoples in Canada as outlined in the British North America Act, was perceived by Indigenous peoples as an attempt at total assimilation and abrogation of their rights.35 It is often discussed as a catalyst for activism and political mobilization of Aboriginal peoples across Canada, evident in a series of protests, demonstrations, and other political events. Eventually the bill was pulled from the political agenda of the Liberal government, and in the 1970s both Australia and in Canada saw the mobilization of Indigenous activism and the fight for Indigenous lands and recognition of Indigenous land title and treaty rights.36

The Tent Embassy protest thus embodies this era of global Indigenous activism, exemplifying many of the performative strategies incorporated into Indigenous rights movements. As noted above, the Tent Embassy was enacted on the annual national holiday known as Australia Day—known from an Aboriginal perspective as Invasion Day—which marks the claim of the

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Australian continent by the British Crown. Later that day, this strategic Indigenous land rights protest evolved into a tent encampment, called the “Aboriginal Embassy.” The camp comprised a group of shelters made of canvas tarpaulins and plastic sheets. The first establishment of the tent embassy lasted for six months—with several violent oppositions by the police. Despite the violence and arrests, over two thousand people participated in the protest during this period. The media followed the events closely, and when the police violently dismantled the tents, television film crews captured it for the evening news. An outraged public expressed its disgust to the federal government.

This symbolic protest—in its use of the body to intervene and resist—encompasses concepts of physical protest.

This political action was initiated and implemented by Aboriginal activists. The site became known as the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. It was a powerful symbol. The original owners of the land set up an “embassy” opposite the parliament, as if they were foreigners. This act showed compellingly the strength of their sense of alienation. They were landless. Their embassy was a tent—a well understood image of poverty and impermanence. Their camp attracted unprecedented support from people across the country who recognised their sense of grievance and made their views known to the government.37

The action also alludes to concepts of performative protest: it is the staging of an Aboriginal embassy on Australian land—meaning lands occupied through colonial rule and conquest. Explicitly, the concept of the Aboriginal Embassy attempts to delegitimize the presence of the Australian government, which, based on the response of violent police action, was threatened by the presence of Indigenous activists, community members, and their allies on parliament lawns. As previously discussed in this dissertation, settler nations, because of their colonial and immigrant histories of conquest and settlement, have to constantly maintain their legitimacy as a nation through national/ist narratives and oppressive actions towards Indigenous populations. The presence of the Aboriginal Embassy undermined and exposed histories of colonial violence and occupation of Indigenous lands, while simultaneously Indigenizing the capital lands as a site for Indigenous resistance and activism. As a subversive staging, the Tent Embassy, which was and continues to be made up of tents and tarps, references Indigenous experiences of poverty and displacement and the current living conditions of a large percentage of Aboriginal peoples across Australia.

During the six-month staging of the Aboriginal Embassy, a nation-wide protest for Aboriginal land rights was held under the title, Ningla-A-Na, an Arrernte word meaning “hungry for our land.” This period of nonviolent protest is highlighted by the July 14th National Aborigines Day marches across the nation in the major cities. These marches took over cities, and participants included both Indigenous and settler protestors. The Ningla-A-Na protests were framed and centre around the demands for land title and for the prevention of the Nabalco mining operation at Gove. Organized under the pretence of “Black Rights,” the marches clearly made a statement to the Australian government and public—referencing the Australia Day statement by McMahon and the Aboriginal community’s mobilization and gaining the sympathies of Australian settlers. The marches were primarily organized in solidarity with the Tent Embassy by Abschol, which facilitated work stoppages. Also, as noted by the National Museum of Australia, “Trade unions placed a large advertisement in The Australian, in which they reminded readers of the 1971 Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) decision asking for the restoration of ‘tribal land rights’ and for the recognition of ‘Aboriginal people as distinct, viable national minorities entitled to special facilities for continued self development’.” In the same month of the occupation, or rather Aboriginal re-claiming of land, journalist John Newfong wrote an article on the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and the meeting of opposition leader, Gough Whitlam with the Aboriginal activists. He wrote,

> With its flags fluttering proudly in the breeze, the Aboriginal Embassy on the lawns opposite the Federal Parliament has been one of the most successful press and parliamentary lobbies in Australian political history. The tent conference with Federal Opposition Leader, Mr. Whitlam, turned out to be one of the greatest coups ever for the Aboriginal advancement movement. Very much to the Embassy’s credit is the fact that it managed to get such a heavy commitment from a party seemingly so close to power.

In his article, “Aboriginal Tent Embassy: Its Aims,” Newfong also outlines the Embassy’s five points and references Whitlam’s asserted commitment in the press conference after the meeting. He writes,

At a press conference immediately after the discussion Mr. Whitlam said that a Labor Government would be committed to a “properly representative body in the Northern Territory with full legislative power”; to a “complete reversal of the present Government’s land rights policy where it denies corporate title to reserve

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lands”; and to the “protection of all those areas of spiritual significance to the original inhabitants of this country.”

By including the Embassy’s demands and the opposition leader’s address and demonstrated commitment to working towards such (or several) terms, Newfong reveals a clear position of support and a questioning of the current government’s complete disregard for Indigenous sovereignty over lands, governance, and peoples. Newfong then writes that although the lawn conference did not achieve all of the Embassy’s demands, “it nevertheless went a great deal further than most people had expected.”

Produced by the National Museum of Australia in collaboration with Indigenous activist, scholars, and communities a key educational website states, “When Parliament resumed in mid February 1972, there were 11 tents on the lawns opposite Parliament House. Leader of the Opposition, Gough Whitlam, accepted an invitation from Embassy organizers to visit the tents and speak with representatives. This gave it further recognition and legitimacy.”

For most activist movements, legitimacy is a key development in instigating socio-political change. In other words, gaining recognition as an activist body whose political cause is legitimate in the eyes of mainstream society or government can result in policy development, institutional reorganization, and ultimately social change. While this strategy of “legitimating” actions can lead to cooption and loss of political autonomy, it can also create sites for conversation and transformation. This is evident in the solidarity that occurred during the six-month occupation of parliament lands.

In March 1972, Embassy leaders addressed over two hundred Australian National University students, asking the predominantly white settler students for their support for the protest. Many of these students joined the Embassy’s protest and worked in solidarity with the Indigenous activists. Robinson notes that “the Canberra university students billeted Aboriginal protestors, joined the crowd on the lawns, and opened a bank account for the Embassy through the Student Representative Council.”

Press coverage, meetings with government officials, settler-solidarity, and international visitors—such as members of the Canadian Indian Claims Commission, Soviet

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41 The demands were as follows: 1. Control of the Northern Territory as a State within the Commonwealth of Australia; the parliament in the NT to be predominantly Aboriginal with title and mining rights to all land within the Territory; 2. Legal title and mining rights to all other presently existing reserve lands and settlements in Australia; 3. The preservation of all sacred sites throughout Australia; 4. Legal title and mining rights to areas in and around all Australian capital cities; 5. Compensation monies for lands not returnable to take the form of a down-payment of six billion dollars and an annual percentage of the gross national income. Newfong, “The Aboriginal Embassy,” 5.

42 Ibid.


diplomats and an Irish Republican Army member—all contributed to the recognition of the Indigenous issue of land rights, not only in Australia but around the world. The Aboriginal Embassy’s demands outlined on their signs—such as “Land Now Not Lease”; “Land Rights Now or Else”; “We Want Land not Handouts”; “You are Living on Stolen Land”—also clearly exposed the government’s complete disregard of Indigenous peoples and their rights to ancestral lands.

*Ningla A-Na, a documentary film* by Alessandro Cavadini (1972), *captures this moment of activism* and showcases the political shiftings in the Black movement in south-east Australia in the 1970s that became the Aboriginal self-determined movement. In a recent interview, “Re-staging Two Laws: An Interview with Alessandro Cavadin and Carolyn Strachan,” Cavadini discusses his experiences while shooting the film:

In 1971, I began to shoot *Ningla A-na* (AU, 1972), a documentary about the setting up of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns of the Parliament House in Canberra by a group of young urban Aboriginal activists from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, and many more places in the territories of Australia. This political action spearheaded a national Aboriginal movement for land rights. The film follows various members of this original group in Redfern, Sydney, revealing a much larger political and cultural movement that was a template for urban Aboriginal rights. It is a black-and-white guerilla film, an agit-prop document. As I arrived in Sydney from the Europe of ’68, I became involved very quickly in the local politics and understood that a significant change was about to take place in the Australian world of politics and culture. Independent filmmakers in Sydney were already operating a filmmakers’ co-op at the back of the anarchist Bob Gould Bookshop. I was guided to the right people to make this film. I met Carolyn Strachan as *Ningla A-na* entered the final stages of shooting; she formulated a strategy for distribution, and for reaching young audiences. We traveled throughout Australia with the film.45

*Ningla-A-na*, now part of the Australian Nation Film Board’s collection, has recently been showcased as part of the NFB’s Australia’s Audiovisual Heritage Online, curated by Liz McNiven, a Barnba woman from the Budjiti nation of Paroo river country in north-west NSW and south-west Queensland. McNiven acknowledges the national significance of this film in changing the world’s perception of Australia and in gaining international attention for Aboriginal rights. Here, I’ve included several sections from McNiven’s review:

The changing of the guard from white pacifism to black activism within the Aboriginal movement takes place in front of Cavadini’s camera and he captures it beautifully. The film highlights the transition from something old, tired and worn-out to something new, energised and active. This appears in a segue from a lengthy

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interview with an elderly white Australian pacifist to an image of Aboriginal protestors coming into view as they march over Commonwealth Bridge towards Parliament House. A number of historically important interviews are sown into the film. Dr Fred Hollows describes the appalling state of Aboriginal health in the 1970s and talks about the establishment of the Aboriginal Medical Centre in Redfern. Isabelle Coe points out, in a dialogue with feminists, the historic and implicit role of white women in the oppression of Aboriginal people. Paul Coe highlights the need for services for Aboriginal people and Shirley Smith talks about setting up the breakfast program for children in Redfern.

The film canvasses the opinions of white Australians watching the protest. The voice of a young boy with a broad Australian accent announces, “I am with the Aborigines. It’s their land … I reckon we should give it back to them.”

The news footage of police brutalising protesters travelled around the world. It gave international exposure to the Aboriginal rights agenda and provided a spectacle that reflected on Australia’s human rights record. The McMahon Liberal government’s decision to forcibly remove the tents dented their credibility nationally and internationally, while the subsequent Labor government, led by Gough Whitlam, gained by agreeing to give Aboriginal people land rights.

The Aboriginal Embassy protest changed the way the world viewed Australia: from being a colonial power with a primitive dying race of Aborigines to that of a racist country oppressing the Aboriginal people and denying them their human rights as set out in international law. All these years later this remains the pervading attitude of the world towards Australia: a lucky country, if you’re white. Many issues raised in this film persist today. Things did change after the Tent Embassy protest but the denial of Aboriginal people’s rights still remains. As a seminal work on the Black movement of the 1970s, this film is a must-see for all Australians as it provides a mirror to a shared history.46

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy continues to the present day on the grounds of the Provisional Parliament House in Canberra. It has stood in protest intermittently since 1972 and permanently since 1992, acting as an ongoing reminder of Indigenous genocide and ethnocide in Australia, and at the same time of the ongoing struggles over land and sovereignty. It was relocated to Victoria Park in central Sydney during the 2000 Olympic Games, as part of a delegation to the World Court at the Hague, and most recently to Woollongong (2007). In 1995 the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was registered by the Australian Heritage Commission on the National Estate as the first Australian Aboriginal Heritage Site, nationally recognized for the political struggle of the Aboriginal people. However, the fact that the Embassy has become a tourist site and an Australian heritage place raises a question: Has mainstream—that is, settler—Australia coopted this site,

thereby depoliticizing its intentions and occupation? From my positioning as a Canadian settler- 
woman, I can respond that witnessing this site was a powerful anti-colonial experience. During my 
research trip to Canberra in 2008, I witnessed the Tent Embassy (fig. 85). A fire was burning and 
five members of the council were present. We talked for a while about the history of the site and

Figure 85: Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Canberra, 2008. Photo Credit: Carla Taunton.

the symbolic and overt claiming of stolen lands. The Embassy is a powerful performative action, 
which continues to reveal and expose Indigenous rights and the true and sometimes uncomfortable 
recognition that in all settler nations, those who are not Indigenous are standing on stolen 
Indigenous lands. The Aboriginal Tent Embassy camp confronts provisional Parliament House in a 
theatrical and performative political demonstration. The ongoing presence of the tent Embassy in 
front of the old parliament house, now housing the Portraiture Gallery, creates an unsettling 
reminder to government and settler Australians of the continued legacies of colonization. The 
National Museum of Australia analysis of the site of the Aboriginal Embassy clearly shows a 
political change in the attitudes and perspectives of Indigenous rights. It states, “The way in which 
the image of the tents suggests the poverty of Aboriginal Australia contrasts with the idea of an 
embassy that has the power to represent a group to another government. The resulting symbol is

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one which highlights Indigenous people's dispossession and lack of representation in their own land.

As Tuhiwai Smith states, the social movement of Indigenous peoples can be understood “at one level simply as an Indigenous social movement which started as a movement of people and became a movement of peoples.”

During this era, Indigenous peoples across the world were learning and witnessing initiatives and activities of other Indigenous peoples in different settler nations; at the same time, Indigenous peoples, such as the differing Maori groups were coming together. This is also seen in the case of Australia, Canada and the United States. There are many definitions of social movements, and for the case of this discussion I draw on Meyer and Tarrow, who argue that a social movement is noticeably different from a single action, protest, or event by the occurrence of multiple instances of social action in a period of time. Indigenous social movements over the past forty years have involved both non-institutional and institutional-based political tactics. Social movements, as argued by Debra Minkoff, involve the use of non-institutional tactics. What this means is that political actions are mobilized outside of dominant political channels. Mass disruptions, street marches, expressive and performative actions, protests, roadblocks, demonstrations, occupations, and seizure of land or buildings are examples of non-institutional tactics. In other words, these social actions are based in disruptions and gaining social awareness through political activist tactics of nonviolent interventions. In relation to social movement and anti-liberal activism, Paul Almeida argues, “Non-institutional tactics are negative and provide political and economic elites an incentive to negotiate or offer some concessions to the anti-liberal coalition in exchange for a cessation in disorderly movement actions.” On the other hand, examples of institutional-based tactics to achieve political awareness and change are resolutions, contacting, and working with political representatives, letter writing campaigns, and

48 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 108.
voting. However, in my discussion I situate Indigenous social movements, which I also discuss as resistance movements, more in the writings of Indigenous scholars. The focus on the analysis of Indigenous land rights and human rights and how Indigenous cultural knowledge—either of specific cultures or in pan-Indigenous collaborations—is central to Indigenous social movements and actions.

In many cases—seen in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—Indigenous resistance movements were and continue to be based on distinct Indigenous cultural values and systems of knowledge, which, as Tuhiwai Smith argues, “have nurtured people, their values and their beliefs within their own communities, reserves, tribes, and nations for over 500 years.” A significant aspect of the development of Indigenous resistance movements, or the Indigenous peoples’ project, that is agreed upon by many Indigenous writers is that the movement ignited underground, or “out of sight of dominant society,” before claiming space on national and international stages. Ranginui Walker explains this concept of “out of sight mobilization” in relation to the emergence of radical Maori organizations in New Zealand. He writes that they “were an underground expression of rising political consciousness.”

This Maori resistance movement in Aotearoa New Zealand, a gathering of iwi, hapu, whanau, and urban Maori—a uniting of forces so to speak—has been grounded and shaped by radical activism and action. Land rights and the Treaty of Waitangi have been two key issues, which have facilitated organization of a pan-Maori framework of activism. However, it is significant to recognize, as Tuhiwai-Smith discusses, Maori cultural systems of knowledge have been key elements in this coming together of Maori people. These systems, which have been the conceptual backbone of Indigenous social movements in New Zealand, include the following key Maori cultural concepts: tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty); whanau, hapu, iwi (extended family, subtribal groupings, tribe); te reo (Maori language); and tikanga Maori (Maori Cultural customs). These cultural, political and social structures are “embedded in the Maori language and world view.” The Treaty of Waitangi is, however, the more commonly recognized ‘organizing framework’ which has facilitated dialogue and protest with and against dominant society and government, “while education, health, justice, and Maori development have provided more defined sites of struggle.”

The inclusion of Indigenous knowledge and cultural value systems within the activist movement is often disregarded or misunderstood by settler nation’s governments and society.

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54 Smith, 108.
56 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 109.
Similarly, from my own experiences of the solidarity movement with Indigenous activist and social resistance, white settler allies tend to misunderstand or not acknowledge local and specific Indigenous cultural systems that are and have been embedded in Indigenous social movements in Canada. I argue that this recognition is of primary importance for solidarity movements, such as in the case of Haudenosaunee resistance movements for land rights. In many cases, settler activists have not realized the importance of listening to Clan Mothers, the matriarchal leaders and decision makers of Iroquois society. In this way, settler allies perpetuate colonial power-relations, whereby paternalistic attitudes and actions permeate Indigenous activist movements. In order to contribute as non-Indigenous allies to Indigenous social movements, it is imperative to recognize the Indigenous political and cultural values that have facilitated and framed Indigenous social action locally, nationally, and internationally. That being said, those working in solidarity, along with recognizing such cultural and political structures, must also acknowledge their limitations in understanding such complex social and cultural knowledge systems and their roles as outsider allies. This side note is not meant to take away from the discussion of Indigenous resistance and activism, but to contribute and extend the discussion to incorporate settler responsibility within and towards such movements. In settler nations, such as Canada and New Zealand, the role of the white settler activist is one of support, witness, and recognition, whereas Indigenous social movements are most productively governed and organized by Indigenous leaders, activists, scholars, and artists.

In the mobilization of Maori resistance during this period, some of the key events include the Land March (1974), the Waitangi Day protests from 1971 to present, the occupation of Bastion Point (1978), the disruption and protests of the South African Springbok Rugby Tour (1981), and the Maori Education Development Conference (1984). These are only a handful of the radical political actions taken by Maori activists and community leaders. Recently, nation wide protests erupted across New Zealand after the 2007 raids by New Zealand military under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2002. Maori activists and their allies were arrested and their communities detained and put on lock down. Fifteen hundred people participated in the Hiki March to parliament—taking over the capital and Wellington’s streets and demonstrating opposition to the government’s infringement of civil rights in the name of so-called anti-terrorism. The events of October of 2007 reminded global Indigenous movements of their continued struggles against systemically racist governments and the continued colonial entrenched consciousness in settler societies.  

57 Smith argues,

The journey towards a wider movement by Maori has been fraught with political strife and social conflict. It has witnessed the challenges of a younger generation of Maori to the dominant hegemony held by Maori in the 1960s and 1970s, and the challenges of Maori across the multiple sites of education, health, development, government policy and of the non-Indigenous society generally.\textsuperscript{58}

The Waitangi Day Protests were first conceived and staged as a boycott of Waitangi Day, New Zealand’s national holiday, by several Maori elders in 1968 in response to the Maori Affairs Amendment Act.\textsuperscript{59} A small protest was organized at parliament in Wellington, were the group was received by Labour MP Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan. This Act was seen as yet another land grab by government and Pakeha (settler/white) New Zealand. The first protest, organized during the Waitangi Day celebrations, was in 1971 by a group of young Maori activists, called the \textit{Nga Tamatoa} (The Young Warriors). In a performative disruption staged during official speeches at Waitangi, the \textit{Nga Tamatoa} started to perform the cultural dance, the \textit{haka}, and sang songs. \textit{Nga Tamatoa} emerged out of the national Maori council’s Young Maori Leaders Conference at Auckland University in 1970.\textsuperscript{60} One of its key initiatives was the introduction of Maori language instruction in primary and secondary schools. \textit{Nga Tamatoa} organized the first performative intervention of the national holiday, which was at the time only celebrated in the North island of New Zealand and nationalized in 1974. In “Healing our History: The Challenge of the Treaty of Waitangi,” Robert, Bob, and Joanna Consedine wrote that during the protest, after the official party found their place, Maori activists started chanting over the speeches, “ Honour the Treaty”(\textit{Tino rangatiratanga}) and “Give back the land.”\textsuperscript{61} The performative protest at the celebration of the Treaty of Waitangi, in Waitangi, not only subverted the holiday into “a day of mourning for the loss of 25.2 million hectares of Maori land,”\textsuperscript{62} it also intervened in the official national/ist programme through its cultural performance. The self-determined actions of Maori performance thus were a means to protest, resist, and publicly perform cultural continuance.

This era of Maori resistance and social action is characterized by Ranginui Walker as \textit{nga tau tohetohe} (years of anger), whereby Maori activists engaged and challenged the concept of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[58] Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies}, 108–9.
\item[59] In contrast, for the past 20 years, in Australia, Yumin or rather ‘Survival’ Day has occurred as an alternative, Aboriginal celebration of Indigenous survival and resistance, cultural continuance on Australia Day.
\end{footnotes}
Fourth World living conditions in First World nations. He notes that Maori activists began the challenging task of exposing New Zealand’s histories of occupation and oppression, during an era when the nation prided itself on its national political, economic and social successes and its international label as the nation with the “best race relations.”\textsuperscript{63} The Waitangi Day protests and marches exemplify the strategy of occupying spaces and lands using Indigenous bodies and cultural performance. Every year, Maori gather together to protest, resist, and demand that treaty rights—as laid out in the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the founding document of New Zealand—be acknowledged and honoured. Maori dance, perform the haka, sing cultural songs, and give speeches. Many gather in Waitangi, in the Bay of Islands (North Island) to disrupt celebrations of New Zealand settler nationhood, which despite the rhetoric of bi-culturalism (exemplified in the incorporation of Maori language and representation in government and national institutions) remains Pakeha dominant in its social structures and implementations of treaty rights. In “Negotiating Claims: The Emergence of Indigenous Land Claim Negotiation,” Christa Sieglind Scholtz argues that the protests of the 1970s were successful in gaining national and government attention. She writes,

\begin{quote}
\textit{It was Maori protests, such as rugby demonstrations, the Land March, tent demonstrations, and annual demonstrations on Waitangi Day that convinced policy-makers the long-term relationship between Maori and the Crown required fixing. The protests put land rights and the vehicle for those rights, the Treaty, up front and center. Land rights and the Treaty became issues on which a significant cross-section of Maori voices could agree. So long as protests continued, the political costs of inaction or delegation mounted, since a government could hardly enjoy victories in the courts if Maori could continue to struggle in the press and on the street. Maori protest led policy-makers and other outside government to question the cost of past policies and future strategies.}\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

Social action and protest facilitate—like the production of activist art, political art, and political protest through art—a certain level of social change and shiftings in witnesses’ and participants’ consciousness, national memory, and understandings of the legacies of colonization. Radical, creative, and performative protests go further, participating in a large movement of initiatives and actions. As Smith argues, “While protests are the still a feature of Maori action, what needs to be seen alongside the protests are the range of initiatives and cultural revitalization projects which have been advanced.”\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{65} Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies}, 109.
Indigenous social action and protest in North America—like those in Australia and New Zealand—continued from the 1960s and 1970s into the next decades. Two significant movements, Red Power and the American Indian Movement (AIM), participated in the late 1960s and 1970s Indian activist movement in North America. Joane Nagel defines “The Red Power Movement” as a period of greatly increased American Indian activism beginning in the 1960s. Organizations and other larger-than-tribal groups, often with urban origins, typically facilitated this activism. Many Indigenous activist groups participated, working towards local and national issues of Indigenous human and land rights. Donna Hightower Langston notes, in her essay “American Indian Women’s Activism in the 1960s and 1970s,” that “[m]any groups borrowed strategies, tactics, theory, and vision from the African American movement.” Baylor notes that while similarities in goals and tactics can be found among activist groups, such as Black Power and feminist activists of this period, Aboriginal groups differed from others in a number of key areas and drew on their own unique history of continued resistance over land and resources.

This issue of cultural, land, and political sovereignty remains fundamental to Indigenous movements today. One of the major distinctions was that Indigenous movements focused on maintaining cultural production, and with it cultural continuance, rather than on integration into and within dominant society. In this sense, Indigenous movements, due to their ownership and sovereignty as nations/tribes/iwi established the focus of their activist movements—which was and continues to be fighting for treaty, land, and cultural rights. A pivotal Indigenous perspective on this era of Indigenous political mobilization in the United States is provided by Paul Chat Smith and Allen Robert Warrior’s Like a Hurricane: Alcatraz to Wounded Knee. In their introduction they note,

We came to writing Like a Hurricane out of a profound dissatisfaction with the existing narratives of this crucial period in Indian and American history, one that we believed too often saw Indian people as mere victims and pawns. Our focus is not on the U.S. government’s failed policies or on police repression, but on how

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69 As Robert Winfrey notes, the situation for African Americans civil rights movement differed from Native Americans, as Black Americans had historically been denied integration into North American dominant society, whereas American Indians had since colonization faced a history of forced assimilation. Robert Hill Winfrey, “Civil rights and the American Indian: Through the 1960s.” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1986), 145.
Indian people, for a brief and exhilarating time, staged a campaign of resistance and introspection unmatched in this century. It was for American Indians every bit as significant as the counterculture was for young whites, or the civil rights movement for blacks.70

Chat Smith and Warrior’s discussion focuses on AIM and several of the organizations’ key political actions in instigating militant protest for Indian land and human rights. Their account explores the dramatic activist stagings of the seizure of Alcatraz in 1969, the take-over of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building (which occurred on the eve of President Nixon’s re-election in 1972), and the AIM-supported and endorsed seizure of Wounded Knee by the Oglala Sioux in 1973. They focus on the American context; however, these key moments of political stagings and militant and also nonviolent take-overs represent an era of Indigenous political mobilization during this period in North America.

For instance, in both Canada and United States, the rise and organization of Native social movements resulted from a series of federal government policies, which increased funding available for Indigenous political organizations. Within this discussion it is important to historically contextualize Native organization in relation to federally oppressive legislation. In Canada for example, “it was not until 1951 that the government removed from the Indian Act some of the restrictions preventing native political development: the right of Indians to organize outside of their reserves, their right to leave reserves without getting permission from their Indian agent, and the right of others to help Indians prepare claims against the government without legal penalty.”71

Within a decade of this colonial legislative control of all aspect of Indian life in Canada, perspectives started to shift. In the mobilizations after 1960, for example, status Indians were able to vote in federal elections for the first time. As J. R Miller notes in Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens, A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada, the return of a disproportional number of newly politicized Aboriginal veterans in 1945—veterans with a heightened awareness of racism experienced during World War II—resulted in Indigenous political mobilizations.72 In other words, as Ruth Phillips has noted,

Enfranchisement had resulted from a revision of the Indian Act (a piece of Victorian legislation under which Canadian Aboriginal people still live) and was

71 Pauline Comeau and Aldo Santin, The First Canadians: A Profile of Canada’s Native People Today (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1990), 145.
the culmination of a new era of opposition to official assimilationist policies that had begun in the years following the Second World War. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, too, Aboriginal self-empowerment was strengthened by models provided by American civil rights movement and global movements of national liberation.\textsuperscript{73}

These legislative initiatives made by the settler government in the 1960s generated more funding for previously founded political organizations, which enabled a greater amount of recognition—as well as stability—of such organizations.\textsuperscript{74} In the Canadian context the increase in federal funding resulted in the founding of three nationally based political organizations in the early 1970s: National Indian Brotherhood, the Native Women’s Association of Canada, and Congress of Aboriginal People.\textsuperscript{75} These organizations participated in a variety of actions and within the larger structures of Native social movements. However, they also were nationally and federally recognized as legitimate Indigenous political organizations. This is a complex situation in terms of Indigenous mobilization and organization in North America and government control and cooption of Indigenous efforts towards self-governance. In many ways, federal funding for Indigenous issues is a double-edged sword—a necessary entity and a responsibility of government due to histories of colonization, treaties, and assimilation legislations, as seen in the Indian Act.

For example, in 1974 Aboriginal peoples organized a cross-country caravan that left Vancouver on September 15th and arrived on September 30th in Ottawa, on the day of the opening of Parliament. The caravan was a political campaign to raise awareness and for social change surrounding issues of treaty rights, land claims rights, housing, education, and health care as well as the Indian Act and the Department of Indian Affairs. The organizers staged a nonviolent demonstration of hundreds of Aboriginal people on Parliament Hill. However, RCMP officers in full riot gear greeted the protestors and they were refused meeting with political representatives. These actions of the RCMP and the government outraged the Canadian public, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. In response to this Canada-wide reaction, the federal government agreed to


\textsuperscript{74} Rima Wilkes, “The Protest Actions of Indigenous Peoples: A Canadian-U.S. Comparison of Social Movement Emergence,” American Behavioural Scientist 50, no. 4 (December 2006): 510–525; Joe Sawchuk, “Fragmentation and Realignment: The Continuing Cycle of Métis and Non-Status Indian Political Organization in Canada,” Native Studies Review 10, no. 2 1995. For example, in the United States, these federal funding increases led to the founding of the following organizations: the National Indian Youth Council (1961), the American Indian Movement (1968), and the Native American Rights Fund (1970).

organize regular meetings with the leaders of the National Indian Brotherhood, an organization that had had little leadership role in the caravan demonstration. Although this first agreement of the Canadian government to meet on a regular basis with a Native political organization is seen as a very significant moment in the recognition of Indigenous political mobilization in Canada, it is interesting to note that the government would only meet with a national organization and not the Vancouver-based caravan group.\footnote{Vern Harper, \textit{Following the Red Path: The Native People’s Caravan, 1974} (Toronto: NC Press, 1979); Wilkes, “The Protest Actions.”}

In Canada, collective action within the Indigenous social movement has been less associated with political organizations than those in the United States such as AIM. The Red Power movement in Canada has also been less about pan-Indian identity, more sporadic, and less localized than other Indigenous movements. There have been moments of national mobilization, such as the response to the 1969 White Paper, as previously mentioned. A similar pan-Indigenous response occurred in 1990, during a local struggle of the Mohawks of Kahnesatake in a militant standoff with National Guard near the town of Oka, Quebec. A key aspect to Indigenous activism is land rights (known to governments as land claims), and in the case of Oka, Indigenous peoples across Canada who were also fighting for their treaty and land rights were once again spurred into national action. The Mohawk people initially mobilized in response to the town of Oka’s proposed plans to expand a golf course onto their lands.\footnote{Donna K. Goodleaf, \textit{Entering the War Zone: A Mohawk Perspective on Resisting Invasions} (Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 1995).} After negotiation attempts failed, barricades were erected and the town of Oka asked for provincial officers to come in. This was followed with the arrival and replacement of local and provincial authorities by the Canadian Arm Forces.\footnote{Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera, \textit{People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka} (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991).} During this seventy-eight-day standoff, support of the Mohawks protest came from across Canada, such as blockades by Lah-Kwil-Tach First Nation of British Columbia and by Big Cove First Nation in New Brunswick, as well as urban protests across the country.

**Expo 67 and the Indians of Canada Pavilion: Indigenous Self-Representation**

In the Canadian context, there has been no pan-Indigenous social movement established in the same way or to the same extent as in the United States in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. This being said, Indigenous mobilizations and actions do participate in the Red Power Movement. A significant moment in the history of Aboriginal art, Indigenous political movement, and Aboriginal
identity politics in Canada was the 1967 Expo in Montreal, where colonial histories, legacies, and ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples were presented for the first time to a national and international audience at the “Indians of Canada Pavilion.” Although this Expo was heavily saturated in Canadian nationalism and the rhetoric of Canadian identity, there was space, for the first time, for an articulation of Indigenous politics, identities, experiences, stories, cultures, and survival from Indigenous perspectives. Seneca artist and curator Tom Hill wrote in 1976 about the pavilion, “The government really wanted a positive image in that pavilion and what they got was the truth, that’s what really shocked them the most.”

The politics of the Red Power Movement were very much present at the Indians of Canada Pavilion. As Ruth Phillips has argued in her essay, “Commemoration/(De)Celebration: Supershows and the Decolonization of Canadian Museums, 1967-92,” the first exhibition to be framed or rather “to become the focus of” revisionist activism was the Indians of Canada Pavilion. As a world exhibition celebrating the Canadian centennial, as Phillips has remarked, “the Indians of Canada Pavilion emerged as a surprise highlight of the fair. It is perhaps typical of the decade of the 1960s that the pavilion proved popular not because it acceded to the general mood of celebration but because it mounted radical critique of standard progressivist representation of Aboriginal history.” The separate and distinct pavilion for Indigenous peoples in Canada, and the fact that First Peoples had input to the histories presented outside of Canadian nation/ist narratives—which tends to place Aboriginal peoples in relation to contact and pre-history of the Canadian nation—supported the presentation of Indigenous experiences, histories, and legacies of colonization in the pavilion to both settler Canadian and international visitors.

The Indian Pavilion of Canada participated in the larger context of Indigenous activism and political mobilization. Phillips notes that “the realization of this critical project was, in turn, the product of a campaign for self empowerment waged by Aboriginal people working within the federal bureaucracy during the preceding years.” Phillips argues that “in retrospect, the more focused political process that led to the creation of the pavilion left a legacy for the history of contemporary Aboriginal art and museology that was at least as important as was the innovative

81 Ibid., 102.
82 Ibid.
nature of the pavilion’s exhibitions.” In this way, the Indians of Canada Pavilion is a significant moment in the history of Indigenous activism in Canada. Exploring the exterior of the building’s Aboriginal art programme and the interior installation storyline reveal the complexities the pavilion exposed and addressed.

In Phillips’ forthcoming book, her chapter with Sherry Brydon, “Arrow of Truth: The Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67,” explores the history of the development of the pavilion extensively. Phillips and Brydon examine the role of Aboriginal artists, activist and leaders in its conception and the trials and struggles that Indigenous organizers experienced, and present a strong analysis of the exterior art project and the interior installation’s storyline. The exterior installation, including the architectural design of a stylized teepee and contemporary art, attracted and represented the familiar for visitors; whereas the “interior sought to mediate between generalized stereotype and local particularities and between affirmations of the value of contemporaneity and tradition”—and, in doing this, “presented them with something they had not seen before.”

The stories and histories included were not part of the public understanding of Indigenous experience or Canadian history. The visitors encountered for one of the first times Aboriginal self-representations about Indigenous lived-experiences. In this way, the Indian Pavilion was an active site of Indigenous intervention and resistance, similar to the works explored in the previous chapters. For example, the installations presented cultural diversity amongst Indigenous peoples in Canada, cultural continuance and survival despite colonization, and extensive federal assimilist campaigns and legislative policies. It revealed the contemporary legacies of colonialism, such as extreme poverty, poor living conditions, and lack of health care, education, and adequate housing. The viewer was confronted with harsh realities and a focused critique of Indigenous–settler relations, which most national/ist narratives highlight as a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian nation. By contrast, the installations presented the negative impacts of contact on Indigenous cultural, political, and social practices, while presenting the contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples.

The political and social context of the 1960s and the federal government and Indigenous peoples relationships of that time contextualize the unsurprising tensions between the planning organization of the Expo, the Centennial Commission, and the Aboriginal organization and consultation bodies. Sherry Brydon’s “The Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67” includes

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 104.
thorough archival research of the reports and dialogue between federal officials, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), and the Task Force on Expo developed by DIAND, deemed the main consultative body in the development of the storyline, the Indian Advisory Council (IAC). \(^{85}\) Brydon’s conclusions point to the struggle for control over the storyline and also the design. \(^{86}\) Phillips argues,

> These records can—and have—been read in different ways. Two prominent Aboriginal leaders of the period have, for example, published divergent accounts. Harold Cardinal rejected the importance of the Indian Advisory Council whose members, he wrote, operated as individuals and not as community representatives, and he pointed out that their recommendation were not binding on DIAND. \(^{87}\)

Whereas, George Manuel and Micheal Posluns considered the process of consultation and committee work to have been effective, because of the opportunity it offered to diverse Aboriginal stakeholders. They argued that “the greatest single value that the meetings of the National Indian Advisory Council offered was that the Indian leadership from all across Canada got to know one another, and to discover where our common interests lay.” \(^{88}\)

The subsequent development of the IAC is an example of Indigenous empowerment and self-determined political actions. Manuel (who was both a prominent Indian leader of the time and also on the committee) described an event that highlights the internal process of Indigenous activism and empowerment. He remarks that the initial development of the IAC by the CIAC (meaning the members, its chair, and its agendas) was organized without consulting any Native peoples. What occurred next is an example of Indigenous activism and political action. In protest of this paternalistic and colonial action, members of the IAC threatened to walk out and go to the press. As a result, the IAC achieved the right to determine agendas and determine a vice-chair, which was followed by the resignation of the CIAC appointed chair. This event changed the course of the development of the pavilion and was a significant moment in Indigenous–government relations and consultation protocol. Manuel and Posluns have argued that the IAC’s actions

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\(^{86}\) Ibid.


demonstrated to government officials “the determination of Aboriginal peoples to assume a large measure of control over the process of Pavilion development.”

After the formation of the IAC, the committee demanded that artists needed to be more extensively consulted. This action was instigated after members of the IAC saw the DIAND design of the pavilion, which had been organized prior to the development of Aboriginal consultation.

This is also argued by Myra Rutherford and Jim Miller in “It’s Our Country: First Nations’ Participation in the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67,” who state, “Instead of portraying First Nations in agreement with the policies of the federal government, the interior of the pavilion actually told a story that was meant to provoke the viewers to think about the impact of colonization on First Nations.” What this meant was that the Indian Affairs Branch, which wanted a venue that presented a positive image of its policies and their results, did not succeed in conveying this message. However, they did manipulate and attempt to steer organization and decision making.

As Rutherford and Miller suggest, Indian Affairs at this time had a history of manipulating public relations in order to present to the public a positive image of the work and policies done to supposedly support Indian life. This larger history of how public relations white-washed Indigenous issues is explored in the next chapter in discussions of Aboriginal performance at Royal Tours and other World Exhibitions. Rutherford and Miller argue, “An approach that emphasized public relations had been a part of Indian Affairs strategy since the late 19th century, a ploy that had stood

89 Ibid. Also quoted in Phillips and Brydon, “Arrow of Truth,” 8.
90 Phillips notes that the IAC approved the plans nonetheless. Given “the major effort and expensive costs involved to date in producing the design and model,” it argued, “the general feeling that, in the face of a pressing deadline as well, it would be irresponsible to reject the work done so far.” KRCC, “Minutes of the First Meeting of the Indian Advisory Council for The Indians of Canada Pavilion - Expo ‘67,” March 14–17, 1966, 8–9. The pavilion, which was a teepee design appears to have been accepted and well received by Aboriginal people, however, the use of an iconic and stereotypical image of the teepee does raise some issues. For instance, the use of the teepee design participates and perpetuates the long-history and long-standing homogenous construction of Indigenous cultures and peoples by Western society and popular culture. This representation of Indianness does not resist or intervene in this misunderstanding and totalizing construction. As Phillips and Brydon argue, “By privileging the teepee over other potential architectural prototypes, the Pavilion assimilated all the Aboriginal peoples of Canada to the romanticized nineteenth century, noble-savage image of the Plains Indian—the image which also lies in the heart of the dominant twentieth century stereotype, the Hollywood Indian.” Phillips and Brydon, “Arrow of Truth,” 10. This issue of homogenous representation of Aboriginal peoples and cultures was not however, present in the interior installation storyline within the Pavilion and was subsequently challenged by the diverse range of contemporary art on the exterior of the building. Arguably these outcomes were due to the extensive participation of Indigenous leaders, artists and activists.
92 For more through discussion see Rutherford and Miller, “It’s Our Country.”
it in good stead politically even if it did little to improve conditions for First Nations.”

The incorporation of Indigenous participation in decision making highlights a significant moment in the history of Indigenous political mobilization, as well as in terms of the history of contemporary Aboriginal art.

The art project commissioned for the pavilion brought together Aboriginal artists from different nations, from across Canada, and of different generations. This was among the first contemporary gatherings of Aboriginal artists in Canada and is recognized in the history of Aboriginal art as a pivotal moment for the recognition of Aboriginal artists as artists—not tourist artists or craftsmen. Ruth Phillips argues that the “works presented at the Expo 67 Indians of Canada Pavilion stand at the beginning of a shift that would lead both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists to produce more explicitly critical, political and critical and spiritual art.” The artists incorporated into the project of the Pavilion were George Clutesi (Nuuchahnulth), Noel Wuttunee (Plains Cree), Gerald Tailfeathers (Blood), Ross Woods (Dakota), Alex Janvier (DChipewyan), Tom Hill (Iroquois/Six Nations), Norval Morrisseau (Anishinabe), Carl Ray (Anishinabe), Francis Kagige (Odawa), and Jean-Marie Gros-Louis (Huron Quebec). The Indian Pavilion arguably marks the beginning of the incorporation of Aboriginal art in the gallery space and the catalyst of decades of struggle and activism staged by Aboriginal artists for their rightful place in gallery spaces. For example, the coming together of these artists, as argued by Phillips, “established a powerful precedent for future national Aboriginal artists' organizations (such as the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry [SCANA]), which have, among other things, lobbied effectively to loosen the exclusive hold of ethnographic museums on contemporary

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93 Ibid., 156.
95 The exterior of the pavilion included George Clutesi’s painted “West Coast,” a vertical wall composition of a thunderbird and whale crests, along with Henry and Tony Hunt’s monument 65 foot Kwakwakawak totem pole, Anishinaabe painters Norval Morrisseau and his assistant Carl Ray’s large graphic style “Earth Mother with her Children” work, and Francis Kagige painting “The Land.” These works, collectively, presented a very powerful message of cultural continuity in terms of oral traditions and Indigenous spirituality. Phillips and Brydon argue, “because they were figurative rather than abstract, they were accessible to a broad public; because they appeared ‘traditional,’ they were among the most recognizably ‘Indian’ of the commissioned works, inscribing in the Pavilion a primary message of the survival of traditional spirituality.” Phillips and Brydon, “Arrow of Truth,” 13–14. More abstract works were also created, such as the series of round panel paintings (9 and a half feet in diameter) by Alex Janvier, which were attached to the sides of the five hexagonal bays surrounding the base of the teepee. Another work, which conveyed contemporary Aboriginal art and its fusions with history and Indigenous cultural knowledge, was Tom Hill’s “Tree of Peace,” which was a collaborative piece with ceramic artist Gros-Louis that presented and interpreted the culturally significant Iroquoian symbol of the tree of life (seen also as part of wampum belt iconography and throughout political, cultural and social knowledge systems).
Aboriginal art and to insert it into Canada’s art galleries.”

In an interview with Rutherford and Miller, Tom Hill spoke of the first meeting of the artists. He said that it was one of the main highlights for him during the experience of Expo, because it was the first time that First Nations artists from across Canada came together and shared concerns. Similarly, Tom Hill, in a personal communication with Sherry Brydon (Ottawa, 18 March 1991) stated that the Pavilion project “brought a sense of power to the artists, people all of a sudden realized what they could do, as artists, to communicate ideas.”

My account here is a brief summary of the complex negotiations made by Aboriginal groups and individuals in the organization of the Pavilion, accounting for the political significance of a separate Indian pavilion, one outside of complete federal government control and doctrine. I have not recounted all the negotiations made by the Aboriginal consultants, the tensions, or the frustrations of intermeddled organizing bodies, nor have I discussed the presence of fourteen Aboriginal women from across Canada who were trained as the Pavilion hostesses. This discussion could also have been framed and linked to the history of world fairs and the performance of Indigeneity for cultural and political resistance. The complex history of the Expo 67 is introduced here to further support my argument that Indigenous cultural production is a performative force within the larger context of the political mobilizations of Indigenous peoples in Canada. It is interesting to note the overall representation of the Pavilion by the media, which from many accounts were positive. Rutherford and Miller note, “The general consensus in the press at least was that the First Nations had finally had an opportunity to tell their side of the story, and it was a version that they had not been allowed to tell so publicly until then. Media reports on the pavilion served to remind Canadians that all was not well. Journalist did not shy way from the issues that were revealed.”

Looking back at the Indians of Canada Pavilion does generate many questions, such as: What was the political impact of Expo 67 in terms of Indigenous activism and social change? As I have explored in the previous section of this chapter, art, culture, and performance can present social injustices and be used within the structures and strategies of social movements. Such was the case at the pavilion. But without support of other societal and institutional structures, the momentum gained can easily be dismissed, ignored and or mediated. I argue that within settler

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97 Rutherford and Miller, “It’s Our Country,” 159.
society there is an entrenched consciousness of indifference, ignorance, and apathy with regard to Indigenous rights, and ongoing oppression by federal and provincial governments. If this was not the case, the over three million visitors of the pavilion in 1967 who witnessed and encountered the devastating living conditions and ongoing human rights violations of Indigenous peoples would have been shocked into action. But for the most part, they were not. Currently, many of the same issues are still on Indigenous movement platform. Indeed there have been changes, but overall white Canada remains silent, apathetic, and disinterested. As the dominant part of Canadian society, white settler Canada does not have to participate in the Indigenous social movement.

This being said, in the larger context of Indigenous activism, the Pavilion did serve as a catalyst for Indigenous mobilizations. It saw the coming together of Indigenous peoples from across Canada and asserted the ongoing presence of Indigenous rights and autonomy. The Indians of Canada Pavilion achieved many firsts and many successes. It broke the long-standing colonial representations of Aboriginal culture as monolithic Indianness; it explicitly rejected and intervened with colonial legislations and policies; it stressed the heterogeneity of Indigenous cultures across Canada, and the contemporarity and cultural continuance of Aboriginal peoples. As Phillips and Brydon conclude, “The Indians of Canada Pavilion constitutes the first act in a drama which, twenty years later, would reach a kind of denouement when Canada entrenched Aboriginal sovereignty in its constitution and, a decade later, began to enact new forms of Aboriginal self-government in the Arctic and northern British Columbia.”

The Pavilion was a site for Indigenous self-representation, activism, and social justice.

Since Expo 67, The Aboriginal Tent Embassy 1972 etc., ongoing struggles for land rights and Indigenous human rights continue in settler nations. It has been internationally recognized that in Canada, Indigenous populations are living in Fourth World living conditions in a first world nation. Extreme poverty and basic living conditions—in terms of housing, education, and health care—are current and past platforms within the global Indigenous social movement. In 1981, one hundred Aboriginal women from across Canada took over the Department of Indian Affairs (now DIAND) in Vancouver, British Columbia. They occupied the government office for eight days, after which time they were forcibly removed by the police, charged, and then jailed. During their eight-day occupation, the organizers of the protest invited the media to record particular moments, such as the sharing of stories and the singing of songs (fig. 86). Tagny Duff writes,

Amelia Productions, a collective of video artists and feminists, were also invited to

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document the event, and produced the documentary video *Concerned Aboriginal Women*. The organizers employed video, TV, and print media (in particular *Kinesis*, a feminist magazine) and worked with Amelia Productions to declare their manifesto calling for better living conditions for Indigenous people living on reserves, and for the provincial and federal governments to acknowledge corruption in the DIA office.101

![Image](image.png)


As Duff states, this political action of documenting and recording the occupation of the DIA offices is in line with the parameters of what she calls *performance intervention for the camera*. Duff argues that this protest reflects parallel strategic tactics to *performative media infiltration* employed by earlier feminist activists. The protest staged by the Aboriginal women reflects the long history of Indigenous political interventions, protests, and political resistance.102 The Tent Embassy, Waitangi Day Protests, and the DIA take over are all examples of such performance interventions—in many cases, the press are invited to document the protest and social action in order to indigenize the often one-sided settler-focused media portrayals of Indigenous protest and human rights issues.


Exhibit 671B: The Intersection of Indigenous Cultural Autonomy and Land Struggles

Rebecca Belmore was one of the first Canadian Aboriginal performance artists to receive attention in the late 1980s. She certainly received national attention for her Thunder Bay Art Gallery performance, Exhibit 671B (fig. 25), a critical response to issues surrounding the exhibition, The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada’s First Peoples, a show organized by the Glenbow Museum in conjunction with the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympic Games. As much as Exhibit 671B was a performance of political protest, it also foreshadowed the beginnings of Canadian Aboriginal contemporary performance art. Belmore describes how “in a display case set up by the roadside I sat with a Shell logo pinned to my chest, and a Canadian flag pinned to my back. Above my head is a sign: ‘The Glenbow Museum presents’ and leaning against my display is another sign, which reads ‘The Spirit Sings.’ Directly in front of me is a number which discreetly labels this exhibit: Artifact #671b.” Belmore’s identification of herself by numbered code subverts the fixed and silenced position of Indigenous cultural artifacts in museum collections, making reference to the over six hundred objects from the historical and colonial period exhibited in Spirit Sings. Replacing the artifact with her body, Jolene Rickard suggests that Belmore “tagged her body like an artefact in a museum, but with one important twist, one of the signatures was the Shell corporate logo, marking corporate incursion on First Nation space.”

Her act is a provocative intervention in relation to museum practices based on the salvage practice. It is important to point out that Spirit Sings, while ostensibly a celebration of First Nations peoples through their art, also celebrated the history of the museum practice that had “salvaged” these objects. In so doing, critics argued, it redeployed colonialist narratives and ignored the contemporary realities of Aboriginal peoples. Spirit Sings was strongly criticized, publicly boycotted, and angrily condemned for its perpetuation of a romanticized image of Aboriginal culture, while denying the complex contemporary issues faced by Aboriginal communities. It was also boycotted by many Aboriginal nations in Canada because its corporate sponsor, Shell Oil, was one of several companies drilling on land that the Lubicon Cree, a band of Alberta First Nations,

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104 The number 671b is an inside joke incorporated by Belmore. The number is the Ontario Liquor Control Board’s number for a favourite local brand of cheap wine. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, “Rebecca Belmore,” in Land, Spirit, Power (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992), 117.
had laid claim to and from which they had been recently evicted.\textsuperscript{106} In this regard Belmore was also making a political statement about First Nations land claims. Her performance illuminates the history of government and industry exploitation of Native lands without Indigenous communities receiving the economic benefits. The momentum generated by this controversy resulted in heightened public awareness of the exploitations by both Shell Oil and the Alberta government of Lubicon territorial land, although it did not result in a land claim settlement. The Spirit Sings controversy did, however, result in the establishment of the Task Force on Museums and First Nations (TFMFN), which ultimately set up a new code of ethics of museum practice.

The Task Force’s report, \textit{Turning the Page: Forging New Partnerships Between Museums and First Peoples} (1992), modelled relationships of partnership and collaboration between museum professionals and Aboriginal communities based on principles of sharing and mutual respect.\textsuperscript{107} While the Task Force was preparing its report, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the National Gallery of Canada were developing and organizing their respected exhibitions, \textit{Indigena} and \textit{Land, Spirit, Power}, both of which were intended to mark the Quincentennial of Columbus’ arrival in North America. Thus, Belmore’s performance is linked to historic moments of change; it is connected not only to the boycott of Spirit Sings but also to the subsequent establishment of the Task Force, which has set precedents for ethical and inclusive museum practices for Canadian cultural institutions, and also for other settler nations, such as Australia. Belmore’s performance exemplifies the interconnections of Indigenous resistance movements and their political actions and the issues performed and revealed in contemporary art practice, both simultaneously fighting for autonomy over cultural practice, land, and Indigenous human rights.

