

Ghost Dances on Silver Screens

*Pumzi and Older Than America*¹

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“Ghost Dances on Silver Screens: *Pumzi and Older Than America*” is a meditation on the ghost artistry of filmmakers Wanuri Kahiu and Georgina Lightning. Ghosts are an embodiment of the invisible forces of a past that hasn’t gone anywhere. Revealing what is normally concealed, ghosts are sacred/demonic tricksters who provide alternate perspectives on the here and now and on the future. Asha from Kahiu’s *Pumzi* and Rain from Lightning’s *Older than America* engage with the ghosts of their ancestors not as an exercise in nostalgia for a paradise lost nor as a scare-you-to-death adrenaline ride. Rain and Asha dance with the ancestors so that they might reorder the cosmos. They are futurists, reanimating and reinventing the world.

Ghosts. Spectral Visions. Hauntings. Lost Memory Restored.

Think of a ghost story from your own life or from very close to home. Have you had personal encounters with ghosts? Have you dreamt about friends, loved ones, enemies, strangers who have died and come back to walk in your dreams? Do you wake up disappointed, relieved, or puzzled that the dead are still dead, despite their vivid appearances? Have restless spirits brushed up against you when you were wide awake and moving through the world? Have you called on the ancestors to come to your aid? Do ghosts/ancestors fill your eyes with visions, your mouth with poetry? Do they spew curses or threats? Share experiences? Dance your fears? Sing your joy? Do spooks, specters, and shades offer a portal, a way out of no way, to the future?

What’s your ghost theory? I know you have one. We are all pattern masters, artists and scientists, philosophers, and clowns making sense of the chaos. Confounded, we ask: What are these compelling beings who do not exist on the material plane yet have such a rich existence? I’m a futurist speculating on disappeared history. Before analyzing the ghost artistry of filmmakers Wanuri Kahiu and Georgina Lightning, here are my ghost theories.

Ghost Theorizing

Visible and invisible, real and not real, dead but not gone... Ghosts are transcendent and transgressive. Scary fun! Thoughtful terror. They go beyond the body, beyond the material universe. They breach time and space. They test/break social, moral, and ethical codes. Ghosts support and defy traditions, rearrange social reality. They are unresolved history; tasks left undone; buried horrors and mysteries that won't rest in peace. Ghosts spook the living into transforming their world.

Ghosts are everywhere. No one lives far from haunted houses, gardens, and forests; ghostly galleons ride the sea—some appear for a heartbeat, a night, or sail forever. Ghost trains rush through the underground. Rivers and streams are filled with haints, phantoms, and hungry wraiths. There are ghosts in the machines! Some are thin as a whisper; others are loud and rowdy—poltergeists. In German, *Geist* means spirit, ghost, and mind. Ghosts tempt us, taunt us, warn and save us. They are jealous of our warm flesh, greedy for our voluptuous lives; they want to swallow our sweet breaths. Sacred and profane, ghosts are restless guardians of our humanity. Ghosts help define what it means to be alive, a brief instant in the great chain of being that is life. Ghosts are part of the medicine wheel.

One ghost article I came across on *Huffington Post* claims:

The idea of ghosts as hopeful evidence of life after death goes all the way back to ancient Egypt, where it was commonly believed that death was merely a transition to some mysterious netherworld of another existence. (Spiegel)

I appreciate Egypt and its African bounty of magic, science, mystery, and art, but indeed, elephants mourn their dead, returning to weep and trumpet over the bones of loved ones. Are elephants haunted? They remember/map the past, know death, and project into the future. They have a theatre of mind and dreams. Do elephant-ghosts thunder through the ground, calling the living elephants to action, goading them to change? Do elephant-ghosts warn against folly, scare elephants out of peaceful sleep or complacent apathy? Are elephantoms entertaining the herd with a delicious, dead-but-not-gone-yet thrill?

