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Queer Native Poetics in Demian DinéYazhi's Artistic World

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Chicana & Chicano Studies

by

Sophia Sambrano

2023

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Queer Native Poetics in Demian DinéYazhi's Artistic World

by

Sophia Sambrano

Master of Arts in Chicana & Chicano Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Gaye Theresa Marie Johnson, Chair

“Queer Native Poetics in Demian DinéYazhi's Artistic World” examines queer Indigeneity through the artistic output of Diné transdisciplinary artist and poet Demian DinéYahzi. This thesis examines DinéYazhi's visual art, their chapbook called *An Infected Sunset*, and their Instagram account @RISEindigenous to excavate the ways that Indigeneity shows up with respect to time, place, and Indigenous survivance. This thesis reads DinéYazhi's visual poetry as firmly situated within a legacy of women of color artistic production. Written in the wake of the 2016 election, Pulse nightclub shootings, and #NoDAPL actions, *An Infected Sunset* is located within that moment, and this thesis utilizes queer of color critique and queer Indigenous studies to analyze DinéYazhi's spatial sensibilities, politics of possibility, and an artistic practice that nurtures vulnerability and healing. This thesis also analyses the material aspects of DinéYahzii's artistic output in the form of the @RISEindigenous Instagram account and Etsy store, which provides political education and sells merchandise with queer Indigenous political

messages, and provides an avenue to analyze the way political emotions circulate when shared online.

The thesis of Sophia Sambrano is approved.

Rafael Pérez-Torres

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Gaye Theresa Marie Johnson, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

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Queer Native Poetics in Demian DinéYazhi's Artistic World

Introduction

This project explores the work of Demian DinéYazhi', whose poetry and performance speaks to the transformation and survivance of queer Native ways of knowing despite ongoing colonial violence. Demian DinéYazhi' (they/them) is a Diné (Navajo) transdisciplinary artist, poet and curator born in Gallup, New Mexico, and presently working out of Portland, Oregon. DinéYazhi''s art engages in creative writing, curation, performance, street art, instillations, and zines, among other mediums. They are also the founder of RISE (Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment) – an Indigenous artist and activist collective with a popular Instagram account that highlights Native art and activism, with a large focus on education.

DinéYazhi''s poem, performance piece, and zine/chapbook *An Infected Sunset* is “an ekphrastic long-form prose poem first conceived in August 2016 in the wake of the Orlando nightclub shooting, police killings of unarmed Black men, and in the midst of the Standing Rock #NODAPL Resistance.” Zines and chapbooks historically defy traditional conventions of knowledge distribution through self-publishing, and *An Infected Sunset*'s physical form speaks to hierarchies of knowledge in more ways than one—the latter half of the zine is a “Liberated Poem,” loosely bound with no numbered pages, which allows for endless meaning making and re-making after the point of publication. The “Liberated Poem” was conceived as “an offering to Indigenous communities and landscapes that strive for a decolonial and sovereign future emancipated from white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchal settler colonial trauma drama,” and explicitly challenges the prescribed timeline of writing and publishing that forecloses further re-articulation after publishing. This thesis utilizes DinéYazhi's anthological entry in *Nepantla, An Anthology for Queer Poets of Color* to situate their artistic production within the legacy of

women of color feminism and queer of color critique, focuses the bulk of textual analysis on *An Infected Sunset*, and analyzes *R.I.S.E.: Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment*, DinéYazhi's Instagram page and Etsy shop in order to explore their sovereign artistic world created online.

“Untitled” and R.I.S.E.: Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment

My introduction into DinéYazhi's work was through their visual art, specifically a mixed media visual poem “Untitled (For Andrea Smith),” included in *Nepantla, An Anthology for Queer Poets of Color* (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). This two-page entry exemplifies DinéYazhi's critical engagement with form and demonstrates their positioning of Native feminism as necessary for social movements that seek liberation from heteropatriarchy. DinéYazhi's entry in the collection is the only one that utilizes collage and stylized typography, in effect “yelling” at a reader who might be casually flipping through the book to stop and pay attention. This disrupts the anthology through form, communicating that Native feminism is worthy of this literary scream. The title of the poem points towards ongoing discussions of Native feminism as the title names a contemporary scholar who investigates violence against Native women as a systemic issue rather than an individualized one.

The visual poem features a portrait of a Native individual overlaid multiple times with the words “PROTO-FEMINISM” displayed in bold text at the bottom of the image. The modern serif font used is associated with printed material and is visually the piece's only point of commonality with the rest of the entries in the anthology. This modern font paired against an archival photograph destabilizes the temporal realm of this work, and the phrase “PROTO-FEMINISM” makes this destabilization explicit. The term refers to a movement that encourages de-periodization of feminism as first, second, and third wave feminism, encouraging popular

feminism to recognized gender-based resilience and resistance as pre-dating the modern western naming of “feminism”.¹

“UNTITLED” explicitly asks the viewer to consider Indigenous resilience and survivance as proto-feminist. Positioning Indigenous survivance as proto-feminist re-periodizes feminism

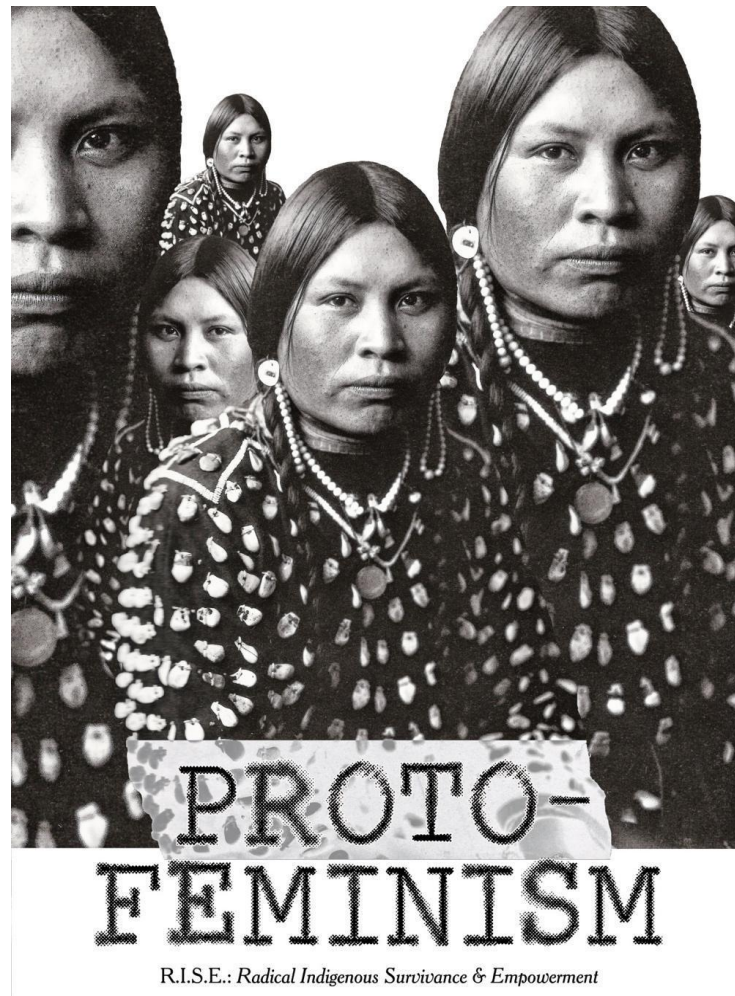


Figure 1 “Untitled (For Andrea Smith)” 2012. Demian DinéYazhi'. RISE tumblr.
<https://burymyart.tumblr.com/image/113104525448>. Accessed 10 May 2022.

Captioned on Tumblr: “High resolution poster of an Apsaalooke’ woman photographed by Cree photographer Richard Throssel in the early 1900s. As with all our posters, feel liberated to print out and wheatpaste at will!”

¹ Blackwell, Maylei, “The Telling is Political,” *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2011), 2.

and holds that Indigenous survivance is constitutive of feminism, especially a feminism that resists settler colonialism.

“UNTITLED” continues on the next page with a typographic image that reads “If one were to develop a FEMINIST history centering NATIVE WOMEN, feminist history in the COUNTRY would start in 1492 with the RESISTANCE to patriarchal COLONIZATION.”² The historiographical nature of an anthology, this one deemed “the first major anthology for queer

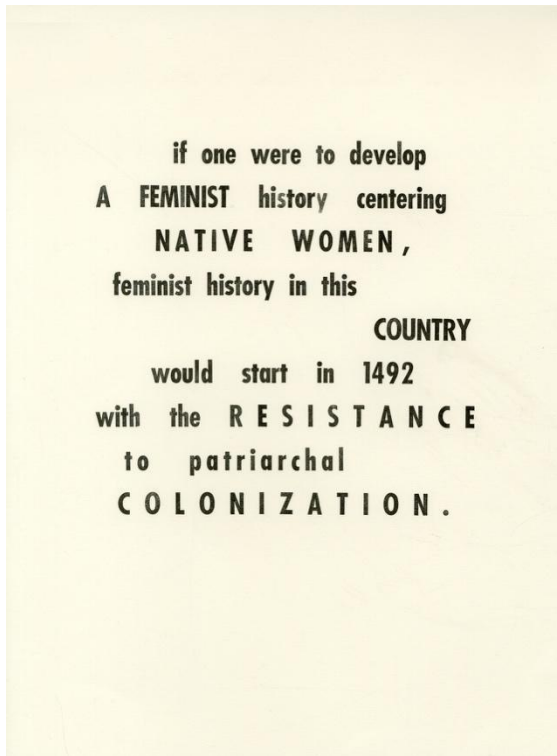


Figure 2 “Untitled (For Andrea Smith)” 2012. Demian DinéYazhi’. Letterpress print on Stonehenge paper with hand-set text in Futura Condensed 36. RISE tumblr. <https://burymyart.tumblr.com/post/63766488412/heteroneoushomosexual-demian-dine-yazhi>. Accessed 10 May 2022.

poets of color,” signals an attempt to mend a deficit in the archive, and “Untitled” expands that motive to address the constitutive relationship between heteropatriarchal violence and colonial violence, both past and ongoing, while disrupting the form of a traditional written poem.