\textbf{Performative Action and Commemoration: Vigil and Stolen Sisters Walk4Justice}

Stolen Sisters, Walk4Justice 2008 was an advocacy walk organized from Vancouver to Ottawa to raise awareness of the national-endemic issue of violence against Indigenous women—and to demand governmental attention. Walk4Justice is a grass roots Indigenous movement founded by Gladys Radek and Bernie Williams. The organization states that Walk4Justice is tasked with raising awareness of the plight of missing and/or murdered women and children. Whether the missing are from The Highway of Tears, The Pickton Farm, the Downtown east side of Vancouver or any-town

Canada; this organization has called on the Prime Minister of Canada to call for a public inquiry. The list of over 2900 names was walked across Canada from Victoria BC in June of 2008 arriving at Ottawa on Sept. 15th 2008.\footnote{Walk4Justice website, accessed 3 February 2010, www.FNBC.inof/walk4justice.com.}

Walk4Justice commenced on National Aboriginal Day in Sprout Lake Park in Vancouver, British Columbia. With the support of the B.C. Federation of Labour and the Union of B.C. Chiefs, co-founders Williams and Radek addressed the walkers and supporters. Representative of the Union of BC Chiefs, Grand Chief Stewart Phillips spoke, stating that the organization fully endorsed the walk and called for a national inquiry of the Highway of Tears, the Vancouver East Side as well as national murders of Aboriginal women. Jenny Kwan, the MLA for Mount Pleasant, also spoke, stating her commitment. She called for national recognition by government at all levels. Gladys Radek voiced her impetus for action, describing a vision she had had seven months before the beginning of the walk—after her niece went missing on the Highway of Tears (Highway 16 between Prince Rupert and Prince George). Since the late 1980s, many women have disappeared or been found murdered along this stretch of highway. Lori Culbert and Neal Hall, in a recent article in the \textit{Vancouver Sun} that looked into the RCMP investigations on the missing and open files, state, “Victims’ families and women’s advocates argue the official list should be much longer than 18 names, suggesting as many as twice that number of girls and women have met similar violence in northern and central B.C. over the past 40 years.”\footnote{Lori Culbert and Neal Hall, “New Details Emerge About Probe of Highway of Tears Murders,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, December 12 2009.} At the launch of the walk, Radek spoke to media of this vision, stating that she was walking for those who no longer have a voice and that the ongoing violence against Indigenous women was unacceptable. This was a day of mourning, a day of celebration, and a day to honour the lives lost of thousands of Aboriginal women in the past several decades. Bernice Williams also spoke, stating that “We are walking for the women … We have had enough and We want to bring some Justice.”\footnote{“Highlights from the Launch of the Vancouver-Ottawa Walk4justice,” Workingtv, June 21, 2008, accessed February 12, 2011, http://www.workingtv.com/walk4justice.html.} 

Along the walk-route, organizers and walkers listened to community and family stories. They witnessed and documented the experiences of those who have lost mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends to violence. This witnessing is a significant act, an act of remembrance and also one of political action. Walk4Justice brought these stories and accounts to the federal government and to the media, and they also gave recognition to the women whose violent murders have been silenced and ignored by settler Canada for over thirty years. The grueling physical walk across the country
symbolizes the commitment of these activists to bring awareness to the murders and also to honour the lives of the women. Walks for awareness across Canada, such as Terry Fox’s walk in support of cancer research, have grown in popularity over the past several decades. However, the Walk4Justice did not receive the same attention or focus as many of these other cause-oriented walks. This is a devastating history, a shameful and uncomfortable issue, especially for white settler Canadians, whose apathy or complete disregard perpetuates the silencings and the violence.

The walk ended on Parliament Hill on 15 September 2008. Many supporters greeted the walkers, who had travelled over five-thousand kilometres, accompanied by several vans and cars covered with posters of the missing women, their names, and the photographs of Aboriginal women killed across Canada. I witnessed the arrival of the walkers and their support vehicles as they walked onto Parliament Hill. Speeches, a healing circle, and songs were performed, a ritualized performance, similar to many of the events at the stops along the route. These events supported the testimony of those who had lost family members; here, witnesses could listen and become aware of the silences surrounding violence against Aboriginal women. Williams and Radek spoke of their experiences along the walk and addressed the number of names they had compiled on the journey. After these speeches and a welcome by Algonquin representatives, a representative from the Prime Minister’s office came out to meet the Walk4Justice organizers. He took with him the 2900 names of Aboriginal women murdered or still missing and several resolutions (one from the Union of B.C. Chiefs). Despite the efforts of the Walk4Justice and numerous other activist organizations awareness campaigns (among them Amnesty International’s 2004 *Stolen Sisters* report) the federal government has not issued any official statement, commitment, or public enquiry.

In early January of 2010, the Walk4Justice group hosted a protest and vigil in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside to honour the murdered women and to once again demand government action. More than one hundred women gathered in Crab Park in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside to once again demand a public inquiry by the federal government into the three thousand missing and murdered Aboriginal women cases across Canada. At the vigil, 520 tea light candles were lit and placed in a circle around a stone in memory of Vancouver’s missing women. Bernice Williams is quoted by the media,: “We've asked and asked again but there is no answer.” Walk4Justice—a solution-based awareness activist group—is no longer interested in government rhetoric and silencings. *Vancouver Sun* journalist Tifanny Crawford’s account of the Vigil shows the media’s gaining awareness of Indigenous activism against the violence against Indigenous women:

Many women shivered in the cold as they held hands in a circle around the memorial as a sombre native drumbeat cut through the silence. Dressed in a red and
black robe, native elder Eunice McMillan came to march and play a traditional drum song. “We want to know why so many of the missing women cases in Canada remain unsolved,” said McMillan. Despite their many efforts to raise awareness, the women say the government is indifferent to their plight.\footnote{111} Along with the walks and the vigil, there is a twenty-year history of an annual women’s memorial march for missing and murdered women held on Valentine’s Day.\footnote{112} At these, song, testimony, healing circles and prayers are incorporated into the protests.

Walk4 Justice then—formed by Indigenous cultural knowledge—incorporates Indigenous values of the organizers and those they meet and listen to along the route. Walk4Justice gives testimony to the history of violence against Indigenous women—a history that is a living one, dating back to the colonial era. The walk has raised awareness about the ongoing murders of Aboriginal women and created a space for Indigenous healing, mourning, and honouring. And while it also served as site for settler-recognition, the question remains whether or not settler Canada will choose to take action and move beyond the historic boundaries of indifference and apathy. The Walk4Justice was thus a performative protest, whereby Indigenous women’s bodies brought forward local issues from urban and reserve communities to the federal government. It participated in the larger social mobilization, generating awareness of this brutal and violent contemporary issue. In this way, it participates, like the many commemorative YouTube videos on the Stolen Sisters (in many cases produced by young Aboriginal women who have lost mothers, sisters, and friends to violence) with larger actions, such as the Stolen Sisters and No More Stolen Sisters reports by Amnesty International.\footnote{113}

Vigil, a performance by Anishnabe Vancouver-based Rebecca Belmore, engages with the history of violence against Aboriginal women in both local and national contexts (fig. 87). In this 2002 performance, part of the Talking Stick Storytellers Festival, Belmore incorporated historical

and contemporary stories as her points of departure to produce a powerful work, one that can be framed as Indigenous activism. *Vigil* tells a contemporary story that is linked to colonial legacies—the history of violence against Aboriginal women. In this work, Belmore vocalizes a public secret, forcing recognition of the missing women.\(^{114}\) Since the staging of this performance, William Robert Pickton has been charged with the disappearance of forty-nine women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. Given the years of denial of the murders of these women, could it be argued that Belmore’s performance participated in vocalizing this tragic history?

Belmore employs her body and includes her own voice to vocalize the trauma of loss and mourning. This performance honours the women who have disappeared from downtown Vancouver.\(^{115}\) During *Vigil*, which was performed and videotaped on the streets of Vancouver at the corner of Gore and Cordova in June 2002, Belmore yelled out the names of the missing women from Vancouver. Belmore places herself on the streets that the women disappeared from. In doing so she created a record of this contemporary invisible history. *Vigil* is made up of several physical actions, arguably performative scenes: washing the street with water; lighting candles; yelling out names; drawing roses through the mouth; washing the mouth with water; putting on a red dress; nailing a dress; and ripping the cloth off a telephone pole. It starts with Belmore marking her

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\(^{115}\) Townsend-Gault, Have We Ever Been Good?” 18.
performance space with her chosen objects. She places them in a circle. With a wooden-handled brush, she then washes the concrete, cleansing her marked performative space. Here, Belmore’s actions are a symbolic reclaiming of Aboriginal land—a method of indigenizing, thereby re-inscribing and re-mapping the space in which she stands. This is a strategy of resistance. Belmore proceeds to light tea-light candles. She then stands, peering down at her arm, with a dead dried-up rose in her hand (fig. 88). The first names of the missing women are written in black marker on her arms; these marks act as cues prompting Belmore to yell out the names of the missing women (fig. 89). She then takes the rose in her left hand and puts it to her mouth, and rips it through her lips (fig. 90). The number of roses and lit candles correspond with the number

Figure 88: Rebecca Belmore, Vigil, Performance Still, Vancouver, 2002. Video Credit: Paul Wong.

in black marker on her arms; these marks act as cues prompting Belmore to yell out the names of the missing women (fig. 89). She then takes the rose in her left hand and puts it to her mouth, and rips it through her lips (fig. 90). The number of roses and lit candles correspond with the number
of missing-murdered women. She proceeds to put on a red dress. Then she walks away from the candles and the remnants of roses, with a bag of nails and hammer in hand. She begins to nail her red dress, still wearing it, to a pole in the alley (fig. 91). Once the cloth is attached to the wood, Belmore rips the cloth. She struggles to tear the dress from herself and the pole (fig. 92). This process continues in a violent repetition. Belmore repeats this act of nailing herself and the dress to the pole until she is finally freed from the cloth—freed from the marked status of the red dress, with
the torn pieces of cloth hanging off the pole (fig. 93). At the same time, she is left standing almost naked, vulnerable, and in plain view for all to witness. The dress is no longer identifiable; all that remains is fragments of red cloth.

The symbolic acts and physical actions throughout *Vigil* attest to the ritual of mourning the dead, and also mourning a non-recognized history. She lit candles for the lost women, and marked them on her own body. Belmore’s performance created a vigil-like scene, through which her actions bear witness to the women’s disappearance. She uses her body and a set of recurring gestures to express the loss, trauma, mourning, and the silencing of Vancouver’s missing women. In *Vigil*, crimes against the body, specifically the Indigenous woman’s body, are embodied in, enacted by, or inscribed on Belmore’s own body.

![Figure 91: Rebecca Belmore, *Vigil*, Performance Still, Vancouver, 2002. Video Credit: Paul Wong.](image)

The red dress marks the retraumatization of the body, marking her as a symbolic participant within this history of violence committed against the body. The torn pieces of the red dress nailed to the pole are arguably a strategy for bearing witness; each fragment of cloth representing a memory, a name, and a body. Her body bears witness; her body calls for remembrance. *Vigil* can therefore be
seen as Belmore’s response to the tragic deaths of both the “unnamed” Indigenous women and those named as part of the seventy missing from the streets of Vancouver.

Here it is important to recognize that storytelling is a strategy of socio-political and cultural resistance. This is not new. The story has been and is a means for Indigenous cultural continuance, and can account for its survival. As discussed in the previous chapter and in this chapter, Indigenous activists and artists incorporate Indigenous knowledge, such as storytelling, as strategies for socio-political and cultural activism. Belmore’s use of her body and the performative is a form of social protest. She vocalizes the issues of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, a history not commonly recognized or known by non-Indigenous Canadian society. In this way, Vigil works within the decolonizing project of exposing the affects of colonization on Indigenous peoples, presenting the hard truths of the value placed on Indigenous lives and bodies in Canada. Vigil bears witness not only to a silenced history, but to the contemporary reality of the dispensable status of Indigenous women in dominant settler society. The performance practices examined in this chapter—Vigil, the Walk4Justice—along with other individual and collective artistic and political actions (in local community-arts actions across Canada, such as in Regina and Winnipeg, for example) and the commemorative YouTube videos, all participate in a project of naming and mourning Indigenous women murdered in Canada. They are all connected to an awareness project by Indigenous social movements of the violence of colonization and the ongoing legacies of colonialism in Canada.

Colonial experience and legacies are explicitly part of discussions evoked by Rebecca Belmore’s installation blood on the snow (2002) (fig. 72), which references both historic and contemporary violence experienced by Aboriginal people, and specifically women. This installation works as testimony of the Massacre at Wounded Knee in South Dakota in the winter of 1890 (also the focus on Belmore’s Bury My Heart, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4) as well as of the disappearances of Aboriginal women from the streets of Vancouver and across Canada more broadly. The room-sized white-quilted installation—placed in a central position in the gallery—references Belmore’s inversion of symbolisms associated with the colour white, such as purity. She substitutes an Indigenous point of view: whitewash and white lies. In the middle of the large white quilt, which rests on the floor, is a chair, also enveloped in the quilt. At the top of the covered chair is a blood-red stain. The contrast between the white quilt and the blood detail generate questions

and convey silent messages. For instance, a viewer, without knowledge of colonization’s extreme violence against Indigenous peoples could potentially see the installation as referring to violence—due to the inclusion of the blood. This installation has been incorporated into several exhibitions, such as the recent In My Lifetime, re-installed at the Canadian Museum of Civilization (2008), and in Belmore’s solo exhibition, The Named and the Unnamed, at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery at University of British Columbia in 2002. Curator and director the Belkin Gallery, Scott Watson, notes in the exhibition catalogue foreword that the video installation of Vigil, the Named and the Unnamed, and blood on the snow, draw attention to a fact not sufficiently accounted for. A disproportionate number of missing women are native. The absence of Belmore’s body or any bodies, simply traces of violence against the body are provocative and raise questions. The question one must ask is: did the murderer(s) choose these women because the police would be less likely to care if they were “missing”? If that is the case then in a real way society marked these women and is implicated in their demise. Quietly, indeed, without uttering any words except the names of the missing, Belmore leads the viewer to make his or her own subtle connections.

In this way, Belmore’s video and installation insert Indigenous world views into the museum space, thereby exposing the inequitable power relationships inherent in museum spaces. These mirror and reflect the gallery spaces’ larger context and relationship within Canadian settler dominant society. Blood on the snow is a strategic intervention of continued settler hegemony because it exposes a violent silence of settler society’s power structures and institutions.

In writing about The Named and Unnamed exhibition, Charlotte Townsend-Gault draws on the work of Michael Taussig and his analysis of public secrets: “Public secrets are everywhere, like the bad faith of power. Micheal Taussig defines the public secret as ‘that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated.’” Taussig writes of the atrocities of Colombia’s police state, arguing: “Wherever there is power, there is secrecy, except that it is not only secrecy that lies at the core of power, but public secrecy.” Townsend Gault writes, “Taussig proposes that it is through the act of defacement, of desecration, that the (public) secret makes itself apparent. Desecration, spoiling, defacement were all implied as was the sluggish indifference of authority to make a more than

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119 Townsend-Gault, “Have We Ever Been Good?” 118.
120 Michael Taussig, Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 5.
121 Taussig, Defacement, 7.
twenty years of disappearances.” Townsend-Gault connects Taussig’s argument of exposing public secrets and the power of silence to the art practice of Belmore, who names, reveals, and presents public secrets through her works in the exhibition, specifically *blood on the snow* and *Vigil*. In reference to these works, Townsend-Gault writes, “Belmore was making a connection between the violence against these unnamed, apparently unimportant women—sex workers, addicts, many of them First Nations, all of them relatively powerless—and the exercise of ‘the power of the nation.'” *blood on the snow* is yet another example of Indigenous activism that subtly and symbolically exposes and recounts a living history of colonization, while providing an Indigenous space for honouring and mourning Indigenous peoples.

Earlier, I discussed this issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in relation to Lori Blondeau’s performance *Asiniy Iskwew* (fig. 73). My witnessing of Blondeau’s performance was a similar experience to that of witnessing Belmore’s video-installation of *Vigil*. In both instances I was overcome with emotion. I became enraged by this silenced history, while their performance space also created a site for personal mourning and collective grieving of this appalling and reprehensible contemporary living colonial legacy. Their performances also raise the fact that the devaluation of Indigenous women’s bodies in Canada can be connected to colonial histories and historic stereotyping. In Wanda Nanibush’s curatorial statement on Blondeau’s performance of *Asiniy Iskwew*, she makes a similar analysis: “This performance piece comes out of a knowledge that Aboriginal women are most likely to experience violence based on how they are stereotyped. This performance memorializes all the missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, a contemporary colonial legacy.”

The performances by Blondeau and Belmore participate in the current Indigenous political movement to expose the ongoing murders of Indigenous women and the lack of justice surrounding their violent deaths and disappearances. Performances like *Vigil* and *Asiniy Iskwew* work as participants, as activists within the larger context of Indigenous activism. Recently, Indigenous activists and artists have been politically voicing the legacies of colonization in Canada. By making connections between colonial violence, colonial tactics of oppression to representation of Indigenous peoples, and furthermore to contemporary social conditions and human rights violations, Indigenous artists and activists are advancing Indigenous experiences, stories, and histories concealed by Canadian national/ist narratives, institutions, and governments.

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122 Townsend-Gault, “Have We Ever Been Good?” 19.
123 Ibid.


*Are You My Mother? Residential School, Remembrance, and Resistance*

Indigenous performance artists are constantly engaging in contemporary histories of Aboriginal people. In this section, I explore Lori Blondeau’s performance of *Are You My Mother?* (fig. 11) as performative activism. I argue that her effective use of stories is the performative force that creates a site for the transmission of Indigenous experiences of residential schools. The incorporation of Indigenous perspectives and voices in Indigenous performance art serves as a powerful political tool for staging performative resistance, as we have seen in Belmore’s *Victorious* and *Vigil*, in which she uses the body to tell distinct Indigenous stories. As discussed in Chapter 3, Indigenous storytelling functions as a socio-political and cultural tool for survivance, self-determination, and sovereignty. The incorporation of storytelling into performative actions is a strategy of activism, one that is entrenched in Indigenous socio-cultural knowledge and the history of performance by marginalized and Indigenous peoples. The sharing of Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and histories through storytelling contributes to the project of Indigenous decolonization. I have discussed the concept of decolonization and its implications with regard to performance and storytelling at length in Chapter 3 and 4, and now incorporate this discussion in relation to political activism.

The use of stories in Indigenous performance art—shared through gesture, voice, projection, soundscapes, and props—can be understood in some cases as political acts of protest and strategies for social-cultural continuance. It is important to acknowledge that performances such as *Are you My Mother?* also serve—as did *Victorious* and *Vigil*—another purpose altogether: they contribute to Indigenous social memory, acting as sites for honouring Indigenous lived experiences, mourning experiences of violence, and remembering Indigenous individuals, stories, and histories.

Belmore’s performance of *Victorious* politically negotiates and responds to the federal government’s apology to Indigenous people for the Indian residential schools legislation enacted in the late 1800s. Similarly, Lori Blondeau’s performance, *Are You My Mother?* (1996), performatively actualizes memories and experiences of her family at residential schools. The residential school system was officially established in 1892 and was in effect until 1969 (students attended church run schools starting in the 1850s). Although the Canadian government withdrew from official responsibility, several schools continued to operate through the 1970s into the 1980s. However, the last federally run residential school, the Gordon Residential School, closed in Saskatchewan in 1996. The colonial agenda behind the institution of the residential school system,
stated in the 1897 Sessional Report from the Indian Commissioner, clearly establishes it as a racist and paternalistic regime of assimilation and ethnocide—meaning cultural genocide. A.E. Forget, then Indian Commissioner, wrote in the Report,

This branch of the Indian service has ever been recognized as one of the most, if not perhaps the most, important features of the extensive system which is operating towards the civilization of our native races, having its beginning in small things—the first step being the establishment of reserve day-schools of limited scope and influence, the first forward step was the founding of boarding schools both on and off the reserves. The beneficent effect of these becoming at once apparent, an impetus was thus given to the movement in the direction of Industrial training, which was at once entered upon the establishment of our earlier industrial institutions … until to-day the Dominion has had at its command a system which provides for its Indian wards a practical course of industrial training, fitting for useful citizenship of the youth of a people who one generation past were practically unrestrained savages.125

What is evident from this report is that the Aboriginal children entering the residential school system were to be re-educated to fit the Euro-Canadian—that is, settler—model of societal norms, behaviours, and cultural knowledge in an attempt to strip them of their Indigenous knowledge, which due to Eurocentric prejudices of the time was considered to that of “savagery.” Jeff Thomas remarks in his catalogue Where Are the Children?: Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools that the residential school system, a program of social engineering established by the Canadian government, can be characterized as an aggressive system of ethnocide.126

The residential school system was a forceful attempt to break down the foundation of Indigenous communities—the family. The relocation of children was a means to solve the “Indian problem,” which can be defined as the existence of Aboriginal peoples in the newly founded nation of Canada. This meant the presence of Indigenous communities on lands, rightfully claimed as their own, and the clash between settler and Indigenous social and cultural structures.

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125 A. E. Forget, Sessional Report from the Indian Commissioner (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1897), 291. The following passage was included in the joint project catalogue to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Legacy of Hope Foundation and National Archives of Canada exhibition, Where are the Children, which was published in 2003. This passage is found under the subject heading “The Purpose Behind the Residential Schools,” in Where Are the Children?: Healing The Legacy of the Residential Schools (Ottawa: Legacy of Hope Foundation and Library and Archives Canada, 2003), 16–17.

126 Jeff Thomas, Where Are the Children? Healing The Legacy of the Residential Schools (Ottawa: Legacy of Hope Foundation and Library and Archives Canada, 2003), 17–18. Ethnocide is defined as a deliberate attempt to eradicate socio-cultural frameworks of a people, and depends heavily on the dominant society’s strategic manipulation of its political power. Thomas Barfield, ed., The Dictionary of Anthropology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 156.
It was during this period of early “development” that the government officially adopted a policy of assimilation, which was originally established during the pre-Confederation period. This policy was designed to “move communities, and eventually all Aboriginal peoples, from their helpless ‘savage’ state to one of self-reliant ‘civilization’ and thus to make Canada but one community—a non-Aboriginal, Christian one.” The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples remarks that education was evidently a significant method for “civilizing” and assimilating Natives. Today in Canada, a settler nation that has adopted a policy of multiculturalism, the treatment of children in such a violently brutal and cruel fashion seems unfathomable and indeed disgraceful. Unfortunately, residential schools maintain strong ties to today’s reality: the physical, mental, spiritual, and sexual abuses endured by some of the children who attended these jail-like “educational” institutions constitute a legacy of trauma for new generations of Aboriginal children and their families. From this perspective, continued exposures of this history is essential, and fundamentally linked to the possibilities of community healing. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) suggests in their “program handbook” that

intergenerational or multi-generational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as “normal” when we are children, we pass on to our own children. Children who learn that … or [sic] sexual abuse is “normal”, and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical and sexual abuse on their own children. The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so. This is the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in residential schools.  

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129 Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Aboriginal Healing Foundation Program Handbook, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 1999), A5. Not all children who attended residential schools endured abuse. However, my intention in this inclusion is to acknowledge the significant trauma still faced in Aboriginal communities as a result of experiences in Residential schools. Other legacies, recognized by the AHF, of the residential school experience are dysfunctional families and interpersonal relationships; parenting issues such as emotional coldness, rigidity, neglect, poor communications and abandonment; low self-esteem; educational blocks, such as aversions to formal learning programs that seem ‘too much like school’; psychologically-based learning disabilities; alcohol and drug abuse; chronic, widespread depression, rage and anger. See the website http://www.wherearetethechildren.ca/en/impacts.html for a more complete list of
Though there is a significant history of the degradation and abuse endured by the children, there is also a history of resistance and even stories of positive experiences. Many children challenged and resisted this colonial system of education, for example, by continuing to use their Aboriginal language.130 These disturbing legacies have been recognized and brought out into the open. Organizations such as AHF support and encourage discussion of these experiences through storytelling and the visual arts. Indigenous artists, activists, and scholars are currently engaging with these histories of violence against Indigenous children and the ongoing intergenerational impact of these experiences by survivors. Belmore’s *Victorious*, in which she re-creates an image of Queen Victoria, the reigning Canadian monarch at the time of these aggressive colonial and assimilist policies, raises many questions about Canada as a settler nation and concepts of decolonization. This performance shows the viewer the resistance and agency of Indigenous peoples, and their survival of colonial agendas and racist legislation. Blondeau’s *Are You Mother?* incorporates the imagery of Queen Victoria and uses other props and her voice to recount her connections to the history of residential schools.

The gallery space is completely transformed for the performance of *Are You My Mother?* (fig. 11). Blondeau sits on a large rock, skinning logs. The audience walks in during her action. There is an enclosed pen made of wood posts and sheep wire near the back of the gallery, and a large rock (or chair) off to one side of it. Chairs are placed both inside and outside of the pen for audience members. In front of the rock are two logs. Sod covers the floor of the gallery space, and projected on the wall is an image of Queen Victoria. Blondeau is wearing red pants, black cowboy boots, and a traditional ribbon shirt. When the pen is full, she stops skinning logs and hammers the fence shut. She sits down on the rock (or chair) and continues skinning logs. Throughout this act, she tells numerous stories about the impact of the residential school experience on her family. At times she digresses from her storytelling, giving out commands such as, “Sit up straight.” At one point in her performance, she invites the audience to join her in skinning logs. After audience participation, she returns to her storytelling. At the end of her performance, she asks an audience

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130 Basil Johnston, *Indian School Days* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989). Celia Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving Indian Residential Schools* (Vancouver BC: Arsenal Press, 1988). These two publications provide examples of the Aboriginal struggle against these institutions and the resistance negotiated by its students. For example, some children were able to maintain their knowledge of Aboriginal culture and language.
member to assist her, and Blondeau braids the woman’s hair—then they switch places. Next, the planted audience member braids the artist’s hair. In the closing scene of her interactive performance, Blondeau’s braid is cut off. She then stands and walks in silence out of the gallery.

Her narratives illuminate the reasons for the fence, the skinning of logs, and the picture of Queen Victoria, while also giving meaning to the title of her performance. The title Are You My Mother? recalls the lack experienced by Aboriginal children for large parts of the year of nurturing mothering due to the residential school environment. In many cases, children became disconnected from their mothers and their families because of the long periods away from home and ongoing abuses endured at the schools, which constantly demeaned Aboriginal cultural, spiritual, and linguistic knowledge. The title also evokes Blondeau’s learning of her mother and grandmother’s experiences, making her see them in a new light. The title invokes a vision of an Aboriginal child looking up at the photograph of Queen Victoria and asking, “Are you my mother?” This question recalls the displacement the children would have felt when left with only memories of home. These are Blondeau’s family’s stories.

Blondeau has established her position as a performance artist that incorporates personal and family stories as the foundations of her performance narratives. She relates, “My family is my first and most important community. My mother and grandmother taught me how to tell stories and they taught me the significance of telling my own stories … their stories are a part of my history.” blondeau’s point of departure in Are You My Mother? is her family’s stories of the residential school experience in Saskatchewan. It is a story of survival and of resistance. Lynne Bell suggests, and I would agree with her, that Blondeau utilizes the medium of performance art to clear a new space for “the enunciation of difficult knowledge.” These new spaces that Blondeau generates from her thoughtful, introspective, and generous performances enable negotiation of colonial histories and offer resistance to silenced stories. In this respect, Walter Benjamin’s account of memory and stories can be employed to illustrate Blondeau’s process-oriented performance practice. Benjamin notes that “memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on

132 This performance was first performed as Minding the Motherload in 1997 at Emily’s, a small café in Saskatoon. The piece was a part of a festival organized by “Women in the Arts” associated with the University of Saskatchewan. The thematic focus of this festival was on artists and mothering. Lynne Bell and Janice Williamson, “High Tech Storyteller: A Conversation with Performance Artist Lori Blondeau,” Fuse Magazine 24, no. 4 (2001): 31.
from generation to generation,“133 and the storyteller shares her own experiences or those which have been reported to her. Through the act of sharing, she makes it the experience of those who are listening.134 When the audience members become witnesses, they take on the role of active listeners publicly giving recognition to her stories.

Blondeau’s storytelling contributes to the ongoing processes of Aboriginal empowerment and healing. Her family’s stories of the trauma endured in residential schools—as presented in Are You My Mother?—mirror the lived experiences of Aboriginals across Canada. These experiences are arguably a major contributor to many socio-cultural issues in Aboriginal urban and reserve communities.135 Blondeau remarks,

It wasn’t until 1988, when she [my mother] and my grandmother came to visit me in Montreal, that she started to talk about these experiences. There was a program on television—a drama series called Where the Spirit Lives—about a residential school on the prairies at the turn of the century. It was a young Cree girl who was taken from her family and put into a residential school: it was her story.136

After viewing the film Where the Spirit Lives, Blondeau asked her mother and grandmother what residential schools were really like. Blondeau recalls, “It was the first time that I found out that my grandmother’s first language was Cree. They both told me that the television show we watched was very similar to their own experiences.”137 Thus, it was as an adult that Blondeau was made aware of the tragedies endured by the generations of Aboriginal people sent to the jointly administered, government- and church-controlled boarding schools.138 Although the fallout from this colonial system of education has been significant, cultural resistance and survivance continued, undermining these aggressive assimilation policies.

Perhaps, in this sense, a performance such as Are You My Mother? can act as catalyst for continued healing and empowerment. Blondeau reveals why it was so important for her to tell these stories:

I wanted to talk about my mother’s residential school story because, even though I am not part of my family’s residential school generation, I realize that I am still strongly affected by the after-shocks of the system that was put in place to

137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
assimilate my people and exterminate their culture. We are still feeling the effects whether we went to residential schools or not. This was the drive behind wanting to make Are You My Mother?139

Blondeau intricately weaves multi-generational stories into a politically vocal fabric. I suggest that this process of telling and re-telling not only sparks discussion but also acts as a memorial to all Aboriginal families touched by the reality and aftermath of residential schools. Thus, her performances can be seen as testimony; they acknowledge the travesties of assimilation policies while recognizing the power of the human spirit to prevail. In the following passage, which is included in the performance narrative, Blondeau remarks on the inhuman treatment of both the child and her relations, while at the same time noting the power of memories as a method of cultural survival:

One of the stories my mother told me was about her grandparents visiting her in residential school. Her own parents wouldn’t go because it was too difficult for them. When her grandparents visited her, they weren’t allowed to go into the grounds; they had to visit with a chain-link fence between them. My mother told me that she missed home, but what she missed most of all was the smell of home, because the residential school was a sterile environment. When her grandparents visited, my great-grandmother would throw a tablecloth over the fence for my mother and set one for herself and my great-grandfather. They would have a picnic of tea and bannock. My mom would always get her grandmother to throw her sweater over the fence, and then my mother would take the sweater and hold it up to her nose and just smell it. The smell evoked the memories that gave her the strength to be in this jail-like environment where physical contact with her family was not allowed.140

Blondeau’s great-grandmother’s presence, her smell, and her bannock served as reminders of the safe, nurturing home that Blondeau’s mother grew up in prior to being forcibly removed from her family and relocated into residential school. This was the first story that Blondeau internalized and used as inspiration for her performance, and she notes, “When my mother told me about this story, I was taken aback because I could visualize it in my head as a performance piece.”141

In all of Blondeau’s work, the audience plays an integral role, participating in processes of recognition, reconciliation, re-writings, and restitution. Blondeau is actively engaged with Canada’s colonial histories, and negotiates what renowned contemporary artist Isaac Julien calls “the undoing

139 Ibid., 27.
140 Ibid., 26–27.
141 Ibid., 27.
of the colonial archive.” In this respect, I would argue that a close engagement with the colonial archive with the intention to un-do it reflects a palimpsest aesthetic. In Are You My Mother?, by bearing witness to the violence and hardship of residential schools, the audience is thrust into a reciprocal relationship with Blondeau and her family’s stories. What this means is that Blondeau’s stories are certain to traumatize her audience as a method of provoking recognition. From this point of view, her deployment of narrative pulls into public circulation traces of memory, knowledge, and stories that have been discarded, camouflaged and or silenced by dominant discourses.

In addition to sharing Blondeau’s familial stories of the residential school, Are You My Mother? generates a commentary on power relations and systems of domination. Foucault suggests that strategies of power make an individual a subject. He argues that power applies itself to everyday life and categorizes the individual, therefore marking her by her own individuality; it attaches her to her own identity, thereby imposing a law of truth on her that she must recognize, and by which others have to recognize her as well. Foucault defines the term “subject” as one who is “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to.”

In the context of colonial domination of Aboriginal peoples, Are You My Mother? attempts to subvert colonial power structures by appropriating and disclosing them. This point is illustrated by the following description by Blondeau:

There is an image of Queen Victoria projected on the wall, making reference to the language of treaties, which refer to her as the Great White Mother. I imagine her picture would have hung on the walls of turn-of-the-century residential schools. Symbolically, she was the mother of all the Native children who were forced to go to residential schools.

Furthermore, the projected image of Queen Victoria recognizes the British Empire’s “conquest” of lands throughout the world—and acknowledges colonial hegemony over Indigenous peoples. While sitting in the pen, the audience is looked down upon by Queen Victoria, an analogy

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142 I discovered the use of Julien’s term in relation to the Canadian contemporary Aboriginal context in reading Lynne Bell’s abstract “The Post/Colonial Photographic Archive and the Performance as Testimony,” where she discusses the work of Lori Blondeau, Edward Poitras and Dana Claxton. Bell states, “All three artists are actively engaged in a mode of decolonizing visual work that has been called ‘the undoing of the colonial archive.’” This lecture was given at the Australian National University Testimony and Witness: From the Local to the Transnational Conference, February 14–16, 2006, http://www.anu.edu.au/HRC/conferences/conferences_2006/Testimony_Abstracts.pdf. See also Isaac Julien’s professional website: http://www.isaacjulien.com/home


to the experience of the residential school student. The image of Queen Victoria is an emblem of the colonial discourse, which is saturated by attitudes of a hierarchy of culture, defined by superiority and entitlement. Colonial discourse is arguably an apparatus of power, which, as Homi Bhabha suggests, activates the recognition and disavowal of racial, cultural, and historical differences. Bhabha pursues the topic further:

Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a “subject peoples” through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised … it seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical … The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.145

From Bhabha’s perspective, residential schools participate in the colonial discourse of surveillance and domination. Blondeau now articulates these histories in a space once controlled by the dominant society. In Blondeau’s performance space, she subverts the systems of control once held by a colonial hegemonic government and illuminates the presence of surveillance. Surveillance is defined as “[one of the] most powerful strategies of imperial dominance…because it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies and interpellates the colonized subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor.”146 Blondeau does this by placing and “locking” some of her audience members in a confined pen, thereby controlling their movement. In the context of surveillance and control systems, the “gaze” plays a fundamental role; and conversely, in the postcolonial sense, by recognizing the presence of a colonial gaze, the subaltern can mirror back colonial strategies of dominance.

Are You My Mother? elucidates the power structures of colonial Canada and the systemic incorporation of domination throughout societal spheres. During her performance, once the fenced in area is full of audience members, Blondeau closes the pen shut. This act of enclosure, I would argue, is intended to make her audience feel uncomfortable and force them to recognize their loss of control. In “Some Kinda Princess,” Blondeau writes: “I get up when I see the pen is full, and I close it and hammer it shut with fence-post nails … I want people to feel that they can’t leave, that they have no choice but to stay in the pen. This is a reference to my mother’s experience in

residential school: She had no choice; she had to stay.”\textsuperscript{147} There are numerous possible readings of the fence, but I would suggest that it resonates with the same symbolism as the image of Queen Victoria: colonial control, domination, and superiority. The fence maps out a specific space. In this performance, however, it is a fluid space that moves through history, naming both colonial and postcolonial landscapes. Blondeau can be said to move through history by means of the stories she shares, back to those of her great-grandmother, then forward to her own story. She negotiates a new space, one that she controls and claims for her family’s stories. The fence in her performance evokes the experience of her parents and grandparents being forbidden to enter onto residential school grounds. In theory, Blondeau thereby reclaims the fenced-in land of residential schools. As Blondeau tells the fence story, some audience members sit confined in this space, while others peer in. In this way, the enclosing fence makes reference to concepts of the spectacle. Each group is looking at the other side of the fence, while Blondeau controls both spaces.

In addition, the story of Blondeau’s mother and grandmother visiting through the fence stirs the senses, where remembrance is stored. Among the senses, smell is particularly evocative and poignant. Blondeau affirms, “It is about how smell can trigger memories.” This appeal to the senses, incorporated into the gallery space, will generate personal memories for the audience, perhaps of their own mothers and grandmothers. In “Some Kinda Princess,” Blondeau refers to another sensory element of the performance, “I want to fill the entire gallery with the smell of freshly skinned logs. It is a way for me to evoke my mother’s action of smelling her grandmother’s sweater.” And this is exactly what she does, by skinning logs herself. Blondeau states that “the smell of logs being skinned, triggers for her memories of being at her grandparents’ house.” In addition, this narrative asks the engaged listener to think of the smells that remind them of home. This can be seen as counterpart to asking the audience to imagine a child in a sterile space that smells of bleach and cleaner, longing for home. As Blondeau tells her audience, “My mother told me that she missed home, but what she missed most of all was the smell of home, because the residential school was a sterile environment.” Perhaps in this sense, Blondeau’s inclusion of the smell of fresh cut wood is a means to performatively assert Indigenous lived experience and being.

Blondeau notes that the physicality of skinning logs also interested her. She writes, “As I skin the logs, I begin my narrative of my mother’s experience in residential school and my own story of being affected by this colonial institution, even though I never went there.”\textsuperscript{148} Here, we are

\textsuperscript{147} Blondeau, “Some Kinda Princess,” 27.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
reminded of Blondeau’s position as a storyteller, using numerous props in order to capture the imaginations of her audience. Her voice is another essential performative tool. Blondeau comments, “Once I’ve enclosed all the people in the pen, I go back to my position of skinning the logs, and I continue my narrative in a monotone voice.” There are numerous possible readings of the incorporation of the monotone narrative. Is it the voice of the sisters teaching the children? Is it making reference to the deficient recognition of this history? Is it reference to the life lived in residential schools—that is, the monotonous daily activities, of cleaning, chores, eating, praying, and then sleeping? Blondeau continues, “At one point, I look at the audience members in the pen and tell them to sit up straight. This is done in a moment of anger. Then I go back to my monotone voice and continue on with my own storytelling.” This radical shift in tone of voice giving aggressive direction to people who are “locked in” makes reference to both the physical and verbal violence directed towards the children. Blondeau’s moment of anger can also be understood as representing the residual anger within survivors of residential schools and their families. While memories of their own schooling may be triggered throughout this performance, the non-Aboriginal members of the audience may realize their inability to truly understand this colonial legacy.

By recognizing the limitations of understanding a lived experience that you yourself have not had, one acknowledges the process of learning new knowledge through performance art. Live performance negotiates lived experience, thereby acting as a bridge between the narrative of memory and current reality. I suggest that through continued learning and sharing of stories, communities can cross cultural borders and continue conversations in order to foster an understanding based on respect. The notion of “understanding” in relation to the politics of performance has been discussed by Peggy Phelan in Unmarked. Although I agree with Phelan concerning the limitations of fully understanding one another’s differences, I disagree with her notion that we must not continue to strive for further cultural understanding and that the concept of understanding means that one must arrive on the other side. I suggest that cultural understanding means an attempt to recognize differences and to acknowledge a commitment to learning cross-culturally in a respectful way. In Phelan’s view, “Perhaps the best possibility for ‘understanding’ racial, sexual, and ethnic differences lies in the active acceptance of the inevitability of misunderstanding.”

Acknowledging the dangerous nature of her statement as a political and pedagogical telos inviting “belligerent refusal to learn,” Phelan modifies her argument by saying,

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149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
“It is an attempt to walk (and live) on the rickety bridge between self and other—and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other—that we discover real hope.”

I would argue that this walking on the bridge between self and other is the key to understanding and social change, however, it is important to recognize that one cannot ever arrive on the other side. Instead cross-cultural negotiations rooted in respect and acknowledgment of differences can foster stronger relationships.

Following the command to “sit up straight”—arguably a moment of violent rupture in the narrative—Blondeau asks the people in the pen if they will help her skin the logs. Bearing in mind that throughout Blondeau’s action of skinning logs, she shares the stories of her mother’s experiences at residential school, multiple readings of her request are possible. In Blondeau’s writings she does not give specifics into the possible readings of the logs, just that the smell reminds her of her grandparents. It is at this moment in the performance that the roles of the audience and the performer shift. She asks them to participate in a reciprocal relationship, where they in turn perform for her. Blondeau acknowledges the politics of spectacle and the colonial gaze by noting, “I am now the audience gazing at them.”

Here, the artist blurs the boundaries and suggests empowerment through switching the dynamics of the colonial power system: the Aboriginal woman now sits in the seat of power as the observer. By laying claim to the gaze, Blondeau also invokes a connection to the history of physically exhibiting Indigenous peoples for the European gaze. Within colonial history exists a tradition of exhibiting the “other” for the enjoyment and pleasure of the dominant society. Aboriginal peoples were exhibited in numerous spaces throughout post-contact history, for example in 19th-century World Exhibitions. Arguably here, as in all her performances, Blondeau asserts a reciprocal gaze, once again resisting the colonial discourse and making space for Indigenous voice and vision.

Several audience members now begin stripping logs with Blondeau. They contribute to the performative ephemera, as well as to the re-writing or stripping of colonial histories from the Canadian landscape. This generates a reciprocal exchange between discourses and performance art participants, enabling multiple stories to be told simultaneously. Each individual brings his or her story into the performance space. Although participants may not verbally share these experiences, their interpretation of the performance witnessed will be based on their memories and experiences.

152 Ibid, 174.
In this piece, Blondeau is playing with power. She comments on colonial domination and the power structures built to ensure the position of the colonizer over the colonized. She also acknowledges her own power through the sharing of her stories and through her authoritative gestures and commands. She reflects colonial systems of control back onto themselves, and reverses the image of the colonizer over the colonized, creating a new space for negotiations. Fundamentally, Blondeau’s act of enclosing her multicultural audience in a pen and requesting their help to skin logs demonstrates the power held by the state over Aboriginal peoples during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This reading is re-enforced by her inclusion of the pen in the gallery space. An alternative reading can be found in the fact that Blondeau is not merely asking the audience to skin logs, but rather is demanding they do so. This section of the performance recalls the hard labour and chores expected of the children during their attendance at the schools. 

Blondeau transforms herself from the child doing the chores into the teacher or principal dictating the work loads.

After the participation of the audience, Blondeau returns to her place on the rock and resumes her role as orator, shifting the gaze back to her. As previously suggested, the gaze and action can be reciprocal. Through this act of shifting the boundaries, from participating by listening to physical participation, the audience is made aware that they too are being watched. Blondeau utilizes aggressive acts of engagement, first by closing the audience in, next in her angry command to sit up straight (as one could imagine the teachers at the schools saying), and then through asking them to assist in skinning logs. As the audience looks at Blondeau, she looks back at them, watching their reactions to her stories, her commands, and her questions. Blondeau’s performance space re-imagines colonial systems of power. The colonized are symbolically represented by those in the pen who are rendered powerless. As they look out they are, in turn, closely observed while their mobility remains controlled by Blondeau. Are You My Mother? transcends the borders.

154 In was not until 1951 that the Indian Act policy towards Aboriginal education was changed. Prior to this time, children were consistently removed from their learning to do chores around the school and also some had ‘vocational’ jobs in the surrounding areas. Prior to this, little time was spent on learning, on average two hours of instruction per day on academic subjects and the rest of the day was spent working, cleaning and farming. Non-Aboriginal children spent five hours a day in public school learning. See Jeff Thomas, Where Are the Children? Healing the Legacy of the Residential Schools, 54–55.

155 The process of skinning logs is a laborious task, which involves removing the tree’s bark, along with the branches, until all that’s left is a long thick pole. The process of skinning logs transcends cultures. Aboriginal peoples, specifically the Plains Cree, removed bark from lodge wood pines which were used as the poles for their tipi lodges, while the European settlers skinned logs for creation the log cabins. While the log cabin participates in the representation of Canada’s western development, presented as an icon of Euro-Canadian settlement of ‘wild and vacant’ lands, the tipi lodge participates in the iconic narrative of the Wild West and the warrior plains peoples presented in literary fiction and Hollywood films.
between storyteller/performance artist and listener/audience, while also slipping through historical and cultural divisions.

The audience continues to participate in the performance. Blondeau recommences her oral narrative, moving this time to the thematic of hair:

At this point, I get an audience member (someone planted) and sit her down on the rock on which I have been sitting and begin to brush her hair. As I am brushing her hair, I say, “I come from a long line of women who love to pick lice.” Then I begin to tell stories that have been told to me by my grandmother and mother about picking lice. I also tell my own stories about lice.156

This is the concluding story of Are You My Mother? It is a multifaceted narrative, which places nurturing moments alongside moments of aggressive tensions. Blondeau’s oral narrative can be unpacked in many ways, as there are many stories interconnected to the ones that she shares. This narrative of picking lice may come as a shock to some of her audience. Mothers may understand immediately one of Blondeau’s meanings, residential school survivors may make very different associations.

The story of picking lice is a parable of the nature of mothering. Her story’s meaning is illuminated by the nurturing actions of brushing hair. On the other hand, one of her personal stories is about the trauma of lice. When she was in grade one, at the age of six or seven, Blondeau was made to feel that if she had lice, it was due to cultural ancestry. Her teacher told her “that it was only Indian people who got lice because [they] were dirty.”157 Unfortunately, this shared memory recognizes continual racial prejudice in the mainstream education system while also acknowledging the stereotype that Aboriginal people are dirty. The teacher’s harsh comment was internalized by Blondeau and had a profound impact on her self-esteem. Later in life, as a mother, she notes,

While living in Montreal, I had an experience that brought back this memory. My oldest daughter was infested with lice and I took her to a clinic. We went into the doctor’s office, and I explained to him that she had these bugs in her hair; at that point he asked us to leave his office and not touch anything. This incident triggered memories of the stereotype that had been ingrained in me as a child.158

This episode motivated Blondeau to ask her mother and grandmother about head lice. Their stories caused her to wonder why they and her aunties claimed to “love picking nits?” Their answers enabled Blondeau to see the link between picking nits out of a child’s hair and nurturing:

I came to realize that it wasn’t about being dirty. And it wasn’t about us being

157 Ibid.
158 Ibid., 28.
Indians, because everyone gets lice. It was about affection, grooming, catching up on community gossip. And making sure that we take care of the lice so that we don’t keep getting infested with them. Witnessing my mother, grandmother, and my aunts telling about why they like to pick lice and listening to their humour totally empowered me.\(^{159}\)

As the audience bears witness to this intimate story, they participate in the erasure and re-writing of the stereotype of the dirty Indian. Blondeau goes on combing the woman’s hair, and tells another story:

When I think of my mother’s residential school story, I think about how difficult it was for my grandmother to have her children taken way from her for ten months of the year. As a mother myself, I think how hard it must have been to witness your children being taken away from you and not being able to have any physical contact with them. My grandmother told me that when the kids came home from residential school they had lice. She would spend her first week with them cleaning their heads. I saw this also as a way for her trying to reacquainted physically, mentally and emotionally with her children. Picking head lice became a ritual for her.\(^{160}\)

I suggest that the act of combing the woman’s hair is a theoretical returning home of the child from the experience of residential school into the nurturing space of empowerment. From the very beginning, Are You My Mother? is overshadowed by the projected image of Queen Victoria as the symbolic mother fig. of colonial Canada, and the theme of mothering is marked by tensions and contradictions. A definition of “mothering” is to give birth to, create, and produce; to watch over, nourish, and protect maternally. The obverse side of this definition held true in the residential schools, where the majority of children were neither nurtured nor protected. Instead they were punished and abused, and made to feel that their mothers were savages and unfit to watch over them.

Are You My Mother? is a performance full of complexities, moving from moments of mothering affection to violent narration. The story of hair and the residential school is a violent narrative, linked to the indoctrination process. Trauma was endured from the moment of arrival. Brothers and sisters were separated from each other; they were then scrubbed with disinfectant and had their hair cut. The action that marked the completion of their institutionalization process was their renaming and/or assignment of a number. These practices of separation served to systematically strip the children of their “Indianness,” along with their dignity, making the acts just

\(^{159}\) Ibid.

\(^{160}\) Ibid.
as violent as sexual or physical abuse. Arguably, this process of stripping the children of the scents of home reflects a colonial ritual, defined by Bourdieu as symbolic violence, which he says is “the gentle, hidden form which violence takes when overt violence is impossible.” The trauma of having hair cut for the first time is revealed in this boy’s story: “They went to work and cut off my braids, which according to Assiniboine custom, was a token of mourning—the closer the relative, the closer the cut. After my haircut, I wondered in silence if my mother had died, as they had cut my hair so close to the scalp.” Hair, for Aboriginal peoples, was and continues to be sacred, and the cutting of hair was only done in most Aboriginal cultures for specific events, such as mourning. As one step in the larger process of “civilizing” the Aboriginal children at the schools, the cutting of hair, viewed by Westerners as harmless, became a violent act and an assertion of control over the child.

From the optic of Bourdieu’s symbolic violence, such acts were part of a strategy of domination through the imposition of cultural values. They were violent because of their role in the establishment of social inequality, and “gentle” because they were embedded in so-called well-intentioned practices. Drawing on Foucault’s discussion of power and control, the goal of the process was to convert the children from Aboriginal to Westernized individuals. These conversions most often led to a resistant acceptance and adoption of Western cultural values, behaviours, and expectations. Homi Bhabha discusses how these conversions of Indigenous peoples into “Westernized” peoples are usually connected to an ambivalent and diffused feeling of resistance to imperial power. Bhabha calls such conversions “mimicry” that “always teeters on the edge of menace.” The conversion process is presented in the photographic images of Thomas Moore (fig. 94), which were utilized by the Department of Indian Affairs in their 1897 Annual Report to show a “before” and “after” representation of how the residential school system was a successful strategy.

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161 Roberta Greyeyes, St. Michael’s Indian Residential School 1894–1926: A Study within a Broader Historical and Ideological Framework (master’s thesis, Carleton University, 1995). Jack Funk elaborates on this dehumanizing process. His account is specific to the Delmas Boarding School in Saskatchewan. He states, “Each student was given a number which they retained during their years at Delmas. Their number determined the order in which they line up for anything, and they lined up for everything: classes, prayers, food, dismissal, bedtime, toilets, and washing in the mornings, noon, and night. Often the students were called by their number rather than by name.” Jack Funk, “Une Main Criminelle,” in Residential Schools: The Stolen Years, ed. Linda Jaine (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1993), 72.


164 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 123.
for conversion. However, is young Thomas Moore truly converted? Or is he a mimic of Western identity camouflaged in European dress?

![Image of Thomas Moore before and after his entrance into the Regina Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan, photograph, 1874. Library and Archives Canada, NL-022474.]

In the last moments of the performance, Blondeau trades places with the woman whose hair she has been combing. As Blondeau describes, “She begins to comb and braid my hair. I am silent. When she is done braiding my hair, she cuts my braid off. I get up and walk out.” In the Cree ceremony, the hair of a corpse was braided, and prior to burial the braid was cut off and then tied to the end of an upright stick at the head of the grave. According to David Mandelbaum, four days after burial, the braid was brought into the tipi during a feast of mourning.165 Mandelbaum recounts,

[When] none remained, except the leader and a few old people, the braid was untied from the stick, wrapped in cloth or hide, and bound with thongs. A bit of tobacco was placed next to the hair. The wrapped braid was placed in the nayahtcikan (carried on the back bundle), together with the braids of other deceased members of the family. These bundles were sacred family possessions and were carefully guarded.166

Once again, Blondeau’s performative narrative tells several stories, offering complexities and the opportunity for multiple readings. The practice of braiding hair that Blondeau incorporates into her performance alludes to the personal adornment of Aboriginal women’s hair. In the case of the Plains Cree, women usually wore their hair in two braids with the tips wrapped in leather or ribbon. The final act of cutting off the braid is powerful and violent. Her audience is left in the void of their storyteller’s silence, and remain locked in their pen with Blondeau’s braid left on the floor of the

165 Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1979), 154.
166 Ibid., 155.
performance space. Memory, story, and ritual imbue these last moments of Blondeau’s performance, intimately engaging the audience until she abruptly ends the piece by walking out.

This piece indicates shifts in the current political climate surrounding the residential school experience, exemplified by the Canadian government’s acknowledgment of this once silenced history. In the summer of 1998, a number of residential school survivors gathered in Squamish, British Columbia, for what Richard Kistabish, the Chairman of the Legacy of Hope Foundation, deemed an important first step in the healing process, the creation of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF). Kistabish writes,

The Legacy of Hope Foundation was established to address the long-term implications of the damage done to Aboriginal children and their families by many of the residential schools. The psychological wounds run deep and have infected new generations. Healing is a gradual process that will demand time and patience. A primary objective of our work is to promote awareness among the Canadian public about residential schools and try to help them to understand the ripple effects those schools have had on Aboriginal life. But equally important, we want to bring about reconciliation between generations of Aboriginal people, and between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Canadians.167

*Are You My Mother?* contributes to this discourse, re-addressing the story of residential schools, and acknowledging the ripple effects of this traumatic history. It is a decolonizing re-writing for a new understanding, negotiating reconciliation and empowerment. Through her performative body Blondeau’s vocalizes the intergenerational impact of residential schools, working in concert with Indigenous activist across Canada to support Indigenous survivors of this project of ethnocide.

