ELEVEN
EMBODIED RESURGENT PRACTICE AND CODED DISRUPTION

IN "EVERYDAY DECOLONIZATION: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics," Kwagiulth (Kwakwaka'wakw) scholar and resurgence theorist Sarah Hunt and non-Indigenous scholar Cindy Holmes ask, "What does decolonization look and feel like, what does it entail, in our daily actions as queer women? What is decolonization beyond something to aspire to as allies to Indigenous struggles for self-determination or as Indigenous queers who want to align various aspects of our Two-Spirit identities?"[1] They ask us to actively take up decolonization in intimate spaces—with friends and family and in our homes—and encourage us to engage in critical conversations within these spaces as a mechanism to see, hear, and think differently. They challenge us to embody our decolonial politics and practice them in our daily lives. If we are members of Indigenous nations, they propel us to live in our bodies as Indigenous political orders in every way possible. They ask us to re-create Indigenous political practices inside our homes, right now, every day, including a criticality about the replication of heteropatriarchy. This to me is a

powerful movement and a powerful way of embodying radical resurgence.

Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel's research on Indigenous pathways of resurgence focuses on identifying "everyday practices of renewal and responsibilities within native communities today" by asking the simple question, "How will your ancestors and future generations recognize you as Indigenous?"[2] His challenge is for individuals and communities to reject state affirmation, recognition, and the performativity of the rights-based discourse and to move beyond political awareness and symbolic gestures to grounding ourselves and our nations in everyday place-based practices of resurgence. He warns against the politics of distraction—states' attempts to move us away from the renewal of place-based practices by distracting us with politics that are designed to reinforce the status quo rather than deconstruct it. He encourages us to center our individual and communal lives around renewal. I see power in Hunt and Holmes's and Corntassel's work as flight paths out of the cage of violence and shame that colonialism traps us in.

The combination of living decolonial queer politics in intimate spaces and everyday acts of resurgence can be a force for dramatic change in the face of the overwhelming domination of the settler colonial state, particularly on microscales.[3] This kind of thinking has inspired diverse nation-based principled action, particularly among Indigenous youth, all over Turtle Island. The generative and emergent qualities of living in our bodies as political orders represent the small and first steps of aligning oneself and one's life in the present with the visions of an Indigenous future that are radically decoupled from the domination of colonialism and where Indigenous freedom is centered. This embodiment draws us out of the politics of distraction and away from continually positioning ourselves and structuring our movements in a response to the politics of distraction. We then become centered in our Indigenous presents, rather than centered in responding to the neoliberal politics of the state.

This is so crucial in the context of resurgence. My Ancestors are not in the past. The spiritual world does not exist in some

mystical realm. These forces and beings are right here beside me—inspiring, loving, and caring for me in each moment and compelling me to do the same. It is my responsibility with them and those yet unborn to continuously give birth to my Indigenous present. This spatial construction of time is crucial and is encoded in Nishnaabemowin. Nishnaabeg artist Susan Blight recently explained this to me using the word *biidaaban*. This is commonly translated as "dawn." Blight, learning from elder Alex McKay from Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwag, broke down the word as follows. The prefix *bii* means the future is coming at you; it also means the full anticipation of the future, that you can see the whole picture. *Daa* is the verb for living in a certain place or the present. *Ban* or *ba* is a verb used for when something doesn't exist anymore or someone who has passed on. Biidaaban, then, is the verb for when day breaks, the actual moment daylight appears at dawn, not as a prolonged event but the very moment.[4] My own interpretation of this is that the present, then, is a colliding of the past and the future. Everyday embodiment is therefore a mechanism for ancient beginnings.[5] Engagement in these practices unlocks their theoretical potentialities and generates intelligence. It is this present, this *presence,* that will create flight paths out of colonialism and into magnificent unfolding of Indigenous place-based resurgences and nationhoods. I was reminded of this by a short video from the Polynesian Voyaging Society's journey of the Hōkūle'a when one of the knowledge holders comments, "you can't go anywhere if your canoe is tied to the dock."[6]