This type of participation in the colonial archive is productive, but DinéYazhi’ moves beyond politics of representation and inclusion, which are a feature of neoliberal identity politics,³ in favor of a vision of Indigenous futurity rooted in anti-capitalist

resistance to colonialism. “Untitled” was produced under DinéYazhi’’s artist/activist initiative,

² Christopher Soto, *Nepantla: An Anthology for Queer Poets of Color* (New York: Nightboat Books, 2018).

³ Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

R.I.S.E.: Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment, and was originally created as a political poster with freely accessible distribution via tumblr. In addition to an archive on tumblr, R.I.S.E. also runs a popular Instagram account, @RISEIndigenous. With over 116,000 followers, R.I.S.E. posts share-able, educational political content focused on Native liberation and decolonization. The content in these images are often from a queer decolonial perspective, and are notably radical, invoking the historical legacy of genocidal violence onto Native peoples and linking it to critiques of heteropatriarchy and white supremacy today. This paper also explores the RISE Instagram and accompanying online shop where merchandise with these messages is sold as they pertain to online activism and interconnectivity in an increasingly globalized landscape.

This paper traces the relationship between women of color feminism and queer Indigenous studies, arguing that the various forms DinéYazhi's artwork takes (1) exemplifies queer Indigenous survivance and futurity, while (2) continuing women of color feminist writing, publishing, and other expressive traditions. This research attempts to answer questions that are informed by the fields of Queer of color theory, women of color theory, and Queer Indigenous studies, I ask: How can Native identity be defined outside of violence and trauma? How is Queer Native futurity apprehended in artistic works that are informed by women of color feminist practices?

Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

When directly referring to an author's work, I use the terms Indigenous, Native, Native American, and American Indian as they are named by the respective author. Outside of direct references, this paper utilizes the terms Indigenous and Native interchangeably. When it is not relevant to identify my specific community, which is the Pueblo of Laguna, the term "Native"

most closely resonates with my experience growing up in New Mexico in the 2000s after the implementation of neoliberal multiculturalism⁴. DinéYazhi' self-identifies as Indigenous, which has become a powerful identifier that signals global solidarity among Indigenous people, while Native refers specifically to the Indigenous people of what is now known as the United States and their historical relationship to the U.S. nation-state.⁵

New Mexico's ethnic and racial formation reflects its history of colonization and created the conditions for New Mexico's tri-cultural myth, which holds that Spanish, Anglos, and Natives live in harmony and make the state a keeper of Spanish colonial heritage with a unique racial make-up⁶, which also informs my own racial identification and terminology used in this paper. This trope, embedded in New Mexican culture⁷ privileges the history of Spanish colonization in the area and the reign of Spanish elites well after the formal end of colonization, and implies a host of other cultural markers like the large Catholic presence in the state, and imbues the state with a sense of pride toward New Mexico's ability to retain its Spanish identity despite the Anglicization encouraged by the United States when the territory became a state in 1912⁸. The tri-cultural trope has material grounding as 50% of New Mexicans are Hispanic and

⁴ "Native Knowledge 360°: Frequently Asked Questions," *Teaching & Learning about Native American*, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/faq/did-you-know>.

⁵ "Native Knowledge 360°: Frequently Asked Questions," *Teaching & Learning about Native American*, accessed January 14, 2022, <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/faq/did-you-know>.

⁶ Fairbrother, Anne, "Mexicans in New Mexico: Deconstructing the Tri-Cultural Trope," *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies* 7 (2000): 111-130.

⁷ "Research Guides: Three Peoples Murals in Zimmerman Library," *Home - Three Peoples Murals in Zimmerman Library - Research Guides at University of New Mexico*, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://libguides.unm.edu/c.php?g=1168686&p=8535451>.

⁸ Gómez, Laura E., *Manifest Destinies: the Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University, 2007), utilizes New Mexico as a case study in the racial formation of Mexican Americans as it relates to manifest destiny and colonialism. Ed. Gonzales-Berry,

10% are Native American, but the trope is used to detach the Spanish from violent conquest and subsequent rule over New Mexico in favor of a myth of equal-footing and harmony⁹. One of the outcomes of the tri-cultural myth is a (sometimes feigned) familiarity with Indigenous people of the area, and because of this, “Native” is often used colloquially identify Native people in mixed Native and non-Native groups in New Mexico.

Due to my upbringing on and off the reservation in Las Cruces, Laguna, and Albuquerque, “Native” is my own choice of identifier when “Pueblo” or “Laguna” is not relevant. “Indian” may refer to governmental institutions that pre-date terminology shifts (i.e. Indian Health Service, Bureau of Indian affairs) and is often perceived as an outdated term that does not acknowledge Native people’s right to self-identify. However, there is also a reclaiming of the term “Indian” as an in-community identifier, often stylized among younger people as “ndn” which signals its casual nature, brings it into the digital age of abbreviations and shorthand, and updates the governmentally imposed term for reclamation all at once. DinéYazhi’, as well as many other Natives with an online presence, use this term to signal in-community familiarity. This terminology shift from “Indian” to “Native American” and “Indigenous” began in the 1970s out of the American Indian movement and was more commonly implemented by neoliberal multiculturalism in the 1990s¹⁰.

Erlinda, David Maciel, in *The Contested Homeland : a Chicano History of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), also discusses New Mexican’s relationship to colonialism. I also hope to explore the impact of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 in the formation of Pueblo identity in future research.

⁹ “American Indians and Alaska Natives - by the Numbers,” *The Administration for Children and Families*, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ana/fact-sheet/american-indians-and-alaska-natives-numbers>.

¹⁰ “Native Knowledge 360°: Frequently Asked Questions”

This literature review brings together the fields of women of color feminism, queer of color theory, and queer Indigenous studies. I also outline the structural conditions of this historical moment to discuss settler colonialism and its current iterations under neoliberal status quo. DinéYazhi's work is in the lineage of women of color feminist expressive tradition that articulates a multiply voiced subject. Queer of color critique takes up questions about who has (or has not) historically made up that multiply-voiced subject and allows us to analyze that subject as queer, and as always outside the confines of subjectivity. Queer Indigenous studies centers settler colonialism and its enforcement of cis-heteropatriarchy and brings forth discussions about Native sovereignty and futurity. Bringing these fields together pinpoints the theoretical location of DinéYazhi's work and my analysis. In the theoretical framework section, I look at the current mechanisms of oppression, specifically neoliberalism that furthers settler colonialism. I define these terms and their application as they are used in this paper, focusing on neoliberal identity politics that favor inclusion and representation that continue to produce totalizing discourses about marginalized people. I also seek to incorporate a Marxist material analysis of DinéYazhi's work that extends into their Instagram presence and merchandise on their Etsy shop. These discussions culminate in the broader aims of this research and the questions that guide it.

On a broader level, this literature review seeks to bring together the fields of Chicana studies and Native studies through a queer of color critique. Field-forming texts of Chicano studies from the Chicano movement were predicated on reclamation of an ancestral Indigeneity to resist Spanish settler colonialism, but failed to adequately address the racial tensions associated with settler colonialism and its uneven treatment of Indigenous people and mestizos,

which ultimately reproduced Indigenous erasure¹¹. Mestizaje, or racial mixing, has a past of erasing Indigeneity and blackness within the Chicano movement, but also signals “utopian possibilities” and an incorporation of contradiction in Chicana/o identity formation¹² Although racial and geospatial politics are being critically interrogated within the field of Chicana/o studies through trans-border frameworks such as Critical Latinx indigeneities¹³ and Central American studies finding a home in Chicana/o studies, my experience as a fourth generation Chicana and Pueblo of Laguna Native is largely rooted in a U.S.-based identity that I hope to interrogate through this thesis. Chicana¹⁴ studies and critical ethnic studies as whole have deeply informed my political racial identity, and my lived experiences necessitates that my research interrogates the gaps (and wounds) found between Chicana/o studies and American Indian studies. In mapping Chicana/o and Native relationships, this research also seeks to contribute to the body of scholarship that maps multiracial spaces and the relationships that form in these spaces, with attunement to both conflicts and coalitions¹⁵. This literature review charts these gaps and overlaps as I have uncovered them in my academic journey, which was also geopolitically

¹¹ Lourdes Alberto, “Nations, Nationalisms, and *Indígenas*: The ‘Indian’ in the Chicano Revolutionary Imaginary,” in *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 107–27. <https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.1.0107>.

¹² Pérez-Torres, Rafael, *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), xiii.

¹³ Blackwell, M., Boj Lopez, F. & Urrieta, L., *Special issue: Critical Latinx indigeneities*, *Lat Stud* 15, 126–137 (2017).

¹⁴ I use “Chicana/o” when referring to the field of study, and “Chicana” to denote my academic upbringing as a student of queer Chicana feminists/queer Chicana and lived experience as a queer Native Chicana.

¹⁵ Johnson, Gaye Theresa, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), xi.

informed by my upbringing in New Mexico as a fourth generation Chicana and three generations removed from my reservation due to boarding schools. This literature review also includes a review of the theoretical modes of material analysis I use to dissect Demian DinéYazhi's work, which seek to understand Queer Native ways of knowing in the present conditions of neoliberal late-stage capitalism and acceleration of time-space compression.

Women of Color Feminism

This section of the literature review focuses on expressive traditions within women of color feminism, tracing women of color expressive works, organizing practices, and scholarship as articulating a multiply voiced subject that resist totality. Creativity as a site of resistance has a rich tradition among marginalized peoples whose existence is rendered illegible through epistemic erasure. Women of color feminism has held creativity as a site of theorizing and resistance since its early academic inception in the 1970s and 1980s. The anthological collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (1981) has proven to be an enduring contribution to early women of color feminist theorizing through creative work and includes Native authors and Native mestizas/Chicanas. In its introduction, the text makes a commitment to articulating differences among women, the “experiences with divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice, and denial of differences within the feminist movement” (xliii). The anthology was a key feature of 1970s social movement consciousness raising. Because marginalized peoples have historically been barred access from any meaningful inclusion in the archive, anthologies became a way to showcase the myriad of writers of color that do not have access to publishing. These early collections also organized women of color as a group [continue quote from above], and have retained their ability to form a collective identity while maintaining difference. Anthologies also foreground

difference and multiplicity within the identity groupings they represent, pushing back against hegemonic, one-dimensional representations of marginalized people.

