

CREATIVE COMBAT:
INDIGENOUS ART, RESURGENCE, AND DECOLONIZATION

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

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of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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University of Victoria

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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

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Dr. Taiaiake Alfred, Indigenous Governance, University of Victoria
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Dr. Arthur Kroker, Political Science, University of Victoria
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ABSTRACT

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

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

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DEDICATION

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

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

*Creativity armed is an
unstoppable force.*

- Raoul Vaneigem

CHAPTER 1

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

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

- Jimmie Durham

CHAPTER 1

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

The linear trajectory of progress configured by coloniality and modernity, however, is not new. Tropes of the vacant, open, colonial frontier coupled with the dying, vanishing, disappearing, maligned, forgotten, abjected, and invisible Indian have been with us since the first waves of settler invasion. What distinguishes our contemporary moment from previous eras, however, are the strategic and creative ways in which Indigenous peoples are contending not only with the tired tropes of colonial misrepresentation found in contemporary media and normative discourse¹, but also with the systems and structures of power that re/produce this dialectical antagonism of conjoined forces. Settler colonialism orders Indigenous social, political, and economic life by conditioning and facilitating its own reproduction. It deploys violence, coercion, and dispossession to instantiate an ideological and material apparatus of control in which Indigenous peoples are subjected to imperial techniques of governance. This regime of rule denies our autonomy and freedom by creating us as “subjects of Empire” (Coulthard 2007). Colonialism is thus deeply entwined with contemporary capitalism in a doubled helix of domination; it enforces material forms of “accumulation by dispossession” and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RE/VISIONING THE WORLD

How, then, are we to create spaces of freedom in a present that is defined by complexity and entanglement? Colonialism remains both an originary structure of dispossession “that is fundamentally grounded in the theft of land and the usurpation of Indigenous peoples’ political authority in relationship to [the] land and their communities” (Epstein 2015) and a “dictatorial myth [for] how we live our lives” (Schlebrügge 2000) that continues to shape the Indigenous imaginary. Colonialism reproduces itself as both a hegemonic narrative and a normative order. The colonial imaginary occupies Indigenous land and consciousness, but Indigenous artists have resisted its discursive enclosure and the democratic dictatorship of coloniality by performing indigeneity² as a counter-imperative and counter-presence to Empire. Indigeneity marks our difference in multiplicity; our diverse nations, homelands, and ways of being provide the literal and symbolic ground from which our creative practices are derived and mobilized.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

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

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

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

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

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that Indigenous peoples have long understood the relationship between creation and survival. “Creating,” she states “is about transcending the basic survival mode through using a resource or capability that every Indigenous community has retained throughout colonization — the ability to create and be creative” (Smith 2012: 159). Creativity is not only essential to the regeneration of Indigenous societies in *response* to colonial invasion, it is intrinsic to who we are as human beings:

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

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

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

INDIGENOUS RENAISSANCE(S)

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

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

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

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

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

CREATIVE SOVEREIGNTIES, SOVEREIGN CREATIVITY

Indigenous artistic renaissances are frequently discussed in relation to the discourse of sovereignty³. As Indigenous creativity expanded across disciplines, genres and aesthetics, many

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INDIGENOUS ART AND NATIONHOOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Alfred’s view, the restoration of nationhood is “the fundamental struggle”. Art-making is an embedded part of this process; one that flows from both relational practice and Indigenous understandings of nationhood without the state⁴. For Leanne Simpson, Anishinaabeg nationhood is “based on a series of radiating responsibilities” (2013: 2) that form an interconnected network of relational ties to land, people, place, and all beings. Like art, music, film, storytelling and

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

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

CONSTELLATED CREATIVITY: SELF/COLLECTIVE/COMMUNITY/NATION

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

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

FIGHTING WHERE WE ARE

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

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

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

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

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: DECOLONIAL BRICOLAGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

research is a self-reflexive, intersectional⁵ and transdisciplinary project that cuts across multiple concurrent fields of inquiry simultaneously: Indigenous politics, resurgence, and governance, contemporary art and aesthetics, (new) media and communications, music and performance, hip-hop, social movements, critical theory, and decolonial/anticolonial studies. While the scope of my inquiry is broad, my research investigates a recurrent set of critical thematics and concepts refracted and co-determined by the Indigenous artists interviewed in my research. My approach to engaging critical texts, literatures and voices from such diverse sources is not simply the collation and re-presentation of concepts implicit in existing bricolage research methods but, instead, a critical practice of *sampling*⁶ and *remixing* that makes use of all available theoretical sources and intellectual histories as the source material for a recombinant critique that is inspired as much by Indigenous art-making and bricolage, as it is by hip-hop artists and Situationist practices of detournement. As I suggest later, these practices are double refracted in the media-making practiced by Indigenous artists. I propose this research method as a means of embodying an ethico-political commitment to achieving symmetry and balance in the form and content of my work, such that it remains true to the aims of decolonization, resurgence, and Indigenous theory.

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

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

MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF STRUGGLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘TO LOOK FOR NEW WEAPONS’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER OUTLINES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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