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9798276023496

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Publication Date

2025-12-06

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Whales On The Mouth: A Mixtape of Critical Kwinaył Sound and Music Theory

By

TORY JOHNSTON
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Native American Studies

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

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2025

Acknowledgements

The word expressing gratitude in kwinaył tak, the Quinault language, is “siokwil.” I grew up with the knowledge that the word simply means “thank you,” though I intuit that there may be a discrepancy between how siokwil is interpreted as “thank you” and how my kwinaył ancestors understood the term. Our language revitalization program in Taholah is just starting, and another life path would have had me working in our Language Department as an apprentice, starting in 2015. In light of the relative nascency of our language program and my decision to foray into Sound and Music Studies, I want to start by acknowledging our language program for their hard work over the last decade. So, siokwil to Cosette Terry-Itewaste, Adrian Vitalis, and the rest of our language team for helping me remember the language of our ancestors.

Siokwil to Quinault Indian Nation’s (QIN) Postgraduate Endowment Fund, The UC Davis Humanities Institute’s Mellon Public Scholar’s Program, and the Eloise Cobell Scholarship at Indigenous Education, Inc., for funding this research. It means so much to me that QIN’s Business Committee demonstrated how we invest in our own through their trust in my work. Specifically, I extend gratitude to the current endowment fund committee — M’liss DeWald, Tashia Delacruz-Arnold, Carly Martin, and Daniel Ravenel. For the Mellon Public Scholars program, I thank Stephanie Maroney for mentoring me through the program. For the Cobell Scholarship, I am honored to have come full-circle, as my first job after my undergraduate education was at QIN’s Cobell Land Buy-Back Program, special thanks to Nelson Dan and Kathy Rosenmeyer, my colleagues in that program.

Siokwil to Seattle’s Southend, for allowing me to place roots in Duwamish/Suquamish homelands in a part of the city I am proud to call home. I give a loving acknowledgement to The Station Coffee Shop, where I wrote so much of this dissertation, the North Beacon Hill and

Columbia City neighborhoods, and all communities that have stayed strong through gentrification wrought by Seattle’s shifting tech-bro imposition.

Siokwil to my California friends in music making and the house on Mangels Avenue in San Francisco. I dearly miss improvising guitar solos alongside Grace Cheng on keys and vocals, Jared Marx-Kuo on the bass, Tharun Sankar on the trumpet, and Ross Taylor on the drums. We made up an improvised music collective called Dysfunktional, with a “k,” as in, “funk.” The small gigs in San Francisco’s Mission District were my first gigs ever, and some of my favorite memories. I extend gratitude for the love and friendship of those at Mangels: Allyson and Jennifer Foerster, Marvin Paddock and Mady Martin. Thank you for keeping me a part of the home even after I have moved back up to Seattle. Finally, I thank Elizabeth Davis for teaching me to love plants, and for our friendship.

Siokwil to my colleagues in Indigenous Sound and Music Studies: Sierra Edd, Everardo Reyes, Christina Thomas, and Su Ny Vang, for generously collaborating between UC Davis and UC Berkeley and making real our deeply felt-thought love for sound. Siokwil to the mentors in Indigenous Sound and Music Studies that have generated so much inspiration for me, including Trevor Reed, Dylan Robinson, and Heidi Senungetuk. I give special thanks to Amy K. Stillman, for telling us early-career scholars in a Zoom call to “make our own theory” — this dissertation would not look the same without that guidance.