DinéYazhi's poem in *Nepantla* engages with the form of an anthology on multiple levels, by subverting it through the form of a visual poem, while participating in advancing the identity-making process of anthologizing through their insertion of Native feminist politics in their poem. The artist takes a women of color feminist stance by invoking a multiply-voiced subject, calling back to Indigenous proto-feminists and centering feminist resistance to settler-colonialism in queer of color politics. This theoretical impetus that utilizes the anthology to foreground difference and subvert monographic form has been explored in depth by Chicana feminists and queer of color critique¹⁶. These authors uncover the inherent multiplicity of identity within women of color feminist theory that includes queer people of color, and articulates the fields as sites that are always concerned with developing frameworks for felt knowledge through creative expression, while also being able to articulate a collective identity that foregrounds and embodies difference. Norma Alarcon articulates *This Bridge Called My Back* as birthing a multiply voiced theoretical subject, challenging mainstream feminist standpoint theory that holds gender difference as the ultimate "common denominator" and in effect, annihilates all other differences and further renders women of colors experiences as illegible¹⁷. This also speaks to the ways that mainstream feminism has historically been able to include and appropriate these central women of color feminist works without meaningfully

¹⁶ Norma Alarcón, "The Theoretical Subjects of 'This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism'," in *Criticism in the Borderlands. Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture and Ideology*, ed. Hector Calderón and José David Saldiva (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

assessing the discursive methods that continually reproduce their exclusion, which also speaks the appropriation of queer Native ways of knowing within white LGBTQ studies that I address later.

This type of exclusion is continuously reproduced in scholarship that addresses identity-based marginalization—between queer theory and queer of color critique, between queer studies and queer Indigenous studies, and even between Chicana lesbian feminists and trans studies. Further, this research seeks to articulate the utility of difference within identity-based politics. Other scholars seize the differential nature of women of color consciousness in organizing practices rather than literary practices, highlighting the ways that women of color coalitional politics have historically been able to seize dimensions of difference in order to render women of color's issues as legible under totalizing power structures¹⁸. Chela Sandoval's differential consciousness brings utility to a collective identity in difference—Sandoval's work also cites *This Bridge* in order to draw on the many dimensions of women of color consciousness. My contribution to this legacy of scholarship falls in line with this urge to argue against the totalizing nature of representative identity politics and in favor of the utility of cultivating differential knowledge. *Nepantla* emerges as the first queer of color poetic anthology, thus continuing this identity-forming legacy.

Queer of Color Critique

Queer of color theory has also taken up identificatory difference in women of color feminist theory, through its expressive, organizing, and theoretical traditions, and is another indication of the overlap between women of color feminism and queer of color theory. Queer of

¹⁸ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

color theory also brings forth a framework to identify the ways that marginalized identity categories are produced and reified through state-sanctioned projects. Coined by Roderick Ferguson, queer of color critique refers to practices that utilize "queer social formations as ways of apprehending the overlaps between race and political economy" and also charts the ways gender, sexuality, and race are co-constitutive in processes of belonging and citizenship.¹⁹ Ferguson researches early anthropological studies on race and family in order to demonstrate the particular ways that Black women's gender and sexuality, as well as nonnuclear family structures, are discursively constructed as nonnormative and punished by hegemonic institutions accordingly. Creative expression is able to speak to the institutional violence that historically does not allow marginalized people to voice their own theories, and Ferguson cites women of color feminism's legacy of creative expression as knowledge production, but more specifically Black lesbian feminism as informing the tradition of this practice. Early women of color feminist anthologies are one of the ways liberal feminism gestures toward inclusion— Ferguson analyzes the ways representational diversity does not necessarily begin to repair the lack of marginalized people in the archive, because it also institutionalizes a monolithic representation of that marginalized group.

Queer of color critique exposes the limits of liberal universality and employs a multiplicity of tactics in order to critique these limits. This speaks to Alarcon and Sandoval's work that also traces this genealogy of women of color feminism in relation to white feminism, but also utilizes queer analysis to further demonstrate the ways that nonnormative genders and sexualities are already always problematized as outside of whiteness, outside of the confines of national citizenship. Queer of color critique also provides another opening to analyze white queer

¹⁹ Ferguson, Roderick, *Aberrations in Black*.

theory and its relationship to Native queer theory and women of color feminism—neoliberal politics of inclusion align with liberal feminism and homonationalism, and ultimately end up co-opting marginalized narratives for their own gain. For marginalized writers, anthologies can define marginalized groups—*This Bridge Called My Back* is cited as one of the first uses of the term “women of color” and *Nepantla* is the first grouping of queer of color poetry. Queer of color critique is especially useful for thinking about marginalized groups in terms of difference rather than similarities, which, for this work, helps to think outside western knowledge paradigms that attempt to categorize and reduce marginalized identities. Ferguson’s queer of color critique also encourages thinking through the relationship between marginalized people and the nation-state, which is always necessarily at the forefront of discussions in Native studies, where the ultimate mission is self-determination and sovereignty for Indigenous peoples.

Native feminism and queer Indigenous studies

The resistant power of creativity in early women of color feminist anthologies is reflected in early Native feminist queer theorizing. These early Native feminist and queer works are interdisciplinary and take creative work as serious sites of critique and theorizing. *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women* (1983) is the first anthology of Native women’s writings and brings together creative and theoretical work from both queer and heterosexual Native women into conversation with each other. Another location of these critical early academic conversations is Paula Gunn Allen’s *Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), which theorizes Native feminism through a variety of traditions, including storytelling traditions that focus on Keres, but span across tribal groupings, a native literary tradition, and the last section dedicated to furthering contemporary academic Native feminist theory. This expansive work is also notable for the variety of themes it covers,

from kinship, belonging and alienation, Native women's activism, white feminism, and provides many methodological avenues for analyzing Native work through the western lens that is predicated upon our erasure. Allen also devotes an entire chapter to excavating lesbianism within American Indian cultural traditions and literature, and throughout the essays, also articulates gender and sexuality as co-constitutive of imperial and colonial projects. Allen's work is highly regarded as one of the first in-depth studies on Native feminism, but it has received criticism for its assumptions of pan-tribal matriarchy/gynocentrism, but nevertheless maintains tribal specificity and holds that in order to understand and interpret certain aspects of Native literary work, one must be familiar with the specific ways of knowing of that group.

While not the focus of this literature review, the field of anthropology has a particular colonizing relationship to Native people—the field's origins are deeply entrenched in the cultural erasure of Natives, a necessary project of settler colonialism that helps sustain settler claims to land. From looting of Native graves and artifacts to the discursive projects that seek to erase, contain, and appropriate Native ways of knowing, Indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhwai-Smith (Maori), detail this colonizing relationship between Indigenous people and anthropology in *Decolonizing Methodologies*²⁰. Part of this discursive project included documenting gender variance across tribal groupings for their “usefulness” within anthropology. Walter Williams 1986 work on *berdache*, an anthropological term co-opted from Zuni Pueblo that refers to men who live outside the western gender binary, is a notable contribution to that anthropological

²⁰ Linda Tuhwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin, N.Z.: Otago University Press, 2012).

project²¹. Since colonization, Native people have been structurally barred from creating knowledge about our own communities. Queer Natives, Native feminists and women of color feminists have used self-publishing and creative expression as a form of self-theorizing knowledge production. This research takes on Tuhwai-Smith's "twenty-five indigenous projects" through celebration of survivance,²² reading, writing and theory-making; this research celebrates queer Native ways of knowing in the present (survivance), reviews the literature with attunement to the dearths and gaps revealed when Indigeneity is interrogated (reading), and reads DinéYazhi's work as a blurring of boundaries between "poetry, plays, songwriting, fiction, and non-fiction" "as indigenous writers seek to use language in ways that capture the messages, nuances, and flavor of indigenous lives" (writing and theory-making)²³.

William's research is another example of objectifying research on Native people, but Native scholars surely pushed back on these colonizing narratives with *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology*. This anthology continues the work of articulating a queer Native theory through literature from an anthropological perspective, and excavates gender variance throughout tribes in the United States utilizing poetry, prose, myth, and other creative writing by queer Natives to theorize the survivance and evolvment of queer Native ways of knowing despite colonial erasure. *A Sacred Hoop* contextualizes these texts further, exhibiting the ways that gender and sexuality are used as a colonial and imperial tool of domination, and specifies the

²¹ *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (1986) by Walter Williams attempts to excavate *berdache*, an anthropological term co-opted from Zuni Pueblo that refers to men who live outside the western gender binary, through many tribal groupings.

²² Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance combines survival with resilience to speak to the ways Native people exist in the present.

²³ Tuhwai-Smith, Linda, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 150-151.

particular ways that Native literary work speaks to tribally specific ways of knowing that center spirituality, and kinship, as well as Native women and LGBTQ+ people.

This ongoing, fluid relationship between women of color feminism, queer of color theory, and Native feminism, is not well documented within the respective academic traditions, and the next section attempts to recount the way women of color feminism and queer of color theory have evolved alongside Native feminism and queer Indigenous studies. These groupings also reflect my academic journey as a scholar of Chicana/o studies

Contemporary queer Indigenous studies

The early 2010's brought forth a renewed academic interest in queer Indigenous studies, formally marked by *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly's* 2010 special issue, "Sexuality, Nationality, and Indigeneity," edited by Mark Rifkin, Daniel Justice, and Bethany Schneider." This interest coincides with the U.S. political landscape at the time and a normative LGBTQ+ movement that focused on liberal citizenship rights in the form of marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws. This issue further explicates the relationship between queer studies and Native studies through the lens of settler colonialism as it limits the confines of citizenship alongside racialized gender and sexuality, and addresses identificatory issues that arise when analyzing the relationship between marginalized people gaining rights through identity categories that have differing levels of visibility and legitimacy in the liberal arena.