Embodiment compels us to untie our canoes—to not just think about our canoes or write about our canoes but to actually untie them, get in, and begin the voyage. Embodiment also allows individuals to act now, wherever they are, city or reserve, in their own territory or in that of another nation, with support or not, in small steps, with Indigenous presence. These acts reinforce a strong sense of individual self-determination and freedom and allow individuals to choose practices that are meaningful to them in the context of their own reality and lives. On an individual level, people are taking it upon themselves to learn

their own nation-based Indigenous practices. This can mean everything from becoming vitally attached to land and place; to learning language, songs, dances, stories, and artistic practices; to renewing ceremonies; to engaging in land and place-based practices and ethics; to revitalizing our systems of politics, governing, caring, education, and service; to reclaiming birthing, breastfeeding, and parenting practices and death rituals; to regenerating the responsibilities and positions of the 2SQ community. At first glance, these acts seem to have the most transformative power within individuals. But as I've witnessed this unfolding in various manifestations, these individual everyday acts of resurgence are starting to also become organized and collectivized, and it is in relationship to each other that we can enact and renew our political and governing practices. I am thinking here of the Dene students at Dechinta, spending significant time on the land with elders mastering Dene thought through the practice of Dene bush skills. I am thinking here of the Onaman Collective regularly hosting language immersion houses, building canoes and snowshoes, making maple syrup, and fund-raising to buy land for a permanent cultural camp; and the Ogimaa Mikana Project in Toronto restoring original names and inserting Nishnaabemowin into the urban spaces of downtown cores. I am thinking of the Kwi Awt Stelmexw language institute for Skowmish immersion. I am thinking of the tireless peer-to-peer work on sexual health and addictions done by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network.[7] I am thinking of young moose-hide tanners in Denendeh whose work might start out as individual everyday acts of resurgence but then grow as they connect with hunters, expert hide tanners, tool makers, story, and Ancestors and as they embody and generate theory.[8] I am also thinking of the resurgent organizing and daily embodiments of Indigenous practices taking place on the land around occupations such as the Unis'tot'en Camp and the ongoing blockade at Grassy Narrows.[9] I am interested in thinking about how to build upon these place-based resurgent mobilizations to build a network of resurgent struggle. Everyday acts of resurgence tie us to original creative processes that create networks across time and

space and generate doorways for new theoretical understandings to emerge. They are the kinetics in Edna's creation story. They are the *how*.

Refusing Colonial Spatialities

Everyday acts of resurgence sound romantic, but they are not. Put aside visions of "back to the land," and just think land—some of it is wild, some of it is urban, a lot of it is ecologically devastated. Everyday acts of resurgence are taking place as they always have, on both individual and collective scales on Indigenous lands irrespective of whether those lands are urban, rural, or reserve. Every piece of North America is Indigenous land regardless of whether it has a city on top of it, or it is under threat, or it is coping with industrial development. I am uncomfortable with the continued settler colonial positioning of reserve versus urban communities as a mechanism to reinforce division. Reserves are colonial constructs, as are urban communities. Urban Indigenous communities are often sites of tremendous opportunity and action in terms of political alliance building, governance (because urban Indigenous collectives and organizations are not under the thumb of the Indian Act), language revitalization, local Indigenous economic and food initiatives, urban land reclamation and renaming, artistic renaissance, political education, and community organizing, as are reserve communities, and I believe many Indigenous peoples are attached and in love with our homelands regardless of where we live. Indigenous women and 2SQ people have particularly long histories of activism in Canadian cities as a result of the expulsive heteropatriarchal policies of the Indian Act. We have a network in cities of Friendship Centres, shelters, theaters, health care programs, organizations that support the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and schools because of these actions, not to mention the decades of 2SQ movement building and organizing that has taken place in urban environments, and this unfortunately too often goes unseen.

