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Abstract

The phrase “All that glitters is not gold” refers to seemingly universal life lessons where visible perceptions of beauty and value are revealed as a façade. The phrase is also akin to golden, shiny metals, which appear valuable but are actually not as valuable – such as the misidentification of pyrite as gold. In this project, it refers to the imperfect connections between land, identity, location and belonging(s). It is a nod to the sparkle of copper in the project, a material that glitters but is not gold. All that Glitters is Not Gold… is also a reference to the name of the institutional space at Simon Fraser University, Goldcorp Centre for the Arts.

Keywords: trans-nationalism, site-specificity, reclamation, Indigenous knowledge, resource extraction, Belongings
For Toki
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List of Acronyms

SFU                  Simon Fraser University
HBC                  Hudson’s Bay Company
All that Glitters is Not Gold ... 2019 Install view

Photo credit: K. Coughlin, 2019
Statement of Defense

Introduction

The phrase “All that glitters is not gold” refers to seemingly universal life lessons where visible perceptions of beauty and value are revealed as a façade. The phrase is also akin to golden, shiny metals, which appear valuable but are actually not as valuable – such as the misidentification of pyrite as gold. In this project, it refers to the imperfect connections between land, identity, location and belonging(s). It is a nod to the sparkle of copper in the project, a material that glitters but is not gold. All that Glitters is Not Gold… is also a reference to the name of the institutional space at Simon Fraser University, Goldcorp Centre for the Arts.

Key Terms

Transnational/transnational identity: A field of theory that focuses on Nation-states as being pluralist, dual, multiple, and complex. Transnational identity considers concepts such as diaspora, hybridity, duality in regards to an individual’s unique position(s) and experience(s).

Belonging(s): A concept where an art object is owned and cared for by an individual, and represents a cultural or kinship connection.

Location(s): A term to describe site-specificity, as well as social and cultural belonging/membership.

MFA process and trajectory

When I began the MFA program at SFU, I was given a tour of the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts. Immediately, new MFA students were informed of the school and site’s history – the history of Woodward’s, the 2010 Olympics, and the neighborhood itself. I was impressed with SFU’s transparency regarding its colonial history, and decided to learn more – this is where my research begins. During my studies at Simon Fraser University, I studied with Sabine Bitter’s “Laboratory Landscape” visual arts
course, which allowed art schools to participate in the creation of public artwork for the LandMarks2017/Repéres2017 National art project. During this 6-month course, students researched colonial sites and local Indigenous histories. The course encouraged students of all levels and disciplines to be reflexive of their own locations – it was also a great experience creating works that combined research and creative practice.

I was studying artworks that integrated concepts of land and belonging, I was inspired by Rebecca Belmore’s work 1181 (2014). 1181 is a tree stump with 1181 nails hammered into it, each nail representing one of the missing and murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Queer and Two-Spirited (MMIWGQ2S). As an Indigenous woman who grew up in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, the on-going disappearance of Indigenous bodies continues to be a lived reality. Belmore’s work evokes feelings of vulnerability, strength, and violence. Belmore’s work Sister (2010), displayed in the front window of the Audain Gallery in Vancouver, was meant to be seen by the local public: “The work was intended to be seen by participants of the February 14, 2010 Annual Women’s Memorial March for missing and murdered Indigenous women. Sister faced Hastings Street in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside” (Belmore 1). Belmore’s works thoughtfully and beautifully connects concepts of body, land, and place. Her work inspires me to look at my own relationships to the land, and my own identity as an Indigenous woman.

Since starting the MFA program, my artistic practice has focused more on the artistic process than final art object. Working with artists from different disciplines and different conceptual interests has inspired me to work with different mediums and concepts. This has given me new project opportunities; such as working with the City of Vancouver for the Canada 150+ Indigenous mural project where I combined images of local landscapes and Northwest First Nations Formline design elements into a large-scale mural in 2017-18. Time spent in the MFA program has also given me space to develop my skills in photography, painting and printmaking, which resulted in being selected for a finalist in the RBC painting competition and the Phillip Lind Prize for Contemporary photography, both in 2018.
While working on my final MFA project, I decided to explore Northern Tutchone art history, aesthetics and practices. This led me to further investigate Northern Tutchone trade history with the HBC, and current trade practices with corporate infrastructures. Through this trajectory, I was interested in creating an artwork that challenges those binary systems of representation, in which many Indigenous issues are mistakenly conceptualized.
Learning to utilize multiple mediums and medias has allowed me to better articulate concepts that are inherently difficult, dynamic and complex. Identity is a complicated mess of locations, always in a process of construction and destruction. How could I express identity through acts of construction and destruction? How can art objects and materials convey belonging?