**Artist as Activist: *I Want to Know Why***

Dana Claxton’s role as political activist is also overtly asserted in her work *I Want to Know Why* (1994) (discussed in Chapter 4). In this work, Claxton incorporates her voice, and recounts her family’s violent history and the brutal experiences of several of the women in her family, such as her mother. She gives testimony to the abuse and addiction her mother and grandmother experienced, and angrily demands, I want to know why! The repetition of the demand asserts a strong act of self-determined Indigenous inquiry and challenges the viewer to ask the same

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question. Why? Why did Claxton’s great grandmother walk to Canada with Sitting Bull? Why did she walk to Canada starving? Why also did Claxton’s grandmother, Pearl Goodtrack “die of alcohol poising in a skid row hotel room?” and why did her mother, Ella Goodtrack, “overdose at the age of 37?” Claxton’s repetitions of these questions, naming the women in her family and the violence they endured and succumbed to explicitly reveals her family’s history of colonial genocide. In Monika Kin-Gagnon’s description, “Claxton’s voice recounts how her great-grandmother was one of 2,000 starving Lakota walking to Saskatchewan in 1877 with Sitting Bull, feeling the genocidal practices of the U.S. government in South Dakota: ‘And I want to know why,’ she roars.”\(^\text{168}\) The inclusion of multigenerational familial histories of violence also asserts a complicit history of violence against Indigenous peoples on both sides of the border. In many cases, in comparative studies of colonization in Canada and United States or Australia and New Zealand, one nation-state’s relations and actions are deemed more or less brutal. Claxton engages with nation/list narratives without recounting or naming them, but by interconnecting the histories of colonization and ongoing legacies in both Canada and United States.

The ongoing addictions of many Indigenous peoples in Canada have been directly connected to experiences of colonialism, such as historic and current occupation, oppression and marginalization, and specifically to residential schools. Although Claxton does not state the words genocide in her recounts, she does name both the deaths of her mother and grandmother. In this way, she is calling for a recognition, or rather demanding recognition, of the histories and experiences of violence due to colonization. In other words, \textit{I Want to Know Why} is an indigenized assertion of genocide in North America, recounting historic and contemporary examples of violence. The examples of the impacts of colonization are seen in the contemporary experience of her mother’s early death. While Claxton repeats the three demands, images of Western representations of Indigenous peoples are looped together. The viewer witnesses iconic Indians on buildings as architectural sculptural detail, and North America’s largest stone Indian figure at Indianhead, Saskatchewan, while listening to Claxton’s voice. Claxton also includes archival photographs of her great-grandmother Mastachila juxtaposed with imagery of the Statue of Liberty. These juxtaposing images and sounds could be argued as a commentary between national/ist or colonial representations of Indigenous history and colonization and Indigenous experiences of colonialism cultural, social, and political violence. I would argue that \textit{I Want to Know Why} is an

overt political assertion by Claxton of Indigenous perspectives, stories and experiences. Claxton’s voice serves as an Indigenous inquiry into current social conditions for Indigenous people. Her use of video and personal narrative voice is a political act.

**The Red Paper: Subverting the Narrative, Revealing Indigenous Reality**

Claxton’s *The Red Paper* (1996) is an Indigenous drama that satirizes Eurocentric discovery narratives of North America. This video’s storyline explores the rhetoric and language used by early European arrivals to North America and perspectives of Indigenous experiences during this period. Claxton presents the video in an installation. This all Aboriginal cast (except for the two white actors, a woman and a man) is costumed in ruffled shirts, buckled boots and flowing gowns and delivers the video’s narrative in a pseudo-Elizabethan speak. *The Red Paper*’s storyline illuminates the ongoing impacts of colonization. Claxton’s multilayered narrative can be seen in the two following scenes, for example: a white man wearing a strait jacket who repeats, “I did not know, I did not know,” and a dialogue between two Aboriginal men in which they state, “The invaders are primitive in thoughts” and “Thoughtless, greed, and vacant in wisdom.” Monika Kin-Gagnon describes Claxton’s strategic layering:

> Poised against the weight of prevailing “discovery” narratives that have consistently favoured a viewer identification with Christopher Columbus, what is initially striking about *The Red Paper* is the film’s intertextuality, its layering and pastiche of various cultural codes retelling the arrival of European colonizers. There is a melee of cultural stereotypes, more particularly, of Indian stereotypes produced by mainstream white culture.¹⁶⁹

This highly stylized black and white film incorporates moments and stories of the arrival of European explorers to North America. Claxton recounts the story of European invasion and tactics of brutality, but Claxton’s version counters the commonly believed history of European “discovery” and subverts the narratives. Her story is told from the perspective of Indigenous experience, thereby creating a poignant commentary of the savagery of European strategies and behaviours towards Aboriginal peoples. *The Red Paper* reverses the arrogant and racist accounts of contact, revealing how North America was conceived as an “empty land” despite the presence of thousands of Indigenous nations. Her experimental video incorporates Indigenous bodies as a means to disrupt the history of discovery and reconfigures the colonial history of Columbus's

arrival on the shores of San Salvador in 1492. This performative video work incorporates resistance strategies of subversion, and furthermore powerfully and provocatively employs narrative as a means to destabilize the concepts of “discovery” and “conquest.” In the opening scene of the Red Paper, for example, which sets the stage for the rest of the film, the viewer meets Louis and Young Man, two Aboriginal actors dressed in Renaissance European fashions (fig. 95). The two men describe the brutal, uncivilized, savage, and barbaric behaviours of the invaders.


meaning Europeans. Claxton’s use of Aboriginal actors in conventional white-European characters exemplifies her incorporation of the tactics of inversion and unsettlement. This inversion, as highlighted by Kin-Gagnon, suggests commentary on and the subversion of the history of white actors playing Native roles in film and on the stage. The re-writing of colonial saturated histories is a deliberate act of political activism.

Claxton’s title alludes to the historic and controversial White Paper document, discussed earlier in this chapter. Her complication and displacement of so-called European discovery narratives is further pushed by the title, as it was the official response to the White Paper policy of

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171 Gagnon, Other Conundrums, 37.
1969 by the Indian Association of Alberta, written by principle writer Harold Cardinal. In the federal government’s White Paper, Pierre Trudeau and Indian Affairs minister, Jean Chretian, proposed a “just society” for Indians, conceived as a way to incorporate Aboriginal peoples more fully into Canada society. The document proposed ending recognition of special status for Indians, dismantling the Department of Indian Affairs and the Indian Act, and abolishing treaties with Aboriginal peoples. Trudeau’s argument for this Aboriginal policy was that treaties were something only signed between sovereign nations—and he did not recognize Indigenous nations as sovereign. Jackie Wolfe-Keddie states, “The response from the First Nations was swift, unequivocal and unanimously negative,” exemplified in Cardinal’s *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada’s Indians*, “a treatise quickly dubbed the ‘Red Paper.’” In her essay “Listening and Heeding: Challenges of Restructuring the Relationship Between Aboriginal Peoples and Canada,” Wolfe-Keddie’s uses the Red Paper and White Paper debate to exemplify ongoing challenges and colonial legacies in the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government (and Canadian public). Wolfe-Keddie writes,

> The inability or unwillingness of Canadian politicians and the Canadian public to maintain concern for Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal issues long enough to come to understand them and to commit to substantive structural changes in relationships (relationships that continue to be destructive to Aboriginal society and are a recurring embarrassment for Canadian society) is not new. It is a continuing reality experienced by generations of Aboriginal peoples in Canada as they seek to gain sustained attention from Canadians and Canadian politicians—and fail repeatedly.¹⁷³

This observation of Canadian indifference of Aboriginal issues is mirrored in Claxton’s white actor’s words, “I did not know.” These highlight the historic and contemporary Canadian consciousness and the all-too-familiar response of settler society to exposure of colonial atrocities on Indigenous peoples. The actor’s words act as the contemporary settler society’s plea for absolution of guilt due to ignorance of colonial histories and Indigenous experiences. But in truth, histories of colonization are unsettling to those implicated by their settler heritage. Claxton’s inclusion of the white actor and his words then alludes to an even more unsettling phenomena in settler-Canadian history: the fact that settlers “did not and do not want to know.” The Red Paper


and other events of the 1960s, such as the Indians of Canada Pavilion at Expo 67, created opportunities for Indigenous perspectives to be witnessed by settler society.

In Cardinal’s “Red Paper” he outlines the ongoing oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and how Canada’s policies of assimilation undermined legal treaty rights and ongoing promises to Aboriginal people. The White Paper and subsequent responses by Indigenous leaders and other collective and individual Indigenous voices marked a pivotal moment in the mobilization of Indigenous social movement and activism in Canada. Cardinals’ words inspired Indigenous social action in the 1970s and into recent decades. Claxton’s naming of her work *The Red Paper* illuminates her own positioning as a political activist and connects her video work to a history of Indigenous political response. Although this work does not reference specifically the White Paper or Red Paper, the narrative of the work satirizes Eurocentric (mis)understandings of Indigenous peoples and cultures, offering a revisionist history of colonization. Her video points out the paternalistic actions of non-Indigenous society towards Indigenous peoples. Claxton, like Cardinal, is displacing dominant and erroneous narratives of Aboriginal peoples by inserting her own perspectives delivered by Indigenous actors. The fact that *The Red Paper* has no clear historical period also possibly illuminates Claxton’s intended message of the legacies of colonization and current oppressions by the state of Canada. Monika Kin-Gagnon, in her article on Claxton’s video works, “Worldviews in Collision: The video work of Dana Claxton,” writes that “*The Red Paper* offers the complexities of these negotiations between historical representation, politics, and aesthetic genres in its forays with theatrical stagings of reversal and parody. In this regards, *The Red Paper* is exemplary of how the aesthetic and political are entwined.”174

Her experimental film of scenes of dramatic action and dialogue is composed of episodes staged in three locations: the fortress halls, the priest’s chambers, and a banquet room. Claxton’s chosen aesthetic of fragmented scenes and a non-narrative approach can be argued as a critique of the writing of history—exposing the production, approach, and strategies of colonial and settler-history writing. In other words, colonial history writing is ostensibly an account of realistic truths, and in juxtaposition Claxton’s visual aesthetic is non-realistic and more exploratory.175 In many ways, *The Red Paper* reveals many of the legitimating tactics of colonization and subsequent settlement (such as Christianization) that the Indian Act—evidence of Indigenous persistence and treaty and land rights in Canada—ultimately undermines. This highlights one of the many political

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174 Gagnon, *Other Conundrums*, 36.
175 Ibid., 38.
and nationalistic reasons behind the proposed White Paper: it was the ultimate assimilation plan. Experimental and non-narrative, this film’s aesthetic and conceptual effect is achieved through the incorporation of both historic and contemporary signifiers. The costumes an theatrical language, for example, were accompanied by a broadcast of TV news on a 1990s Watchman wrist screen. What this conveys, argues Kin-Gagnon, is “an insistence that colonialism’s effects continue to rupture the present.” In other words, The Red Paper’s lack of historical specificity elucidates the concept that history is present, and furthermore that colonization in North America is not in the past, but instead is a living (and current) history.

**We Are All Treaty People!**

*Treaty Card* is performative web-based work produced by Cheryl L’Hirondelle that addresses the reality that all peoples living in Canada, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are treaty peoples. The piece asks the audience to question their treaty-status and their location on Indigenous lands (fig. 96). Suggesting that all Canadians are treaty peoples asserts many controversial ideas: for example, if a treaty can only be signed by two sovereign nations, then why does the Nation-state of Canada not recognize Indigenous nations as sovereign? As L’Hirondelle states, “[W]hen the treaties were signed it was between a chief on behalf of the people and a representative of the queen on behalf of her people. Since the treaties were made between at least two parties, then both should have a card.” This performative interactive piece was originally part of the Wildfire on the Plains exhibition at the Mendel Art Gallery in 2003 as a PERL-based beta version. As curator Morgan Wood states in her catalogue essay, “Wildfire on the Plains,” “This online work is an attempt to address relations between natives & non-natives by re-examining the intent, issue and details of the Canadian Government’s ‘Certificate of Indian Status’. With this project, anyone can log-in and create their own Treaty Card, or modify the details on their already existing card to better represent their relationship to land and state.”

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176 Gagnon, *Other Conundrums*, 37.
177 Ibid.
L’Hirondelle clearly states her intentions for this work,

this site is an attempt to re-dress current relations between natives & non-natives by re-examining the intent, issue and details of the canadian government's 'certificate of indian status' which is more commonly known as “treaty card” in mainly the plains on the land base now called canada.

today “treaty indians” are the only holders of the card which is commonly known to be a carry-over from the reserve pass system whereby indian people living on reserves were not allowed to leave (to hunt & gather, visit relatives or carry out business) unless the indian agent who also controlled food rations would issue this pass. perhaps this is why the card is a canadian government issue and doesn't acknowledge the original treaty agreement as much as it still attempts to control the identity & movement of the card holder by branding all “…is an indian within the meaning of the indian act, chapter 27, statutes of canada . . . “ and has efficiently trained card holders to present as a regular part of daily interaction (and
sadly even used to boast as some elevated form of government certification).

_Treaty Card_ is arguably a performative act of decolonization, whereby all living in the territories now known as Canada must carry a “treaty card” or “status card.” The artist includes directions on how to make your own card. On her website or in the gallery space, the audience member can follow step by step instructions. For example, L’Hirondelle states,

for current holders: this version will enable you to now provide more relevant information as it pertains to your landbase (ie. original names in your language, & hopefully a more flattering photo of yourself)

for metis, non-status: this version allows you to finally have your own personal facsimile of the gov't issue (if you've been feeling left out of the club). If you are part of a “surrendered” band and/or are under re-entitledment this can be added in the place of origin/birth field.

for non-natives: never let the words “_i wish I had a treaty card_” pass your lips again—sign up today (refer to use).

L’Hirondelle’s directions for non-Indigenous participants provides an opportunity to address and redress Indigenous treaty rights that, in many cases, are not upheld by governments. L’Hirondelle’s asks the participants of her performative project who are non-Indigenous to realize the implications of treaty-cards, meaning Indian Status cards, with regard to surveillance and identification. She states,

this is intended for first time non-native card holders only:

the purpose of the “treaty card” has been to track the movement ie. spending patterns, prescription drug use, doctor & dentists’ care, police contact, social services use etc. and institutionalise the identity of “_... indians within the meaning of the indian act, chapter 27, statutes of canada._”

L’Hirondelle then includes an action list for her non-Indigenous participants that reveals the potential ways Indigenous bodies are mediated, controlled, and marginalized by the state. Her list also represents the numbering of Aboriginal peoples—locating the racist histories of numbering Indigenous peoples, such as Inuit tags and the residential schools experience of becoming nameless numbers. She writes,

if you have created your own card, or are about to, please consider taking action

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and do all or some of the following:

after you've printed the card (colour inkjet works best), cut around edge of card, fold in half and insert into a plastic sleeve and:

carry this card in your wallet, purse or on your body as your primary form of identification - memorize the registry number & be prepared to quote it by stating”my treaty number is _____” (refer to registry # on front of card) - present it whenever identification is requested, present it when you purchase anything - present it when you visit the doctors', dentists' or any other government subsidized health practitioner - present it when visiting any government agency - present it if stopped by the police or rcmp - most importantly, take note of how it feels always have to account for your identity - show off to your friends by stating that you now finally have “your very own treaty card” - refer to yourself as being 'treaty' above any other type of self identification

This web-based project was incorporated into the 2005 ImagineNative Film festival’s New Media programming and has been exhibited in many spaces since 2004. I incorporate it into my discussion of Indigenous women and social activism and performance because of her instructions. She invites her audience to participate by creating their own treaty card and to then carry this card with them on their bodies. She is also alluding to the already card carrying Indigenous bodies that, due to the nature of colonial treaties, are the ones considered Treaty-People. These have had their bodies controlled, monitored, racialized, and oppressed due to treaties and legislations defining their identities as Indian. *Treaty Card* is an attempt to address relations between Native and non-Native people living on the land known as Canada by re-examining the intent, issue and details of the Canadian Government's “Certificate of Indian Status.” With this PHP-driven database project, anyone can login and create their own Treaty Card, or modify the details on their already existing card to better represent their identity and relationship to land and state. Judy Iseke-Barnes and Deborah Danard argue in relation to L’Hirondelle’s Treaty Card project,

This inter-active production allows site visitors to create their own Treaty cards or modify the details on their already-existing cards to better represent their identities. This may be an empowering activity for Indians who have been issued Treaty cards as a carry-over from the reserve pass system where by Indian people living on reserves were not allowed to leave (to hunt and gather, visit relatives or carryout business) unless the Indian agent who also controlled food rations would issue this

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180 L’Hirondelle, *Treaty Card*.
Iseke-Barnes and Danard suggest that the business of registering “status” Indians is a complicated and tedious law, which is considered a form of apartheid in Canada. L’Hirondelle’s work creates a space for considering the issues of treaty cards and the history of Indian status. This work also raises the history of exclusion of status, specifically, of the gendered process whereby some Aboriginal women were refused status or lost their status due to marrying outside their bands or white men. Iseke-Barnes and Danard state in relation to the performance,

Creating a treaty card may also be important to those who have been denied these cards, such as status women who married (before 1988) non-Indian/non status men and who were required to leave their on-reserve community and were no longer registered as status Indians. Their children were also excluded. Some people consider the Canadian Indian Act registry to be numerical genocide and that within 25 to 70 years many reserves will have no registered members and therefore no one to claim their inherent rights, including land claim settlements.

The act of creating a treaty card on this website constitutes both contemporary and retroactive resistance to historical and ongoing colonial suppression experienced by Indigenous peoples. It provides the opportunity to consider what classifications (internal and external) constitute being “an Indian within the meaning of the Indian act, chapter 27, statutes of Canada.” This work generates conversations and questions about individual and collective identities within the territories of Indigenous nations occupied by the nation of Canada.

**Speaking to Their Mother: Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan**

*Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* (1991) (fig. 97) is a performance that demonstrates Rebecca Belmore’s use of Indigenous oratory in her art practice for political activism. It is a site of exchange and communication. Belmore’s *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan* exemplifies the intrinsic relationship between Indigenous socio-political and cultural frameworks, knowledge and identities with land. This performance employs a beautiful and enormous wooden megaphone reminiscent of birch-bark cones used for moose calling in Northern Ontario. This communal performance is arguably in response to the mass media

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185 Rickard, “Rebecca Belmore,” 69.
coverage of the 1990 Oka confrontation that silenced Indigenous voices. The performance moved to various locations across Canada addressing mother earth, acting in continuum as a collective story. Belmore explains her feelings of anger and frustration after the Oka Crisis and how, in essence, Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan was her way of responding to the violence (and perhaps the ongoing struggles for Indigenous land rights). She also describes, in retrospect, a memory from the performance that acutely elucidates the importance of the performance tour for both artist and audience as Aboriginal people:

Now I can see myself as that younger artist who needed to temper the personal turmoil that she felt because of what had gone down and to recognize that the political landscape in the country had shifted for Aboriginal people. This is what led me to imagine building a large megaphone with the idea of asking Aboriginal people to speak through it and directly to the earth. I recall that at one of the sites where we installed the artwork, a woman who identified herself as a young mother stated that she did not find this way of addressing the earth (speaking through the megaphone) any different than our traditional ceremonies. In retrospect, the concept for this artwork was motivated by my own need to hear our voices on the land, to recall this land as our audience—one that is listening.

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186 Townsend-Gault, “Rebecca Belmore,” 118.
This giant megaphone negotiated and opened up spaces for Aboriginal peoples to voice their experiences. Jolene Rickard suggests that this piece “created a site for the recognition of the historical erasure of Aboriginal voices, and empowered Aboriginal people to speak to all of their relations.”

_Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan_ was constructed in Banff in 1991 for the exhibition Between Views and Points of View at the Walter Phillips Gallery, and in 1992 it toured across Canada to Native communities. Curator Daina Augaitas describes the first performance in Banff: “On July 27, 1991, over sixty people walked in a procession to a mountain meadow in Banff National Park where Aboriginal speakers, invited by the artist, addressed the land and their relationship to it by speaking into the sculptural device and having their voices echo across the landscape.” Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan was a series of performances, within which Belmore approached the megaphone and spoke first, addressing her personal words to mother earth. At Banff, Belmore’s first words were the following:

> My heart is beating like a small drum, and I hope that you mother earth can feel it. Someday I will speak to you in my language. I have watched my grandmother live very close to you, my mother the same. I have watched my grandmother show respect for all that you have given her … Although I went away and left a certain kind of closeness to you, I have gone in a kind of circle. I think I am coming back to understanding where I come from …

In 1992, Belmore, Florene Belmore, and Michel Beynon travelled to various sites and communities in Canada. Belmore took the work to reserve, urban and small town locations, which illustrates, the presence of Aboriginal people across Canada and the many different realities of Indigenous peoples (fig. 98). Belmore also recalls the tour and describes how each performance started and how she organized the tour:

> To give you a sense of how the work unfolded, I will briefly describe how I recall some of the gathering that took place. It is important to relate that events were organized by establishing a relationship with a local person who acted as our community liaison who could choose the site and organize and promote their local gathering. Essentially, we were simply moving the art object from one site to the next. Although I was specifically interested in taking this artwork into the Aboriginal world, everyone was welcome to participate and to speak. Each gathering began with me approaching and using the megaphone. I did this as a way of showing people how the object functioned. I recall that my words always felt hesitant. I was simply there to offer the use of the artwork and then I would walk away and wait for someone to accept. In retrospect, I was impressed with the

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188 Rickard, “Rebecca Belmore,” 69.
190 Ibid., 46.
openness of the individuals who came forward to activate my art idea with their voice, and with the depth of what was spoken by the many people who shared their words through this visually absurd but beautiful object.\textsuperscript{191}

![Figure 98: Rebecca Belmore, Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother, Performance still. Accessed March 6, 2011. http://www.rebeccabelmore.com/exhibit/Speaking-to-Their-Mother.html.](image)

As Dot Tuer notes, this performative work/megaphone “served as a flashpoint of protest and storytelling in different locations across Canada from Banff National Park to the prime minister’s Sussex Drive residence to a northern Saskatchewan logging blockade.”\textsuperscript{192} *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan: Speaking to Their Mother* is a performance that created a site for gathering and served to communicate greater awareness of Aboriginal issues, assert political protest and actions, and instigate the act of listening. This megaphone-based performance functioned as the apparatus for sharing and created sites for listening to Indigenous voices. As Belmore describes it, “The art object became merely a function tool; the essence of the piece was the voice and its reverberation across the land. Strategically, I was consciously hoping to remind listeners that our Aboriginal histories are carried by our original languages and are directly connected to the land.”\textsuperscript{193} Clive Robertson argues “that the large wooden megaphone conceptually was designed as a device to ‘break the windows of government on Parliament Hill—because they don’t listen;’ (fig. 99) as

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{192} Dot Tuer, “Performing Memory: The Art of Storytelling in the Work of Rebecca Belmore,” in *Mining the Media Archive* (Toronto: YYZ Book, 2005), 171.
\textsuperscript{193} Augaitis and Belmore, “Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan,” 42.
well the sculpture became a constructive technology for reconnecting with family and community.”

In 1996, it was included as part of the formal Aboriginal People’s Protest held in Ottawa over the exclusion of their representatives from the First Ministers Conference. As noted by Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Belmore’s megaphone enabled the members of the Assembly of First Nations “to voice their anger … outside the Prime Minster’s official residence during the conference dinner.” In regards to the inclusion of her art at an official political protest, Belmore comments, “Perhaps I have moved this artwork into a different place by allowing it to enter into an official political realm. Hopefully, it insists and continues to echo: we are of this land.”


The history of Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan brings forward Indigenous cultural knowledge and understanding and also exemplifies Indigenous cultural continuance and connections to place and land. This performance works in relation to the history of Indigenous performance and the performance of Indigenous histories, performed orally as lessons and as means for community to remember its histories, experiences, and ancestors. Belmore’s description of the subsequent tour reveals her intentions behind the performative project and some of the experiences that happened at the sites of performance. I include an extensive excerpt from Augaitis and Belmore’s conversation, without interruption or interjection, as a site for listening (reading) the artist’s voice. She replied to Augaitis’ question of “How did the work continue after Banff” with the following:

194 Clive Robertson, Policy Matters: Administrations of Art and Culture (Toronto: YYZ, 2006), 175.
195 Townsend-Gault, “Rebecca Belmore,” 118.
We started the 1992 tour of the work in Ottawa, on Parliament Hill, where the voice echoed off the American embassy that was located across the street. It made me think about the border between the two countries and how it divides many reserve communities located in its midst. It was significant to begin in the nation’s capital, during a time when constitutional talks were well under way. In fact, during our gathering, two politicians climbed up the steps and had to walk by the megaphone. I invited both to speak by asking them if they would like to speak to our Mother, gesturing toward and meaning the earth. One of the politicians, Joe Clark, who was the constitutional minister at that time, complied. The other political figure, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, declined. It was important to start our tour on the front steps of parliament; it gave the beginning of journey a hard edge.

We then took the megaphone to Kanestake and installed it at their second powwow, two summers after the armed standoff. It stood pointed towards the golf-course, the very piece of land that triggered the “Oka Crisis.” I felt that here the artwork was overwhelmed by the site itself. I recall how remarkable it was to just listen to the drum and the voices of the singers while watching golfers go about their game on the other side of the fence. The megaphone here became a quieted symbol, a visual reminder of all the protests that took place in this country during the hot summer of 1990.

The next site was Halifax, Nova Scotia, where the megaphone was carried from the Mi’kmaw Native Friendship Centre to the top of the Citadel Hill and the voices echoed off the city below on a cool misty morning. We returned to the Mi’kmaq Native Friendship centre afterwards for a feast of lobster and fish.

We then drove it to Thunder Bay. It was placed on Mount McKay, which is a tourist site located on the Fort William First Nation. Here it overlooked a celebrated view of Lake Superior. One of the speakers at the gathering was a six-month-old baby whose parents held the microphone mechanism to their child’s mouth. To the amazement of all who were gathered, the baby made a sound, recognized its own echoing voice and then proceeded to experiment with a variety of vocal utterances. This event took a devastating turn during our time on the mountain when a man who was climbing on the rocky cliff, high above our gathering place, tragically fell to his death. This artwork was intended to create a sense of possibility, but here it was especially challenged by intervening realities—in fact, by nature itself.

In Winnipeg, the gathering was held in the downtown park where the Red and the Assinaboine Rivers meet, opposite St. Boniface Cathedral, where Louis Riel, a Metis leader accused of and executed for high treason, is laid to rest. Here our local community organizer had arranged for a drum group to begin the gathering with an honour song. People began to speak, their voices aimed out and across the river. Angry passers-by actually heckled us at this particular site. It made me think about Louis Riel’s much-quoted words about how art has the potential to move people: “My people will sleep for 100 years and when they wake, it will be the artists who give them back their spirit.”
The megaphone engaged with a real protest site that summer. This was a logging blockade north of Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, that was organized by a group of Cree elders to protest the clear-cutting of the land in their territory. Here, the megaphone was installed for a period of four days. Because of its extended stay, people became very comfortable with this strange but familiar symbol. It was used as a means to amplify traditional fiddle music in the early evenings beside a campfire. On one afternoon during a media visit by the CBC television magazine program W5, some of the elders in the camp who were not the official protest spokespersons chose to speak through the megaphone instead of talking directly to the cameras. For me, this was a subversive act, where the elders spoke directly to the land that they were trying to defend. This oversized object that has the quality and beauty of a musical instrument had found its place and did its work.

This performance employs a beautiful and enormous wooden megaphone; it has moved to various locations across Canada addressing Mother Earth, acting in continuum as a collective story. The megaphone recently returned to Ottawa, as part of the National Gallery of Canada’s Caught in the Act: The Viewer As Performer exhibition (2008-2009), where the megaphone was placed outside the gallery space, and in the main atrium facing Parliament Hill. Witnessing the location of the piece and having the opportunity to speak into the enormous megaphone over tens years after its first performance was powerful.

Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan claims a decolonized space for the sharing of multiple Aboriginal voices. This performance can be seen as a tool to talk to the land and to talk back to colonial history and legacies. It also offers the opportunity to share stories—participating in Indigenous political and cultural movement towards sovereignty. The work is also about creating a space to share Indigenous lived experiences, in other words, of ‘being’ Indigenous. Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan offered a platform for personal voices to be vocalized, voices that throughout the processes of colonization had been marginalized and muted. Townsend-Gault discusses how in Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan, the lyrical and political negotiate equal roles in

197 In 1996 it was included as part of the formal Aboriginal People’s Protest held in Ottawa due to the exclusion of their representatives from the First Ministers Conference. Noted by Townsend-Gault, Belmore’s megaphone enabled the members of the Assembly of First Nations “to voice their anger…outside the Prime Minster’s official residence during the conference dinner.” In regards to the inclusion of her art at an official political protest, Belmore comments, “Perhaps I have moved this artwork into a different place by allowing it to enter into an official political realm. Hopefully, it insists and continues to echo: we are of this land.” Townsend-Gault, “Rebecca Belmore,” 118.
198 It was first shown just outside the Banff Centre of Fine Arts. She invited thirteen Aboriginal people to address the earth directly. Lubicon Cree Chief Bernard Ominayak’s powerful call to Mother-earth set the stage. He said “with a call for support and unity, an invitation to ‘join the circle’ in the political struggle of the First Nations to prevent the expropriation and destruction of the land.” Townsend-Gault, “Rebecca Belmore,” 118.
giving voice to others, while also enabling Belmore to find hers. Belmore’s work thus creates an indigenized space for contemporary Aboriginal stories and voices to be heard.

The words spoken by several of the Aboriginal people invited by Belmore for the first performance in 1991 were published by the Walter Phillips Gallery catalogue, Between Views and Points of View. The words spoken and shared in the performance addressed issues of land, sovereignty, cultural survival, and political resistance. Witnesses to the eleven performances carry with them the words shared and bore witness to the self-determined perspectives of those who spoke to mother earth. As a performative act, I conclude this section with the words of those who participated in Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan, those who, with Rebecca Belmore, became active agents of performative political and cultural force. Chief John Snow, Stoney, Alberta proclaimed:

> It is an honour for me to be here on this very special occasion, on this joyous occasion in recognizing a great achievement in the work of art created by one of our sisters, Rebecca Belmore … She has created an opportunity to remind us, so we could remember our mother earth, and to speak with our mother, our brothers and sisters and the whole of creation. This megaphone is symbolic of speaking with one voice …

Lakota Sioux artist, Brad Lee Larocque spoke of the connections between contemporary politics, colonization and land rights. The words he shared proclaimed the ongoing struggles of Indigenous individuals and communities and the presence of racism in Canada:

> There’s lots of frustration, for me personally lots of anger, for a lot of people there is a lot of anger. We lost generations and generations of magic, of medicine, of understanding. Now the time comes when we are trying to get those things back, there is a barricade up there, there is a government who wears masks, we try to fight them off, we get charged. We get thrown into their system that represses, suppresses, kills, maims, and mutilates the spirit of children, and they call us the savages, they call us the militants, refer to us as warriors … We do not have a lot of time left. But all the time we do have left, we have to fight for that next minute, for the next second, for the next heartbeat, and that is to see what we are seeing today, that is you earth mother …

Lyle Morriseau (Anishinabe, Manitoba) also made a political statement, similar to Larocque’s, of resistance and the necessity of continued mobilization and protest for Indigenous rights and land rights:

> It troubles me to see that this society finds it so acceptable to institutionalize individuals who have defended the earth … Unless we, as a people, take the

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199 Ibid., 118.
responsibility seriously, to defend the earth and to stop the injustices, then we too
are guilty of what is being done to her….

*Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan* is a communal performance, one that acknowledges the
significance of oral traditions and ritual gatherings of peoples through its facilitation of
metaphorical and literal amplifications of First Nations voices. When a voice speaks into the
megaphone, an echo can be heard—in Tuer’s words, “as the earth returned words scattered in the
wind back to the speaker, stories were embedded in the landscape.” This is a performative act for
the decolonizing of the colonial landscape and for the embodied reclaiming of Indigenous lands and
territories.

**Environmental Violence and Resistance: For Dudley**

A fundamental issue that encompasses and informs Indigenous social movements and Indigenous
activism is the struggle for land rights. In this section, I explore Belmore’s commemorative
performance *For Dudley* to reveal the political role performance art plays in raising awareness
about ongoing environmental and physical violence Indigenous peoples and territories face in the
nation state of Canada. Indigenous peoples’ resistance to colonization is rooted in the invasion and
occupation of North American land. These violent resistance movements started with contact
between Indigenous peoples and European colonizers in the 15th century, and continue today. In
this tradition of resistance, *For Dudley* performatively actualizes and remembers the 1995 events at
Ipperwash Provincial Park, the site of a sacred Aboriginal burial ground. Oka represents the
contemporary struggle for land (land, in settler terms, as resources and capital). In an interview with
Daina Augaitas and Rebecca Belmore about *Ayumee-aawach Oomama-mowan*, Belmore responded
to a question about the early 1990s and the impetus behind this creation:

> When I think back to the early nineties in this country, I think “Oka Crisis.” That
was the a burning issue for me, not as an artist but as an Anishinabe person who
was deeply affected by the fact that the Canadian government turned its military
power against the Mohawk people. The question of identity in the Canadian art
world was perhaps heightened by this potent political situation that challenged the
notion of Canada as a peaceful, peacekeeping country. You and I first met not long
after the crisis had calmed, the guns were put down and the tanks were taken away.
I recall sitting across from you over coffee in a Toronto café and thinking that your
invitation to make a new artwork was an opportunity for me to address this strong

201 Ibid., 45.
203 Tuer, “Performing Memory,” 171.
sense of unease and racial tension between Aboriginal people and the Canadian public.  

The blockade at Ipperwash and death of Dudley George represent a violent stand-off between the Ontario Provincial Police and Aboriginal peoples, in this case the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. This land dispute in this case goes back to 1942, during the War Measures Act, which expropriated land of the Stony Point Nation for the building of a military camp, Camp Ipperwash. After World War II, however, the land was not returned as promised. Reminiscent of other land disputes, such as Oka and Caledonia, the Ipperwash dispute results from the historic struggle over Indigenous lands between governments and Aboriginal peoples.

The ongoing struggle for land by Indigenous nations is filled with explicit examples of broken treaties and promises by the federal government. The Stony Point First Nations began in 1993 to move back onto their land, expropriated by the government fifty years earlier. The barricades at nearby Ipperwash Provincial Park were organized to expose this history and protest their land claim as well as to protect the destruction of the burial ground. Among the thirty protesters was Dudley George. The events that occurred during this organized and nonviolent blockade resulted in a provincial inquiry into the murder of Dudley George by the OPP. As reported by the press, the inquiry findings by Justice Sidney Liden ruled in May 2007, twelve years after the murder, that the OPP, the government of former Ontario premier Mike Harris, and the federal government all bear responsibility for events that led to his death.  

The inquiry concluded that the Stony Point First Nations protestors were unarmed and nonviolent and that the OPP moved in with unnecessary force.

The night raid of 6 September 1995, that resulted in the murder of Dudley George has many accounts. Sgt. Kenneth Deane of the OPP has been convicted of criminal negligence causing death. The original land claim was finally resolved in 1998, with the lands occupied by the military camp returned to the First Nations. Although the Indigenous social mobilization that followed George’s death demanded an official inquiry into his death, the provincial government at that time

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204 Augaitis and Belmore, “Ayum-ee-aawach Oomama-mowan,” 41.
206 The original land claim - the reason protesters occupied Ipperwash Park in the first place - was settled in 1998. Under the $26-million agreement, the land occupied by the former military installation was to be cleaned up and returned to the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. As well, every member of the band was to receive between $150,000 and $400,000 in compensation. On 2 October 2003, George’s family dropped a lawsuit against Harris after reaching a settlement with the Ontario Provincial Police. The agreement included a $100,000 payment for George’s family. Ibid.
refused, stating officially that it had no relationship with the actions of the OPP that day. However, on 12 November 2003, during the first days of the new Liberal government under Dalton McGuinty, a public inquiry into Dudley George’s death was officially announced. From 20 April 2004, to August 2008, the inquiry heard over one hundred witnesses. The systemic racism entrenched within the OPP and the Provincial government were exposed in a very public arena with extensive media coverage. One of the major allegations that surfaced revealing Canadian society’s intolerance of Indigenous land issues and racism towards Indigenous peoples came from former attorney general Charles Harnick in November 2005. In a CBC news article Harnick is noted as having “testified that former premier Mike Harris said ‘I want the fucking Indians out of the park,’ during a high level meeting about the Ipperwash occupation just hours before the fatal shooting of Dudley George. When Harris appeared at the inquiry in February 2006, he denied using that language.” This information supports the OPP’s claim that the then-premier Mike Harris issued the go-ahead order for the police to rush the barricades. Eight years after Dudley George’s murder by the OPP, justice for the George family and Stony Point First Nations finally came in legal terms. However, the history of violence against Indigenous peoples and brutalities against Indigenous bodies continues, as we’ve seen in relation to the Stolen Sisters report. The loss of Dudley George will never be reconciled by any public inquiry.

On August 8, 1997, at Sympton Hall, Belmore performed a piece that honoured Dudley George’s life, his social action of protest, and that exposed his brutal murder by the OPP, which was supported by the then provincial government. Prior to the inquiry and the legal justice that came out of Indigenous social action, Rebecca Belmore produced *For Dudley* in 1997 for the Teratoid Cabaret at the 7a*11d International Performance Art Festival in Toronto. In Belmore’s performance, she incorporates a large poplar tree, an electric kettle, a tea setting, a large butcher knife, and two long ropes that are attached and dangled from the ceiling. Belmore wears a long flowing red dress with a white slip underneath. This performance is described as being drawn from events and stories of George’s life. One aspect, that Belmore incorporates, was that during the land dispute the police claimed George was holding a gun, in fact, he was holding a stick. George was killed.

In *For Dudley*, Belmore enters holding the freshly cut poplar tree as a flag. She places the tree on the picnic table, which is one of the focal features of her performance space. Belmore then proceeds to skin the tree, removing the branches and the bark, until it becomes a pole. She places

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207 Ibid.
the pole horizontally on the hanging ropes and then removes her dress and slip. She ties them to the pole, transforming them into a banner like screen. In that moment, an image of Dudley George is projected onto the dress-slip screen with the song *Bang Bang* by Sonny and Cher playing in the background (which plays throughout the performance). During Belmore’s skinning of the tree an electric kettle boils. Once George’s projected photograph claims the space, Belmore sits at the picnic table, naked, and makes a cup of tea in solitude. *For Dudley* incorporates many symbolic and embodied acts of healing, protest, and remembrance, through Belmore’s performance materials and her body’s actions. She laboriously skins the poplar tree, a species of tree very common in the Ipperwash region. Her physical actions create a space for mourning and grieving, both over the death of George and over the ongoing struggles for land rights by Indigenous peoples across Canada. Her incorporation of the picnic table obviously references provincial park grounds and the site of George’s murder. Belmore’s performative acts were a dedication to Dudley George, and to bring awareness to his murder. She presented the suffering of George, his family, and the Stony Point nation through her body and her actions of stripping the tree and herself. As Charlotte Townsend-Gault suggests, Belmore

made her body the surrogate for others' suffering. This is also the tradition worked since the late 1960s by performance artists such as Marina Abramovic and Carolee Schneeman. In a performance dedicated to the young native man Dudley George, whose death in the stand-off at Ipperwash remains unresolved, Belmore wore a sweeping red dress and stripped a young tree of its leaves and twigs, systematically dismembering it with her own hands. Then she stripped herself naked.²⁰⁸

In Belmore’s performances, “Art shades into activism” — *For Dudley* reflects this, foregrounding the artist’s use of the performative act as a force and recourse to gather witnesses of ongoing human rights violations against Indigenous bodies and lands.

**Shelley Niro: The Shirt**

Shelley Niro’s video *The Shirt* (2003, NGC Collection), is an example of Indigenous activism in the arts and the use of the Indigenous body to performatively protest Aboriginal issues, such as land rights, genocide, ethnocide, and ongoing settler indifference (fig. 64). In this performative video work, frames of renowned Native North American photographer Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie wearing a white t-shirt and American flag bandana standing in a grassy North American landscape are

²⁰⁸ Townsend-Gault, “Have We Ever Been Good?” 13.
interspaced with scenes of the Grand River. The viewer then encounters a tough-looking Aboriginal woman in aviator sunglasses and jeans. The narrative of the short video is presented to the viewer through screened text—sentences telling the story of colonization—incorporated onto the t-shirt on the body of Tsinhnahjinnie, this Aboriginal woman who stands strong asserting her agency and self-determination in defiance of colonialism and its legacies on the contemporary realities of Aboriginal peoples. Several different messages as t-shirt slogans reveal histories of colonialism in North America. Printed in bold black ink, the first shirt reads, “My ancestors were annihilated exterminated murdered and massacred” (fig. 100). In the next frame the text reads, “They were lied to cheated tricked and deceived,” (fig. 101) and this is followed by, “Attempts were made to assimilate colonize enslave and displace them” (fig. 102). And finally: “And all I get is this shirt” (fig. 103) Niro uses Tsinhnahjinnie’s body to assert Indigenous resistance and survivance. She proclaims Indigenous sovereignty over North

Figure 100: Shelley Niro, The Shirt, Video-Still, 2003.

American land by placing her body on the land and showing the connections between Indigenous identities, cultures, and land. In the concluding scene of *The Shirt*, Tsinhnahjinnie is stripped of her t-shirt (fig. 104) and her spot is appropriated by a white woman, who stands in place of the Aboriginal woman in the North American landscape (fig. 105). This scene comments on
continued Euro-American/Canadian colonization and cultural appropriations of Aboriginal knowledge, lands, and cultures. These concluding frames along with the rest of the 5:55-minute video represent what The Shirt challenges—the silencings of colonial histories and neo-colonial experiences—and assert Indigenous perspectives. This brutal and ironic message speaks of the history of oppression that Indigenous peoples have experienced in North America and globally. Niro’s use of the t-shirt asserts appropriation by settler society of Indigenous cultures, and more significantly the colonial occupation of Indigenous lands. It serves as a reminder of colonial histories, which are commonly forgotten within to structures of nation-states and nationalist narratives. Her inclusion of the white-settler woman, who seems unaware that she is wearing a stolen t-shirt, references settler consciousness—the ability of settler society to not engage with the politics of Indigenous peoples. The Shirt vocalizes such erasures and is a politically potent assertion of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination over Indigenous minds, bodies, and lands. Niro’s act of political protest alludes to ongoing Indigenous struggles over Indigenous land rights and treaty rights. It also is an assertion of Indigenous survival and persistence.

**A Site for Gathering: Powwow as a Site for Indigenous Activism and Cultural Resistance**

In this final section, I explore the development of pan-Indigenous powwow in relation to Indigenous activism in North America. Here, I explore the connections between powwow and Indigenous activist movements such as AIM, connecting Indigenous traditions of performance to Indigenous activism and cultural continuance. For my brief analysis of pan-Indigenous powwow in North America, I draw on the work of Gail Guthrie Valaskakis and expand on her discussion in her chapter, “Dance Me Inside: Pow Wow and Being Indian.” In this, I extrapolate the connections between activism, performance, and cultural continuity and continuance in relation to Indigenous peoples’ survival of colonization and assimilation in North America. My discussion does not offer a complete history of powwow, nor does it cover its multifaceted meanings for Indigenous peoples across North America. Nor does it approach the range of discussions and arguments relating to powwow and its multifaceted implications for Indigenous identity. However, my discussion of powwow in the context of resistance and cultural continuity and continuance offers one analysis of the many meanings of this complex site of Indigenous identity, agency, autonomy, and subjectivities. My analysis means not to isolate powwow within the political and historic, but to highlight its relationships to Indigenous resistance and political activism. In this way, it is imperative to acknowledge the significance and empowerment of powwow for Indigenous
participants and for local and transnational Indigenous community, and to acknowledge my own limitations in this discussion as a non-Indigenous scholar. It is for this reason that I include perspectives offered by Indigenous writers and powwow dancers, such as Valaskakis, who writes, “For Indians, pow wow involves more than artistic or ethnic performance.” Catherine Wipple writes about her experiences of powwow and the connections between her spirituality and dancing:

Drums vibrate through the dirt and grass to my feet. The sun dips into the earth and the wind swirls in different direction mimicking the grass dancers. Jungling sounds from dresses mix with grasshoppers … I focus on feathers, beads, and braids all shifting in and out of focus as dancers twirl by, sometimes dipping and disappearing from my view. High pitched voices sing with rhythm of the drums, sing with the shaking of the earth as dancers move together in a circle. 210

Powwow dancer Jac Venza expresses similar experiences, “The drum talks to us to tell us who we are. In our circle, we are in touch with our world.” 211 These connections are tied to Indigenous understandings of ceremony, tradition, and cultural knowledge. Powwow for some is also about a shared sense of Indian empowerment, meaning a sense of belonging and a site for acknowledging Indigenous identities. Valaskakis writes,

For Indians, the presence of the past is built in shared stories of dominance and resistance, connection and purpose that construct a sense of common Native heritage—remembered, transformed, and imagined. In communities unified in difference, Native North Americans identify with the reconstructed commonality of pan-Indian cultural formation and struggle. The collective meanings that emerge in pan-Indianism are ambiguous and contested, but they neither dissolve tribal identities nor erase tribal differences. 212

In this sense, the site of powwow is a transnational Indigenous site for the gathering of distinct peoples from across North America for the sharing of a collective identity. This identity, as argued by Valaskakis, is defined and shaped by Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and nationhood. 213 She writes, “The sensibility of pow wow—differently felt and expressed, contested but remembered, imagined and constructed in contemporary ceremony—is articulated to collective culture and the political possibility of Native empowerment.” 214

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214 Ibid.
The reclaiming of the term powwow from Euro-centric misunderstanding and study of Indigenous cultural performance and dance also is an example of Indigenous mobilization and resistance. The first Toronto powwow was hosted during the Quintecentennial year of Columbus’ arrival to North America, participating in the counter-Indigenous celebration of five hundred years of resistance—rather than the settler-focused celebration of five hundred years of settlement. The program discusses the term powwow:

The term pow wow is a European term that has since been borrowed back by natives … “Pau wau” which means medicine man or conjurer, was misconstrued by European settlers who witnessed the healing practices of the village shaman … The word was taken to mean “the gathering of natives” that surrounded the medicine man during healing practices, rather than the individual himself.215

Currently, powwow has many meanings; however, it is commonly understood within Indigenous communities as a gathering, a meeting, or a dance. The development of contemporary powwow in the late 1940s and early 1950s reflects the changing political climate, whereby Indigenous peoples were organizing and mobilizing against colonial policies of assimilation. Powwow is a gathering of Indigenous peoples from across the North American continent to express both individual and collective Aboriginal identities. The organization of powwow also serves as an example of Indigenous resistance, as they developed during a period of ongoing government control and oppression.

As evident throughout colonial histories in North America, isolation is a tactic of colonization, away of maintaining colonial rule over Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have been isolated from each other due to bans prohibiting the gathering of groups of native peoples. They have also been isolated from other nations of Indigenous peoples as the result of government control of Aboriginal movement through pass-and-permit laws and the reserve system.216 Erika Daes writes that the aim of isolation is to generate feelings of aloneness among colonized peoples and to establish in their consciousness the idea that they are out of reach of the rest of the world. Daes argues,

the colonized society as a whole is made to think of itself as entirely alone in the universe—completely vulnerable and unprotected … one of the most destructive of the shared personal experiences of colonized peoples around the world is intellectual and spiritual loneliness. From this loneliness comes a lack of self-confidence, a fear of action, and a tendency to believe that the ravages and pain of

215 Program of the Toronto International Pow Wow 1: Pow Wow Time (Hargersville, ON: Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations, 1992), 7.
colonization are somehow deserved.\textsuperscript{217}

In this regard, the concept of a Indigenous networks, such as the pan-Indigenous social movement and the community generated from the development of the powwow, can be understood as strategies of Indigenous activism in the context of the postcolonial project. The historic isolation of Indigenous peoples lends urgency to the sites of Indigenous gatherings. The tactics of banning gathering and ceremony were very strategic acts of colonial oppression and attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples and their culture. Valaskakis explores this strategy in relation to the significance of powwow: “If anthropologists were slow to recognize the power and practice of Indians drumming and dancing, missionaries and Indian agents were not. Working in concert, they mounted forceful spiritual and legal attack on Indian religious and cultural practices that is entrenched in the memories of Native North Americans.”\textsuperscript{218}

In both the United States and Canada, legislations were passed to ban Indigenous ceremony, specifically due to the communal nature of such spiritual gathering. The ceremonial ban in Canada lasted from the 1850s to the amendment in 1951, and in United States the Ghost Dance and the Sun Dance and the Native American Church were banned in the 1890s. Valaskakis writes, “In that year, federal troops, fearing an Indian uprising related to the nativistic ideology and nationalism of the Ghost Dance Movement, killed over 300 unarmed Sioux at the Massacre of Wounded Knee, in South Dakota”\textsuperscript{219} These actions point to the fact that colonial governments recognized the power of Indigenous ceremony and dance and the mobilizing force of spiritual gathering.

Michael Greyeyes argues that powwow has its historic roots in the early 1800s. During this time, dances, regalia, and stories of the Sun Dance of the Mandan and Hidatsa, and the Grass Dance of the Omaha, the Pawnee and the Dakota were given as gifts to other Native nations.\textsuperscript{220} It is important to note that despite this period of ceremonial bans, Indigenous spirituality was not eradicated; instead, ceremonial knowledge and practices went underground. Valaskakis suggests that this mixture of social and spiritual practice moved in silence and secrecy to conceal religious

\textsuperscript{217} Daes, “Prologue,” 7.
\textsuperscript{218} Valaskakis, “Dance Me Inside,” 164.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 165. The Ghost Dance was a healing ceremony in which participants joined hands and danced in a leftward movement that linked them together with those in the next world. She reveals that the bans on the Ghost Dance and Sundance affected and extended to all Indian spiritual/religious activities. Valaskakis, “Dance Me Inside,” 166.

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performances from Indian Agents and missionaries.221 Joanne Wetelainen, in her essay “Out of Dreams and Vision,” addresses the development of contemporary powwow, writing, “the modern day Pow Wow is a descendent of summer tribal gatherings, where political decisions were made and ceremonies were performed by medicine societies.”222 This being said, powwow should not be confused with spiritual gatherings and ceremonies. Powwows, as defined by Greyeyes, “are not Native spiritual rites. Pow wow is, however, significant sites for Indigenous cultural expression, cultural continuance, social practice.”223

As previously mentioned, the post–World War II period in North America saw the development of heightened Indigenous social movement and political mobilization. This was the period that also supported Indigenous communities’ development of the powwow. There were many participating factors in the development of the pan-Indigenous powwow circuit in North America. Historian, Rachel Buff argues, “The powwow circuit” has developed and expanded since the 1950s, when the combined forces of urbanization and the proliferation of automobile and bus travel made Indian people much more mobile and likely to travel between reservations and cities.”224 Valaskakis writes, “in the 1940’s, pow wow emerged from the shadows to celebrate the return of several 1000 Indian warriors who fought with Americans and Canadians in the Second World War”225 Indeed, despite the ceremonial ban on dancing, Indigenous dance and performance continued—however, not for Indigenous social practice, but on settler stages (this discussion is further explored in the next chapters). “Indian Dance,” powwow, and performance of Aboriginality continued in the Wild West shows, at the rodeo—the Calgary Stampede for example—and at other tourist sites, such as the Indian Days at Banff. Valaskakis argues, “These local fairs and festivals, complete with parades, pageants, pow wows, and riding competitions—variations of which still occur today.”226

The 1970s Red Power Movement, exemplified by AIM, also participated in the development of the rising pan-Indigenous powwow movement. The Indigenous movement’s political actions and modes of resistance involved more than protest rallies, armed occupations, and political marches. Cultural reclamation and practice were part of the movement’s tactics. For example, Valaskakis

221 Valaskakis, “Dance Me Inside,” 168.
226 Ibid.
discusses the revival of the Ghost Dance at Wounded Knee by AIM and also the Sun Dance at the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. She writes, “Led by AIM spiritual advisors, the Sun Dance was introduced to Indians whose tribal traditions were different, fragmented, or absent. Mi’kmaq and Mohawk, Chippewa and Sioux, urban and reserve were allied through emerging ideology, political purpose, and collective performance.” What this reveals is that pan-Indigenous cultural and spiritual knowledge were foundational frameworks for political and social movement in North America. The inclusion of Indigenous cultural values and spiritual beliefs within Native social movement, as suggested by Smith in the beginning of this chapter, supported the coming together of diverse and distinct individuals from various Indigenous backgrounds. Pan-Indigeneity, celebrated and criticized, is a significant aspect of the powwow, where Indigenous peoples from across North America gather to dance and celebrate Indigenous identity, cultural survival, and peoplehood. In 1979, Noel Dyck argued that powwow should be recognized as autonomous Aboriginal achievement in terms of organization. He also suggests, that powwows were spaces for the coming together of distinct Indigenous nations and peoples from across North America.