In *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations,* Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman asks us to question the

acceptance of colonial spatialities, and she challenges us to construct deeper understandings of ourselves by examining our own relationships to place and to each other outside of the spatial constructs of settler colonialism.[10] Goeman speaks of her family's mobility in a manner that enables me to see that they are mapping aspects of their Seneca grounded normativity through spatialities as intervention, as a mechanism through which to maintain their dignity and self-sufficiency as Indigenous people. Through connections with other Indigenous people outside of their reservation, they created tiny islands of Indigeneity, in spite of these settler colonial spatialities. They created refuges. They escape into Indigeneity. Goeman uses the concept of (re)mapping, drawing on Gerald Vizenor, to "connote the fact that in (re)mapping, Native women employ traditional and new tribal stories as a means of continuation."[11] This makes sense to me. Mapping, storytelling, and continuation have always been a part of our grounded normativity, even shattered grounded normativity. Vizenor defines survivance as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."[12] Within Nishnaabeg thought, stories throughout time have always been a renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry, and so to me, the lens of resurgence resonates more than the lens of survivance. I don't experience a division between "tribal" and "new." I don't just renounce. I refuse and I continue to generate. Tools do not necessarily define process, and while we have added "new" tools for storytelling within our embedded practices, we can also remain rooted in our deeper philosophical and aesthetic understandings to generate meaning. There is no hybrid. Mobility shatters and refuses the containment of settler colonialism and inserts Indigenous presence. This is an asset.

Indigenous mobility under the domination of settler colonialism as process is complicated and layered with multiplicity. I see at least four kinds of mobility: mobility within grounded normativity as an embedded Indigenous practice, mobility as a response to colonialism as resistance, mobility as a deliber-

ate and strategic resurgence, and mobility as direct or indirect forced expulsion, relocation, and displacement and the creation of Indigenous diaspora. Indigenous movement can be any one of those things or a fluid combination of any or all of those elements. Indigenous peoples and our mobility can certainly be an expression of agency and self-determination within even shattered grounded normativity. Given the reality of settler colonialism, many of us continually reevaluate where we live, whether it is a city or a reserve, in our own territory or not, as a process to figure out how to live with as much dignity as possible. Our answers change as we move through the stages of life. I see this as a theoretical intervention. I see this as us using our mobility as a flight path out of settler colonialism and into Indigeneity. I see mobility imbued with agency as resurgence.

Mobility and the diplomacy and community building inherent in it are a practice of many Indigenous nations. We've always moved throughout our territories and through the territories of others with the practice of diplomacy, moving with the consent of other nations. Most of us have lived or will live in a variety of places throughout our lives, and we travel back and forth maintaining connection wherever possible and whenever we have the means. This in my mind does not necessarily dilute our Indigeneity, nor does it dilute our demands for a land base. In resurgence practice we should be working to strengthen the connections between our communities and building upon our strengths rather than falling into the colonial trap of urban versus reserve. Everyday acts of resurgence are one mechanism that can be used to build a more united resurgence movement that strengthens nationhood and works outside of the colonial spatial constructs the Indian Act has created to keep us divided, particularly when everyday acts are collectivized and done in relationship or community with other Indigenous people. Indigenous makers—those who live Indigenous practices inside of Indigenous spaces—hold onto these practices. When we start to link up with other individuals and communities engaged in everyday acts of resurgence by refusing the divisions of colonial spatialities, networks, or constellations, emerge.

The Indigenous artistic community is a site where this has always occurred, and I'd like to think about these contributions as a mechanism for moving from individual acts of resurgence to collective ones.

Creative Combat: Resurgent Artistic Practice

In his extraordinary dissertation "Creative Combat: Art, Resurgence, and Decolonization," Jarrett Martineau begins to consider what happens when everyday acts of resistance become collectivized. Martineau uses the artistic practices of a diverse series of Indigenous provocateurs to examine the decolonizing potentiality of art making to disrupt and interrogate forms of settler colonialism and advance the project of resurgence and Indigenous nation building.[13] Using the practices of the artist collectives Post Commodity, Walking with Our Sisters, and Skookum Sound System, among many others, for examples, Martineau not only examines potentiality but artists and artist collectives engaged in radically resurgent production processes that result in art not as a product or even as an event but as an organizing structure of their lives—for their collectives and for the audience that participates with them.[14] Martineau argues that they are engaged in *affirmative refusal,* a refusing of forms of visibility within settler colonial realities that render the Indigenous vulnerable to commodification and control. He frames these creative practices as against representation, arguing that resurgent practice (he uses "artistic practice"; I would argue all resurgent practice) acts as "noise to colonialism's signal"; that is, resurgent practice is a disruptive and a deliberate act of turning away from the colonial state. But these practices aren't *just* disruptive. They are grounded in a coded articulation, like Martineau's dissertation itself, of Indigenous intelligence as theory and process and as affirmative refusal, resulting in the creation of not just points of disruption but collective constellations of disruption, interrogation, decolonial love, and profound embodiments of nation-based Indigeneity. They are artistic processes based in the infinite creative wealth of grounded normativity.

