What's Normative Got to Do with It?

Toward Indigenous Queer Relationality

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Indigenous studies and queer studies have so far had a strange and disjointed intimacy, at times desiring and pursuing each other at the speed of land rushes and at the margins of whiteness, feminism, and queer of color critique.[1] At other moments, the two fields act as if the one does not exist at all for the other, not least because of queer investments in ongoing settler colonialism on the one side and an Indigenous commitment to illegibility and outright refusal of recognition on the other. Within the constraints of both fields, where it is either presumed that the Indigenous is always already queer to the normative settler or that the colonizing queer cannot and should not encapsulate Indigenous identities, genders, kinship structures, and sexualities that were only ever normative within their presumed-inclusive cultures of origin, what often emerges is an assertion of de/colonial difference enacted as and for the real. There are many reasons for such performative disjunctures and desirous pursuits that extend from genocide and the loss of languages and worlds those languages contained to the masculinist heteronormativity of some modes of Indigenous resurgence that has tried to overwrite, silence, and then speak for queer and feminist voices through homophobic gestures of liberalism.

In naming an impasse at the outset, I do not, however, want to suggest that queer and indigeneity do not go together, that they do not have vital points of intersectionality or methodology. They do, as research on the remaking of Indigenous kinship structures, genders, and sexualities into respectably recognizable Anglo-American heteronormative civility shows, or as the intervention Two Spirit makes to the hegemonic settler categories of LGBTQ demonstrates.[2] And yet, neither should one presume the queer and the Indigenous have anything to do with each

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other after all, especially as it is not entirely clear yet, as I have observed elsewhere, whether the queer in Indigenous studies bears even a remote passing similarity to the queer in queer studies. The disconnect might be ontological, a matter of living and being, surviving and thriving, resisting and resurging, or it could be that the need for materiality, for historical archives, for embodied identities, and for cultural and linguistic recovery within Indigenous studies continues to stand in for theory, for performance, and for disidentification within the queer. "It is in the unthinkability between queer and Indigenous," Driftpile Cree poet and scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt writes, "that some of us stage our lives. We are both nothing and everything at the same time."[3] Within the impasse between queer and Indigenous is an erasure that shadows the dispossessive regimes of settler colonialism that has already conditioned Indigenous presence, knowledge, and livability.

It is here in this unthinkability between queer and Indigenous, what Belcourt names a nothing and everything at the same time, that I want to instantiate both a space and the ground through which to consider further the challenges Indigenous studies and queer studies pose to each other at the sites of materiality, normativity, and relationality. These words, *materiality*, *normativity*, and *relationality*, have emerged lately as key concepts for both fields; they are routinely evoked, contested, and reaffirmed, and in their sustained critical usage, such words can give a sense that the two fields are actually speaking to and hailing each other. But in that delimiting and sometimes limited circulation, meaning can also be fraught and, at times, contrarian, giving the illusion that there is a conversation under way when, in fact, the shared vocabulary is a structural violence or outright disavowal after all. One of my hopes in chronicling such disconnects, failures, and refusals in this article is that, in doing so, I might first offer some provisional thoughts on how to hold the Indigenous and queer together and bind them through the concept of ground, not as identitarian categories to be revitalized and performed within ethnographic and linguistic records of colonial archives or as decolonially affirmative sexualities, but as a possible way to hold the simultaneous nothing and everything—and I want to add the spatiality of nowhere and everywhere to Belcourt's simultaneity—that the conjunction of Indigenous with queer might provide as a critical stance for eschewing recognition altogether. My secondary hope is to understand how the dispossessive logics of the nothing/everything and the nowhere/everywhere vectors of the Indigenous queer make legible exactly how central (dis)possession and its concomitant figuring of Indigenous bodies as material and immaterial manifestations of land and relationality are to how we understand ontology, embodiment, and subjectivity within the ongoing colonization of Indigenous lands.

Positioning the queer as a vital analytic within Indigenous studies might also allow, I hope, a return to the question, what is queer about queer studies now? that David Eng asked with Jack Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz in 2005 to consider what is now left of queer within the dispossessions, retrenchments, and neoliberal g(r)aspings for relevancy that racial capitalism enables at the site of regressive white masculinist heteropatriarchal supremacy in the post-postracial, postqueer liberalisms that were only ever repressive logics at the heart of a brutal settler empire.[4] In arguing that queer epistemology "disallows any positing of a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent," Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz theorized a manifesto for a globally situated subjectless queer studies that, in decentering identity and the self, could offer sustained engagements with gender and sexuality, as both are constituted intersectionally at the site of race, empire, diaspora, militarism, and colonialism.[5] That lack of fixity is, however, still and importantly grounded through the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands. Ground—as land, as base, as territory, as wellness, and as center—persists as a guiding principle for decolonization, but it also becomes the locating authorization for claims, for meaning, for rightness, and for identity, subjectless or not.