In this way, powwow supports transition and mobilization of Indigenous communities—acting as sites for sharing experiences, stories, and cultural expressions. The concept of pan-Indianism or pan-Indianness and powwow was introduced under this term in 1955 by anthropologist James Howard. In an article published in the early 1980s, “Pan-Indianism in Native American Music and Dance,” Howard revisited this concept in relation to powwow dance and music styles. In this article, Howard argues that this trend of collective dance, song, and drum styles (in both southern and northern powwows) is detrimental to local Indigenous cultural knowledge and threatens the continuation of specific nations (tribes) knowledge and performance of music and dance. Howard’s well known statement—used as the conclusion of his essay, “Better Pan-Indianism than no Indianism”—I would argue reflects his disconnection and Eurocentric approach towards understanding the development and reasons behind pan-Indigenous powwows. I would also argue that this type of analysis is entrenched in colonial misunderstandings of Indian cultural traditions and disregards the ongoing shifts and adaptations always present in Aboriginal cultural knowledge. He seems to be searching for the so-called authentic in Aboriginal music and dance. Howard states,

If this trend continues, as seems likely, it portends the development of a fairly homogeneous “Indian” music and dance culture throughout North America as the

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227 Ibid., 174.
twentieth century draws to a close. Participation in Pan-Indian events undoubtedly drains performers or potential performers from more distinctly tribal or regional music and dance forms. Younger Indians, like young people everywhere, want to be a part of whatever everyone else is doing, not lonely advocates of tribally specific music and dance styles associated with and known only to a few of their elders. This, in fact, is almost certainly the principal appeal of Pan-Indianism-solidarity with other Indians in a rapidly shrinking Indian world. Though one may lament the growth of Pan-Indianism in sounding the death knell for many ancient and beautiful Native American songs and dances, such is the way of the world. In most cases these songs and dances would wither and disappear in any case, probably to be replaced by non-Indian music and dance. I will therefore close my essay with what will undoubtedly come to be known as Howard's famous epigram: “Better Pan-Indianism than no Indianism.”

My response to his cautionary call for less pan-Indianism is that there was and continues to be space for both expression of pan-Indigenous collective identities (music, dance, politics) and distinct performance of local cultural and performative knowledge. These types of analysis of powwow do not allow for the multifaceted experiences and happenings in these sites. His tone is paternalistic, condescending and saturated in overtones of the vanishing race paradigm. It reflects an outsider ownership that does not offer complex analysis of contemporary Indigenous cultural performance.

Pan-Indianism is an aspect that must be acknowledged when discussing powwow and the development of the Indigenous cultural, political and performative institution. I would argue that the development of pan-Indianism or pan-Indigeneity in North America is directly associated with the need to gather together to celebrate Indigeneity and the complexities of being an Aboriginal person in North America. Also, the rise of pan-Indigenous performance mirrors the developments of pan-Indigenous social movements in both Canada and United States. Once again, I return to the argument that the unifying of Indigenous peoples across North America—connected by pan-Indian/pan-Indigenous cultural signifiers such as the dance and music styles of southern and northern powwows—supported the mobilization and political organization of distinct and diverse Aboriginal peoples in Canada and the United States. In this way, we can understand pan-Indigeneity as a political development, as a strategy for Indigenous-based activism, empowerment, and resistance to assimilation policies.

Whereas, Howard argues, “The result is a homogeneity in Pan-Indian pow-wows approaching that of Howard Johnson restaurants or McDonald hamburger outlets,"230 my research and engagement with Indigenous perspectives leads me to argue the opposite. As Valaskakis suggests, “This feeling of collective identity and shared community is not an expression of nativisitic revitalization but an awareness of cultural persistence, which is built in pan-Indian images of oneness.”231 In Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism, Devon Abbot Mihesuah suggests, “Despite debates over the meaning of powwow dancing and the corruptions in some powwow dances, the powwow had endured as a social gathering … Dancers dance for themselves as a creative expression, for their tribe, for money, as an energetic expression of their pride in being Native, or perhaps for a combination of all these reasons.”232 Through understanding powwow in terms of Indigenous political activism, I draw on Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson to argue that powwow and pan-Indian identity can support Indigenous peoples movement “toward a place and state of being that is [their] own.”233 In this way, powwow has not taken away from local continuations of cultural knowledge, but has supported the ongoing performance of dance and music. Powwows are sites for Indigenous empowerment by the very fact that they are sites for transmitting political, cultural, and personal experiences of individuals and communities from across North America. The gathering to dance and drum at powwows creates opportunities for social change. Individuals go home with news of mobilizations and self-determined intervention from other areas, urban and reserve. In other words, powwows create networks of Indigenous peoples who gather to dance and drum, and to participate in an Indigenous site to celebrate survivance and cultural continuance.

Valaskakis relates her own personal experiences of being at powwows and the impact they have had on her own identity. She writes, “For me, like others from Indian Country, pow wow recalls a kaleidoscope of deeply felt, ambiguous images of power and identity”234 She explains that powwows are a space for the articulation of cultural specificity of a tribal nation, as she says a “unique community, a particular ceremony,” and at the same time “pow wows express certain cultural similarities and a deeply felt and shared sense of ‘being Indian’ that threads through the

230 Howard, “Pan-Indianism,” 74.
231 Valaskakis, “Dance Me Inside,” 151.
232 Devon Abbott Mihesuah, Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 158.
234 Valaskakis, “Dance Me Inside,” 151.
dichotomies use to analyse power and identity—belonging and exclusion, knowledge and ignorance, control and resistance—all signified in the rhythm of the drum and the collective singing of seemingly worldless songs.” 235 Ultimately, Valaskakis argues, powwows are a site of cultural struggle—”a site of cultural struggle over conflicting identities and competing ideologies, Natives, newcomers, performers, and spectators negotiate the meaning of Indianness.” 236 Valaskakis’ thorough discussion of powwow concludes by stating that “pow wow is part of the social imaginaries and historical narratives that spiral through popular culture, political policy, and academic analysis to construct representations of Indianness that can marginalize memory, fragmented testimony, and eclipse the transformative nature of Native experience.” 237

Powwows are important sites of Native North American popular culture—across both American and Canadian borders. They are sites were thousands of Natives from across North America gather to celebrate, resist, share, dance, and continue cultural performance. Mihesuah argues, that powwow is an expression of empowerment and activism. She writes that while some believe that powwows are a place for dancing, music, and the articulation of distinct and pan-Indigenous identities, others understand the space of powwow as an arena for political discussion. Mihesuah writes,

The emcee might discuss political events throughout the powwow, and the dancers and singers might focus their attention on the politics, such as at a powwow sponsored by the American Indian Movement. Also in some cases, such as at powwows organized by Kiowa Nations, the purpose of the powwow, or one of the key reasons for its organization, other than dancing and singing to fundraise for community members in need. 238

The summer powwow circuit has become a Native institution. The powwow trail connects people through reservations, college towns, and cities across Canada and United States all year long. “This uniquely Native cultural activity, which is rooted in traditional heritage, historical representation, and commercial venture, has gained new popularity at a time of increasing struggle over the politics of difference linked to Native treaty rights, land claims, and self-determination.” 239 In this regard, powwows can be seen as sites of active agency in the self-representation of Indigenous culture. Valaskakis argues that “the sensibility of pow wow—differently felt and expressed, contested but remembered, imagined and constructed in contemporary ceremony—is articulated to collective

235 Ibid., 152.
236 Ibid.
237 Ibid., 174.
239 Ibid., 152.
culture and the political possibility of Native empowerment.” In this sense, powwow is about cultural persistence—a space for remembrance and for looking into the future, a site to recalling stories, to imagine sovereignty, to perform self-determination, and to mobilize nationhood.

**Afterthoughts: Indigenous Performative Activism**

In this chapter, I have explored the interconnections between performative acts of protest and Indigenous political movements. I have discussed contemporary Indigenous performance art in relation to major political mobilizations and the ways in which art presents, asserts, and actualizes debates, issues, histories, and stories. I argued that Indigenous artists, working alongside Indigenous activists, critique, resist, and protest political realities through their performative acts. In this way they challenge dominant society’s indifference and the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous histories and contemporary issues. Indigenous women artists such as Lori Blondeau, Cheryl L’Hirondelle, Rebecca Belmore, Ursula Johnson, and Dana Claxton express and raise awareness through their art practice. I have argued that performance spaces activate coming together or gathering, which is the agent of social change, and that the creation of Indigenous networks fosters Indigenous social action.

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Interview

Indigenous Resistance and Activism

Carla Taunton:
Can you talk about your work and/or contemporary Indigenous performance art more broadly in terms of Indigenous resistance and activism? And, do you see some or all of your work as art-based-activism?

Tanya Lukin Linklater:

This question makes me think about Ai Wei Wei and his ability to politically mobilize through his art, through social networking, within an overtly oppressive regime. His “community” is China, millions of people. He is a public figure and documents through video and photography constantly. His life has become this open space. He is at one end of the scale of activism.

My work is more intimate, small scale. There are maybe 4000 Alutiit from Kodiak Island. My idea of home is smaller. Since I engage with the idea of “home” and domestic spaces, this also changes my relationship to activism. Yet, I do think that the work is political, and culturally reconstructive practices are becoming more significant in a globalized world. The Russian sea otter fur trade in Alaska and its effects on the Alutiit is a microcosm of the economics that became globalization. Performance art has the potential to activate resistance. I see networks of resistance that are locally based.

My first performance art work dealt with the memory of my grandmother in Afognak village, caring for her children in the 1940’s in remote Alaska. This work became an act of memorialization for her cultural work, mothering and grandmothering. While not overtly activist, my engagement with her particular history, and the history of Alutiiq women surviving violence, is a kind of activism that makes visible that which is invisible. My continued focus on the cultural work that occurs in
domestic spaces and through women’s bodies is a kind of activated embodiment.

**Cheryl L’Hirondelle:**

*Linda Tuhiwai Smith talks about the act of sharing information as resistance. I came about my activist-based work during a time when I was thinking about my proximate community and who I was producing my work for... I wanted to be radically inclusive. I wanted to engage with people and have more people be part of my work. I wanted to share my ideas.*

*Treatycard came out in 2003 (the first version of it) and I had been thinking about the concept of it for over a year before producing it. It was created just at the beginning of web 2.0 paradigm. Prior to this the Internet was exclusive and not a lot of Native people had access to it. This work was produced before the world of blogs and social networking, and I really wanted to create an interactive and generative piece. Treatycard was a way for Native people to have a presence and a way for non-native people to also take on an active role by creating a space to make their own treaty cards. The website allowed for people to alter it, to add to it, to change to it, and to be part of it. The work became a more inclusive band roll.*

*I’ve found that my strategy of being inclusive and welcoming has supported engagement with my work and has had a very strong effect on the reception of my work.*
Chapter 6

Staging Aboriginality in Colonial Spaces/ Recontextualizing Indigenous Agency

Exploring the historic and contemporary relationships between Indigenous nations and Canadian governments reveals the deliberate state-sponsored campaigns to isolate Indigenous peoples, to control Aboriginal sovereignty, and to marginalize Indigenous culture. The contemporary legacies of colonialism in Canada are encountered, revealed, and explored by contemporary Indigenous women artists. However, their performances not only reference colonial and neo-colonial experiences and memories, but also assert Indigenous “being,” ways of knowing, and lived experiences. As a result, a discussion of agency and cultural autonomy is key to this diachronic exploration of Indigenous performance.

In this, chapter I explore the contradictions in colonial histories and explore both historic and contemporary examples of staged performance by Indigenous artists. For example, residential schools and ceremonial bans exemplify Canada’s strategies to eradicate Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being; this racist era of legislative control over all aspects of Indian life—community, spirituality, health, education, family, and movement—was a deliberate campaign of ethnocide. At the same time, however, Indigenous performances, such as Pauline E. Johnson’s and Wild West Shows, were very popular—Indigenous performance, in fact, was among the events included in British royal tours. These entangled histories demonstrate a contradictory aspect of Canadian colonial policy. Indigenous peoples were permitted to perform for settler audiences (permission had to be officially granted by Indian Agents and the Department of Indian Affairs), but they were not permitted under law to pass traditions on to their children, to organize multicommmunity gatherings, or to perform ceremonies, dance, or song for their own cultural purposes.

However, during this period of colonial oppression and legislative assimilation, many examples exist of Indigenous negotiations of, and resistance to, domination, particularly in the field of the arts. This chapter is divided into several sections and is supported by many historic and contemporary examples. My exploration of Indigenous performance on colonial and settler stages
for Euro-American consumption is examined in relation to tactics of Indigenous resistance, spectacle, tourism, and colonial domination. The purpose of this diachronic chapter is to show connections between performances produced by Indigenous peoples in Canada’s colonial period and contemporary performances produced by Indigenous artists Belmore, Reece, Blondeau, and Claxton.

First, I look at royal tours in Canada and the participation of Indigenous performance throughout these visits. Specifically, I look at the visit of Prince Albert to Upper and Lower Canada in 1860 and that of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V and Queen Mary), who toured Canada from coast to coast in 1901 as part of an Empire-wide tour. Many of these delegations performed culturally specific dances and songs on royal stages during these political meetings. In this section, I look at Rebecca Belmore’s performances of *Rising to the Occasion* (1987, 1991) as examples of Indigenous responses to British imperialism and colonial expansions.

In the section that follows this, I examine Aboriginal representation at World Fairs from the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, complicating my discussion to include the Indigenous peoples performing on international stages, specifically in London and Paris, during the colonial era in North America. Briefly, I outline the history of Indigenous peoples on display at World’s Fairs, outlining the inclusion of Indigenous peoples from North America. I discuss the reasons for the inclusion and Indigenous peoples’ experiences within these sites and explore the strategic performative approaches used by Indigenous performers. Skeena Reece’s performance *Do Not Disturb* is discussed in relation to histories of Indigenous peoples on display as well as to arts-based intervention strategies. I also introduce Belmore’s installation *Wild* (2000), at the Art Gallery of Ontario, to extend the discussion of intervention in such colonial entrenched spaces as museums, which have historically excluded Indigenous artists.

In the third section of this chapter, I explore Indigenous performances in Wild West Shows. I view 19th- and early 20th-century Indigenous performances on colonial stages through the complex lens of settler entertainment at a time of restrictive federal legislation, which deemed illegal the performance of Indigenous ceremony and spirituality and the gathering of Indigenous peoples. I also examine issues surrounding Indigenous performance and the creation of national cultural identity alongside North American tourism and immigration. I analyze the sites of these performances, their political contexts, the audience receptions, and most significantly, the agency of the performers. In this section, Lori Blondeau’s performance, *Belle Sauvage*, and her co-produced performance with Adrian Stimson, *Bringing the Wild back into the West*, are discussed in relation
to the historical examples. Here, I develop my discussion of the exoticization of Indigenous peoples and of the stereotypical representations and production of Indigenous peoples at Wild West Shows, Indian Days, and the like. However, I expand my discussion of the use of stereotypes by Indigenous performers in the 19th and early 20th centuries by arguing that historical and contemporary performances are acts of Indigenous intervention and resistance.

The performances of Pauline Johnson (Mohawk) and Maggie Papakura Makereti (Maori) are examined in relation to the larger context of Indigenous peoples performing on settler and international stages. I argue that these women use performance to resist colonial oppressions and to voice Indigenous perspectives. I analyze Pauline Johnson’s tours of Canada, United States, and Great Britain, but focus more extensively on Maggie Papakura, a famous Maori woman of the Aware iwi who, I argue, made a similar strategic use of performance and her body. She combined Maori performance and cultural knowledge with tourism as a method for the negotiation of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination during New Zealand’s nation-building period. I also explore Makereti’s organization of the first tour of an all-Maori performance troupe to travel abroad and her participation in hosting British royal tours. I then discuss Belmore’s *High Tech Teepee Trauma Mama* (1988), hosted by the Lake Head University Native Student Association, and performed as part of the University’s Indian Days Winter Carnival, as well as Blondeau’s performance personas, *CosmoSquaw* (1996) and *Lonely Surfer Squaw* (1997), to show the contemporary use of performance as a form of art production, cultural continuance, and interventionist resistance. Belmore and Blondeau provide examples of Indigenous performance that resists the history of stereotypical representation of Aboriginal women, which I argue, has been perpetuated by Euro-American popular culture (films, literature, theatre, advertisements, etc.). However, once again, I connect Belmore’s and Blondeau’s use of their bodies and performance as a form of resistance to the historical strategic use of performance by Indigenous women, such as Johnson and Makareti.

**Setting the Colonial Stage**

In this section, I introduce the colonial context of these performances, revealing the contradictions of colonial agendas and the participation of various stakeholders in the development of a variety of “stages” for Indigenous performance. In many instances—such as in the royal tour’s extensive incorporation of Aboriginal performance—the inclusion of such performances went against legislation and state agendas to isolate, assimilate, and silence Indigenous peoples. I explore the use
of the performative body to stage resistance, cultural continuance, and political activism to expose the always already presence of Aboriginal agency. Settler society’s desire to “know” and “encounter” “real Indians” is contextualized in order to highlight the socio-cultural contexts from which these performances were staged. Rather than simply viewing these performances as exploitative acts of spectacle, I engage with notions of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and authority. Unraveling the social environments in which these performances were staged elucidates how Indigenous peoples staged resistance.

To this end, I draw on Philip Deloria’s discussion of “playing Indian.” In Playing Indian, Deloria addresses the reasons behind why Indigenous peoples have played into stereotypical and homogenous representations of Indigenous peoples within North America. One of his main arguments is that throughout US history, settler society has appropriated and enacted a variety of Indian images to articulate a distinct national identity as well as individual identity. He explores the use of Native American iconography in North America, specifically cultural imagery, in representations of statehood and identity, such as in popular culture. He also investigates the settler history of dressing up and playing Indian as a means of asserting American identity. He suggests, “From the colonial period to the present the Indian has skulked in and out of the most important stories various Americans have told about themselves.” Deloria asserts his argument by referencing the establishment of the Western sciences of anthropology and ethnography and the emergence of documenting Indigenous cultures and peoples.

In this way, I argue, as Deloria and many scholars have, that the collecting and classification of Aboriginal cultures and peoples, as well as the representations and acts of “playing Indian,” culminate in the colonial project of paternalistic ownership and of settler-societies’ consumption of Native peoples, lands, and cultures. In other words, these cooptions of Indian culture strategically plays into the occupation and marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in North America. Similarly, in the Canadian context, Indigenous peoples as well as Aboriginal aesthetic expression were documented and ethnographically collected, seen, for example, in the photography and anthropological work of the geological survey. This extensive collecting period, which responded to the vanishing race paradigm, supported an educated elite’s sense of understanding as well as ownership over Indian people. However, the historic study of Aboriginal culture and peoples, situated in 19th century anthropology, is based on what James Clifford has called “salvage

anthropology”: that is, a “desire to rescue ‘authenticity’ out of the destructive historical change.”  

This paradigm of anthropological thought, which pervaded settler consciousness, rendered the Indian a static and monolithic identity. As Deloria argues, “the only culture allowed to define real Indian people was a traditional culture that came from the past rather than the present.” The salvage ethnography mediated an opportunity for settler society in North America to experience a so-called authentic encounter with Indigenous people without having to engage with the politics of oppression and violence against contemporary Native peoples.

This discussion of the relationship between settler consciousness and the salvage paradigm is directly connected with Aboriginal performance on settler stages in the 19th century. Ruth Phillips’ argument, which I introduced in Chapter 3, is that during the modernist century, lasting from the 1860s to the 1960s, “performance, not graphic or plastic art, was the available space for Native artistic production, and further, that performance offered the most favourable site for Native negotiations of the dominant culture’s images of Indianness as pre-modern, degenerate and vanishing.” In this way, Indigenous peoples played into the desires of settler society to have seemingly “authentic” encounters by performing Aboriginality. I would argue, based on Phillips’ analysis of Aboriginal women performing Aboriginal women in the early 20th century, that performance is a strategic site for political and cultural assertions, and that it became a significant site for articulating and negotiating Indigenous agency in periods of colonial expansion, occupation, and oppression.

In order to unravel these Indigenous negotiations of colonialism, nation-state hegemony, and settler society, it is imperative to recognize the contradictions of this period. The late 19th and early 20th centuries in North America saw the development of new technologies, tourism, industrialism, consumerism, and commodity culture as well as the establishment of assimilist legislative policies and agendas, which were catalysts for the embedding of stereotypical representations and understanding of Aboriginal people. At the same time, these developments also created opportunities for Indigenous resistance and negotiations of sovereignty and self-determination due to an increased mobility of Native performers. This increasing mobility, due to

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5 Phillips, “Performing the Native Woman,” 27.
advancements in travel technologies, was accompanied by the increased interest of settler society to have, as already discussed, authentic encounters with the “Vanishing Indian Race.” In other words, the ambiguities and complexities of colonial settler societies in Canada and the United States supported the development of an Aboriginal performance enterprise. Phillips argues that enhanced mobility increased the ability of Indigenous peoples, such as Esther Deer and Molly Spotted Elk (Molly Nelson), to intervene in racist discourses. She writes,

In early twentieth century, when visual fine arts were confined to static plastic and graphic forms, the added dimensions of performance—temporal, spatial, and vocal—offered better tools for Native intervention. The directness and immediacy of live performance confronted audiences with the fact of the Native performers’ contemporaneity and bodily co-presence.

Drawing from Phillips’ discussion of body-politics and the immediacy of performance, I explore historic examples of performance as a space for Indigenous resistance, and a site for asserting agency.

These entangled histories demonstrate a contradictory aspect of Canadian colonial policy. Indigenous peoples could obtain permission to perform for white audiences, but they were not permitted under law to continue to pass on traditions to their children, to organize multi-community gathering, or to perform ceremonies, dance, or song for their own cultural purposes. I explore the two sides of this contradiction: the oppression of Aboriginal culture and its display through public performance.

The assimilationist imperative underpinning the operation of residential schools in Canada from 1879 to 1996 has been recognized as a policy supporting a program of institutional cultural genocide. Gillian Whitlock discusses this in “Active Remembrance: Testimony, Memoir and the Work of Reconciliation,” and argues that the oppressive racist policies of the 1837 House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines influenced the development of the settler societies Canada, Australia and New Zealand. She writes, “These paternalistic policies were established to maintain settler dominance and administered by teachers, missionaries, and public servants.”

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid. Phillips states that it is no surprise that Esther Deer and Molly Nelson (Molly Spotted Elk) experienced their greatest success and artistic freedom during the 1920 and 1930s – a period during Primitivism’s greatest intellectual and artistic vogue. She writes, “This period also witnessed a radical reversal of American policy towards its aboriginal peoples, a change that had been prepared in part by the antimodernist interest in tribal cultures of a segment of the dominant class that was politically liberal and nationalist.” Ibid., 41.
New Zealand, after the Maori Wars ended in 1867, church-run schools for Maori children were closed and the government retained control of Native education.\(^9\) (This coincided with confiscation of large amounts of Maori land by government.) The 1867 Native Schools Act was a deliberate assimilist initiative, to bring Maori children into New Zealand settler society—to educate them and to bring their behaviour into line with British ideals and concepts of civilization. This act has been both celebrated and criticized, as it resulted in Maori literacy in English but also in a substantial decline in fluency and understanding of Te Reo Maori. There are countless reports of children being physically punished and abused for using Maori language in the schools. In Canada, the church-operated Indian residential school system was the central institution in the policy of social engineering, which attempted to “kill the Indian in the Indian” in order to raise civilized Native children that would contribute to Canadian society.\(^10\) In the Australian context, child removal effected the institutionalization of Indigenous childhood, which was organized through the establishment of Aboriginal reserves. Children were separated from parents and raised in dormitories, half-caste homes, and as part of non-Indigenous families.\(^11\) The Canadian and Australia systems of child removal and abuse have had long-lasting legacies: high rates of poverty, unemployment, death, youth suicide, substance abuse, domestic violence, and family breakdown.\(^12\) Forced relocations of Indigenous peoples onto reserve lands and the institution of the ceremonial ban in 1884-85 by the Canadian government also participated in this assimilationist period of Canadian history.

The contradiction of Ceremonial bans and control over Indigenous performance is another example of this complex period of colonial assimilation and dominance over Indigenous peoples. The ceremonial ban made Indigenous cultural performance and ceremony illegal by Canadian law. This policy, connected to the pass and permit system, not only controlled the cultural aspects of Aboriginal communities, it also restricted the movement of peoples off reserve. Prior to the ban, and throughout the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Crown, Aboriginal peoples had travelled to England and participated in royal tours. However, after the passing of the ban, it became more challenging for Indigenous delegates and leaders to travel abroad. For example, in August 1906 three Salish chiefs, one of whom was Chief Capilano, visited King Edward VII to discuss their promised sovereignty. Pauline Johnson was also present at this meeting. The Canadian

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\(^10\) Ibid., 29.
\(^11\) Ibid.
\(^12\) Ibid., 25.
government representatives did not encourage such congregations and attempted to implement the ceremonial ban policies as much as possible, as illustrated in correspondence between Canadian Governor General Earl Grey to the British Colonial Office:

The tenacity of Indian memory is a well known fact. These three chiefs will remember every detail of their visit to His Majesty as long as they live and will transmit even the minutest detail to their children and the account of the visit may be handed down until it become traditional. From the earliest time in the dealing between the British and the Indians it has been considered a matter of policy to explicitly carry out promises made to the Aborigines and no small share of the success of the British and Canadian Governments in dealing with their wards may be attributed to this policy being carefully carried out.13

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reveals the deliberate agenda to not only control cultural practice but also Indigenous movement and the locations in which Aboriginal performers were “allowed” to dance:

Due to the growing popularity of stampedes and agricultural exhibitions at which Indians were increasingly invited to dance, an amendment was passed in 1914 barring western Indians under penalty of law from participating without official permission in “Aboriginal costume” in any “dance, show, exhibition, stampede or pageant.” Arrests and prosecutions immediately went up, but because the offences were indictable ones, they were beyond the jurisdiction of Indian agents acting as justices of the peace. In such cases they could merely lay charges in another court. In 1918 this was corrected by bringing these offences within the agent's jurisdiction and removing them from courts outside the reserve.14

In the amended act (1933), the definition of a participant in Aboriginal costume was removed with the effect that any Aboriginal person who partook in an event or cultural performance without permission regardless of their dress could be charged under the law. This amendment increased control of Aboriginal peoples by Indian Agents. The report states,

The apparent intent was to prevent Indians from attending fairs and stampedes without the permission of Indian affairs officials. Since the first prohibition was enacted in 1895, various means had been found by Indians and their supporters to get around the ban on dancing. This new offence seems in retrospect to have been the last desperate attempt of Indian affairs officials to enforce their anti-dancing policy.”15

The act reads,

14 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, “Attacks on Traditional Culture,” vol. 1 (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs, 1996).
15 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, “Attacks on Traditional Culture.”
Any Indian in the province of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, or British Columbia, or in the Territories who participates in any Indian dance outside the bounds of his own reserve, or who participates in any show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant in aboriginal costume without the consent of the Superintendent General or his authorized agent, and any person who induces or employs any Indian to take part in such dance, show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant, or induces any Indian to leave his reserve or employs any Indian for much a purpose, whether the dance, show, exhibition, stampede or pageant has taken place or not, shall on summary conviction be liable to a penalty not exceeding twenty-five dollars, or to imprisonment for one month, or to both penalty and imprisonment. This amendment extended the application of the subsection and made it apply to an Indian whether he was in aboriginal costume or not. Department of Indian Affairs Report 1930

The ceremonial ban in Canada lasted from the 1850s to the amendment in 1951, but by that time the government’s cultural genocide had had serious impact on Indigenous cultural knowledge and practice.

In this chapter, I frame my analysis through the lens of Indigenous agency as a means to expose Indigenous participation in performances on settler stages—in World Fairs and Wild West shows, for example—to contribute a discussion of Indigenous resistance and intervention within colonial periods in North America. Further, my discussion of Indigenous agency challenges the victimization of Indigenous peoples that occurs through the writing of histories within a framework of the colonizer-colonized binary, which does not allow for recognition of the sophisticated and both subtle and overt stagings of political activism, economic negotiations, and cultural continuance. This discussion of agency thus exposes the complexities of Indigenous experiences and performances in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and contributes to current scholarship that reveals deliberate acts of Indigenous resistance to expose ongoing Indigenous agency within colonization and assimilation.

**Royal Tours: Performing Indigeneity/Resisting Imperial Consumption**

During the late 19th and early 20th century, Canada hosted several royal tours. In this section, I focus on the place of Indigenous performance in these visits. More specifically, I explore the royal tours as a site for a complex Indigenous negotiation of colonial occupation, Canadian national/ist building, and Imperial domination. I argue that during these moments of heightened colonial

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[16] *Department of Indian Affairs Report* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs, 1930). Subsection three of section one hundred and forty of the said Act was amended by striking out the words “in aboriginal costume” in the fifth line thereof.
legislation attempting to control and marginalize Indigenous peoples in Canada, Indigenous peoples nonetheless continued to resist and assert agency. Here, I specifically examine two visits: that of Prince Edward, Prince of Wales, to Upper and Lower Canada in 1860 in a period of pre-Confederate Canada; and that of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V and Queen Mary), who toured Canada from coast to coast in 1901 as part of an Empire-wide tour.

I explore the reasons for the inclusion of Indigenous performance and delegations during these Royal visits, and argue that Indigenous culture was included as part of celebrations and spectacles of nationhood because these tours were potential sites for the maintenance of notions of colonial domination over lands in northern North America. At the same time, Indigenous performance, from an Indigenous perspective, was an assertion of Indigenous cultural autonomies, subjectivities, and identities. During several of the visits, Indigenous peoples were being moved onto isolated reserves and forbidden under Canadian federal law, as stipulated in the Indian Act, to perform ceremonies, such as dance. So the inclusion of Indigenous performance in these royal tours of Canada exemplify a dual potential: they illustrate colonial processes and assertions of the nation-state’s attempt to covertly appropriate certain aspects of Indigenous culture into nationalist narratives, and they simultaneously elucidate Indigenous peoples’ clever and politicized use of these sites to assert Indigenous agency. My exploration of the royal tours, which is more an overview than an in-depth study, thus posits a complex trajectory, in which I argue an established history of Indigenous performance as a political, cultural, and social assertion of Indigenous agency—that is, Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty over Native lands, bodies, and minds.

Prince Edward’s royal tour to Upper and Lower Canada in 1860 included many stagings of Canadian nationalism that included Aboriginal representation—both as part of the narrative of the distinct developing nation and as part of the narrative of the technological and industrial advancements of early Canada (which were opposed to Indigenous culture). During these celebratory spectacles of nationhood in numerous Canadian cities, the Province of Canada was presented as a nation with culture, urbanized centres, industry, and technology. Upon the Prince of Wales arrival in Montreal on 25 August 1860, among the crowd of 40,000 to 50,000 welcome, a large procession of officials and elites included Hodenaussone (Iroquois) representatives from
Kanawake. The Iroquois representatives were placed near the head of the procession, “dressed specially in buckskin and feathers and with faces painted for a ceremonial occasion.”

My discussion of the Prince of Wales tour of early Canada draws on Ian Radforth’s thorough study of the royal visit. According to Ian Radforth, the inclusion of Indigenous performance and presence in the Prince of Wales’ North American tour of 1860 program changed the nature of monarchical spectacle in Canada: “Because of the vivid (if racist) representations of Indians in 1860, and thanks to the public performances of Native people before the Prince of Wales, Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people together fashioned a tradition: majesty in Canada would have an Aboriginal aspect.” The inclusion of Aboriginal people and performances—alongside representations of Indianness on the architectural triumphal arches, and ceremonial stagings—alludes to the presence of history in the royal tour of 1860. Although Indigenous presence at the city celebrations did create a feeling of positive relations between Indigenous peoples and the Crown, their presence, from a colonial perspective, generated and supported representations of British conquest and colonial expansion. Although the tour focused on progress and looking forward, Indigenous peoples did not perform in contemporary dress; instead, they performed in more historically traditional costume/regalia. This arguably created a sense of British North America’s past victory of conquest and colonial agendas. In other words, the inclusion of Aboriginal performance plays into the narrative of conquest and progress and alludes to a history of

18 Ian Radforth, Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 6.
20 Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 11.
colonization—but also of alliance between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Perhaps, then, these inclusions present a problem that settler nations continuously negotiate in terms of national representations. That is that Indigenous presence both undermines nationalist projects of ownership and authority over lands in North American (as well as in Australia and New Zealand) and at the same time, due to colonial conquest, represents so-called western (meaning Eurocentric, paternalistic) notions of progress (industrialization, consumerism, and urbanization).

However, in relation to my exploration of Indigenous performance, Indigenous presence at and within the celebrations was strategic, political—as a means to acknowledge links to the Crown, and through these links, to demand that the crown uphold legal documents and treaties over Indigenous land and cultural sovereignty. In this way, Indigenous participation in the late 19th-century tours is connected to the development of the Province of Canada and nation-building that undermined Indigenous claim, ownership, and sovereignty over lands. Buckner’s argument then simplifies Indigenous participation and overlooks the precarious situation of Indigenous nations in pre-Confederate Canada. It ignores that the Indigenous presence at the celebrations and the participation as performers could be seen as a strategic political act asserting the legal sovereignty and cultural autonomy established in 1763 by the Royal Proclamation Act. In this approach, a more pluralistic and complex understanding of Indigenous participation can be elucidated and also incorporated into the histories of royal tours and Indigenous activism in the late 19th century. In other words, the royal tour in 1860 came at a time of political change for both Indigenous and settler populations. It was a time of transition for government control and distribution of organization and governance between the crown and the legislative assemblies in Canada.

For example, on July 1, 1860, days before the departure of the Prince of Wales from Plymouth enroute to Newfoundland, formal control of the Indian Department passed from the control and governance of the imperial government to the Province of Canada. This shift came with new policies and practices that were actively disputed by Native peoples and their leadership. Further, in 1857 the Province of Canada passed an Act to “Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes in Canada,” and to “Act to Amend Laws Respecting Indians.” The purpose of this

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21 I agree with Phillip Buckner that the royal tours offered an opportunity for British-settlers to emphasize their connection to Britain despite their locality of North America and at the same time creating a site for the development of a national identity embedded in the re-enactments of British nationalism and imperialism. Buckner, “The Invention of Tradition?” 33.
23 An Act for the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in This Province, and to Amend the Laws Respecting Indians, S.C. 1857, c. 26 (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada).
Act was assimilation and emancipation. Its stated purpose was to encourage “progress in Civilization among the Indian Tribes,” to gradually erase legal distinctions between Indians and other subjects, and to facilitate the acquisition of property and accompanying rights for those First Nations who wished it. Under this new act, the province declared authority to determine Indian identity and facilitate the enfranchisement of adult Indian men as citizens, who in turn could individually claim land ownership shaved off of reserve lands. This act is clearly outlined in the governmental sanctioned paper “Aboriginal People: History of Discriminatory Laws,” written by Wendy Moss and Elaine Gardner-O’Toole (Law and Government Division). They state,

By 1857, in the Province of Canada an Indian man could qualify for the right to vote by applying for enfranchisement and receiving an allotment of reserve lands, which would be subject to assessment and taxation. Enfranchisement simply removed all distinctions between the legal rights and liabilities of Indians and those of other British subjects. It did not in itself, grant an entitlement to vote. Enfranchisement did, however, require the abandonment of reserve rights and the right to live with one’s family and culture. Further, it was dependent upon proof of literacy, education, morality and solvency. Consequently, the requirements for enfranchisement constituted discriminatory conditions imposed on Indians, preventing them from qualifying for the right to vote.24

As Tony Hall argues in “Native Limited Identities and Newcomer Metropolitanism in Upper Canada, 1814-1867,” “to be an Indian was not to be a citizen, and to be a citizen was not to be an Indian.”25 This act undermined Indigenous self-government and Indigenous self-determined identities and autonomies. It also lays the foundation for the passing of the highly paternalistic, racist and discriminatory Indian Act (1867). The 1857 act resulted in Indigenous political mobilization. In The Legacy of Shingwaukonse: A Century of Native Leadership, Janet Chute notes Indigenous political opposition to government attempts to control social, cultural, and economic structures. For example, in 1859 Annishnabec chiefs and community leaders met for a Grand Council in Rama to share information and plan further actions.26 Celia Haig-Brown, in “Seeking Honest Justice in a Land of Strangers: Nahnebhae Struggle for Land,” described Ojibwa-activist-writer Nahnebahwequa’s (Catherine Soneegoh Sutton) trip to England in the spring of 1860 to

petition Queen Victoria over grievances regarding the Indian Department and its treatment of Indigenous rights. During the council meeting in Rama, Nahnebahwequa was appointed the representative of the chiefs. Following her interview with the Queen, the Duke of Newcastle was assigned the task of investigating the grievances in Canada during the Prince of Wales’ royal tour. This example illustrates the awareness and active resistance of Indigenous peoples in the late 19th century, and also highlights the Queen’s promise of protection and aid to Aboriginal people in Canada. The decision of Indigenous peoples to perform as part of the 1860 royal tour, then, can be understood within this context of political mobilization (evident in the grand council meetings and resolution writings) and also of their loyalty to the Queen. The performance of Indianness, or rather Indigeneity, thus participates in the larger context of Indigenous intervention in colonial tactics of occupation, domination, and isolation.

Performing Indianness, or “the spectacle of race,” participates in the settler–Indigenous paradox, whereby Indigenous peoples not only performed the tensions of race politics, they also resisted and undermined them. As Karen Dubinsky suggests, the gaze of outsiders was complicated by a white, European, and North American civilized/savage paradox: “they deplored the ‘savages’ in their midst and at the same time made them central characters in their museums, exhibitions, circuses, fairs, and literature.” Radforth argues that in recent scholarship the social and cultural dynamics of Aboriginal peoples’ performances in national celebrations suggest a more complex understanding than simply seeing the performances as demeaning and exploitative. Similarly, in “It’s Our Country”: First Nations’ Participation in the Indian Pavilion at Expo 67,” Myra Rutherford and Jim Miller make connections between the centennial celebrations of Canada in

28 In Haig-Brown’s account of Nahnebahwequa’s visit to London, the letters of the young Anishnabe activist are extensively incorporated. This is significant in relation to complicating contemporary understanding of nineteenth-century settler-Indigenous relationships and also in terms of Indigenous responses, resistances and mobilizations of colonial agendas, such as land loss. On June 19, 1860, Nahnebahwequa wrote a letter to her uncle and grandfather that described her experience meeting with the Queen. In this letter, the outcome of the meeting is explained. She writes: “My Dear Uncle and Grandfather – I have just returned from the palace….The Duke [of Newcastle] went before us and he made two bows, and the I was presented to the Queen…The Queen asked me many qu... Reproduced in Haig-Brown, “Seeking Honest Justice,” 153.
30 Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 1.
1967 and the 1860 Prince of Wales tour, a link that emphasizes the history of Indigenous performance at national and international exhibitions that were celebrations of nationhood. Rutherford and Miller argue that the “promoters realized that staging major colonial or national spectacles and attracting tourists to popular destinations required the attendance and participation of First Nations. The nature, extent, and meaning of that participation have prompted historians’ interest.”

One of the questions Miller and Rutherford incorporate into their discussion prompted me to complicate my perspective of the history of Indigenous peoples performing Indigeneity on settler stages. They ask “whether First Nations passively portrayed themselves as a ‘romantic hangover,’ to use Monture’s words, or whether they were able to forward their own agendas and demonstrate that they were ‘intent on holding to a country and an identity,’ while under the gaze of outsiders?”

I agree that the question of intent is key within these discussions of Indigenous performance in royal tours and world exhibitions; however, I would argue that it also plays into the representation and understanding of Indigenous peoples as passive victims. Rather I would like to put forward a question that builds from Rutherford and Miller’s: “What were the implications for Indigenous peoples of performing Indigeneity for settler stages?”

Exploring Indigenous performance within a framework of Indigenous agency highlights Indigenous acts of intervention within colonial structures of isolation, dominance, and assimilation. As Ruth Phillips argues in “Making Sense of the Visual,” the performance, speeches, presentations of gifts and modes of self-display were “meaningful and highly ritualized, forming part of a long sequence of such exchanges that stretched back to the beginning of contact.” The performances were therefore significant by the very fact that, despite conquest and colonial settlement, the performers were able to maintain and continue cultural practices. To question whether the performers were aware of their position seems also to play into Eurocentric, prejudiced representations of Indigenous peoples as savage and underdeveloped. As peoples that were colonized and in some cases allied to colonial bodies—such as the British monarch—for several centuries, Indigenous peoples in North America would have experienced numerous interactions with settlers and settler systems of governance. A way to move away from these tired and erroneous perspectives is to acknowledge the always already presence of Indigenous agency within

32 Rutherford and Miller, “It’s Our Country,” 152.
the structures of colonialism. By doing this, many cases of Indigenous performance on settler stages, such as the royal tours of 1860 and 1901, can be viewed as self-determined acts of resistance, political negotiation, and cultural continuance.

A key issue in analysis of historical Indigenous performances is that the archival material, eye witness reports, and visual documentation (drawings, etchings, photographs) are from settler perspectives. These Eurocentric accounts, entrenched in political, cultural, economic and social systems, do not represent the Indigenous experience. Current historians wanting to incorporate Indigenous perspectives in order to displace biased, settler-centric histories of Canada must look to Indigenous oral histories and visual culture. Only in this way can they present a more complicated understanding of historical colonial events. Ian Radforth suggested that despite the fact that the nation state of Canada “robbed, suppressed, patronized, and denigrated First Peoples, governments nevertheless found it advantageous to include Aboriginal people in celebrations that define and affirm an imagined national community.”

He also argued that the 1860 royal tour provided an opportunity for Indigenous peoples to “claim public attention” affirming their loyalties and cultural integrity, and allowing them to demand redress of political grievances. Radforth also raised issues of representation, such as the issue of dress. For instance, one of the considerations negotiated by official organizers was “whether Native participants in public spectacles should appear in ‘traditional dress’ or in ways that better signified their adaptation to the colonial world around them.”

Radforth’s analysis pointed to the consistent decision made by the Indian Department, which “pressed” for a spectacle of Indians in paint and feathers regardless of the Department’s assimilist agenda. Radforth also examined the media coverage of the performances, considering how such reports reinforced stereotypical constructions of Indigenous peoples, which underscored “the formidable obstacles to the successful assertion of Native rights.”

Once again, I return to the question of how to frame and view these Indigenous performances. Although Radforth’s thorough analysis of the performances puts forward many significant perspectives of Aboriginal presence at the 1860 royal tour, I suggest yet another way of looking at these performances. Drawing from his arguments, I argue that regardless of the fact that the media representation confirmed and perpetuated stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, explorations of these performances must be based on Indigenous contexts and perspectives, not on settler reception and representation of them. Indigenous agency must be acknowledged and

34 Ian Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 1.
35 Ibid., 2.
36 Ibid.
recognized in considering how Indigenous peoples decided to present themselves. Their awareness of the significance of the royal visit is evident in the fact that Indigenous peoples were participants in the ceremonies and celebrations across British North America. However, the archival material—such as news reports and illustrations in Globe and the London Illustrated Times—all present Eurocentric and racist perspectives of Aboriginal peoples and their cultures. The contemporary representations in media of the royal tour portray settler consciousness and British attitudes towards Aboriginal people—a fact that illustrates the obstacles faced by Indigenous participants which Radforth alludes to.

This section explores several Aboriginal performances. The last performance of Indigenous peoples during the royal tour occurred in Sarnia on 13 September 1860. Between two hundred and four hundred representatives from Anishinabe nations, the Odawa, Mississauga, Munsee, Potawatomi, Delaware, Wyandott, and Oneida participated in the planned event. Over eighty chiefs were present from the various bands. Sarnia was chosen as the site of congregation because of the large Anishinabe reserve nearby, and because it was easily accessible—via the Grand Trunk Railway and Lake Huron—to settler spectators. Prior to the reception of the Prince of Wales, the delegation of international chiefs and warriors held a grand council on the Sarnia reserve on September 11. Radforth notes that Bartlett, of the Indian Department, called the grand council meeting but instructed the delegation that “the Council was not for business.”

The council meeting, ignoring the Indian Department’s instructions, used this opportunity for political purposes. They discussed grievances over the recent policies administered by the Indian Department, specifically surrounding issues of Indigenous sovereignty over lands and resources. A petition was drawn up from the grand council meeting and signed by Chief Henry Hadwayosh of Saugeen “and 49 others,” and it was presented to the Duke of Newcastle at the Prince of Wales’ welcome in Sarnia. This petition laid out specific grievances against the Department: the loss of islands used for fishing stations and the government’s imposition of new charges for fishing rights, the illegal sale of Indian lands without permission or compensation of the bands, the forcible confiscation of large amounts of lands with adequate compensation, and the loss of thousands of dollars due to careless or fraudulent payments of lands. The overall grievance put forward by the petition was the issue of land title, as stated in its conclusion, “We pray that something may be done speedily to set the question of Title at rest forever.”37 All of boldly stated claims were introduced

with the request that an investigation into the conduct of the Indian Department be undertaken by Newcastle.\textsuperscript{38} The use of the council meeting to discuss grievances and organize this petition was a continuation of the purpose of Anishnabé grand council, and given Bartlett’s prohibition, was a strategic act of defiance and resistance.\textsuperscript{39} Further, it is significant that the attendees of this grand council meeting participated in the welcome and performance at Sarnia. These individual Anishnabec men had specific political reasons for participating in the royal tour—they were not simply performing for the sake of performing, but for Indigenous sovereignty and cultural autonomy. The Sarnia welcome was thus an act of Indigenous self-determination.

On the morning of September 13, the Prince of Wales arrived from London to Sarnia. As consistent with the rest of the celebrations, many speeches were made by civil servants, such as Mayor of Sarnia Thomas W. Johnson, to a large crowd of spectators. \textit{Globe}’s Robert Cellem reported, “some 5,000 people were seated; and the strangest sight of all some 200 Indians from Manitoulin Islands, sat on long straight benches in the front.” Cellem was not correct in his statement—the Aboriginal delegation was in fact made up of Anishnabé bands from across what is now known as Ontario. After the speeches, the delegation’s chosen representative, Chief Kanwagashan, commenced an act of Indigenous oratory. Cellem and Kinrahan Cornwallis, another journalist present at Sarnia, similarly interpreted the performance of Indigeneity; however, Cellem also includes the speech given by Kanwagashi. Cellem wrote,

\begin{quote}
Then commenced one of the most interesting proceedings which had yet taken place. The Indians, real red savages, majestic in mein, painted as to their faces, adorned with hawks’ feathers and squirrels’ tails as to their heads, with silver spoons in their noses, moccasins on their feet, and many of them ignorant of English, came forward, and one of them, a magnificent specimen of his tribe, named Kan-wa-ga-shi, or the Great Bear of the North, advancing to the front, stretching out his right hand yelled out an Indian address to the Prince, which was translated to him by the Indian interpreter, who, as the red man finished each phrase and folded his arms, gave the meaning of what was said.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Robert Cellem’s account of the performance and speech given by the Anishnabé delegation again is entrenched in Eurocentric understandings and racist views of Indigenous peoples. However, what

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[38]“Petition signed by Henry H. Madwayosh and 49 others.” Radforth discusses this petition in Ian Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 20–21. For further information on the meeting and several specific discussions that were conducted see Chute, \textit{The Legacy of Shingwauknonse}, 176; Shields, “Anishinabek Political Alliance,” 26.
\item[39]For an extensive discussion on Anishnabé council meetings and 19\textsuperscript{th} century political mobilization, see Shields, “Anishinabek Political Alliance,” 26.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
I wish to point out here is the dress of the Indigenous peoples and the speech given. The delegation came in cultural dress signifying their identities as Ojibway, showcasing Indigenous cultural survival and ways of being. Also the speech was a deliberate act to acknowledge allegiance to the British Crown and to recall and allude to treaty and political allegiance between Indigenous peoples—specifically, in this case, the Anishnabe—and the British Monarchy. Chief Kanwagashi speech was printed in the press as follows:

Brother, Great Brother—The sky is beautiful. It was the wish of the Great Spirit that we should meet in this place. My heart is glad that the Queen sent her eldest son to see her Indian subjects. I am happy to see you here this day. I hope the sky will continue to look fine, to give happiness both to the whites and to the Indians. Great Brother—When you were a little child your parents told you there were such people as Indians in Canada, and now, since you have come to Canada yourself, you can see them. I am of the Ogibway chiefs, and represent the tribe here assembled to welcome their Great Brother. Great Brother—You see the Indians who are around you; they have heard that at some future day you will put on the British Crown, and sit on the British Throne. It is their earnest desire that you will always remember them.41

This performative act of oratory expresses loyalty to the crown and re-affirms and asserts the commitment the Crown declared in treaties that acknowledged Indigenous sovereignty. Also, as Indigenous knowledge systems are based in oral transmission and performance (explored in Chapter 3), the act of giving this speech participates in the larger cultural practice of Indigenous oral histories, and thus can be argued to be an act of cultural continuity and continuance. After the prince’s response to the speech, he gave medals to the Anishnabe delegates. Each name was read from a list given by the Governor General. In turn, the delegation of chiefs and warriors presented gifts to the prince. Radforth writes, “The chiefs reciprocated by presenting the prince with tomahawks, wampum, pipes, bows and arrows, and decorative work done on birchbark.”42 These gifts are more extensively described in Phillips’ account, which discusses the significance, especially of the giving of wampum, of these objects of material culture.43

Another example of Indigenous performance during the royal tour occurred several days later in Brantford, where a delegation of the Six Nations Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) leaders represented by Oronhyatekha addressed the prince. The welcoming ceremonies of Sarnia and Brantford, with the incorporation of Indigenous delegations, were planned congruently. Radforth’s accounts of the

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41 Cellem, *Visit of His Royal Highness*, 299.
42 Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 11. The list of gifts given by the Anishnabe delegation that Radforth presents here is also recorded in *The Globe*, September 14, 1860.
43 For a more extensive account of the material culture gifted see Phillips, “Making Sense.”
performances reveal the engagement of the Indian Department in terms of organization, encouragement, and subsidization for the inclusion of Indigenous participants. He writes,

The festivities at Sarnia and Brantford were carefully planned from the top, under the direction of Richard Theodore Pennefather, former private secretary of Governor Head, but since 1856 civil secretary and, ex officio, the chief superintendent of the Indian Department …. Pennefather instructed the district superintendents to exert themselves so that the Indian under their charge would present the right sort of images that would gain the approval from the press and visiting dignitaries.\textsuperscript{44}

The Indian Department paid for two chiefs from each band to attend the welcoming ceremonies and also encouraged the bands to send additional “warriors.” The desired image of the Aboriginal delegates perpetuated by the department was of the pre-contact Indian: superintendents like W.R. Bartlett encouraged Indigenous leaders to come in traditional dress, or rather in “Indian Costume.”

In correspondence between Bartlett and Reverend Allen Salt, a missionary assisting in the organization of the delegates, Bartlett wrote “Let them take any war clubs and tomahawks they may possess, and what they do not possess perhaps they may borrow from those who have.” In a subsequent exchange, Bartlett explained to Salt the Department goal for the spectacle of Indianess: “Our great object is to show the Prince of Wales how the Indians dressed in their aboriginal state, and an artist will probably be there to take sketches of everything of note during the Prince’s progress. We want if possible to have a very grand affair.”\textsuperscript{45} Bartlett expresses a similar sentiment to his counterpart in Sarnia, Froome Talbourd: “[W]e shall show the Prince the finest sight he has seen or will see during his tour.”\textsuperscript{46} Phillips notes that the self-presentation of the delegates at Sarnia and Brantford constituted, then, a sanctioned revival of traditional usages that had been largely suppressed for several decades. This active encouragement startlingly reversed, if only temporarily, an official civilization policy which discouraged precisely these kinds of “pagan” and warlike traditional usages, and it exemplifies the contradictions produced by the non-Native desire for spectacles of Indianess.\textsuperscript{47}

It is significant to address, as Phillips and Radforth have, that Indigenous performance and presence during the royal tour contradicted the Indian Department’s policies of assimilation. John Millow and other historians of Indigenous–settler relations have addressed the fact that since the early

\textsuperscript{44} Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 12.
\textsuperscript{47} Phillips, “Making Sense,” 600.
1800s the department had increased and intensified its assimilist agenda. In Radforth’s extensive research on the Indian Departments correspondence he notes that he found “no evidence that Indian Department Officials in 1860 had any disagreements that their role was to mount a spectacle, and that paint and feathers were needed.” Regardless of the Indian Department’s objectives of having Indigenous participants in traditional dress, for the Indigenous people the stagings of the royal tour provided an opportunity for performing and asserting Indigenous cultural continuance. This can be seen in tactical shifts in chosen dress: Oronhyatekha's chosen style of dress, for example, highlights this self-determined and strategic Indigenous self-representation. Ruth Phillips writes,

Like the fringed garments of the Sarnia chiefs, Oronhyatekha’s clothes completely covered his body, a clear outward signifier of “civilization.” Yet beyond this basic similarity, his garments unite two different impulses. On the one hand, the garment types—leggings, tunic, armbands, garters, moccasins, bandolier bag—are Iroquois in concept and design. Though more tailored, the blowsy fullness and length of Oronhyatekha’s tunic recalls the long muslin and calico shirts worn during the second half of the eighteenth century over a breech clout and leggings… The omissions of key traditional signifiers of the noble savage—the blanket cloak, the shaved head and the roach headdress—are equally significant in light of the need, in 1860, to appear “civilized.” Interestingly, too, Oronhyatekha did not wear the traditional Iroquois gustoweh headdress given such prominence in the early and authorities reports on Iroquois material culture published in the 1840s and 1850s by the pioneering ethnographer Lewis Henry Morgan, but rather the Plains feather bonnet already identified by non-Natives with authentic Indianness.