In a sense, the artists that Martineau draws upon and Martineau himself are making alternatives and are creating islands of colonial disruption in the present.

While Martineau's work makes crucial interventions in and across the fields of Indigenous studies, Indigenous contemporary art and aesthetics, performance studies, critical theory, political philosophy, sound studies, and hip-hop scholarship, the dissertation itself is also elegantly engaged in an affirmative refusal. I see a foundational use of Indigenous intelligence in Martineau's dissertation, yet to someone without extensive experience inside Indigenous knowledge systems, his work appears theoretical (only) in a Western sense of the word. This is because Martineau is refusing to visibilize Indigenous intelligence or grounded normativity and therefore make it vulnerable to commodification and control by settler colonialism, and by those that have not done the work within Indigenous intelligence systems to carry the knowledge in the first place.[15] It is an elegant level of protection and disruption, and it is a reminder that one does not become educated within Indigenous intelligence systems by reading books or obtaining degrees. My experience of this dissertation was not of a linear, logical work that moves from A to B, but of a spiraling into and then out of a core series of arguments, much like the movement of spiritual energy in ceremony. I interpreted this as a profound coded expression of Martineau's own Cree and Dene grounded normativity. In moving from individual acts of resurgence to connecting with networks of resurgence, coded communication and articulation are important because they protect the network from cooption, exploitation, and manipulation, and the sovereignty of the network remains in the hands of its Indigenous makers. This is perhaps one of the greatest lessons I continually learn from Indigenous artists: coded disruption and affirmative refusal through the use of Indigenous aesthetic practices. As a writer, my biggest struggle is often to speak directly to Indigenous audiences without the manipulation of settler colonial publishing, editing, and distribution. How do we speak to each other and build relationships with each other on our own terms?

Indigenous Aesthetics: Coded Disruption and Affirmative Refusal

The use of Indigenous aesthetics in artistic practice is one mechanism Indigenous creators use to code their work, to "disrupt the noise of colonialism," to speak to multiple audiences, and to enact affirmative and generative forms of refusal. It is also an everyday act of resurgence and a practice in and of itself that becomes collectivized when Indigenous peoples recognize the shared code. In my own writing, I rely on Nishnaabeg aesthetic principles to speak to multiple audiences through my own artistic and intellectual practices. This began a few years ago when I was at a talk by Monique Mojica at Nozhem Theatre in Peterborough, Ontario.[16] She was explaining her artistic process in working with a Kuna visual artist and in writing a play in pictographs. She talked extensively about Kuna aesthetics: *repetition, duality, multidimensionality,* and *abstraction.*

This resonated with me because I saw those aesthetic principles and theory underlying all kinds of things in Nishnaabeg thought, from ceremony, to storytelling, to art making of all kinds, and I recognized that I was already using them in my practice and wanted to deepen this practice. I thought carefully about each principle.

Repetition is interesting for a writer, because editors unfamiliar with Indigenous aesthetic principles hate repetition. Repetition is a bad thing whether you are writing nonfiction or fiction. Editors look for it because the assumption is that the reader will get bored, yet rhythmic repetition is at the base of Nishnaabeg intelligence. We hear variations of the same creation story for our entire lives, and we are expected to find meaning in it at every stage of life, whether that meaning is literal (when we are kids), metaphorical, conceptual, or within the constellation of our collective oral traditions or that meaning comes from lived experience. Our way of life is repetitive. Every fall we collect wild rice. We don't take a year off because we are bored, because aside from that being ridiculous, if we are not continually and collectively engaged in creating and re-creating our way of life,

our reality, our distinct unique cultural reality doesn't exist. If you're bored, frankly you're not paying attention.