In the decade plus since that state-of-the-field double issue was published in *Social Text* to take stock of queer studies' emergence and to assess queer's sustained political utility as a social critique of the normalization of meanings attached to sovereignty, democracy, rights, freedom, citizenship, immigration, kinship, belonging, and the human, Indigenous studies likewise arrived and transformed how scholars approached such questions by returning land, territoriality, and decolonization to the fundamental list of questions that might be posed to each and every subject-position imagined and enabled by settler colonial imperialism. Indigenous critique radically shifts the scales of interpreting the historical and political intent inherent within how self, subject, object, (dis)possession, and belonging are cohered within the context of ongoing settler colonialism. And, like the queer before it, indigeneity has had its own political utility, as well as its own internal debates about the politics and consequences of recognition and incorporation, culture and identity, sovereignty and nationalism, development and extraction, dislocation and movement, land and (dis) possession, labor and capitalism. I want to suggest that indigeneity itself functions similarly to queer as a means for interrogating how race, gender and sexuality, labor, possession, and rights are produced globally in relation to the ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands and the erasure of Indigenous peoples, in what I have elsewhere theorized as the queer politics of the transitive native.[6] Perhaps the reason Indigenous and queer continue to hold their boundaries and their ground against intersection-

alities is not just settler colonialism but the sheer magnitude of cognitive collapse that occurs when they occupy the same space at the same time.

While most efforts to bring these two fields into conversation have centered on Indigenous critiques of how the queer can often reify settler colonial dispossession, this article examines instead how Indigenous studies has subsumed the queer within Indigenous feminisms and how critiques of heteropatriarchy have queered all Indigenous peoples and have flattened Indigenous women's bodies into land. If there is anything for the queer to offer Indigenous studies, I want to suggest, it may be found in the quality of (im)materiality of the Indigenous body as the ground through which belonging and being are rendered, critiqued, and transformed.

I. Grounded Materiality

But what is the ground through which Indigenous bodily materiality is apprehended? When Maori scholar Brendan Hokowhitu theorizes material Indigenous physicality as the source of embodied Indigenous epistemologies, he does so through Foucault, through C. L. R. James, and through the sheer centrality of the Maori cis-male body playing rugby to argue that "the indigenous body symbolised the physical realm and, thus, was employed for its physical labour, observed for its performativity, and humanised through the physical pursuits of sport."[7] In calling for such a materially constituted Indigenous body at play, he further advocates for the immediacy of Indigenous existentialism as a necessary transformation of the fixity of Indigenous physicality to stand against the realm of a self-pitying and romanticized "pure pre-colonial past" as he asks a series of seemingly rhetorical questions:

> Are Indigenous bodies anxiety ridden in the present, lost between the pure past and the impure present; racked by tears over the actions of others upon us? Do we feel cheated of the future? Does the birth of our children lack responsibility; that is, will we pass on to them as part of our bodily "traditions," the tears of self-pity? Conversely, can we "jump for joy" in the knowledge that regardless of our facticity, we have choice, responsibility and freedom?[8]

Hokowhitu does not formally theorize Indigenous existentialism through an acknowledgment of gender, and by not doing so he reproduces and universalizes the materiality of the Indigenous body at the site of an Indigenous masculine heteronormativity that refuses tears for the joy and responsibility of generational futurity.

In his powerful critique of the institutionalization of "Indigenous masculinities" following a series of panels at the 2015 Critical Ethnic Studies Association Conference in Toronto, Belcourt affirms after Sara

Ahmed that "sometimes complaining is a life-or-death matter" and that Indigenous feminism

> was and is a world-building project, asking us to think about how to think about living differently without resorting to a kind of cruel nostalgia or to the putative givenness of qualifiers like "masculine." For queers who are native and in but not of Native Studies, our modes of intellectual production are often paranoid readings of the discipline or provocations of sorts to do things differently.[9]

The taken-for-grantedness of certain Indigenous bodies, according to Belcourt, presumes both a gender and a body that are able to cohere their materiality, their immediacy in the here and now, their fleshiness as solid ground against the traumas and violences of colonialism not least because they lack the interventions of feminist, transgender, and queer studies to disrupt the masculinist traditions that are rooted in much of the scholarship of the field. In other words, Indigenous studies has a queer problem.