In Phillip’s account, Oronhyatekha’s outfit asserts the continued cultural practice of Indigenous dress while at the same time playing into settler understandings of both “civilization” and so-called authentic Indianness, this latter signified by the strategic incorporation of the Plains feather headdress. As Phillips argues “Oronhyatekha’s outfit expresses the postures of difference and accommodation.” Dress is thus used as a strategy of cultural and political negotiation, whereby combinations of Indigenous and European elements are strategic signifiers to assert different meanings to settler audiences. This notion is explored later in this chapter through the performances

50 Phillips, “Making Sense,” 603. It is interesting to note, as both Radforth and Phillips have, that Oronhyatekha traveled to England after the 1860 Royal Tour in 1861 – and that he took with him his ‘ceremonial suit’ which he had first worn in Brantford for his address and performance to the Prince of Wales. During that visit he was photographed wearing the suit. See Trudy Nicks, “Dr. Oronhyatekha’s History Lessions: Reading Museum Collections as Texts,” in Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History, ed. Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996).
by Mohawk 19th-century performer and poet, Pauline Johnson. Using dress as a political and cultural negotiator was not a new concept to the Iroquois and Annishnabe delegates. As Phillips notes, “In the Great Lakes region, as elsewhere in North America, dress has traditionally been one of the most important sites for the aestheticized expression of group and individual identities.”\(^5^2\) This understanding of body adornment thus illustrates another assertion of continued use of Indigenous cultural traditions during the Sarnia and Brantford performances, which created such opportunities for Indigenous self-presentations and self-determined action.

Throughout the royal tour, arches were erected in each city that the Prince of Wales visited. As part of the Brantford celebrations, many arches were erected throughout the city. The Six Nations Iroquois also participated, creating an arch for the celebrations. However, this arch differed from the non-Indigenous settler arches erected throughout Upper and Lower Canada: rather than being decorated with paint, flowers, or carvings, the Six Nations arch was decorated with four warriors. This monument was thus a living display, a site for performance. Radforth notes, that the arch “projected a self-identity of the Six Nations as proud, autonomous allies of the crown.”\(^5^3\) A reporter in the Toronto Leader described the living arch as “four warriors who bent their bows and stood in a fixed attitude as the Prince passed.”\(^5^4\) This arch is yet another example of self-representation by Indigenous people during the tour. It worked in opposition to, or rather intervened with, the Aboriginal iconography incorporated into the decorative details of many of the other arches erected for the prince’s visited. Radforth describes one triumphal arch raised in honour of the royal tour that incorporated Aboriginal imagery of peoples and linked them to notions of nature: “According to the Morning Freeman, one large arch built at Saint John, New Brunswick, had, on one side of the abutments, ‘a squaw in full Indian dress, and a deer on the other a bear and deer, and beneath the date of the foundation of the city, 1783.’”\(^5^5\) This image of the Aboriginal woman/animals juxtaposed to the date of the city’s establishment emphasizes notions of progress, that is, the European concepts of metropole, civilization, and development. By contrast, the living Aboriginal arch in Brantford emphasized the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Furthermore, by including Iroquois men, not only did it reflect a self-determined act of Indigenous agency, it played into settler desires to see and encounter Indianness. The Iroquoian creators of the arch thus made a very strategic decision to include four of their warriors in the monument.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 599.
\(^{53}\) Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 8.
\(^{54}\) Toronto Leader, September 15, 1860.
\(^{55}\) Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 7.
This inclusion is also interesting in the questions it raises about the meaning of monuments and the differing understandings between Indigenous and Western notions of memory-making. The former make memory through performative and oral traditions, whereas the latter focuses on textual and more static mnemonic devices, such as stone monuments. The creation of a triumphal arch decorated by living Iroquois warriors reflects an Indigenous world view of history making—in the performative act of storytelling. In this way, the Six Nations arch is arguably an act of Indigenous cultural sovereignty and continuance, by which the Iroquois delegation incorporated Haudenosaunee cultural and political knowledges. Furthermore, the arch worked in opposition to the contemporary Eurocentric view of Indigenous cultures as static and non-changing, inserting Indigenous perspectives into the Canadian national/ist campaign played out throughout the tour. The arch represents the sophisticated negotiations made by Indigenous participants in the royal tour celebrations. These performances of agency, autonomy, and cultural sovereignty also played into settler audiences concepts, such as the fact that Iroquois women, the leaders of Haudenosaunee governance, were not incorporated into the arch or as representatives within the Iroquois delegation. In most cases, patriarchal social structures dismissed the significance of the Clan Mothers and the matriarchal society of the Six Nations Confederacy.56

Very few Aboriginal women were included in the performances organized for the royal tour in 1860, and they were consistently overlooked in media reports. This differs from the presence of women in the 1911 King George V tour. Radforth notes that newspaper reports both praised and disparaged the performance of Aboriginal men, but that they “almost universally dismissed Native women. When journalists noticed Aboriginal women at all, they generally portrayed them as part of the backdrop rather than leading players, and they almost always ridiculed the ‘squaws’”57. For example, in the special correspondence in the New York Herald of the Brantford celebrations, the journalist, Cornwallis, observed, “The red men of Brantford were dressed in as full and gorgeous costumes as their brethren of Sarnia, but the squaws, that stood crouchingly aloof, looked wretched.”58 These type of representations, entrenched in racism and sexism, reflect the binary Eurocentric mis/representation of Indigenous women as either the wretched ugly squaw or the

56 In Edward Chapwick’s 1897 anthropological account of Haudenosaunee cultural, political and economic structures, The People of the Longhouse, the role of women is diminished and the role of clan mother’s simply not included. Chapwin does however discuss the fact that Haudenosaunee society was matriarchal and that title and land were past down through the mother’s line. Edward Chadwick, The People of the Longhouse (Toronto: Church of England Pub. Co., 1897).
57 Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation,” 27.
58 Kinahan Cornwallis, Royalty in the New World, or The Prince of Wales in America (New York: M. Doolady, 1860), 142.
noble and beautiful Indian Princess. In looking at such erroneous and epistemically and representatively violent portrayals of Indigenous women, I would like, here, to emphasize Indigenous perspectives and acts of agency. In several instances Aboriginal women participated within the celebrations, not simply as spectators but as performers and also as the producers of the garments wore by the men. In this way, Indigenous women partook in asserting cultural continuance of Indigenous cultural knowledge.

In Halifax, both Mi’kmaq men and women participated in the reception of the Prince of Wales. Prior to the prince’s arrival, the local press announced the upcoming sporting races (canoe and track and field) for local Mi’kmaq women and men. The day after the prince arrived, Mi’kmaq women and men paddled in canoe races, which were extensively covered in the press as the “grand regatta.” It is interesting to note that all participants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were promised prize money for winning performances. The Halifax British Colonist on 26 July 1860, proclaimed prize money of $10 for first prize and $5 for second prize, and announced that the winner of the “Indian flat race” could also run in the champion race, meaning with non-Indigenous runners. The opportunity to make money would have been an encouragement for Indigenous participants, along with the opportunity to stage loyalties to the Crown, participate in cultural continuance, and intervene within exclusionary settler society (for example, the separation of “Indian races” and settler based races). The blue frock coats and trousers worn by the Mi’kmaq athletes were decorated in traditional beading techniques and designs using colourful thread.

Although no official welcome was planned for Mi’kmaq representation in Halifax other than the sporting events, the first Aboriginal public performance for the tour occurred in Halifax during the prince’s royal entry by boat. Radforth states, “A group of Mi’kmaq men who had come to town for the occasion stood waiting for the prince’s arrival at the Dockyard, the site of the official ceremonies. Shortly before the royal visitor was rowed ashore by sailors of the Royal Navy, the Mi’kmaq men set off in a dozen specially decorated canoes to greet him and escort him to shore.” In doing so, as Radforth argues, the first people to welcome the prince to Halifax were the first peoples of the lands of Halifax and surrounding areas, the Mi’kmaq. He notes that in his research he has found no reference to plans about the canoe escort and that it may have been a Mi’kmaq initiative. He also notes that although there seems to be no record of an official welcome by Mi’kmaq, the celebrations organization committee knew that a delegation of Mi’kmaq would be

60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
present at the welcoming spectacle: a local press reported, as noted by Huskins in “Tale of Two Cities,” that a subscription drive was undertaken to raise money for the Mi'kmaq women to produce ‘traditional costumes’ for the event in Halifax.62 This points to the possibility that the Mi’kmaq organized the performance of the canoe, and could be argued as an example of intervention within the royal tour program—a program in which the inclusion of Indigenous participation was on colonial and settler terms. The Mi’kmaq decision to organize a Indigenous welcome outside the organization of the royal tour thus provides yet another example of Indigenous cultural and political agency. Here again Indigenous cultural signifiers, such as dress and the act of canoeing, were incorporated into their welcoming of the prince onto their ancestral lands and territories. The fact that they were the first to welcome the Prince of Wales—and not simply part of the entertainment or sporting events—is also significant in relation to Mi’kmaq political and cultural agency.

The paddling of canoes by Aboriginal delegations was a recurring event in the tour program as part of the spectacle for the Prince of Wales. Paddling represents a multilayered colonial encounter with Indigenous peoples: it constitutes the paradox of the colonial experience. The Indigenous act of paddling, on the one hand, plays into settler expectations of having an “authentic” encounter with Indianness, and on the other hand creates sites for Indigenous agency over continued cultural practice and political assertions.

These statements may seem repetitive to the reader; however, my aim here to is to stress the significance of Indigenous perspectives and experiences of the royal tour and not only highlight their relevance in terms of settler consciousness and understanding of Aboriginal people and their cultures. During the Montreal celebrations, the Hudson’s Bay Company organized a day for the prince to visit Dorval Island in Lake St. Louis. During this day, over a hundred Iroquois performed a meticulous synchronized canoe show for the Prince—described by the press as a water spectacle that dazzled the royal prince and his entourage.63 Cornwallis wrote of the Haudenosounee canoeists, who were most probably from the Mohawk community of Kahnawake:

When about mid-channel [the Royal party] were met by ten canoes, each manned by a dozen Indians, who formed a double line, between which the man-of-war boats passed, to the music of an Indian salute from those on board the canoes. His Royal Highness….went on board an Indian canoe, to be paddled round the island to the before mentioned village of Caughwaga, and back to Lachine. This was done

63 Toronto Leader, August 28, 1860.
to the evident pleasure of England’s eldest son.\textsuperscript{64}

This description by Cornwallis highlights the prince’s reception of the Iroquois canoe performance, but it also documents Mohawk participation in the tour. What also can be drawn from historical accounts, such as this one, is Indigenous implications and use of the tour to assert cultural and political knowledge. For instance, as above, when the prince got into one of the Mohawk canoes, the Mohawk delegation proceeded to give him a tour of their community and waterways. This was an instance where Indigenous perspectives governed the prince’s tour of Khanawake, showing Mohawk autonomy and control over his experience. The combination of the “water spectacle” and tour reveals Indigenous insurgence of perspectives: the royal tour was seen by Indigenous peoples as an opportunity to assert their presence in British North America, their sovereignty over their lands, and their ongoing practice and performance of cultural custom.\textsuperscript{65}

The canoe, now an icon of Canadian identity, is also interesting to think about in terms of tours intended to display distinctness and connection to Canada’s national identity. In Montreal, several days prior to the canoe performance and tour of Khanawake, a lacrosse game was staged for the prince’s entertainment. During this event, a spectacle of “Indian Games,” two opposing teams played the first match made up of Algonquin and Iroquoian players. This lacrosse game was also a staging of the historically recognized hostility between these neighboring Indigenous nations. After the game, the Iroquois team played against an all-white team from Montreal, winning the match.\textsuperscript{66} Radforth notes, in the “Memorandum from the Montreal Reception Committee to Pennfather,”\textsuperscript{67} that the Montreal organizational committee for the tour “chose to play up the community’s reputation as a sports centre to entertain the royal visitor and to attract a large number of ticket-buying spectators who would help subsidize the city’s reception.”\textsuperscript{68}

Before a crowd of over two thousand people, the Indigenous players, wearing red shirts and blue or white tights with “plenty of feathers and paint on their faces and calves,” performed a ritual

\textsuperscript{64} Cornwallis, \textit{Royalty in the New World}, 105.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Globe} (Toronto), 31 August 31, 1860. An additional example of performances by Indigenous peoples during the tour was staged in Ottawa, where a grand canoe entry was organized for the prince, his entourage and settler spectators. Over 1200 men in 150 birch bark canoes greeted the prince along the river several miles below Ottawa. In the lead of the notably spectacular canoe reception were several Indigenous canoes, potentially from the local Algonquian bands whose lands Ottawa is hosted on. The newspaper account from 1 September 1860 printed in the Toronto \textit{Globe} described the Indigenous canoe and paddlers in the following passage: “A few Indian canoes with warriors in full dress and war paint, led the van.” The rest of the paddlers were lumberman who followed the ‘Indian canoes’ and proceeded in point-formation.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Globe} (Toronto), August 28, 1860.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Globe} (Toronto), August 18 1860.
\textsuperscript{68} Radforth, 10.
of Indigenous sporting practice—that of playing lacrosse. This activity is a continuation of Indigenous societal practice, a technique for training warriors for battle. “During the games the Boston Fusiliers marched into the ground, proceeded by their band. They took up a position at the right of the Prince’s platform. Their band first played ‘God Save the Queen,’ … Next they struck up ‘Yankee Doodle,’ and the Prince returned the compliment just paid by taking off his hat and remained bareheaded until the strains were over.”

The juxtaposing of the performance by the Boston Fusiliers with the Indigenous performance/game of lacrosse, the latter described as performances that “were far more fantastic than terrible,” were possibly organized in this way to reinforce one of the over-arching themes of the 1860 royal tour previously mentioned: that is, Western (meaning British) expansion, progress, and social development in North America. The Indigenous performance was incorporated to create a binary narrative of Indigenous culture and British and European culture.

However, by placing emphasis on Indigenous participation and perspectives, we can see a more complex account of the royal tour’s inclusion of Aboriginal participants playing out. Although this narrative may have been the result of the juxtaposition between Indigenous dancers and drummers and Boston singers and band, a question arises: What is the narrative or theme created from the lacrosse games? The playing of lacrosse, an Indigenous Haudenosaunee game, by Indigenous and non-Indigenous players for a large stadium of settler spectators puts forward many meanings. It suggests an understanding of contact histories, wherein Indigenous peoples supported and assisted settlers in their arrival to the Americas. Settlers drew from Indigenous knowledge and technologies to survive. In the act of the settler team playing lacrosse, these experiences and histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous alliances are enacted and performed. Further, the game between the Mohawk and the Montreal-based settler teams performatively enacted the current history of the developing nation of Canada. What I mean here is that the lacrosse game is as a powerful signifier of contemporary politics: of the struggle over lands, over cultural autonomy, over the settler control of national narratives and identities, and over cultural continuance and sovereignty for Indigenous peoples.

In Radforth’s quote from the Globe above, which was just one of many newspaper accounts of the lacrosse game and performances, the imagery presented to the reader of the Indigenous performance after the games proceeded the account of the marching band. Following the lacrosse games, Indigenous dance and music were performed by male dancers and drummers from

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Globe (Toronto), August 28, 1860.
Kahnawake and Kanesetake. The press described these performances press as “Indian war dances,” emphasizing the distinctive Indianness of the modes of dress by these Mohawk performers. The dances performed were also described as being fantastic and were once again linked to the dress of the Mohawk warrior dancers and drummers, who wore buckskin, paint and feathers and brandished rattles and weapons such as tomahawks and knives. Radforth stated that the warriors’ performance mimicked “a bloody battle—completed with the scalping of enemy captives.” Iconic descriptions of the Indigenous performance were captured in print as “a party of Indians with tomahawks, tom toms, rattle and horns, danced a war dance and shouted their war hoop.”

These generic descriptions of Indigenous performance are seen in all the accounts of Aboriginal participation in the festivities of the royal tour. At times—such as in the Halifax, where the Mi’kmaq are named—reports differentiate between Indigenous groups by naming the nations of which the participants were part. However, the details of the performances, specifically dancing or singing, are usually described as homogenous “war dances” and “war hoop” or “Indian shouting.” This plays into the general homogenous understanding of Indigenous peoples during the 19th century, which have informed and perpetuated misunderstandings and ignorance in contemporary Canadian-settler consciousness of the diversities and complexities of Aboriginal peoples and their cultures across North America.

Regardless of how Indigenous peoples were represented in the media, which Radforth explores extensively, Indigenous participation in the ceremonies staged for the prince were a form of Indigenous resistance. As presented in The Empire Strikes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures by Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, a central issue in concepts of resistance is the simplification of resistance as oppositionality. This is evident in the deferring tactics of Indigenous resistance in North America, which has a dynamic and multifaceted history that is not always connected with forms of direct opposition. This is exemplified in the performances made by diverse Indigenous groups during the Royal Tours of 1860 and also in 1901. Edward Said also explores this problem and asserts agency in relation to political and cultural negotiation and intervention rather than direct oppositional tactics by colonized peoples. Postcolonial theorists have revealed that resistance in relation to colonial politics and discourse is not necessarily a complete rejection of the colonized societal structures and that an understanding of resistance as rejection simply re-confirms a binary relationship between colonizer and colonized

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70 Ibid.
that does not allow for a complex discussion of Indigenous mobilizations and interventions within the colonial and subsequent dominant society. In a discussion of Edward Said’s theoretical contributions, Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, write, “opposition, far from achieving a successful rejection of the dominant culture, locks the political consciousness of the colonized subjection in a binary relationship from which actual resistance is difficult to mobilise.” I include Said’s analysis of resistance and agency to stress the diverse strategies of resistance. Although the media representation and settler experience of the Indigenous performances may stress a playing into (and most likely did play into) colonial society’s racist, simplistic, and biased discourses and understandings of Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and cultures, these performances by Indigenous peoples were acts of resistance and assertions of both cultural and political agency.

### 1901 Duke and Duchess of Cornwall Royal Tour of Colonies

In this section, I explore several examples of Aboriginal performances and gatherings organized for the 1901 Duke and Duchess of Cornwall Royal Tour. Queen Victoria’s death in early 1901 brought the organizing of the tour to a standstill, and Edward VII, who had travelled in 1860 to North America, was also reluctant to send his only remaining son, George, Duke of Cornwall on a lengthy and extensive tour of the colonies. The tours of 1860 and 1901 similarly were seen as a means to reward colonies and their subjects. This tour, in comparison with the 1860 tour, was much more elaborate, specifically the ceremonies in the urban centres. The Duke travelled across the country in a specially designed train, and was hosted in such cities as Victoria, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Saint John, and Halifax. Smaller celebrations were organized along the route,

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74 Once again credit for the tour, as in the case of the 1860 tour, was given to Queen Victoria. She was credited as designing and organizing the extensive tour in 1901 of the British Empire. Phillip Buckner notes that as early as 1898 the British Government proposed for a tour of the colonies by the Duke of Cornwall should be organized. He states that “Victoria was unenthusiastic about sending her grandson (and heir) on a lengthy tour across the globe. After the passage of the bill federating the Australian colonies, Joseph Camberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, strongly urged that the Duke should open the first Australian Parliament. Victoria reluctantly consented but sought to confine the tour to Australia. Camberlain, however, was determined to send a signal of gratitude to the other self-governing colonies for agreeing to send troops to participate in the South African War and at the last moment—over the Queen’s objections—Canada and South Africa were tacked on to the tour. Phillip Buckner, “The Invention of Tradition,” 21.

75 For instance, in the case of the tours in Canada, were an opportunity to reward and acknowledge Canadians and their contributions to imperial war and also as a means to reinforce colonial loyalty to the British Empire. Ibid., 22.
where hundreds and sometimes thousands of spectators from smaller communities would gather at railroad stations to greet the heir to the British throne.\textsuperscript{76}

For the royal tour of 1901, Indigenous performance was incorporated into the festivities. “The Great Powwow of 1901” was one aspect of the Aboriginal program; as Wade Henry noted, the 1901 tour was both a Native ceremony and a royal ceremony.\textsuperscript{77} Henry argues that the inclusion of Indigenous performance during the tour “must be understood not only in the context of the government’s Indian policy, but also as part of the broader context of royal ceremonies, national identity, and power.” He recognizes that the Great Powwow was a small but significant part of the 1901 Royal Tour of Canada, arguing that the Indigenous performances were “intended to contribute to this project of articulating a sense of Canadian national identity linked to the image of the “Indian.”\textsuperscript{78} In other words, like the 1860 tour, Indigenous peoples were incorporated as symbols of Canadianness, meaning that the tour organizers intended to control and maintain stagings of Aboriginality for several purposes: to serve as living examples of British justice in Canada (meaning that Indigenous peoples were treated fairly in the Empire) and to simultaneously signify narratives of progress and development in Canada. Henry states that although Indigenous peoples did have an imagined place within the Canadian nation during the 1901 tour, they did not necessarily hold political power or control over their incorporation. He writes, “While seemingly investing Native with symbolic power, royal ceremonies such as the Great Powwow were also used to maintain the hegemony of white Canadians, in part by consolidating and defining their culture in opposition to subordinate Native culture.”\textsuperscript{79} This being said, it is imperative to recognize the royal tours as a contested site of the Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations. By acknowledging the royal tours as sites of contestation and complexity, we highlight the ways in which both Indigenous and settlers imagined themselves, and how they manipulated structures of representation.

The 1901 tour exemplifies the contradictions of this period of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, whereby the Canadian government, the Indian Affairs department, and other civic officials decided to incorporate Indigenous peoples in regalia and as performers to entertain the royal tours at the same time that they were enforcing assimilist campaigns, such as the ceremonial ban and residential

\textsuperscript{76} In an account in the \textit{Globe} (Toronto), October 16, 1901, stated that even when the train was not scheduled to stop in smaller communities, “a crowd of people cheering and waving” arrived at the station to simply see the Duke’s train.


\textsuperscript{78} Henry, “Imagining the Great White Mother,” 89.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
schools. In Henry’s pivotal study on the 1901 royal tour, “Imagining the Great Mother and the Great King,” he comprehensively discusses the organization of the “Great Powwow” and the incorporation of Indigenous performances into the itinerary. It is interesting to note that at the beginning of organization Aboriginal presence was not of interest of the state. A letter written by J.D. McLean, the then Secretary of Indian Affairs, clearly asserted that state sponsorship of Native participation was not advisable. McLean’s position is not surprising given that during his tenure (1901-1919), he exemplified the department’s unsympathetic approach toward Indigenous peoples; his policies emphasized assimilation, control, and suppression of Aboriginal cultures.\(^80\)

However, despite efforts of both McLean and James Smart, Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Superintendent General Clifford Sifton nevertheless decided to make enquiries as to whether the department should support Native participation. Sifton’s decision put in motion the organization of a “few cases [of Aboriginal performance] to allow them to express their loyalty and affection to the Crown of Great Britain,”\(^81\) along with Governor General Lord Minto’s desire to have a more extensive and expansive participation. Lord Minto lobbied for a large gathering of Indigenous peoples, specifically Blackfoot, Blood, and Sarcee bands, at or near Calgary.\(^82\) Lord Minto’s proposal to the prime minister (based on ideas from Commissioner A. Bowen Perry of the North West Mounted Police) proposed cattle roping, broncho riding, etc. However, Sir Wilfred Laurier rejected the concept as too essentially Cowboy and Indians, limiting Native involvement to a sideshow act. Laurier suggested that the gathering be a more formal welcoming, whereby the future King of England could bestow small but valued gifts to the Native chiefs. He wrote to Lord Minto, “It has been the constant policy of the British government on this continent to have the sovereign bestow upon the Indian chiefs, marks of individual favour. There are many braves who to this day will wear with pride, silver medals sent to their great great grandfather by George III.” Lord Minto subsequently agreed and replied that he too was “rather inclined to think there is too much Cowboy and too little Indian!” which could risk the danger of having the Native gathering of becoming “a circus show”\(^83\) The result of the discussions was a decision to have a separate Calgary event with cowboy riding and exhibitions to the Indian gathering to take place at Shaganappi point (three kilometres outside of the city).

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 91; “Clifford, Sifton, and Canadian Indian Administration,” 127–151 RG10, Black Series, reel C-10144, vol 2823, file 60511–1. Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada.
\(^{81}\) J. Smart, RG10, Black series, vol. 8582, file ½ 2-15-6, “J. Smart to C. Sifton,” May 20, 1901 (copy), National Archives Canada.
\(^{82}\) Henry, “Imagining the Great White Mother,” 92.
\(^{83}\) Ibid. 93.
Henry’s research outlines the multiple levels of control over the Indigenous participants, and how during the organization period, provision of a liberal supply of food, tobacco, and tea for the Aboriginal people was considered a necessity to hopefully keep them on reserve. The rations, Henry states,

were to be distributed by the Indian Agents, giving the Indian Department some control over any potentially damaging outcomes of the Indian Gathering … Since a cornerstone of Indian policy was to keep Natives segregated from the white community on reserves and to instill self-sufficiency and thrift in their communities, Indian administrators were not enamoured with the prospect of having hundreds of Indians venturing off their reserves to receive free food at the Pow-wow. By holding the ceremony away from Calgary with a contingent of police on hand and directing the issues of rations, they hoped to limit the potential threat of their program of Indian assimilation.84

The concept of Indigenous dancing and ceremony was among the issues faced by the organizers of the royal tour as different members of the state articulated different positions on the inclusion of Indigenous performance. Since the late 1800s the Indian Department had legislatively banned ceremony, such as the Potlatch and the Sun Dance, and had promoted a militant assimilist agenda to eradicate Indigenous cultural practices. The issue of Indigenous dance and performance highlights the differing opinions of settlers during this time in relation to Indigenous peoples. Henry argues, “While officials from the Department of Indian Affairs resisted any action that could possibly interfere with their programme of Native assimilation, from dancing to the Powwow itself, other officials, influenced by popular romantic images of savage Indians, advocated spectacular ceremonies that conformed to their racial stereotypes.”85

I draw my discussion from previous studies of royal tours, contributing to these by looking to the question: Why did Indigenous peoples participate? Building on my analysis above on the 1860 Indigenous performances, I would like to extend my argument in relation to the 1901 tour. This period of post-confederate Canada saw, as previously examined, harsh treatment of Indigenous communities. The Indian Policy was to control and maintain Native subordination within the hegemony of British-settler Canada. However, despite the ongoing colonial tactics of isolation, assimilation, and violence, Indigenous peoples resisted the states domination, often in subtle ways, to promote economic, political, and cultural sovereignty. By looking to Indigenous agency through a frame of Indigenous sovereignty, we remove the participants of the royal tours from a simplistic understanding of victimization to a more complex understanding that moves away from collective

84 Ibid., 94–95.
85 Ibid., 96.
experience and highlights individual experience. What I mean here is that although many
Indigenous communities and individuals did not have the opportunity to resist or stage cultural and
political intervention and protest, many others did. Looking to Indigenous agency within the history
of the tours emphasizes Indigenous self-representation and cultural continuance.

At the “Great Powwow” over two thousand settler spectators witnessed the dancing and
ceremony of the Plains Indigenous peoples. Along with the chiefs, who sat in the front row directly
facing the dais erected for the event, students from the residential schools and also women and
children were present. The presence of the residential school children mirrors an incorporation
similar to those of Indigenous performances at the 1893 Chicago World Fairs, which are explored
later in this chapter. In both of these instances, the juxtaposition of the Aboriginal chiefs and
performers in regalia, with beads and feather and painted faces (from an Indigenous perspective
symbols of cultural continuity and continuance, and from a Eurocentric perspective symbols of
savagery and inferiority) with the Aboriginal children with short cut hair in official uniforms
supported Canada’s Indian Policy of assimilation. It was thus a staging to show the successes of the
project of assimilation. During the event the Indian tribes of Southern Alberta made an address that,
Henry notes, largely reflected the attitudes of the Indian Department. The numerous addresses that
had been submitted were consistently declined by the Governor General’s office due to their
political nature—an example of the control the department exercised in reviewing all addresses to
the Duke and Duchess. However, the chiefs were also able to give unofficial and individual
addresses to the Duke, on their own terms. Due to concerns as to what the chiefs might say, this
part of the event was restricted in time. Henry argues,

So far, the Indian Department had been able to trunk the Pow-wow from a potential
disaster to their advantage. First, by positioning all of the Natives symmetrically in
straight lines, balanced groups, and according to hierarchical status, the Department
arranged the Indians so as to give the impression of order and control. The seeming
spatial control of the Indians was reinforced by the contingent NWMP which,
though small, conveyed the impression that they contained the Indigenous peoples
and would safeguard the heir apparent by patrolling an imaginary boundary
between the Natives and the public.

It is interesting to note that the chiefs and the school children were outfitted in clothing that
the state and missionaries provided, which could be seen as a means to further suggest and

86 Ibid., 97–98.
87 Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, The Web of Empire: A Diary of the Imperial Tour of Their Royal
88 Henry, “Imagining the Great White Mother,” 98.
support the assimilist project. Henry writes, “Dressed in dark Hudson’s Bay Company reefing jackets with matching trousers, and topped with a felt hat with a red ribbon the chiefs exuded the dignity they supposedly lacked in traditional garb.” The staging of the Aboriginal peoples by the government was meant to encapsulate imagery of assimilation and Canadian control over its wards of the state, thereby providing visual imagery for the spectators, the royal party, and the media of the Indian Department’s successful containment of Indigenous peoples, as well as of the progress of Aboriginal people into Western society and their contentment within it.

Looking to the speeches explicitly, however, reveals the presence of Indigenous agency and perhaps an explanation as to why Indigenous peoples participated. For example, during the speech made by White Pup, a chief from the Blackfoot people, he presented the treaty made twenty years earlier with Queen Victoria to the Duke, and proclaimed that the Blackfoot people would always observe the treaty faithfully. Chief Bull’s Head, on behalf of the Sarcee people, requested necessary food and explained to the duke that his people were hungry, but he also reaffirmed their allegiance to the Crown. The media seemed disappointed in its response to the Chiefs speeches, describing how demanded “lots of grub” and seemed to be complaining. Henry suggests that the spectators, officials, royal party and media present were not moved by the chiefs’ speeches about starvation, treaties, and land loss, and that their words did little to change sympathies or opinions about the treatment of Indigenous peoples by the Canadian state.

Regardless of their reception, these speeches—translated into English (which would have stripped them of their eloquence and the nuances of the Indigenous languages)—represented the self-determined voices of the Sarcee, Blood, Blackfoot peoples. After the individual addresses, gifts were given and reciprocated, and then the Duke made an address: directed first to the Aboriginal peoples speaking of allegiances; and then to the settler spectators about the prospering nation and the generous treatment of Natives. Following Prince George’s address, the children from the residential schools sang God Save the King, once again illustrating their progress away from Indian

89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., 99.
91 E. F. Knight, With the Royal Tour: A Narrative of the Recent Tour of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York through Greater Britain (Toronto: Longmans, 1902) 334–35; Manitoba Press, 30 September 1901.
92 Henry, “Imagining the Great White Mother,” 99.
93 Ibid., 101.
culture and ways of life and successful assimilation into white culture. After this imperial sentiment, approximately eighty Indigenous men dressed in regalia entered the powwow grounds and began a demonstration of dancing. The men entered on horse back and circled the arena with rifles in their arms.

Henry argues that despite the attempts of the Indian department to influence the movement of the powwow, the words expressed, and even the attire of the Aboriginal people at the Powwow, the moderate performance by the Blackfoot, Sarcee and Blood men created a counter-representation that the press presented to the Canadian public and throughout the Empire. Henry writes, “Whatever the case, the display of dancing, no matter how restricted, and number of Natives who dispense in modern attire contradicted the messages of Native assimilation that the sate was attempting to diffuse.”

For example, in the Calgary Herald, the dancers in regalia and war paint were praised as having danced in “the most fantastic manner”; in the Manitoba Free Press the headlines read “A Great Gathering of Red Men to Meet Royalty”; the Ottawa Citizen proclaimed, “Loyalty of the Natives Warmly Praised”; and the World stated, “Peaceful Indians in War Paint Entertain Royalty at Calgary.”

During the Duke and Duchess 1901 tour Indigenous peoples were incorporated into the celebrations. Numerous archival photographs record Aboriginal performances and welcomings to the royal party. The Great Powwow of 1901 was used as an opportunity for Indigenous peoples to articulate their agency and self-represent Plains cultural traditions. The archive of powwow photographs, many of them taken by photographers from the Topley Studio, founded by William James Topley, provides visual representation of the asserted agency of the dancers and the Indigenous women. These images are connected to the larger archive of historical photographs of Indigenous peoples from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Recent scholarship has stressed the biased lenses of Euro-Canadian photographers. The reasons for their production are seen to be entrenched in Eurocentric desires of collecting, documenting, and consuming Indigenous peoples and their cultures. The extensive archive of Aboriginal photographs in North America was furthermore created and perpetuated under the trope of the vanishing race paradigm. Nevertheless, the photographs that remain from the 1901 tour present Indigenous peoples’ self-representation. These images can be looked at in terms of the ongoing struggle for Indigenous sovereignty and the always already presence of Aboriginal agency within Indigenous resistance. When they are decolonized.

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94 Ibid., 102.
95 Calgary Herald, September 30, 1901.
96 Ibid.
from colonial perspectives and their historical contexts, these photographs serve as evidence of political and cultural resistance through Indigenous performance.

For example, the image *Indians gathered at Shagannapi Point to meet H.R.H the Duke of Cornwall and York* taken on 28 September 1901, captures more than fourteen of the dancers on horseback. The Indigenous riders are portrayed in profile, all looking forward, dressed in regalia and with their horses decorated and painted. These men do not convey a message of assimilation, nor do they convey a message of the colonized. To look at this image is to witness the ongoing cultural continuities of the Plains Indigenous peoples, despite the isolation and starvation supported by the state. Another photograph, with the same title, focuses on the Indigenous women present at the Powwow (fig. 106). In most of the ceremonies and performances, Indigenous women were excluded from the official organization. However, they were present. Two women and a small child are the focus of this image. They are standing with a long line of Indigenous riders in the background, and other women, elderly, children and men sit around them. This image can be seen

Figure 106: *Indians gathered at Shagannapi Point to meet H.R.H the Duke of Cornwall and York*. Library and Archives Canada, 3193380.
to signify agency and autonomy over self-representation, juxtaposing the inferior place white patriarchal society bestowed on Indigenous women. I see this image as a counter-representation of popular culture’s stereotypes of Aboriginal women and the monolithic Indian princess or Squaw. Here, the viewer meets the individuals, dressed according to their own ancestry, family, and personality.

I have focused on the discussion of the Great Powwow during the 1901 Royal Tour; however, other Indigenous performances occurred throughout the tour of Canada. For example, in Vancouver, Indian canoe races were staged, as well as large welcoming ceremonies by North West Coast dignitaries. In Ottawa, the Duke and Duchess were welcomed by boat by Indigenous canoes in Rockcliffe. Phillips argues that native dance was performance, referring to the fact that since the time of Jacques Cartier, Europeans have been greeted by Native peoples with dance performances. Importantly, Phillips recognizes that when Native-European relations were based on mutual recognition of sovereignty, Native dance performances for white spectators functioned as “ritualized gestures of respect and/or self-presentation.”97 However, with the increase of colonial settlement and economic dispossession of Indigenous resources, which led to the deterioration of native economies, Natives started dancing for money “as one of a number of strategies for survival.”98

It is important to acknowledge that during both the royal tour of 1860 and 1901, Aboriginal peoples “managed to convey a message beyond what was expected by the organizers.”99 Indigenous activism and resistance were mediated and negotiated through the performative body. As Rutherdale and Miller argue, “While the Prince of Wales may have been edified by the dances performed in the 1860 royal tour, he also, through his colonial secretary, was presented with First Nations’ petitions that discussed local grievances.”100 To reiterate my argument, then, and to build on recent scholarship, Indigenous performance, exemplified in the performances at the 1860 Prince of Wales royal tour and the tour of 1901 are both subtle and overt instances of staging Indigenous agency. In many instances, scholars have focused on settler or white leaders’ reactions and responses to Indigenous protest, resistance, and on political leaders’ and delegations’ actions, which is significant in terms of looking at the result of Indigenous activism and socio-political change.

97 Ruth Phillips, “Performing the Native Woman,” 34.
98 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
within colonial nation states. However, what I aim to stress is the sophisticated and strategic acts of staging Indigenous agency in terms of an Indigenous perspective. These performances were acts of cultural continuance and sites of social gathering and political mobilization.

This chapter, as I have already stated, includes many examples of Indigenous performance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to show a history of Indigenous resistance, cultural continuance, and agency through performative acts. I argue that these performative stagings, such as the playing of lacrosse in Quebec during the Prince of Wales visit, are significant because Indigenous populations at this time were experiencing settler encroachment on their lands, development of assimilist agendas and policies, and an increase of isolationist tactics brought forward by colonial governments. Isolation and assimilist legislative policies were vehicles used to perpetuate and maintain settler domination and the outcomes of British conquest of northern North American lands. The 1901 tour is arguably a more significant example of Indigenous agency through performance because this period was an extreme period of Canadian nationalism and assimilist campaigns, which further isolated and dominated Indigenous peoples from across the country.

**Rising to the Occasion: Contemporary Intervention in Royal Tours**

As a response to the royal visit of Prince Andrew and Lady Sarah Ferguson’s 1987 visit to Canada, Rebecca Belmore participated in a staged silent parade (conceived by Lynn Sharman) in Thunder Bay. For this performative artist intervention, Belmore created *Rising to the Occasion* as part of the Twelve Angry Crinolines exhibition, where artists created dresses and as part of the show danced together in them. Her chosen objects, attached to the dress and sewn into its fabrication, address the affects and legacies of cultural tourism, expansion of the British Empire, and Canadian nation-building on Indigenous peoples and their cultures. *Rising to the Occasion* is a Victorian style dress with a beaver dam bustle adorned with china teacups breast plates, a wagon wheel parasol, a fringed bodice and a leather feathered headdress with ajoined fake braids. In the bustle a coin from Queen Elizabeth’s silver jubilee, news paper articles and photographs of the British monarchy, tea cups with Prince Charles and Princess Diana and even a silver spoon with the word Canada engraved and a gold buffalo (fig. 107). As Barbara Fischer and Dot Tuer remark in *Rebecca Belmore: 33 Pieces* this work is a “mimicry of Royalty and subversion of the colonized subject.”

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This work demonstrates how Aboriginal performance artists excavate colonial legacies, while simultaneously revealing and sustaining Indigenous cultural and knowledge systems.

Figure 107: Rebecca Belmore, *Rising to the Occasion*, Multi-media installation, AGO Collection.

In this sense, colonial legacies, Indigenous knowledge, and political realities come together for a performative staging of Indigenous resistance. Curators Daina Augaitis and Kathleen Ritter write, Belmore’s work first came to the fore with the *Rising to the Occasion*, an artifact from a performed staged in response to an official visit by the Duke and Duchess of York to Thunder Bay in 1987. The “dress” worn by the artist during their visit, skillfully combines clichés from both British and First Nations cultures. It is at once a fine Victorian gown of embroidered velvet and satin and a biting satire – the bodice punctuated with beadwork and porcelain saucers, trimmed with buckskin fringe, the back a beaver-hut bustle made of a chaotic mass of sticks, embedded with royal memorabilia and kitsch souvenirs. Fantastical in appearance and acerbic in wit, the dress juxtaposes cultural signifiers that are not just contradictory, but oppositional in meaning. Belmore’s inversion of the signs of both Aboriginal and Western European culture challenges the conventional stereotypes of both, a tactic used consistently in her work. Just as Belmore “rose to the occasion” of the royal visit in 1987, she has since consistently put herself in a position to respond to political contradictions and injustices in the intervening twenty years, critically questioning the dominant order. She continues to rise to the occasion, often using provocation, strong symbolic references and the disarming quality of beauty to
present an eloquent alternative voice to society’s official narratives.\textsuperscript{102}

The Twelve Angry Crinolines pageant, protest, and tea party on the occasion of the Duke and Duchess’s visit highlights the performative and constructed nature of the royal tours and the incorporation of Indigenous peoples as performers. \textit{Rising to the Occasion} also alludes to the historical precedent of the 1860 Royal tour, in which Indigenous peoples were featured despite assimilist campaigns to eradicate Indigenous cultural practice into the official ceremonial programs. Over one hundred years later, during the Duke and Duchess of York’s official visit to Canada, a similar program was once again manifested. However, like the Mi’kmaq who staged their own welcome in Halifax in 1860, Belmore and the Twelve Angry Crinolines protest parade was an intervention and a dynamic act of Indigenous agency, presenting to the Canadian public and the Royal party self-determined Indigenous presence.

\textbf{On Contested Grounds: Performing the “Native”/Performing Resistance at World Fairs}

Indigenous performance is linked to histories of exhibiting Indigenous peoples as objects of curiosity. In colonial periods, conquered resources, lands, and peoples were put on display in World Exhibitions as evidence of European conquest and superiority. Indigenous peoples and their material culture were included in World’s Fairs in order to legitimate colonial rule and violent processes of colonization. A significant moment in this history is the presence of a Kwakwaka’wakw performance troupe at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. Its participation in the fair was a strategic decision and was used as an opportunity to show Kwakwaka’wakw agency, leadership, autonomy, and resistance during the time of the Potlatch Ban in Canada (1884-1951). Arguably, its performances undermined and exposed the contradictions of Nation-state policy. This complicated and contradictory moment is linked to the broader history of human zoos and Indigenous peoples on display. My purpose at this point in my discussion is to explore how performance was used for the staging of Indigenous resistance and as an act of Indigenous activism.

In “The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,” Curtis Hinsley states that the display of Indigenous peoples “for profit,

entertainment, or public edification has a long and problematic history.” The first World’s Fair to include humans on display was the Paris Exposition of 1889, and by 1890 there were two traditions of human display: i) anthropological displays showing scientific and ethnographic specimens and ii) sideshows that presented human oddities. Both of these types of display overlapped and appeared in the “Native Villages” of world fairs.

In An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War, P. Hoffenberg states that World Exhibitions were representations of imperial and national social and commercial enterprises during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. He writes:

They were spectacles of tangible fantasy, in which participants forged nations and the Empire, both imaginary and material. Imperial, colonial, and national inventories were linked at the exhibitions by official tests and jury reports, consumption, tourism, and historical pageants. The power to organize, study, and compare this diversity strengthened the authority of commissioners and their states.

In this regard, Robert Rydell argues that World’s Fairs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries performed a hegemonic function precisely because they promoted, propagated, and legitimized the ideas and values of the host nation’s political, economic, corporate, and intellectual leaders; they concretized these ideas and values as “the proper interpretation of social and political reality.” In this way, the underlying purpose of the fairs was to serve as reminders to their visitors of the legitimacy of Empire, nation-building, and colonization. It is important to recognize, as many scholars of world exhibitions have, that the fairs were connected to ideas of progress, which was synonymous with imperial material wealth and economic expansion. World fairs thus manifested and legitimated colonial conquest based on ideals of white superiority and Western civilization.

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104 Hinsley, “The World as Marketplace,” 346. Hinsley argues that the display of so-called exotic types for public display and private profit seems to have originated in the late 1870’s with Hamburg animal trainer and zoo master Carl Hagenbeck. Hagenbeck had a collection of artifacts and a Greenland Eskimo family of six brought to Hamburg where they traveled as exhibits through Europe for eight months.” Due to its popularity and profits in Europe this was the first of many tours of Indigenous peoples. In 1880 a tour of eight Labrador Eskimos ended in tragedy with the entire troupe dying of smallpox, while in 1885–6 nine members of the Bella Coola nation toured twenty-seven German cities in eleven months, including three weeks of dancing in Hagenbeck’s Hamburg theme park.
105 Peter Hoffenberg, An Empire on Display: English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2001), xv.
Race relations are overtly presented at fairs, where “the idea of technological and national progress became laced with scientific racism.” Similar discussions of racism and progress constructed as an intellectual framework were used to justify slavery; and, at the world fairs, race hierarchies and white superiority were used to justify the colonization of Indigenous peoples. In the display of Indigenous peoples and their material culture, a scientific approach, with its emphasis on classification, was used to stress the “diversity of racial ‘types’ and an evolutionary hierarchy that showed notions of racial progress.” In other words, these were sites for the representation of Darwinian theories about racial development, as well as about imperial material wealth and national progress.

In *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*, Rydell argues that, in the case of Chicago,

the Native Americans who participated in the exhibits did not benefit from the exposition. Rather, they were the victims of a torrent of abuse and ridicule. With Wounded Knee only three years removed, the Indians were regarded as apocalyptic threats to the valued embodied in the White City who had to be tamed—an idea already captured and put into effect in Wild Bill’s Congress of Rough Riders, which was performing on Sixty-third Street, several blocks from the fair.

Here, the “living display” concept was used in an attempt to illustrate the inevitable triumph of white civilization over the Indian nations. For example, in The Northwest Coast Village at Chicago, Hinsley notes that the dances of the Kwakwaka’wakw were no longer practiced. He writes,

They were aiding Boas in his effort to recapture a presumed pristine, pre-Columbian condition. In their determination to establish a baseline against which to measure civilized progress, Putnam and Boas were risking erasure of the past and current dynamics of history, literally blocking out the changes of time.

Accounts such as this do not offer space for Indigenous agency and render those on display voiceless victims. However, although the relationships of power between white organizers of the anthropological displays and the Indigenous peoples who performed was unequal, it is imperative to recognize Indigenous agency. For example, at Paris, a group of Aboriginal peoples from diverse regions of Australia was forcefully brought to participate in the Exposition Universale. Of the

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107 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 5.
108 Ibid.
110 Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 63.
111 Ibid., 64.
group, only three Aboriginal people—a woman, a man, and a child—survived the long journey from Australia to Europe. When it came time to perform for the French public, they refused.\footnote{Roslyn Poignant, \textit{Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle} (New Haven, Con: Yale University Press, 2004).} They enacted their personal agency by sitting with backs turned to their audience in a performative act of resistance.

In their article “The ‘Shy’ Cocopa Go to the Fair,” Nancy Parezo and John Troutman discusses Indigenous agency and the complexities of Indigenous performances in white settings, specifically at world fairs. Their conclusions address the ambiguous experience of Indigenous peoples who participated or who were placed on display. They argue that that Indigenous peoples were used by the exhibition organizers as “scientific specimens and tools to explain technological progress and to justify their subjugation and conquest through a self-celebratory rhetoric.”\footnote{Nancy J Parezo and John W. Troutman, “The ‘Shy’ Cocopa Go to the Fair,” in \textit{Selling Indians: Commercializing and Appropriating American Indian Cultures} (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2001), 30.} However, Parezo and Troutman also argue that Indigenous peoples came to the fairs for socio-political and economic reasons. In 1904, for example, a group of people from the Cocopa nation who participated in the St Louis Fair, came with their own ambition to protest and state their claims against the government of United States. (The diversion of the Colorado River to California’s Imperial Valley by the American government made it impossible for the Cocopa people to continue farming.\footnote{Parezo and Troutman, “The ‘Shy’ Cocopa,” 30.} Parezo and Troutman argue that “the fair became an opportunity for the Cocopa, although it was a risky one. As the Cocopa case demonstrates, native peoples were not merely exploited. They were neither unwittingly fooled by the anthropologists of fair agents nor completely trusting of them.”\footnote{Ibid., 31.}

In her study “Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka’wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World’s Fair,” Paige Raibmon explores the complexities of the presence of Kwakwaka’wakw performers at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. She connects the socio-political realities of the performers, examining how they used their cultural performances to showcase their nations’ struggles to survive and maintain control over land, resources, and spiritual-life. This contextualization of Indigenous performance recognizes Indigenous agency and motivations for participating in performances and living-displays for white audiences. In front of 10,000 spectators one night, the Kwakwaka’wakw performers presented a version of the \textit{Hamatsa}
dance, one of the most politically and spiritually important initiation rites. The performance included the initiation of two performers, in which their backs were slashed four times and ropes were tied beneath the slashes of flesh and the ends of the pieces of skin were tied together. Raibmon writes,

As several performers yanked violently on the loops of rope, attempting to tear the loose flesh, the intensity of the singing increased. The initiates finally grabbed the ropes themselves, ripping the flesh from their backs. When George Hunt reappeared on stage and calmly offered his arm to one of the initiates, the performance reached a fever-pitch. The young Kwakawaka’wakw man sank his teeth into Hunt’s arm until he was dragged away, apparently having bitten off a piece of flesh as large as a silver dollar.117

These performances by Kwakwaka’wakw dancers would have infuriated Canadian officials, who were attempting to show Canada as a nation of civilized progress.118 Raibmon argues that even though the performance enacted and reinforced stereotypical understandings of Indians by non-Aboriginal society, it “simultaneously declared both their cultural persistence and their political defiance.”119 The Kwakwaka’wakw performers defiantly and proudly performed cultural dances and songs and used the fair as a stage for the performance of cultural continuance.

This was a period of extensive struggle for the Kwakwaka’wakw peoples against colonial forces, such as capitalism and Christianity. They were caught between 19th-century Euro-Canadian contradictions, exemplified in the competing colonialist agendas of anthropology and government legislation. During this period, Indigenous peoples in North America experienced the anthropological push, which encouraged mass collection of material culture and preservation and re-enactment of the most “traditional” parts of their cultures.120 Meanwhile, missionaries and government officials were pressuring Indigenous peoples to abandon “tradition” and to embrace “civilized” behaviours legislatively imposed through assimilation policies. Raibmond writes, “The performers’ trip to Chicago World’s Fair placed this conflict on a global stage, in ways that proved even more unsettling to Canadian authorities than were the theatrical scenes of cannibalism and

118 Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact,” 178.
119 Ibid., 158.
120 This is exemplified in the work of Edward Curtis in both his film and photography of Aboriginal peoples throughout North America. “Land of the Headhunters” is a film that Curtis produced which was meant to look like a documentary but was in fact a staged-narrative in which local Kwawk’waka peoples participated. They were dressed up in pre-contact clothing. The strategy of dressing up Indigenous sitters for ethnographic photographs is common practice by the majority of turn of the twentieth century ethnographic photographers.
mutilation to the startled fair-goers.” 121 The performers’ decision to accompany Franz Boas to Chicago and to perform is connected to their socio-political and economic realities and the current politics along the Northwest Coast, such as missionary and government pressures to assimilate into white Christian society. Through analysis of the Potlatch Ban and other assimilist legislations, such as residential schools, Raibmon argues that the Kwakwaka’wakw performances were not intended for the Chicago fair-goers, but were performed specifically for the Canadian government. 122 Unpacking Raibmon’s argument, performance was used by the Kwakwaka’wakw performers to show their autonomy and agency against the state and its program of ethnocide. And it shows how Kwakwaka’wakw performers negotiated the institutions of white society, such as anthropology and world fairs, for their own economic, political, and cultural gain.

The experiences of Indigenous peoples at world fairs are diverse. Some, such as George Hunt and the other Kwakwaka’wakw performers, were willing participants who used exhibitions as sites for staging resistance, undermining colonial oppression, and performing Indigenous self-determination. Their performances exposed the contradictions of Canadian assimilationist legislation aimed at eradicating Native ways of being. On the other hand, children brought by the Canadian government and the Canada Department of Indian Affairs to Chicago from eight residential schools from across Canada did not have a choice in their inclusion in a live exhibit at the fair. They were part of the Canada Exhibit and were dressed as examples of what settler society saw as successful civilization and assimilation policies. Raibmon explains, “The children were displayed in a mock schoolroom, where they could be seen working at various tasks.” 123 Currently, there are no known archived accounts of the Native children’s experiences at the fair; however, we can draw from the stories of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse revealed by residential school survivors to illuminate the children’s experiences in Chicago. Survivor testimonies also recall moments of resistances, such as running away, the performance of secret ceremonies, and the use of their own languages. 124

Many contemporary Indigenous artists are recalling the experiences of Indigenous peoples on display and performing at World Fairs. Recently, in 2009, Skeena Reece installed a performance as part of Nuit Blanche, Please Do Not Disturb, that connects historical examples of Indigenous peoples on display to contemporary performative interventions. In both historic World Fairs and

121 Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact,” 162.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 179.
124 Whitlock, “Active Remembrance.”
contemporary performance, Indigenous performers have always already exhibited both subtle and overt stagings of resistance.

