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Book Review of Mark Rifkin's Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination

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Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination. By Mark Rifkin. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017. 296 pp. ISBN: 9780822362975; paperback, $26.95.

A lot has happened in Indian Country recently: water protectors and the NoDAPL movement brought international attention to Native sovereignty and ongoing resistance to settler forms of violence against Indigenous ways of being; a settler public became aware of the MMIW movement and the ongoing assault on the lives of Indigenous women; an apology was given by executive order for a genocide that occurred in California and a Truth and Healing Council was created to investigate the historical relations between California Indians and the state of California; and Native identity is "complex" and certain people seek to profit from that complexity by duplicitously or erroneously claiming Native identity, to name a few. To be sure, these are all issues long addressed by Native people (Indigenous movements, in particular, always have a long arc), but it sure feels like these are events that happened within a recent timeframe.

The feeling that these are events and not manifestations of continuing struggles that go back hundreds of years is related to the well-documented fact that settler discourses on Native peoples often still represent us as existing in the past. A settler public, almost ritualistically, gets reminded of the existence of Native people and is seemingly perpetually surprised. This condition, while representing a significant problem on its own, for Rifkin also represents a double bind for Indigenous people. The long-standing and common response to these discourses of Native pastness has been to assert Native contemporaneity and/or modernity, but, for Rifkin, such a response participates in the very terms set forth by the discourses by contesting them within a linear, developmental, and rationalistic temporal framework. Rifkin rather seeks to dispel the idea that such a response adequately

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contests continuing settler domination and to show that it appeals to and bolsters a deeper settler framework.

The double bind is a familiar ruse first theorized by Gregory Bateson in communication theory as patterns of confusion, a general condition for him for PTSD and schizophrenia, and popularized by Michel Foucault's analysis of two opposing forms of power that together enmesh unsuspecting and well-meaning subjects further into power's snares. In brief, Foucault argues that repressive power, the blunt, straightforward, top-down, and usually explicit kind, elicits an antagonistic response from the subjugated that surreptitiously turns them to directly face the repression or exclusion, speak up and against it, and, in order to be intelligible, and this is the twist, assert themselves within the terms of a growing if dispersed productive power that works through them. Rifkin links the double bind to claims that modernity is a collaborative construction between *the West and the rest*. In this case, for Rifkin, a generative knowledge production on Native contributions to modernity both depends on and bolsters what he refers to as the "background" of a shared temporal framework, asserting a common container in which events take place, which contests narratives of Native disappearance and vulgar forms of archaism and yet contributes to national and global narratives of historical progress, wedding Native assertions of contemporaneity to state interests.

Rifkin's answer to this dilemma is *Beyond Settler Time*, a long, theoretically expansive, wide-ranging, and erudite book on what he calls "temporal sovereignty," which he contrasts to "temporal recognition," the institutional and assimilative mode through which Indigenous peoples get brought / bring themselves into the present. Temporal sovereignty, on the other hand, engages "the texture of Indigenous temporalities" (Rifkin 2017, 7–8) and Native collective experiences of becoming. Echoing Glen Coulthard's distinction between a politics of recognition (mediated by the settler state and its epistemic frames) and grounded normativities, "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 others over time" (cited in Rifkin 2017, 207–8), Rifkin's argument likewise emphasizes a form of self-determination that refuses external legitimation, flowing directly from Indigenous experiences, forms of governance, and social relations but in temporal terms.

Rifkin's turn to time isn't an obvious one for Native studies considering the intense and persistent focus the field has on "the land question."

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Though, from at least the publication of Vine Deloria Jr.'s *God Is Red*, in which he asserts that Indigenous epistemologies have a spatial orientation in contrast to Western, Christian orientations to historical, linear, and teleological/eschatological time (which Deloria claims undergirds an inherent colonial imperative uprooting a lived sense of place) to the recent publication of *Our History Is the Future*, Nick Estes's analysis of the longue durée of Native resistance up to Standing Rock, scholarship in Native studies has had an abiding interest in theorizing time. This includes the heavily populated list of Native scholars that Rifkin draws on to make his argument, including those whom he critically locates as being Native theorists of modernity (Philip Deloria, Scott Lyons, Jean O'Brien). But Vine Deloria's lesson, drawing on years of Indigenous struggle, has been influential, with the most recent and visible manifestation being the LandBack movement. In this sense, Mishuana Goeman's *Mark My Words* is another important touchstone for Rifkin, linking as it does Indigenous modes of storying to practices of grounded normativity, distinguishing between Indigenous place making and settler-colonial space making, or, as Robert Nichols calls it, the (violent) *production of land as property*. Goeman writes, "Stories teach us how to care for and respect one another and the land. Responsibility, respect, and places created through tribal stories have endured longer than the Western fences that outline settler territories and individual properties that continue to change hands" (cited in Rifkin 2017, 59–61). To Goeman's abiding sense of storied Indigenous place, Rifkin offers a storied, collective, and experiential Indigenous sense of duration.