My work co-hosting KEXP’s Global Indigenous Radio Show, *Sounds of Survivance* has led to connections with some of the most amazing musicians/artists I have been fortunate to know. I extend a loving gratitude to the musicians that have shaped and are still shaping how I see, know and hear the world. To the Indigenous artists singing our ancestor’s voices — Takiaya Reed (Cherokee), Mali Obomsawin (Odanak), Rob Ludgate (Siksika), Sondra Segundo (Haida),

Preston Singletary (Tlingit), Gene Tagaban (Tlingit), Arias Hoyle (Tlingit), Liv Rion (Quinault, Hupa, Yurok), Def-i (Diné), and Elisapie Issac (Inuk), I am filled with joy to amplify your art and to have known you through in-studio sessions and interviews. To the co-conspiratorial music makers who are some of my favorite people — Francesca Eluhu, Li (DJ Kukri), Lily Minke Tahar, Thomas Arndt, Zora Seboulisa, Xiomara Mills-Du-Pree, Josh Pehrson, Shelby Natasha, Magdalena Abrego and Kimmortal, siokwil for the wellspring of creativity, for providing much needed care and conviviality, and for fiercely uplifting QTBIPOC auralities. Finally, I give thanks to Gabriel Teodros, without whom *Sounds of Survivance* and none of these connections would exist. Thank you, Gabriel, for your genius, your mentorship, your kindness, and for starting it all.

Siokwil to my colleagues at KEXP. Franny Thomas, for your energy and leadership as DJ manager, the greatest of all DJ assistants, Tehāni Lefotu and Aja Utsugi, and the cohort of DJs that have changed the radio station for the better — DJ Jewel, Diana Ratsamee, Prometheus Brown, Noel Brass Jr., and last but certainly not least, DJ Kevin Sur, my Kānaka Maoli brother in amplifying Indigenous music and co-host of *Sounds of Survivance*.

Siokwil to the faculty at UC Davis, who have affected my thinking in so many generative ways and guided my graduate student cohort through the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order. Thank you to Beth Rose Middleton, for demonstrating leadership in showing up for communities on-the-ground and to Inés Hernández-Ávila, for your poetry, your wisdom, and for catalyzing my fundamental shift from law school to music studies in your Native Literature seminar.

Siokwil to Dian Million in the University of Washington's American Indian Studies department, for shifting my thinking in the most profound ways, with brilliance and generosity. I

often tell my students that “if I can be half as good as Dian Million, I’ll have done enough.”

Siokwil to each and every one of those students, for your time and curiosity.

This dissertation and all my future work would not be possible without the mentorship and guidance of Jessica Bissett Perea. Siokwil, Jessica, for being of the most important people of my life, for showing me that all I have heard and loved in music matters, and for your continued support. I also extend gratitude to John-Carlos Perea, for your musicality and mentorship. The two of you are such incredibly awe-inspiring musician scholars.

Siokwil to my friends-as-family — Ava Adams, Logo Lologo, Andrew Bending, Mary Jane Bermudez, Bethany Palkovitz, DeWayne Capoeman, and Urijah Willis. You have seen so many sides of me and even when I (like anyone) can be irritating, you always return with love and trust. I love you all.

Finally, siokwil to my immediate family — Kiwi Chenois, Tyson Johnston, Alyssa Johnston, Hazel Rhoades, River Jackson, and Novalisse Chenois-Jackson. We are breathing činus being into the world, and the following words of this dissertation are my small gift to grandma Alice, aunties Edythe, Rose Ann, and Louise, grandma Edwina, and grandpa Dan along with our činus ancestors and every generation after us.

Abstract

This dissertation is a curated work of critical Indigenous sound and music theory. From a music and sound studies perspective, it is known-felt as a mixtape. Working with and through Performance Studies, Science and Technology Studies, and Environmental Humanities, the analyses herein model theoretically and methodologically “promiscuous” lines of inquiry as a commitment to interdisciplinary approaches in Indigenous Studies. Primarily centering kwinaył/Coast Salish Indigeneity and knowledge systems, I argue that the Indigenous onto-epistemological world is replete with musicality; the sound and music we make carries transformative, transtemporal, relationship-building and worldmaking potentialities that exceed their objectified/materialist context. A corollary of this line of inquiry reveals the ways that the objectification of music has been used as a mechanism of settler colonialism through the presumed superiority of eurological ways of knowing/doing music and the containment/measurement of Indigenous auralities. This interrogation is one part of a broader methodology that centers Indigenous-led and Indigeneity-centered ways of listening. As a work of ethnography, the sites of sound knowledge that encompass this dissertation include the academy, the Annual Tribal Canoe Journey, the Internet, the material-relational dimensions of guitar playing and cedar basket weaving and my experiences as a guitarist, canoe paddler, global Indigenous radio DJ, and kwinaył sləgwəlmiš (Quinault person, Indian, Tribal member) from Taholah on the Mouth of the Quinault River. My findings demonstrate how sound and music give breath to the ways that our knowledges are collected, developed and disseminated, the sacred ways of being/knowing/doing that animate our place- and water-based relationships, our claim to art-making in the midst of a cyberspace that imagines a creativity without humans, and the loving relationships we have with our materials, our kin, our more-than-human relatives.