Ghosts are ubiquitous and far outnumber the living. Other animals may be haunted. Beyond Western culture and its Egyptian roots, humans all over the world and throughout time have believed in ghosts, have taken note that we are on our way to being ghosts. Perhaps some of our earliest stories are

ghost stories, messages from the ancestors. In the theatre of our minds, the living and the dead gather for grand comedies and dramas. We tell these ghost stories to one another, act them out. Ghosts are long-running popular culture in every story-telling form: Hungry Ghost Festivals, phantom operas, spook sculptures and spectral tapestry tales, badass *I'm dead but I'm goin' get you sucker* jokes. Méliès, the early French filmmaker, invents special effects and makes the *Haunted Castle* in 1896, four years before he makes *A Trip to the Moon*. Ghosts are primal stories intrinsic to our imaginative capacity.

In Nigeria the Yoruba Egungun masquerades call down the ancestors to expose the moral/ethical character of the living and challenge them to change for the better. Dancer/performers in colorful, cascading robes are possessed by the spirits of the dead. These sacred and profane Egungun cleanse the social world with their performances of the moral and amoral. The Egungun end their ritual masquerade with an offering of warnings and blessings.

At the end of the nineteenth century, inspired by the visions of the Wovoka, a Northern Paiute spiritual leader, indigenous people all across the American West performed Ghost Dances to bring peace, health, and prosperity. A call to the ancestors and the “old ways,” these communal ritual performances were to reanimate and reinvigorate the living in the face of holocaust.

Where do ghosts fit in our current “age of reason?” Ghosts are liminal beings, the presence of an absence. We may forget or maybe we're not aware; however, dead ancestors are always manifest in who we are and what we do. We are ongoing natural and social history. Ghosts haunt the futures we aim for. According to recent Pew Research (Lugo et al.), Harris (Shannon-Missal), and *Huffington Post* (Spiegel) polls, 40–50 percent of Americans believe in ghosts, while 18–30 percent say they've had an encounter with a ghost. In our materialist, post-enlightenment techno-times, almost as many people in the USA believe in ghosts as in Darwinian evolution (“Public's Views”). More people believe in angels than in ghosts or evolution. How does that make you feel? Who haunts the room you're in? The ground our lives are built on?² Go and find out. That's a life assignment.

America is a Haunted House

Let us pour libation to our ghostly ancestors with deeds and thoughts. Let us ask: Have we taken *Dream Suppressants*? Ditched our imaginary friends? Fewer men than women believe in ghosts. More people of color

than white people believe in ghosts. Fewer adult men than adult women admit to having had childhood imaginary friends (see Lugo et al.; Spiegel; Carlson and Taylor; Taylor and Mannering), although no gender disparity exists among children. Are these surveys proof that white men are more rational and rigorous than the rest of us or that they're liars fronting logical positivist childhoods and objective, hard sf manhood? Or is it that women are credulous and colored folks superstitious? Or do *Dream Suppressants* work in a gendered/raced way? Interestingly, more artists are willing to admit to imaginary friends than non-artists. Creativity and problem solving correlate with lively childhood and adult imagination. Perhaps you've heard Einstein's supposed aphorism: "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales." The ghost of his genius persuades us of this truth. Ghosts work the metaphorical mind.

So my questions as an artist dealing with ghosts are: Do some of us refuse to hear the ancestors whispering on the wind? Or have those voices grown too quiet in the abstract cacophony that separates us from our histories and the consequences of our past and present actions? Are we embarrassed by our metaphorical, intuitive, childish, so-called savage minds? Do we tolerate our rich metaphorical minds yet aspire to a pure, rational, objective, mature, white masculine mind that can exploit/control the metaphorical mind? Do we want to deny our capacity, our need, our desire to commune with the immaterial? Or perhaps, we struggle in a false binary. The mind is metaphorical *and* rational despite the mythic, scientific ideology that splits mind into right brain/left brain antagonists.