The structure of Rifkin's book is a familiar one, beginning with a brief preface; followed by a long first chapter that details the primary argument and the theoretical and methodological investments of the book and then three chapters that develop the argument through close readings of texts, heavily weighted by novels (where the rubber hits the road, so to speak); ending, finally, with a coda that critically reflects on the relation between the book's argument and U.S. Indian policy as it affects Native American sovereignty. Because this is such a theoretically rich text and because Rifkin takes great pains to develop a powerful if complex argument on Native conceptions of time, in this review I primarily focus on the first chapter. For those interested in Native American literature and other forms of Native writing, Rifkin is a consummate literary scholar, and it is certainly worth reading his continuing engagement with the work of Native authors in the last three chapters where he offers fresh takes based on his theorizing of temporal recognition and temporal sovereignty of largely canonical Native

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literary texts and authors. Each of these chapters engages a different aspect of temporal recognition as the means through which more radical temporal formations in the form of sovereignty are managed or silenced.

In brief, chapter 2, "The Silence of Ely S. Parker," addresses U.S. historical narratives of developmental progress through the rhetoric of a perfecting union. Beginning with a meditation on the silent, onscreen presence of Haudenosaunee politician, Ely S. Parker, in the Steven Spielberg and Tony Kushner film *Lincoln*, Rifkin addresses the imposed temporal formation of the expanding and perfecting rule of law and its relation to violence by juxtaposing two concurrent wars caused by uprisings, the Civil War, and the lesser-known Dakota War. Attending to the writing of Parker as well as Dakota scholar Charles Eastman, Rifkin analyzes the temporal formations of the treaty and reservation systems as outcroppings of the rule of settler law. Chapter 3, "The Duration of the Land," focuses on John Joseph Mathews's novel *Sundown*, set in an Osage community during the allotment era. Analyzing the temporality of U.S. Indian policy and its focus on resource development (allotment and the petro-economy here), Rifkin notes how Mathews's novel represents and disrupts a maturational and heteronormative conception of social reproduction. To do so, he juxtaposes reproductive futurity to the queerness of the main character, Chal, whose Indianness acts as an opening onto a sense of place-based duration. The final chapter, "Ghost Dancing at Century's End," addresses the almost excessively researched social, political, and spiritual response to settler invasion, the Ghost Dance. Removing it from the sociological interpretations it has been subjected to and restoring its affective and everyday aspects, Rifkin discusses two novels in which the ceremony features prominently, Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes*. Referencing the version of the ceremony envisioned by the Paiute Doctor, Wovoka (there have been others), the ceremony, as made clear by Rifkin's readings of the two novels, is both a hopeful vision for a future restored to Indigenous peoples, with the dead returning to live with the living in many interpretations, and a messianic manifestation of Indigenous rage through the prophesied disappearance of all white people. This affective ambivalence is summed up by Rifkin through the emotions anger and longing, which, he argues, open up cross-time proximities based in prophetic temporality and its everyday manifestations.

Rifkin lays out the book's theoretical and methodological infrastructure in chapter 1, "Indigenous Orientations," where much of his aforementioned argument and the basis for his notion of Indigenous duration reside.

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Ambitious and just a bit irreverent, the chapter ranges across a bewildering set of philosophies, concepts, and theories: Native and Latinx philosopher V. F. Cordova's vitalist philosophy; Sarah Ahmed's queer phenomenology (from which Rifkin draws the term "orientation"); Native theorist, memoirist, and poet Deborah Miranda's archival meditations on the afterlife of annihilation in the wake of the California missions; theories of Native modernity; decolonial theories of coloniality (which get lumped in with the previous group); postcolonial critiques of the enlightenment; Native studies critiques of recognition politics; queer theories of time; Einsteinian relativity; Henri Bergson's philosophical concept of duration; Native theorist Dian Million's felt theory (along with non-Native queer theorists of affect); and Native conceptions of storying. It's honestly a bit overwhelming; however, Rifkin's erudition together with a conceptually tight argument hold it all together.

