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MARK MINCH-DE LEON

Atlas for a Destroyed World: Frank Day's Painting as Work of Nonvital Revitalization

Once in a while I take up color and paint a little bit, because, if I do not do this, all things will be forgotten. It's good enough all right to sing and talk and explain things on these broadcasts here or especially on tape recording or in records, but it's also nice to have someone who's able to print this or illustrate by color upon a chart. And then it would remain that way. You cannot change it then. And then you've got to be honest and true about it, and not copying from anybody else. But just translating the language, the Maidu language, and putting it up on a chart. And this shows exactly how the Maidu people had been doing before the coming of the white man.

—FRANK DAY, SELF-RECORDING, 1975

All the things that I have illustrated here by drawings, paintings, is true because I went to see it. I'm able to take you back to it.

—FRANK DAY, INTERVIEW, 1963

All Things Will Be Forgotten

Outside of California Indian communities and art and academic circles, Frank Day is largely unknown. His obscurity is compounded by the still mostly unacknowledged catastrophic conditions of his people, the Kóyo•mkàwi Maidu.[1] Born in 1902 in the Northern California Sierra Nevada foothills, by Day's own account, he saw the end of a way of life, the end of a world. His grandparents' generation had experienced massacres, abductions, sexual violence, enslavement, removals, and confinement. Day himself was taken as a child and placed in a federal boarding school for forced assimilation. An overdetermined silence on the destruction was created by few survivors, laws barring Indian testimony, settler-centric media, interdictions on speaking of the dead, suppression of languages, abduction of children, and legal prohibitions against ceremonies and gatherings, including for mourning. The continuing pressures of land loss, extreme poverty, lack of political representation, enforced western culture and epistemology, and racism compounded these initial conditions, foreclosing the Maidu relationship to

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death in an ongoing catastrophe. Dying in 1976 in the midst of such disaster, Day spent the last sixteen or so years of his life documenting the Maidu world in paint and on recording tape so that things would not be forgotten.

The above epigraphs make clear that Day's project of anamnesis is a matter of Indigenous informatics and cartography. Day used paint and tape, images and words to code information and map the (destruction of the) Maidu world in order to transmit information across space and time. The politics of information in this context is fraught, thanks in part to the early twentieth-century anthropological project of salvage ethnography and the critiques it has provoked. In salvage ethnography, much has been written on the separation between those who had direct experience with "traditional" ways of life and those with *mere* memories. Much scholarship also exists that reframes and sometimes reclaims the work of so-called informants outside such a notion of salvage. This is especially true of Day's generation, who were represented as a bridge between those who lived more traditional lifestyles and the postassimilation generations. These ancestors have, of course, left us an amazing gift in the information they provided, risking the dangers of colonial knowledge-making enterprises to sow the seeds for revitalization projects.

The claims of our ancestors to provide access to their worlds are not often taken at face value, with a critical ethics intervening to oppose evaluations of authenticity.[2] Focusing on authenticity and its critique, however, risks overemphasizing problematics set out by fields of study such as anthropology and art history, predetermining how we hear the words and see the images of our ancestors and leaving us circling around these knowledge formations in a critical posture, fascinated and revulsed. On the other hand, hearing and seeing our ancestors' mediations too literally, with an ear and eye for realism, couch their often subtle strategies and our Indigenous modes of being in a western metaphysical formalism that consolidates an Indigenous subject and an Indigenous world as stable identities easily transmitted and known. In approaching Day's obscurity and his claim that the Maidu world has come to an end—the unknown and the unsayable—I prefer to take Day's words and images at face value. I attempt to listen to how he frames problems, trying to understand his artwork in response. Due to the complex mediations at play in Day's representational practice, such intensive listening requires delinking from the false dilemma between antirealist critique and realist assertions of positive knowledge. Navigating around these two intimately related aspects of western knowledge formation—assertion and critique—is made easier by attending to California Indian epistemologies and metaphysics that outstrip their western counterparts. I draw much of this knowledge from Day himself, who not only emphasized

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the mediation of his knowledge in a distinctly California Indian epistemology but also used this mediation to invoke and transmit a disrupted way of being and an interrelationality that constitute the essence of the Maidu world.

As Day describes in one of his recordings, as part of his research he spent years looking for the "central point in Maidu territory," a journey that led him to all the different regions through which he "slept, crawled, walked," never finding an answer.[3] But, he reports, while painting the four points of a leaf from a tree, "as I was illustrating, it came to me." In a detouring exposition on Maidu patterns and designs, Day links these four points of a leaf to different periods of time, such as the "half-mourning" performed during severe drought; the spiritual realm; the significance of geographic shapes, especially straight lines, curves, circles, and points; the celestial sphere; the use of indelible roots for designs in basketweaving; and the existence of petrified monsters. Following this detouring path requires one to emulate the tempo and halting movements of Day's failed pilgrimage. It further requires shifts between times, levels of abstraction, and categories of knowledge across representational practices. This complex episode hints at how Day maps the missing center of the Maidu world in paint and on tape. Together, Day's words and images chart a detouring path back that is oriented around this central emptiness, one made possible by its very difficulty.

To add to the productive difficulty, Day was a problematic individual distrusted by many of the academics he contacted in his attempts to have his knowledge recorded and by many members of his own community, who referred to him as a criminal, cheat, and fraud.[4] This biographical wrinkle has implications for understanding how to hear and see Day's words and images. That Day was ostensibly a liar exposes cracks in the knowledge edifice and its modes of stabilizing and transmitting information. Day's lying also draws attention to the intricate and foreclosed networks between witnessing atrocity and being a cultural informant. Within a California Indian framework, lying is understood to be a legitimate way to confront radically incommensurate forms of power, such as the forces that destroyed Day's world, that threaten further destruction through the forgetting and silencing of the catastrophe, and that carve out institutionalized forms of memorialization based on a discourse of truth. The lack of veracity in Day's words and images, from this perspective, short-circuits the demand to be a "real Indian" by offering a path outside of aesthetic and veridical forms of recognition without falling back into a critique of the Indian as ideological figure covering over the real Native.

Along this path, Day painted nearly two hundred paintings and spent the last year of his life producing over seventy hours of self-recordings,

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from which the first epigraph of this article is taken. How do we hear the above claim that he is simply transmitting information through painting? That this information is coded in the Maidu language, which he charts with images? What does this statement say about painting and art more generally in the context of Native California, Native America, and Indigeneity more broadly? How does the claim to transparent information transmission help us understand the relation between Day's images and the hours of recordings he made, as well as the recorded explanations he gives for his paintings? Day's stated problem is to preserve what he fears is being lost, yet to travel over distance or time requires being in a form, hence paintings, stories, and songs. The above questions are raised by Day's work in these media and are obscured by disciplinary knowledge formations such as art history, anthropology, and other social sciences, which have their own institutional and epistemological investments. What is needed instead is careful consideration of Day's informatics and cartography through mediation, as well as the difficulties and interruptions he confronts in the recording and transmission of information. Archival issues, catastrophic foreclosures of relations to death, violences of representation, disciplinary and discursive captures in truth-making procedures are all impediments to the conveyance of knowledge for Indigenous people. If the medium is the message, what do these interruptions say about the Indigenous message?

"And our archaeologists say, well it never happened that way. . . . They say, 'Oh, Frank, it's never happened that way. What you see [petrified monsters] is just maybe something that formed like the animal.' All right, you believe that way. We believe it the other way."[5] On the significance of recording: "It may come in mighty handy . . . especially to the young Konkow people who may listen to it at a later period of time."[6] The dilemma for Day is how to both transmit the information he seeks to preserve under these perilous conditions and create the conditions for the revitalization of a kind of personhood and its concomitant world. This personhood, I argue, is one that resists western conceptions of person, subject, and the human. Transmitting information and personhood are not opposed, though they generally imply different forms of mediation: the first is interested in smooth transference without interruption, while the second lingers in the interval, in ethical breaks. Day, I argue, destabilizes any consolidation of mediatory processes into this difference (information/personhood) and finds the point of intersection between them. He outstrips both reference to a stable identity and world through knowledge *and* the performative force of an ethical transference of personhood.

To transmit information and create the conditions for revitalization, Day creates through his paintings and words an atlas for the Maidu world.