If a person sees visions, spirits of the dead, or folks from her dreams strutting down the avenue offering warnings and blessings—should she question her sanity? Can we believe in science and ghosts? Are we twenty-first-century technocrats hell-bent on colonizing the future and the past, and do ghosts haunt us, trouble us out of our imperialist follies and delusions?

We live in the presence of an absence. Don't worry about that dystopic near future looming over the horizon coming to get you in story after movie after novel after TV show. The Apocalypse has already happened. Actually, it's ongoing and we have survived. (So far!) Comfort is precarious, an illusion some of us enjoy as a privilege. The dead bones we stomp across can seem silent. Meaning has been extracted from the factory knock-off clothing we wear. We don't recall the history swirling through the monotonous concrete architecture we inhabit—all over the globe. Is this architecture the way we want to shape space, structure our encounters, contain our spirits?

The history ghosting around the distribution of wealth is particularly illusive. Of American voters, 52 percent don't know who the Koch brothers are (Carlotto and Angela Olson). One hundred families in India own one-fourth of the GDP of that country (Mishra). Our current distribution of wealth is worse than in the fantasy epics of kings, queens, lords, and ladies playing the throne game. Is this good for us, for our future? Too many of us are willing to believe that we have little power in the face of a global predatory capitalist juggernaut that's hell-bent on consuming our humanity (and a large portion of the biosphere). Apocalypse is a denuded world drowning in consumables where once life flourished. What wealth have we squandered? With no wet lands to buffer the ravaging storms, with so little delta silt trickling down the dammed Mississippi, Louisiana is losing a football-field size land mass every hour to the sea. At this rate Central Park would vanish in a month (Rich).

Shouldn't we all Question our Sanity?

America is a haunted house. India, Africa, Europe, China too. Some of us fear the spooks ghosting through the shadows. Indeed, world history might put a spectral chill on escapist fun. But I say, finding a way out of no way is always delightful fantasy entertainment, a real escapist thrill. And, as J. R. R. Tolkien says, only jailors are against escapism.

We are the generations gone by and those to come, the miracle of the web of life, a planetary network, yet ... 25–40 percent of the American population doesn't believe in climate change but the majority do believe in the invisible hand of the market (Buchele). Many also believe that nature and nurture are an actual antagonistic reality out there in the universe, that we can sensibly reduce life to a question of genes versus environment. In this view, genes are like atoms, discrete entities constituting and controlling bodies. And these are selfish, imperialist, rugged individualist, conquering cowboy genes devoid of context, history, relationship, or community ... Gangsta genes are in charge of the future. *Nothing personal, just business*—these words are the gangsta-gene blessing, the mind-wipe spell we whisper or yell over immoral, unethical, but legal dastardly deeds. In the midst of the sixth extinction, we should question this suicidal consensus delusion.

Everything is Personal!

The 7,000-year-old Mississippi Delta gone in eighty-five years haunts me ...

I agree with scientists Lynn Margulis, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Dana Beresford-Kroeger, with Cree and Kikuyu elders, with mystics, skeptical atheists, and agnostics, with Wiccan Pagans and Buddhists. Life is a global phenomenon. Each individual life is part of all life, the dead and the unborn. It's a symbiotic planet with a mirage of a space between nature and nurture (see Margulis; Fox Keller; Beresford-Kroeger). We are our environment. Life is non-linear. We make the truth that makes us. We de-animate the universe at our peril. A lifeless universe is death to us. According to monkey madness, ape solipsism, and patriarchal cosmology, the world, the universe, consists of abstract objects to be manipulated by the one true subject—man in the image of God, now with the techno-power of God. All beings and processes in the universe are resources and tools for techno-god-man's enterprises. The object-universe is to be valued only in so much as it is instrumental to our mad monkey schemes. Trees, bugs, ideas, moons, songs, stories, bacteria aren't valuable, aren't good in and of their cosmic selves, but are instrumental commodities in a techno-arms race. This devastation of spirit is the ongoing Apocalypse right now.