Solving that problem, for some, has meant asserting a cascade of differently embodied genders, sexualities, and kinships as the traditionally rooted grounds for truly liberating resurgence. As Lenape scholar Joanne Barker points out,

> Critical Indigenous studies scholars have uncovered multiple (not merely *third* genders or *two*-spirits) identificatory categories of gender and sexuality within Indigenous languages that defy binary logics and analyses. Within these categories, male, man, and masculine and female, woman, and feminine are not necessarily equated or predetermined by anatomical sex; thus, neither are social identity, desire, or pleasure.[10]

But even that multiplicity in the nonalignment of bodies, anatomy, desire, pleasure, and identity runs the risk of asserting Indigenous difference as the very ground that both reproduces and then defies the binaries of settler genders. Belcourt's provocation to the field asks us to consider exactly who and what Native studies' Native actually is when it "emerges as if it didn't emerge at all. . . . Which is to say that the Native is the subject, intelligible in form, who comes into being prior to study in order to conduct that study."[11] The ontological turn to embodied materiality as always already decolonial in Indigenous studies asserts the queer even as it denies any ground for the difference the queer might make.

One of the many disciplinary challenges that transgender and nonnormative gender studies has offered to feminism and to queer studies is the need, first, to reassess how the "real" of bodily materiality functions beyond performativity, discursivity, and the embodied epistemological "sense" of gender and then to shift to denaturalize how the material of all

bodies functions within transnational labor, militarization, medicalization, colonialism, and racial capitalism to produce power over the always already racialized, subjugated, and jettisoned from the registers of the natural, the normal, the able, and the civil. As Gayle Salamon's engagements with phenomenology and queer theory suggest, transgender studies demonstrates not that "the transgendered body has a material specificity that marks it as different from a normatively gendered body, but rather that the production of normative gender itself relies on a disjunction between the 'felt sense' of the body and the body's corporeal contours and that this disjunction need not be viewed as a pathological structure."[12] In making legible the disjunction between corporeality and the felt sense of the body, transgender studies amplifies how we might, after Judith Butler, make bodies that matter.

But this concern with bodies mattering has always already haunted racialized and colonized bodies, and here Black feminisms and queer of color critique have (re)situated queer studies' concern with bodies mattering within the afterlife of slavery and the ongoing gendering of racialization. As work from Hortense J. Spillers and Sylvia Wynter to Christina Sharpe, Sarah Haley, and Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley reminds us, gender, queerness, and the body are produced in the "living laboratory" of captive, enslaved, and incarcerated flesh and labor that make gender for some bodies nonnormative, deviant, and pathological from the outset.[13] Gender, as Haley painstakingly demonstrates, "is constructed by and through race, and that the production of woman and other stable gender categories requires violence."[14] For Sharpe, antiblackness is the constitutive ground through which figuration occurs, and in the "Trans*Atlantic" that she theorizes as the wake of slavery, "Black has always been that excess. Indeed, blackness throws into crisis, whether in these places one can ever really think together, Black and (hetero)normative. That is, Black life in and out of the 'New World' is always queered and more."[15] However, in developing expansive forms of Black and queer femme-inism, Tinsley tells us, it is crucial to acknowledge "the different social situations of cis- and transfemmes."[16] Rather than collapsing transgender studies into Black feminist studies, Tinsley instead spatializes the intellectual genealogies they both provide to stage epistemological and ontological insights into how race and gender are coproduced on and through the body. With the masculinization through criminalization of Black women that Haley documents in her study of gendered racial capitalism, we can see how "the modifier 'black' indeed repudiated 'woman' but was also distinctly different from 'man.'"[17] But, as Tinsley additively stresses, "commonsense expectations of butchness for black queer ciswomen are *not the same* as commonsense expectations of heteromasculinity for black folk assigned male at birth, and black cisfemme-ininity and transfemininity resist gen-

der conformity in different, complementary ways."[18] In this way, Black feminisms hold in productive tension the material consequences of anti-blackness in which Black bodies are queered within racial capitalism and white settler heteronormativity without ever losing the material and lived particularities of the Black queer and trans body.

For its part, Indigenous feminisms have sought to intervene within and against the bodily matters of gendered racial capitalism by diverging from these questions of trans*corporeality to attest to an Indigenous alterity that does not and is not matter precisely because colonization stripped the ground from beneath our feet. After all, settler colonialism is, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes, "the force that has removed me from my land, it has erased me from my history and from contemporary life, and it is the reason we currently have thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and Two Spirit/queer people in Canada."[19] Rather than embodying labor or capitalist orders, Indigenous bodies are, according to Simpson, best understood as "political orders." Further, she continues,

> they represent alternative Indigenous political systems that refuse to replicate capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and whiteness. They are the embodied representation in the eyes of the colonizers of land, reproduction, Indigenous governance, and political systems. They reproduce and amplify Indigeneity, and so it is that these bodies must be eradicated—disappeared and erased into Canadian society, outright murdered, or damaged to the point where we can no longer reproduce Indigeneity. The attack on our bodies, minds, and spirits, and the intimate trauma this encodes is how dispossession is maintained.[20]