Quo-Li Driskill's essay included in this special edition, "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies" addresses queer of color critique for its lack of consideration of settler colonialism and its ongoing impact on Native people, and holds that Two-Spirit critique has a particular ability to critique the colonial nation-state, as "Native Two-Spirit/queer people position ourselves and our identities as productive, if

not central, to nationalist, decolonial agendas”²⁴. Two-spirit critique takes a similar stance to Ferguson’s queer of color critique, holding that marginalized people have the knowledge to critique the structures that perpetuate their marginalization, and Driskill work moves toward decolonization, addressing settler colonialism and Native survivance as constitutive of this critique.

In the face of totalizing neoliberal identity politics that represent marginalized peoples as monolithic categories, this research gives utmost importance to the experiential knowledge cultivated by Indigenous people through living in an Indigenous body. The resurgence of queer Indigenous studies in the contemporary period is marked by a return to the body and embodiment of a queer Indigenous experience. Chris Finley addresses Native feminism and the treatment of gender in Native studies and argues that including discussions of sexuality re-centers the body and reveals the ways that sexuality and colonial violence are linked.²⁵ Finley’s essay was published in the 2011 collection *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*,²⁶ which focuses on advancing critical conversations in the field. This collection was published in tandem with *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literature*,²⁷ which focuses on creative work. Together, these publications represent a serious renewed interest in the field, as well as a continued commitment to centering creative work in these intellectual movements.

²⁴ Driskill, “Doubleweaving,” 77.

²⁵ Finley, Chris, “Decolonizing the Queer Native Body (and Recovering the Native Bull-Dyke)”.

²⁶ edited by Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Gilley, and Scott Morgansen.

²⁷ edited by Driskill, Daniel Heath Justice, Deborah Miranda, and Lisa Tatonetti.

Returning to the body as a site of knowledge is another avenue through which queer Indigenous studies and queer theory intersect. “The Erotics of Sovereignty” by Mark Rifkin brings forth an “Indigenous structure of feeling” informed by Ray Williams, that “can refer to a sensation of belonging to place and peoplehood excluded from settler governance but that remains present, most viscerally in the affective lives of native people”²⁸. Rifkin also cites Driskill’s work on sovereign erotics to argue that addressing sexuality and sovereignty together is essential to decolonization work, and this mode of analysis produces “rhetorical register and experimental template through which to manifest Native placemaking as feeling in ways purposefully rendered unintelligible within U.S. administrative discourses”²⁹. This call to return to the body calls upon Diane Million’s earlier 2009 essay “Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History,” which articulates the imperative of First-Nation women’s experiential knowledge in bringing forth previously obscured violence and harm caused by assimilationist policies and other violent discriminatory acts by the Canadian government, and in doing so, reveals the epistemological dearth in white modes of knowledge production that devalues and marginalizes emotions felt in the body as knowledge³⁰. Although Rifkin is firmly positioned as a literary scholar, Million’s analysis as a historian points to the more material applications of embodied knowledge in Native studies, and points to the relationship between queer Native studies and Native feminism, which is where I locate DinéYazhi’s work.

²⁸ Ibid., 173.

²⁹ Ibid., 179.

³⁰ Million, Diane, “Felt Theory,” *Wicazo Sa Review*, 24 (2), 54.

Queer native studies also address white queer studies and problematizes the field's lack of attention given to the constitutive relationship between cis-heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism. Part of this project also includes addressing appropriation of Indigenous spirituality and precolonial Indigenous gender variance, which implicates early Chicana feminists, many of whom were lesbian, as well as white queer people. Scott Morgensen's research demonstrates that white queer movements have historically embraced settler colonialism as justification in the fight for citizenship rights under the law, while simultaneously appropriating imaginary native spirituality and racialized other-ness as their own struggle³¹. Morgensen also addresses diasporic queer movements and their respective analysis (or lack thereof) of settler colonialism, and in doing so also addresses Chicana/Latina lesbian appropriation of a tribal universality and a reclamation of an Indigenous past as anti-colonial resistance. Also associated with early Chicana feminist texts like Cherie Moraga's "Queer Aztlan," Morgensen specifically addresses "how Gloria Anzaldua's Chicana queer claims on indigeneity historically engaged white settler queer primitivism," either "recapitulating or disturbing" it³². When read as calling upon de-essentializing theories of subjectivity or a multiply-voiced subject, as discussed by Sandoval, who Morgensen cites, Anzaldúa's writing on a queer universal spirituality that is anti-colonial complicates white settler queer primitivism for the benefit of transnational queer movement solidarity, but can also easily fall back into appropriative primitivism that keeps Natives as static and in the past.

³¹ Morgensen, Scott Lauria, *Spaces Between Us : Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

³² Ibid., 249.

Speaking to the ways that literature can articulate Native spatial embodiment, Mishuana Goeman's work examines Native women's literary works as sites that re-articulate and unsettle Native spaces³³. Goeman analyzes the ways that Native women's poetry and prose articulate space, and in doing so, "(re)map" our realities to create decolonial spatial knowledge. Focusing on maps as discursive tools that are given power to bring the ideology of conquest and domination into the material world brings forth "(re)mapping," which Goeman defines as "the labor Native authors and the communities they write within and about undertake, in the simultaneously metaphoric and material capacities of map making, to generate new possibilities"³⁴. Goeman's work is attentive to the ways that Native women's literature specifically can reveal knowledge about race and gender in relation to settler heteropatriarchy and its imaginative power, however she gives little to no attention to sexuality. Goeman's work is firmly situated within Native feminism, but her analysis and methods of the spatial implications of Native literary and creative work is particularly useful for its implication that creative expression impacts the material reality of land and space. DinéYazhi's poetry in *An Infected Sunset* unsettles and (re)maps space in this way, and does so in complicated layers that engage with Native conceptions of time and space, and the way those conceptions interact and clash with time-space compression under late-stage capitalism.

Relationality, queer studies, and neoliberal politics

This research's primary method of critique is two-spirit critique informed by queer of color critique. This allows my research to make connections between Indigenous experience,

³³ Goeman, Mishuana, *Mark My Words : Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

apprehended through DinéYazhi's work, and the current larger political landscape of neoliberal multiculturalism, and the way neoliberal policies further settler colonialism. This research relies on David Harvey, Marxist geographer, to define neoliberalism and time-space compression under capitalism, which is incredibly important for analyzing DinéYazhi's work as it exists in and engages with the present. DinéYazhi's presence on social media via @RISEIndigenous and its accompanying online store provide rich avenues to explore the way indigeneity moves through our increasingly globalized, increasingly instantaneous interconnected worlds.

Neoliberalism as a political theory is concerned with the advancement of free market capitalism through decreased regulation of markets, increased privatization and decreased social spending. Neoliberalism allows for deregulation of business further allowing for capitalist profit exploitation, and under neoliberalism this also facilitates accelerated time-space compression that "annihilates space through time" first theorized by Marx and expanded upon by Harvey.³⁵ This acceleration is in part fueled by neoliberal incentives to expand the market to be as large as possible with the ultimate goal of totalizing "all human action into the domain of the market", resulting in an increased emphasis on the individual as the ultimate neoliberal subject, and an accelerated pursuit of information technologies to optimize markets³⁶. In turn, this facilitates accelerated timelines and expanded geographical space through which our goods and services are produced under neoliberal globalization. Harvey, and others³⁷ detail the impacts of free market

³⁵ Harvey, David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Harvey, David, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2014), 17.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1990).

capitalism and neoliberal individualism on our collective culture through the lens of postmodernity, which Fredrick Jameson defines as “the consumption of sheer commodification as process” because of a lack of historicity and depthlessness that characterizes late-stage capitalism. Scholars of color have taken postmodernity and expanded it to consider the impact of postmodernity and late-stage capitalism on marginalized bodies, who, since its inception, have always been situated outside of modernity³⁸

Under neoliberal globalization, our goods—everything from the clothes on our bodies to the computer I type this research on—were passed through the hands of workers throughout the globe from mining of the materials to assemblage of the goods to the retail workers who sell these items, with many more people and places in between. Additionally, neoliberalism encourages hyper-individualism through reliance on the market to provide all wants and needs, and this has also extended into the digital sphere, which is increasingly the provider of community through simulated social interaction via commoditized social media. This research is also concerned with the ways this impacts Indigenous people and Indigenous ways of knowing that hold interconnectivity to be self-evident, while remaining localized in practice. Globalization and the information age also allows for an unprecedented level of access to the experiences of people worldwide. DinéYazhi’s work considers intersecting timelines and geographical spaces both in the artistic subject matter and their own engagement with social media and online activism, accompanied by an online store where they sell their art.

³⁸ These scholars include Gerald Vizenor, bell hooks, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Hortense J. Spillers, and Sianne Ngai, among others. I am interested in postmodernity and late stage capitalism as they relate to marginalized artistic production, and will carefully excavate these strains of theory as they relate to my research in the future.

This project tends to the ways that Native identity and ways of being, moving, and consuming throughout the world are impacted by settler colonialism in its current neoliberal iteration. This also includes examining the ways that gender and sexual violence and policing are used to further marginalize Indigenous people and are integral to imperial state formation as both a historical and ongoing process.³⁹ Individualism and liberal selfhood seem to be inherently at odds with ways of knowing that acknowledge the interconnected systems that constitute daily life, and Jodi Byrd takes up the way that “liberal tolerance that contemporary settler colonial governments use to manage racial, gender, sexual, and Indigenous differences.” Byrd’s entry for *Critically Sovereign*, provides case studies that “exemplify the state-endorsed modes of liberal tolerance that contemporary settler colonial governments use to manage racial, gender, sexual, and Indigenous differences.⁴⁰” Byrd also posits queer studies’ subjectless critique as a method to help retain ethical commitment to critique, “by challenging the possessive logics inherent in liberalism, subjectivity, and personhood.”⁴¹ This positioning widens the grasp of ethnic studies and allows for relational thinking as opposed to comparative identity-based modes of analysis.