So, as an unprecedented number of species are driven to extinction, as languages and cultures are disappeared, as rivers and traditions are sucked dry, we struggle to re-animate the universe. Ghosts from the past and future haunt us, whisper in our ears, just below consciousness. Spooks make us shiver with a sense of wonder and awe. The dead we've forgotten dance with our spirits.

Ghosts are an embodiment of invisible forces from a past that hasn't gone anywhere. Revealing what is normally concealed, ghosts are sacred/demonic tricksters. They can offer us alternate perspectives on the here and now. Existing in Deep Time, ghosts are activation energy in the midst of Apocalypse Now. They point to a way out of no way to the future. This is the escapist premise of Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* and Georgina Lightning's *Older Than America*. Two women filmmakers, one Kikuyu from Kenya and one Cree from Canada, work to activate our capacity to see what is invisible. Their narratives challenge consensus delusions that would destroy us. Kahiu and Lightning create protagonists engaged in transforming the disappeared past and apocalyptic devastated now into a possible future.

Ghost Art

Pumzi takes place in post-World War III Kenya. In this future, Asha, a scientist/curator working at a museum of the dead in the Maitu Community, doesn't really want to take her *Dream Suppressants*. She doesn't want to colonize/oppress her metaphorical mind. WWII was the water war. Water is the measure of wealth, the currency of this future society (and our current society). It is dispensed at security checkpoints. Sweat and urine are collected and recycled—everyone in the Maitu community has a personal jar. Asha shares water with the pale (working-class?) woman cleaning the toilets near the virtual museum of the dead. Asha doesn't just want to catalogue and mourn bleached fossils, withered limbs, and dried bugs. She would follow her visions of life into a radiated, devastated landscape and plant hope. Asha is no helpless, suffering victim. She would transform the world. Hope is, of course, not the same as optimism. Hope is counterfactual, is faith in a Magic If. Hope is a bridge through ongoing devastation. Hope is part of survivance (Vizenor)—a dynamic present inventing tomorrow.

In *Older Than America*, Rain, a teacher living now in Indian Country in Minnesota, is haunted, ridden by ghost ancestors. She doesn't want to electrocute her connection to her ancestors' wisdom and take Jesus as her personal savior even if he could walk on water and raise the dead. But Rain fears going "crazy" like her comatose Mom, who was locked away in a mental ward after doctors tried to mind-wipe her. Rain also fears passing tainted, "schizophrenic" genes onto any babies she might have. She is afraid of the future that might come through her body from her ancestors. Haunted, Rain has, up until the now of the film, refused marriage and family. Still, she is not another Indian casualty of European Manifest Destiny. She acts to heal herself and her community, and create a new future.

Both Asha and Rain commune with the ghosts of their ancestors not as an exercise in nostalgia for a paradise lost or simply as a wonderful scare-you-to-death adrenaline ride. Rain and Asha dance with the ancestors so that they might reorder the cosmos. They are futurists reanimating and reinventing their worlds. They don't take their *Dream Suppressants*! They redefine what is taken for granted as normal, as sane. The self-destructive normalized brutality of civilized empires is called out, exposed. It's not empire business as usual or regrettable, tragic demise, but Apocalypse that can be prevented, subverted, transformed: survivance. Both films clarify our subjectivity. On screen and in the audience, we are agents of action, agents of change. The future is not inevitable. We are the fates weaving catastrophe or unraveling it.

In Kahi's and Lightning's films, the dead, the devastated haunt the protagonists and call them to life. It's personal!