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Following Day down this path, we are helped by a number of elements that constitute a map key. Stated here in preliminary and condensed form, rather than rendering meaning more transparent, the elements of the map key may appear inaccessible. But this difficulty is part of the means of transmission, with access becoming possible by following Day on his errant journey and in his halting time. Noting that what is carried over is not the world itself, whatever that might mean, Day begins with the enigmatic violence of suspending the usual ways of seeing and interpreting painting, culture, and meaning. Clearing the ground, he similarly resists evaluations that privilege the western epistemological distinction between the vital and the mechanical, personhood and information, opting instead for an Indigenous, nonvital sense of the eye and the ear as material mediations. This nonvital approach opens onto a uniquely California Indian theory of power in the form of luck and a sense of the interrelationality of all things. Drawing on this theory, Day achieves a force of suspension by emphasizing the indexicality of painting as nonvital and interrelational, pointing both toward the world and toward the mediation of painting itself in a form of representation that is ambiguously pictorial and discursive. These indexical elements are distributed throughout Day's oeuvre, marking a metaphysical investment in the complexity and permanence of what is understood to be a uniquely Indigenous form of image-making: the petroglyph. Day represents and produces this complexity as what is to be transmitted and the means of such transmission. Through paint and tape, Day creates an atlas to a destroyed world by transmitting with and transmitting an undone petroglyph in images and words.

Enigmatic Violence

We enter the path through Day's paintings. Nonvital, immobilizing, fragmentary, his series of images represent a force of suspension. This static movement is not entirely obvious at first glance, considering the wide array of beings, elements, relations, and actions that make up the Kóyo•mkàwi Maidu world Day represents. Bodies and trees are locked in a tension between preservation and decay; stones manifest on a continuum from the most general to textured and colored particularity to petrified monsters that connect the land to time immemorial (storied time); wind is caught for a moment in violent spirals; water is always potentially poisonous (from shamans or earthquakes); smoke curls and rises, cutting across variously hued skies to carry prayers, to cleanse; there is fume, mist, and fire. Every figure, including that of the landscape, which never settles, is in arrested motion: wrestling, jumping, falling, killing, cooking, gathering. Animals and

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monsters are engaged in life-and-death struggles with their natural adversaries. The sick, dead, and dying lie somewhere between healing and decay, buried and disinterred. The land is riven with crevices; marked by impressions and petroglyphs; littered with bone and tree fragments; gathered and released in earth and stone forms, smooth and flat spaces, a proliferation and spilling of particulates. It rises up violently. The landscape is, further, visually partitioned by rocks and fallen trees that carve internal frames, fracturing the scene. Day certainly represents violence in his images, both the violence of bound and tortured bodies and the violence associated with life, activity, supported by his ethnographic-esque representations of village life, but, *at its heart,* Day's painting commits a very different kind of violence against vitality itself through employing representational powers of suspension.[7]

What are they, these "strange, sensuous, mystical paintings"?[8] They are not art—they are too "cultural" for such a designation. They are not cultural documentation—painting was not made for such work. Are they even true? Are they even good? These questions have little bearing. Despite Lucy Lippard's claim that Day is a "consummate artist," he himself deferred that designation, preferring to see himself as a documentarian, at best an illustrator, and yet it is generally agreed that his information left much to be desired.[9] His paintings have been variously interpreted as folk or outsider art due to his lack of training, cultural content, and ambiguous narratives, with the paintings being shown at the influential 1986 exhibition *Cat and Ball on a Waterfall: 200 Years of California Folk Painting and Sculpture*; as a type of autoethnography, due to his use of western aesthetic and representational practices to document his culture for his and his people's purposes, which is the primary lens through which his main biographer, Rebecca Dobkins, interprets his work; and, of course, as an Indian artist, with his work being historicized as a precursor to the California Indian painting movement, which began in the late twentieth century. All of these interpretations, though, fail to capture the radical rupture Day's paintings make in the field of the image as these interpretations seek *to make something* of them. They make meaning and/or knowledge by finding in his work critical vitalist tendencies that render visible his life, culture, and imagination at the margins.

The first thing one must contend with in viewing Day's images is this desire to want his paintings to be more, for them to make something visible. This desire raises an anxiety and a palliative such that Day's work seems to be a pale imitation of western painting—to signify that practice by failing at it—yet supersedes it on so many levels. The question of how to read Day's paintings is thus exacerbated: as paintings, as cultural documents,

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as spells of some sort? The discomfort this raises for many viewers is that Day's paintings offer us nothing to hold on to while indexing so much more and so much less than western art—both the absolute and "just something," as we will see—by using painting's representational capacities inappropriately to transparently represent, like science. Day instrumentalizes this desire to make visible and yet inverts and frustrates it by making nothing clear, by failing. Suspending the play of visible and invisible by disrupting the power to make visible at its source—being more and less than—Day's images carry the suggestion that western art and knowledge are a farce. "Painting deceives the eyes in so far as they admire the painter's art" and not the replication of a thing, yet what cannot be shaken in Day's context is that the catastrophic loss of what is replicated occurs through the very force of its representation.[10] This is a dangerous game, which Day gladly enters, the power of his work hinging on this fulcrum.

I have struggled with the desire to make something of Day's work in trying to write near his images, to see in his work a form of intellectual sovereignty and the performance of a gesture of survivance. I have finally, as much as I can, tried to let go of this desire after my realization that Day was engaged in a much stickier problem: the impossibility of visibility itself under catastrophic conditions. This is a problem that brings refusal—Day's refusal to paint something recognizable and my refusal to make positive knowledge about it—into an uncomfortable intimacy with failure.[11] Because of this problem, Day's paintings and words are better understood in the context of the archive in general, issues of vitalism in western metaphysics, and the unsayable in the face of genocidal violence and the intractability of the archive. In this sense, biographical, historical, cultural, and any other contextual frames need to be explained by Day's work and the problems he addresses as much as the other way around.

Tear of the Visible

Day's movement of suspension can be seen in the untitled painting that is part of a series of images by Day that show Maidu people skinning deer (figure 1). It is a good example to demonstrate how Day's paintings have generally been read. As a dramatic scene of Maidu life, of the reproduction of Maidu life, of relationships between human and nonhuman bodies, of cultural information of the variety sought vigorously by salvage ethnographers, as well as by some of the anthropologists with whom Day was in direct contact throughout the 1960s and 1970s, this image seems heavily coded in the discourse of cultural anthropology. In its aesthetic presentation, the image appears to be clearly a figurative painting, representing a narrative cultural

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FIGURE 1. Untitled, ca. 1967. Destroyed in the 1991 Oakland Hills fire. Photograph courtesy of Rebecca J. Dobkins.

scene in as truthful a manner as possible. But the image cannot be *only* a figurative painting, because the relationship to "real life" is complicated by the disruption caused by catastrophic violence, and it cannot be *fully* narrative, as the function of story gets repurposed by Day through a complex relationship to truth and the archive.

Day likely never experienced this scene as presented, yet such a rupture is already implied by the mechanism of painting: "The art of painting as mimesis, with all its technique and science, is made to deceive the eyes by an innocuous magic which makes a picture display things that do not exist."[12] Through variance in resemblance, painting suggests what it represents without ever representing anything at all, yet this force of suggestion is only possible because of the representational promise. In the practice of painting, Day finds a strange destructive power that fails precisely where it draws its force, making painting a paradoxically appropriate medium to register catastrophe. Two things emphasize the enigmatic aspect of this weak (and/or self-) destructive capacity: use of painting to scientifically document and

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the role of documentation in contributing to the catastrophic function of the archive.

To understand the dilemma, we can turn to the inherent absurdity of a project like anthropology, with which Day was intimately familiar, which asked people to record knowledge of their culture in the face of their own disappearance both after catastrophe and in response to its always imminent arrival as an extension of murder. To contribute to one's own disaster as an informant was the condition for having a share in the visible world. Herein lies the perverse destruction of visibility as such. The *savage,* from this perspective, was always understood to be concomitant with the archive, to be their own archive without distance. Hence the impossibility of an Indigenous archive through technological mediation and the need for ethnographic transcription and translation. Rendering the savage visible was therefore a destructive act, leading to the crisis anthropology underwent in the recognition of the murder of its own referent.