Byrd’s research and theoretical underpinnings are incredibly important to this research as it makes claims that Indigeneity is primarily cultivated through experiential knowledge—Indigeneity cannot be captured in the neoliberal representational identity politics. Byrd’s more recent essay “What’s Normative Got to Do with It?: Toward Indigenous Queer Relationality” also neatly charts the relationship between Indigenous Studies and queer studies from a

³⁹ Barker, Joanne, *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

⁴⁰ Byrd, Jodi A., “Loving Unbecoming: The Queer Politics of the Transitive Native,” in *Critically Sovereign*, 214.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

theoretical standpoint wherein queer natives are “nothing and everything at the same time,” giving way to a “critical stance for eschewing recognition altogether” (106). Again, Byrd calls on queer theory’s subjectless critique as articulated by Eng, Halberstam, and Munoz as an anti-identarian methodology, but complicates it with the reminder that its destabilized nature is still “grounded through the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land,” the very land that allows for claims to liberal subjectivity (145). Byrd characterizes Indigenous studies and queer studies as “holding their boundaries and their ground against intersectionality” because of “the sheer magnitude of collapse that occurs when they occupy the same space at the same time,” which not only emphasizes the utility and possibilities of these two fields, but also reifies the extent to which racialized queerness problematizes liberal selfhood (107-108). Byrd’s discussion of Indigenous feminism addresses the foreclosure of indigenous embodiment through colonial land



dispossession and is particularly useful as an advancement of queer Indigenous critique and as an expansion of earlier understandings of postmodernity. This informs my discussion of DinéYazhi’s work as it addresses the ways in which Queer Native embodiments interact with the postmodern condition of late-stage capitalism.

Figure 3 An Infected Sunset, 2018. Risograph. Demian DinéYazhi!. RISE online Etsy store. Accessed 10 May 2022.

An Infected Sunset: “Water is Life”

Demian DinéYazhi’s work takes the physical form of a yellow zine, with a blue paper accent stripe and *An Infected Sunset* printed in red vertically in a classic serif font (Figure 2). Opening the zine reveals the title page, with a photo in printed in red ink on blue paper as the background for the title, alongside DineYazhi’s biography and photo in a red font. The zine’s use of color is especially striking and continues through the rest of the text with the poetry being printed with purple ink in a similar serif font. *An Infected Sunset* is half staple-bound and half loose-leaf pages, with the latter half being dubbed “A Liberated Poem” with no set page numbers, and this both retains the DIY feel of a zine while taking it a step further, encouraging the reader to interpret the zine in any order they wish, reflecting the DIY nature onto the reader and expanding their role to meaning-maker. The zine was independently published in small batches, allowing for these custom font choices and loose-leaf format, allowing the zine to feel like an art object as well as a DIY publication.

The form of a zine itself speaks back to hierarchies and valuations of knowledge through the literary tradition of self-published zines. Self-publishing and creative work as a site of resistance firmly situates *An Infected Sunset* within the legacy of queer feminist of color knowledge production⁴², as the Women of color feminism has always historically been rooted in

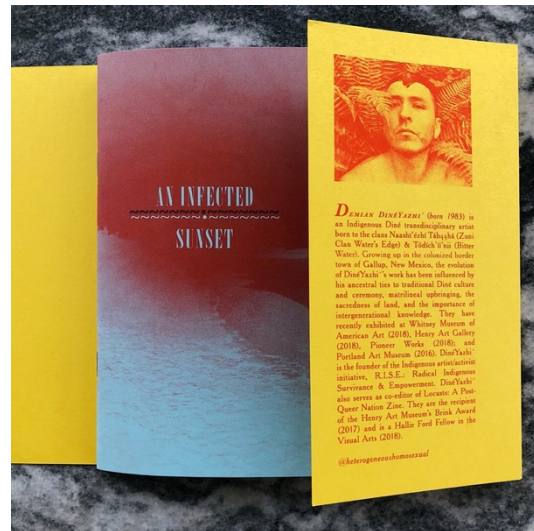


Figure 4, *Ibid.*

⁴² DineYazhi, Demian, “An Infected Sunset | Live from the Whitney.” Youtube.

subverting traditional modes of knowledge production and distribution, with many seminal works from its canon coming from non-academic publishing houses,⁴³ and a large focus on centering lived experiences in knowledge production. Zines also have a rich historical legacy within feminism and communal knowledge distribution, an avenue for experimentation, and have historically provided avenues for BIPOC to distribute their work,⁴⁴. When read this way, autobiography and self-knowledge practices can be viewed as a way of sustaining, through sharing, the contradictions of lived experience as a critical mode of knowledge production that brings forth and centers difference⁴⁵.

As a piece that speaks to DinéYazhi's lived experience, *An Infected Sunset* can be read as sustaining the contradictions of a U.S.-based Indigenous experience of ancestrally and currently surviving and resisting through settler colonialism, and in doing so, also imagines a subjectivity that navigates and reveals these contradictions as sites of knowledge. Modern Native life is in part defined by contradictions—the very existence of contemporary Natives defies settler colonial logics of time and space that only allow for Natives to exist in the past, to be eliminated during the westward expansion that solidified the borders of the nation-state, and in this way Native people today function as a spectre of the U.S.' violent past⁴⁶. Further, discourses of modernity necessitate the positioning of Indigenous people as savages in opposition to the

⁴³ Moraga, Cherie and Anzaldúa, Gloria, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Aunt Lute Press, 1981).

⁴⁴ Grech, Alisha, "The Experiential Matrix: a Feminist Zine About Feminist Zines," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 50 (3): 309–21 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2022.0053>.

⁴⁵ Alarcon, Norma, "Theoretical Subjects of *This Bridge Called My Back*", 28.

⁴⁶ Vizenor, Gerald Robert, *Manifest Manners : Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 14.

modern, rational subject, rendering the modern Native subject as always out of place and out of time.⁴⁷

Section III begins with a distinct, bold san-serif typeface that reads “WATER IS LIFE,” visually serving as a title, and the only title out of the four sections. This section of the poem is placed during #NoDAPL protests at Standing Rock and contextualizes the Dakota Access Pipeline among hundreds of years of Indigenous resistance to environmental destruction and captures interactions that illuminate a sense of queer Native time and place. DinéYazhi’s use of Standing Rock situates their work in

a particular time and place, and throughout “III”, DinéYazhi’ rewrites places and timelines over which indicate a sense of interconnectivity

through resistance for Indigenous people, unsettles the space, and situates time within collective memories.

“III” repeats the refrain “I should be at standing rock”⁴⁸ throughout the poem and resembles a prayer or meditation on Indigenous legacy of resistance the speaker *should* be contributing to but is not. Here, “should” can indicate a conditional tense, obligation or propriety, or a future probability. colonizing conceptions of Indigenous people as always tied to the land. This section captures the collective energy surrounding Standing Rock, an energy that for many U.S.-based Indigenous people, was a testament to the power and threat of Indigenous resistance



Figure 5 "III. Water is Life." *An Infected Sunset*, 2018. Risograph. Demian DinéYazhi'. RISE online Etsy store. Accessed 10 May 2022.

⁴⁷ Rifkin, Mark, *Beyond Settler Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.

⁴⁸ DinéYazhi’, Demian, *An Infected Sunset* (2018), Subheading III.

to the current colonial order. The first invocation of the phrase goes, “I should be at standing rock instead of listening to Laura Nyro under a river tree and drinking coconut water in the Columbia River gorge on a beach that would not exist unless the earth was exploded to construct a series of man-made dams along this river’s natural course.”⁴⁹

Here, in articulating their non-participation in #NoDAPL protests, the speaker is still able to place themselves within several contradictions. The image of a peaceful moment in nature is a departure from the disruptive image of a protest against environmental destruction, but not a natural feature at all, the river is immediately placed within the same colonial violence as the pipeline. The activities of listening to Laura Nyro, an underrated and oft forgotten pop musician from the late 60’s, and drinking coconut water, a “tropical” health food from the global South, also point to a temporalization in the globalized present where these objects are readily accessible; the former through music streaming that underpays artists for the listener’s benefit of instantaneous access, and the latter through the global commodity chain that underpays and exploits workers in the global South. Water itself also connects three distinct locations of the water at Standing Rock, the water of the Columbia River, and the coconut water from an ambiguous location in the global South. This positioning aids in resisting universalization or totalizing neoliberal identity formulations by placing a (universal) Indigenous legacy of

⁴⁹ Ibid., Subheading III.

resistance within a specific moment of globalization, gesturing toward its many iterations throughout colonization while making it particular to the historical moment of Standing Rock.

DinéYazhi's juxtaposition of natural versus man-made in this passage also aids in an Indigenous unsettling of space through literature⁵⁰, critiquing the environmental impact colonization has on Native survivance, which is exemplified by contradictions inherent to living on stolen land. The paradoxical phrase "exploded to construct," in the stanza quoted above, exemplifies one of the many paradoxes of living as a colonized subject—the constant haunting of violent destruction in favor of positivist progress. After pointing out that the beach would not exist without colonial violence, the poem continues:

"now this site is a nude beach
primarily populated by white cis queers

a couple of months ago a friend complained to me on facebook about the
amount of heterosexuals who were taking over the beach / the prime
real estate / fallacious queer utopic destination:

do you remember when rooster rock was a gay beach?

I chimed in *remember when rooster rock was Indigenous land?*"

someone said *this comment should have ended the discussion*

but you know how white progressives are in this town

they keep going

and going

⁵⁰ Goeman, Mishauna, *Mark My Words*, 15.

and going”⁵¹

Colonial “progress” constructs the other, paradoxically creating queer space both discursively and materially. This man-made beach, and the colonial destruction/development it represents is lost upon its conceptualization as a utopic white queer space. The land is deconstructed as a white queer space, second as a man-made beach, and once more as Indigenous land, historicizing the space in these distinct moments, all existing simultaneously. This remapping of settler space through an imaginative medium is discussed as a central function of Indigenous women’s cultural material—although this space is marked by multiple violent histories, they intertwine into one contradiction that through water, seems to connect the speaker back to Indigenous resistance at Standing Rock and “(re)map” the space⁵². The repetition of the word “going” signals the never-ending nature of the destruction and extraction of colonialism and capitalism.