Duality is another principle that confuses Western thinkers because they get it mixed up with dichotomy. Duality again is present in all of our stories and our ceremonies and our daily lives, but it is not an either-or situation. I understand it really as holism. Every year, we all experience the fall and spring equinoxes, when there is the same number of hours of darkness and light everywhere on earth. Now that's not what really happens. Our experience of an equinox is mitigated by weather, for one thing, but even if we understand that one day as a dichotomy, there are 363 other days of shadowlands, and all of it is part of a complex whole—a whole that is constantly in motion and constantly changing. Yet there is a clear dichotomy between night and day, and you know what? I'm not a postcolonial critical theorist, so I don't experience dichotomy as a problem.

I like writing *multidimensionality* into my work not because I'm trying to write speculative fiction but because that's how Indigenous worlds work. There is an organization of time and space that's different than the colonial world's—different plans of reality. The implicate order, if you want to use that term, is influencing and intertwined within our own continually created physical reality. I was recently asked to write Indigenous science fiction, which coming from Indigenous aesthetics didn't make much sense to me. Our stories have always talked about the future and the past at the same time. They've always coinhabited the spiritual realm; the birthright of the storyteller has always been to make the stories that come through them relevant to the current generation. A lot of what science fiction deals with—parallel universes, time travel, space travel, and technology—is what our Nishnaabeg stories also deal with.

Abstraction is also a grounding principle in Nishnaabeg aesthetics. Again, I think Western thinkers get this confused with extraction. Indigenous abstraction is different because it comes from our grounded normativity. Extraction is a cornerstone of capitalism, colonialism, and settler colonialism. It's stealing. It's taking something, whether it's a process, an object, a gift, or a

person, out of the relationships that give it meaning, and placing it in a nonrelational context for the purposes of accumulation. Abstraction within the context of grounded normativity is shifting the relationality to change meaning or to illuminate a different meaning.[17]

I also now see *layering* as an aesthetic through which makers weave multiple and coded meanings, and these can be literal, conceptual, metaphorical, and theoretical meanings layered into their artistic practice and the art they produce. This became very clear to me in working with Kanien'kehá:ka dancer and choreographer Santee Smith on her piece *Re-Quickening*. *Re-Quickening* blurs the lines between performance art, dance, and theatre and is a call for a reawakening of the intact feminine. As an audience member, I experienced the performance through movement, sound, and embodied kinetic conceptual knowledge that centered the truths of Indigenous women and our relationships in spite of the strangulation of various settler colonial insurgencies. It was grounded in Kanien'kehá:ka internationalism, as Santee worked with Maori, Zapoteca, and Kuna artists.[18] Two years before the world premiere, I was invited by Santee to her parents' home at Six Nations to talk about women, sovereignty, and violence along with four Indigenous artists: Christi Belcourt, Monique Mojica, Marina Acevedo, and Frances Rings. What unfolded was a very honest, complicated conversation about our experiences being Indigenous women that was highly influential in my development of parts of this book because I was so struck by the raw truths that come out in the intimate spaces Indigenous women and 2SQ people create and by the fact that these truths are so (still) rarely written. I am tremendously grateful for Santee's willingness to honor and center my experience and our collective experience as strength. In Santee's collaborative process the themes discussed at this meeting became an embodied performance ritual with multiple meanings mapped over objects, wardrobe, movement, sound, text, and the relationships between the performers themselves. This is an echo of what happens in my own creative work around layering meanings within storytelling, and I see it as ultimately

an Indigenous mechanism for packaging and revealing knowledge in different contexts throughout a person's life. This to me is how ceremonial knowledge works: one can experience it on literal, conceptual, metaphorical, emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual levels through time and space but only if one deeply engages with the work with an open heart.