**Site/Location**

Simon Fraser University’s Vancouver Campuses are located on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples – the Squamish First Nation, Tseil-waututh First Nation, and the Musqueam First Nation. Simon Fraser University’s School of Contemporary Arts in Vancouver is located in the Goldcorp Centre for Arts Building, in the Woodward’s complex. Once a single building, Woodward’s was a department store in the Downtown Eastside, a place that I have fond memories of. Woodwards’s is now transformed into multiple buildings within a single large one-block complex. Working within this institution/site/space, I was inspired to create a piece which addresses complex transnational relationships while using aesthetics that were directly linked to my
The blanket also acknowledges the history of Woodward’s, a company that was partially owned by the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC History 1), now the site of Simon Fraser University’s Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, home of SFU’s Contemporary Arts programs. The project uses a cedar frame built from scrapped timber from SFU Burnaby campus, decommissioned Canadian pennies, a blanket, wool, and copper wire. Combining these materials, this project explores traditional and contemporary uses of materials and contemplates where these materials originated and their history.

Figure 3.  All that Glitters is Not Gold... 2019 view from Hastings Street
Photo credit: K. Coughlin, 2019

The location of the project facing Hastings Street is meant to create accessibility to the artwork. The framework of viewing All That Glitters is Not Gold… from behind glass is meant to mimic the way First Nations art and Belongings, also known as artifacts, are often displayed in museum displays – behind glass displays and vitrines – as a visual critique of how Indigenous art is consumed. The site of this artwork – the front window – is meant to make the artwork accessible to the public. It mimics the
display and use of storefront windows, which are used to advertise and entice passers-by. Like Belmore’s Sister, I want my artwork to be visible and accessible to the community.

Figure 4. ts’at (blanket) 2018 install view
Photo credit: K. Coughlin, 2019

Project Background

Northern Tutchone Indigenous art is and has been directly connected to the materials related to the land. Art and art-objects (belongings) were often functional and transportable – important to Northern Tutchone First Nations that travel seasonally. Materials are significant in their use and can be related to specific First Nation’s identity and traditional territories.

Selkirk First Nation is named after Fort Selkirk – a historic location along the Pelly River where a Hudson’s Bay trading post was established (Council of Yukon First Nations 1). However, Selkirk First Nation used this site before HBC settlement as a location for trade and ceremony with neighboring Northern Tutchone and Tlingit peoples. In fact, the HBC blankets and clothing were traded and gifted from the Tlingit prior to the
Hudson’s Bay settlement at Fort Selkirk (Kampen, Early Yukon Art 12). Northern Tutchone traditional territory has an abundance of copper and precious metal deposits, through which much of the Copper is traded and gifted to neighboring Coastal Northwest First Nations. The Northern Tutchone of Fort Selkirk (Selkirk First Nation) has a long history of material trade.

The combination of contemporary and historic art objects—an HBC blanket, cedar frame, and decommissioned Canadian pennies—is presented in a way that thoughtfully and respectfully acknowledges my own identity and that of my nation. As Goldcorp is a mining corporation that has a gold and copper mine on Northern Tutchone traditional territory, it is important for me to address my own complex relationships.

**HBC Blanket**

Traditionally, Northern Tutchone people had obtained and gifted HBC blankets ripped in half during Potlatches (Cruikshank, Reading Voices 72). Northern Tutchone Elder Rachel Dawson describes the last Potlatch during the Potlatch Ban in 1914: “[They] cut the button blankets in half, gave them to the Wolf people. ...They gave away Hudson’s Bay Blankets too—tear them in half and give them to wolf women” (Rachel Dawson QTD in Cruickshank, Reading Voices 72). The blanket was an important aspect of our culture, with many Northern Tutchone people buried with their belongings/blankets. The blanket ceremonies ended during Canada’s Potlatch ban, which forbid Indigenous people of Turtle Island from practicing our culture. This practice of destruction may be unique to Northern Tutchone First Nations’, however many other First Nations and Indigenous cultures also utilized HBC blankets in different ways, such as making clothing or use in ceremony: “Often, these wool blankets are fashioned into capotes, or jackets, and you will see Metis, Cree, Dene, Siksika, and other Indigenous Peoples cutting a fine figure in their HBC outerwear” (Vowel, Blanket Statement 1).