The final page of section III *An Infected Sunset* depicts contradictory longings for emancipation that ostensibly conform to a nationalist subjectivity, but with a closer reading, still sustain the contradictions that a politics of liberation requires.

“as I leave the river I create a mantra for myself:

you should erect a monument in a public site that honors this sacred fight
you should erect a monument in a public site that honors this sacred fight
you should erect a monument in a public site that honors this sacred fight
you should erect a monument in a public site that honors this sacred fight”⁵³

⁵¹ DinéYazhi’, Demian, *An Infected Sunset* (2018), Subheading III.

⁵² Goeman, Mishuana, *Mark My Words*, 3.

⁵³ DinéYazhi’, Demian, *An Infected Sunset* (2018), Subheading III.

Repeated four times, the number four becomes important, as it invokes the four directions, four seasons, four times of day, four stages of life, and so on, and is a common symbolic number among Southwestern Indigenous people. While this reading is local, it is also universalizing—the number four is associated with the Zia sun symbol of the New Mexican flag, which was appropriated from the Zia pueblo⁵⁴. Monuments themselves are also both local and universal, with many colonial spatial implications. In the Southwest, monuments and statues have historically depicted colonizers and conquistadors, erasing the Indigenous past of the space they inhabit while inscribing the violent acts these men committed into the landscape. These monuments are internalized and fed to Indigenous people as official state history and memory. Furthermore, many monuments are erected at geographical sites that are often important to the Indigenous people of the area, which further appropriates the space and makes it unavailable for Indigenous use⁵⁵. After repeating the phrase four times the speaker continues:

“and with all this positive energy

ancestral memory

and sacred medicine

I think we all just might”⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Catherine Saez and David Blomstrom, “Indigenous Knowledge Misappropriation: The Case of the Zia Sun Symbol Explained at Wipo,” Intellectual Property Watch, December 14, 2018, Accessed October 1, 2022, <https://www.ip-watch.org/2018/12/11/indigenous-knowledge-misappropriation-case-zia-sun-symbol-explained-wipo/>.

⁵⁵ Denson, Andrew, *Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest over Southern Memory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017) details the relationship between monuments and historical sites, memory, and national narrative.

⁵⁶ DinéYazhi’, Demian, *An Infected Sunset*, Subheading III.

Here, the history of monuments as a colonial erection is delineated and individuated— “I think we all just might” signals a simultaneous collectivity and gives power to the individual energies, memories, and medicine that Indigenous resistance collectively carries. The desire to erect a monument could be considered an appropriation of nationalist construction of subjectivity, but those meanings are immediately complicated by the possibility of individuated memories and medicine as a collective memorial. Further, the rhyming of fight with may suggest the future possibility of neat resolve to the issue of the pipeline wherein Indigenous sovereignty is respected, but it may also signal a false sense of resolution that simply conforms to western poetic devices. This duality of a simple rhyme itself embodies a contradiction of colonization, wherein a final couplet can embody sovereign possibilities or a colonial dead-end.

In the last lines of this section, the speaker says after texting a friend:

“she tells me that nations are uniting and shifting consciousness
on a global scale
that outside action brings light to this and all the desire
of similar actions of environmental racism
and I remember desire
a memory within my body / my ancestry”⁵⁷

This further locates the geographically local protest at Standing Rock within a global Indigenous desire for resistance, and relates it again to embodied memory. Attention to memory also invokes the concept of blood memory⁵⁸, which references family, extended kinship, and blood quantum

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Mithlo, Nancy Marie, “Blood Memory and the Arts: Indigenous Genealogies and Imagined Truths,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 35 (4) (2011), 103–18.

as they pertain to native identity and communal belonging. The stylization of “my body” connected to “my ancestry” with a slash uncovers another contradiction. The body is the site of intergenerational trauma, personified in part by blood quantum that serves as another mechanism of erasure and polices the boundaries of indigeneity, but also as a site that tangibly connects Native people to internalized memories of collective knowledge and history. Memory, another ambivalent mechanism, invokes loss, of Indigenous ways of knowing, of land, of cultural production, leaving something to be desired, but memory also connects the speaker back to a generative ancestral memory that is imperative to keep safe due to the violences and erasures of colonialism. Continuing on desire:

“desire to speak even when no one is around to listen
even when there is no paper in sight
even when the words get carried off in the breeze
desire that gets mistaken lost misplaced stolen colonized
desire for resistance”⁵⁹.

Here, the speaker locates a historical desire for resistance, but must also invoke memory because a canonical history does not include this sustaining desire for resistance. This desire for resistance does not live within monuments or the official colonial record, but nonetheless is invoked repeatedly, and is a deeply rooted bodily memory, or blood memory⁶⁰ with global implications.

⁵⁹ DinéYazhi’, Demian, *An Infected Sunset*, Subheading III.

⁶⁰ Mithlo, Nancy, “Blood Memory.”

DinéYazhi' is explicit about using their art to subvert traditional distribution of knowledge⁶¹. The second half of the chapbook, "A liberated poem" subverts traditional publishing in omitting page numbers and printing each portion of the poem on loose-leaf sheets, allowing the poem to be read in any order the reader wishes. This not only subverts traditional linear narration, but also embeds a never-ending possibility of meaning-making, and transforms reading itself into an imaginative space. This can also be read as a method of Indigenous storytelling, which traditionally allows for and embraces many iterations of the same story as told by community members, who add their own flare or anecdotes of any given story.⁶² In this type of storytelling, community members interrupting the storyteller to interject additional details or differing versions is welcomed and is viewed positively as the interjector is providing more context, details, or interpretations, even if they are contradictory.

Read as an art-object, "a liberated poem," and the zine as a whole, becomes a contradictory embodiment of wholeness and fragmentation that enacts renewed methods of Indigenous storytelling. The "liberated" portion of the book holds endless possibility but no stagnant or prescribed meaning, and it is in this very contradiction that holds the liberatory power and calls upon Indigenous modes of storytelling. The pages of the poem exist as objects created in the past, but hold endless meaning in the present and sustain this provisional wholeness. This mode of publishing also delineates settler systems of knowledge transmission, opening the possibility for the reader to become a meaning-maker alongside the author and engage in an

⁶¹ "A Poetics of Survival: A Conversation with Demian DinéYazhi," *Temporary Art Review*.

⁶² Silko, Leslie Marmon, "Interior and Exterior Landscapes," *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 32.

Indigenized poetry, playing with the very function of poetic devices of using words and language to create meaning beyond its literal or simple interpretation.

Readings of “liberated poem” and performances of indigeneity

In DinéYazhi’s readings from *An Infected Sunset*, it seems as they have preference for reading from the “liberated poem.” In this section, I analyze a performance from The Whitney in New York City, but it is important to note that this is just one particular performance of a piece that was imagined to take on new meaning for both the artist and the readers of the poem with each reading. In this hybrid reading/performance at The Whitney, alone on a stage, DinéYazhi’ sheds each page of the liberated poem after reading from it, tossing it on the ground creating an audible and satisfying whooshing sound. Eventually, a large pile of sheets of paper on the ground surrounds them.⁶³ This invokes the sense that once meaning is made through recitation of the poem, that particular meaning is now firmly part of the past, but simultaneously creates something new in the present. Positioning events as firmly and always in the past has specific implications for Native people and decolonization—it is a commonly held national sentiment that genocide and slavery, the two mechanisms through which the U.S. has accumulated its land and wealth, do not need to be remedied because they are firmly in the distant past. However, the whooshing sound of the paper falling to the floor and the piling up of paper around DinéYazhi’ shows that even the act of discarding something and leaving it in the past creates something else, and imbues the past and present (as it is always touched by the past) with endless possibility. Decolonization may consist of this something else, and gestures towards an Indigenous decolonial future that creates new possibilities out of a discarded past. *An Infected Sunset* as a

⁶³ DinéYazhi', Demian, “An Infected Sunset | Live from the Whitney,” Youtube.

performance piece allows engagement with Jose Esteban Munoz' theorizations on performing brownness that hold a fragmented subjectivity as a generative one. The liberated poem is never whole, but allows for a constant "sense of wholeness that allows for a certain level of social recognition" and, furthermore, articulates it as "a reparative performance".⁶⁴ Again, this calls upon Indigenous modes of communal storytelling wherein meaning is playfully contested and communally informed⁶⁵. This type of storytelling allows for an Indigenous unsettling of time and space, as any given story, in this case, the pages of the poem, exist as an object of the past, with the sustained ability to be re-articulated in the present.

Leaning into this malleable way of publishing adds another layer of contradiction—while enacting this shared meaning making that creates a collective "sense of wholeness," DinéYazhi' is also risking the social recognition associated with it, and opens their work to projection on part of the reader.⁶⁶ This connects to other observations pertaining to @RISEIndigenous and engagement in the neoliberal political arena. This projection goes beyond that which is articulated by Muñoz, as the reader already has the ability and permission of the author to imbue endless meaning onto their work since its inception. Once articulated and published, any work can be co-opted and interpreted beyond any intention of the author, and DinéYazhi's work exemplifies a vulnerability that is oppositional to affective paranoia. This also connects to queer women of color feminist methods of knowledge production that center sustaining the

⁶⁴ Muñoz, José Esteban, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position," *Signs* 31, no. 3 (2006), 683.

⁶⁵ Silko, Leslie Marmon, "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian perspective," *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, 49.