**Please Do Not Disturb: Skeena Reece**

For the 2009 Nuit Blanche, an all night art event in Toronto, Skeena Reece, a Tsimshian Gitksan and Cree performance-based artist, produced *Please Do Not Disturb*, a performance that responds and intervenes within the histories of Indigenous peoples on display for non-Indigenous gazing and entertainment (fig. 108). *Please Do Not Disturb* elucidates the histories of World Fairs, for example, in which Indigenous peoples were incorporated into international exhibitions, and which, in many instances, were displays of imperial domination. In this way, the Indigenous living displays, at times placed into villages of colonized peoples, were exhibited as the “treasures” of imperial expansion and colonial conquest. However, it is imperative to recognize, as I discussed in the preceding sections, that despite the dynamics of power, exuding the colonizer/colonized dichotomy, many instances of Indigenous resistance and intervention were staged and performed.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 108: Skeena Reece, *Please Do Not Disturb*, Performance Still, Toronto, Nuit Blanche.**

With these complexities of histories of Indigenous on display in mind, we can see *Please Do Not Disturb* as a contemporary example of Indigenous agency and staging of intervention within the historical instances of placing Aboriginal peoples on stages, in living villages, etc. for the consumption of European eyes as curiosities. Reece’s *Please Do Not Disturb* participates in the larger discussion of interventionist art practice as exemplified by Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco
Fusco’s 1990 performance *Couple in a Cage*. Marvin Carlson suggests that Gomez-Pena and Fusco’s performance is probably the best known performance of the 1990 “because it touched upon so many of the central concerns of performance in that decade—including spectatorship and display, the touristic gaze and cultural appropriation, colonialism, racism, and the dynamics of cultural interaction.” This performance, like *Please Do Not Disturb*, draws upon the practice of exhibiting Indigenous peoples from Africa, Asia, and the Americas in fairs, and exhibitions. During *Couple in a Cage*, Gomez-Pena and Fusco displayed themselves for three days in a cage as recently discovered Aboriginal peoples from an island in the Gulf of Mexico. They performed “traditional tasks” of sewing voodoo dolls, lifting weights, watching TV. They ate “traditional foods” of sandwiches and fruit and were taken to the bathroom on leashes. Information panels were provided with mock scientific and anthropological details on their “cultural heritage” and “native culture.” This was an ironic commentary on the colonial discourse and its appropriations and representations of Indigenous peoples. However, to the surprise of both performers, many viewers took their exhibition seriously. This outrageous misinterpretation raises many questions regarding performance arts subversion of stereotypes and use of parody to generate political slippages. It also raises the significant point that these types of performances continue to be viewed by mainstream society as fostering education and greater understanding of our colonial histories.

In her essay, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” Fusco describes her collaborative performance with Gomez-Pena, stating that it was intended by the artists to be a site of reflection on “performing the role of a noble savage behind the bars of a golden cage.” She was “intrigued by this legacy of performing the identity of an Other for a white audience, sensing its implications for us as performance artists dealing with cultural identity in the present.” *Couple in a Cage* (fig. 109) was part of the Indigenous response to the Quincentennial of Columbus, 500

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126 Ibid.
128 Ibid., 163.
Years of Resistance. Fusco notes that these celebrations of the so-called European discovery of land already inhabited by Indigenous peoples and the silences and erasures of Indigenous histories, stories, voices, and bodies due to colonization inspired them to take a “symbolic vow of silence with the cage performance.” She argues,

>We sought a strategically effective way to examine the limits of the happy multiculturalism that reigned in cultural institutions, as well as to respond to the formalists and cultural relativists who reject the proposition that racial difference is absolutely fundamental to aesthetic interpretation . . . Our cage became the metaphor for our condition, linking the racism implicit in ethnographic paradigms of discovery with the exoticizing rhetoric of “world beat” multiculturalism.\(^{129}\)

Fusco’s discussion and the performance tactics of *Couple in a Cage* resonate with Reece’s performance of *Please Do Not Disturb* in Zone C of Nuit Blanche. However, in Reece’s performance the audience could only see Skeena through a projection on a wall, whereas Fusco and Gomez-Pena deliberately placed themselves in a cage to be gazed upon as part of their interventionist performance. Reece’s tactics engaged technologies, such as her cell phone and Skype, to interact with her audiences. In addition, Reece’s performance statement clearly sets out her intentions and the histories she is responding to and revealing; whereas, the *Couple in a Cage* performance was staged without any verbal or written guidance by the artists to inform the audience of the racial contexts Pena and Fusco were challenging, resisting, and radically

\(^{129}\) Ibid.
commenting on. The differences are not identified here to argue that one tactic is more successful than the other, but rather to reveal the links between these artists’ distinct performance tactics of intervention.

In the 2009 Nuit Blanche program, Please Do Not Disturb is described as “a performance piece where the artist tries to live a ‘normal’ life behind glass, interacting with the audience through email, phone and two-way microphone (fig. 110). This is also a social experiment, and a comment on the history of Aboriginals on display.” Reece’s interactive performance and multimedia installation was exhibited near the covered walkway on Manitoba Drive, CNE Grounds (Between the Horse Palace and Ricoh Coliseum). The curatorial artistic statement for Please Do Not Disturb states,

Taking place in a constructed living space, this durational piece will be interactive through email, phone, two-way microphone and a projected computer monitor. By choice Skeena will try to live a normal life in the space “behind glass.” The project is inspired in part by Minik, an Inuit boy who lived with five others on display at the American Museum of Natural History in 1897.130

Figure 110: Skeena Reece, Please do not distrub, Performance Still, Toronto, Nuit Blanche.

The audience that engaged with Reece’s performance was witness to an Indigenous intervention and assertion of agency within the history of Aboriginal peoples on display. Reece describes how she was inspired by Minik, an Inuit boy from Greenland displayed in New York. Minik’s life story is a very disturbing example of Indigenous peoples’ experiences of European anthropological

130 Skeena Reece, Please Do Not Disturb, Curatorial Statement, Toronto, Nuit Blanche, 2009.
research and of the human rights violations legitimated in the name of science, civilization, and knowledge.

*Give Me My Father’s Body: The Life Story of Minik, The New York Eskimo* by Ken Harper is the only thorough biographical account of Minik’s experiences, based on oral histories and archival materials, during his time on display at the American Museum of Natural History, as well as the challenges he faced after. In her article, “Nanook and His Contemporaries: Imagining Eskimos in American Culture, 1897-1922,” Shari M. Huhndorf writes,

In the fall of 1897, a ship called Hope docked in New York City harbor; its arrival changed forever the lives of its passengers and captivated an entire nation. On board were six Polar Eskimos—one woman (Atangana), three men (Qisuk, Nuktaq, and Uisaakassak), and two children (Minik and Aviaq)—brought by Arctic explorer Robert Peary at the behest of anthropologist Franz Boas and other officials of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). Encouraged by the stunning popularity of the live human exhibits on the World’s Columbian Exposition’s Midway exhibit in Chicago four years earlier and undeterred by the high mortality rate of the people exhibited for fair goers’ amusement, Boas had asked the explorer to bring back an Eskimo for scientific study on his next journey North. But not even Boas could have foreseen the public sensation these Eskimos caused. On a single day following the Hope’s arrival, twenty thousand people visited the ship, anxious to glimpse the Native Greenlanders who, despite the stifling heat, were dressed in the elaborate furs expected by curiosity seekers. Nor did New Yorkers’ attention soon wane. Housed in the museum’s basement, the Eskimos drew throngs of eager visitors who crowded around a ceiling grate installed above their living quarters.131

Soon after their arrival into the museum living display, the Inuit fell sick and within four months all but Minik and Uisaakassak died of pneumonia. Huhndorf states that even in death “they endured prying Western eyes”; their brains and bones, after being removed and studied, were placed on display “despite the vociferous protests of the remaining few.”132 Museum officials returned Uisaakassak, the only surviving adult, to Greenland in July 1898; however, they decided to keep the then only eight-year-old Minik, placing him in the care of an Anglo-American family as a social experiment in cultural assimilation. Minik’s father was among the dead, and after his death museum officials staged a funeral burial of his body, later placing his bones on display. Minik attempted, once he was aware of the fact that the museum held his father’s remains as part of its collection, to have his father’s bones returned home. It was not until 1993, after much public pressure, that the bones were indeed returned to Greenland and properly and respectfully buried. Minik was

extremely critical of his experiences and the treatment of the Inuit on display. He was publically vocal about the violations, proclaiming in a press interview the day before his departure from the United States, “You're a race of scientific criminals. I know I'll never get my father's bones out of the American Museum of Natural History. I am glad enough to get away before they grab my brains and stuff them into a jar!”

A fundamental tactic of colonialism, similar to Indigenous isolation, is the project of silencing. In many ways, silencings and erasures of Indigenous voices and perspectives serve to maintain the realities of colonization and to perpetuate and legitimate violence and racism. Colonialism to some extent depends on silencing the colonize; however, Minik voiced the brutalities of anthropological research evident in the taking of material culture, as well as in the housing of people in museums: placing them on display as specimens of inferior races in comparison to the white race and civilization. Harper includes a statement by Minik, in which he describes the Inuit experiences of the ships landing in Arctic villages: “We knew what white men do,” he explained, “so our men hid all the furs and ivory to keep them from being stolen.”

Similarly, Huhndorf argues,

[Minik] provided a counternarrative of colonialism, an account very different from those offered by Arctic explorers, filmmakers, anthropologists, and museum officials. He was outspoken with his criticisms of these figures, and he expressed his views in letters he wrote to friends and in reports of interviews with the press. Not only that, during his life he served as a witness to the events colonial culture persistently denied. Colonialism depends, to some degree, on its ability to silence its subjects and to conceal its workings. … after the deaths of Minik's companions, Boas claimed there was ‘nothing particularly deserving severe criticism' about the museum's handling of the affair (G, p. 94). For years afterwards, other institution officials even absurdly denied that the museum possessed the Eskimos' corpses. Minik testified to the events that Flaherty and others purged from their accounts and attempted to exclude from historical memory.

*Please Do Not Disturb* alludes to the cases, display spaces, and even cages Indigenous peoples lived within in museums and at fairs. This performance also brings forth a space to acknowledge the acts of protest and resistance by Indigenous peoples during their experiences of being collected, exhibited, and viewed as specimens. Reece’s public statement of the performance’s connection to Minik’s story reveals a not very well known history of colonization and the horrific human rights violations that occurred within the guise of World Fairs celebrations and Museum collections. In

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133 Ibid., 142.
135 Huhndorf, “Nanook and His Contemporaries,” 146.
this way, her performance not only enabled her audiences to interact with her and witness her own acts of resistance and assertions of Indigenous agency, but it created a site from which audience members could gain knowledge and learn about the histories of human zoos and human living displays.

During Reece’s performance she invited the audience to participate and engage with her. However, Reece’s choice of a plastic teepee as her site of interaction deliberately made it difficult to clearly see her. She remained enclosed within the teepee throughout the performance, incorporating projections of herself and her communication on the large brick wall across from her enclosure (fig. 111). It is significant that not all the conversations were amplified and projected for everyone to witness, but that Reece made decisions throughout her performance as to what the audience would see and hear. These concepts of access and the pluralities of visibility and invisibility were introduced in the curatorial statement:

During the performance the artist will invite the public to engage her through various media while she remains enclosed. Although the public has access to her she will be able to control when their messages are accepted and how they are responded to. Some of the communiqué will be projected or amplified for everyone to hear and see. This will be an intensive night of access and information sharing. 

Please Do Not Disturb is a social experiment exploring the history of Indians on display—as public spectacle, freak shows, and now today on Facebook. Reece’s performance, however, subverts and

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Wild, by Rebecca Belmore

*Wild* was a performance and installation designed for the 2001 centenary of the Grange, which was celebrated by the exhibition *House Guests: Contemporary Artists in The Grange*. The Grange is an estate in downtown Toronto dating to the 1820s that was the original home of the Art Gallery of Ontario. In this performance, Belmore took over the mansion’s master bedroom and inserted an Indigenous presence—through her body and signifying props—onto Indigenous lands, specifically Mississauga territory, now hosting the city of Toronto (fig. 112). At first glance, the only inclusion into the historic room is Belmore’s sleeping or resting body; however, upon closer inspection, the audience encounters the artist’s other inclusions. Belmore has incorporated beaver pelts on the canopy of the bed and a blanket detailed with woven in long black hair (fig. 113). This performance by Belmore, like Reece’s *Please do Not Disturb*, is a performative intervention. *Wild* makes explicit reference to the history of Indigenous peoples on display, connecting itself to the historical practice of museums and other institutions, such as World Fairs, which placed both the living and dead bodies of Aboriginal people into museum exhibitions. James Luna’s *Artifact Piece* (1987) (fig. 26) at the Museum of Man in San Diego also recalls this history. In this performance, Luna literally places himself into the museum exhibition case—placed on display.
for the visitors of the museum to look at and to realize his performative subversion. Charlotte Townsend-Gault writes that Luna’s “subjects are the too-long submerged history of his people, the tension between acknowledged debasement and evident survival, the consequent identity search,
the gross misrepresentation from outside, and the self-representation from within. His performances and installations are about ignorance and type-casting and ways of understanding.”

In *Artifact Piece* Luna demands his audience to engage with the history of displaying and housing both live and dead Indigenous peoples in museums—presented, documented, and exhibited like artifacts. Luna’s display of his body as an artifact recalls Haida/Tsimshian art historian Marcia Crosby’s discussion of “the construction of the imaginary Indian,” in which she states,

> The interest in First Nation people by Western civilization is not such a recent phenomenon; it dates back hundred of years, and has been manifest in many ways: collecting and displaying “Indian” objects and collecting and displaying “Indians” as objects and human specimens, constructing pseudo-Indians in literature and the visual arts.

Crosby’s account clearly and accurately connects the histories of displaying Indigenous peoples in living displays and the stereotypical representations of popular culture. These politics of display were played out at World Fairs, in royal tours, and on settler entertainment stages, such as Wild West Shows and Banff Indians Days, all of which are highlighted and revealed through the performances of both Belmore and Luna.

However, in *Wild*, Belmore determines the inclusion and also her location. Her decision to take over and claim the master bedroom of the house is a powerful and significant act. This locale could arguably signify the colonizer house, the master, or perhaps dominant settler society in Canada. Belmore’s acts of re-dressing and taking over the bed are acts of Indigenous resistance and intervention, through which the artist asks her audience to witness her body within the 19th-century display room. In a CBC review of Belmore’s recent retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Greg Buium describes *Wild* and the artist’s presence in the performance: “She is seen sleeping, staring, and just lying silently in bed. She’s ensconced in a seemingly pristine, historically accurate room. Yet something isn’t quite right. Belmore has, in her words, ‘redressed’ the bed.”

In the Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition, Belmore’s body is absent, leaving the strange canopy bed to stand alone without an occupant, void of a body. However, like many of Belmore’s performances and installations, the title here is crucial, working as a compass to direct and engage audience

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members. Buium argues, “There are beaver pelts on the canopy. And, as she points out, the bedspread is decorated ‘with a lot of black hair.’ There’s something creepy about Wild, even a little grotesque.”

From my examination of the images from the installation, I would like to put forward a different interpretation than the concept of the grotesque. The inclusion of the beaver pelts and the black hair is a powerful inclusion that denotes emotional response. Rather than seeing Belmore’s inclusions as “creepy,” perhaps another reading is to look at Wild as a performative installation that exposes the trauma of colonial encounters as well as the dynamic Indigenous resistances performed to negotiate settler encroachment, both politically and culturally. In this way, the long black hair stands in to reveal Indigenous survivance and continuance despite colonial assimilist agendas and violence. The hair is a reminder, a trace of Indigenous experiences of colonialism. The large amount of hair could be seen to displace monolithic understandings of the diverse experience of Indigenous peoples of colonial expansion in North America. What I mean here is Belmore’s incorporation of “a large amount” of hair onto the red blanket alludes to the fact that the hair comes from many individuals. The juxtaposition of the hair with the red blanket elucidates the historical violence experienced by Indigenous communities across the continent—and it also alludes to the ongoing systemic violence endured by Indigenous peoples currently in North American societies. The beaver belts function in many ways—as a reminder of the fur trade; of the dynamic and interconnected relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples; and of Indigenous knowledge, world views, and systems of living.

The presence of Belmore’s body reminds her audience that Aboriginal peoples did not disappear (fig. 114). In the preceding chapters, I have explored Belmore’s laborious actions, the stress and endurance she puts her body through. However, in this performance, her body is lying at rest. As Kathleen Ritter argues, the resting body in Belmore’s work “unexpected because it is not immediately encoded as a signifier of resistance. This motif is at the core of Belmore’s politic.”

As Belmore notes in relation to her body-politics and the meanings her body can invoke,

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140 Buium, “Body Language.”
141 Kathleen Ritter, “The Reclining Figure and Other Provocations,” in Rebecca Belmore: Rising to the Occasion, ed. Daina Augaitis and Kathleen Ritter (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2008), 55.
“I think it has to do with myself being an Aboriginal person and how my body speaks for itself. It’s the politicized body, it’s the historical body. It’s the body that didn’t disappear. So it means a lot in terms of the presence of the Aboriginal body in the work. And the female body, particularly.”

Belmore’s presence in the “master’s bed” in the Grange, arguably an architectural emblem of colonial history, also alludes to the absence of Aboriginal women’s histories within the narrative of Canada and of nation-building. In this way, Belmore performatively plays the role of the unwelcome guest occupying, with her naked body, the bedroom for over five-days. In a conversation with curator Ritter, Belmore states,

To occupy this bed of history and to have viewers confronted by my presence was interesting. The most extreme reaction to the work was for people to enter and observe the “historic beauty” of the room, discussing all the objects in the rest of the room, while ignoring me in the bed. I then thought that my occupation of the bed worked because it illustrated a denial and inability to accept the Aboriginal female body in that narrative.

Overall, this interventionist performative installation is a multilayered work that evokes multiple potential readings and reveals the contradictions of colonial history and Aboriginal experience. This

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143 Ritter, “The Reclining Figure,” 56.
being said, it is imperative to incorporate Belmore’s voice into this discussion. In the catalogue for *House Guests*—later reprinted in *Rebecca Belmore: Rising to the Occasion*, the catalogue for the retrospective at Vancouver Art Gallery—Belmore provides a beautiful and eloquent statement to guide viewers and to remind the witness of her presence as an Aboriginal woman and of the invisible and forgotten fact that they were on Indigenous lands. Belmore writes,

> I wish to rest my weary body in the master’s bed. The bed has an autonomous quality that I find extremely attractive. The bed is a fortress. The four posts clearly marking its territory. Its canopy offering protection from the powers that live in the sky. It has become my shelter.

I have re-dressed the bed. The bed cover is made of long black hair, the canopy is trimmed with fur. To lie in this historic bed covered in a mass of hair is evocative of a time when the newcomers to this land viewed us as wild. The decorative fur detail of the canopy refers to the taking and taming of this “wilderness.” My black hair is a celebration of survival.

By occupying this place as personal as this bed I am making connection between myself and the history of the Grange. It is a way of asking, “Where is my history?” This placement of myself in the most private place of this house—an Indian woman in the white man’s historic bed—is for me a vulnerable position and the warmth of my skin unsettling to the careful composure of the household.

I cannot even begin to imagine being an Indian woman living in another time. The reality of constantly having to assert oneself in a world that has only a vague memory of us is tiresome. My persona reaches back in time to find someone not unlike myself. She claims this foreign place for all my mothers before me.

Looking around this room, which is heavy with possessions from the past, I imagine the weightlessness of the houses of my ancestors. Then, who would I have been? I most certainly would not have entered this house. Now, as a contemporary artist, I have been invited.

My presence in the stillness of this room surrounded by a sea of black hair suggests the natural process of time on our bodies and ultimately death itself. The object kept here in this vacant house are meant to preserve a past. Beyond this house, somewhere on the land is my history. This is comforting.

And on this bed I rest and I dream.¹⁴⁴

*Wild* is a subversion of the Indigenous body presented as an artifact or specimen and is charged with a commentary on museum institutional history that has emphasized the collecting and exhibiting both of Indigenous cultural knowledge, visual, and material production and of

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Indigenous bodies. At the same time, Belmore’s performance alludes to the history of non-inclusion of Indigenous artists within museum collections and exhibition programming. Wild references the processes of retelling and rewriting, of re-naming spaces coded in colonial discourse. It exposes and connects the histories of colonialism’s constructs, such as wilderness, primitive, and civilization. For example, gallery and museum spaces have a long—and in many cases persisting—history of being encoded by Euro-centric perspectives of Aboriginal cultures. Aboriginal cultures, as previously mentioned, have long been the object of Western fascination, a curiosity that led to the development of academic fields and museums. Annie Coombes notes that during the late 19th century, museums housed Aboriginal cultural material that was collected and categorized for the purpose of ethnological and anthropological study. Coombes writes that the collections were used as visual “evidence” of racial inferiority in comparative studies with European “civilization” to justify colonial expansion and domination of Aboriginal lands and peoples. These collections were also objects of aesthetic and exotic pleasure, and spectacle.\footnote{Annie Coombes, “Inventing the ‘Postcolonial’: Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating,” in \textit{The Art in Art History: A Critical Anthology}, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 489.}

\textit{Wild} presented the dichotomous divisions between civilized and wild that were hierarchical categorizations employed to distinguish white settlers from Indigenous peoples. This performance elucidates the colonial history that marks the Indigenous body, which in many cases was erased and displaced from spaces of so-called civilized society of the 19th century. Charlotte Townsend-Gault argues in relation to \textit{Wild},

She installed her wild/native self in The Grange, that acme of Canadian nineteenth-century civilization. In a live re-working of Luna’s \textit{Artifact Piece}, Belmore herself lollled in the master bed, all caparisoned with long, black human hair, another kind of black torrent, the felt dimensions of the colonial encounter. The hairy bed seemed a refreshed, neo-surreal version of Meret Oppenheim's furred cup and saucer, \textit{Objet} (1936). But here was no china, and Belmore was personifying not an artifact but the living wild.\footnote{Charlotte Townsend-Gault, “Have We Ever Been Good?” \textit{The Named and the UnNamed} (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2002), 41.}

In this way, her chosen title reveals the history of civilizing strategies deployed by colonial powers onto Indigenous peoples, while also playing with many constructions of Canadian narratives, such as wilderness and the wild west. Townsend-Gault’s analysis of \textit{Wild} connects Belmore’s statement and her performative actions during the piece with colonial experiences, performative interventions, and the discourses of colonization in North America. \textit{Wild} and Belmore’s description of her
performance experience create a space for the discussion of concepts of civilization and wilderness: The civil and the wild. The binary that exists between these two concepts—constructs that have multilayered histories and employment in the North American contexts—has commonly been used to juxtapose European settlement as the “civilizing” process of taming and conquering the wild Indigenous cultures and the wild lands of the continent.

William Cronon connects the construct of wilderness to its many meanings within the history of colonial occupation and settlement. In his article, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” Cronon explores the reasons for the narratives of wilderness and the socio-political impacts of its varying meanings. In the North American context, the lands were determined to be “uninhabited wilderness,” in other words, free lands meant for the settlement of Euro-Canadians and Americans. The removal of Indigenous peoples onto reserves through such colonial tactics as violence, deceit, and starvation was supported by the concepts of “manifest destiny” or *terra nullius*. Cronon argues that the removal of Aboriginal people from the so-called free uninhabited wilderness reveals the invented and constructed element of “wilderness.” He argues that there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. Rather, wilderness can be seen as yet another legitimating narrative for colonial expansion. Belmore’s *Wild* asks her audience to think about the concepts of civilization and wilderness, while also claiming space and putting forward the ongoing realities and historical evidence (regardless of the narratives of nationalism’s “uninhabited wilderness”) that the lands of North America are Indigenous. They were never empty of people and free for the taking. Cronon writes that American (North American) wilderness, is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny. Indeed, one of the most striking proofs of the cultural invention of wilderness is its thorough going erasure of the history from which it sprang. In virtually all of its manifestations, wilderness represents a flight from history. Seen as the original garden, it is a place outside of time, from which human beings had to be ejected before the fallen world of history could properly begin. Seen as the frontier, it is a savage world at the dawn of civilization, whose transformation represents the very beginning of the national historical epic. Seen as the bold landscape of frontier heroism, it is the place of youth and childhood, into which men escape by abandoning their pasts and entering a world of freedom where the constraints of civilization fade into memory. Seen as the sacred sublime, it is the home of a God who transcends history by standing as the One who remains untouched and unchanged by time's arrow. No matter what the angle from which we regard it, wilderness offers us the illusion that we can escape the cares and

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troubles of the world in which our past has ensnared us.\textsuperscript{148}

But can Indigenous peoples escape the illusion and construct of wilderness and the erasures, silences, and epistemic violence of chronopolitics? Or does the wilderness continue to be a beloved narrative of both Canadian and American nationalism? How does \textit{Wild} participate in the history of wilderness? Belmore’s presence in the re-dressed master-bed and her chosen title are deliberate subversions of colonialism’s rendering of Indigenous peoples as wild, primitive, and uncivilized. Belmore’s performance participates in the ongoing decolonization of Indigenous histories, bodies, minds, and knowledges from the narratives perpetuated and maintained by the dominant institutions. Her performance also alludes to another history, a history connected to the narratives of the wilderness and the expansion of Canada and the United States. The “wild west”—yet another colonial construct connected to the concept of wilderness—was performed and perpetuated by the invention of the Wild West Shows and other cultural performances, such as Banff Indian Days and Hiawatha Pageants. In these, settler audiences could “experience” the wildness of the wilderness and Indian cultures. By referencing all these entangled meanings and histories, the presence of Belmore’s body in \textit{Wild} demands recognition of her agency.

\textbf{Indian Entertainers: Wild West Shows}

Indigenous entertainment for settler consumption developed in collaboration with Western settlement of North America, exemplified among other things in the building of transnational railroads, the forced movement of Aboriginal peoples onto reserves, and the eradication of the buffalos. These entangled histories are all connected to the beginnings of the Wild West Shows, which were extremely popular in the late 19th and into the 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

Wild West Shows are an example of the performance industry that employed Indigenous peoples during the heightened era of assimilation and colonial domination. In a similar way to the World Fairs and royal tours, they highlight the Indigenous peoples’ reasons for participating on such stages for settler entertainment. In this analysis, I stress the presence of Indigenous agency in these sites of performance, while also acknowledging the complex socio-political, economic and cultural power relations of the current colonial time. By drawing on recent scholars of Indigenous performance of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, such as Paige Raibmon, as well as political theorists of Indigenous resistance, such as James Scott, I clearly outline the concept of Indigenous

\textsuperscript{148} Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 16.
resistance as distinct from revolution yet connected to ongoing mobilization of Indigenous struggle against the colonial world. James Scott, among other scholars, differentiates between revolution and the everyday resistances negotiated and strategized by colonized peoples, peasants, and those in the lower classes. In Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, he argues that these more subtle acts of resistance are not necessarily “newsworthy,” meaning that they are not overtly recognized as a form of political and cultural resistance and as result have not been recognized, nor recorded as such.\(^{149}\) The determined decision of Indigenous peoples to perform and to “play Indian” is an example of everyday resistance, as it undermined the assimilist agendas of both Canadian and American state-governments to eradicate Indigenous cultures and to absorb Aboriginal peoples into the dominant societies.

Many scholars have explored the development of the Wild West Shows and the biography of Cody Williams, the founder of the concept of the shows. During this era, the Wild West Show became a type of entertainment for settlers to experience so called authentic histories and events of the wild west. Paige Raibmon argues that “Aboriginal engagement with colonial notions of authenticity, such as their performances at world’s fairs and in Wild West shows, involved self-representations that used and reinforced the colonial categories that framed them as ‘other.’”\(^{150}\) She asks, “Why [did] Aboriginal people participate in the commoditization of their culture?”\(^{151}\) Raibmon’s argument suggests Indigenous resistance within the colonial world: although Indigenous peoples did not possess the power to determine “the rules of engagement,” the structures of performance and entertainment were sites from which Indigenous peoples interacted, resisted, and intervened in dominant and colonial society.

In other words, Indigenous participation in Wild West Shows was a form of socio-political resistance through cultural performance, which in turn supported cultural continuance. Also, the programs established for the Wild West Show illustrate that Indigenous peoples performed historical events, battles, cultural knowledge, and practices for audiences. In this way, their decision to “play Indian” also continued the performative aspect of Indigenous history writing, grounded in oral transmission and performance transmission of stories, histories, knowledges, and cultural practice. Although the histories performed within the shows were biased and Euro-American focused, Indigenous performers’ reenactments of history also reminded audiences of their presence.


and their claim to lands of the Americas. In a way, then, the Wild West Shows could be seen as undermining the concepts of Manifest Destiny/Terra Nullis through the stagings of battles between colonial military and Plains Indians. The presence of the Aboriginal body in the shows exemplifies the survival, resilience, and persistence of Indigenous peoples despite colonial violence and assimilation.

In *Hostiles? The Lakota Ghost Dance and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West*, Sam Maddra discusses the events that took place on 30 March 1891, less than four months after the military suppression of the Lakota Ghost Dance and the massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. On this day, twenty-three Lakota Sioux imprisoned at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, were released into the custody of William F. Cody. “Buffalo Bill” hired these Indigenous prisoners of the American state as performers. These Lakota men who had been labelled as “hostiles” by the federal government and by the American media, would perform this narrative construct of Indian hostiles before British audiences in 1891-92 as part of the Wild West Show’s second tour of Britain. Wild West Shows travelled throughout North America using the established transcontinental railways and also went abroad to England, Scotland, Wales, France, and Italy, performing for European audiences. Playing into the stereotype of Western society and the longings for encounters with “real Indians,” Indigenous performers negotiated a space not only for cultural continuance but for economic independence.

The Wild West Shows created an opportunity for both Buffalo Bill and Aboriginal peoples. It is important to recognize the economic factors within the discussion of Wild West Shows. Vine Deloria addresses Buffalo Bill’s relationship with the Indians in his show, stating that Buffalo Bill’s position as the founder and owner of the shows, and as a veteran military man, enabled him to employ Indigenous individuals who at this time were considered dangerous and hostile by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He was able to take these individuals off the reservations and out of prisons to tour with the show. Since many Indian and military officers would rather have imprisoned these men, touring with Buffalo Bill “probably saved some of the chiefs from undue pressure and persecution by the government at home.” The second point Deloria mentions is that Cody gave his Sioux warriors status as part of his “Congress of Rough Riders” (fig. 115), a contingent that represented the finest horsemen in the world: American cavalrymen, German Cuirassiers, Vanqueros, Cossacks, Arabs, Cubans, and Pacific Islanders—”instead of degrading the Indians and classifying them as primitive savages.” As Deloria notes,

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Cody elevated them to a status of equality with contingents from other nations, and therefore recognized their skills as horsemen and warriors by stressing their patriotism in defending their lands. Although the show operated under the principles of stereotypes and archetypes of the west, this conferred status indicated Cody's transcendent and sophisticated view of the Native Americans. 

Figure 115: “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West: Congress of Rough Riders of the World.” Promotional Poster, circa 1900.

The programs and illustrations created for the Wild West Shows illustrate the experiences staged for the audiences. Historical scenes and characters were incorporated into the story line, promoting the fact that the show included actual scenes from the history of the wild west. These included Indian races, dances, peace councils, and warfare, as well as a real buffalo hunt, Indian villages, and other representations of a living picture of life on the frontier, such as cowboys and Mexicans. The living-picture concept created a performance stage from which settler audience members could experience the narratives, myths, and histories of the settlement of the North America. It also brought the west to the audience, creating an opportunity for localized tourism similar to the experience of World Fairs, where the Western audience member encountered cultures and peoples from around the world. Rather than the audience travelling to the western lands of North America, scenes and romanticized narratives were brought to them. They witnessed a living display of those myths, while also experiencing Indigenous dances and cultural practices that were deemed illegal by the state governments of Canada and United States. The Wild West Shows are an example of the complexities and contradictions of this period of North American history—in which the desires entrenched in antimodernism and the necessity of legitimizing colonial expansion came to the stage and entertained both North America and European white audiences.

Ibid.
Some of the first film footage of Indigenous dance in North America was recorded in 1894 by the Edison Film studio. In these short silent films, North American Native dancers performed both the Buffalo Dance and the outlawed Ghost Dance. The performers featured in these films, according to Edison film historian C. Musser (as noted by the Library Congress), were performers from Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. The Buffalo Dance (15 seconds) constitutes the first appearance of Indigenous peoples in a motion picture and features Last Horse, Parts His Hair, and Hair Coat dancing.\textsuperscript{154} The Ghost Dance film in the Edison Films catalog is described as representing the most peculiar of the Sioux traditions, performed by “genuine” Sioux in war paint. In addition, the description from the Raff and Gammon price list, which is subsequently incorporated into the library and Congress archival information, states that the “Ghost Dance” film is “a very interesting subject, full of action and true to life.”\textsuperscript{155}

Indigenous women were also performers in Wild West Shows; however, there are few accounts of their experiences and performances. This lack of representation refers to the larger void of documented and written histories of Indigenous women. Many current Indigenous women scholars have been repatriating and writing Aboriginal women histories. One of the Aboriginal women who performed as part of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West shows was Kitsipimi Ottuna (who I briefly mentioned in Chapter 2). Kitsipimi Otunna was a Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee) woman from Southern Alberta who joined the show at the age of twenty-two (fig. 2). She would have had to receive permission to leave her reserve from an Indian Agent and been placed in Buffalo Bill’s custody. Otunna retrospectively discussed her role in the shows, suggesting that her performances were a means for cultural continuance during the era of ceremonially bans. She wrote of the importance of Aboriginal performance as a “message to the white race,” in that the group’s performances and dancing allowed her to show “myself and my people in a true and authentic manner.” In \textit{Buffalo Gals}, Chris Enss’s recounts that Otunna was consistently incorporated into the program, playing “either a devastated Indian maiden whose husband had been killed in battle or a gracious Indian interpreter who helped Cody communicate with the Braves.”\textsuperscript{156} Dressed in her Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee) or presumably Indian Princess costume, Otunna would welcome and thank the audience. In this way, throughout the show she served as an interpreter between the white audience and Aboriginal performances. Another known Aboriginal woman performer was Plenty Shawls, a Sioux known for

\begin{flushleft}
155 “Ghost Dance (The).”
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her horseback riding skills who also performed in the re-creation of the banned Ghost Dance ritual. These Aboriginal women performers as show women “helped to educate white audiences about Native American lifestyles and beliefs. It also gave them a chance to earn a living.”

The living-pictures displays and performances enacted by Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Shows stressed their authenticity and the realistic details of the life on the frontier. These theatrical performances were sites from which the myths and narratives of the frontier and the so-called Wild West came alive to entertain the audiences. During such shows, the audience encountered Indian life, sometimes presented as “transplanted from the Plains,” experiencing and consuming the myths of the west as curiosities. The Wild West Shows were also an opportunity for Indigenous peoples to leave the confines of the reserve and to earn money by performing versions of their cultural practices that, in many instances, were legislatively banned by state governments. Analysis of the Wild West Shows within their historical context, then, supports the exposure of Indigenous agency and the complexities and contradictions of this era of colonial occupation and domination.

**Belle Sauvage: Decolonizing History Lesson of the “Wild” West**

In many examples of Indigenous performance art, artists draw from histories of Indigenous experiences of colonization to expose and reveal the complexities of the eras of colonial expansion and settlement in North America. *A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage* by Lori Blondeau speaks to the histories of Indigenous peoples performing on settler stages and is arguably a commentary of the stereotypes perpetuated within the realm of entertainment, such as Wild West shows. At the same time, *A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage* is a performative history lesson in which she shares with her audience Indigenous experiences of assimilation, domination, and occupation.

Blondeau draws from her family history in the scripting and design of her campy, satirical performance. In *A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage*, Blondeau’s stage persona is loosely based on Indigenous women who performed in Wild West shows and Vaudeville acts in the early 20th century and spoofs the 1950s film *Calamity Jane*, in which Doris Day appeared as a cross-dressing, gender-bending white cowgirl (fig. 116). Blondeau’s performance art remix of the wild west presents a postcolonial reading of the narratives perpetuated by Hollywood.

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westerns and popular culture. Her work speaks to the importance of maintaining identity and beliefs as a First Nations person while living and working in “mainstream” society. In her pointed and disarmingly humorous take on contemporary art and society, Blondeau confronts and coopts conventional stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in North America and the narratives of western settlement and expansion in North America on Indigenous lands.

*A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage* addresses the history of colonial trauma and the limitations of Aboriginal women’s stereotypes with humour, subversion, and parody, to radically open up decolonized spaces. Belle Sauvage first appears as a photographic image in the style of an early 20th-century postcard (circa 1918). Blondeau has a thorough understanding of the politics of representation, and attempts to subvert these images of Aboriginal women. She creates imagined spaces for Native women, negotiating identity through stories. Blondeau generates a new discourse that exposes the instability of the structures of power, thwarting them through irony. Foucault discusses the mutability of power:

> Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the concept’s complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it
reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.¹⁵⁸

Blondeau’s performative practice, as evidenced in Belle Sauvage, makes clear how power and history can be dynamically and continuously contested, and therefore localized once the discourse in which they reside is understood. She describes her reasons for the development of the Belle Sauvage persona:

The Persona of Belle Sauvage was created for a postcard I made in 1998 for the Dunlop Art Gallery. The Dunlop asked me to make a work responding to the show Indian Princesses and Cowgirls: Stereotypes from the Frontier. For me, this exhibition demonstrated once again that as a Native woman I could play only two roles in the frontier narratives: one being the Indian Princess and the other, the Squaw. I saw this as my opportunity to create an Indian cowgirl.¹⁵⁹

Blondeau creates an intimate conversation between herself and her audience members, enticing listening, witnessing, and remembering. I explore A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage performance space as a site for palimpsest exchange, where Blondeau shares stories as an agency of testimony.

A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage transforms the gallery space to transport Blondeau’s audience and herself back in time, to the Wild West of the 19th century. The back of the gallery is draped in luminous brown velvet curtains and filled with hay bales, a cow skull, and shadowy black and white images of an Indian Cowboy and an Indian Princess. These images are of her grandparents, underscoring the use of her family’s stories as a point of departure.¹⁶⁰ The multicultural and multigenerational audience sits or stands facing Blondeau’s staged Wild West arena. As the curtains part and the crowd applauds, Belle Sauvage (fig. 117) makes her memorable entrance to the Doris Day song The Black Hills of Dakota (from the film Calamity Jane). Belle Sauvage is dressed in a cowboy hat, western-style vest, fringed suede pants, and cowboy boots with metal spurs. Her gun holster, presumably purchased at a souvenir shop, bears an image of the “Indian Brave.” The smoke from her cigarette spirals up, while the audience

follows the star of the show into the intimate atmosphere of a dusty rodeo arena. Throughout Belle Sauvage’s storytelling, she drinks out of a whiskey bottle, pulls and shoots her guns, and practices her roping skills.

Belle Sauvage is an imagined persona (fig. 118). However, woven into the imagined are personal memories, factual stories, and historical events. Blondeau states that through the project, which she mounted first, at the Dunlop Gallery, she was able to “create my own fictional history. If western history could do it why couldn’t I?” A large body of literature and visual imagery represents the Western Frontier through a European lens. Gerald McMaster writes, “It makes little sense for Indigenous people to respond to the outrageous historical fictions of the West. On the contrary, we must focus on our own perspectives.” McMaster’s argument is significant, but it optimistically overlooks current reality and the impact of colonial histories on Aboriginal identity. These historical representations, no matter how outrageous or ridiculous, continue to circulate within popular culture and consequently shape the identities of all North Americans.

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Artists such as Blondeau respond to these colonial narratives and representations, because if they are left untouched by critical investigation, they will remain the imagery representing Aboriginal peoples.

Blondeau also creates imagined spaces of the Wild West in which colonial history and Indigenous perspectives intertwine. Her Aboriginal stories challenge the West’s fictitious narratives. Belle Sauvage (fig. 119) is a mean trick-roper, capable of drinking most men under the table. She is also a notorious outlaw with a large appetite for adventure. During the performance, she turns on her legendary charm for the cameras, posing with guns twirling.\textsuperscript{164} Lynne Bell remarks that “this seductive cowgirl’s props are a long cigarette holder, a trick rope and a bottle of whiskey.”\textsuperscript{165} This Aboriginal cowgirl is exemplified in Blondeau’s “Some Kinda Princess” (fig. 120).

\textsuperscript{164} Bell, “Scandalous Personas,” 48.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
In yet another creative twist, *A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage* is set as the only gay Wild West Show that toured Europe and North America. Blondeau notes that she imagined Belle Sauvage as being “bigger than life and bigger than Calamity Jane or Belle Star.”\(^{166}\) This persona arose out of Blondeau’s awareness of the absence of First Nations women in North American history, which made an impression on her when researching Pocahontas. She recalls another impetus:

I became frustrated with the conflicting stories surrounding her life. Belle Sauvage gave me the opportunity to develop a fictional persona using my own, my mother’s and my grandmother’s stories. Building on these stories I developed a persona that is part fiction and part non-fiction. Belle Sauvage is both believable and absurd at the same time. Her persona plays with the notion of history and its authority.\(^{167}\)

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\(^{167}\) Ibid., 29.
The decision to name her persona Belle Sauvage, then, is a parodic commentary on the history of the Indian princess and of Pocahontas.\footnote{168}

The performance \textit{A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage} is, as Lynne Bell states, rich in comic exaggerations, taking the audience on a roller-coaster ride through laughter and painful testimony.\footnote{169} Blondeau writes,

She tells us about some of the men she has known and the women that didn’t want to know her and how her life has always been lived on the fringe. She tells us that she rode with the gay Wild West show because it was the only show in town that would take her seriously as a cowgirl and not just stereotype her as an Indian Princess.\footnote{170}

Blondeau succeeds in sharing some of her painful stories through humour. In one segment, Sauvage gestures towards the life-sized black-and-white photograph of an Indian cowboy, and declares, “He was a bronco rider who kept horses in the 1920s on the Gordon Reserve in the Touchwood Hills, Saskatchewan.\footnote{171} It’s a pity that he couldn’t leave the reserve without a pass.” In this image of her grandfather as a young cowboy in 1927, he has a six-shooter in one hand and a shotgun in the other. He is wearing a beaded cowboy vest, gloves, and jeans tucked into his cowboy boots. In the performance, the Touchwood Hills of Saskatchewan are identified as a place occupied by colonial systems of oppression, by the “Gordon Reserve.” The pass Sauvage mentions, refers to the pass and permit system, a component of a larger system to control the movement of Aboriginal peoples from their reservation lands. Passes had to be applied for and were granted by an Indian Agent. These Department of Indian Affairs positions held great power and authority over First Nations communities, as they controlled the economic, agricultural, educational, medical, political, and cultural aspects of reserve life.\footnote{173} Blondeau’s grandfather’s personal story is associated with the

\footnote{168} As previously mentioned, the first play written about the legend of Pocahontas was titled \textit{Belle Sauvage}.\footnote{169} In one of Blondeau’s performances of \textit{Belle Sauvage}, the performance starts with Sauvage entering the gallery, whose walls are draped in white curtains and lit with red lights, to Doris Day’s song “The Black Hills of Dakota.” There are life-sized photographic cut-outs mounted on foam core, and a hay bale with a plastic bull’s head in the middle of the gallery for Belle Sauvage’s roping practice. As Day’s song plays, Belle Sauvage saunters around with a bottle of whiskey in hand, captivating her audience with her life’s testimony. Bell, “Scandalous Personas,” 48.\footnote{170} Blondeau, 29.\footnote{171} Blondeau spent her summers as a child at her grandparents’ house on the Gordon Reserve in the Touchwood Hills. This is another example of Blondeau’s incorporation of personal stories into her performance narratives.\footnote{172} Bell, “Scandalous Personas,” 50.\footnote{173} In a 1958 study the duties of superintendents (agents) were noted as the following: “[T]he superintendent deals with property and with records, or with the recording of property. He registers births, deaths and marriages. He administers the band’s funds. He supervises business dealings with regard to band property. He holds band elections and records the results. He interviews people who want irrigation systems, who
larger reality of the Indian Act. The words pass and permit introduce into Blondeau’s performance space the politics of the so-called Indian problem, and the Canadian government’s “civilizing” and “assimilating” interventions.

Belle Sauvage’s storytelling forces the audience to take part in a postcolonial history lesson. She lures them into questioning their understanding of Indian Agents, the Indian Act, and other hegemonic policies. In *A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage*, her stories also act as evidence of the failure of the Canadian government’s attempts at cultural genocide. Blondeau writes,

The first time I saw this photograph of my grandfather I thought, wow! He was a cowboy and a bronco rider. But he was an Indian cowboy with these beautiful beaded garments. He couldn’t leave the reserve because it was still under the pass-permit-system. But he owned his own horses and that’s how he learnt how to break horses. I wish I could talk to him. Where did he first see the cowboy image? Why did he want to become a cowboy? Maybe he was a performance artist? My grandfather comes from one of the original ten families of Gordon’s First Nations located in the Touchwood Hills. His grandfather was Daybird, who in his time was a very powerful medicine man. My grandfather was also a strong man when it came to his culture and identity as a Native person. This was something that not even colonialism could take away from him. He was a traditional dancer, and when we were children, he would take us around the powwow trail in the 1960s and complain about land encroachments, who are applicants for loans. He suggests to others that, if they are in a common-law relationship, they should get married, for, among other reasons, this simplifies the records. He obtains information about persons applying for enfranchisement. He adjusts the property of bands when members transfer. He deals with the estates of deceased Indians. He obtains the advice of the engineering officers on irrigation systems, and the building of schools. He negotiates the surrender of lands for highways and other public purposes. He applies for funds to re-house the needy and provide relief for the indigent. He draws the attention of magistrates to factors which bear upon Indians standing trial on criminal charges.” H.B. Hawthorn, C.S. Belshaw, and S.M. Jamieson, *The Indians of British Columbia: A Study of Contemporary Social Adjustment* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1958), 486. See Peter Carstens, *The Queen’s People: A Study of Hegemony, Coercion, and Accommodation among the Okanagan of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 88. See the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* for a discussion of specific Agents roles and reported abuses of power in communities. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* “False Assumptions and a Failed Relationship: The Indian Act,” Ch. 9 Section 11.

174 In the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* the pass system is discusses in relation to the *Indian Act*: “It began as a result of informal discussions among government officials in the early 1880’s in response to the threat that prairie Indians might forge a pan-Indian alliance against Canadian authorities. Designed to prevent Indians on the prairies from leaving their reserves, its immediate goal was to inhibit their mobility. Under the system, Indians were permitted to leave their reserves only if they had a written pass from the local Indian agent...The pass system should be read against the backdrop of other attempts to interfere with Indian cultural life, as it was intended not only to prevent Indian leaders and potential militants from conspiring with each other, but also to discourage parents from visiting their children in off-reserve residential schools and to give agents greater authority to prevent Indians from participating in banned ceremonies and dances on distant reserves.” Canada, *Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples, Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Vol. 1: Looking Forward Looking Back, Part 2: False Assumptions and a Failed Relationship, Chapter 9: The Indian Act; Section 10: The Pass System* (Ottawa: 1996), 272, accessed April 11, 2011, http://caid.ca/RRCAP1.9.pdf.
1970s. Maybe he showed us that you could live in both worlds and still maintain your identity and your beliefs as a First Nation person. 175

These stories of Blondeau’s grandfather, incorporated into the life and narrative of Belle Sauvage, emphasize cultural survivance and resistance, revealing the presence of “the creases of sovereignty.” 176 Blondeau continues the lifeline of her family’s stories into the present by telling and re-telling them; thus, her storytelling actively contributes to their survivance. By placing their experiences into the present, she presents them through the lens of sovereignty.

The following passage by Lynne Bell, a personal account of her experience of this performance, informs us of the intensity of Blondeau’s practice and methods and reminds us of her intentions as a performance artist/activist. Blondeau deliberately creates this environment and space: for the purpose of education. Bell states that Blondeau’s statement that her Grandfather was restricted from leaving the reserve “hangs in the air, its sense suspended, a reminder of the prisons of colonial space and the public secret of the pass and permit systems that restricted the movement and business transactions of First Nations people in Saskatchewan from the late 19th through the mid 20th centuries.” 177 I would agree with this statement, and offer this reading of Blondeau’s work. Even if the viewer is not aware of colonial histories, the concept of confinement and displacement connected with the words reserve and pass will register. I suggest that Belle Sauvage not only offers a re-dressing of colonial histories, but offers her histories as a reciprocal gift to her audiences through the inclusion of humour. Although these histories are hard and traumatic to remember, her listener of Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal descent can take in the story Blondeau tells in order to participate in her postcolonial re-writing.

Blondeau’s performance points to the historical climate of an earlier era. The current discourse of antimodernism investigates “primitivism,” and subsequently the romanticization of all things “primitive.” The desire for the return to nature that prevailed in what is termed the “modern era” is marked by significant ironies and complexities. The period of extensive “salvaging” by museums, for example, occurred at the same time as the development of the legislative ceremonial bans. These bans either forced Canada’s Aboriginal peoples to go underground to perform cultural rituals and stories or produce material culture, or to abolish them completely. The Belle Sauvage persona plays with “history and its authority” in the “development” of the West. The land that now

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177 Bell, “Scandalous Personas,” 50.
makes up Canada was viewed by Euro-Canadians as open and free for the taking. Blondeau’s choice of a Wild West setting recalls this history of Aboriginal land loss. Using parody and humour, the artist creates a counterpoint to Canada’s iconic “old west,” with its celebration of white cowboy culture and its erasures of Aboriginal histories and voices. This brings us back to the concept of performance using storytelling as a way to disrupt national patterns of remembering and forgetting—and in this case to educate and start a new pattern of cultural understanding and empowerment. Blondeau states that “parody can be a powerful force for challenging and disempowering the inherited violence embedded in Western ways of knowing the world.”

This performance is Blondeau’s version of the old west, populated by First Nations cowboys and cowgirls. Through Belle Sauvage, a voluptuous, worldly, and gay First Nations cowgirl, Blondeau writes yet another layer of meaning over the history of Aboriginal representation in popular culture. Her “imagined” wild west reflects a closer reading of the period than that projected by Hollywood westerns.

The concluding section of Belle Sauvage’s performance is her exit to the lyrics of Tom Petty’s song *Swingin*:

Well, she was standing by the highway in her boots and silver spurs  
Gonna hitchhike to the yellow moon when a Cadillac stopped for her  
And she said, “Hey, nice to meet you, are you goin’ my way?”  
Yeah, that’s when it happened. The world caught fire that day  
And she went down swingin’. Yeah she went down swingin’  
Well, she was over twenty-one in trouble with the law  
And it didn’t faze her none. She called her mother-in-law  
And said I need a little money. I knew I could count on you  
After that night in Vegas and the hell that we went through  
We went down swingin’. Like Benny Goodman. Yeah we went down swingin’  
Moonlight on the interstate. She was ‘cross the Georgia line  
Looked out the window feeling great. Yeah, it had to come in time  
And she said I’m never going back. She said at last I’m free  
I wish ma could see me now, she’d be so proud of me  
She went down swingin’. Like Tommy Dorsey. Yeah she went swingin’. Like  
Sammy Davis  
She went down swingin’. Like Sonny Liston

The words of the song fill the room, bearing witness to the names of individuals such as Sammy Davis and Sonny Liston, who had to fight and challenge societal “norms” to achieve their life goals. If the audience is aware of this song and the histories of these individuals, they may make

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178 Ibid.  
179 Ibid., 52.
connections between the histories of Belle Sauvage and Blondeau’s grandfather, therefore recognizing and bearing witness to colonial histories.\textsuperscript{180} The chorus “She went down swingin’” arguably alludes to a fundamental meaning of this performance, which is Aboriginal resistance and survivance. Belle Sauvage’s persona is a fighter, too. Her “opponents” are stereotypes and the colonial discourse; her altercations provide an opportunity for disruption for the purpose of social change. The songs used in this performance are meant to trigger memories for the audience, and to leave traces of the experience in their minds.

Blondeau’s multifaceted performance practices invite critical listening and engagement from her audience. In\textit{A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage}, Blondeau not only tests the audience’s knowledge of Canadian and Aboriginal history, she knowingly tells stories that are unknown to most in the room. I found that her methods of engagement lured me in, acting as catalysts for my own self-questioning. Blondeau’s inclusion of harsh historical testimony also reminds the audience of the “power, unpredictability and rawness of live art.”\textsuperscript{181} Her intentions are clear: to educate through storytelling. She also assumes the role of meaning maker: her performative storytelling draws upon memory and inserts it into the official narrative, thus participating in the process of decolonization.