Visual artists Leah Decter and Jaimie Isaac used HBC blankets in their project *Official Denial* trade value in progress which looked at Harper’s G20 statement in 2009 where he denied Canadian colonial history, the piece invited participants to write and bead their own responses to Harper’s statement.
The HBC blanket also has a dark history. It is often associated with Indigenous erasure through the small pox epidemic in the 19th Century, and through the intentional spread of disease by colonizers to Indigenous peoples. The blanket has become a symbol of attempted Indigenous erasure as well as a symbol of belonging and identity. “The HBC’s Point Blanket has both been a historical and contemporary resonance. It is a highly charged symbol of Canada’s inception through its role as a colonial currency in the fur trade, and its implication in the spread of smallpox to Aboriginal communities. Its contemporary significance is solidified through its invocation as a nationalist symbol. “ (Decter, Unsettling Narratives 103).
Displaying half an HBC blanket conveys not only concepts that are relevant to my own identity as Northern Tutchone, but also the destruction and display of the blanket itself points to a dissatisfaction of colonial-Indigenous relations. Metis writer Chelsea Vowel writes about the HBC blanket in Canadian Art:

Just because these blankets originated with settlers, it does not mean they belong to settlers in the way they ‘belong’ to Metis and First Nations here in the west. Our relationship with these blankets stretch back many generations, and involves a history that is fraught with complex dynamics and resistance to colonial encroachment…(Blanket Statement 1).

While the HBC blanket contains many complex references and relationships, I wanted to explore familial relationships through my photography piece ts’at (blanket) 2018. This triptych shows a messy blanket, folding of a blanket, and a folded blanket; it is a narrative of being (un)done. The blanket represents a colonial present/past/future. Considering the role of kinship in the exhibition title “WE ALL COME OUT FROM
BETWEEN OUR MOTHER’S LEGS…” (2018), I wanted my own family to be a part of the artwork, and had my mother and sister fold the HBC blanket together.

**Mining and Trade – Copper and Gold**

Copper trade continues to grow on Northern Tutchone territory in the form of mining by corporations. In Northern Tutchone First Nations, there has been a huge boom of mining and resource extraction within traditional territories. This is a complicated relationship between Nation(s) and corporation(s) – a contemporary form of trade for First Nations in the Yukon.

There are many copper and precious metal mines and corporations located on Northern Tutchone territories – Capstone Mining Corp’s Minto mine, Goldcorp Coffee mine, Western Copper and Gold’s Casino Mine, to name a few – with some of these mines owning multiple excavation pits. It is noteworthy to bring up the importance of proper First Nation’s consultation and consent within these relationships – a challenge that Goldcorp was met with in 2017 when multiple Yukon First Nations brought up lack of consultation and proper assessment1.

Mines offer bands (First Nations) financial support through revenues such as royalties. The royalties are small compared to the amount of income acquired by corporations. First Nations citizens - who are land stewards - receive small monetary compensation for the trade. This is small change compared to the earnings derived from mining these resources -Pennies on the Dollar. However, corporate developments also give Self-Governing First Nations the opportunities to invest in their own infrastructure and people – such as giving students financial support during their educational pursuit.

**Summary**

As a Canadian citizen and Selkirk First Nation citizen, I wanted to create an art project that looks at the complexities found within my own transnational identity. Transnational identity usually refers to belonging to more than one nation-state, often conceptualized as separate spaces – a concept which reinforces colonial philosophy of land ownership and use. For many Indigenous peoples and communities, traditional

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territories are complex, fluid, and overlapping and not bound by colonial border concepts. Complex concepts of identity and belonging are at the core of transnational identity theories. This is the place where I approached this MFA project – an artwork that uses objects heavily laden with symbolism for both First Nations and Canadian viewers to create a dialogue about identity, belonging, and transnationalism.

The final artwork, *All that Glitters is Not Gold…*, is a sculptural installation made with a Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) blanket, wool, reclaimed cedar, copper and decommissioned Canadian copper pennies. *All that Glitters is Not Gold…* questions the intersection of place, trade, land, and identity through use and display of materials. This project utilizes Northern Tutchone aesthetics and materials (HBC blanket and copper) while using a visual language that also speaks to Canadian-Indigenous relations, and corporate and colonial history. *All that Glitters is Not Gold…* indirectly addresses the complex relationship between mining corporations (Goldcorp) and Indigenous land stewardship, such as self-determination of Yukon First Nation’s territories.