In other words, for Indigenous feminisms, the materiality of Indigenous bodies is not individual, or necessarily even gendered. Instead, it is relationally collective; what matters are the land and the alternative governance structures that that Indigenous collectivity signifies. Because indigeneity represents alternative modes of governance and existence, as Barker points out, "imperialism and colonialism require Indigenous people to fit within the heteronormative archetypes of an Indigeneity that was authentic in the past but is culturally and legally vacated in the present."[21] That process of legally vacating the present for an indigeneity authentically mattering only in the past is the killing force of genocide and has been just one of the ways that Indigenous bodies go missing as remains within the archives of the past that the imperial state produces as its end goal of dispossession. As those Indigenous bodies go missing, the queer Indigenous body is lost entirely from the outset.

In her recent work on settler governance, gender, and sorrow, Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson characterizes the imperial state as male, white—or, if not quite, then aspiring—and heteropatriarchal.

To clarify, she explains, "I say heteropatriarchal because it serves the interests of what is understood now as 'straightness' or heterosexuality and patriarchy, the rule by men. As well, it seeks to destroy what it is not. The state does so with a death drive to eliminate, contain, hide and in other ways 'disappear' what fundamentally challenges its legitimacy: Indigenous political orders."[22] In governing as a straight white man, the Canadian settler state enacts violences on Indigenous women by first attempting to define them and any children they might have completely out of existence through the 1876 Indian Act, which imposed patrilineal descent and used marriage to render Indian women not just the property of their husbands but the race of their husbands. Simpson's work shows how Indian women, stripped of any belonging to their community if they married out, literally disappeared into the limited enfranchisement of settler womanhood within the colonizing society that surrounded them. Then, when it became clear to the state that not all Indian women would vanish through such eliminatory projects, it targeted their bodies as excessively fleshy in their failure to disappear, to remain as Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence did when she began her hunger strike on behalf of her people in December 2012, robustly present as political actors embodying alternative governance to that of the settler state. "Women's bodies were to the settler eye, like land, and as such in the settler mind, the Native woman is rendered 'unrapeable' (or, highly rapeable) because she was like land, matter to be extracted from, used, sullied, taken from, over and over again, something that is already violated and violatable in a great march to accumulate surplus, to so called 'production.'" Indigenous women, Simpson concludes, "disappear" precisely because they are "killable, rapeable, expendable. Their bodies have *historically* been rendered less valuable because of what they are taken to represent: land, reproduction, Indigenous kinship and governance, an alternative to heteropatriarchal and Victorian rules of descent."[23]

Absent, erased, disappeared, vanished, and vacated bodies and genders are recurrent themes that circulate though Indigenous feminisms and in queer Indigenous cultural and literary productions, albeit toward significantly different ends. For Belcourt, a wound can become a world, and in the epilogue to his award-winning poetry collection, he reflects on work by Judith Butler and Lauren Berlant to juxtapose the violent erasure of Indigenous bodies with the condition of love as a poetics of the unbodied. "If I have a body," he writes,

> let it be a book of sad poems. I mean it. indigeneity
> troubles the idea of "having" a body, so if I am somehow,
> miraculously, bodied then my skin is a collage of meditations on love
> and shattered selves.[24]

Conjoining the queer quality of sex as undoing with what he sees to be the "co-constitutive categories" of death and indigeneity, Belcourt hovers in the traumatic spaces of mangled and undone bodies to consider an ontological possibility for indigeneity where "closeness to sadness and to misery enables a reworking of the codes of bad affect, enabling us to free them from the apoliticized cages of pathology and the private."[25] Rather than resisting the unbodied materiality of indigeneity, Belcourt inhabits the immateriality of Indigenous queer love as a way to remake the world through fluidity, collapse, heartbreak, and bodies coming back together again.

Though Audra Simpson does not outright say it, in reading the state as a heteropatriarchal straight white man, she suggests a nonnormative, nonstraightness for all Indigenous bodies and their flesh that resists settler governance in their excesses and refusals to be eliminated, disappeared, or rendered dead. The nondifferentiation of a possible queer or gender-nonconforming Indigenous body who does not or cannot reproduce is collapsed into the materiality of the Indigenous woman as already queer. What Simpson demonstrates in her pointed reading of settler violence is that there is a curious elision that both centers heteropatriarchy and conquest through its white, straight, and masculinist vectors and simultaneously and inadvertently deflects the Indigenous queer in the moment it is evoked as supplement to the category of Indigenous woman. In their enjambment of Simpson's return to fleshy corporeality with Spillers's distinction between body and flesh, Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein ask us to consider what "differential relational study [might] yield, particularly outside the limitations of what we might call white queer theory and its attendant focus on anti-reproductive futures" if we were to begin with "queer of color and queer Indigenous critiques [that] elucidate that Black and Native bodies are always already queered under the terms of colonialism."[26] Through the interventions of transgender, Black, and Indigenous feminisms, we can see how the differential mattering of bodies produce gender, queerness, and sexuality within the ongoing dehumanizations of criminalization, surveillance, hypervisibility, and erasure that have been built through settler governance's attempts to legally and materially clear the land of (and from) some bodies while denying other bodies a right to exist at all. There is a difference, though, between queer and erased that Indigenous studies has yet to address.