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Figure I.1 The Mouth of the Quinault River at sunset. Photo by the author.

Introduction: On the North Pacific and Why My Works are Whales

it's low tide, and there's a whale on the Mouth

we discuss important philosophical ideas together

is the Mouth a point of coalescence or confluence

at what point does the river become the Mouth become the ocean

what happens when we laugh together

how do the trees across the river recognize us

who are those trees anyways

where do i end and you begin

from my vantage point i can see that transitory place

between river and ocean

between seed and garden

between human and whale

between theory and method, and

the ocean is to the west
as west as one can get, home
we answer no questions because answers probably live in another village
we visit for a little while, but it's time for the whale to go home
i'm glad that we've given each other some things to think about

If I am to be truly honest with myself, I wouldn't say that I'm a "spiritual ndn." I seldom have "ancestor dreams," my dreams are actually quite mundane when I remember them. I have a medicine box, bentwood style, that I was gifted by my brother. It watches my apartment in South Seattle. As in, it is adorned with eyes in that formline style that I'm so used to having grown up in my homelands in Taholah, on the Mouth of the Quinault River. Each medicine inside the box was gifted to me: by former students, by former colleagues, by friends and family members. I don't often "use" them - you won't see me burning sage or rubbing a salve into my skin or praying with the rocks collected from the beach back home. Still, the gift-medicines fill me with gratitude, and I think that's medicine enough. My relationship with spirit is called forth in other ways - the quiet contemplation between each moment, the trancelike feeling I get when I lose myself to the guitar, the conversations I have with my ancestors when I'm in a dark place. What I tell folks is that I'm "more spiritual than most non-Indians think I am and less spiritual than your average Indian." I might conjure an ancestor that was just as much of a skeptic as I am from time to time, but I haven't yet talked to them in a dream.

I say that, but I did have one dream about a whale.

It was a light-gray overcast in Taholah, where I grew up. In that dreamlike fashion, I was standing high above the shore of the Pacific Ocean peering down at the mouth of the Quinault River. My footing was placed upon a material that doesn't exist in reality, but I felt a comfort in knowing I wasn't going to fall. I was alone until I wasn't, a human child burst from me and looked at me quizzically. The look in their eyes showed me that they were all I've ever (and will ever) make. They were me, and not me. Right as I was about to call out to them, they shapeshifted into a whale. But, they didn't quite make it back to oceanside. No, they first dipped into the mighty Quinault, scrambling in that between-place where the Mouth pours into the ocean.

It's common knowledge where I'm from that when an Elder tells you to do something, you do it. Whales are emphatically Elders, for they have existed in our waters for millions of years before we fished from them. The word for whale in kwinaył tək, the Quinault language, is skaallin (or alternatively, kaallin). In my dream, the whaleshifter was genderless and nameless, bearing not much besides the prerogative to shift from Mouth to ocean. They were also me, a relative, and if they were the swimming part of me I was simply their eyes and ears.

Shapeshifting is a process of becoming, of changing form, or adapting to circumstances. My ancestors and future generations are fisherfolk. Our most famous marker of trade is the Blueback (sockeye) salmon. Blueback is a staple food, and a keystone species in the Quinault river water system. Yet, settler-induced climate change threatens the Blueback's livelihood, which has mobilized our governing body to act in climate change adaptation. The rhetorical saying goes "if we lose the Blueback, who are we?" Our relationship to Blueback has stayed

consistent, but our practices have shifted to accommodate the circumstances. In our waking life, skaallin has shapedshifted into a plethora of forms.