**Works Cited**


Installation Details

Figure 7.  detail of pennies
Photo credit: K. Coughlin, 2019
Figure 8. detail of fringe
Photo credit: K. Coughlin, 2019
Figure 9. detail of copper wire
Photo credit: K. Coughlin, 2019
Figure 10.  detail of HBC blanket
Figure 11.  detail of copper nails
Photo credit: K. Coughlin, 2019
Appendix A.


“Why is everyone talking about land? At home we talk about territory, which includes not just the land, but also air, stories, spirits, ancestors, everything”
– Brian Martin (Migration as Territory).

Imagining

Indigenous Futurism looks at the way we create the future potentials as Indigenous Peoples. I am interested in Indigenous Futurism because of the possibilities it holds to visualize and decolonialize Indigenous identities within Canada. Current Canadian colonial practices, such as the Indian Act, have created a national narrative of Indigenous people as temporary, and in the past. This type of ideology, called the “vanishing Indian”, works to conceptualize Indigenous identity as linked to blood quantum; therefore, Indigenous identity would be inevitably doomed to extinction. This framework is also used to erase Indigenous presence, and perpetuates stereotypes and misconceptions of Indigenous Peoples. It is important to understand how colonial “vanishing Indian” myths work to define our current Canadian-Indigenous relations.

Indigenous presence has always been an obstacle to settler nations. By claiming that Turtle Island – now known as the Americas – was “Terra Nullius” or uninhabited, settlers began a narrative of settler entitlement. Because the land was conceptualized as vacant, Settlers granted themselves permission to create colonies for settlement and resource extraction. Early Canadian national narratives relied on the image of the landscape as bountiful and empty – it was the New World as prophesied by European travellers and explorers. University of Winnipeg Indigenous Art historian Dr. Julie Nagam explores this concept during the 2017 Future Imaginary Symposium:

The project of colonialism is tied to the concepts of the civilized and the savage, which are intrinsically bound to technology and the advancements of societies. Metis historian, Olive Pete Dickenson, addresses historical colonial conditions in her book the Myth of the Savage. Dickenson’s main argument is that French settlers justified
colonialism of the Americas by creating the civilized/savage dichotomy. This totalizing project was applied to the people of the “New World” with a total disregard to the fact that in the 15th century, Indigenous people of the Americas had a greater variety of societies than Europe. In fact, beautifully epigraphed by artist and intellectual Robert Houlle who argues for the technological strength and advancements of past Indigenous societies. It is this reality that contradicts the rationale for the Americas.

Positioning Indigenous knowledge as advanced is also argued by author Lindsey Catherine Cornum’s article on Indigenous Futurism “The Creation Story is A Spaceship” which says:

By now, it has become a racist cliché that many would rather speculate that the Egyptian pyramids, or the large mound structures of the Mississippi tribes, or any other example of the virtuoso structures of non-European groups, were made possible only by extra-terrestrial assistance. The joke’s on them, because it’s us—those perpetually-underestimated Brown people—who are the advanced race capable of large-scale works of technology, memorial, etc. In other words, we are the aliens we’ve been waiting for. We are the highly intelligent beings the government has tried to cover up.

This paper will look at the effects of Indigenous futurism and visual art, and how Indigenous futurism can challenge colonial narratives and create new concepts of Indigenous identities. This paper will take the position that Indigenous knowledge and wisdom is important to the Indigenous Future Imaginary. Through a visual arts focus, this essay will explore the relationship between visual art narratives and Indigenous Futurity.

Indian Act /Colonial narratives in Canadian Art

The Indian Act is a piece of Canadian legislature that defines the laws around Indigenous identity. The Indian Act was the driving force behind Residential Schools, the Potlatch Ban, and ongoing disenfranchisement. While the Indian Act has changed over the past 150 years, it continues to define who is and is not identified as Indigenous within Canada institutions. This is implemented through status cards, which many Indigenous nations consider mandatory for citizenship. The status card, however, assumes that Indigenous people will lose qualifications for “Indian status” through marriage and reproduction; and therefore the population numbers are doomed to wither away. This creates issues of linking Indigenous identity to blood quantum rather than
community and kinship ties. In the eyes of the Canadian government, the future of Indigenous people is bleak. However, Aboriginal people of Canada are the fastest growing demographic (Statistics Canada 1) and continue to remain resilient: we’re still here despite all the attempts of colonial erasure.