II. Grounded Normativity

In positioning *queer* as a referent that might "tack back and forth to situate Indigenous and Black genders and sexualities" as "the very terms consti-

tuted by and, in turn, constituting the human," Vimalassery, Hu Pegues, and Goldstein momentarily withdraw queer from both its identitarian and its antinormative imperatives.[27] In doing so, they invite us to consider further how identity, normativity, and antinormativity might function when queer does shift to the Indigenous and back again. Insisting on the heterogeneity of historical locations and cultural specificities for theorizing sexuality, women of color feminism resists the institutionalizations of queer studies that often reduce heterogeneity into singularities and universals as part of disciplinarity. "This material specificity," Roderick A. Ferguson observes, "produces a tension between theorizations of racialized sexuality and efforts to capture those theorizations within universalist enunciations of sexuality."[28] Ferguson further traces how, "as African American normative and national formations arose out of U.S. imperialism, African American elites learned the tactics of sexual and gender regulation from the itineraries of imperialism, imposing those tactics onto black poor and working-class folks."[29] Documenting what she terms gendercide in the Spanish genocidal colonization of what becomes California, Deborah A. Miranda observes something similar in the archival evidence of how the *joyas* were exterminated in the sixteenth century. When it became clear that Spaniards were targeting third genders as part of the campaign of conquest, some in the Indigenous community participated in identifying and rounding up *joyas* to be killed. "This tragic pattern in which one segment of indigenous population was sacrificed in hopes that others would survive," Miranda writes, "continues to fester in many contemporary Native communities where people with same-sex orientation are no longer part of cultural legacy but feared, discriminated against, and locked out of tribal and familial homes."[30] Such strivings for normative respectability cohere power for elites at the site of gender, sexuality, race, and class, and the historical differential specificities between centuries and racialized subjectivities within empire demonstrate the lasting cumulative force that emerged in the cauldron of violence and enslavement that demarcated freedom in the new world that Lisa Lowe analyzes as *The Intimacies of Four Continents*.

Within queer theory, the word *normative* functions as shorthand for the hegemonic power embedded within the structures of European white supremacist heteropatriarchy that draws lines of distinction between what is deemed normal and natural from what is aberrant and deviant at the site of raced, gendered, and classed bodies, as well as at the site of the ethics, politics, and morality that rule them. Normative circulates as a culture's and society's norms and, at its most basic definitional level, is the social contract through which governance supposedly enacts its good and righteous rule. Within the imperial United States, the normative manifests within institutional state structures of anti-Black racism, settler colonial

dispossession, racial capitalism, compulsory heterosexuality, misogynistic heteropatriarchy, Christianity, monogamy, and possession, to name only a few.

Thus, normativity, Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson quip, "marks the spot where *queer* and *theory* meet."[31] "Normative sexualities, normative genders, normative disciplinary protocols, normative ideologies, normative racial regimes, normative political cultures, normative state practices, and normative epistemes: these figures of normativity have been the heart of queer theoretical inquiry for nearly three decades."[32] By calling into question the axiomatic critique of normativity within the field, Wiegman and Wilson ponder other possible disciplinary meanings and formations that could be missed "because normativity has come to stand as the negative force against which the field crafts its self-definition."[33] Advocating for an anti-antinormativity in the field of queer studies, Wiegman and Wilson finally wonder what is lost when a critique of norms becomes oppositional to merely instantiate opposition. What if not all norms are wrong, they seemingly want to ask. Norms are, they point out, "stochastic. Norms generate not sovereignties, but overdetermined relationalities. So, to stand against one part of a normative system would be to stand, comically, against oneself."[34] To which, Jack Halberstam has responded succinctly, "Without a critique of normativity, queer theory may well look a lot like straight thinking" where "straight thinking is characterized by a matrix of rhetorical operations that support the common sense of the moment, commit to foreclosing on critiques of the status quo and reinvest in the ordinary, the good and the true."[35]