In the opening epigraph, Day insists that he can hold this catastrophe at bay with just color and a little bit of painting. Such a claim marks a confluence of humility and the absolute, which characterizes much of Day's life. While seemingly echoing the destructive anthropological gesture, it instead marks a refusal/failure to make visible. This interruption emphasizes the force from which anthropology's dangerous powers are drawn but in an ambiguous medium with its own destructive powers. In the above untitled painting, instead of depicting a truthful cultural scene or a history of painterly gestures, Day simultaneously employs and maps the destructive powers of representation in both its pictorial and discursive senses. A response to what Marc Nichanian calls the "tear of the gaze"—the impossible desire to render the catastrophe visible through aesthetic means and/or representational practices—Day's refusal/failure to make visible brings the viewer to the limit of the image and employs the limit itself for preservation.[13]

Day's painting turns away from the aggressive exigency to make visible without recourse to the invisible or hidden, what is merely not yet visible. He hides nothing. He instead suspends the question of visibility in order to make other arrangements of the senses available in his images. Day's words, for instance, as we will see, are difficult to follow because they fail to uncover what is hidden, unlike the language of anthropology or the formal language of exposition. Yet they also do not hide anything, which would merely be a call to be deciphered. His words are then open to enter into interrelation with his images in a way that holds the viewer suspended between visibility and invisibility, sound and silence, ear and eye. Day paints the impossibility of representing the catastrophe by not showing it and not hiding it, by painting the nothingness left in the wake of the world's destruction as refusal/

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failure to make visible: "To show the most terrible images is always possible, but to show who or what kills every possibility of the image is impossible, except by recreating the gesture of the murderer."[14]

The various elements represented in the untitled painting demonstrate how this suspended action produces an orientation through avisuality. Together, the elements offer an impression of Day's cartographic strategy, though in inchoate and barely adumbrated form. I list them here to coax them into a precariously held shape: the toes of a petrified monster poking into the frame on the right; the differently shaped and individuated stones littering the landscape; the circle of the dance ground; the jagged, broken form of a log or large rock; the floating quality of the figures involved in deer skinning; and, finally, the enigmatic symbols drawn onto/above the painting near Day's signature. Each of these elements will be addressed in more detail below but here can be enigmatically highlighted as an ensemble lying somewhere between a discourse and a picture. These distributed elements suggest representational powers while drawing out the more dangerous aspects of representation by resisting categorization or clear organization. The ensemble suggests a world and orients the viewer through suspension/preservation of its possibility.

By addressing this tear in/of the visible through its impossibility, Day is not intentionally being evasive, as Sascha Scott reads the paintings of Awa Tsireh, the early twentieth-century Pueblo painter who became well-known for his striking minimalist renderings of Pueblo imagery.[15] Scott carefully interprets the evasive strategies Tsireh employed to sell his paintings on the substantial Southwest Indian art market without revealing any sensitive knowledge and to cleverly manipulate the desires of Pueblo art aficionados. But the Indian art market did not want Day's work. Or, at least, there was not much of a market for California Indian art during the time he was painting. He did have collectors—the usual hodgepodge of local anthropologists, Native art enthusiasts, public historians, and some academics, as well as a few Indians. And he did eventually find a venue at Pacific Western Traders in Folsom, California, where he became a fixture for the last three years of his life. But Day's story must ultimately be understood as one of failure and not one of resistance. Day's paintings are not a fully intentional and masterful coding of information but rather a failure to communicate and to communicate by that very failure. As Nomtipom Wintu scholar, cultural leader, and artist Frank LaPena writes, "Sometimes Frank's stories were so strange, or the point of view so unfamiliar, that one was unsure whether one was listening to Frank's personal creative inventions or stories representing events from another time and place. For instance, his explanation of several paintings dealing with the time when there were once 'monster beasts'

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in the beginning of creation was better understood if one knew the Maidu tradition or had a chance to actually see what he was talking about."[16] This ambivalence not only does not resolve in Day's transmission of information but also becomes the very means of charting itself.

Real Indians Don't Lie

Specifics of Day's life contribute to the ambiguity. By some accounts, Day was a trickster, a coyote slinking around the outskirts of the community, a "con man"; by others, he was a central and important figure of Maidu cultural renewal. These accounts are not mutually exclusive, and their concomitance in Day strikes at the heart of presumptions about cultural authenticity and the figure of the witness. Day's dual positioning challenges conventional forms of analysis and representation, including the critically examined figures of the anthropological "informant" and the market-based "Indian artist," not to mention the historicist tendencies within biographical, social, and political context. Day, however, positioned himself as a bulwark at the threshold of the disappearance of the Maidu world, drawing on the waning powers of western figurative painting and salvage ethnography to engage the catastrophe on other terms for the sake of preservation: "If I do not do this, all things will be forgotten."

Day was raised as the son of one of the last headmen of the Bald Rock band of the Kóyo•mkàwi Maidu, the people of the meadows. His mother died when he was two. A Northern California tribe whose homelands are in the Sierra Nevada foothills, the Kóyo•mkàwi were devastated by the gold rush, including mass murder; many of their people were marched (often to death) in the Maidu Trail of Tears in 1863, as well as in the earlier 1854 removal. The Maidu homelands were flooded in the 1960s by the Oroville Dam project, with several village, ceremonial, and cultural sites now underwater. Day attended the Greenville Indian Industrial Boarding School, a coercive federal project to humanize the savage by destroying their cultural life and severing their ties to Indigenous modes of interrelationality by taking away language, ceremony, and knowledge. At the same time, his father, Twoboe (a.k.a. Billy Day), a well-respected political, cultural, and spiritual leader, was sought out as an anthropological informant, something Day would have been very aware of as a child, leading to an early understanding of the significance of the production of an archive and the need for cultural preservation. Frank Day was also raised around elders who are considered the last to structure their lives around the time of the roundhouse, the ceremonial house at the center of Maidu life, and was therefore exposed to ceremonial singing "all day and night."[17] So Day from a very early age had a sense of the

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catastrophe, the one that had already occurred, the one ongoing during his life, and the impending one prophesied through the night singing performed by these elders.

Rebecca Dobkins, who wrote her dissertation on Frank Day in the 1990s, curated an art exhibit and edited a catalog based on his paintings. She also produced an account of Day's early life that indicates the holes in knowledge and the limitations of biography, particularly under the extreme conditions of poverty, colonization, and U.S. hegemony. Conducting interviews with Kóyo•mkàwi elders who knew Day, reconstructing his biography and genealogy using spotty and problematic census records, and engaging with Day's shifting autobiographical accounts, Dobkins indicates the slippages between different narratives and the doubtfulness of producing an authoritative or coherent biography for him. Day, for instance, suffered a severe injury when he was a child that limited the use of his legs. For years, it seems, he used tin cans tied to his hands for mobility, dragging himself around. Giving an explanation for this injury, Day says that he was thrown from a horse, but several other accounts, including one by Day himself, state that he was beaten severely by his grandmother when he was three years old for running through acorn soup that she was leaching (a primary food source that requires significant labor), to the point that one witness thought he was dead. Day's explanation for how he regained the use of his legs recounts a miracle: "One day while sitting in a vineyard, Frank decided to take hold of a vine. A radiant light came out of the dawn and gave him the power to pull himself upright. Immediately he was made 'whole.' So from that time forth he has carried the name Ly•dam•lilly, which in Maidu signifies 'fading Morningstar.'"[18] Day elsewhere has given as the reason he received his Maidu name that he was born in the early morning hours.[19] He apparently suffered numerous injuries throughout his life, including having both of his knees broken in a farming accident that left one leg permanently shorter than the other. According to one account, Day took up painting while recovering from this last injury, but Day also claims to have taught painting while traveling throughout the country as an itinerant laborer during his early twenties.[20] He also claims to have taught "spiritual ministry" during this time and to have attended a number of religious colleges, though there are no records of his enrollment. Enigmatically, in the same recording where Day discusses the loss of the use of his legs and miraculous recovery, he recalls that an "enemy later destroyed me, but I'm not going to talk about that; I'm going to sing you a song."[21]

This refusal to talk about his personal destruction by an enemy all while giving competing personal narratives that sound fantastical to the skeptical ear is a complex play of power. Dobkins, for instance, cites an account by Day of how his two older brothers died from wearing stone caps that were

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part of “spiritual warfare.”[22] Expressing that initially she found the story to be fantastical, she was surprised to have it corroborated both in interviews with the Kóyo•mkàwi community and in earlier anthropological literature that documented ku’kinim to’ni (spirit or pain baskets), portable mortars “used by shamans as receptacles in which to keep their most powerful and precious charms, especially the ‘pains’ which they shot at people to cause disease or death.”[23] At the same time, California Indian power is tricky and dangerous, affecting not only the ways people behave but also the very structures of many California Indian languages, which only indirectly reference it.[24] In a description of California Indian power, another anthropologist notes that while it is accepted that it is generally wise to be honest, moderate, and reciprocal with others in order to not offend power and bring about your own destruction, as well as acquire power yourself, “honesty is qualified by the understanding that deceit can be used by the weak when dealing with powerful beings or persons who have an unfair advantage.”[25] In this realm of the indeterminacy of truth and lying, of power and weakness, Day engages the dangerous colonial tools of representation in order to transmit information without truth, a nonpatriarchal transmission and use of authority.