After establishing the broad parameters of temporal recognition, described above, Rifkin explores a variety of theoretical conceptions of temporal plurality, what he calls being-in-time, as alternatives to dominant settler time. As a subjective form, being-in-time is a phenomenological orientation drawn from past experiences that frame possible future experience, turning one toward the future through interest and momentum in the form of a trajectory. The phenomenological experience of time organizes much of the chapter, though it takes different faces with Ahmed's queer phenomenology, Bergson's theory of duration, and Merleau-Ponty's more canonical philosophy. What this step does is specify the experience of time away from abstract, common time. Threaded through this argument is the question of collective (as opposed to common) and therefore Indigenous experiences (which are not just subjective or intersubjective). To begin to answer the question, Rifkin turns to Native scholars: Cordova's notion of communal frames of reference and Miranda's and Dian Million's respective theories of collective storying. Rifkin ends the chapter by staging a conversation between Indigenous storying as collective and affective frames of reference and queer theorizations of temporality. This last section is the only one in the book where non-Native theories are directly questioned through a Native critical lens and is, for that reason, one of the more robust moments of theorizing in the book. It is also very much in Rifkin's wheelhouse, hearkening back to his earlier work on intersections of queer and Indigenous studies.

The hinge between temporal recognition and temporal sovereignty in the chapter, perhaps surprisingly, is physicist Albert Einstein's theory

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of relativity and his idea of frames of reference. In Einsteinian relativity, Rifkin finds a conception of time that breaks with natural time, the common temporal experience of the present as an "unfolding, universal line of development" (Rifkin 2017, 34–35). Frames of reference, on the other hand, are based on one's relative position and make the idea of a universal time impossible. Turning to theoretical physics in order to understand temporal sovereignty, though, carries a number of risks, which Rifkin acknowledges by noting the limits of Einstein's theory for discussing Indigenous experiences. While, according to the theory, there is no possible universal time, what makes a frame of reference intelligible is having a common measure to compare frames, in this case mathematics itself (it also helps to have a common perspective, the absolute speed of light). One can understand differences between frames by comparing them according to this measure, each having internally consistent relations to time that easily map onto each other. The problem, of course, is that this leaves little room for different qualitative experiences, a problem that philosopher Henri Bergson explicitly sets out to solve with his theory of duration. To relativity's quantified and infinitely divisible (spatialized) notion of time, Bergson offers a purely qualitative, indivisible, continuous, sensuous, multiplicitous, and mobile notion of duration. It is, essentially, the dynamic, vital, and subjective side of relativity, a philosophical supplement to Einstein's physics (even if written earlier).

Leaving aside the infamous debate that Bergson had with Einstein when Bergson was president of the International Commission for Cooperation (the precursor to UNESCO), the difference between the two thinkers' conceptions of time is fundamental to Rifkin's distinction between temporal recognition and temporal sovereignty. Bergson's separating of vital and experiential duration from spatialized/mathematized "clock" time orients much of the critical thrust of Rifkin's analysis, offering a schematic opposition that repeats throughout the book. "Rather than approaching time as an abstract, homogeneous measure of universal movement along a singular axis, we can think of it as plural, less as temporality than *temporalities*" (15–16). The key term here is "movement," as Bergson's notion of duration is bound up with the question of motion in two senses: against deterministic theories that claim human action is part of causal chains, asserting instead a realm of human freedom (the subject of Bergson's dissertation, *Time and Free Will*); and, perhaps obliquely, as a response to the paradox by ancient Greek philosopher, Zeno of Elea, that motion is an illusion if one takes the view that space is infinitely divisible. This process of unmixing space and

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time to assert a realm of experiential duration, freedom, and heterogeneous becomings, separate from abstract, infinitely divisible, "dead" space, had significant influence on American pragmatist thinkers such as William James, as well as American modernist poets and novelists. It's a vitalist, critical framing that has had wide-ranging impact and has acted as a form of critical common sense, as evidenced by this quote by V. F. Cordova: "Time is an abstraction derived from the fact that there is motion and change in the world" (cited in Rifkin 2017, 15–16).