In times before capital we traded Blueback with Makah for whale blubber. This is skaallin becoming commerce. It is said that whale hunters in Quinault territory held a particular spirit power,¹ for which they earned through rite and ceremony.² This is skaallin becoming desire. In 2017, the Makah Indian Tribe and the State of Washington filed a lawsuit against the Quinault Indian Nation and the Quileute Nation (with real parties of interest including all peninsula tribes and interior Salish Sea tribes) alleging that the Treaty of Olympia's decree that Quinault and Quileute peoples possess "the right to take fish in usual and accustomed fishing grounds" did not include whales because they are not "fish."³ Makah's aim was to adjudicate our boundary out at sea, enclosing our right to harvest at a certain court-defined point. This is skaallin becoming litigation. The decision of the court was that despite the Makah's Treaty of Neah Bay specifying whaling and sealing, the use of the term "fish" in the Treaty of Olympia is still interpreted as the taking of whales and seals.⁴ This is skaallin becoming "fish." The court case, although unintentionally, mediated the tension between settler ways of knowing ("adjudication") and Quinault/Coast Salish ways of being in relation (the problem of "fish" is simply semantics). By refocusing our spiritual agreement with skaallin to be commensurate with our rights as peoples, skaallin becoming a fish is a way of remembering them as a relative.

¹ I was taught not to use the word for this (which can be found easily for the curious), so I will not repeat it here. However, "power" and the acquisition of power animates the spirituality of many tribal peoples across this region. For more on this and other Quinault related histories covered in this introduction, see Capoeman 1991.

² Jacqueline M. Storm et al., *Land of the Quinault*, ed. Pauline K. Capoeman (Quinault Indian Nation, 1991). 71-72

³ Makah Indian Tribe v. Quileute Indian Tribe, 2:09-sp-00001-RSM, 2:70-cv-09213-RSM (United States District Court for the Western District of Washington October 23, 2017).

⁴ Ibid. 5-6.

I wouldn't interpret my dream to mean that I have become a whale. skaallin hasn't become me. I'm but a human relative, a kwinaył sɫəgwəlmış (Quinault person, Indian, Tribal member) who has an affinity for making things. A way of feeling it would be that I make relations between human knowledge and whales. But this wouldn't explain how the whaleshifter emanated from my body, how we share a simultaneous yet distinctive experience. When I visualize what I saw in that dream, the whaleshifter in transit between that ethereal metaphysic between Mouth and ocean, the felt knowledge that washes over me is that I *make* whales on the mouth.

Or, at least I make music theory.

My engagement with sound and music is an amplification of the North Pacific, the permeating roar of the Pacific Ocean that rests as west as one can get in the village of Taholah in what is commonly referred to as "Washington State." The ocean taught me that we are relatives, and all that I do as a guitarist, DJ of Global Indigenous Music, and scholar of Indigenous Studies is an extension of that water-body-sonicity. The North Pacific is also the home of skaallin, the whaleshifter, the being that quietly contemplates in the water while singing songs and occasionally coming up for air, for breath. I resonate so deeply with the thoughtfulness of whale-being. So, as I introduce you to this work, I would hope that you would ask for permission to come ashore, so as not to disturb skaallin's rest without permission.

Whales On The Mouth

This dissertation consists of thoughts, ideas, analysis, dreams, and songs, lovingly curated in order to reflect the sounded intersubjective realities between my being/knowing/doing as a kwinaył sɫəgwəlmış and those who choose to listen. From a music and sound studies perspective,

I know-feel this work as a “mixtape.” My whales have brought me to so many beautiful places through playing guitar, DJ’ing (as curatorial work), and researching in this thing called Indigenous Sound and Music Studies. I hope that while reading this work you feel, like I do, that none of these practices are separate and that, for me in my contexts, they are all animated by that place where Mouth becomes ocean.