**Putting the Wild back into the West: Lori Blondeau and Adrian Stimson**

Buffalo Boy and Belle Sauvage are performance personas that evoke histories of Wild West Shows, Indian Days, and other stages on which Indigenous peoples performed in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. In this section, I discuss and argue that Blondeau and Stimson’s collaborative performance, \textit{Putting the Wild back into the West}, is connected to this history of Indigenous performance, a history of Indigenous peoples establishing economic enterprise and creating sites from which to stage cultural continuance and resistance (fig. 121). This contemporary example of

\textsuperscript{180} In Blondeau’s concluding sentence of her article “Some Kinda Princess” she writes “When they hear this song, will people remember my performance? If they know the song, what memories will it trigger?”

\textsuperscript{181} Bell, “Scandalous Personas,” 50.
Indigenous performance art reveals how contemporary artists like Blondeau and Stimson participate in a continuum of using performance as a tool for political activism and Indigenous interventions. These tactics of resistance are a long-standing tradition within the diverse Indigenous nations of the Americas. *Putting the Wild back into the West* thus participates in the larger context of Indigenous performance artists who, as Mohawk curator, Greg Hill notes “[draw] on that multi-layered and multi-contextual history; their art rebukes and engages it, turns it on its head, is intertwined with it and honours it.”

The character of Buffalo Boy originated in 2004 as a parody of Buffalo Bill. Stimson notes that “Buffalo Boy is a trickster character. He’s campy, ridiculous, and absurd, but he is also a storyteller who exposes cultural and societal truths” (fig. 122). Buffalo Boy made his public debut during a Mendel Art Gallery artistsbyartists collaboration with Lori Blondeau. Entitled *Buffalo Boy and Belle Sauvage: Putting the WILD back into the WEST*, it included photographs, artifacts, and performances by the two artists. It was subsequently been performed in the fall of 2006 at Western Front in Vancouver (fig. 123) and in the spring of 2008 at La Centrale in Montreal both curated by Joanne Bristol. The final installment, performed in October 2008, was co-hosted by Kamloops Art Gallery and Arnica Artist Run Center and curated by Susan Buis. In June 2009, Stimson and Blondeau performed *Putting the Wild back into the West* one last time. This performance, curated

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by Wanda Nanibush and part of the Ode'min Giizis Festival in Peterborough, was staged at the Artspace Gallery.

Figure 122: Jeff Thomas, *Buffalo Boy (Adrian Stimson), Samuel de Champlain monument*, Ottawa. 2011. Photo courtesy of Jeff Thomas.

Figure 123: Lori Blondeau and Adrian Stimson, *Putting the Wild Back in the West*, Performance Still. Photo Credit: Western Front Gallery, Vancouver, B.C.

Buffalo Boy, the multi-gendered persona of Saskatoon based artist Adrian Stimson, resurrected the turn-of-the-century staged frontier spectacles well-known from Buffalo Bill’s Wild West travelling shows. Part drag, part shape shifter, Stimson’s Buffalo Boy confides in his prairie chameleon intuition to camp up issues related to the colonial project, sexuality, and authenticity administered into the social psyche through cultural replay/foreplay. By representing himself in many facets, Stimson’s Buffalo Boy toyed with becoming an icon of destiny as well as destruction.
These forces merged together to represent transition, survivance and growth on a daily basis within Blackfoot and contemporary North American Western/prairie societies, which challenge historical discourses of difference. In this way, Stimson’s Buffalo Boy persona participated in what Vizenor calls Native survivance, which links Indigenous survival, continuance, and resistance to both the presence of stories and the continued acts of telling stories. Stimson, who is from the Blackfoot, Siksika Nation, reveres the buffalo as an important source and ongoing inspiration for his performance alter ego. Stimson states, “I use the bison as a symbol representing the destruction of the Aboriginal way of life, but it also represents survival and cultural regeneration. The bison is central to Blackfoot being. And the bison as both icon and food source, as well as the whole history of its disappearance, is very much a part of my contemporary life.”

*Putting the Wild back into the West* reveals continued legacies of colonization and racist stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples. Blondeau’s persona Belle Sauvage actively plays with the stereotypes of the Indian princess and squaw while drawing on Indigenous women who performed in Wild West shows and Vaudeville acts in the early 20th century. The name Belle Sauvage (Indian Princess) reflects Blondeau’s multifaceted performance strategies: a colonial name appropriated and used in a humorous and parodic way for subversion. Belle Sauvage is usually dressed in a buckskin dress (made of cloth), with a holster, two toy guns, and a beehive hair do. In the multiple stagings of this performance, Belle Sauvage has worn a cowboy hat, a bobbed haircut, and cowboy boots with spurs. As noted in the previous section, Blondeau persona of Belle Sauvage, as an Indian cowgirl subverts the roles in the frontier narratives of Aboriginal women (i.e. the Indian Princess and the Squaw). In a similar vein, Stimson’s Buffalo Boy is a character parody of William Cody that re-signifies colonial histories and representations from an Indigenous and queer perspective.

During this performative staging, Blondeau and Stimson create an interactive space for remembering and conversing with Canada’s 19th and early 20th century histories of colonial expansion and racist and assimilist legislation, which attempted to control all aspects of Native life. This co-produced performance also provides a space for recalling and then unpacking the limited and stereotypical representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures in the archives of Canadian history. The body, for Blondeau and Stimson, is integral to their art practice, acting as the site for

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social intervention and cultural resistance. Dot Tuer notes that within the contexts of mining the media archives and cultural resistance, the body must be recognized as a cipher of memory, as a cipher of storytelling and as witness to history to make the body’s connections to history, remembrance, and bearing witness. The performative interactions between Buffalo Boy and Belle Sauvage can be analyzed as an artistic process of fusing memory, history and storytelling that fosters a space for listening and remembering: in this way, the body can be understood as a repository from which Indigenous knowledge is shared and as the site from which silenced histories are remembered. The bodies of Blondeau and Stimson thus collaboratively articulate Indigenous agency—asserting their self-determined perspectives and recalling the agency present in historical performances staged by Indigenous peoples throughout colonialism. The act of remembering for both the artists and the audience becomes a political act of Indigenous cultural survivance and continuance, and, for those non-Indigenous audience members, a politicized act of solidarity.

Blondeau and Stimson perform their personas within a constructed “Wild West” diorama. This arguably highlights the constructed nature of national narratives that legitimized settler expansion on western North American Indigenous lands. They invite audience members to join them within their imagined wild west stage for an interactive photo session, creating a scene in which artists and viewers co-participate in creating contemporary meanings of 19th-century histories and re-examinations of the silences surrounding Indigenous histories of this era. This campy performance invites its audience members-turned-performers to dress up in costumes that evoke notions of wild west and its myths and histories. The photographic evidence, or rather remnants of the performance, raises many different questions and challenges classifications of race, sexuality, culture, and identity. The photographs also offer an opportunity to reflect back on how Indigenous peoples and their cultures have been represented by Euro-Canadian society. The inclusion of humorous and campy personas supports continued exposures of how the photograph has been used to document, record, produce, and construct Aboriginal peoples through the Western lens. Buffalo Boy and Belle Sauvage are thus creating a new photographic record, exposing the absurdity and the constructed nature of stereotypes.

I witnessed and participated in the performance during the last staging of *Putting the Wild back into the West*. Audience members signed up, made their mark (in many cases, an X), and paid their five dollars to be part of and then spectators of the show. After signing my mark, I was

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ushered into a make-shift dressing room full of costumes and accessories. From buffalo blanket to military jacket to Indian princess dress, the choices were abundant. It was extremely interesting to witness the soon-to-be performers choosing what they were going to wear—or rather, who they were to perform. The combinations of dress, cross-dressing, and shape shifting spoke to the complex histories of contact, colonization, settlement, and movement into the so-called postcolonial period. What I mean here is that this performance offered an opportunity not only for Indigenous individuals to dress up as settlers or as the iconic Indian, noble savage, Indian Princess etc., but also for non-Indigenous to dress up and symbolically “go native.” Many other combinations of dress were made that could not be typified or directly linked to an archive of representation or expectations of gendered and raced identities. The performance explicitly brought to the surface how Indigenous peoples have used various modes of dress, both in performance and within the political arena, to assert and negotiate settler/dominant societal structures of dominance.

For my photograph with Belle Sauvage and Buffalo Boy, which I posed with Iroquois video artist Bear Witness, my costume choice was a fusion between a historical imagining of one of my ancestors, from my mother’s side of the family, Grace Cree Brown, who settled in the Prairies, and Annie Oakley (fig. 124). I wore a hide jacket over a turn-of-the-century house dress with a fur scarf and cowboy hat. Before I posed for the photograph, Buffalo Boy offered both myself and Bear Witness a shot of whiskey to finalize “our deal.” In the photograph, Witness is seated in the middle of the scene, bare chested, wearing a chosen costume of a buffalo blanket and dream catcher as his medallion. To the left of Witness, cow skull sits on a table beside a bottle of whiskey (whose label is covered by a heart). Buffalo Boy stands in behind, a plains headdress resting on display to his left. I stand to the right with Belle Sauvage, my hand resting on Witness’ shoulder. Both Belle Sauvage and Buffalo Boy have their guns pulled, directing them at Witness. Buffalo Boy, with one hand, motions toward me in a cautionary gesture. This scene is humorous and playful, but with elements of potential violence. Looking at this photograph later, many questions arise: Are Belle Sauvage and Buffalo Boy holding me and Bear Witness captive? Are we negotiating a treaty?
Regardless of the possible analysis of this new archive of photographs, after participating it seems clear that the focus is on the performance. In conversation with Witness after our experiences viewing/participating in *Putting the Wild back into the West*, the significance of performance emerged: it lay in exchange between the artists and the audience, the choosing of costumes, and the moments of decision in terms of poses. He argued that the focus in the performance was not the photograph, but rather the performative aspect. In this way, the photographs are an archive of the experiences of the performance: traces and repositories of the memories of the experience. We discussed with the artists the experiences of Aboriginal sitters in historic photographs. What were their experiences? Did they enjoy the performative aspect of dressing up, as we all did? The photographs from *Putting the Wild back into the West* raise important questions, suggesting new ways of understanding historic and ethnographic photography like those produced by Edward Curtis. In this way, this performance and resulting photographs support a space for acknowledging the agency of historic Aboriginal sitters and makes links to the possibility that they too were
performing. *Putting the Wild back into the West* is a performance that challenges understandings of settlement in western lands of North America, exposes erasures of colonial violence, reveals broken treaty promises, and complicates histories of contact and notions of identities and subjectivities. It does this while also playfully creating space for imaginings determined by both audience members and the Indigenous performance artists, Blondeau and Stimson.

The interplay between i) the audience and ii) Buffalo Boy and Belle Sauvage illuminates the function of both the performance and the wild west diorama as participants of criticality, reconciling with absences and attempting to replace voids—indigenizing the gallery space within which Blondeau and Stimson perform and also the colonial histories/stories they are sharing. This highlights the value of the performative alongside the use of humour and notions of serious play in constituting meaning and challenging firmly rooted conventions and assumptions. *Putting the Wild back into the West,* then, opens up spaces for the previously marginalized, excluded, and silenced histories and voices. It recalls the experiences of historical Indigenous performers, such as those in Banff Indian Days, Wild West Shows, and vaudeville, and creates space for considering these performers’ negotiations of colonial domination and reasons for performing. As individual performance artists, Blondeau and Stimson stage resistance of status-quo understanding of Indigeneity, asserting their agency and sovereignty over their own identities, personas, experiences, stories, and the spaces in which they perform.

**The Rise of Indigenous Popular Performance: The case studies of Pauline E. Johnson and Maggie Papakura**

As a result of industrialization in North America and the settler society desire to connect back to a “simpler time,” Aboriginal peoples and cultures, perceived as primitive and inherently connected to nature, became a means for settler audiences to experience their constructs of the primitive wilderness. Multiple sites of performance can be connected to this modern/anti-modern paradigm during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. World Fairs, Vaudeville theatre, Wild West Shows, and royal tours were stages from which settler societies in the British Empire could experience Indianness. In this section, I connect Pauline Johnson’s and Maggie Papakura’s performances to those of Aboriginal peoples on the “Native performance stages” of World Fairs, and Wild West and Indian Medicine Shows in order to highlight the tradition of performance and performative storytelling as means for cultural continuance and political activism. Many accounts of these performances portray the power dynamics between Indigenous performers and their settler audiences as one-dimensional, rendering the Native performer as victim, voiceless and oppressed.
(occupying the position of the colonized) and the white audience member as the powerful oppressor
(occupying a position of colonizer).

However, in fact, the performance of Aboriginality for settler audiences involved complex
negotiations between Aboriginal performers and their settler audiences. The complexities are
seemingly obvious to Indigenous peoples and those exploring obvert and subtle instances of
interventions against colonial power structures and relationships. Even so, this recognition is absent
in a significant amount of scholarship exploring Indigenous performance. By including discussions
of Aboriginal agency and recognizing Indigenous strategies in the analysis of the performances of
individuals like Pauline Johnson’s, we can expose how Aboriginal’s performing during this period,
in local, national and international spaces, were aware of the expectations and desires of their settler
audiences. Settler Canadian society’s longing for experiences with so called authentic, pre-contact
Indians was manipulated by Aboriginal performers for both economic and political gain. They also
undermined federal assimilist policies that attempted to control all aspects of Aboriginal life. In
other words, the politically informed use of performance on the stages, circuses, and fair grounds
became sites for Indigenous interventions of colonial power structures and relationships.

Thus, the performers played into Eurocentric romanticism of Aboriginal cultures,
exemplified through the images of the Indian Princess and the Indian Brave, in order to make
political statements; to increase mobility both national and internationally; to create networks with
other Indigenous peoples; and to gain economically. Phillips describes the 1931 Colonial and
Overseas Exposition in Paris, arguing, “In 1931 this doubleness was manipulated to satisfy two
potentially conflicting sets of desires: those of the Aboriginal actors for employment, travel, and the
affirmation of identity, and those of the exhibition commissioners to demonstrate the success of
assimilationist policies and to appropriate the Native to a modern nationalist construct.”186 She
writes, “It is necessary to interrogate standard representations that depict Native populations as
silent and passive victims of colonization, not only by locating the sites of Native action and
participation, but also by problematizing Native people’s complicity in aspects of Primitivist
discourse.”187 In other words, performance was used as a strategic tool to subvert, to undermine, and
to stage resistance against colonial agendas and racist systems of domination, as well as to
intervene in Eurocentric representations and narratives, such as the classification of Indigenous
knowledge systems as inferior, which were perpetually used to legitimize colonization.

186 Phillips, “Performing the Native Woman,” 26–27.
187 Ibid., 29.
Significantly, performance on settler stages was also means for Indigenous culture continuance and continuities.

Mohawk poet and performer Pauline E. Johnson (1861–1913), whom I discuss in detail in Chapter 3, personifies this negotiation. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, she was the first woman of Aboriginal descent to publicly perform her stories for settler society in Canada. Johnson’s poems were complex. They played into the legacy of exoticism and romanticism attached to Aboriginal representation, yet at the same time, they criticized assimilation and land loss and challenged the audience’s understanding of what an “Indian” woman is.

The representation of Aboriginal culture from the settler perspective enabled her to negotiate a space for her acts of socio-political intervention. Arguably, the result of her performances can be seen to have reproduced the romanticism informing settler views of Indigenous peoples. However, I would argue that it was Johnson's understanding of the social climate of her time that enabled her to play with images such as the romantic “Indian Princess” in order to subvert them and intervene within colonial and racist representations. Johnson was a provocative performer; she incorporated contrasting personas and captivated audiences with her theatrics. Her dual performance personas represented both her Mohawk and her British ancestry, each recognizable to her audiences by their distinct dress. She wore her buckskin “Indian Princess” dress, with its bear tooth necklace, for the first half of the concert (fig. 125), and a Victorian evening gown for the second (fig. 126). The change of costume reminded her audience that although she was Aboriginal playing into their understanding of “‘Indian” culture (“exotic,” “romantic,” “primitive”), she was also a middle-class, Euro-Canadian woman connected to them through her mother’s lineage. Johnson’s change into an evening dress after her Indian Princess
dress constitutes her attempt to legitimize her performances and to facilitate acceptance of her work by reminding the audience of her European ancestry. She negotiated dominant Euro-Canadian society’s reception of her by prompting the audience’s mystification of her “Indianness,” while also impressing them with her European-based poise, middle-class respectability, and most importantly, her talent.

Johnson’s performances are linked as much to the tradition of oratory as to the tradition of spectacle. Through her strategy of “dressing up” she created a space to share her provocative stories, voice political issues facing Indigenous peoples, and offer an Aboriginal perspective. Johnson wrote poems and prose that provoked a re-evaluation of then dominant society’s norms, while also making interventions in colonial narratives supporting nation building. Johnson clearly gave voice to stories of colonial atrocities, many of which were contemporary to her and would otherwise have been silenced. Her dynamic acts of performativity can be understood as a historical precedent for contemporary Aboriginal performance art as political intervention.
While Johnson toured Canada, United States, and Great Britain, another Indigenous woman in the Empire, Maggie Papakura, a famous Maori woman of the Aware iwi, made a similar strategic use of performance (fig. 127). She combined Maori performance and cultural knowledge with tourism as a method for the negotiation of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, and resistance during New Zealand’s nation-building period. Makareti, also known as Maggie the Guide, was a performer, dancer, singer, cultural guide, Maori ambassador, manager, leader, and scholar. She gained economic and political power as a hostess and guide in the tourist district of Rotorua and its hot springs and geysers. Papakura was among the most sought after guides at Whakarewarewa, which was the Maori village tourists would visit to see living Maori in carved houses and traditional dress. Whakarewarewa was a village operating as a living museum. She not only controlled the beginnings of Maori cultural tourism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but she also hosted British royal tours to New Zealand. Makareti was the first to organize a tour of an all-Maori performance troupe, which travelled throughout New Zealand, Australia, and Europe. In 1909 she led her Te Arawa troupe, which had previously toured New Zealand, with a carved Maori

Figure 127: Maggie Papakura, Postcard, New Zealand Maori Village, circa 1901. National Archives, New Zealand.

village as its set to perform in Sydney for ten weeks. Papakura then organized a larger tour to Australia in 1910, where they performed in Sydney and then in Melbourne. This tour completed its performances in England at the Crystal Palace Theatre for the Coronation of King George V.

The program bill read, “Maggie Papakura: The Arawa Warriors and Maori Maidens.” The evenings’ performances opened with “Living Pictures of Maori Life,” which were tableaus of Maori everyday activities (fig. 128). Then Papakura would do a solo performance, in her role as tourist guide, that explained the carved village set (which was meant to replicate Whakarewarewa). In this sense, through the act of performance, Papakura took her audience to

![Image](image.png)

Figure 128: “Maggie Papakura: The Arawa Warriors and Maori Maidens.” Circa 1900s, National Archives, New Zealand.

Rotorua. Once the audience members imagined themselves as actually having travelled to New Zealand as tourists, they experienced a “living display” of Maori life similar to that they would have had in Whakarewarewa. They witnessed, among other things, “Maori Maidens” performing traditional poi dances and singing Maori love songs, and Warriors performing the war dance, the Haka, and practicing war postures with traditional weaponry. Papakura’s turn-of-the-century performance program has influenced and constitutes the contemporary cultural performance that tourists experience in Rotorua today. Her impact on Maori cultural tourism has been significant, as it created economic independence during a time of growing Maori poverty and dependence on New Zealand government.

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189 Ibid., 88.
190 Ibid., 93–98.
It was through her performances and politically savvy negotiations of settler–New Zealand relations that Papakura was able to travel to, and subsequently settle in, England after one of her performances in 1911. She is among the first Maori, and was the first Maori woman, to receive a Bachelor of Science from Oxford University, where she focused her studies in anthropology.\textsuperscript{192} Papakura’s thesis, \textit{The Old-Time Maori}, explored her memories and personal knowledge of traditional Maori life and was completed before she died in 1930.\textsuperscript{193} \textit{The Old-Time Maori}, first published in 1938, was the first Maori-based anthropological study of Maori customs and material culture, and it was subsequently republished in 1986 by the New Women’s Press.\textsuperscript{194} Through the act of performing Maori dance and songs and telling her Arawa iwi’s stories to tourists, among them international leaders, Makareti managed to negotiate a space for a Maori voice within a racist, colonial New Zealand. She captivated white audiences through her perceived exotic beauty, presented Maori self-determined performance programs, shared Maori histories and managed to have her perspectives on Maori culture distributed to Empire’s public in print.

At the height of colonial assimilation, Papakura and Johnson are but two examples of Indigenous resistance through cultural practice. Esther Deer and Molly Spotted Elk are two other examples of Indigenous performance on settler stages in the early 20th century, such as Kitsipimi Otunna. Esther Deer, from the Mohawk nation and Akaswane community, was born in 1891 and performed as Princess White Deer from the age of eleven with her father and uncles’ act “The Famous Deer Brothers, Champion Indian Trick Riders of the World.” The Deer family performed both on their own and within travelling Wild West Shows. She has been named one of the first Native American Indians to gain fame as a dancer. Esther Deer eventually joined the vaudeville Florenz Zieflled show, in which she had a popular solo act. Esther Deer’s performances not only played into the romantic narrative of the vanishing Indian, in her “Deer family, Indians of the Past,” but also into the desire for white audiences to see and meet a “real indian.” Depending on her stage and her audience, Esther Deer performed both the seductress Indian woman (playing into the exoticification of Indigenous women) and the naïve and passive Indian Maiden (fig. 129). Phillips concludes that Molly Spotted Elk’s choice of modern dance as her medium for self-expression was, on one level, a matter of individual predisposition, but the success of this choice was also predicated on the long history of distance dance and white spectatorship (fig. 130). She writes, “In the first decades of this century the distance from basketry or bead embroidery to modernist easel

\textsuperscript{192} Diamond, \textit{Makereti}, 143.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 158.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 177.
painting or marble sculpture was hard to travel, yet all these forms were deployed within a visual environment whose common terrain it is important to recognize if we are to appreciate the resonances of mimicry as they echo across the distances and down the years.”

In a similar way to the strategies employed by Molly Spotted Elk, both Johnson and Papakura employed Indigenous performance as a strategy to gain mobility, leadership, and respect. They exploited and manipulated settler-colonial romanticism and fascination with the exotic other—the Indian Princess or Maori Maiden. In doing so, they staged acts of resistance in an era that focused on silencing and eradicating Indigenous histories. Today, this performative strategy to counter processes of colonization is continued by Indigenous artists such as Blondeau, in works such as *CosmoSquaw* and *Lonely Surfer Squaw*.

![Figure 129: (Left) Esther Deer, Promotional Photograph, circa 1921.](image1)


**Subverting the Stereotype of Indigenous Women: Lori Blondeau**

Lori Blondeau’s use of performance personas reflects a similar strategy of performing Indigeneity as that we have seen above employed by Johnson, Deer, and other Aboriginal men and women in

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195 Phillips, “Performing the Native Women,” 43.
the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Like Johnson, who incorporated the stereotypes of Aboriginal women constructed by settler society, Blondeau includes the Indian Princess and Squaw constructs. However, in the case of Blondeau, specifically in her contemporary performance and performative photographs, the monolithic and exotic constructs by popular culture of Aboriginal women are subverted, undermined, displaced, and challenged. Johnson, as noted above, incorporated the constructs of the Indian Princess and exotic Indian temptress to gain her audiences attention and to fulfill their desires to meet, experience, and witness a ‘real Indian’ in order to create sites from which she could share her stories of resistance and protest. On the other hand, Blondeau overtly uses humour and other strategies to intervene within the stereotypes, which still circulate within popular culture and collective North American settler imaginations.

Performance artist and scholar Coco Fusco discusses the “othering” of peoples within colonial discourse and the significance of the stereotype in relation to power dynamics: “The issue of ‘the other’ is one of power, of a dynamic between those who impute otherness to some and those who are designated as other. So the questions I ask about otherness have to do with how others or the other are spoke of, who is speaking about them, and why have they chosen to speak of the other at the given historical moment.”196 In this way, performances by historical Indigenous women and also by contemporary artists raise questions about the history of representing Indigenous peoples as “others.” They challenge the constructs of stereotypes and put forward Indigenous perspectives in spaces that tend to be, for the most part, occupied by non-Indigenous peoples and dominant discourses. The process of reclaiming, renaming and retelling histories and stereotypes is a process of decolonization and an example of a process of asserting Indigenous agency.

In Aboriginal performance art, here specifically Blondeau’s CosmoSquaw and Lonely Surfer Squaw, the representations and constructs of Aboriginal women and their histories by settler society are challenged, displaced, and transformed by a process of subversion and a sophisticated use of humour. Re-appropriation and adoption of colonial language is yet another means for the dislodging of fixed signs perpetuated and maintained by dominant settler society, one that Blondeau incorporates into her performance practice. I propose that Blondeau’s use of colonial entrenched language is a dynamic act of protest: an attempt to decolonize histories and imagery of Aboriginal peoples from the dominant discourse and archive of representation. For example, she re-appropriates of the word “squaw” in her performance narratives and persona’s names, CosmoSquaw and Lonely Surfer Squaw, an act that mirrors Judith Butler’s discussion of using the

“word that wounds” to subvert and as an “instrument of resistance.” Belle Sauvage (Indian Princess) is another of Blondeau’s colonial name appropriations, used in a humorous and parodic way for subversion. In regard to the subversion of deprecating, harmful and, derogatory names, terms, and words, Butler argues,

The word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment means speaking words without prior authorization and putting into risk the security of linguistic life, the sense of one’s place is language as it calls into question the linguistic survival of the one addressed. Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change.197

In the case of Blondeau performances and photographs then, the “epistemic violence,” as termed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, connected to the word squaw is challenged and also exposed. In “Can the Subaltern Speak,” Spivak discusses the everyday violence of being a marked colonized body—rooted in the language, representations, and stereotypes of the dominant society, which is used to define identities and subjectivities of colonized and marginalized peoples.198 Transnational feminist Himani Bannerji extensively explores the links between othering, colonization, violence, and identity politics. Her arguments, put forward in such texts as “Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism,” draw from the pivotal works of Franz Fanon and Edward Said and other key postcolonial theorists. Bannerji writes, “There has been throughout colonization, slavery and after, an identity politics already in place—though not acknowledged as such. Political and cultural critics such as Fanon and Said and other anti-colonial, anti-imperialist writers have drawn our attention to colonial culture or discourse, to cultural imperialism and reified or distorted representation.”199

Looking to postcolonial and transnational feminist discussions of race, identity politics, and colonization elucidates the significance of the work of artists like Blondeau in the processes of exposing, displacing, and challenging dominant and violent modes of representation entrenched in popular culture and settler consciousness. The stereotypes (representations, names, etc.) of Aboriginal women in Canadian narratives are seemingly organic; however, the work being done by Indigenous artists, scholars, and their allies exposes the constructs and more importantly the

reasons for why such stereotypes or epistemic violence of Aboriginal peoples and cultures are perpetuated within the neo-liberal society of Canada. As Bannerji argues,

This violence and its constructive or representative attempts have become so successful or hegemonic that they have become transparent—holding in place the ruler’s claimed superior self, named or identified in myriad ways, and the inadequacy and inferiority of those who are ruled. This is so pervasive and naturalized that when spoken about it takes on a hollow ring or the rhetorical quality of political rant. And yet this hegemony does exist, not just as forms of consciousness, but as organic and mediatory to structures and institutions, to legalities and moralities, to semiotics of cultural life. And as the names proliferate they provide legitimization, informing relations of ruling or of doing capital, class and imperialism—and thus provide the ground for the experience of being non-white in Europe and North America.200

Bannerji argues that in order to replace such stereotypes “embodying negative forms of difference” embedded in the terrain of dominant exclusion and violence, angry rejections must take place.201 This argument draws from Fanon’s assertion that both colonization and decolonization are processes of violence. This being said, Blondeau’s processes of claiming the term squaw and incorporating stereotypes of Indigenous women into her performance personas also incorporate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into her practice of displacement and intervention. For example, Blondeau recounts a personal memory, arguably an experience of epistemological violence, which ultimately participated in her decision to subvert and reclaim the derogatory term squaw:

I remember being called a squaw, and it was meant to insult, violate and degrade. One day I went home crying after being called “a fucking ugly squaw.” I was only sixteen. My grandmother, who lived on the reserve, was visiting. She asked me what was the matter, and I told her, “I was called an ugly squaw.” She looked at me and said, “You are a squaw and be proud of that.” I asked her what “squaw” meant. She said, “It means ‘woman’ and you are a woman. And you’re beautiful.” After this, anytime anyone called me a squaw, I would reply, “Yes, I am. Do you have a problem with it?” I would no longer give the person the satisfaction of seeing me hurt and embarrassed. I now had the knowledge of what the word meant and knew somehow that the person insulting me did not. All it took was this moment of doubt in the mind of the person calling me a squaw and he or she retreated with the embarrassment that was intended for me.202

In this way, Blondeau rejects the stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples constructed throughout the process of colonization. She renders the epistemic violence associated with such constructs passive,

200 Bannerji, Thinking Through, 24.
201 Ibid.
while simultaneously exposing the lack of understanding and knowledge settler society has of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Her work plays a significant role in the repositioning of Aboriginal peoples identities and histories in the Canadian cultural landscape, and perhaps even more significantly within an Indigenous context of decolonization.

Postcolonial theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin introduce their discussion of place and displacement in *The Empire Writes Back*. Given the colonial sense of displacement, it is within the discourse of the postcolonial that we find acknowledgment of the crisis of identity, and fundamentally “the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and space.” In *The White Man’s Indian, from Columbus to the Present*, Robert Berkofer writes, “For most of the past five centuries, the Indian of the imagination and ideology has been as real, perhaps more real, than the Native American of actual existence and contact.” The image, and therefore the representation, of the Aboriginal woman in particular has been saturated and defined as other, from the dominant Eurocentric perspective. Blondeau’s personas Betty Daybird, *CosmoSquaw*, *Lonely Surfer Squaw*, and Belle Sauvage actively play with the stereotypes of the Indian princess and squaw. The suffering and damage caused by stereotyping is discussed by Indigenous feminist, Bonita Lawrence, who addresses Aboriginal identity in terms of how it has been constructed through the process of colonization. Lawrence argues that the colonial regulation of Aboriginal people has “permeated the ways in which Native peoples think of themselves.” Similarly, Hilary Weaver asserts, “Today, Native people often learn about themselves and their culture within the dominant mainstream, and therefore adopt some stereotypes and distorted meanings.” I include a brief discussion of the impacts of stereotypes on Indigenous peoples and the complex implications of decolonizing such processes of othering to highlight the significance of Blondeau’s performance practice and her use of personas in relation to asserting Indigenous agency; claiming political, cultural, and land sovereignty; and putting forward self-determined representations of Indigenous subjectivities.

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203 Many contemporary Aboriginal artists have negotiated new readings of the images represented in the photographic record. See the work of Jeff Thomas, K.C. Adams, Terrance Houle, Ehren Bear Witness Thomas, David Neel, ShelleyNiro, George Littlechild, and Joane Cardinal-Schubert.
In her article “Some Kinda Princess,” Blondeau discusses her reasons for including the creation of personas into her performance practice, along with personal stories of her lived experiences as an urban Cree/Saulteaux growing up in Saskatchewan. She recognizes the lasting wounds stereotypes trace on a person. She writes,

Today we can see the image of the Indian Princess is still alive and well in the 1995 Disney film of Pocahontas which is educating a new generation of non-Natives and Native children on how an Indian princess should look. As I am confronted with these new images of old stereotypes, I feel an urgency to document my own stories and the stories of the women in my family. This is a story of my journey through oppression, consciousness, and finally resistance.208

Blondeau clearly articulates two significant events in her life that substantiate the impact of stereotyping on Aboriginal women. She shares her experiences with the Indian princess:

When I was fourteen, a non-Native woman asked me if I were an Indian princess. I replied no. She went on to say, “If you were to lose some weight, you could be an Indian princess.” This was the first time I had ever been asked that question, but it wasn’t the first time I had been confronted with the image of the Indian Princess. Growing up in Saskatchewan as an urban Indian, I remember my mother braiding my sister’s long hair and putting a beaded headband around her forehead. My mother then took a picture of her gazing off into the horizon and not into the camera. These pictures were carefully placed in our family photo album. At the time, I do not think my mother realized or even thought about where she had seen these images of a Native woman looking so romantic. But the reality was we grew up with them all around us. We saw them in Hollywood Westerns, on product packaging, on calendars, and now we were creating them for ourselves. The Indian Princess was an acceptable image; she represented something opposite to the Squaw. How could we not see her as our only positive role model? After all she was a princess. She was royalty. She represented some sort of civilized image far from the image of the Squaw, who was not as well accepted by the general public.209

Here, Blondeau’s story recounts the implications of stereotypes, as discussed by many postcolonial, transnational feminist scholars, and cultural theorists, such as Charles Taylor. Taylor argues that the sign created by dominant culture is adopted by the oppressed, consequently instilling the negative stereotype into the consciousness of the community. This means that the stereotype is then projected as a true rendering, a true identity of self.210 Taylor writes about the significance of recognition for a subordinated and marginalized community such as the Indigenous peoples of Canada:

209 Ibid., 28.
A group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.\(^{211}\)

One key aspect of the constructs of Aboriginality, or Indianness, must be made: a misrecognition of Aboriginal peoples as “Indians,” according to Vizenor, is oppressive and constructs a prison of false identities.\(^{212}\) In other words, regardless of the fact that scholars and artists have pervasively revealed and challenged the constructs of the stereotype and how dominant society has maintained and consumed such images, these types of misrecognitions of the complexities of Indigenous subjectivities continue to permeate popular culture. The anecdote about Blondeau’s mother and the romantic photograph is an example of this theory in practice. Because of the politics of colonization, Aboriginal peoples have historically been relatively powerless in terms of self-representation, which, as Weaver states, has allowed Indigenous peoples to be invisible and nameless.\(^{213}\) Weaver’s statement give weight to the process of claiming and re-writing evident in the work of Indigenous performers like Blondeau. As a performance artist, Blondeau reclaims the identity and image of the Aboriginal woman by performing and putting forward new representations. A question that comes to mind when looking at her performances, such as *Lonely Surfer Squaw* and *CosmoSquaw*, is what the implications of such processes of reclaiming, re-envisioning, and subverting are. In other words, Blondeau performs in many spaces, often in mainstream venues primarily made up of non-Indigenous audience members; in discussing Indigenous performance, then, the issues of recognition and reception are brought forward. This discussion also raises the question Blondeau’s intended audience. Her practice is connected to a practice of displacement, resistance, and social activism, one that engages non-Indigenous audiences to question and gain awareness about Indigenous issues and perhaps creates a site for positive recognition; however, her performances are primarily performed for Indigenous reception and recognition. Her identities and stories are for her Indigenous audiences. 

The politics of identity are directly connected to this complex web of stereotypes. Blondeau’s performance practice participates in the process of decolonizing the imagery of Aboriginal women as the squaw and Indian princess. These stereotypes have a long tradition of representation in Western literature and imagery. Pocahontas, the quintessential Indian princess

\(^{211}\) Taylor, “Politics of Recognition,” 75.  
\(^{212}\) Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 22.  
\(^{213}\) Weaver, “Indigenous Identity,” 243.
story, has inspired countless works of art in all genres, usually idealizing the image of the Aboriginal woman to conform to Eurocentric concepts of femininity and beauty. In the early 17th century, James Nelson Barker was inspired by the narrative of John Smith, whose life was allegedly saved by Pocahontas; as a result, Barker wrote a play entitled *The Indian Princess or La Belle Sauvage*. This was the first of the Pocahontas dramas; it established the basic story, although the narrative evolved throughout colonial history to reflect the nature of the Aboriginal–non-Aboriginal relationship. Chippewa scholar Gail Guthrie Valaskakis argues that the Disney version of the fairy tale reveals that “Pocahontas’s social imagery is monolithic, a representation rooted in ambiguous, sexualized fantasies that appropriate and reconstruct her Indian identity.” Valaskakis remarks that “Disney’s historical revisionism emerged at a time of new tension between Natives and newcomers, over land and resources, sovereignty and self-determination, artifacts and images.” Disney’s Pocahontas tale is one of the vehicles Blondeau uses to destabilize the archive of representations of Indigenous women.

The squaw can be understood as the Indian princess, or Pocahontas’ darker twin. Calling her the “anti-Pocahontas,” Daniel Francis specifies, “Where the princess was beautiful, the squaw was ugly, even deformed. Where the princess was virtuous, the squaw was debased, immoral, a sexual convenience. Where the princess was proud, the squaw lived a squalid life of servile toil, mistreated by her men . . . prostituting [herself] . . . a low, sexual commodity.” In *Fear and Temptation*, Terry Goldie discusses the representation of Aboriginal women in literature, stating that “both maiden and squaw are manifestations of the white culture’s felt temptation by the indigene and by what the indigene represents in the land.” The Indian princess, Goldie argues, stands for temptation, and the squaw, fear. He expands on this idea, stating that the maiden represents the “optimism that the land holds, the potential of a positive indigenization,” whereas the squaw represents “the pessimism and potential that this alien realm will be a negative indigenization, a destructive takeover of the soul.” These descriptions shed light on the imagery incorporated into Blondeau’s performances. Such depictions of Aboriginal women devalue and

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214 Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian*, 121.
216 Valaskakis, *Indian Country*, 133.
objectify Indigenous women’s identities and subjectivities. Blondeau’s performance personas appropriate the stereotypical representations of the Indian princess and squaw in order to make a space for representations of Aboriginal women from Indigenous perspectives.

In the early 20th century, the Indian princess continued to inundate popular culture and as a result inform settler society’s mis/understanding of Aboriginal women. These narratives are a continuum of the Pocahontas story. The Indian princess was taken over by Sacajawea and her sisters. These maidens paddled birch bark canoes, fished, and walked in flower patches, and were posed in a picturesque landscape of mountains, waterfalls, forests, and moonlit lakes, wearing a red tunic, a requisite headband, and feather. From 1915 to 1940, the Indian princess, or the “lady in red,” was the dominant representation of Aboriginal women in popular culture, appearing on paintings, postcards, calendars, and advertisements. The images of Nanoochee (fig. 131) and Daughters of the Incas (fig. 132) exemplify the tradition of the single or twinned “red-tunic lady” presented in the standard romanticized pose and setting. These are arguably the first North American “pin-up girls,” featured as icons of consumer society for mass-produced goods such as Land o’ Lakes butter and Mazola oil, and Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West shows. Furthermore, such stereotypical representations were used by governments and corporations within North America as tools to propagate and to promote the development and settlement of the western lands. Guthrie Valaskakis substantiates this claim noting that “[t]hese statue-like figures of the imagination marketed the North American West as alluring, unoccupied, available, and now open to railroad travel.” These images of Indianness were commodities for Euro-Canadian consumption and appropriation, marking the Indigenous women’s body as unoccupied and available for the taking.

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221 Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Indian Country. 136. See a more thorough investigation in Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Indian Princesses and Cowgirls: Stereotypes from the Frontier (Montreal: Oboro, 1992).
Lori Blondeau’s use of “doubleness” to subvert these stereotypes of Indian women thereby displaces them from their history as commodities and nameless monolithic identities. Her personas are not for consumer consumption; they function within the realm of intellectual consumption and reception. Her strategic subversions are illustrated in the performance personas CosmoSquaw (fig. 1) and Lonely Surfer Squaw (fig. 133). Playing with stereotypes in order to subvert is arguably a dangerous act, as it could possibly result in their reinforcement. However, as Coco Fusco suggests, an awareness of symbolic representation is a key site of political struggle and political irreverence. Blondeau’s extensive knowledge of the history of representation of Aboriginal women allows her to utilize this archive of iconic and stereotypical imagery in order to intervene and disrupt these derogatory, simplistic, and monolithic representations.

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222 Coco Fusco, The Bodies That Were Not Ours, And Other Writings (London: Routledge, 2001), xvi.
Lori Blondeau: CosmoSquaw and Lonely Surfer Squaw, and Betty Daybird

Lori Blondeau’s *Lonely Surfer Squaw* (fig. 133) and *CosmoSquaw* (fig. 1) are examples of “performative photography.” The use of a photo-shoot by Blondeau to produce these works parallel Shelley Niro’s series *Mohawks in Beehives* (1991) (fig. 134), which consists of photographs of her sisters. Both Niro and Blondeau’s humorous performative photography incorporates and plays with stereotypes. Blondeau has acknowledged the work of Niro as an influence, especially in her early work, which includes *Lonely Surfer Squaw*. Blondeau has created these personas as part of her strategy to unsettle her audience's perceptions of the image and identity of Aboriginal women. She writes,

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The signifiers of Indian-ness (such as coloured feather, beaded headbands and faux buckskin dress and moccasins) are not true representations of Indians. They are stereo-typical representations that have been created by the dominant society to appease its way of seeing Native Americans. The stereotypes of Indian women can be traced back to first contact with Europeans through narratives, drawings, paintings, and photographs.  

CosmoSquaw, otherwise known as Betty Daybird, uses the parodic mode to re-represent the cultural stereotype of the “squaw.” CosmoSquaw made her debut as a magazine cover girl, forming part of a light-box image made in collaboration with Bradlee LaRocque for a show entitled Native Love in 1996. Since then, CosmoSquaw has appeared in live performances, television interviews, videos, and on the internet. Her audacious persona, confident attitude, and flamboyant clothes derive from Blondeau’s personal experience with popular culture. Her genesis dates to the time when Blondeau “started thinking about inventing a magazine like Cosmopolitan for Native women . . . coming up with the name CosmoSquaw.”

225 Blondeau “Some Kinda Princess,” 23
228 In an interview with Lynne Bell, Blondeau explains the CosmoSquaw performance persona and how she came to be. Blondeau states “In Montreal, I worked in a Native women’s shelter where all the counselors were single women. One of the women used to bring in Cosmopolitan magazine every week and all the counselors and clients got involved with the quizzes. I just thought: How can you read this? The magazine targets white middle class women. How do you think you’re going to find a man using the tips it gives? But at the same time, I was tempted to read it because I was a single woman looking for a man.” Ibid., 28.
229 Ibid.
The decision to use the word “squaw” was difficult for Blondeau, as it is generally regarded as a derogatory and harmful term—and because she was aware that she would receive criticism from the Native community. However, her use of the term reflects her intention to reclaim the word’s original meaning in Cree: “woman.” In this regard, Blondeau is strategically employing what Rebecca Schneider identifies as counter-mimicry in order to re-negotiate the identities of the Aboriginal woman. Through her personas, Blondeau explicitly presents how identity is constructed within a colonial framework. Her incorporation and prominent use of the term squaw is, as she states, “about taking away the negative connotations and replacing them with something positive,” and about drawing attention to the colonial stereotypes that have influenced Aboriginal women’s sense of self. Butler argues that this act of reclaiming is the initiating moment of a counter-mobilization. According to Blondeau, the decision to incorporate the prefix “cosmo” relates to her belief that all women are cosmo-squaws, or women of the universe. One could argue that Cosmopolitan magazine equates to the artificiality of Euro-American fashion and beauty industries and that the women represented in its pages are stereotypes. In other words, there is little “real” in Cosmopolitan magazine. Blondeau’s CosmoSquaw may thus be seen to challenge not only the representations of Aboriginal women, but also the unrealistic images in the magazine.

In this work, Blondeau reinvents herself as a cover girl model, with big hair, red lipstick, and pouting lips. She is confident, sexy, and powerful. She utilizes the layout from Cosmopolitan, including the types of information on the cover. This month’s CosmoSquaw cover girl is surrounded by titles of mock feature articles such as “10 easy make-up tips for a killer bingo face,” and “Is your man getting tired of the same old dish? Learn How to Spoon-feed your Man!” These mock titles are rewards to the Aboriginal woman who understands the inside jokes, especially the meaning of “the spoon,” which in many communities is a slang term for vagina. Both the CosmoSquaw and Lonely Surfer Squaw personas take on the idealized portrayals of feminine beauty in the media, and the damage these can do to women from minority groups—who

232 Schneider, The Explicit Body, 134.
234 Heather Marie Anderson, Contemporary Canadian Women’s Performance Art, 81.
236 This title makes reference to how bingo is widely popular in Aboriginal communities throughout Canada and also is a play on the term, ‘poker face’.
are not even represented within these marginalized depictions of the “perfect woman.”

Turning her focus to the harmful effects that the popular media has had on herself and on the other women in her community, Blondeau places her own body on the iconic image of the white pin-up girl. Blondeau draws from her own stories and experiences to generate her performance personas. Blondeau’s mock magazine addresses the need for an increase in visible, positive Aboriginal role models in the media, or at least diverse visibility to counter the negative stereotypes perpetuated on the nightly news.

Taking *Cosmopolitan* magazine’s cover page as a point of departure, Lori Blondeau challenges her audience to produce new readings and recognize new decolonized identities. In this work, she invites her viewers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to question the fixed signs of Indigenous women, exemplified by the word squaw. Deploying the tactic of repetition-with-difference, she reveals through shifts in meaning the silences and omissions of the original page. Aboriginal women are excluded from the “original page,” based on “mainstream” definitions of femininity, sensuality, and sexuality. Lynne Bell says that Blondeau is among the “Canadian artists who rent or poach the format of highly influential pages in everyday culture in order to, in the words of the cultural critic de Certeau, ‘insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text.’” Within the paradigm of decolonization, Blondeau “rents” the front cover of *Cosmopolitan* to insert herself as the first Aboriginal cover girl, ensuring her audience’s immediate recognition of her intervention in popular culture. This image remains accessible for further viewing, and for continued contemplation.

*CosmoSquaw* employs mimicry and parody in providing an alternative to Aboriginal women, while addressing the erasure of their bodies in popular culture’s hegemonic model of beauty. Mimicry gained a significant space within postcolonial studies, due to its possibilities to describe the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized. In colonial discourse, the

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238 This is articulated in Jim Logan’s *Venus Myth*, 1993. In the text incorporated into the image, Logan writes, “Beauty seems to be a secret, kept by those in magazines. So powerful is beauty that my sister wishes she was white and my sons won’t look at their own.”


240 Bell “Artists Pages,” 263.

241 The use of the term ambivalent suggests Homi Bhabha’s understanding of it, which is meant to describe the complex relationship, or mixture rather of attraction and repulsion between the colonizer and colonized. This complicated relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. This means that complicity and resistance exist at the same time, in constant
colonized are encouraged to adopt and mimic the colonizer’s cultural habits, institutions, and value systems. The result of this type of mimicry is never a simple reproduction of traits, it is rather a “blurred copy” of the colonizer, and a potential threat, because mimicry is never far from mockery. Mimicry therefore locates cracks in the proclaimed certainty of colonial dominance, generating an uncertainty in its control over the behaviour of the colonized.

The use of costume is a major factor in the effectiveness of Blondeau’s personas in terms of re-addressing and re-envisioning signs of Aboriginal women. The artist employs costume to mimic and subvert the dominant culture’s image of women’s beauty. As Bhabha argues, “Mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowel. Mimicry is thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform.”

Blondeau’s performance personas arguably are “double articulations,” negotiating identities and stereotypes. In “Dressed to Thrill: Costume, Body, and Dress in Canadian Performative Art,” Jayne Wark introduces the necessity of considering costume in relation to body politics, in other words, to not overlook the inclusion of a persona’s costume as a significant facet of performance methods. She writes,

> If the body is indeed the site where the particularities of identity are visibly marked, it is also indisputable that the body in performance is rarely unadorned. More often than not, the body is accompanied by various cultural artifacts, from simple street clothes to theatrical costumes to elaborate constructions that function as hybrids between prop and art.

Kaja Silverman discusses the significance of dressing the body in “Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse,” noting that without ornamentation the body is not culturally visible, furthermore, that clothing on the body enables an articulation into a “meaningful form” and to be “culturally seen.”

Viewed in this way, clothing or dress acts as a signifier of cultural identity, allowing the body to be interpreted and recognized as belonging to a certain socio-cultural group. Blondeau’s inclusion of fluctuation. Most importantly, Bhabha’s theory of ambivalence disrupts the simple relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, therefore, it is an unwelcomed aspect of colonial discourse for the colonizer. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 12–14. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 121–31 and 145–74.

242 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.


elaborate dress for her personas provides an introduction to the problematics of stereotypes. She is not dressed in the iconic “Indian” women’s dress; she wears lingerie and bikinis.

While CosmoSquaw is easily recognizable as a subversive reiteration of a Cosmopolitan cover girl, Lonely Surfer Squaw, with her beaver skin bikini and gigantic pink surfboard, appropriates and transforms the 1960 pin-up girl of California. The Lonely Surfer Squaw persona also mocks the idealized Californian beach-babes from mainstream television. In Lonely Surfer Squaw, Blondeau poses in a fur bikini and knee-high fur boots, holding a surfboard carved from pink insulation foam, along the bank of the partially frozen South Saskatchewan River.245 This image and persona were originally created for an internet postcard project in 1996. Bradlee LaRocque’s photo shoot produced the series, titled 6 tips for prairie surfin, which included the images SurferSquaw Catch (fig. 135), Surfer Squaw Surf-Up (fig. 136), and Surfer Squaw Grease (fig. 137). In addition to the images on the internet, Lonely Surfer Squaw has been publicly viewed in Toronto during the IndigenUs Festival (fig. 138), was included in Lynn Bell’s Canadian Art article on Blondeau, and was recently part of Richard Hill’s World Upside Down touring exhibition (Banff, Kingston, Victoria, Joliette).


In this context, Blondeau’s sexy Surfer-Squaw comments on the lack of inclusion of Aboriginal women in popular culture’s fashion and beauty magazines, reinforced by the inclusion of the word “lonely” in the title of the piece. She may also be lonely because she is attempting to surf in the middle of winter on a river in the Canadian prairies, humorously revealing that she is displaced—lost in the landscape. Blondeau states that although humour, expressed as absurdity, is a primary element, the underlying meaning to her *Lonely Surfer Squaw* series relates to the effects of displacement.\(^2\) In addition, *Lonely Surfer Squaw* overtly expresses issues of sexuality. It appears that she is flirting with the viewer, suggestively looking at and posing for the camera. Her bare skin and bikini combo feed into Blondeau’s sexualized vocal image. *Surfer Squaw* is self-represented, enticing the viewer to look at her not as a victim but as an empowered self-determined individual. The setting in the snow, arguably an iconic sign of Canada, seems to hold out the promise of a voluptuous Canadian Aboriginal surf-babe. This image offers viewers a self-representation of an Aboriginal woman, while also acknowledging the impact of displacement and isolation of Aboriginal communities.

*CosmoSquaw* and *Lonely Surfer Squaw* re-deploy wounding experiences and words from Blondeau’s own life and the lives of her mother and grandmother. These two pieces are intergenerational, multilayered works that use tongue-in-cheek humour to “startlingly subversive, compulsively entertaining, and highly political ends.”\(^3\) Mimicry is employed as Blondeau’s postcolonial choice of agency. Blondeau’s performances wield humour and memory to invite contemplation of the violence of colonization and offer the opportunity to envision a new possibility—decolonization.

Subversion through humour is a powerful cross-cultural weapon that can bridge multicultural audiences. They become connected to each other by Blondeau’s storytelling.\(^4\) Blondeau has created a detailed biography for Betty Daybird, which is based on her own histories and articulated in her performances. Blondeau incorporated her great-grandfather’s name, Daybird, as a method of asserting continuum, a way to foster survivance of her family’s stories. Betty Daybird tells of her birth on a Cree reservation, “in a small government frame house … under the long shadow of St. Anne’s church tower,” and her childhood summers “spent travelling extensively

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\(^3\) Ibid., 53.

with her grandmother [Belle Sauvage] in what some likened to be the only gay Wild West show on the continent.\textsuperscript{249} Although Blondeau never did travel with a Wild West Show and historically there were no gay Wild West shows, she did spend her summers with her grandmother on a reservation in Saskatchewan. Blondeau writes a history for Daybird that includes her performing as the “Eskimo High Tower Diver,” the “Wild Indian Wonder Girl,” and her big break in Hollywood as the “Million Dollar Surfer Squaw.” These roles reflect the objectification of Aboriginal people as the exotic ‘other.’

Blondeau imposes her reconstructed self/identity on the dominant aesthetic system, which only accommodates the Aboriginal woman in representational stereotypes.\textsuperscript{250} Drawing upon Amelia Jones’ notion of “subversive narcissism,” Amy Sara Carroll suggests that Betty Daybird’s parroting of the diva claims “a self-fashioned space for her identity as a Native woman, while also poking fun at the idea of the performer [artist]-hero[ine] by pushing the image to an extreme limit.”\textsuperscript{251} I would argue that Blondeau’s performance practice reflects Jones’ concept of subversive narcissism, but goes beyond it to include the stories of her family and community.