In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard advocates for a resurgent theory of Indigenous resentment against the politics of recognition, liberal pluralism, and reconciliation that have defined the colonial relationship as "a form of structured dispossession" that the settler state maintains in perpetuity with Indigenous nations.[36] Critiquing the normative requirements of constructivist/inclusion paradigms for recognition that settler states offer as democratic and egalitarian if not progressive accommodations to Indigenous assertions of nationhood, Coulthard stresses that "when constructivist views of culture are posited as a universal feature of social life and then used as a means to evaluate the legitimacy of Indigenous claims for cultural recognition against the uncontested authority of the colonial state, it can serve to sanction the very forms of domination and inequality that anti-essentialist criticism ought to mitigate."[37] The settler state, in adjudicating its own violent past through attempts for its own reconciliation, further entrenches dispossession of Indigenous lands and Indigenous nations' self-determining authority. And though Coulthard does not cite queer theory, his critique resonates with those scholars who have questioned the

homonormative logics of marriage equality, military service, and LGBT civil rights within the settler state.

But instead of using queer theory to interrogate normativity, Coulthard locates his intervention at the intersection of political theory and Indigenous studies and centralizes norms and normative in his work to address the regulatory modes of governance within political orders. At times, he is critical of normativity, as he is when he reads against Seyla Benhabib's antiessentialist models for state recognition. Claiming to draw on gendered and feminist analysis as a backdrop for his concerns, he writes,

> Benhabib's anti-essentialist criticism includes two dimensions: it claims to be grounded on, first, an *empirical* understanding about the constructed nature of cultural identities, which she then, second, deploys in a *normative* argument in defense of gender justice for Aboriginal women and other marginalized members of cultural minorities. . . . In other words, what is convenient about the social constructivist position to the deliberative democratic project is that it justifies subjecting "the cultural" to the norms that guide deliberative conceptions of "the political."[38]

As an alternative, the core of his scholarly contribution to the articulation of Indigenous anticolonial relations to land centers on what he terms "grounded normativity," by which he means, "the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman other over time."[39] Elsewhere in *Red Skin, White Masks*, he writes that the "imperatives of capital accumulation signified an affront to our normative understanding of what constituted proper relationships—relationships between people, relationships between humans and their environment, and relationships between individuals and institutions of authority."[40] In upholding Indigenous normative understandings derived from relationships with land and with the human and nonhuman other on that land and over time as both the ground of authority and the grounding of being, Coulthard affirms the basis for Indigenous political governance and sovereignty that opposes that of the settler state and, in this way, deploys normativity strategically and in ways that would necessitate a nonoppositional anti-antinormativity (and is that straight?) engagement to resist the countercharge of engaging in colonialist thinking. Further, in forwarding Indigenous norms and normativities, Coulthard performs Indigenous statecraft that differentially parallels settler states in its ability to self-recognize and self-actualize Indigenous territorial sovereignty and governance.

That said, his use of normativity throughout *Red Skin, White Masks* raises substantial questions for two fields that have yet to find the ground through which queer and Indigenous might converge. In expanding his

theorization of grounded normativity as the basis for Indigenous political difference to settler colonial governance, Coulthard coauthored a response to David Roediger's 2015 presidential address at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting in Toronto with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson titled "Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity." In it, Coulthard and Simpson acknowledge the grounded normativity of the land that the conference was held on as providing the relationships, practices, and knowledges through which Nishnaabeg nationhood would be able to "critically interrogate capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. It provides them with the material culture to rebuild their political orders and conceptualization of nationhood without replicating heteropatriarchy or anti-Blackness normalized in our settler colonial reality."[41] Critiquing the normalization of heteropatriarchy and antiblackness, on the one hand, they position Indigenous grounded normativity as the pure decolonial and antiracist alternative, on the other. And in so doing, they return us to a fundamental conundrum: what is left of queer if the normative is no longer something to critique but to champion?

This is the question that, for me, discomfits some of the recent work in Indigenous feminisms that attempt to account for a radical possibility for Indigenous queer mobilization within in the field; the question not only troubles the straight thinking implied in the acceptance of the commonsense of the good but also raises the stakes by adding colonial thinking to the evocations of sovereignty, nationalism, and political governance that underscore Indigenous struggles for land-based decolonization. In her Indigenous resurgent manifesto, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, Simpson returns again to Coulthard's "grounded normativity" as the rationale through which to locate Nishnaabeg political systems and original instruction, and in the process, she paradoxically posits "Indigenous queer normativity" as an additive good faith gesture of incorporation of the queer within Indigenous resurgent struggles. "We simply cannot accept a singular, shallow interpretation of Nishnaabeg thought and use it to shame, exclude, and degrade members of our nations," she writes. "Our thought systems within grounded normativity are fluid, dynamic, and responsive, and it is our responsibility to practice grounded normativity in the way it was intended: to build strong societies of individuals who are functioning as their best selves."[42] Into this notion of building strong societies of best selves, Simpson foregrounds Two Spirit and queer individuals, where *queer* is understood as solely identitarian, and the good centers on the self-actualization that comes when cultures and societies radically accept all individuals for exactly who they are. "While the intersections between queer theory and Indigenous Studies are interesting," Simpson explains, "I am more drawn to recovering how Indigenous theory, in my case how Nishnaabeg