To ensure such transmission within a treacherous context, Day leverages his authority on his very failure to be an authority: “I’m not a doctor, I’m not a soothsayer, I’m not a shaman, I’m not a spiritual man, I’m not a medicine man. I’m just an ordinary man who by my constant listening and . . . my business . . . was . . . to be around older folks to listen, to learn. It’s been my business to prepare myself for the spiritual course in the Indian tradition, and then the way of life came to an end when I was just nine or ten years old. And things have changed.”[26] This complex authority distinguishes between the ordinary and extraordinary while conflating the two within a discourse of catastrophe. Day’s use of this authority is augmented by his outsider position in relation to his community. While Day might have been the son of an important leader, his decision to leave the community to travel around the country after performing a burning ceremony for his father’s death created distrust. Returning after twelve years, Day was somewhat excluded, although his vast knowledge was welcomed, as evidenced by his performance of a mourning ceremony promptly upon his return.[27] In a type of quasi exile without full exclusion, Day returned home without ever fully returning, his travels appropriately bookended by mourning.

Yet Day was responsible for bringing songs and dances back to his people. Frank LaPena led a dance troupe, the Maidu Dancers and Traditionalists, who studied under Day. LaPena describes the experience of performing for the Kóyo•mkàwi at Bald Rock: “In order to appreciate the moment,

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you must imagine the power of words, Maidu words sung on a public occasion, in Maidu territory where Indians were not always acknowledged, and Frank Day as a Maidu elder bringing their dance back to them."[28] What Day returned with was the journey itself. The dances and songs had traveled with Day, a traveling that did not end with his return to Northern California. Neither entirely welcomed back nor excluded: this contradictory and suspended movement of Day's life has been transcribed into his work, making it difficult to position him. Indeed, Day was not to be trusted, because he took it upon himself to live the dissonant rhythms of power and knowledge at the limits of two different and genocidally structured cultures. This dissonance has been transcribed into and has made possible the recording of a type of Maidu visuality and visual theory in paint.

Subterranean Vision

In Frank Day's painting *The Mushroom Picker* a relationship is implied between the Kóyo•mkàwi man picking mushrooms and the ants in the bottom left corner of the image, but it is a subtle one mediated by a transverse decaying fallen tree that separates the top of the human figure from his legs and acts as a dark tunnel of activity for the ants, an extension of their mound (figure 2). The other trees in the background are on a continuum of life and death, reflecting the stakes of survival through the mirrored bending of the man's figure, draped over the fallen tree, and the bending of the lightest-colored tree out of the left side of the frame. The lean musculature and protruding spinal column and ribs of the figure get analogized in the bone color of the left-leaning tree, which fades in brightness and deforms, suggesting an indeterminacy between flesh and bone. A dead gray spire splits both this mirrored image and the evergreens in the background, with a black bird of some sort perched on a branch near the top. Two deer run up the hillside. As with most of Day's paintings, the landscape is complexly textured and full of tensions, ridges or rifts, and various states of solidity. Everything in the image, from a certain standpoint, has an organic quality to it; from another standpoint, everything tends toward a subtle deformation that resists the organic/inorganic distinction (which in a Maidu sense means it is charmed, imbued with power). In several of Day's paintings, like this one, a vista is naturally framed; here the frame is made of the transverse tree resting on a rock or earth formation (creating a triangle shape, replicated by the figure's bent arm). Through this vista runs a creek and then a valley that seem compressed and distorted. The vista disciplines the eye with texture and other earthly elements, enfolded into the layered interplay of environmental forces, just like the horizon itself.

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FIGURE 2. *Cycle of Life,* ca. 1965. Crocker Art Museum, 2017.62.5. Gift of the Aeschliman McGreal Collection.

The fungal, though, is the essence. Mushrooms pervade the scene, insinuating themselves into the crevices, where they populate the darker spaces, moving from textural affect to figure and back. They are mediators between decay and life, the darkness of the earth and the cool night sky, soil and digestion, rootedness and floating spores, unseen underground rhizomes and aboveground fruit. Life and death are in an oscillating series of tensions. This painting is (about) employing the forces of death, the earth, and darkness for the sake of preservation. The status of death, though, is up in the air. Another title recorded for this painting, *Cycle of Life,* represents an organic vision, yet death in Day's work and practice pushes beyond the organic cycle toward another kind of death outside of the life and death divide. Though it appears to be daytime, it is a day that is strongly interrupted by the forces of the night. Trees are both bone and decaying flesh, structure and meat, just like the human body. Using these qualities in paint, Day has sealed in the essence of fungus, which infuses the painting itself, insinuating itself, like the ants, between the paint and the canvas, the image and the neutral,

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toward which it always leans.[29] Day explains, the ants are horticulturalists who plant mushrooms in the dead tree, harnessing the forces of the earth, of death and decay, to bear fruit, just as Day uses the decaying corpses of art and anthropology to preserve the Maidu world.[30] By sprouting, this painting takes us underground in the full light of day.

What kind of vision is this? It is not stratigraphic, a form of vision detailed by Jason Weems in his discussion of subterranean mapping as an expansionist force that reshapes the landscape of the "American" West, making the invisible visible, particularly through geology and archaeology.[31] It is, in fact, the inverse. In the former, rationality, action, clarity, abstraction—all of the instrumental forces of the day in the service of "life"—are brought to bear on the hidden recesses of the earth. It is a kind of vision that "seek[s] to perforate meaning by forcing . . . entry or breaking it open to dissipate what is thought to be its secrets," an action that Trinh T. Minh-ha claims is akin to "verifying the sex of an unborn child by ripping open the mother's womb. It is typical of a mentality that proves incapable of touching the living thing without crushing its delicateness," a mentality that, ironically, presents itself as being in the service of life.[32] In Day's vision, one does not pry open the earth to reveal its secrets, exposing it to the light of day; instead, one entreats the forces of the earth for the purposes of survival, going into the ground like a corpse in order to deform the visible landscape itself with an opaque sight, that of painting. Rock and earth fold, contract and dilate. Trees and land take on monstrous forms. The darkness of the earth, of night, of death otherwise, of what Day refers to as "the Great Mystery" of the West, is brought to bear on the California landscape, so well-known in colonial terms with its two kinds of light in landscape painting (northern and southern) and history of visual and epistemological representation and capture.[33]

Nonvital Interrelationality

By employing a subterranean vision, Day's representational practice seeks to step into the realm Kim TallBear locates beyond the life/nonlife binary, where Indigenous interrelationality challenges the life and death distinction.[34] For TallBear, what she calls an Indigenous metaphysics precedes and exceeds the biological or carbon-based metaphysics that subtends western and colonial forms of governance. Drawing on the work of both Vine Deloria Jr. and Charles Eastman, she argues that the sociopolitical interrelationality that includes humans and animals, as well as energy, spirits, rocks, and stars, upends the slow division that occurred between the human and other than human worlds that has marked colonization and the enforcement of an imperial epistemology.[35] It also shifts the position of the human in relation

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to ontological hierarchies that alter the human constitution, which can be understood in more complex ways than in simply biological terms.[36]

Contesting the scientific "molecular definition of life," which is founded on the presumed extinction of Indigenous populations and the study of their cell lines, TallBear notes how DNA becomes a proxy for bodies and life in such a way that a contradiction is exposed in the desire for western genomic futures.[37] Not only are Indigenous peoples persistently narrated in discourses of endangerment and death, but their preservation is required for nationalist coherence. As Jasbir Puar might frame it, U.S. sovereignty requires the stunting of the Indigenous body (politic and otherwise) and not its death.[38] This perversion of power, for TallBear, is part of the way that death is brought into power and biopolitically managed. Indigeneity is held back from the brink of extinction through an epistemological form of recognition that ultimately destroys Indigenous identity, and the settler is thereby granted eternal life in the reservoir of Indigenous half-life.