Investment in this distinction positions Rifkin's project as ideological critique. It goes something like this (in capsule form): settler time, defined as a particular way of narrating, conceptualizing, and experiencing, is a fixed abstraction that promotes a singular temporal experience for everyone; temporal formations, such as Indigenous ones, that don't fit this ideology are assimilated through temporal recognition, translated through a conception of shared modernity and the present; however, time is plural and the monologic nature of settler time is a spatialized abstraction, a deadening of lived, experiential time. The next step that Rifkin takes is to collectivize this plurality to show that Indigenous peoples operate within "perceptual traditions" that are at odds also with the individual nature of Western subjectivity. These Indigenous forms of temporal sovereignty, then, manifest as tensions within the settler framework. Attending to these tensions, for Rifkin, is a way to pluralize time and open space for "Indigenous self-articulations, forms of collective life, and modes of self-determination" (8–9). One way to do this is to read closely the texture of temporal formations in Native-authored texts.

One might wonder why Rifkin turns to physics and a continental philosopher of vitalism to discuss Native temporal sovereignty, especially because early to mid-twentieth-century anthropologists made similar arguments but in regard to Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. These anthropological analyses were also done as a critique of earlier discourses of social evolutionary development and a unifying time scale that differentiates between peoples according to a civilizationist schema, though the move they make is often understood as a spatial one, synchronic as opposed to diachronic. Not to collapse Rifkin's very rich concept of temporal sovereignty into what reductively has become known as cultural relativism, I am left wondering why the Western thinkers Rifkin draws on for an alternative conception of time, who do not explicitly engage Indigeneity, are more useful than the much-derided salvage ethnographers who, while certainly problematic, were directly engaged with Indigenous formations of thought

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and experience, some of whom theorized in ways that could lend themselves to Rifkin's argument.

One obvious answer is that Einstein and Bergson are interested primarily in relativizing time within a Western framework, anticipating to some extent the critically reflexive turn anthropology later makes to an anthropology of the West (if such a designation still makes sense) and then of nonhumans, branching out into science and technology studies, new materialism, animal studies, and so on. This is part of what Rifkin refers to on numerous occasions as his intention to critique Western formations of thought in order to *make conceptual room* for, *open possibilities* for, and *make visible* the texture of Indigenous temporality, part of an immanent critical project within a dominant framework. The other obvious answer is the devastating critique of salvage ethnography by Native studies, that it produced a depoliticized notion of culture that ended up, in effect if not intention, trapping Indigenous people into atemporal evaluations of authenticity, creating a different notion of pastness. This version of pastness is largely responsible for the idea of a fixed image against which Native people are judged, leading to the common nomenclature that ethnography is a trap, trapping Indigenous people not just in time or image but also in space.

Rifkin does address the question of culture in relation to time when discussing Johannes Fabian's well-known prescription for coevalness in ethnographic representation as an intersubjective time (Rifkin 2017, 31–32). Noting the translational aspect of Fabian's intervention into representation, Rifkin shows how coevalness is a concept that employs temporal recognition through the lens of culture and its plural and relative aspects to render Indigenous time against the background of settler time. But there remains a resonance between Rifkin's notion of temporal plurality and anthropology's cultural relativity that I can't shake. And I suspect it has something to do with the complex circuits passing between the so-called salvage ethnography of the early twentieth century and modernist aesthetic philosophy, as outlined empirically and discursively by Tony Bennett, specifically around the culture concept and the influence of modernist aesthetics on its development, and more fundamentally by David Lloyd, as part of an aesthetic anthropology that grounds racial schemas and informs humanist education and training through the disciplining of subjects along the split in the different senses of culture, between humanist education/elitism and the ethnographically defined. Lloyd links this humanist and humanizing project to the various senses of the term "representation," which raises the question of how representation and, indeed, nonrepresentation operate in Rifkin's

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conceptions of temporal recognition and temporal sovereignty. Particularly, how do these conceptions rely on or undergird subjectivity and aesthetics?

Without getting too far afield for a book review (or if we already are there, to rein it back in a bit), the above point about culture and humanism raises questions about Rifkin's book that it doesn't provide answers for. Does Rifkin's reliance on modernist aesthetic philosophy produce a double bind of its own? Not only was Bergson a modernist philosopher if there ever was one, but Rifkin's heavy emphasis on phenomenology indicates a form of critique organized around human freedom of the Western liberal variety. Despite referencing a number of Native thinkers in order to collectivize this sense of time as freedom, Rifkin nonetheless gets there by first positing the ideological problem of settler time and then pluralizing it within the framework of modernist Western thought, specifically around the subject and its freedom. Does separating out time as a category in order to avoid the double bind of historical exclusion and reactive assertions of Native modernity produce another one in relation to the figure of the human as a product of an aesthetic anthropological regime, as Lloyd asserts? That is, does Rifkin replace the statement *Native people are part of modernity after all* with *Native people are also complex aesthetic humans*? To begin to answer this would require engaging the colonial and racial dynamics of reflexivity and its role in apportioning the title of humanity to differentially categorized peoples, as described by Denise Ferreira de Silva, and how that anthropo-logic undergirds a sense of the aesthetic. This is a question that bears on the historically progressive narrative of moving from representation to nonrepresentation philosophically, politically, and aesthetically, a narrative that continues to organize how we treat culture in anthropological, social, and aesthetic senses, their imbrications and antagonisms.