theory, conceptualizes gender or can conceptualize gender and sexual orientation because my sense is that my Ancestors lived in a society where what I know as 'queer,' particularly in terms of social organization, was so normal it didn't have a name." More succinctly, she adds, "Queer Indigeneity has a place for straightness, and that's why we should center it."[43] It is a move that, while ostensibly advocating queerness as normative to Indigenous studies, nevertheless continues to require straightness as the ground through which the queer is made valuable.

It might be tempting to resolve the disciplinary and definitional tensions residing in Indigenous studies' use of normativity by affirming a liberatory intent and foregrounding the anticolonial imperative that figures Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and land-based practices as the basis and source for radical resistance against settler colonial theories of the queer. But the normative gesture of the so-normal-it-did-not-have-a-name, the *as we have always done* past tense and present perfect temporality of indigeneity that Simpson deploys itself erases and vacates that which has always been erased from and abjected in the deadly onslaught of colonialism. If Indigenous bodies matter as the embodiment of land, if they are always already political orders in the settler eye, as both Audra Simpson and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson claim, then how might we understand gender and sexuality, property and territoriality, consent and freedom differently if the land itself is the source of fluidity, authority, and groundedness outside the means of (re)production?

III. Grounded Relationality

I end with a series of questions and provocations: What if, instead of normalizing the queer within recovered Indigenous grounded normativities as a sign of Indigenous liberalism, Indigenous studies followed radical queer strategies to refuse legibility outright through the matrices of sovereignty and its norms, statehood and its recognitions, subjectivity and its rights, gender and its performances to assert instead the possibilities that emerge when the normative is resisted in each and all of those vectors? What if, instead of eliding the queer into that which was always already normal, Indigenous studies disrupted the normal of traditional practice and knowledge as the justification for the good, the just, and the queer? And what if, rather than because it has a place for straightness, queer indigeneity was centered as an analytic because it called into critical relation straightness in all its iterations?

In asking these questions, I seek to amplify a definitional possibility that already resides in Coulthard's grounded normativity and Simpson's place-based practices to offer a slight shift toward grounded relationality as a framework that is still left for the queer beyond normativity. Though

Wiegman and Wilson say that "norms generate not sovereignty but overdetermined relationalities,"[44] they fail to ever engage Indigenous thought in their critique of queer antinormativity, and in their iterations of normative and all its possible positivistic valences they do not elaborate further on this one-sentence observation. But if, as they claim, norm is merely a statistical category, stochastic, random, and leveling to a mean, then it is not about overdetermined relationalities at all but about assuming and then forcing into relation connections that might not otherwise exist; in a full circle, we tack back again to normativity as it is defined and then critiqued within queer theory. *Relationality*, on the other hand, is a word that emerges across a range of disciplines and finds origins in Karl Marx's relations of production, in the Black Atlantic and Caribbean poetics and discourses of Edouard Glissant, in Donna Haraway's cyborgs and kin in the Chthulucene, and in the Indigenous philosophies of North America and the Pacific. As Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite explain, "Relationality is rooted in context and the prime context is place. There is a conscious acknowledgement that particular world views arise from particular territories, and the ways in which the push and pull of all the forces at work in that territory determine what is most salient for existing in balance with it."[45] When Coulthard defines "grounded normativity" as "the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman other over time,"[46] it resonates with and draws on existing definitions of relationality already in use by the field.

In attempting to advocate a theory of anomaly that links Southeastern Indian philosophies to queer's antinormative imperative, Daniel Heath Justice observes that the upper, middle, and lower worlds of Mississippian cosmology are represented in our iconography "by flux, conflict, and an unending struggle for balance (not supremacy) between worlds of order, balance, and chaos. Humans share this dynamic cosmos with a diverse community of other-than-human beings, all of who have their own subjectivities and powers, and each of whom has a particular set of relationships with all other entities, some more intimate than others."[47] Justice emphasizes that, in the interplay between these worlds and the beings who inhabit them, it is the relations between them that matter the most. While most entities exist in one world or another, nothing is absolutely fixed in this cosmology, and there are moments when the boundaries break down altogether to allow crossings, transformations, and stealings away. However, there are also certain powerful beings who inhabit or move through the multiple worlds seamlessly and simultaneously, and Justice gives the examples of bats, flying squirrels, the pitcher plant, and the water panther as entities that defy and refuse expectations. These entities,

Justice suggests, might best be understood as anomalies to classificatory categories and, as such, could provide insights into how a Southeastern queer relationality might serve as an analytic method.