I have also learned a great deal about the Nishnaabeg aesthetics of *reenactment* and *presencing* from watching the performances of Nishnaabeg performance artist Rebecca Belmore and Nishnaabeg artist Robert Houle. From Belmore, I've learned that my voice, my body, and my physical presence are interventions in a settler colonial reality, in a similar way to the work of Audra Simpson, but in this case not intellectual, or not just intellectual, but as a physical presence. Belmore's body is her art, as my body is research. When Belmore enters a space to perform or even to give an artist talk, she does so in a way that emanates Nishnaabeg sovereignty and self-determination to a degree that I've only witnessed in elders. She comes into space with grounded power as a provocateur and agent who is not a victim. She is intervention. She is theory. She is both the presence and the doorway, and in her performances she often gives birth to the flight paths out of settler colonial reality and then literally takes those flight paths in front of the audience as witness.

A good example of this occurred in Belmore's performance in Queen's Park, Toronto, on Canada Day 2012. The space was marked with four pots of niibish, or nibi (water), and three large plastic bottles of water marking the front of the space, telling me that this performance was going to be about women. Nibi within Nishnaabeg philosophy carries within it many complex teachings and is also a strong reference to women. There are four female spirits responsible for the water in the oceans, the fresh water, the water in the sky, and the water within our bodies. Nibi is the responsibility of women. Nibi is women's sovereignty.

Belmore began by leading her three shkaabewisag (helpers) around the mitigomizh (oak tree), which would become the focal point for the work. Over the next hour, large sheets of brown kraft paper were unrolled, moistened with spray bottles

of water, and carefully wrapped around the tree over and over. They used nibi to hold the sheets together. At first, the tying of the brown paper around the tree seemed like a marker to me. My attention was exclusively on mitigomizh. It was the elder, the grandmother Nokomis in the park. I imagined the destruction Nokomis had witnessed over the course of her life. I thought of all the water held by her roots and in her body. I thought of all the black oak trees and black oak savannas that are no longer in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory. I noticed the hordes of people walking by the tree, not noticing, on their way to see the horse statue and the legislature. For an hour, we sat or stood, talking and laughing quietly with our friends, eating and drinking and looking at Nokomis, the old oak tree in the context of water. We watched as our water was used to hold together the paper, methodically being wrapped around our grandmother.

I remembered the murdered, the missing, the stolen, the disappeared, and the erased. I remembered generation after generation after generation after generation of our warrior women and 2SQ. I remembered the generations yet to come. When mitigomizh was wrapped with the paper, it reminded me of a sexy, strapless party dress, with ruching from top to bottom and one asymmetrical strap coming across her shoulder, where Belmore had attached the gown to the tree (by initially throwing the paper tied to a yellow rope over a very tall branch).

Mitigomizh for me had become sexualized through no choice of her own. She was aesthetically beautiful, but then she was also aesthetically beautiful before the performance began. I had just forgotten to notice.

Then, one of the shkaabewis, dressed in her own black party dress and with long, flowing black hair, sat in the lap of mitigomizh. Belmore took the wig off the shkaabewis's head and placed it over her face. Then she continued to wrap the shkaabewis into the tree with the paper. All the while, our sacred water was being used as the glue. Eventually, the Indigenous woman disappeared.[19] Belmore then sat on the ground in front of the pots of water, facing the mitigomizh and the disappeared woman.

That in and of itself was emotionally moving.

Then, the pinnacle.

The peace was suddenly and without warning shattered by the sound of gunfire. I immediately thought of Oka and the sounds of bullets terrorizing the pines. The violence of the explosion vibrated through my body and the ground.

The twenty-one-gun salute felt like the brutal targeting and assassination of Indigenous women disguised as a salute and an honoring, which speaks to the insidious and manipulative nature of colonialism, helping, and reconciliation and the dangers of perpetually placing Indigenous women in the context of victimhood. The audio also included casual chatting, as if nothing was happening. As if it was all so normal, because violence against Indigenous women and 2SQ people is normalized. The layers of paper on mitigomizh's body made the stereotype of "easy squaw" came alive for me as the paper now became the layers of sexism, racism, and heteropatriarchy slowly and seemingly gently, but fiercely and persistently, wrapped around my body, replacing my own context of sacred being, good in her own right, with one of violence and attack, directly in the line of fire with people who are not afraid to pull the trigger. The water, my own fragmented power being used to hold me down, hold me back, to make me disappear.

This is the collective story of Indigenous women and 2SQ people in Canada.