Breath

Kahi starts *Pumzi* with an image montage of: news clippings detailing a devastated biosphere; extinct bugs floating in glass jars; and the definition of the Kikuyu word *Maitu*, which means "mother seed," from *Maa*—truth and *Itu*—ours. The citizens of the Maitu Community are survivors of the World Water War. After cataloguing Apocalypse, the camera finds Asha asleep at her desk in the Virtual Natural History Museum. Dreaming, Asha comes upon a great mother tree blossoming in the desert. Asha is joyous, reaching out to the lush greenness of the tree. Her beautifully painted face glows. And then an alarm brings her back to the sterile office at the museum. A percussive voice insists over and over: *Dream detected. Take your dream suppressants.* In this society, dreams are overtly colonized and controlled. Asha complies with the insistent command, sucking down pills and a sip of precious water. Kahi's first-act visuals juxtapose journalistic realism, surrealistic dreams, and repression of spirit.

The museum has an exhibit dedicated to the "last tree." This exhibit is a shrine to passive nostalgia for lost species, peoples, and cultures. The exhibit allows viewers to weep and despair, to feel catharsis at unavoidable, inevitable tragedy. No other action/sacrifice is required. However, the majestic mother tree in Asha's vivid dream is a provocative ghost. Asha is haunted by a plant, by the spirit of the woods, by a wet, green world. Tree ancestors call her to action for the future.

After the dream Asha trudges through what passes for life in post-WWIII Kenya. The Maitu Community is the abstract post-apocalyptic future already found in any *New York Times Style Magazine*—angular and sterile, glass and steel, all grays, beige, taupe, no vivid colors. The people living and working in the Maitu Community are as gray and taupe as the furniture. They shuffle through the motions of existence like living dead. They are compelled to be "self-powered" energy generators. Community spirit is taupe people on treadmills, ellipticals, and rowing machines generating electricity or gray people in the toilets collecting bodily fluids. Good citizens drink their recycled sweat and urine. Yum. They don't dream or smile. They endure.

Returning to her desk, Asha receives a mysterious package. A good scientist, she analyzes its contents. To her surprise, someone has sent a sample

of non-radioactive dirt with numbers that could be the coordinates to her mother-tree-ghost dream. Smelling the dirt, she is plunged into a water dream and sees another vision of the mother tree. Female authorities order her to destroy the dirt, destroy the physical evidence that connects her dreams to a living world beyond the compound. Dirt connects her to the past and the future, to the spirits animating the universe. How can the leaders ask her to destroy such artifacts?

Recognizing that the dirt is sacred, Asha rebels against the abstract Ikea present she's stuck in. A good scientist, she defies unreasonable technocrats and plants a seed in the dirt and adds water. Violent male storm troopers who bust through the museum, smashing the exhibits and trashing the past, do not intimidate Asha out of her good sense. The burly operatives drag her from her desk, but not from her truth. Smelling/tasting the living dirt, Asha believes in the ghost tree and heeds its call to action. Aided by the woman working the toilets (with whom she shared water), Asha crawls through a ventilator and escapes the sterile Maitu Community.

Outside Asha is confronted with a desolate, lethal environment. Yet the sea of radioactive sand does not deter her. Carrying the mother seed and dirt, her small bottle of water, and a compass, Asha strides through the desert in search of the coordinates of her dream. The sun batters her. The poison sand is unrelenting. A lifeless, hopeless landscape threatens to defeat her. Abandoning the compass, Asha follows a spirit trail. Finally she finds the skeleton of a dead mother tree.

Asha is thrilled to meet the ghost that has been haunting her, calling her to the future. In an impossible, lifeless desert, at the roots of blistered tree bones, Asha rejoices. She is more than a cog in the impersonal machine of the post-modern state. She plants the seed and nourishes it with her body, with the ocean caught in her blood, urine, and sweat. Asha is a mother seed, Maitu, our truth. The trees are her ancestors and her children. She blooms as the camera pulls out for an impossible overhead shot. Asha becomes the material substance of her dreams.

The breathtaking visual beauty and elegant silent movie simplicity of the storytelling are the thrills of *Pumzi*. From our own devastated landscapes, the audience shares and believes in Asha's vision of the mother tree, a ghost of life before the water wars and a promise of a green future. Asha crosses our radiated deserts and offers us pumzi, breath in Swahili. Hope.