This work is primarily ethnographic. Though I share the sensibility of Hopi music and legal scholar Trevor Reed that the purpose “is not to extract cultural material from an Indigenous community to generate an authoritative text on [kwinaył] music and performance.”⁵ Reed’s apprehension comes from a self-awareness about his work on Hopi music being situated in the academy. While I do have a commitment to and affection for the field of Native American and Indigenous Studies, and perhaps even more the nascent works of Indigenous Sound and Music Studies, the goal of adding to the written theoretical or methodological body of scholarship in Indigenous Studies is secondary to the prospect of future kwinaył sləgwəlmiš picking up my work and making music with it. This is where the identifier “critical kwinaył sound and music theory” becomes important. These terms, “critical,” “kwinaył,” “sound and music” and “theory” need a special focus, so that is where I turn to here.

“Critical”

In the edited volume *Critical Indigenous Studies* (2016), Cherokee literary scholar Daniel Heath Justice describes his approach to the “critical” in “critical Indigenous studies” as “an

⁵ Trevor G. Reed, “Sonic Sovereignty: Performing Hopi Authority in Öngtupqa,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 4 (2019): 508–30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196319000397>. 514.

interventionist analytic of transformation committed to and dependent on local specificity within a broader network of relationships, a responsible but not unreflective obligation to community, a fierce commitment to truth, a robust insistence on multiplicity and complexity, and just action toward our human and other-than-human kin.”⁶ A work of distinctively Indigenous sound and music theory is bound to be interventionist, particularly in a field like music whose investments are deeply conservative of viewpoints and ways of doing outside of the canon of western text-centric musico-theoretical traditions (see Chapter 1). The interventionist analytic also demonstrates a general principle of the field of Indigenous Studies more broadly. Working from various “state of the field” pieces written in *American Indian Quarterly* in the mid to late 2000s, Chris Andersen (Métis) and Jean M. O’Brien (White Earth Ojibwe) advocate for a “methodological promiscuity” given the vast array of theoretical and methodological approaches, global communities, and debates within the field.⁷ This represents a certain reflexivity in the field that I would position in the early 21st century, which responds to the earliest questions of the discipline, from the original debates from thought leaders like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Dakota) and Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), who advocated for an Indigenous Studies that served tribal communities first. Cook-Lynn’s position was bolstered by the overtaking of Indigenous-centered intellectual production by the whitestream in the academy, and she advocated to center scholarship from within tribal communities.⁸ Deloria Jr. famously critiqued the notion of intellectual sovereignty for what he perceived as an unnecessary preoccupation

⁶ Daniel Heath Justice, *A Better World Becoming: Placing Critical Indigenous Studies*, in Aileen Moreton-Robinson, ed., *Critical Indigenous Studies: Engagements in First World Locations* (University of Arizona Press, 2016).

⁷ Chris Andersen and Jean M. O’Brien, eds., *Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017). 2.

⁸ Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, “Who Stole Native American Studies?,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 12, no. 1 (1997): 9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1409161>.

with abstractions based on broader socio-political structures.⁹ A more capacious perspective came from Jack D. Forbes (Powhatan-Renapè, Lenape) and Robert Warrior (Osage). Forbes advocated for the establishment of a hemispheric (and thus global) approach to Indigenous Studies, while also making space for Indigenous peoples in diaspora in urban communities.¹⁰ Robert Warrior advanced the perspective of intellectual sovereignty as both an individual and collective venture, where we make meaning individually and collectively while deciding on issues that affect our lives.¹¹

Working with and through Performance Studies, Science and Technology Studies, and Environmental Humanities, this dissertation engages theoretically and methodologically “promiscuous” lines of inquiry and my analyses presented model an interdisciplinary approach to Indigenous Studies, which is a commitment that I value highly. I would even contend that the future of Indigenous Studies research should extend its reach *beyond* the discipline alone. This is already evident in theoretical and methodological moves in the field that (generously) remix/riff off of thought in other fields, though I would place particular attention on the ways that Black liberatory theory and praxis has shaped Indigenous Studies over the past ten years or so.¹² This

⁹ Deloria, Vine. “Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Looking at the Windmills in Our Minds.” *Wicazo Sa Review* 13, no. 1 (1998)

¹⁰ Jack D. Forbes, “Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Implications for Native Studies and for Native Intellectuals,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 13, no. 1 (1998).