We all to varying degrees face the daily firing squad, disguised as a reconciliatory salute. Our young girls are slowly but surely wrapped in heteropatriarchy and racism. Our bodies are never our own but always the focal point of the gaze, receptacles of violence. And then there are our grandmothers, carrying the water inside them, rooted to the land, their bodies magnificent archives of story.

The brilliance of Belmore's work is always for me in its apparent nuanced simplicity, which hours and days later becomes more and more complex. It is the very best of Indigenous storytelling grounded in the very same processes that have brought meaning to the lives of our Ancestors: multidimensionality, repetition, abstraction, metaphor, and multiple sites of perception.

In short, a multilayered conversation whose meaning shifts through time.

At the end of the performance, Belmore took the wig off her shkaabewis's face and helped her out of the wrappings and down off the tree. The image of Belmore extending a hand to Cherish Violet Blood and Blood bursting through the bonds of five hundred years of oppression with a huge smile on her face is one of the images seared into my memory from that day. The others, I'll carry with me, and every time I pass by a mitigomizh, wherever I am in the world, I will now remember the fierce, gentle, beautiful, nurturing nation-building spirit of Indigenous women.

Rebecca Belmore is presence. She takes (back) her (our) space (land) in the world, and her work compels me to take (back) my (our) space (land) in the world. On Canada Day in 2012, she took every mitigomizh in my territory back, no matter where they grow. She embedded the story of Nishnaabekwewag into their bark, and in doing so she liberated the story of Indigenous women from the bonds of victimhood. Belmore constructs a constellation between the missing and the murdered, the erased and the present, and she does so on the terms of kwe, not so much as performance but as reality. I experienced Belmore's intervention as radical resurgence.[20] After reading Martineau's work, I also understand it in terms of affirmative refusal. In reconsidering it here, years after the original performance, I see it is a coded intervention that disrupts the heteropatriarchy of settler colonialism and generates and then reinserts kwe as theorist and kwe as revolutionary.

Robert Houle's *Paris/Ojibwa* is another intervention that is generative encodement and carries within it an expression of Nishnaabeg aesthetics.[21] When I first stood in front of Houle's reconstruction of a 1840s Parisian salon, I had tears in my eyes thinking about my Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg relatives from the Credit River at the center of the installation. I felt the horrific pain and despair of Uh wus sig gee zhig goo kway, a young Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg mother and artist who watched her children die of smallpox in Europe while completely isolated from her

land and family. Standing in the gallery some 170 years later, I could feel my heart break, imagining the moment when she realized that she would lose her own life and leave her remaining children motherless in a foreign and hostile land. This is the brilliance of Houle—his ability to create islands of decolonial love in their full richness while also evoking raw emotional responses, and in the process collapsing the perceived gap between artist and audience.

Paris/Ojibwa is a contemporary, multifaceted response to the story of a group of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg artists who traveled to Paris in 1845 to entertain French nobility as part of George Catlin's "Indian Museum." The artist collective included a family: Maungwedaus (see also chapter 4), his wife Uh wus sig gee zhig goo kway, their children, and various other family members. The early and brutal first stages of colonialism had foisted upon them a set of complex circumstances that led to their collective resistance and artistic response—one that took form through dance, performance, and the writings of Maungwedaus himself. I experience Maungwudaus and Uh wus sig gee zhig goo kway as rebel artists refusing colonial recognition at a time when Maungwudaus's brothers were (already) actively engaged in the politics of recognition as a mechanism to improve the social conditions of our people. Maungwudaus's journal invokes this. He was irritated and critical of his audience. He was not uncritically performing for white people. When he wrote in his journal lines like "The English women cannot walk alone; they must always be assisted by the men. They make their husbands carry their babies for them when walking," he is providing us with a rare written critical account of English life through the eyes of a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and artist.[22] To me, he was a performance artist in the same vein as Belmore, giving a performance as coded intervention and affirmative refusal.