TallBear analyzes two western theoretical fields located broadly under the umbrella of posthumanism that seek to reflexively subvert this power-laden conception of life and death by focusing on a broader notion of vitality and finds both lacking in relation to Indigenous metaphysics. In the first, multi- and interspecies fields such as animal studies get close to Indigenous emphases on "complex forms of relatedness of peoples and nonhumans in particular places" but ultimately fall short by limiting relationality and "life" to the organismically defined.[39] In the second, new materialism extends understanding of how both organic and inorganic nonhuman lives "press into and are co-constituted with human lives," emphasizing the vitality of all things in a world of quasi agents and forces.[40] This coconstitution comes close, for TallBear, to Deloria's ethical metaphysics, in which there is a realization that "the world, and all its possible experiences, constitute a social reality, a fabric of life in which everything [has] the possibility of intimate knowing relationships because, ultimately everything is related."[41] Here the issue is the secular nature of the discourse that discounts Indigenous emphases on the coconstitution of the material world and immaterial realms and beings. This immaterial realm is sometimes described as spirit or the sacred, but, referencing David Shorter's important critique of the use of spirituality to define Indigenous practices, TallBear makes clear that material and immaterial beings are all part of the social fabric described by Deloria.[42]

A sense of interrelationality can certainly be seen within Day's images, including relations with petrified monsters, vengeful whirlwinds, smoke for prayer and healing, coyotes that mourn an old man who has died. Moving to the level of representation, however, requires care in how vitality gets

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understood beyond the life and nonlife divide, because the move risks reinstating a critical mode based on the privileging of vitality in a way that can be too easily co-opted. TallBear makes this clear in her critique of new materialism, a discourse that furtively borrows Indigenous perspectives and universalizes and secularizes them as a form of vitalist critique. Such a sense of critique amounts to a disavowal of death, of all that is inert and non-agential, tending toward a flattening ontology that renders representation transparent/inconsequential and equalizes in a manner counter to California Indian interrelations, which can be very particular and have more complex relations to vitality and animacy. Not all rocks are alive, but some are (and some have power and are good for gambling, but some might kill you). To the decisively animist question *are rocks alive?* the appropriate nonvitalist response is *which rock?*

Indigenous sociopolitical interrelations do not imbue everything with vitality, which would expand biopower exponentially. Life and death are not managed according to what Elizabeth Povinelli calls a "biontological enclosure," in which "Western ontologies are covert biontologies" and "Western metaphysics [acts] as a measure of all forms of existence by the qualities of one form of existence, [Life]."[43] Like TallBear, Povinelli is concerned with the way these new vitalisms impose the qualities of one of western metaphysics' categories (Life) onto its concept of existence (Being), raising the question: "How does this ascription of the qualities we cherish in one form of existence to all forms of existences reestablish, covertly or overtly, the hierarchy of life?"[44] Instead, the particularity of Indigenous interrelations is part of a distinctly and differentially interested (and oftentimes threatening) world, and the concept of vitality offers little in the way of understanding it or operating within it.

The disruption of the biontological enclosure can also be understood in relation to California Indian conceptions of power, which are not simple and which open up onto a nonvital field. In a number of California Indian frameworks, along with the material and immaterial beings and realms that, according to TallBear, make up the social fabric, there is a third realm that has generally been translated as "luck." Power has two valences, then. There is a positive valence, which humans and other beings can gather and harness, as evidenced by the work of healers, who can use this power for good or bad. In some conceptions, this power is a remnant of the creative energies employed during the formation of the world, which both explains its dissemination into all types of beings and its specific and unequal measures, as this form of power is entropic. But the realm of luck is of another order and is entirely negative in valence in the sense that one cannot control it, curry its favor, or approach it directly: "The natural, reached through luck, is

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impersonal; it cannot be known or sensed, and it is never addressed; but not so the supernatural."[45] Luck has the effect of bending the very structure of language, which contorts to take on a humility and indirectness in relation to luck. It also bends behaviors, relationships, and the entire world around it and its unknownness, placing an infinite distance through distortion and deformation within interrelation itself. Yet one can play within its purview, which explains the significance of gambling in California Indian cultures (hand game, grass game, walnut dice, etc.). Such is the force of enigma, which opens onto the impersonality of catastrophe, as the loss of luck can be catastrophic and is therefore linked to the prophetic.

Charting the Maidu Language

The Maidu language is where Day locates the greatest archive and site of preservation, as it is through language and ultimately song that the world takes form. Day's name for his people, Tay•yee, for instance, means "westward," not just in the sense of being located in the West but as a people that tend toward the mystery of the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean, Mon•dow•wi (big waters), where darkness falls and toward which everything leans: sun, moon, land, streams, tall grass, wind, cold.[46] Day's vision (theory, speculation) is, then, westward leaning, conditioned by enigma, both that of the water and that of the earth. In a thirty-minute-long self-recording made toward the end of his life, Day explains the name Tay•yee, which he links, seemingly haphazardly, to an imperative to never talk fast (as it makes it seem like one is running from something), different types of ground (burial, crying, drying, hunting, etc.), the displacement of his people through "legal" means, the disappearance of a world and "the last of the Tay•yee," identity through language, relation between song and story, his encounter with Ishi before Ishi was captured, the importance of a life of study trying to "understand these things," the reason why he paints "pictures" (to encode the Maidu language in images), and how one learns how to sing. What possible connection can there be between these (other than the tape on which they are recorded)? It is too much. And when one finds out that the tape is part of a series of self-recordings that go on for over seventy hours in a similarly meandering style, it is overwhelming.

This is perhaps why Day's commentators have largely limited their words to his paintings. Though the paintings are also complex, they seem to hold together more consistently in terms of their content and developing realist style. But Day is clear that he is transmitting information/personhood through his paintings, and for that reason one must pay attention to the surreptitious and often subterranean networks of connections between

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what he says and what he shows. What are the elements he is putting into play in each, and how do they resonate with each other? Day was interested in painting not as painting but as a mode of communication (though a problematic and outdated one) that he saw as a visual archiving of the Maidu language, "just translating the language, the Maidu language, and putting it up on a chart. And this shows exactly how the Maidu people had been doing before the coming of the white man." Similarly, the Maidu language for him was encapsulated by individual words and their meanings, which were condensed forms of stories together with an analogy to environmental sounds. Explaining the meaning of a word such as ko•pak, or "deer in a jump trouncing a snake," necessarily leads to an extended, detouring interweaving of story, explanation, and description of the moment a deer jumps on a snake, followed by a song about the event (figure 3).[47]

The telescoping that Day performs when unpacking Maidu words leads ultimately to "song-stories," which he performs on his recordings: "These

FIGURE 3. *Deer Protecting Her Fawn,* ca. 1970. Collection of Frank LaPena.