Circles

An early frame in *Older than America* reads: *This story is inspired by actual events*. In other words: This is a real ghost story. Georgina Lightning's first full-length film, the first big-budget full-length film directed by a Native woman, begins with a dream/vision of a Sun Dance and an evocation of the medicine wheel. Using traditional ceremonies in a public commercial film is risky. Artists could be accused of exploiting or monetizing sacred wisdom by exposing it to the uninitiated. Writer/director/performer Lightning speaks about the necessity of including the Sun Dance and medicine wheel:

The opening scene of the film is the sun dance ceremony. It is the most powerful ceremony we have. The Plains Indians, we have sun dances, we have sweats, and we have healing ceremonies. When I was creating this whole scenario around the boarding school thing, I went back and forth so many times and I prayed so hard on it: Should I incorporate these ceremonies into the film? Because it is taboo to show them publicly. I'm doing this for my community, and I need them to accept and endorse this film. But I just had to go with it. At the end of the day, it's about who we are: our ceremonies, our dances, our songs. All of those things that existed before boarding schools. All of those things that are older than America. (Wise)

Like Kahiu's crafting of *Pumzi*, Lightning also frames her film with a call to realism and a call to tradition and metaphor. Watching *Older than America*, the audience can believe in science and ghosts. Lightning proclaims in interviews the autobiographical and healing nature of her ghost film (Wise; Stolte).³ She invites her audience to join the healing circle.

Lightning herself plays Rain, the daughter of a boarding school survivor. The motto of her mother's school was: "Kill the Indian and save the man." Tortured, driven to suicide or neglected to death, and then buried in an unmarked mass grave, several ghost children from her mother's time at the school haunt Rain and the audience. Actually, the ghost children stare out of the school's window in an audience point-of-view (POV) shot before they step in front of Rain's car on the highway. The audience, like Rain, witnesses the presence of an absence. A dead uncle who was killed for speaking out about boarding school atrocities steps from her Sun Dance dreams into her backyard. This is another audience POV shot. Rain doesn't see her uncle at first. The audience sees/believes in the ghost uncle before Rain bumps into him on the street. The filmmaker uses the realism of a flesh and blood actor caught on film to forge a sacred bond with the audience. Dramatic irony—we are believers before Rain is.

Ghost nightmares are unsettling to Rain; however, having visions of ghosts when awake and walking through the world is worse. Rain doubts her sanity. So does her partner, Johnny. But the audience has experienced her truth. We're on her team, eager for her to believe what we believe. Rain fears she could be "schizophrenic" like her mother, who has undergone shock treatment and been locked away in a mental hospital for telling the truth about the boarding school. This truth was called the ravings of a mad woman by a priest who engineered a cover-up. *Crazy Native Woman* is a narrative just waiting to be filled by anyone challenging the Apocalypse—the business-as-usual genocide. In the so-called rational empire, a woman speaking truth to power is a danger to herself, a danger to us all.

The boarding school has been shut down; the grounds abandoned. The Catholic priests and nuns who ran it believed in one truth, *one ring to rule them all*. Fascists, saving souls and educating savages into the twentieth century, they justified and covered up torture, abuse, and forsaking children to an earthquake death in a locked cellar. The school is now deserted, supposedly history over and done with. The current city regime wants to turn the derelict grounds into a profit-making spa-resort. The ghosts of the children rebel! So does an uncle murdered as part of the cover-up. However, when these ghosts first appeal to Rain, she doubts her sanity.