It is important to begin the discussion of Indigenous Futurism with a look at past narratives of Canadian national identity. Many of the most well-known Canadian artworks are landscape paintings where the Indigenous presence was absent – such as the works by the Group of Seven. In Vancouver, our most well known University for Arts and Design is named after late artist Emily Carr. Carr’s work depicted beautiful villages of First Nations along the Northwest Coast, and her work is on permanent display at the Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver Art Gallery, Emily Carr 1). The “vanishing Indian” narrative inspired Carr’s paintings – she perceived the First Nations Peoples and culture as a dying breed that needed to be documented (Carr, Lecture on Totems, 1). Another visual artist who believed in the “vanishing Indian” narrative was photographer/ethnographer Edward Curtis. Curtis’ work depicted Indigenous men in various pan-Indigenous costumes and positions, which were (mis)represented as authentic regalia and documentation (King, Smithsonian, 1). The images have been mass reproduced and are still considered authentic images of a time past. Curtis’ work, however, employed darkroom techniques to erase signs of modernity that challenged his narrative of disappearance and Indigenous authenticity (King, Smithsonian, 1).

Additionally, Indigenous art and belongings that were collected and stolen from artists and communities are still acquired by museums, institutions, and collectors. These museums and institutions will often display these cultural belongings alongside dinosaur fossils. Indigenous cultural belongings displayed in a context that emphasizes extinction and primitivism works to reinforce negative stereotypes - reinforcing the concept of the “vanishing Indian”. The belief that Indigenous people were doomed to extinction was the inspiration for many anthropologists, ethnographers, missionaries, scholars, and collectors – research, scholarship, and artifact collection of Indigenous culture continues in the present day. This practice also applies to contemporary Indigenous art as well, as many museums today continue to collect and display contemporary Indigenous art.
The Dystopian Present

Considering global environmental crises - such as resource depletion, pollution, ecological collapse, overpopulation, nuclear waste, and global warming effects – it is apparent that we are in the dystopian present. Political corruption, capitalism, greed are all contributing to our current climate of environmental disrespect and our disconnection from the natural landscape. The dystopian present/future becomes more real as Nations worldwide fight over finite resources such as oil and water; meanwhile, ocean levels are rising and Bees are becoming extinct from excessive pesticide use and monocultures. These are issues that need to be addressed if we want to keep this planet inhabitable. It is also important to note that this year (2017) is Canada’s 150 celebration, where the many millennia of “First Peoples” presence and history on this very land remains unacknowledged or, at best, allocated to a “+” symbol. However, with concepts such as the “Era of Reconciliation” or Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) that aim to disclose the traumas created through the Residential school system, and the inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2Spirit (MMIWG2Ss), there is a growing acknowledgement that Indigenous Peoples are an important part of Canadian history.

In today’s climate, Indigenous Futurism is more important than ever before. Indigenous youth have the highest rates of suicide in the world (Health Canada, First Nations, 1), proving that many young individuals can no longer imagine future potential(s). Residential schools, the Indian act, the missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, racism and stereotypes, and the persistent colonial narrative of the vanishing Indian all contribute to the traumatic loss of language, culture, and belonging that many Indigenous people are coping with. There is an overwhelming underrepresentation of Indigenous bodies and knowledge in post-secondary education (Statistics Canada, Educational Attainment, 1), meanwhile there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous people within the criminal justice system (Statistics Canada, Correctional Statistics, 1).

Coupled with the responsibility of stewardship and respect for their land, culture, and territories in the face of corporate and capitalist greed, Indigenous people are faced with great challenges moving forward into a future unknown. Displacement from traditional lands and territories further creates isolation. Indigenous Futurism needs to address the colonial present, and offer alternatives to colonial-based identity politics.
“Canada 150+” is a reminder that the colonial narrative is present within Canadian culture. Reconciliation means that Indigenous voices and perspectives need to be reflected within Canadian national narratives, particularly within institutions. This includes acknowledging our presence on the land, re-examining our relationship to the environment, and acknowledging the timeless presence of the local Indigenous cultures and communities. Indigenous Futurism moves Indigenous culture, art and perspectives into the present and beyond – and out of the boxed-in history of the colonizer.