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songs seem to comprise exactly what the Maidu language is in itself."[48] Further, across the various tapes, Day makes little distinction between biographical details, ethnographic facts, tales of monsters, descriptions of sacred practices, sermonizing, and ethical imperatives, which all blend into each other and are organized into an ensemble around the gravitational pull of the song-story. This is not surprising, considering that most California Indian origin stories begin with the world being sung into being, which places rhythm and resonance at the heart of all things, linking story, sound, and song. Not only was the world sung into being, but words, which derive from the world, were also originally sung: language comes out of singing. What is perhaps surprising is how individualistic these songs can be. Even while everything has its song and there are songs for every action (hand game songs, fishing songs, bubbling acorn soup song, acorn grinding song, hunter song, night songs, doctor songs, different bird songs, bee song, butterfly song, rippling water song, mole song, snake song, snail song, cry song, midnight songs, morning songs, evening songs, fire song, hummingbird song, glowing leaf song, bear song, deer hoof song, gopher song, squirrel song, different dance songs . . . "so numerous"), the economy of songs is based on both the acquisition of personal power and the pedagogical relationship with the world.[49] One learns songs by watching and listening intently, and one gathers songs and makes them one's own for personal luck, protection, power against others, and prestige. There are thus prohibitions on using someone else's song, which Day abides by. But some songs are also about the things other beings have taught Indians, including how to survive, and are sung communally. Some songs are meant to be purely for delight.[50]

In one of his recordings, Day offers up to the listener song as "a foundation that you may build upon for the future."[51] Here he is using song as a way "back to the period of time I'm talking about." This is a precarious path, as songs, according to him, are no longer sung correctly. In a postvernacular way, they are sung without understanding and under the wrong circumstances, usually without awareness of their origin or who they might belong to, which, Day claims, can lead to one's destruction.[52] While this is a warning, it is not entirely a reproval, as Day also repeatedly talks about the importance of younger generations *just going on ahead*. It is this balance between imminent danger and necessary risk that Day navigates in his own relaying of songs, stories, and information. Careful to ascribe these things to their owners and originators, Day nonetheless "borrows" them and sings them before an unknowable audience, using a recording technology that has been widely understood to efface the kind of authority and presence that Day is asserting.[53] But it is precisely this authority and presence that is at stake.

The complexity of this authority can be heard in another recording, in

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which Day meditates on the notion of preservation as it relates to California Indian pedagogical relationships with ants.[54] Noting that rosin (pine pitch) acts as a form of congealed darkness, harnessing the forces of the earth in times of imminent danger, he states that it was by watching ants that Indians learned how to preserve food by encasing it in rosin for the purposes of survival. He goes so far as to equate Indians and ants: "We were known as wild Indians. Ants are still wild." Certainly a risk, Day nonetheless explicitly links the problem of survival to the kinship between his people and ants: the organization of ant mounds mapped onto Kóyo•mkàwi dwellings around the central round house; a tendency toward silent movements; the ant's ability to sense danger, which he links to night singing (a Maidu prophetic tradition); and the use made of the underground for both dwelling and food storage ("[like the ants,] we tried to go beneath the ground").

It is impossible to cleanly parse out from a series the concepts Day offers in his explanation: dwelling, security, survival, preservation, pedagogy, interrelations of beings and environment, darkness, storm, rosin. The explanation goes on for thirty minutes, weaving these ideas together (the length of the recording tape he was using). Day, however, offers clues as to how to hear these ideas. He structures the explanation around a song-story about "how the ants fit in with the life of a Konkow Indian." Just before singing the song, he makes a distinction between two Maidu words for ant: bo•le•sa, which refers to the ants we are in intimate relation with today, and ne•non, which refers to ants during the time of creation stories. This sense of difference between experience and time immemorial, of beings with whom one socializes and beings whose actions made such sociability possible, conditions the performative reenactment through singing. The time immemorial is neither a belief nor a simple empirical fact; it is the condition for the world. To sing is to hear the ant's song interrelationally, and this song is necessarily one that resonates (with) these very conditions themselves. For Day, the song-story functions as a set of instructions, "like 2 + 2 = 4," linking singing and hearing to the first beings and to the pedagogical relations humans have with the rest of the world. In this sense, how might paint and recording tape act like rosin for the sake of preservation, but in a Native pedagogical way? And how can the images inscribed on them be made to carry such resonance?

While expressing urgency, even emergency, about the need for preservation, Day, however, does not demand immediate action or the speeding up of activity. This is because, rather than a call to action, his response to destruction is the imperative to slow down, to take one's time. He gives cautions about the temporality at stake, with perhaps the most poignant example being his repeated assertions of the need to sing gambling songs slowly so

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that one can sing all throughout the night, as opposed to the sped-up singing that he hears California Indians doing and that he laments. This is a warning offered at the threshold and under the sign of disappearance: *You are about to die. Slow down and make it last. And by so doing, maybe you will outlast death.* It is also a practical suggestion in that California Indian gambling often includes singing as a way to hide patterns from those guessing, and slow singing creates more opacity.

Watching the painted environment, like how Day describes watching ants all day long in order to learn from them, we learn from watching such intensive watching that we can no longer simply read or view the painting in an art historical or visual cultural sense. We must learn from it how to endure, hearing it as a song-story or singing it in a way that creates opacity. The painting is a complex niche of its own framed in a way that implicates us. It is a vision, certainly, but one brought down to the ground: "Now I want to come down a little bit in altitude to a thousand feet, between a thousand and three thousand feet." Day's own traditional Indigenous knowledge of his tribal homeland encodes and is encoded in the painting in a way akin to how survival from time immemorial encodes and is encoded in the earthwork performed by ants. As Day puts it, "Maybe that was one of our maps."

The Undone Petroglyph

Day's theories of language and image, evidenced in the recordings and paintings he produces, rely upon a notion of petrification that contrasts with settler memory. Day archives language with certain terminology said to be ancient or original, maps the landscape with the location of petrified monsters, and represents impressions in stones, indexing in exploded form a petroglyph. The petroglyph, as carving in/on stone, already functions in an ambiguous manner, marking the land as Indigenous, communicating a message across time, lying somewhere between image and text, and functioning as a visionary and interrelational space in conversation with the land itself, not just writing on stone but writing stone. Day represents petroglyphs directly in four forms: as preexisting (moving heavily through time), as being made (creating a message), as embodied by figures (which take the form of glyphs, inverting referentiality), and as floating glyphic signifiers abstracted from stone and inscribed in/on the painting or image, like in/on the untitled painting of the deer skinners (figure 1, which makes every stone a surface of inscription and the painting a stone).

Rather than emphasizing motion, implied, for instance, by Gerald Vizenor's neologism "pictomyth," a concept inflected with humanist and vitalist natural philosophical tendencies, Day emphasizes in the petroglyph

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the ambiguity of human or inhuman materialized memory by representing a process of petrification as nonvital and im/mobile preservation. Vizenor would most likely use the term "transmotion" to refer to pictomyths: "The figures painted on stone, on the face of granite, are more fantastic than any representations of natural motion or naturalism."[55] But this distinguishes between natural motion/presence and graphic motion/sense of presence in a way that implies the ability to transmit the essence of motion itself, to carry it across mediations (trans-late) through a privileging of liveliness. The distinction is made emblematic by the difference between Vizenor's descriptions of nature and his sense of the totemic as gesture. From this perspective, reductively, motion is good, stasis is bad.

Day's painting not only indicates the immobility and permanence of images carved in/on stone but also represents motion in a manner that is distinctly unnatural such that the very concept of the "natural" implodes. Suspicious whirlwinds; forces that act on bodies in the form of breath, whistling, vision, and the light from the sun; but, most importantly, the figures who act in the images and take on the graceful, uncanny movements and poses associated with marionettes all represent this unnatural motion.[56] Day describes this awkward gracefulness in terms of the wind, in which "straight wind is a broken up whirlwind," a line that always tends toward a curve.[57] Such is the impression of Day's figures as moving effortlessly and without gravity or center, even as they are at times embroiled in life-and-death struggles, lending them the inhuman effect of an immobility that moves more than any "natural" movement. This sense of unnaturalness represents movement differently outside of the stasis/motion binary. Memory, preservation, revitalization must then be thought in different terms. What Day preserves is not a vitalist sense of motion but an orientation. This orientation, however, is not entirely intentional and, like marionettes, has an inhuman, nonvital "life" of its own.