⁶⁶ Muñoz, José Esteban, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down," 683.

contradictions and discomfort involved in shared-meaning making and vulnerable beside-ness⁶⁷. Muñoz' ethical depressive position of "feeling down, feeling brown," avoids paranoia and pathologizing of minoritarian subjectivities through engagement with Hortense Spillers, who articulates depressive position as giving "an ability to know and experience the other who shares a particular affective or emotional valence with us," moving away from prescribed pathological paranoia into models that foster love and connection as responses to depression that facilitate creation and connection.⁶⁸ This radical assertion of vulnerability as a way to make-meaning helps to disavow the paranoia that for Muñoz, is associated with depression, but more particularly, is also associated with the historical trauma of cultural erasure and appropriation.⁶⁹ This paranoia of being perceived as contrary to intention is not, and cannot be "wished away," as the work of minoritarian artists will remain available for consumption by white audiences. Rather, the paranoia is something to be worked through and taken as part of the contradiction of subverting meaning-making from the outset, also informing @RISEIndigenous' Instagram and Etsy page with queer radical Indigenous messaging on tote bags and stickers that are available for purchase and consumption. DineYazhi's communal approach in the many iterations of their art signals a radical vulnerability that combats colonial wounds associated with systemic erasure of Indigenous culture. Contradictorily, this inherent inability to pin down any one meaning of the "liberated poem" can also be positioned as a move that protects the author from a rigid interpretations of their work, which can occur when minoritized subjects are upheld as

⁶⁷ Hong, Grace Kyungwon., and Roderick A. Ferguson. 2011, "Introduction," *Strange Affinities : the Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 3, 16.

⁶⁸ Muñoz, José Esteban, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down," 684.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

representative of their identity categories under neoliberal identity politics. Protection (in the form of the inability to be compartmentalized) and vulnerability (through trusting an audience with meaning-making alongside the artist) are both inherent to fluidity much like water itself, which is a life-giving essential element as well as a dangerous force of nature. This vulnerability and willingness to allow their audience to participate in meaning-making alongside them is one of the most compelling pieces of DinéYazhi's work.

This Munozian move from paranoia through to vulnerability as a productive symptom of depression connects to Ferguson's situating of Women of Color feminist coalition building, which moves beyond paranoid frameworks of national liberation, into new, imaginative spaces able to theorize "the limits of subaltern identity" beyond the nation-state subject.⁷⁰ Nationalism as an avenue for liberation for the minoritarian subject can be read as an affective embodiment of the nation-state project, versus a Women of Color feminist articulation of liberation that utilizes tactical organizing and pragmatic resistance, but also subverts the conditions that necessitate those pragmatic embodiments and foster love and creation based on recognition and imaginative possibility. *An Infected Sunset* embodies this move, both in its content and in its iteration as an art-object. All this is complicated by the fact that after the book's first pressing, the second half of the book will no longer be published unbound—in DinéYazhi's words, "the second edition will be more accessible and forego the unbound savage nature of the *Liberated Poem*," which further locates the *Liberated Poem* as an object created in the past with the ability to be endlessly re-inscribed into the future.⁷¹ Their use of the phrase "unbound savage nature" is yet another nod to

⁷⁰ Ferguson, Roderick, *Aberrations in Black*, 129.

⁷¹ DinéYazhi', Demian, @heterogeneoushomosexual, (Instagram 29 October 2019), Accessed 22 March 2020.

the historical context of Native people as particularly subjected to erasure in master narratives, and DinéYazhi's own attempt to subvert it through vulnerable shared meaning-making.

This suspension of publishing the "Liberated Poem" unbound can also speak to the inscription of subaltern identities into language. As a political project, minoritarian voices' entrance into the literary canon is an essential component of neoliberal conceptualizations of emancipation, wherein nonnormative voices are *allowed* into the canon, or into the realm of official culture, in order to gain legibility in the political sphere.⁷² A paternalizing project to begin with, this renders itself even more visible when we think about ethnic studies as a whole—writing, researching, fighting for recognition, for bringing voice to the voiceless, is a fruitful and necessary project, yet these departments largely fall victim to resource scarcity and underfunding, even as these fields are still nascent. Publishing the "Liberated Poem" as traditionally bound, but still to be read in any order, speaks to the material necessity of rendering legibility in the political sphere, as accessibility is cited by DinéYazhi' as a reason for this switch. Given the content of *An Infected Sunset*, the author is well aware of the history of consumption of Indigenous bodies, art, and culture, but exists through that contradiction, letting go of an unbound book in favor of wider legibility.

Muñoz' work also brought up questions of performing race, and more specifically in this work what that means for Indigenous people, who are foundational figures in U.S. origin folklore, but remain largely invisible in today's political landscape. The #NoDAPL movement has come to symbolize a new era of Indigenous activism marked by resource and land extraction, and here I return to textual analysis to seize the moments in the poem where the speaker is performing Indigeneity, specifically in the instance of running into two Indigenous people at a

⁷² Ferguson, Roderick, *Aberrations in Black*, 129.

7/11 in part III of the chapbook portion of *An Infected Sunset*. First, the speaker notes “I noticed a sister with a streak of pink hair wearing beaded earrings / so I asked them what tribe they’re from,” articulating two modes of nonnormative fashioning, with the earrings being explicitly racialized, and dyed colored hair being racialized but also absorbed into general non-normativity, and may even be read as queer.⁷³ The speaker continues “which is something I rarely ever feel confident doing / but which is also something I’ve seen my parents do countless times.”⁷⁴ Here, the speaker signals several iterations of performing Indigeneity, through repetition of a learned behavior and expression of doubt. Finding another Indigenous person in a non-Indigenous space and forming connection based solely on Indigeneity will be familiar to many Indigenous folks. This articulation is learned, signaled by the small self-doubt that comes before the connection, which is a particular experience related to age, geographical location, as well as differing experiences among reservation, non-reservation, and urban Natives. Being on the receiving end of a simple “Sister?” in a random public place, most often by elders, is a validating experience when in non-Indigenous spaces. Furthermore, Indigenous youth often joke that elders have “Indian radar,” but is probably more accurately described as a survival tactic for identifying likeminded people in non-Indigenous spaces. Mutual recognition becomes a political act imbued with material implications of resistance, as the pair and the speaker continue with a discussion of Standing Rock, but also with psychic implications in linking this connection to a learned behavior that almost always feels like an act of fate.

While the speaker initially draws attention to the sister in the pair,
“her friend answers

⁷³ DinéYazhi’, Damien, “A Liberated Poem,” *An Infected Sunset*.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

he's a handsome Indigenous guy wearing blue jeans and a white button-up dress shirt," which provides a normative Americanized image of self-fashioning in contrast to the woman's racialized earrings and bright queer-coded hair color. The speaker may also signal queerness in the pair, as the queer speaker comments on the man's pleasant appearance, signaling a comfortability with or slight projection onto this man. Furthermore, the pair is never referred to as a "couple," but this is complicated by the fact that the man in this pair is the only one to share words with the speaker, which signals a heteronormativity and even a toxic masculinity that has infected Indigenous communities. The queerness of the pair is again brought into question when the man ends the encounter with a gesture of giving his card to the speaker. For the speaker, this is taken "as an affirmation," but can simultaneously be read as another articulation of the pairing's queerness. Performing race is entangled with performing gender and/or queerness, but all are performed to signal nonnormative identities to foster a possible connection. This connection and the performance of identity form another contradiction associated with mutual recognition. Performance of a non-normative identity can render one subject to violence, but also facilitates and fosters fateful connections—similar to the trap of vulnerability of shared meaning-making discussed alongside the "Liberated Poem," performance of identity can make one a more visible target of violence, or can lead to misinterpretations, but also fosters connection and subversion of a neoliberal subjectivity.

This exchange also remaps space, which is theorized by Goeman as a central function of Indigenous women's writing, and this can be extended to queer Indigenous writing as well⁷⁵. If

⁷⁵ Goeman, Mishuana, *Mark My Words*.

we read this exchange as a performance of Indigeneity, we can also trace performance of Indigeneity as an act of mapping and re/mapping. The first exchange between the speaker and the Indigenous man is predictably about where the pair is “from,” which itself has many meanings dependent on familial histories of displacement or forced relocation. The speaker and the Indigenous man remap space as they are explaining where they are from, speaking to the uselessness of borders and settler mappings of Indigenous space and people. The speaker articulates that they are Diné and the man replies “*oh dene / from canada*” to which the speaker replies “no / dine / navajo / from the southwest / Navajo nation” to which the man replies “*but did you know there are also Navajos up in canada too / its crazy*” to which the speaker replies “yeah / we were all freely migrating up and down back in the day.”⁷⁶ Through a rather mundane exchange that centers place, the two people delineate spatial conceptions of Indigenous people as stagnant, as having *always existed* in their present-day reservations, which we know is not the case due to forced relocations and other colonial violence that inhibits free movement of people. This also signals a liberatory power of Indigeneity that functionally unsettles nation-state borders beyond the Standing Rock resistance focused on in the poem.

Thematically, *An Infected Sunset* deals with loss, but never as a focus. Loss is articulated as a haunting, as something that exists within memories and is kept secret. Continuing with this work, a thematic reading of desire and loss could further illuminate a queer Indigenous subjectivity. DinéYazhi’s art and activism led me back to the overarching questions that bring forth my academic work in the first place—What is Indigenous identity? How do we articulate an Indigenous identity outside of colonial violence? The answer lies in cultural objects that foster connection to other Native people, past and present, and the way these interactions generate

⁷⁶ DinéYazhi’, Damien, “A Liberated Poem,” *An Infected Sunset*.

openings to articulate decolonial possibilities. It is this very possibility, this desire for freedom, for liberation, for *something* beyond the material conditions created by oppressive structures, that will continue to productively sustain Indigenous resistance and survivance.

MAKE AMERICA SOMETHING ELSE AGAIN

The RISEIndigenous Etsy page also features many of the queer Indigenous political slogans and artwork shared on Instagram. “Untitled (For Andrea Smith),” is printed on tote bags and t-shirts and sold alongside stylistically and thematically similar merchandise, including stickers, mugs, and posters⁷⁷. This complicates and furthers DinéYazhi’s engagement with neoliberal identity politics of representation—their activism on Instagram makes radical queer Indigenous political messages available for consumption, passive sharing, and profit, and may contribute to the totalizing nature of identity politics. Social media’s impact on political education, Native people’s relationship to education, and erasure in the official archive are all unique products of our time and place and the current iterations of colonial violence.