**New Art Disrupting Old Narratives**

Faced with blatant misrepresentation by the Western colonial art narrative, Indigenous artists today are creating artworks that challenge colonialism and the “vanishing Indian”, and “savage” narratives. These contemporary Indigenous artists are revealing the racist stereotypes within historic artworks, and are creating new narratives rooted in Indigenous perspectives and experiences. New Media Mohawk artist Skawennati Fragnito is creating an online episodic piece called *Timetraveller™* which allows viewers to travel time to visit and interact with different events. *Timetraveller™* rejects linear time with a pair of HUD (Heads Up Display) glasses that allows for multiple times and realities (About, TimeTraveller™ 1). This project allows for Indigenous non-linear time concepts to be imagined through an augmented reality. The project states:

Observe famous historical events and interact with the people who made them happen! Ideal for students, architects, artists, and anyone else who wants to experience history as it really was! (Home, TimeTraveller™, 1)

In 2011, *Digital Natives* created a collaborative project with 60 artists and curators in creating a series of 140-character tweets that would be displayed on a billboard along the Burrard Street Bridge (Robinson, Public Art in Vancouver, 44). The text-based project served “[as] an interruption of the city billboard’s regular commercial programming, *Digital Natives* explicitly destabilized narratives of Canada’s benevolent origins” (Robinson, Public Art in Vancouver, 46). It serves as a reminder that Indigenous people are present, and that Vancouver continues to occupy unceded Coast Salish territories. The name *Digital Natives* plays upon the use of Digital media by Native artists, also the term describes the generation who were raised with access to computers and digital media – creating layers of meaning.
Another Indigenous artist whose work addresses issues with representation within the colonial narrative is Kwakwaka'wakw artist Sonny Assu. Assu's work creates a dialogue between colonial art narratives, Indigenous concepts, and science fiction. In the Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition, *We Come to Witness: Sonny Assu in dialogue with Emily Carr*, prints of Emily Carr paintings are re-conceptualized with concepts of Indigenous futurism within popular culture signifiers. The Emily Carr paintings are reprinted and overlaid with Northwest Coast formline design elements, which turn the iconic Carr paintings into estranged landscapes. It is important to note that Carr’s standpoint on the future of Indigenous people was bleak. “Assu confronts the portrayal of Indigenous peoples as a vanishing race by interrupting Carr’s landscapes with an insertion of an ovoid and u-shapes” (*We Come to Witness, Van Art Gallery* 1). Assu challenges the colonial narrative within Carr’s work - the concept of disappearance and the “vanishing Indian” is reworked to explore themes of space exploration and alien abductions. Perhaps the empty landscapes of Carr’s paintings are due to this mass exodus, rather than her imagined “vanishing Indian”.

Portland based Crow Nation artist Wendy Redstar explores colonial narratives and future possibilities through a visual arts practice. Redstar, inspired by the photography of Edward Curtis, creates silhouettes of the male portrait subjects in Curtis’ work, - giving these over circulated images a “rest” (*Redstar, Contemporary Native*, 1). Redstar’s work also explores locations within the Crow Nation where Curtis took photographs, but overlays this map with personal photos of Crow women, which links the women back to the land without relying on the artist’s gaze. Redstar’s work also examines contemporary issues – such as the growing oil industry on Turtle Island through her piece “síkahpoyií / bishée / baleiíttaashtee (Motor Oil Buffalo Dress)” (2013) which uses oil-derived materials to create a traditional-inspired dress. Redstar’s work, *Thunder Up Above*, reimagines an Indigenous presence in the final frontier: space (*Redstar, Contemporary Native, 1*). *Thunder Up Above* creates an Indigenous future - a Future Imaginary that spans beyond our traditional territories and spaces.

**Digital and Social Media as Decolonial Tools**

New and digital media provides new tools for Indigenous narratives and art. Indigenous new media visual artists have the ability to utilize online spaces and speak to wider audiences and connect across landscapes. In creating her Edward Curtis Map
project, Wendy Redstar utilized Facebook to connect to Crow women (Redstar, Contemporary Native, 1). Today, many First Nations themselves utilize websites to network with band and tribal members and communities. With large numbers of Indigenous people living in urban areas and off-reserve, linking individuals to their language, heritage and cultural identity over large geographic distances has become possible. Online media can offer rural Indigenous artists’ sites of dialogue and exchange. As a Selkirk First Nation citizen who lives, works, and plays on the unceded Coast Salish territories known as Metro Vancouver, the Internet has proven invaluable to connecting to my family, community, culture, and Nation 1700km away (as the crow flies) in the Yukon.