¹¹ Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994). 123-124.

¹² Foundational works in this area include the monograph by Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*, 2nd ed. (University of Illinois Press, [1988] 1993) and the publication based on the National Museum of the American Indian’s IndiVisible exhibit. Gabrielle Tayac, ed., *IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas*, 1st ed (Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian in association with the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, 2009). Recent works include monographs by Tiya Miles’ *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* [2005] (2015), Kyle Mays’ *An Afro-Indigenous History of the United States* (2019), Tiffany Lethabo King’s *The Black Shoals* (2019), Alaina Robert’s *I’ve Been Here*

rightly situates Black and Indigenous liberatory futures as entwined, and it's an approach that I'm admittedly still learning, but hope to cultivate in my scholarly journey. With the indiscriminate approach to theory and methodology in mind, I want to bring attention to what Donna Haraway calls "making oddkin" as a way to "stay with the trouble":

"Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated, someplace and not noplacement, entangled and worldly. Alone, in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little, and so we succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible attitude."¹³

Funnily enough, Haraway articulates the conception of "staying with the trouble" as "eschewing futurism," despite that I just made the comment of Black and Indigenous liberatory futures being entwined. Though I think that this contradiction itself is precisely the kind of becoming-with that Haraway describes. This perspective is also shared by Aymara descendent philosopher Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who writes of the Aymara word "ch'ixi": "the notion of *chi'xi*, on the contrary, amounts to the "motley" [*abigarrada*] society of René Zavaleta and expresses the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish but instead antagonize and complement each other. Each one reproduces itself from the depths of the past and relates to others in a contentious way."¹⁴ I grew up in a two square-mile village that can seldom agree with each other on how to forward Quinault sovereignty, amplify that by hundreds of Federally Recognized Tribal nations and hundreds more non-Federally recognized tribal nations, and still

All The While: Black Freedom on Native Land, and Robin Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's co-authored creative monograph *Rehearsals For Living* (2022).

¹³ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices (Duke University Press, 2016).

¹⁴ Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Molly Geidel, *Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: On Practices and Discourses of Decolonisation*, Critical South (Polity, 2020). 66.

hundreds more outside of the grasp of the United States in the first place, and well, I think a little bit of contention is bound to happen.

With all of this being said, my approach to criticality in kwinaył sound and music theory is but one proposition to be contested. It derives strength from the lands and waters that shape me, but it is also an always unfinished project, like playing an instrument.

“kwinaył”

I am the co-creator and host of *Sounds of Survivance*, the Global Indigenous music show on the non-profit radio station KEXP, based in Duwamish/Suquamish homelands commonly referred to as “Seattle, Washington.” One of the most repeated phrases on the show and pretty much everywhere else is that I am “Quinault from Taholah on the Mouth of the Quinault River.” This way of introducing myself, however repetitive, is meant to de-center statehood in the articulation of Quinault being; while we are a “Federally Recognized Washington State Tribe” and a “sovereign Nation with a constitutional governance structure” as well as “the Quinault Indian Nation” (as an organizational structure, enterprise, and municipality), we both spiritually pre-exist and legally pre-exist Washington Statehood. On July 1st 1855, the treaty of Olympia, or the Quinault River Treaty, was signed on the Mouth in Taholah. Washington did not acquire statehood until November 11th 1889. We come from a triangular reservation on the southwest corner of what is now called the “Washington State Peninsula.” Our non-Native counterparts in the area are citizens of Grays Harbor County, which is of course named for a hoquat¹⁵ settler

¹⁵ This is the Quileute word for “white people.” Quinault people have adopted it, even to the point where I am unsure whether some people know it’s not technically a Quinault word. The word that we have in our dictionary is “poston” as in, “Boston.” Yeah, hoquat sounds much better.

named Robert Gray, but my preferred frame of reference involves another hoquat, Kurt Cobain, of arguably the most influential grunge band of all time, Nirvana. The story goes that Kurt slept under a bridge in Aberdeen, WA, where Quinalts from Taholah buy groceries due to our geographic isolation to the west, on the literal end of Washington State Highway 109. (Figure I.1, I.2)



Figure I.2 Quinalt Reservation Boundaries. Google Maps, n.d.