DinéYazhi’s work on @RISEIndigenous brings forth questions about online activism as yet another contradiction: one that furthers neoliberal identity politics and its ability to reduce a 500-year struggle against genocide and erasure into slogans to be bought and worn, while simultaneously granting the ability of these considered and historicized decolonial messages to be widely shared and discussed with the goal of furthering queer Indigenous feminism and a popular education that subverts traditional modes of knowledge sharing. This section analyzes images @RISEIndigenous’s Instagram community and online store as extensions of Demian DinéYazhi’s artistic world with attunement to the felt implications of digitally sharing images that invoke Indigenous futurity. RISE’s Instagram posts transmit feelings of sovereignty that

⁷⁷ Figure 1.

highlight radical queer Indigenous politics, and analyze the ways these affects may or may not change when transmitted to Natives and non-Natives in the same online space. This section also considers a material analysis of how Indigenous affects are transmitted when purchased online and worn on the body or are out in the world. After centuries of violent genocidal policies that have deeply disrupted Native ways of knowing, including broken treaties that guarantee tribal group sovereignty, how do Native people manage attachments to the Native object of desire that is the promise of sovereignty? Does Indigenous futurity depend on sovereignty? How do we reject nationalism while dreaming up Indigenous self-determination? How do feelings of sovereignty and self-determination change when worn on a tote bag or sticker?

The RISE Instagram account (@RISEIndigenous) has cultivated an online following of over 116,000⁷⁸. The accounts functions in a blog-like format, posting an array of forms ranging from original content and art, to re-posts of other social justice-oriented accounts and updates on inventory in their online shop, among other more informal posts like memes, promotion for community events and self-promotion for DinéYazhi's artistic production. This array of posting styles, along with paragraphs-long captions seemingly authored by DinéYazhi', produce a communal sense to the page, resembling a community bulletin board curated by @RISEIndigenous. It is unclear whether the Instagram account has multiple administrators, or if it is solely managed by DinéYazhi'. In some places, RISE is described as an artist collective, but in its Instagram biography, RISE self-describes as "an Indigenous artist initiative dedicated to the amplification & evolution of Indigenous art & culture," which when considered alongside the overall content of the Instagram, signals that it may solely be ran by DinéYazhi'. This distinction is important for situating RISE as an iteration of DinéYazhi's artistic world, considering that the

⁷⁸ @RISEIndigenous Instagram, accessed March 15th 2022.

artist also has a personal Instagram account with a smaller but still significant following of 24,000 followers⁷⁹.

Jodi Byrd neatly charts the relationship between Indigenous Studies and queer studies from a theoretical standpoint wherein queer natives are “nothing are everything at the same time,” giving way to a “critical stance for eschewing recognition altogether”⁸⁰. Byrd also calls on queer theory’s subject-less critique as articulated by Eng, Halberstam, and Munoz as an anti-identarian methodology, but complicates it with the reminder that its destabilized nature is still “grounded through the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land,” the very land that allows for claims to liberal subjectivity⁸¹. Byrd characterizes Indigenous studies and queer studies as “holding their boundaries and their ground against intersectionality” because of “the sheer magnitude of collapse that occurs when they occupy the same space at the same time,” which not only emphasizes the utility and possibilities of these two fields, but also reifies the extent to which racialized queerness problematizes liberal selfhood⁸².

RISE’s Instagram feed can vary starkly from one post to the next, both visually and in subject matter. Upon viewing the profile, it is easy to feel overwhelmed with the sheer amount of content; visually, this includes an array of infographics alongside posters advertising community events, DinéYazhi’s visual art, updates regarding their online shop, memes, and more. Upon exploring the profile, it is revealed that there are often multiple images included in one post, and

⁷⁹ @heterogenoushomosexual Instagram, accessed March 15th 2022.

⁸⁰ Byrd, Jodi A, “What’s Normative Got to Do with It? : Toward Indigenous Queer Relationality,” in *Social Text*: 38 (2020), 106.

⁸¹ Ibid., 145.

⁸² Ibid., 107-108.



Figure 6, @riseindigenous Instagram. Accessed 12 March 2022.

that the posts themselves are accompanied by lengthy captions, partly for accessibility and partly to expand on the content of the post, along with a lively comment section, with the RISE account often engaging in discussion with its followers. This style of posting may be visually overwhelming to some users, but those who dig further through this content will find an incredible spectrum of emotions that mirror the spectrum of content⁸³. From text-only posts to beautiful collages, and celebration of Indigenous artists and authors, the wide array of emotions from anger and despair to joy and recognition mirror the subject matter. RISE’s communal posting style and the affects transmitted through each genre of post are worth in-depth examination, particularly the mixing of genres, but

focusing on the account’s original content provides the most tangible extension of Demian DinéYazhi’s artistic world. It also seems that original posts providing educational content are some of the more popular posts on the account, possibly due to their share-ability via Instagram’s re-post feature.

The posts themselves often contain educational content centering Indigenous issues, mostly throughout the Western and Southwestern United States. These images often feature bold

⁸³ Figure 6.

italicized text, evocative of classic feminist typographic art⁸⁴, and often take mainstream current events and center an Indigenous perspective. RISE imagines a way of knowing that holds Native sovereignty as essential to the struggle against environmental destruction, and as essential to resistance against the violence of the U.S. nation-state as a whole. A post from last year brings forth a more radical stance, aggressively condemning tribal politicians' cooperation with "colonizer scum," specifically for allowing Elon Musk to conduct environmentally destructive business on Nambé Pueblo land in Northern New Mexico⁸⁵. For Native people, this sentiment brings forth feelings from generational conflicts within tribal communities regarding differing views on assimilation, and the painful history of nuclearism and uranium mines in New Mexico. This post, and much more of RISE's content is firmly situated in familiar feelings and sentiments in Native communities, and rightfully taps into the anger and resentment towards both the U.S. nation-state, and the specific history of tribal governments. Historically, tribal governments have been imposed onto Native people by colonizers to undermine traditional ruling structures that tended to be less hierarchical, and have historically furthered assimilationist policies, which is particularly true for New Mexican Pueblo tribes⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ Langer, Cassandra L, "Feminist Art Criticism: Turning Points and Sticking Places," in *Art Journal* 50, no. 2 (1991): 21–28, Langer discusses Barbra Kruger, whose style incorporates bold face sans serif type and comments on advertising and commodification.

⁸⁵ Figure 7

⁸⁶ Pueblo conservatism is debated among Pueblo and other Southwestern Native scholars, particularly as it pertains to literacy, education, and citizenship. In my own life, I have observed the way conservatism has impacted my elders who were once radicalized during the American Indian Movement, but now hold conservative views not only in elections, but also hold a type of Pueblo elitism tied to education.

Debenport, Erin, *Fixing the Books: Secrecy, Literacy, and Perfectibility in Indigenous New Mexico* (SAR Press, 2015).

This context provides a scope of how deep these feelings toward assimilation, citizenship, and self-determination run for Native people, specifically tribalized Native people in the Southwest, but I am also interested in the ways these feelings are felt by non-Native people learning about and consuming this content.. When looking through the comments, the vast majority are supportive or are engaging thoughtfully, understandably wondering how Tesla, which is marketed as environmentally-friendly, is environmentally destructive, and particularly so when considering the history of Native people and their role as water and land protectors. Although the post taps into anger, the comments turn that anger into feelings of confusion toward greenwashing, and then transforming into feelings of betrayal.



Figure 7 @RISEindigenous Instagram, Accessed 12 March 2022.

Teeters, Lila M, “‘A Simple Act of Justice’: The Pueblo Rejection of U.S. Citizenship in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 21, no. 4 (2022): 301–18.



Figure 8, @RISEindigenous Instagram, Accessed 12 March 2022.

To end, I ask: how do we move forward? Although DinéYazhi's artistic world does not provide prescriptive solutions, it does gesture toward a future wherein Natives have achieved "something else." Figure 8 shows a photo from @RISEindigenous of a red "Make America Great Again" hat, manipulated with "something else" over "great." "Make America Great Again," or MAGA, was the slogan of former President Donald Trump's election campaigns, and the red hat became synonymous with white supremacist dog whistles, begging the question, what does "great again" mean? For white supremacists like Donald Trump, we know "great again" is meant to signal an idyllic

past of traditionalism and subjugation of people of color, including Jim Crowe, slavery, outlawing of LGBTQ+ people, and so on. In the age of reproduction and memes, the MAGA hat was also replicated over and over again with reimagining that ranged from silly parodies to political reclamations that said things like "Make America Gay Again" and even simply "Black Lives Matter⁸⁷." DinéYazhi' reimagines the slogan differently than some of these other iterations. Instead of relying on (re)periodization or (re)mapping, DinéYazh'i gestures toward "something else" entirely, and literally. When considering some of DinéYazhi's other work,

⁸⁷ Ernest, Maya, "Make America stop buying 'MAGA' parody merch," *Input*, Accessed 12 March 2022, <https://www.inverse.com/input/style/stop-make-america-great-again-maga-parody-merch>.

particularly *Untitled*, which deals with Indigenous survivance and retrofitting feminist history, as well as other popular MAGA hat parodies like “Make America Mexico Again,” it seems like an Indigenous reimagining of this slogan would take on a similar periodization or geographical approach. The slogan itself falls victim to U.S. hegemony, as “America” is the entire New World made up of two continents, but in this case is referring specifically to the United States. So while we have two avenues for retrofitting the MAGA slogan—either (re)mapping or (re)periodizing, DinéYazhi’s reimagination takes a different route, instead, once again, asking the viewer of their art to join them in the reimagining, while also gesturing toward futurity, rather than returning to an idealized past.

“Make America Something Else Again” was also posted on the day of the 2020 election, when President Joe Biden was elected. Once again, DinéYazhi’s work is acutely aware that neoliberalism and its co-opting of identity politics will not provide a path toward Indigenous self-determination. In this gesture toward possibility, the future, and what could be, DinéYazhi once again invites their viewer to engage in meaning-making alongside them. This “something else” is reminiscent of the political imagination instilled in many marginalized communities, rejecting the current conditions in favor of an uncertain future. These future possibilities, of sovereignty, self-determination, and liberation, and how they interact with Indigenous conceptions of time and space are what will guide my future research on this topic.

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