Digital archives and online databases are becoming more prevalent, and are invaluable resources for research and revival of traditional Indigenous knowledge. Because Indigenous Peoples’ artworks and belongings have been labeled as “primitive”, Museums rather than contemporary art galleries have often collected these belongings. However, Museum websites’ online databases often contain geographic data, images, collection history, - which is helpful to the “repatriation” of cultural belongings. The Yukon Government’s project Searching for Our Heritage states in a 2013 study that “[increasingly], digital media is enabling the repatriation of cultural, artistic, and intellectual property associated with cultural artifacts” (Searching for Our Heritage 5). These online databases also work to supplement Indigenous Stories, and knowledge for future generations.

The Internet can be a site of racism, sexism, and colonialism. The Canadian Broadcast Channel – CBC – has removed its comment section on their webpages and stories that discuss Indigenous politics and issues (CBC, Uncivil Dialogue, 1). This allows the CBC a way to avoid racism and hate towards Indigenous peoples. However, this tactic also works to silence difficult conversations. When many news sources refused to cover the anti-Dakota Access Pipeline/Water Protectors, the Internet served as a site to connect the general population and Indigenous Peoples worldwide. More than 280 Indigenous Nations worldwide travelled to North Dakota in solidarity with the Water Protectors (From 280 Tribes A Protest, NY Times 1), it has been the largest gathering of Indigenous people in over 100 years. This reveals the potentials of cyberspace to create communities and challenge colonial projects; but also reveals issues of power relations and (mis)representations in mainstream media outlets. While
there is potential to connect large groups of people, corporate interests may privatize or silence networked communications.

Mohawk curator and author Steven Loft, in his essay “Mediacosmology” states that the Internet and “Cyberspace connects the past to the present and the spiritual to the material in ways that would make our elders laugh” (175). Cyberspace and the Internet can create new connections and communities, or what Loft calls “Networked Territory” (175). These are territories which connect users- or citizens- to a common “territory” such as a First Nations band website, or a Facebook community page. Cyberspace has the potential to tell stories outside of Western concepts of linear time, through imbedded media, and hyperlinks. Author Lindsey Catherine Cornum states “[s]tories are a technology we use to guide us through the chaos of overlapping times and spaces. Indigenous Futurism is about honing our technologies to the most liberating ends” (Creation Story is a Spaceship, Vozâvoz 1). New and digital medias also offer Indigenous artists the ability to challenge Western concepts of linear time. GIFs as a medium allows for infinite time and looping, while videography techniques allow for time jumps and non-linear stories. Indigenous Orality, narratives, and storytelling conceptualize time as non-linear, moving between past present and future. Looping and circular time has been a concept within Indigenous pedagogy that can be linked to Indigenous language and philosophy.

**Futurity**

Digital arts have abilities to reveal and explore Indigenous worldviews, without having to occupy a certain physical space. Digital spaces also allow for Indigenous storytellers and Elders to document and share their knowledge for future generations. Learning Indigenous knowledge(s), language, and worldviews has vast potential on new media platforms. Northern Tutchone – the language of my nation – is now available to learn online, and in a mobile app which allows students to learn language concepts and pronunciations across far distances (Northern Tutchone, Yukon Native Language Centre 1). Multimedia resources online make learning Indigenous languages accessible, and digital spaces allows real-time connections to teachers, courses.

Digital and virtual spaces offer new ways to think about Indigenous knowledge and territories. In her essay “NWC on the UP…Load”, Lakota visual
artist Dana Claxton asks “If Aboriginal thought is to occupy the Internet, I am curious as to how Aboriginal Imperatives such as generosity, courage, wisdom, and fortitude will exist in cyberspace” (Native Art, 949). Through digital and virtual technologies, Indigenous concepts and knowledge(s) can be learned, taught, shared, looped, glitched, repeated, revisited. Digital media, such as the Internet, offers potentials to connect vast networks of people and cultures – this is important to help reconnect Indigenous communities and families. We must reject colonial narratives that mis-represent Indigenous presence and future potentials. Indigenous Futurity is in the wisdom of the past, ignited by the actions of the present.

Works Cited