Frank LaPena describes Day's painting *Petroglyphs,* in which Day "shows a man using petroglyphic figures to create a message" (figure 4).[58] Because the painting depicts the use of glyphs to create lasting messages and, therefore, issues of variance and permanence in interpretation, it is difficult to get at the meaning of the painting: "Petroglyphs have the ability to capture both the abstract and the prosaic, and the painting conveys this complexity."[59] LaPena emphasizes that what is "conveyed" is the complexity itself, that of being both abstract and prosaic. The conveyance indicates a sort of isomorphic structure between the conveyance performed by the petroglyph and the conveyance performed by a painting representing the making of a petroglyph. What is carried over is enigma, difficulty, even failure to communicate. This transmission is made possible through the conflation of the

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FIGURE 4. *Indian Carving Petroglyphs,* 1962. Collection of the Museum of Anthropology, California State University, Sacramento.

ordinary with the extraordinary. The cool, bloodless, ordinary act of carving on stone is renewed in its very simplicity, heaviness, and atemporality. The prosaic, outside of any distinction between the ordinary and extraordinary, is thereby preserved. Meaning, then, is not the point for either the petroglyph or the painting. The act of carving the petroglyph, like the less than heroic act of painting, is an indexical one that points to the very suspension of meaning itself, not as a simple reference but as what is conveyed and as the form of conveyance.

Painting the Charmed Landscape

Note the left hand of the figure in the painting *E-nom-oe,* or *Dancing Girl and Whirling Snake* (1973, figure 5). The dancing woman is pointing at the petrified remains of a large creature that blends into the granite hills in the background or forms out of them. Her head is turned facing the opposite

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direction, looking out of the frame of the painting. The line of the eye and the line of the index finger form a nearly symmetrical horizon, yet they immediately break the usual connection between pointing and seeing. Her finger points at the mountainous rock remains of a large creature, and this behind-the-back index of the remains of the immemorial, of a time when gigantic beings roamed the land, as told in stories, is further displaced, as it is not entirely clear by perspective that she is pointing at the remains. Yet she is, as two-dimensionally her finger is almost close enough to touch them, nearly interrupted by the spire of a tree that attempts to recover perspective but fails. *This,* her finger seems to say, *look at this,* or perhaps, *look there.* Yet she is dancing. What are we as viewers to make of this silent gesture, caught in arrested motion?

The dancing woman is both within a landscape and indicating something about that landscape. This seems rather straightforward as a representation of a closed-circuit sign system: landscape as background, woman as

FIGURE 5. *E-nom-oe* or *Dancing Girl and Whirling Snake,* 1973. Photograph courtesy of Rebecca J. Dobkins.

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figure, index as representation of a sign, rock formation as ground becoming figure through signification. The viewer's gaze is directed by a sign to an image of a rock, which we are told is the remains of a large creature. But this sign lacks the usual force of indexicality for two obvious reasons: the figure pointing is dancing, and she cannot know what she is pointing at. The fact that she is dancing disrupts the force of meaning-making because we cannot be sure that this is not a randomly arrested posture. Maidu dance also offers its own symbolic system based in gestures, movements, and postures that have mimetic qualities and interrelational acts. Frank LaPena remarks of Day's painting of a deer dancer, *Toto Dance at Bloomer Hill* (1973):

> In my interpretation of this painting, I see the deer dancer at the primordial time when he begins his dance, moving and dancing steps that create the hills and mountains and valleys that became the natural world with which we are familiar. The vitality of toto (dance) is used to explain this moment of cultural consciousness raised to a time of energy, a time of sparkle and fire. If creation is wonderful and dynamic, then I, as a dancer, would present creation as a dance. I can think of no more wonderful thing to do: every time we dance, we re-create the original moment as a conscious act of renewal.[60]

A strict referential gesture interrupts the performative renewal of an original moment just as much as performativity disrupts the transmission of meaning in a strict representation. Such a complex and suspended indexical function documents in its failure to indicate a charmed landscape in an appropriately California Indian oblique gesture.

The dancing woman is part of an assemblage of more-or-less distinct beings that include the creature/rock formation; a shell or distinct stone of some sort that leaves a trace of movement; "resemblance(s) . . . of a fish, angleworm, deer, high-flying bird, a track, [and] grizzly bear"; a wind snake; sky; and a separated and disjointed landscape of differential colors, textures, dynamics, shading, variably recognizable representations, including hills, forest, and a number of crevices, rifts, and boundaries.[61] The painting represents variable motions and variable states of presence and absence (traces), as well as variable times: Is she indicating the creature now or the creature during the time when it was alive? While seeming to privilege the human figure, the painting raises the question of her position within such an unstable landscape. In a literal circle, she is centrally caught in the motion of a whirlwind—in a California Indian epistemology, associated with obscure power—as the wind loses distinction with her own motion of dance, giving one the sense that she is spinning, or the world is spinning about her stillness. This is a variable world of force and fragility in roughly and beautifully formed fragments.

The indeterminacy of the index proliferates indexicals throughout the

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image. The impressions in the stone circle can be seen to indicate other beings and worlds in a manner similar to what Elizabeth Povinelli, in the context of the Belyuen Aboriginal community in Australia, describes as "manifesting." Manifestations, for Povinelli, are an indicative dimension of existence that "discloses itself as comment on the coordination, orientation, and obligation of local existents and makes a demand on persons to actively and properly respond."[62] These manifestations present as either unknown or demanding, which, in a California Indian context, means they present either as deformed things, manifesting their nonvitalism through resistance to form and connection to power, or as linkages to another time through a logic of trace. Much of what constitutes human engagement in such interrelations is the ability to interpret these signs, not to understand them in themselves but to understand changes in the overall interrelationality, particularly for Day as warning signs. There is also the possibility in certain situations, as Povinelli describes, "to lure, seduce, and bait a part of the world to reorient itself toward you in order to care for you," and, indeed, in Day's description of *E-nom-oe,* he explains that the woman has come to this place of power to try to have a child.[63]

Indexicality extends to the roundness in the center of the image, which isolates the figure and connects to the roundness of other prominent images in Day's paintings: his series of round houses; his series of burial images, with the dead enclosed in large circular baskets and curled into fetal postures (a nonvital, crosscut vision of the womb); his images of whirlwinds; the central fire. Many of these circles are, of course, well-known aspects of the notion of dwelling.[64] These circles are also openings through which a subterranean vision can be achieved. Dwelling, in this sense, is linked to preservation, as it, like the mapping performed by ants, takes the viewer underground. Day's well-known cross-cut image of a roundhouse, read in some cases as the epitome of the ethnographic present, can instead be seen as a map that preserves, bringing the image closer to the notion of manifestation than to the salvage ethnographic image. Subterranean vision has the effect of turning the landscape inside out to show how form, as an organizing principle of reality itself in many California Indian epistemologies, becomes the differential force behind interrelationality.[65] The roundness of the image links to the roundness of the eye and the field of vision, which open up to the nonvital forces of the subterranean, which deform. The manifestation and the circle are the points of indeterminacy between land and figure, raising the entire painting to the level of the index, imploring the viewer to listen attentively with their eyes.

Day emphasizes the indeterminacy of painting with two senses of indexicality: as represented (he represents indexing in the woman who points) and

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as performed (he himself is indicating with the image). This double aspect of indexicality has three simultaneous functions for Day that cannot be understood through a simple framework of visible/invisible or information/personhood: preserving, referencing, and pointing in the direction of a path. A formal matter, indexicality here is neither purely human (in the mind as perception) nor in the world waiting to be discovered. Neither showing nor hiding, to compound the complexity, because of its interruption in the image above, as well as in Day's inappropriate use of painting to document, a broken indexicality opens onto the third realm of interrelationality, which includes the reciprocity between the many different beings Day paints and is based on a California Indian theory of mediated formalism where referential signs and the performative force of sign-making become ambiguous. Interrelational indexicality gives us an idea of how to read the elements Day uses in his paintings in conversation with the material media that transmits them in their colonial context, while these elements and materials point us in the right direction. Interrelational indexicality also places Day's work within the category of re-representation, or the charting of elements from an earlier representation to be conveyed. The world has always been mediated. The Maidu elements Day transmits by paint and tape are the very forces of interrelationality and indexicality *themselves,* which together offer a powerful pathway toward re-revitalization.