Figure I.3 Aerial view of Taholah. Quinault Indian Nation, n.d.

I think anyone who visits Taholah would agree that it's a "village." Encompassing two square miles, the entirety of the village used to be exclusive to the area near the Quinault River itself, which made sense in the time of my Quinault ancestors. I was fortunate enough to grow up on "snob hill" a HUD housing project that is just up the hill from the Tribal administration building. That building, and the council chambers therein, was the site of some of Quinault's most famous interventions in Indian Country, with reverberations across what we call the United States to other Federally Recognized Tribal nations. These include an active involvement in the supreme court case *United States v. Washington*, which has come to be known as the "Boldt Decision" as well as the famous closing off of our beaches to curtail settlers who vandalized and trashed our shoreline in the late 60s/early 70s.¹⁶

¹⁶ <https://www.historylink.org/File/23279>

My family is the Chenois¹⁷ family, who have all lived in or near Taholah for generations. The farthest back that I know of my family tree is my great-grandparents, Daniel and Edwina Chenois. Their daughters were Alice, Louise, Rose Ann, and Edythe. Alice was my grandmother. She had three children, my mother Kiwi Chenois and my late uncles Chris and Jason James. I have two siblings, Tyson and Alyssa Johnston, and my sister has three kids; Hazel Rhoades, River Jackson, and Novalisse Chenois-Jackson.

In Taholah, we are fisherfolk. I grew up with friends and peers who worked at the “fish house” which is a processing and cannery facility with docks in the Quinault River. Our staple food is salmon, especially Blueback, a subspecies of Sockeye salmon and the best tasting salmon on planet earth.¹⁸ I never learned how to fish; my uncles were accomplished fishermen and my mom still has a fishing ground in the Quinault, but my uncles died before we ever went out for them to teach me. Though, if I’m being honest, I didn’t need to enroll in a PhD program to think deeply about Quinault being/knowing/doing. I’ve always felt a sense of pride in not being the stereotypical “Quinault male” — my vehicle was the guitar amplifier, not the crab boat; my livelihood was musicking, not fishing; my instruments were the guitar and the computer, not the rifle and the gillnet. I always knew that I would do things differently, simply because I have the aptitude. But I would be lying if I said that it has not been both deeply rewarding and incredibly lonely to be involved in an academic discipline doing work in an artistic world with fewer Quinaults than I can name in either.

I hope that I’ve been able to convey the rebelliousness of Quinault people. Though the Chenois family specifically are also known to be “rebels,” according to a long-time family

¹⁷ Pronounced činus or “chin-oose”

¹⁸ I would happily fight any Alaska Native over this

friend. That rebelliousness, for me, comes from a deep commitment to truth and accuracy and a thirst for making new worlds. I refuse an essentialized notion of “Quinaltness” in favor of bountiful multiplicity of perspective. My relationship to my ancestors is just as active as anyone else’s, and they have evidently told me to become a musicologist. In short, I’ve always known who I am and where I come from, and I think that’s enough to shift a paradigm.

“Sound and Music”

An overarching goal of this work is to contribute to studies of sound and music with an Indigenous-led, Indigeneity-centered lens. This follows a relatively recent cadre of scholarship forwarded by Jessica Bissett Perea (Dena’ina), John-Carlos Perea (Mescalero Apache/German/Irish/Chicano), Dylan Robinson (Stó:lō), Trevor Reed (Hopi), Heidi Senungetuk (Iñupiaq), among others. The works of these researchers represent an “auditory turn” in Native American and Indigenous Studies. One aspect of this work investigates musico-theoretical traditions in sound and music studies more broadly, to interrogate the research histories and practices of its settler colonial/imperial roots. For Indigenous studies, the auditory has until now not had the same level of scholarly inquiry as other creative media such as visual art and literature – much less the same level of attention to environmental sciences, law and policy. This is reflected in my upbringing in Taholah, where the trope of “working outside of the rez to bring the knowledge back to the people” finds valence disproportionately in non-arts related fields/contexts. This perspective was what started my graduate school career — my original plan for graduate study was to earn a master’s degree in Native American Studies to bolster a degree/career in law. Early in my graduate study, I decided that law school was too intellectually constricting for me, music was too important to me, and it was imperative that I