The same priest who abused Rain's mother and manipulated Rain's Christian aunt knows that Rain is sane. Yet, to protect his control of reality, the priest insists that Rain is crazy like her mother. The hospital goes along with his assessment, fries Rain's brain, and locks her in a mental ward. Another *crazy woman*! It runs in our families. Rather than healing, the doctors offer mind-wipe and incarceration. But with the aid of the ghost uncle and a white girlfriend working at the hospital, Rain escapes the locked mental ward. Tribal elders use traditional practices to help Rain explore her visions and heal. By embracing local, indigenous wisdom, Rain can accept the reality of the dead schoolchildren and her murdered uncle. She solves the mystery of their disappearances and finds their hidden graves. Finally, she exposes the business and town officials (including the priest) who would continue profiting from the cover-up of neglect and murder. History and sanity are restored. Rain has no reason to fear passing "insane" genes on to her children. She has found a way out of no way. By healing the community, she revises her personal story and claims the future.

Luke, a white geologist, has a ghost recovery experience similar to Rain's. Luke, like Rain, finds a way to lead the full life that seemed impossible in the jumble of abstract postmodernity. Scientist Luke is haunted—he sees

the ghost of a friend who committed suicide. Additionally, the geological events he examines at the abandoned boarding school defy western scientific explanation. Instead of insisting on hard sf, white, masculine rationality, Luke listens to the ancestors on the wind and to the tribal elders. Luke's struggle to understand his ghost visions result in wisdom and healing.

Despite being played by Bradley Cooper, Luke is not the center of a *hunky white male scientist saved by spiritual Indians* story with exotic booty call thrown in. Rain loves Johnny, the head of Native police, played by Adam Beach. Difficult history troubles and challenges their love, yet Johnny shares Rain's spiritual journey. Johnny comes to believe in the ghosts' truth and aids Rain in uncovering their stories.

At the end of the film, Rain and her community make a healing circle that includes Rain's mom (released from the mental ward), Rain's aunt (no longer enthralled by nefarious priest), Johnny, friends, the elders, scientist Luke, other wayward souls, and, of course, the ghosts of the boarding-school children and Rain's uncle. The living and the dead create a medicine wheel to celebrate the future and a return of the "old ways."

Hope

Pumzi and *Older than America* end with warnings and blessings. Both films are lost memory restored, medicine wheels. Wanuri Kahiu and Georgina Lightning proclaim: We must believe in science, in ghosts, in ancestral wisdom and post-apocalyptic futures redesigned and reanimated. We are all mother seeds.

After dreaming out loud with these movies, I wake up inspired, puzzled, hopeful in the face of ongoing Apocalypse. Kahiu and Lightning call up Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, medicine wheels. Like an Egungun masquerade, the films offer sacred hope, thrilling escapism. Like Asha reaching to the mother tree blooming in the desert, like Rain reaching to lost children who shake the ground with their stories, we can refuse *Dream Suppressants* or Electro-Shock treatment for ancestral wisdom.

I have visions, spectral dreams. Spooked, I see mother trees planted everywhere, floating cities bobbing on rising oceans, and a deluge of salmon flying upstream to the future. I see unruly cyborgs haunted by the dead, by the future, talking to all their imaginary friends and ghosts. Bees and bats and children are at the center. I see the marvelous tech we want, a portal to our full potential, not the mass-marketed lethal widgets that turn us into mind-wiped consumers. I see wealth redistributed. I celebrate the mind of

nature, the mind of space. The commons, the people, and the bacteria become sacred, personal, about their own business, a bountiful shared mystery. Metaphorical and rational, I write that way out of no way to an animated universe full of wondrous possibility.

Notes

- 1 This essay is based on a talk/paper I gave at the Science Fiction Research Association/WisCon Convention in May 2014 and as Guest of Honor at Sirens in October 2014, where they asked me to meditate on ghosts.
- 2 It was Ho-Chunk and the Dakotas when I presented this paper at SFRA/Wiscon in Madison, WI, Chinookan-speaking peoples when I gave the paper in Oregon at Sirens, and the Pocomtuc or Nipmuc where I sit typing in Florence, MA.
- 3 See <http://www.olderthanamerica.com/>.

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