Delving into the quagmire of queer's relation to norm, Justice observes that "the anomaly isn't just in a conditional or circumstantial relationship to the normative body/category—the anomaly is absolutely *essential* to its ostensible opposite. In other words, the anomaly is constitutive of the norm, not outside it or insignificant to it." "If, however," he continues,

> we understand them to be in a relationship of complementary duality, with straightness as the normalizing category and queerness as the constitutive anomaly without which the norm (and the entire categorization system) ceases to exist, then the relationship is much more complicated and mutually interdependent—and thus more fully embedded in the widespread Indigenous values of kinship, community, and reciprocity, without eliminating the specificities of individual lives, loves, and experiences.[48]

These key words—*complementary duality*, *kinship*, *community*, and *reciprocity*—underscore Indigenous epistemologies of relationality, and though Justice foregrounds anomaly as the difference queer indigeneity might make to both fields, it is through relations the queer makes that difference matters materially.

All Indigenous bodies have been erased, vacated, and reduced to bones and caricatures; they have been targeted for sexualized violence, disciplined when they deviate from settler colonial standards of civility, disappeared on the margins of settler occupation, and temporalized to a long ago past that, we are told, has no bearing on the present. All Indigenous bodies are also materially land, water, and political orders; they are fluid, capacious; they transform over time; and they exist outside settler gender binaries, normativities, and even nonnormativities. And like land and water, they have agency, they embody kinships, they sustain communities of life that stretch from the human and the nonhuman, and they provide the material context for what it means to exist in relation. Though Indigenous and queer studies may not yet know exactly what the other means to their respective fields, what is left for both is to find the ground between the nowhere and nothing of the vacated Indigenous queer and imagine an everywhere and everything that the two fields might instantiate at the site of decolonization when they finally meet.

Notes

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1. One of the challenges that concepts such as indigeneity and queerness both pose is their expansiveness, as well as multitudinous contexts hailed in their invocation. For the context of this article and its intervention, I focus primarily on US- and Canadian-based Indigenous and queer studies, though the terms I use exceed that context. There is much more work for me to do to consider how both indigeneity and queerness transform in conversation with and through global souths and beyond the white settler colonies that have so often been the site of critical analysis.

2. See, e.g., Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?*; and Morgensen, *Spaces between Us*.

3. Belcourt, "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?"

4. Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, "Introduction."

5. Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, "Introduction," 3.

6. Byrd, "*Loving* Unbecoming."

7. Hokowhitu, "Indigenous Existentialism," 110.

8. Hokowhitu, "Indigenous Existentialism," 116.

9. Belcourt, "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?"

10. Barker, "Introduction," 13.

11. Belcourt, "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak?"

12. Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 2.

13. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 208.

14. Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 8.

15. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 30–32.

16. Tinsley, *Ezili's Mirrors*, 33.

17. Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 88.

18. Tinsley, *Ezili's Mirrors*, 33.

19. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 7.

20. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 41.

21. Barker, "Introduction," 3.

22. Simpson, "The State Is a Man."

23. Simpson, "The State Is a Man."

24. Belcourt, *This Wound Is a World*, 22.

25. Belcourt, *This Wound Is a World*, 58.

26. Vimalassery, Hu Pegues, and Goldstein, "Colonial Unknowing and Relations of Study," 1049.

27. Vimalassery, Hu Pegues, and Goldstein, "Colonial Unknowing and Relations of Study," 1050.

28. Ferguson, "Of Our Normative Strivings," 86.

29. Ferguson, "Of Our Normative Strivings," 98.

30. Miranda, "Extermination of the *Joyas*," 259–60.
31. Wiegman and Wilson, "Introduction," 1.
32. Wiegman and Wilson, "Introduction," 1.
33. Wiegman and Wilson, "Introduction," 5.
34. Wiegman and Wilson, "Introduction," 17.
35. Halberstam, "Straight Eye for the Queer Theorist."
36. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 7.
37. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 21.
38. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 93.
39. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 13.
40. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 62.
41. Coulthard and Simpson, "Grounded Normativity," 255.
42. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 122.
43. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 138.
44. Wiegman and Wilson, "Introduction," 17.
45. Lewis et al., "Making Kin with the Machines."
56. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 13.
47. Justice, "Theory of Anomaly," 218.
48. Justice, "Theory of Anomaly," 221, 222.

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