An interest in alternative epistemologies and ontologies is ambiguous at best, as made clear by the fraught trajectory of ethnographic representations of Indigenous lifeways. What if Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are not liberatory in the Western humanist sense? What intellectual and practical approaches make possible another way of understanding them? In his engagement with the work of Deborah Miranda, Rifkin offers a possible way. Drawing on the critique of the depoliticizing effect of anthropological representations, Rifkin notes that Miranda's intentional work in the archive of the destruction of her people flies in the face of such a notion of culture, turning away from a coevalness in which Indigenous people offer up signs of culture for an interpretive and translative practice within a coterminous timeframe. Miranda's account rather reorients the

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very forces and materials of destruction through storying as praxis. "Much of our culture was literally razed to the ground. I refused to believe that the absence of language meant my culture was nonexistent, but since even other Indians thought 'all you California Indians were extinct,' it's been a tough road. Along the way, I've learned a lot about stories, their power to rebuild or silence" (cited in Rifkin 2017, 32–34). What is interesting here is the equivocation of the term "culture," with Miranda's use referencing the targeting and destruction of culture as well as its persistence despite absence or in seemingly reduced form, perhaps even through absence and destruction. This isn't completely against the way ethnographers such as Fabian use the term, but it also clearly doesn't have the same meaning. It's at this point Rifkin's account of Indigenous endurance really takes off.

Against dominant, particularly anthropological and state-policy-oriented, definitions of Indigenous continuity as the transmission of (anthropologically defined) culture, uninterrupted land tenure, or unchanged modes of governance, Rifkin finds in Miranda's conception of story a way to rethink the meaning of Indigenous continuity and endurance. In the ruins of representation and recognition, story acts as a reorientation that renders the destruction itself part of an Indigenous "perceptual tradition," connecting, through an expansive sense of relation, different temporalities, beings, and ways of living that remain untranslatable into Euro-American historicism. These connections are an affective legacy of experience, what Dian Million calls felt knowledge, and flow in often unseen and unpredictable directions. The one constancy/continuity is the connection to land, even when displaced, which, according to Miranda, like water flowing underground, "lives beneath the surfaces of our lives" (cited in Rifkin 2017, 50–51), in the form of bodily sensations and temporal experiences. For Rifkin, this sense of storying creates a type of noncontinuous continuity, a lived disruption, that pushes back against the onslaught of imposed settler forms of recognition and assimilation that affect everything from Indigenous governance to relations to land to social and sexual relationships and the "sexual arrangement of the time of life" (Luciano cited in Rifkin 2017, 51–53).

Rifkin is at his best when placing this sense of story into conversation with queer theories of time, echoing his earlier work on imposed forms of settler heteronormativity through Indian policy, elaborating the mechanisms of elimination policies of Native relational socialities and sexualities and replacement with settler forms; in other words, of settler colonialism as a normativizing and sexualizing project. Initially questioning the potential genealogical grounding of story in lineal-based models of recognition (both

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settler and tribal), Rifkin uses this question to reflect on the possible uses of queer challenges to "chrononormativity" (Freeman) and "reproductive temporality" (Halberstam), the reduction of time to the family, heterosexuality, and reproduction through conjugal union, for disrupting this normative model of story. He conversely challenges queer temporal conceptions for their potential dependency on notions of individuality and investments in the continuation of the settler state. Testing these theories against the terms of survival addressed by Miranda and the need for collective continuity necessary to sustain peoplehood in the face of active and structural genocide, Rifkin both takes the lesson from queer temporality and also asserts that Native temporal formations are not reducible to non-Native ones (which presumably includes non-Native queer ones). It's a way of living with the unresolved tension and finding in story an alternative account of continuity. Here, Rifkin does with queer theory what he doesn't do with Western aesthetic philosophy.

Basing his notion of perceptual traditions on this powerful insight about the, frankly, inhuman force of storying in absence and through destruction, Rifkin, through Miranda, orients us toward another way of thinking, speaking together, and making knowledge, making trouble, in other times. How do we take up this charge?

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