The interrupted indexicality of the painting leads to the last and most obscure point regarding this image. There is a direct image of sound represented in the form of a line originating from the wind snake. According to Day, these creatures live between crevices in rocks and trees and come out to dance, whirling, when wind passes through.[66] The most important feature of the ecology of the wind snake, though, is its whistle. The whistle functions as a powerful index, linking it to the discourse on warning and danger in which Day is invested. In fact, most creatures, according to Day, have the ability to whistle in this manner (such as ground squirrels, birds, raccoons, deer, bear, and elk), but the whistle of this snake indexes the mysteries of prophecy, particularly that of Maidu night singing. Night singing is a powerful practice of communal vision that addresses pressing questions that range across the luck involved in hunting; prognostications of danger; the approaching conquest; "sickness in or among the people"; and the ability to dance well. For Day, these different aspects of prophecy are "all enclosed and answered by that little snake whirling around in a circle."

Like the compression of image as language and song, here Day uses the silent image of the sound of the whistle as a condenser of an entire prophetic tradition, connecting the range of manifestations depicted in the image in a complex diagram across which the interrupted indexicality represented

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in the painting and the difficult indexicality of the painting itself take on an isomorphism. An exploded mnemotechnology, Day's images and recordings create an atlas of a destroyed world in order to point the viewer in the right direction, like a set of instructions. Yet this is a broken path, raising the question of how broken one needs to be to traverse it. "*All the things that I have illustrated here by drawings, paintings, is true because I went to see it. I'm able to take you back to it.*"

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Notes

1. This condition of obscurity of the catastrophe has undergone revision recently with California governor Gavin Newsom's executive order apologizing to California Indians and the creation of the Truth and Healing Council.

2. In my own case, this access is mediated through the massive salvage ethnographic survey that took place in California during the early twentieth century.

3. LA186.042. My citations of Frank Day's words are taken from the *Survey of California and Other Indian Languages,* an online archive hosted by the University of California, Berkeley, https://cla.berkeley.edu.

4. Rebecca Dobkins, "From Vanishing to Visible: Maidu Indian Arts and the Uses of Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., UC Berkeley, 1995), 119. I cite from this dissertation in this article because while there are a few short publications by Dobkins drawn from its materials, the bulk of it remains unpublished. Due to the paucity of commentary on Day's work and the extensive and exceptional research performed by Dobkins, this dissertation is one of the best resources on his work and life.

5. Frank Day, cited in Rebecca Dobkins et al., *Memory and Imagination: The Legacy of Maidu Indian Artist Frank Day* (Oakland: Oakland Museum of California, 1997), 69.

6. LA186.034. "Konkow" and later "Concow" are colonial transliterations of Kóyo•mkàwi.

7. Day's images depicting violence against women deserve special consideration, which I do not have space to address here.

8. Peter Nabokov, "Pacific Western Traders," *News from Native California* 25, no. 2 (Winter 2011/2012): 6–11.

9. Lucy Lippard, "Frank Day: Inside Place, Inside Art," *Museum Anthropology* 24, no. 2–3 (September 2001): 30.

10. Louis Marin, "Opacity and Transparence in Pictorial Representation," *Est: grunnlagsproblemer I estetisk forskning,* no. 2 (1991): 55–66.

11. I borrow and adapt this notion of refusal from Audra Simpson's

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important concept "ethnographic refusal." Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal," *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* 9 (New Zealand: Otago Polytechnic Te Kura Matatini ki Otago, December 2007).

12. Marin, "Opacity and Transparence," 57.

13. Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion,* trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 98.

14. Jean-Luc Nancy, cited in ibid., 102.

15. Sascha Scott, "Awa Tsireh and the Art of Subtle Resistance," *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 4 (2013): 597–622.

16. Dobkins et al., *Memory and Imagination,* 29.

17. Dobkins, "From Vanishing to Visible," 93.

18. Ibid., 97–98.

19. LA186.013.

20. Dobkins, "From Vanishing to Visible," 115.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 92.

23. Roland Dixon cited in ibid., 92.

24. See D. Demetracopoulou Lee, "Linguistic Reflections of Wintu' Thought," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 10, no. 4 (1944): 181–87.

25. Lowell Bean, "Power and Its Applications in Native California," *Journal of California Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (1975): 28.

26. LA186.005.

27. LA186.015.

28. Dobkins et al., *Memory and Imagination,* 28.

29. The "neutral" is the space of indetermination. Theories of the image often indicate a sort of vanishing point or disappearance of the image itself in its very function of representing and also its power to make disappear that which it represents by risking replacing it. The neutral is often used as a way to indicate this space of indetermination and nonmeaning that images in their difference from what they represent evade by creating meaning through the separation but also point to the fact that everything does disappear, leaving only the image. Day's paintings, for me, operate in this space of the neutral in complex ways related to his conception of preservation through image.

30. Transcribed explanation of the painting from Rebecca Dobkins's dissertation archive, provided by Dobkins.

31. In his article "Stratifying the West: Clarence King, Timothy O'Sullivan, and History," Weems notes that more than the epistemological effect of making what is obstinately invisible visible, stratigraphy makes it possible to visualize time differently, connecting it to a much more shallow sense of human history in relation to the catastrophist rhythms of geological eras. It also enables both intellectual and economic resource extraction, which together facilitated colonial expansion.

32. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 48–49.

33. LA186.031.

34. Kim TallBear, "Beyond the Life/Not-Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous

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Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking, and the New Materialisms," in *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World,* ed. Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 181.

35. For a historical analysis of the slow banishment of other than human beings from Indigenous political worlds to the realm of belief, see Marisol de la Cadena, "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond 'Politics,'" *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2010): 334–70.

36. TallBear, "Beyond the Life/Not-Life Binary," 191.

37. Ibid., 180.

38. See Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

39. TallBear, "Beyond the Life/Not-Life Binary," 185.

40. Ibid., 189.

41. Vine Deloria Jr., cited in ibid., 188.

42. See David Shorter, "Spirituality," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Indian History,* ed. Frederick E. Hoxie (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2016), 1–24, doi:10.109/oxfordhb/9780199858897.013.20.

43. Elizabeth Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), E12.

44. Ibid., E26.

45. Lee, "Linguistic Reflections," 186.

46. LA186.031. Day claims that Tay•yee is an older name for Kóyo•mkàwi.

47. LA186.024.

48. LA186.042.

49. LA186.005.

50. LA186.026.

51. LA186.009.

52. LA186.005.

53. In discussions of audio recording technology, a distinction is sometimes made between a commodified form of presence that comes about through production quality, something that encourages consumption, and the generally edited-out presence of the body and/or environment, which ambient and experimental projects will seek to capture. But at a technical level, the recording of sound and the nearly unlimited capabilities of copying and disseminating it cut the relationship to the site and moment of performance or necessity of being there. The sense of presence that Day is asserting is intimately linked to the song-stories he is relaying, which always tend toward and indicate an origin, but one only known through a resonance that dissipates and brings out of phase through dissonance the play of absence and presence that western metaphysics continues to return to and attempts to escape.

54. LA186.034.

55. Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 180.

56. See Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Marionette Theater," *Drama Review: TDR* 16, no. 3, the "Puppet" issue, trans. Thomas G. Neumiller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 22–26.

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57. LA186.042.

58. Frank LaPena, “Frank Day, a Remembrance,” in Dobkins et al., *Memory and Imagination,* 28.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., 30. From a description of the painting: “In the practice of Maidu dance, dancers experience spiritual and physical transformation, becoming representative of the spirit of the animal they impersonate in their regalia. In this painting, a deer dancer leaves his footprints, as well as the deer’s hoof prints, in the earth as he dances. He is joined by a centipede, which similarly leaves marks upon the earth. This toto, a frequently performed dance, is taking place at Bloomer Hill, the area where Frank Day’s father Billy had a round house” (ibid., 84). LaPena further comments: “While the deer dancer begins to cause the mountains and valleys to take shape, one can see that it is his own dancing feet and the deer toe staffs that are helping break down and shape the earth and stone. As the pressure from the earth escapes, it is seen that a cloud personifying some ‘being’ is formed in the sky” (ibid., 103n47).

61. The quote is from ibid., 83. The wind snake is a creature that Day explains in detail in one of his recordings, discussed later in this article.

62. Povinelli, *Geontologies,* E63.

63. Dobkins et al., *Memory and Imagination,* 83.

64. For one powerful example, see Trinh T. Minh-ha’s film, *Naked Spaces—Living Is Round.*

65. Lee, “Linguistic Reflections,” 182.

66. LA186.046.

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