Lori Blondeau’s performance “act” recognizes her desire to be seen. Schneider writes, “The ‘seen’ takes on an agency of her own and wields the unnerving potential of a subversive reciprocity of vision, an explicit complicity, or mutual recognition between seer and seen in the scene of viewing.”\textsuperscript{252} Through self-representation in performance art, Blondeau subverts the colonially framed body of the Aboriginal woman as an intervention of the other. This strategy emphasizes the body as an agent of manipulation, re-signifying the Aboriginal woman’s body, and therefore dislodging it from its fixed representations. Performance art is therefore about disclosure, illuminating the multi-meanings in the act of performing the body. Blondeau writes,

For years I had been doing research into Native women. I became frustrated with the research because it was always written from a non-Native perspective. I saw, Daybird as a way to take little jabs at the western viewpoint… and I wanted to play with some of the history. For her character I also use situations that have affected and made me who I am. This meant looking at the women in my family, my

\textsuperscript{249} Anderson, “Contemporary Canadian,” 82.
\textsuperscript{251} Carroll, \textit{Performing Body-Politics}, 44.
mother and her sisters and my grandmother.253

Daybird is a Hollywood diva, chic and sexy in a sassy red negligee and feather boa, black boots, beehive hairdo, and an “Indian princess” tattoo called *falls to pieces* (which was also incorporated into a wall-size photograph in *Hochelaga Revisited*). Typically, Blondeau performs in art venues in a cabaret style performance/audience relationship.254 Amy Sara Caroll at Neutral Ground Gallery in Regina notes how Blondeau’s Betty Daybird “presides over her audience, snapping her fingers to solicit lipstick, a lit cigarette, a glass of wine … she even demands the performances’ second-take, yelling ‘Cut’.”255 (fig. 139) Carroll observed Daybird’s political agenda of self-control, confidence, and representation, stating that her sovereignty shines throughout her performance.256 From my observations, Blondeau is playing with power through her control over the space, the music, the audience. Daybird has the attention of every person in the space—they are watching her every move, drawn in by her confident, almost arrogant demeanour, waiting for her next move (fig. 140).


While viewing recorded footage of one of her many Betty Daybird performances, I witnessed a woman commanding attention, wanting to be looked at (fig. 141). She presents herself as a sex

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253 Anderson, “Contemporary Canadian,” 82.
254 Ibid.
255 Caroll, *Performing Body Politics*, 44.
256 Ibid.
symbol, parading around to a rendition of Sinatra’s *I Get a Kick Out of You*. On numerous occasions, she pulls up her negligee, showing off her thighs. She also removes her red silk robe halfway through the performance, moving into the realm of striptease—without revealing too much. As stated above, during Daybird’s humorous show, images of her “adventures” are projected on a screen behind her. The viewer gets a glimpse into the life of Betty Daybird, such as playing a game of pool at a bar and posing on city streets. Betty Daybird’s character seems close to the absurd, which is clearly a calculated measure taken by Blondeau to elucidate the absurdity of stereotypes of Aboriginal women. Blondeau’s choice of a red outfit recalls the representation of the Indian princess as the “lady in red.” While historically the “lady in red” image was used as a symbol of the availability of the lands in the West, here Betty Daybird stakes a claim to her own space.

The persona of Betty Daybird is Blondeau’s testimony to Aboriginal women’s sexuality, femininity, autonomy, and power. Daybird also tells many stories that expand the limits of Aboriginal women’s identities and subjectivity. Within this discussion, critical questions arise: Why does Blondeau not create new “positive” representations of Aboriginal women? Why does she superimpose the Aboriginal woman onto imagery of white women, who are arguably objectified in popular culture? Is the use of parody and humour an effective strategy? Or is she merely replacing one stereotype with another? Carroll states that Blondeau “claims a self fashioned space for her identity as a Native woman.”257 I agree with Carroll, and suggest that to re-envision the representation of Aboriginal women in popular culture, the stereotype must be explicitly exposed to

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257 Ibid.
show how and why these types of negative images exist. Blondeau's performance of Betty Daybird results in the illumination of the performative and constructed quality of identity. In the persona of Daybird, she offers herself as a re-representation of Aboriginal women’s identity, controlled by the self-determined Aboriginal lens not the colonial gaze.

**High Tech Teepee Trauma Mama**

In final section, I explore Rebecca Belmore’s performance persona *High Tech Teepee Trauma Mama*, which emerged in the mid-1980s. During this time Belmore was a student in the experimental-art program at the Ontario College of Art and Design. High Tech Teepee Trauma Mama developed as a means to both mock, subvert, and challenge the history of vaudeville theatre, specifically, the maintaining and presenting of native Indian stereotypes. Belmore often performed *High Tech Teepee Trauma Mama* for native audiences in Thunder Bay, Ontario. She is described by Marilyn Burgess as “a sort of post modern crazed ‘warrior maiden’ who has shaken to her very bones the enduring image of the passive Indian princess … She is loud and fighting mad, but she is also a trickster seducing her audience with play.” In Trauma Mama’s performance on 16 February 1988 at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Belmore performed for the Indian Days event organized by the Native Students Association. Belmore’s performance space, surrounded by the audience, was made up of a eight-foot-high plastic teepee without a covering and a ten foot high totem pole made out of alcohol boxes. Belmore started the performance by emerging from the tepee. She then turned on the television, which played edited scenes from the movie *Little Big Man* showing the US Calvary invading and massacring an Indian encampment. Belmore then turned on a cassette player and danced barefoot until exhausted to the Bobby Cortolla’s song *You Indian Giver*.

*Trauma Mama* challenges the representations of Indigenous peoples and exposes the violent histories of colonialism and the impacts of stereotypes perpetuated by tourism and popular culture. This performance persona later inspired the writing of its accompanying song, performed as a music-based collaboration project with Allen De Leary. *The Howuh!* performance was jointly supported by the Definitely Superior Art Gallery and the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre in

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258 Ibid.
March 1988. The song’s lyrics extend the commentary presented and evoked by Belmore’s *Trauma Mama* performances. The lyrics are as follows:

Chorus: I’m a high-tech tepee trauma mama, a high-tech tepee trauma mama, Plastic replica of Mother Earth; Plastic replica of Mother Earth Souvenir Seeker, You may think you can buy me—cheap! Plastic woman Long black hair, Shy woman, Silent. WHOOP!

Chorus:

Souvenir seeker, Hang me from your key chain. Watch, while I dangle in distress. Fe-e-e-l like you know our way. Come on! Let’s walk.

Chorus:

I am not, I repeat I am not, an American movie. Nor am I related to Running Bear, yaah! I come from a place just north of here. I bet you met an Indian who came from there once! Am I right? WHOOP!

Chorus:

Souvenir seeker, I know you are not a bad person Free me from the plastic, Come on. Let’s Talk! Trinkets may have bought our past, But now our eyes are open. We can see a long way, Very far ahead, Come on, souvenir seeker, Free me from my plastic!

Chorus:

Howuh!^{261}

Jessica Bradley writes, “‘Playing Indian’ in her performances, Belmore embodies the stereotypical images that have distorted Native culture and history in the service of politics and economy.”^{262} Here Bradley connects Belmore’s use of her body to assert and to address the discrimination endured by Indigenous women. This performatively re-dress or intervention within dominant society’s structures of feminist artists of the mid-1970s utilized the body as a means to protest, resist, and challenge. Amelia Jones termed this type of practice “body art” and located the use of the body as a means to emphasize subjectivity, encoded in theories of feminism and post-structuralism. In *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Jones argues that body art “emphasizes the

^{261} Augaitis and Ritter, “High-tech Teepee Trauma Mama,” 97.

implication of the body (of what I call the ‘body/self’, with all of its apparent racial, sexual, gender, class and other apparent or unconscious identifications) in the work.”

In Belmore’s performances, she uses her body to emphasize and present the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples in the Americas. In Jolene Rickard’s article in Belmore’s Venice Biennale catalogue, “Rebecca Belmore: Performing Power,” she connects the representation of the Americas as an Aboriginal female body with Belmore’s body politics, and discusses the ways in which the native body signified and stands in for the “desired occupation or ownership of the land.” In this way, Belmore’s use of her body to perform self-determined Indigenous representations is a strategic act of activism and a means to overtly make central and visible the heretofore invisible histories of Indigenous women in North America. As Rickard argues, Belmore’s body “has always been a decolonizing zone, starting with the first appearance of the High Tech Teepee Trauma Mama (1987-88), and . . . at different sites, on occasions of trauma and need, and again in Rising to the Occasion (1987-1991), a response to the British Royal visit to Thunder Bay Ontario.” The body work by Belmore powerfully performs the historical experiences of Indigenous women on settler stages in world fairs, in vaudeville theatre acts, and also in Wild West Shows. Her subversion of the Indian maiden calls out the stereotype and the confines of such representations in the imaginations of settler audiences. High Tech Teepee Trauma Mama is a work of protest, a work showing the always already presence of Indigenous agency. It references the beginnings of Belmore’s ongoing performance practice of revealing the trauma of colonization and the history of Indigenous peoples performing for settler stages.

Afterthoughts

In 2009, I attended the first conference in North America dedicated solely to discussion of Indigenous performance art, “Advancing the Dialogue: Symposium on Native Performance Art.” At the symposium, organized and hosted by the Denver Art Museum, I witnessed provocative presentations, live performances, and participated in workshop conversations. This three-day event provided an opportunity to raise issues important to the study and practice of Aboriginal contemporary art, among them, the lack of published material dealing with contemporary Indigenous performance art and its multifaceted histories. It was also a space for acknowledging

263 Jones, Body Art, 12–13.
265 Rickard, “Rebecca Belmore,” 72.
colonial histories such as those connected to the Wounded Knee Massacre and residential schools. Histories were remembered and witnessed throughout the symposium. Performances by James Luna, Rebecca Belmore, Lori Blondeau, Kent Monkman and Greg Hill were celebrated and remembered. We discussed the presence of Belmore and Luna at the 2005 Venice Biennale and Blondeau and Shelley Niro’s joint-performance project during the 2007 Venice Biennale. The current moment North American Indigenous performance art, theatre and dance was discussed and thereby documented in the sessions of this symposium.

Belmore opened her presentation with a story about one of the first Indigenous performance artists, a Mi’kmaq man in early 16th-century Paris who was placed on display on the lawns of a royal court. The expectation was that he would perform his traditional way of life for the entertainment of the Parisian audience. Belmore explains how the nameless Mi’kmaq man hunted a deer, gutted the carcass, prepared the hind, cooked the meat and, as his closing performative act, “took a shit on the Royals lawn.” His final performative act was an act of agency and left a trace of his resistance. In other words, he provocatively resisted and interrupted the audience’s passive enjoyment of the Indian on display. Those present during Belmore’s storytelling bore witness to this history of performance as intervention; we listened to and made connections between the historic performance and the symposium we were attending. This is yet another “matrix moment” of the history of Indigenous performance, where the activation of agency and performance intersect with racist and colonial power relations.

This chapter has woven together the many histories of Indigenous performance with contemporary Aboriginal performance art. I have discussed the connected histories of the royal tours, World Fairs, Wild West Shows, and other settler stages of Indigenous performance to expose the interconnectedness of colonial politics, settler’s desires to experience “Indian culture,” and the political and cultural resistances of Indigenous peoples. And the contemporary performances intertwined throughout these examinations of historical Indigenous performances reveal a history of the use of performance as a means for political and cultural resistance as well as for staging cultural continuance and asserting Indigenous agency.
Interview

Indigenous Agency and Cultural Continuity

Carla Taunton:

Can you talk about whether or not you see your work as participating in cultural continuance and continuity in relation to the historic use of performance/cultural production by Aboriginal peoples in North America? In other words, do you see a link between these diverse types of performances produced in different time periods?

Tanya Lukin Linklater

I first learned about the wild west shows and ethnographic exhibitions, including the Hottentot Venus, during my undergraduate years in the 1990’s. More recently, I have been researching the world fairs and these histories for a specific project that I’m working on titled “Eskimo Kissing Booth.” Gordon Pullar, Alutiiq anthropologist, pointed me to specific examples of Alutiiq people from Woody Island (his village) in the Kodiak archipelago who traveled to world fairs and were exhibited in living dioramas that included faux igloos made out of papier mache. There seems to be a direct link between my people and the world fairs. While the “Eskimo Kissing Booth” is making this direct link apparent, by evoking the carnival environment, I am concerned about this work. I continue to research the world’s fairs and anthropology and ethnological exhibitions. At this point, I am considering a more architectural, sculptural work; I’m not sure that I will perform, as my goal is to subvert these histories rather than re-inscribe them. I may choose not to perform, as I have not yet found a way to engage in performance in a way that meets my aims, given these histories of ethnological exhibitions. By exchanging “Eskimo kisses” with the public, in a booth at this particular sculptural biennale in northern Ontario, on frozen Lake Nipissing, I don’t know that I will be affecting change. This erroneous image is also about a history of economic exchange for
intimate acts in sanctioned events (carnivals, fairs) in American history. So, it conjures gender and sex. It’s a highly intimate act: if I were to engage in “eskimo kisses” with strangers. I consider what the persons will take away with them. What anecdotes will they tell?

Will they know of the living diorama history? Or engage with the ideas of museum exhibits of indigenous peoples? I need to work out this idea in order for it to be effective.

I am troubled by what I read of the ‘wild west shows’ constant inscription of spectacle, or what it must have felt like to be on display in museums, as Ishi or others were. I understand that there are a continuum of readings of these performances, but I find these histories and the notions of exhibition and spectacle deeply troubling.

Yet I work in performance. I consider that I frame performance differently. I do not embrace spectacle. I embrace different notions of the purposes of performance.

**Cheryl L’Hirondelle:**

My great, great, great grandmother Marie Grant Breland was an artist who produced pottery and hooked rugs (one of which was recently exhibited in Sherry Farrell Racette’s group exhibition in Batoche, Manitoba). And, I also come from a long line of musicians so I think I am continuing to contribute to both the cannons of art and music creation. The notion of hybridity started a long time ago, as well as the use of cultural production as strategy of resistance. I think my work participates in these histories especially considering the interdisciplinary nature of my overall practice.

I had a sense a few years ago that my strength was my voice and I asked myself, could I draw things and narratives with my voice. About the same time I was conceiving my Vancouver Songlines project, I started serendipitously meeting and talking to Indigenous peoples from all over the world, such as Saami peoples and Indigenous peoples in Australia, about the use of voice and sound in making song-lines. These conversations confirmed that my intuitive idea that came from somewhere really deep had a cultural meaning associated with many Indigenous peoples world-views. So, in a sense, this work, Song Lines, continues cultural practice.
Performance wise, I think that Native women have and continue to do amazing things to survive. I would love to do a performance art piece that embodies a story Sherry Farrell Racette and Maria Campbell told me about Mme. Tourond. After the first Riel uprising at Fort Garry, right after Batoche was established due to the Canadian government attempt to destabilize the strength of Indigenous governance at Fort Garry and since her husband had been killed during that uprising, Mme. Tourond decided to move up to Batoche. She took her children with her red river cart and an ox and all their belongs accross country. Along the way her ox died, so she then strapped the red river cart onto herself and pulled her family and belongings to Batoche. I would love to re-create this story. This story is an example of durational performance art. Mme. Tourond is someone that embodies Indigenous struggle. When I hear stories like this, I think to myself, these are the things that inspire us and should inspire us to keep moving, to keep walking, and to keep one foot in front of the other, and also to realize that the heavy load, such as the weight and contents of the red river cart Mme. Tourond carried, is an important and valuable load to acknowledge. I think that there is a long history of performance in Indigenous communities. Histories of going against the grain; stories of gathering enmasse, and now going to festivals, conferences, protests, celebrations, that’s us! We, as Indigenous peoples and Indigenous artists, are making history. We are not just making marks. We are an important part of history.

I’ve been thinking of wild west shows and performance troupes….It was about people doing what they loved to do, they loved to perform [to dance]. When I think about Indigenous performance, I always go back to the metaphor of the bird on a branch singing his or her song. For me, this image is so profound and has such a sense of presence, of being, and also of being grounded, resonant and strong… This can be applied to histories of performance. The bird sings because she loves to sing and it is a part of her being, not because she is merely making noise or showing off and most importantly – no one can silence her.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

I began this investigation of Indigenous performance art by thinking about Aboriginal performance art, and contemporary Indigenous art more broadly, in terms of the possibilities and potentialities it offers for resistance, activism, and social justice. I started this research with the following question, which ultimately has framed the writing of this dissertation: How have Indigenous women used performance to stage political interventions and cultural resistance? By exploring a wide range of performances produced by contemporary Indigenous women artists, as well as historical performers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, I argue that the use of performance by Indigenous peoples is a vehicle for cultural continuance, survivance, and resistance. Conceiving of this dissertation as a diachronic study, I trace the relationships between contemporary and historical Aboriginal performance art, Indigenous histories, lived experiences, and resistance. I interrogate performance art’s relationship to activism and Indigenous resistance historically by analyzing the use of this medium by Indigenous artists to intervene in colonial spaces such as the archive and settler-entertainment venues (i.e. royal tours and wild west shows) to articulate cultural sovereignty and autonomy. In doing so, I argue that the use of performance by Indigenous peoples sets a historical precedent by enacting cultural continuance and mobilizing a politics of self-determination and sovereignty.

Through my analysis of contemporary performances I conclude that artists such as Rebecca Belmore, Lori Blondeau, Dana Claxton, Cheryl L’Hirondelle and Skeena Reece produce counter-narratives or rather Indigenous histories and that their performative art work produces research about Indigenous “being” in both historical and contemporary eras. In this way, I argue that through performance art, artists such as Claxton and Blondeau bring memories and histories into the present, thereby revealing how the past is present, and how colonial histories have contemporary relevance and enduring legacies. In this study, I trace the histories articulated by these artists by exploring the archive and by listening to Aboriginal stories of lived experiences. Many of these histories, such as the pass-and-permit system dealt with in Blondeau’s A Moment in the Life of Belle Sauvage, are not part of national/ist narratives and are not commonly known outside Aboriginal communities. I recognize the significance and power of the performances I explore in the production of knowledge and in the writing of history. Consequently, this dissertation records
and disseminates the complex and intertwined histories the artists perform and incorporates further evidence of the events they narrate and the genocidal policies and exclusionary experiences they expose. In this way, Performing Resistance/ Negotiating Sovereignty is a counter-narrative of decolonization, which the artists and myself have collaboratively produced, recorded and disseminated by performing and retelling Indigenous histories, lived experiences, and memories. This study establishes Indigenous narratives of both colonial and contemporary histories through an analysis of Indigenous performance that privileges Indigenous methodologies and perspectives.

My research emphasizes erased and silenced histories and unravels and untangles Indigenous experiences and stories from colonialist and nationalist whitewashing. I invest in the development of strong methodological approaches rooted in self-determination, sovereignty and agency and I extrapolate a productive definition for decolonization in relation to the North American context from post-colonial literature, Indigenous studies and transnational feminisms. In many instances, military and revolutionary actions are tied to the notion of resistance and decolonization, however, Ngugi wa Thiong’o concept of the ‘decolonization of the mind,’1 which he argues is an indigenous revisionist project that can be located in and outside the academy, resonates with my understanding of the works produced by Belmore, Blondeau, Claxton, L’Hirondelle and Reece. Throughout this study, I argue that the work of Indigenous artists contributes to the ‘decolonization of the mind,’ which is an intellectual project of resistance, one that aims to reclaim indigenous stories and representations from colonial entrenched socio-political and cultural histories and archives. In this way, my study participates in the project of decolonization by contributing Indigenous histories of colonial experiences, revealing contemporary legacies of colonization, as well as denaturalizing national/ist narratives and the legacies of colonial processes.

In examining the performances of Indigenous women artists, and by establishing histories of Indigenous performance from the pre-Imperial era to the current global one, I explore the potentials and limitations of performance art as a strategic decolonizing tool. I argue that the artists are researchers who, through their exploration of buried, untold, or unremembered indigenous histories, produce more complex Indigenous histories of Aboriginal and settler relations in Canada and beyond. In doing so, I also argue that works by artists such as Belmore and Blondeau participate in an ongoing decolonization struggle because they contribute to Indigenous stories,

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memories, and lived experiences that have been historically excluded from Canadian history. In this way, the performances are staged as arts-based methods of decolonizing writing, which produce counter-narratives that challenge prevailing power structures and national/ist narratives.

In establishing a discussion of ‘settler-responsibility’ in relation to my own positionality, and by incorporating a conversation about settler accountability in the processes of decolonization, this study of Indigenous performance aims to contribute to the anti-colonial project by considering Aboriginal cultural sovereignty as a valuable lens of analysis. In terms of my argument about ‘settler responsibility,’ which I put forward in Chapter 1, I see one of my roles as a ‘colonial daughter’ within a framework of anti-colonialism as producing research that resists the maintenance of dominant colonialist narratives that perpetuate Eurocentrism, racisms, and neo-colonialism. In other words, based on my analysis of Indigenous performance and decolonization theory, I argue that white settlers must participate in the process of untangling, unraveling, and revealing colonial legacies and acknowledge their inherent implication in the colonial project. I recognize the significant efforts and actions by Indigenous activists, scholars, curators, and artists in mobilizing politics of decolonization, and how, in many ways, it has been the burden solely of Indigenous peoples to facilitate social change and justice. I argue that it is the responsibility of white settler scholars, activists, and Canadian citizens more broadly to decolonize their personal, institutional and national frameworks and narratives. Doing so will support a critical recognition of white-settler privilege and re-evaluation of the entrenched colonial apparatus. Throughout my work, I call on the ‘settler responsibility’ of white settler academics working in fields related to Aboriginal issues. I argue that politics of responsibility, accountability, and solidarity bring forward a productive framework for non-Indigenous scholars to participate and contribute to the project of decolonization.

My framework of decolonization is not meant to confine an analysis of contemporary Indigenous art production to colonization and its affects on Indigenous peoples, but instead to place Aboriginal art in triangulated contexts of the past, present and future. I incorporate discussions of decolonization as a way to show the urgency and power of performance in relation to Indigenous survivance and cultural sovereignty. This being said, colonialism and its processes is a significant thematic thread that runs throughout this study because many of the stories and memories embodied by the artists speak of colonial events, experiences, and legacies. However, colonization is not the only point of reference in this study on Indigenous performance, nor is it predominantly used to understand broader Indigenous lived experience. An issue I have been challenged by in writing this dissertation is language. For example, in my attempts to illustrate and illumine the multiple layers
of the artists’ performances and to show the depth and dynamism of their practices, I hope I have also conveyed the significance of these works as embodiments of Indigenous ways of being. This word “being,” which I incorporate throughout my chapters, does not seem strong enough or even the most suitable to describe what I mean by this. I hope to convey that the works are multifaceted and, even when the artists’ bodies share stories of neo/colonial violence and trauma, as is the case in Belmore’s *Bury My Heart*, the works also speak to the everyday experience of “being Indigenous” in relation to Indigenous individuality, community, subjectivities, and nationhood.

From an indigenous point of view, the ascription of ‘nationhood’ to indigenous groups denotes political and economic sovereignty over traditional indigenous territories as well as the right to determine citizenship and to maintain distinct cultural traditions, language, and forms of knowledge. To this end, in order to show the complexities and multivocality of the performances, I incorporate multiple lenses through which to explore the artists’ strategies and practices.

The incorporation of diverse Indigenous methodologies, such as storytelling, decolonization and cultural sovereignty, as lenses for my analysis of Indigenous performance, is informed by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who argues, “Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of ‘civilized’ knowledge.” I return to Smith’s statement, which I included in an earlier chapter, to draw attention to my employment of Indigenous methodologies throughout my analysis of Indigenous performance so as to emphasize the active role played by the artists in challenging the notion of the West’s centrality. Furthermore, drawing on Smith, Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna Lincoln’s concept of critical Indigenous pedagogy, I apply multiple lenses and thematic approaches to argue that Indigenous performance art is a multifaceted art practice that places Indigenous cultural sovereignty and Indigenous knowledge at the forefront. Central to critical Indigenous pedagogy is its refusal to confine inquiry to one interpretative approach or paradigm and its use methods in a productive, ethical, and political way to mobilize Indigenous social justice. By employing the concept of critical Indigenous pedagogy, my research on Indigenous performance art acknowledges ‘the transformative power’ of Indigenous knowledges

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and perspectives. Rooted in an understanding of self-determination and sovereignty, the untangled histories presented in this dissertation stress the always already presence of Indigenous agency and cultural autonomy in performance arts. As Jolene Rickard argues, “The struggle for autonomous nationhood embedded in a political discourse of sovereignty is a critical factor for the ongoing presence of indigeneity in the Americas.”

In chapter 2, “Locating Indigenous Methodologies,” I discuss the prevailing gaps in the discourse of Indigenous arts, specifically the lack of theoretical approaches for the study of contemporary Indigenous art. Here, I argue that specific writing on methodological approaches for the critical writing of Aboriginal art is needed. I also argue that studying the practice of Indigenous artists, whose works visually and or performatively advance methodologies, strategies, and languages are a means to develop more thorough theoretical lenses for art criticism and critical writing. To this end, I suggest artist practices as possible theoretical lenses, such as Jeff Thomas’ body of photography and Rebecca Belmore’s performances, and acknowledge how the artists’ strategies offer Indigenous methodological approaches for the writing of Indigenous art histories. Furthermore, due to this gap in the literature, I suggest possible theoretical frameworks, which include storytelling, decolonization, politics of sovereignty, self-determination, cultural autonomy and agency, globalization and Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous feminisms. My incorporation of theories of decolonization, Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination to investigate Aboriginal performance supports my argument that Indigenous performance art can produce multilayered histories, indigenize the colonial archive, articulate Indigenous memory, lived experiences, and ways of being and instigate social-action. For example, by incorporating storytelling as a lens through which to analysis examples of contemporary performance art, I argue that these artists are participating in acts of cultural continuance and resilience. In other words, their performative storytelling continues the long-standing and persistent use of orality in Indigenous community in recording and transmitting history and knowledge. Furthermore, the use of storytelling in my analysis of contemporary performance art led me to consider the histories of Indigenous performative storytelling and to look at contemporary performances in relation to the work of past storytellers, such as Pauline E. Johnson. In considering the history of Indigenous performance, I trace developments of Indigenous performance from the imperial to global eras to argue that performances on settler-stages, such as Johnson work is connected and participates in the current

history of contemporary Indigenous performance art. In this way, I argue that performances from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries should be explored and analyzed in relation to one another and as part of the multifaceted history of Indigenous performance as cultural continuance and resistance.

My objective for this diachronic study is to establish links between historic and contemporary examples of Indigenous performance and to nuance the historic employment of performance in enacting, activating and mobilizing Indigenous self-determination, cultural sovereignty, activism, resistance, and agency. I examine and thereby argue that the art practices of Indigenous performance artists work out of historical Aboriginal practices of performance. In other words, the study links current histories in contemporary art practices with historical examples of Indigenous performances on colonial settler stages. By making links between the performance practice of contemporary artists, the development of diverse performance venues by Indigenous peoples for Euro-Canadian audiences (world exhibitions, royal visits etc.), and the establishment of Aboriginal sovereignty and self-determination, I stress the importance of addressing Indigenous agency and ultimately Aboriginal ways of knowing and being in both contemporary and historic performances. I argue that failing to address Aboriginal perspectives and their articulations of agency and cultural autonomy in discussions of colonial experience and contemporary Aboriginal art practice privileges colonization and by extension victimization as the only reference point of Indigenous experience. To this end, I attempt to convey the entanglement of colonial histories with contemporary Aboriginal experiences, while at the same time, I aim to addressing lived indigenous experience and the ongoing presence of Indigenous self-determination and cultural sovereignty.

This project in effect has been a process of listening, witnessing, tracing, and recording. I argue that these performances create space for audience members to bear witness to Indigenous histories, memories, stories, and perspectives. I also argue that Indigenous performance, both historical and contemporary, participate in Indigenous political resistance and projects of Indigenous social action. Doing so, I incorporate a discussion of activism that argues for inclusion of everyday acts of resistance. In addition to the question I ask above about the role of art production in social re-dress and activism, I also raise and address the following questions: How have Indigenous women used performance to stage political interventions and cultural resistance? And, what are the affects of Aboriginal performance art in Indigenous political actions, such as cultural sovereignty?

From my analysis of the performances in terms of enacting intervention and cultural sovereignty, which are woven throughout the arguments put forward in the chapters and specifically discussed in Chapter 5: *Indigenous Performances as Resistance: Indigenizing Activism*,
I argue that Indigenous performance art and cultural production are resources for political mobilization. In doing so, I explore and subsequently argue that performance has and continues to play a significant role in local and global Indigenous political movements. From my analysis of diverse performative political actions, ranging from performance-based political interventions and performance art, I argue that cultural production does not foster socio-political change on its own but, instead, that art, media, and performance can convey ideas, such as Indigenous self-determination, which in turn can raise awareness and thus mobilize activism. This being said, performance-based resistance can be affective in activating cultural knowledge recovery and continuance within Indigenous communities for individual audience members. By exploring examples of performance art in relation to Indigenous activist initiatives, I conclude that the artists’ performances participate in Indigenous activist movements, and contribute to social justice and change by promoting awareness of Indigenous issues and disseminating Aboriginal memories and histories. The notion of Indigenous network is instrumental to my position in the relationship between performance art and activism. I argue that the act of coming together, for example to witness a performance, and the creation of a network can be seen as a force that facilitates social action. Furthermore, I argue that cultural agency and the production of culture can be a force that brings together Indigenous voices. In other words, the production of art can facilitate the organizing of an event (such as a festival or a conference), which, in turn, can act as a platform from which diverse Indigenous issues and perspectives gather strength and give rise to Indigenous networks. Coming together is the agent of social change, and the establishment of Indigenous networks, created at sites such as the Talking Stick Festival, ImagineNative Film and Media Festivals and the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Colloquiums, foster Indigenous social action. The initiatives and advocacy work of such networks in both local and global Indigenous contexts and social movements include the establishment of counter colonial narratives, and the development of local decolonizing agendas, self-determined conversations, and cultural sovereignty.

One such network is the recently incorporated Aboriginal Curatorial Collective (ACC), which was established in 2005. The ACC’s mission statement declares its role as supporter, advocator and promoter of Aboriginal art, artists, curators, and representatives of arts and cultural organizations in Canada and internationally.⁶ In the Canadian context, where hundreds of nations of first peoples live within the borders of the nation-state, the indigenous artistic community is among

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many indigenous networks encouraging and advocating self-determination and sovereignty. This transnational community is comprised of artists, curators, scholars, writers, critics, and representatives of arts institutions and cultural organizations from diverse indigenous nations across Canada. A collective, it is a non-profit organization dedicated to facilitating greater understanding of the role of Aboriginal art curators in protecting and extending Aboriginal arts and culture in North America and around the world through acquisition, conservation, interpretation, and exhibition. The ACC participates and acts in collaboration with other indigenous and non-indigenous organizations and institutions generating local, national and international recognition of Aboriginal culture and art. There have been four national symposium: Winnipeg at Urban Shaman Gallery (2006), Saskatoon hosted by TRIBE (2007), Vancouver at the University of British and Columbia Emily Carr Institute for Fine Arts hosted by Grunt Gallery (2008), Ottawa (2009) at the National Gallery of Canada, and in Toronto, this fall at the Ontario College of Art and Design.

These colloquiums provide an opportunity for individuals from across Canada and the United States as well as from abroad to come together to share experiences, knowledge, expertise, and artistic and curatorial vision. These meetings are divided into panels with speakers and moderators, but also include gallery exhibitions and performances, such as at the Vancouver meeting, where both Cheryl L’Hirondelle and Skeena Reece performed as part of the gathering. At the 2009 meeting at the National Gallery of Canada, a ‘Curators Camp’ was organized as part of the colloquium, which facilitated curatorial-based workshops for members and alliance-members to discuss and build exhibition proposal ideas. The ACC is one example of an indigenous network that helps to build alliances and participates as a strategy for indigenous resistance.

ImagineNative Media Arts and Film Festival hosted annually in Toronto, Ontario, fosters dynamic sites for supporting, fostering, and promoting local, national, and international indigenous networks. It is an international festival that showcases recent media works by international indigenous artists. This four-day film and media arts festival celebrates innovation in film, video, radio, and new media. ImagineNative is an internationally recognized festival, which brings together Indigenous artists, curators, and scholars, thereby connecting global indigenous perspectives, voices, and histories. The festival programs screenings, commissions new works, and organizes panel presentations, discussions, cultural events, art exhibitions, and parties. The dynamism of IN’s programming offers multiple spaces and opportunities for networking among

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media artists, industry professionals, students, programmers and buyers. As I have argued elsewhere, as a festival, imagineNATIVE provides multifaceted sites and spaces for the dissemination of indigenous networks---while also supporting professional development of Indigenous filmmakers, media artists and curators by organizing workshops and other activities geared specifically to enhance creative and professional skills.

The festival was established over ten years ago, in 1998, and is now regarded as one of the most important Indigenous film and media arts festivals in the world. The festival’s board comments, “The works accepted reflect the diversity of the world’s Indigenous nations and illustrate the vitality and excellence of our art and culture in contemporary media.”

Over the course of the festival’s history, indigenous media artists and filmmakers from Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and across the Americas have shown their work. Wanda Nanibush, director of the 2004 festival, advanced the strong international programming commitment by bringing international artists and their media and film works to the festival. For example in 2004, internationally recognized Maori artist Lisa Reihana screened her work and participated in a panel that explored Indigenous media productions in Australia and New Zealand. The 2005 festival featured over one hundred innovative Indigenous produced film, new media, radio and art installations from all corners of the world including the Philippines, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, Finland, India, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. In this regard, the festival connects North American and international indigenous realities and histories and is a site for generating and sharing in discussions surrounding both art practice and contemporary issues relevant to the artist/filmmaker and her/his local, regional, national, and international home/contexts. These cross-cultural discussions and opportunities to share experiences of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the legacies of colonialism are important to the mobilization and struggles of indigenous peoples for sovereignty and self-determination. The festival’s commitment to represent and promote innovative media arts and film by indigenous artists and to participate in the decolonization of indigenous knowledges, subjectivities, identities, and cultures is further demonstrated in the festival’s mission statement,

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imagineNATIVE showcases, promotes, and celebrates emerging and established Canadian and international Indigenous filmmakers and media artists. imagineNATIVE is committed to dispelling stereotypical notions of Indigenous peoples through diverse media presentations from within our communities, thereby contributing to a greater understanding by audiences of Indigenous artistic expression.  

The consistent presentation of significant groundbreaking and legacy works by indigenous media artists and filmmakers at the ImagineNATIVE festival fosters the development of cross-cultural, transnational indigenous networks.

Events such as ImagineNative and the Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Symposiums have been fundamental for my research and in my development of productive and transformative relationships with Indigenous artists, scholars, activists, and curators. Over the course of writing this dissertation I have attended both the festival and symposium on several occasions, and while in attendance I have witnessed the strength of the Aboriginal arts community and been invited to participate in this Indigenous transnational community as an ally and colleague. The opportunity to attend Indigenous festivals, conferences, and art exhibitions has been invaluable in terms of the development of my knowledge about Indigenous art production and in turn has fostered and nurtured the arguments in this dissertation. Due to the meaningful conversations I have taken part in about my research, including discussions about curatorial strategies and Indigenous art more broadly, I would also argue that sites such as the ACC symposium foster important opportunities for the mentorship of young scholars, curators, and artists alike. Furthermore, the development of Indigenous networks, such as the Aboriginal arts community, are nourished by sites such as ImagineNative, as artists, curators and scholars from across North America as well as internationally gather and share ideas about future projects, artistic practice, curatorial strategies, and methodological approaches.

My conversations and experiences at ImagineNative, as well as festivals, such as Ode’min Giizis in Peterborough, have informed my recent research projects and curatorial strategies. For example, Ode’min Giizis is an annual five day interdisciplinary festival that brings diverse Indigenous artists to the city to exchange and share ideas through art production. Hosted on Anishinaabe territory, this festival invites and supports cross-cultural dialogue through the act of gathering. During my experience at Ode’min Giizis, I witnessed an organized Indigenous arts-based take-over of city spaces, through the organization of dynamic programming, which included a

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community procession, traditional gathering, gallery exhibitions, performance art, public talks, dance, storytelling, theatre, and music concerts. This multidisciplinary Indigenous festival, along with others such as ImagineNative, instigated the development of my collaborative curatorial project, Acting Out, Claiming Space. This notion of ‘coming together’ to ‘claim space’ for the sharing of ideas and knowledge was one of the curatorial premises of Acting Out Claiming Space: Aboriginal Performance Art Series, which I co-curated with Daina Warren. Our conceptualization of Acting Out began in Denver at the Aboriginal Performance Art conference and was further developed at ImagineNative the following year. Acting-Out Claiming Space was hosted by Modern Fuel Artist Run Centre (Kingston, Ontario) in conjunction with Queen’s Native Student’s Association Aboriginal Awareness Week in March 2011. As co-curators of this show, we were invested in the following questions: What constitutes Indigenous space(s)? And, how does an Indigenous voice contend with colonial spaces, such as the city of Kingston, that are entrenched in overarching histories and legacies of colonial conquest and occupation? During the series we programmed film screenings, artists talks, and artist interventions throughout the city. Artists Jordan Bennett, Tanya Lukin Linklater, Terrance Houle, and Skeena Reece produced dynamic site-specific performances that engaged with their own local cultural histories and knowledges as well as the local histories and contemporary issues of Queen’s University and the city of Kingston. This series successfully claimed space for Aboriginal community members in Kingston and students, faculty, and staff members at Queen’s University and fostered mentorship opportunities for emerging Indigenous artists, curators and scholars. The performance series created opportunity for productive exchanges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members. In our curatorial essay, “Claiming the Space by Acting Out!” we argue,

Over the course of Acting Out, Claiming Space the artists’ performances claimed, negotiated and revealed Kingston as a historic and contemporary Indigenous transnational space. The artists’ diverse cultural ancestry from across North America alluded to the geographic region’s history as a site for Indigenous gathering. It is significant to acknowledge the fact that Indigenous-nations are diverse nations living within the borders of Nation-states, such as Canada and the United States. Indigenous territories transcend the constructed boundaries of these states and have always already engaged in cross-cultural dialogue and exchange. The powerful and dynamic performances created an opportunity for the sharing of multiple Indigenous perspectives, histories, and identities, which ultimately claimed a space for the recognition of both historic and contemporary Aboriginal issues and the subversion of popular stereotypical narratives and iconic representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures. In this way the performances resisted the erasure of

Indigenous presence in Kingston and Indigenous relationships to the surrounding lands in the region through the artists’ site-specific works. Acting Out, Claiming Space negotiated space for asserting Indigenous cultural, political and land sovereignty by vocalizing through performative strategies Aboriginal self-determination. The artists’ claimed spaces by acting out, thereby indigenizing locations throughout the city.\textsuperscript{13}

By bringing together four Indigenous artists from nations across the North American continent, and asking them to respond and to engage with the local context of Kingston in terms of current issues and historical events, Acting Out, Claiming Space generated Indigenous transnational conversations, whereby the local, the national, and the international intersected.

In her essay, “After Essay: Indigenous is the Local,” Jolene Rickard makes a distinction between work produced in the 1990’s by such artists as James Luna, who deconstructed colonial space, and artists of today, who are imagining an indigenous space.\textsuperscript{14} I argue that the performances of such artists as L’Hirondelle and Reece do just this. They create sites from which to simultaneously imagine and create indigenous spaces. In relation to this concept of indigenizing space and claiming space for both contemporary Indigenous art practice and the Indigenous arts community more broadly, Rickard declares, “We need to make art for each other. We need to write for each other, and we need to do it on a global scale.”\textsuperscript{15}

Moving forward in my research, I plan to expand my exploration of the relationships between Indigenous performance art and tactics of decolonization, as well as contemporary Indigenous performance art’s role in asserting cultural sovereignty and self-determination, and in mobilizing resistance by incorporating such discussions into a more complex global context. In my view, Rickard’s statement above argues for the continued development of global Indigenous networks, promoted by organizations such as the ACC and festivals like ImagineNative, as a strategy to resist neo-colonial occupations, dominations, and co-options by nation states and global forces, as well as to assert Indigenous nationhood, worldviews, cultural sovereignty and autonomy. She highlights collaborations between Canadian and Australian indigenous peoples, stating, “I am not suggesting that we operate in a hermeneutic bubble; rather, I think we need to articulate local knowledge globally.”\textsuperscript{16} As transnational and global conversations become more prominent in scholarly and curatorial practice, something I find particularly pressing is how to most productively

\textsuperscript{13} Daina Warren and Carla Taunton, “Claiming the Space by Acting Out!” in \textit{Acting Out Claiming Space: Aboriginal Performance Art Series} (Kingston: Modern Fuel Artist Run Centre, Forthcoming 2011).
\textsuperscript{14} Jolene Rickard, “The Local and the Global,” 64.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
represent both the cultural heterogeneity of indigenous peoples and the connections between artists’ practices and histories. At this point in my research, drawing from the discussions put forward in this dissertation, I see the local as a powerful vantage point from which to engage in globalized conversations of Indigenous cultural production and histories of survivance and resistance. In other words, I plan to further explore the concept of ‘the local’ as a potential site for the development of global indigenous networks---as a place from which to connect Indigenous communities’ struggles for self determination and sovereignty and to foster mobilization. In so doing, I plan to discuss the possibilities that global indigenous networks offer for indigenous resistance. I intend as well to investigate festivals, artist and curatorial residencies, conferences, and art biennales as sites for the development of global indigenous networks, which arguably connect local individuals and communities to global discussions and organizations. Specifically, I plan to explore specific performances, such as Skeena Reece’s work at the Sydney Biennale in 2010. This being said, I acknowledge that the production and reception of contemporary indigenous art is located in both local and global contexts, but that the politics and specificity of experience is potentially disseminated into global spaces.

Outlining the social movements of indigenous people’s struggles links the histories of colonization of the Maori, in New Zealand, Aboriginal peoples in Australia, and Indigenous peoples of Canada and United States. This linkage must not be seen as an attempt to homogenize diverse experience, but rather as one that aims to elucidate differences and similarities of experience and also of resistance strategies. I plan to build from my research on Indigenous activism and cultural production to trace the development of global alliances of indigenous peoples across borders and to look to key art biennales, festivals, conferences and meetings. Doing so, I will investigate global indigenous art networks relationship to politics of ‘global indigeneity’ as potentially contributing to the international mobilization of indigenous knowledge, experience and stories. In this way, the notion of Indigenous culture as resource will be explored as a means to build platforms for sharing Indigenous experiences and for developing a global Indigenous network.

As I established in Chapter 5, Indigenous activist movements, as well as contemporary Indigenous art production, have global relationships and connections. I introduce in my examination of Indigenous human rights struggles and performative actions in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand the transnational connections between such movements in the late 1960s onwards. In my ongoing research I plan to extrapolate further the concept of ‘global indigeneity’ and the relationships of both imperialism and globalization to Indigenous peoples
cultural production and mobilization of global indigenous alliances and political movements. In the global context, indigenous networks and cross-cultural exchanges among indigenous peoples are strategies used in struggles for the counter-colonization of indigenous knowledge. In “A Two-Edged Sword: A Perspective from Indigenous Peoples,” Stewart-Harawira asserts the significance of the global indigenous network, noting that one of the most important developments in Indigenous peoples’ responses to globalization is the emergence of ‘global indigeneity’ as a pan-national, pan-regional, countermovement to new measures by states to limit definitions and rights of Indigenous peoples. By such means, Indigenous peoples collectively assert their own definitions of indigeneity and determine their own collective responses to nation states and to the institutions of global order.\(^\text{17}\)

In this regard, the concept of a globalized indigenous network emerges as a strategic vehicle for movement towards decolonization of indigenous cultures, lands, bodies, and minds. Naming the local as a specific indigenous context, however, does not mean to say that what is produced within this specific site is fixed within it; rather, that the specificity of indigenous experience is emphasized. As I argued earlier, indigenous networks can be a strategy of decolonization, countering colonial strategies of forcibly isolating colonized peoples from one another. It is important to recognize that Indigenous peoples have been isolated both from another, due to bans prohibiting the gathering of groups of native peoples, and from other nations of indigenous peoples by government control of Aboriginal movement through pass-and-permit laws and the reserve system.\(^\text{18}\) In this context, culture can act as a resource in building platforms for sharing indigenous experiences and for assisting the development of a global indigenous network devoted to social change and political action. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 5, the post-WWII development of the Pow-Wow trail throughout North America arguably supported the dissemination of Red Power ideals and the growth of the Indian Brotherhood Movement and created sites for indigenous peoples from across North America to celebrate Indian identity.\(^\text{19}\) Such gatherings of diverse Aboriginal peoples for the purpose of dancing, singing, drumming and storytelling has had, and continues to have, positive effects (among them, socio-cultural empowerment) within the indigenous rights movement in Canada and the United States. This is due to the fact that dancing has brought many together,

\(^{17}\) Stewart-Harawira, 189.
\(^{19}\) Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Indian Culture (Wilfred Laurier Press, 2003), 152.
offering a space in which indigenous rights and political issues could be developed, shared, and put into action. In other words, the production of culture or a cultural event, such as Pow wow dancing, is a force in bringing indigenous peoples together. It is the coming together that is the performative force behind the indigenous resistance movement, offering potential for social action for global indigenous nations across nation-state borders. In relation to discussions of global indigenous connections, Arjun Appadurai’s concept of grassroots globalization elucidates the partnerships and multifaceted networks that tie together local and global sites of indigenous struggle. He suggests that this new type of transnational activism has more room for building solidarity and partnerships, and therefore develops a “new dynamics in which global networking is put at the service of local imaginings of power.”

Appadurai’s discussion highlights the strategic organizations of networks by local indigenous peoples with other communities within the nation-state as well as with international indigenous communities.

Framed by a global context, my research will continue to examine the historical underpinnings of contemporary Indigenous performance and video art in careful consideration of Indigenous historical performances on settler stages in the 19th and early 20th centuries. I plan to incorporate examples of performances in the Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and British contexts, such as Hiawatha Pageants and Indian Days (Canada), the 1868 Aboriginal Cricket Tour of England (Australia) and Rotorua Maori Village (New Zealand’s first tourist destination), as well as make a comparative case study using the Indigenous performances organized for the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York Empire-wide tour in 1901, which included visits to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. A potential area for further study is the exploration of Indigenous material culture from these performances as additional evidence of Indigenous peoples’ use of performance as resistance to colonial domination, assimilation, and ethnocide. Building on the work of Indigenous scholars such as Sherry Farrell-Racette, my aim is to identify garments in order to reconnect them with their histories of production, performance and cultural significance and to recontextualize their place in museum collections. In other words, I propose to look at Indigenous material culture, which is predominantly produced by women, as encoded objects that are receptacles of Indigenous memory, knowledge, and experience. By exploring material culture worn during performances I plan to investigate the assertion of Indigenous agency and deliberate acts of resistance, within the guise of spectacle, to determine how Indigenous women performers who were living during eras of colonization and enduring policies of assimilation asserted resistance through

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20 Ibid., 136.
Furthermore, I plan to examine the relationship of historical performances to the development of tourism to consider the ways in which Indigenous performance has been employed historically as a strategy of resistance and cultural continuance. In this context, the relationships between 19th and early 20th century Indigenous performance, tourism and colonization gain prominence. As a result, connections could be made between the historical performances and contemporary examples of Indigenous cultural tourism (performance troupes at the Cowichan Cultural Centre, Sydney Museum, and Auckland Memorial Museum) in order to extend my discussion of performance’s relationship to and history of Indigenous agency and resistance.

Through my investigations of Indigenous performance for settler entertainment and for economic and cultural survival, Indigenous cultural tourism will be connected to impacts of colonization and globalization on Indigenous communities. The main thrust of my future project is to trace the use of performance from the imperial to the current global era in relation to Indigenous cultural resilience, activism and cultural sovereignty. My future work will make cross-cultural links between historic performance on settler-stages, examples of past and current cultural tourism, and contemporary performance and video art to establish a decolonized performance history of global Indigenous cultural resistance.

By building on my dissertation research and drawing on scholars such as Jolene Rickard who explores the implications of globalization, postnationalism and multiculturalism on contemporary indigenous art, and who presents the local as a theoretical framework for negotiating the implications of the global on indigenous communities, I plan to investigate contemporary global Indigenous performance and video art as a tool in decolonizing processes, in writing indigenous histories, in producing counter-narratives, and in asserting indigenous ways of being. The local offers a specific point of reference, a space that recognizes community and cultural knowledge and also archives cultural and historic memories. Building on this notion of the local, Aboriginal peoples use of specific place and experiences in that locale for the expression of cultural autonomy can be seen as a form of socio-political resistance against the homogenization of global culture. Indigenous communities’ struggles for self determination and sovereignty can mobilize, and grow in strength through the sharing of stories in the global context by means of global indigenous networks.

While completing this study, Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years, an exhibition of global Indigenous contemporary art opened in Winnipeg. This groundbreaking large-scale show, which featured over thirty Indigenous artists from Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South America and Europe, created a space for the voicing of individual artists’
perspectives and a site for furthering dialogue about global indigenous experience. Using “the future” as a theme, indigenous curators Lee Ann Martin, Steven Loft, Candice Hopkins, and Jenny Western connected the diverse group of artists, and presented their works as “catalysts to invent different ways of thinking, acting, and being in the world of our shared future.” Arguably an indigenous transnational or global space, Close Encounters brought forward distinct local indigenous perspectives by individual artists and fostered a space for global Indigenous cross-cultural dialogue.

Close Encounters represents current approaches and discussions in contemporary Indigenous art history, which incorporates Indigenous global contexts and transnational spheres. Building in momentum through exhibitions such as Close Encounters, international indigenous artist-residency (such as the Aboriginal Peoples Exchange between Canada and Australia), indigenous artists’ presence at art biennales (such as Rebecca Belmore at Venice in 2005 and Skeena Reece at Sydney in 2010), and ongoing initiatives by festivals like ImagineNative and arts organizations like the ACC, more complex concepts of global indigeneity and conversations about the affects of globalization on Indigenous peoples are coming to the forefront. Currently, the development of global alliances of indigenous peoples across borders is attributed to key conferences, such as Making a Noise: A Forum from Aboriginal Perspectives, which was hosted at the Banff Centre in the fall of 2003 (a subsequent publication edited by Lee-Ann Martin was published of the conference papers, *Making A Noise! Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing and Community*) and meetings, which can be seen as contributing to the international mobilization of indigenous peoples through the sharing of knowledge, experience and stories. The creation of international, national and local networks and organizations exemplifies strategies of resistance and the methods through which indigenous peoples are re-establishing their autonomy and building resources. In this articulation, indigenous networks, which are defined, controlled, governed, organized and mobilized by indigenous peoples, are creating alliances throughout the world by recognizing a pan-indigenous struggle against state ambivalence, occupation and oppression. In this way, Indigenous alliances and networks, exemplified by the Aboriginal arts community in Canada, participate in the decolonizing project through their ongoing commitments towards negotiating cultural sovereignty and asserting self-determination.

The writing of this dissertation has been produced through dialogue between myself, the artists and their works, and Indigenous scholars and curators. As I mention above, my engagement with the Aboriginal arts community has been instrumental for my research and the development of my arguments. Conversations about my work and my positionality as a non-Indigenous white settler scholar have also shaped my own process of decolonization and, subsequently, the methodological approaches that I incorporate for the analysis of the performances. The lenses that I use for exploring Indigenous performance histories, such as storytelling and Indigenous memory, the ways I use historical examples and archival materials to support my arguments of the always already presence of Indigenous cultural autonomy, and my incorporation of Indigenous theories and perspectives are informed by recent scholarship of decolonization and anticolonialism. I use this to generate a productive methodology for the study of contemporary Indigenous art, one that is decolonized from Western art historical approaches. Furthermore, the performances produced by the contemporary artists, such as Belmore and Blondeau, as well as the product of this dissertation participate in the decolonization of Indigenous experiences, memories, and performance histories. Taken together, the artists works, my analysis of them, and this study as a whole traces the historical and current presence of Indigenous survivance, agency, self-determination, and cultural memory.

The performances that I examine create a space for Indigenous remembrance and cultural knowledge as well as individual, community and national histories. The works of Belmore, Blondeau, Claxton, L’Hirondelle, and Reece embody the diversity of Indigenous lived experiences and recall the absence of Aboriginal perspectives in settler-nations, such as Canada. Their works are powerful, beautiful, haunting, and hopeful. Through using their bodies as agents for transmitting Indigenous knowledge, histories, and memories they activate spaces for a broader recognition of Aboriginal presence and ways of being. Ultimately, taken together, the performances examined in this dissertation negotiate cultural sovereignty, perform acts of resistance, and imagine Indigenous space.
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