Houle's installation is a reconstructed Parisian salon with four painted panels of figures returning to their homeland: a shaman, a warrior, a dancer, and a healer. Below each panel is an image of the smallpox virus. Above the panels are the names of the dancers, cycling in reference to Nishnaabeg honoring

practices.[23] I loved that Houle's language and visual imagery speak directly to our community: in the bowl of sage in the front corner of the salon, in the "sound of water, which changes to drums and finally an honor song, fills the entire space," and in his respect for our practices of honoring the spirits of those who have passed on by not speaking their names, but cycling them in text at the top of the exhibit.[24] *Paris/Ojibwa* represents a liberation, a homecoming, and an honor song both to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg artists in Catlin's "Indian Museum" and to contemporary Nishnaabeg.

Originally shown in Paris as part of a series of performance reenactments, *Paris/Ojibwa*'s Canadian premier was at the Art Gallery of Peterborough in the heart of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory. The initial Parisian enactments are a crucial part of this story. In 2006, Houle and artist Barry Ace traveled to various locations in Paris, following the footsteps of Maungwudaus's performance collective, reenacting Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg dance and performance for the crowds of Paris.[25]

The installation installed in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory at the Art Gallery of Peterborough now becomes to me about resurgence. I like the irony of a Parisian salon in the heart of Kina Gchi Ogamig, nested in Nishnaabewin, as a physical intervention of the Nishnaabeg internationalism discussed in chapter 4. Houle shifts the gaze from "Indians as objects in a museum" to the politics of power and representation that allow us to exoticize and objectify "Indians" in the first place, while also illuminating the resistance and resilience of the Nishnaabeg. Through *Paris/Ojibwa,* Houle delicately transforms the history of Maungwudaus and Uh wus sig gee zhig goo kway from tragedy into a beautiful, sacred story of the Nishnaabeg kind.[26] This idea of *reenactment as aesthetic* combined with abstraction becomes a way of empathizing across time and space with Maungwedaus and Uh wus sig gee zhig goo kway by creating and then living a different ending.

This reenactment as aesthetic became a part of my own artistic practice with the making of the poem, poem-song, and video "Leaks." The poetry is a response to a racist encounter

with a white county worker while picking wild leeks with my daughter, who was five at the time. This was her first encounter with white racism. I felt guilty for not being able to protect her and initially wrote the poem as a way of processing the traumatic experience for myself. I sent the poem to Cree/Nishnaabeg singer-songwriter Tara Williamson, and she sent a song back. Over the course of a few months of performing the piece in Peterborough, we were approached by Métis filmmaker Cara Mumford, who wanted to make a video of the poem-song and to have my daughter dance in the film. Cara's process involved going back to the site, like Houle, and reenacting to some degree (in a child-appropriate manner) what had happened but this time in a different context—the context of a loving, supportive, funny group of Indigenous women artists. This process of art making through reenactment was not only healing but produced a moving short film.[27]

All of these works involved an initial tragedy or experience with colonial violence, and all three use the processes of Nishnaabewin to lead artist collectives and eventually audiences through a different ending of the story. *Paris/Ojibwa* ultimately restores honor and dignity to those lost through colonial violence, on our own terms. *Paris/Ojibwa* in particular operationalizes the story of Maungwedaus and Uh wus sig gee zhig goo kway but through an opaqueness rather than through the consumptive eyes of the colonizer. While the Parisian audience is consuming Ace's dance performance, *Paris/Ojibwa* is also consuming them under the gaze of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg. While I am walking through the Parisian salon installed in my territory, I am part of a speaking back to colonialism. *Paris/Ojibwa* is a disruption to colonialism's gaze, it is a generative refusal, it is opaque—a visible but largely unreadable or differently read installation and experience to those outside of Nishnaabewin.[28] In a sense, Houle has built a network or a constellation across time and space, transforming Maungwedaus and Uh wus sig gee zhig goo kway from skeletons in unmarked graves in Europe to sacred beings.[29] He then links them as Ancestors to us, to me and my community, to himself and his community, to how we are

represented, and to the audience who walks into a constructed Parisian salon as spectacle, embedded in opaque Michi Saagiig grounded normativity. For me, as a Michi Saagiig audience, he set up a constellation as a flight path to my Ancestors, Maungwedaus and Uh wus sig gee zhig goo kway, their family, and their affirmative refusal, centuries before that was even a concept.