took the opportunity to study with Bissett Perea directly as my advisor. This realization came to me in Nimipu/Tejana literary scholar Inés Hernández-Ávila's graduate level Native American Literature course. In the course we read and discussed Mvskoke poet Joy Harjo's poem *She Had Some Horses*. As a precursor to our discussion, Hernández-Ávila played the musical arrangement of *She Had Some Horses* from Joy's 2003 album *Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century*. The difference between reading the poem and hearing the musical rendition was striking for me, and that distinction became the foundation for all that I do in sound and music studies.

The auditory, like any of the aforementioned inquiries of Indigenous Studies, has much to tell us about land, Indigeneity, metaphysics, governance, medicine; in short, Indigenous theory and praxis. One prominent example is the Potlatch ceremonies known to be practiced up and down the west coast of the North Pacific. Potlatch ceremonies are multisensorial and embodied acts of ceremony. They involve bringing in the community for feasting and celebration, but are also important sites of law-making, generosity, the display of wealth, and coming into being through naming. The ceremony itself is not complete without song. During the Potlatch, we engage in thousands year old sounded practices; the strike of the drum reverberates through time, and the songs we sing are passed down from generation to generation. During the ceremony, we sense the world in the same way that our ancestors did. Rites of relation to the human (other families and tribal communities) and more-than-human relatives are defined and *performed* through song and dance. This site of Indigenous knowledge production and creative praxis is necessarily linked to our relationship to the lands and waters of the North Pacific. Trevor Reed has argued similarly for Indigenous sound: "Indigenous creative work in sound attaches people, histories, and genealogies to places and to communities, not only by indexing particular

memories individuals and groups have had in places but also by generating a particular feeling of feelings that becomes iconic of places.”¹⁹

Though song does not necessarily only find valence in its use in ceremony. Reed points out that the “genre” of musical style/sound utterance does not diminish the strength of that connection.²⁰ It follows that the potency of sonic sovereignty lies in the relationships that sound can bring to a tribal community that other media cannot, as well as the community’s ability to tap into the musicality of Indigenous being and importantly, the individual’s ability to tap into Indigenous musicality while retaining the distinctive place-based connection to their peoples and communities. Much scholarship in Indigenous Sound and Music Studies follows the contributions of Indigenous artists to a variety of musical traditions and genres, making part of the work in the field historicizing Indigenous music. This project is important because despite Indigenous peoples’ contributions to the development of most musical traditions, they are bound up in the politics of raciality and coloniality, structures of power that manage, control and measure Indigenous populations through settler bureaucracies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States and the Department of Indian Affairs in Canada.²¹ Since the underlying logics of these systems is to facilitate land dispossession through Indigenous erasure, they beget the obfuscation of Indigenous identity in musical histories through exercising power over claims to Indigeneity — tribal enrollment/blood quantum requirements, racism, geographic isolation through reservation systems, and relocation programs all contribute to the complexities of being an “Indigenous musician.”

¹⁹ Trevor G. Reed, “Sonic Sovereignty: Performing Hopi Authority in Öngtupqa,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 4 (November 2019): 508–30

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Jessica Bissett Perea, *Sound Relations: Native Ways of Doing Music History in Alaska* (Oxford University Press, 2021). 26.

In light of these logics, Indigenous peoples are represented in the history and continuation of vibrant music scenes — jazz/improvised music, hip-hop, funk/soul/R&B, folk, rock, and metal music are all represented in the current “state” of Indigenous music. Predecessors of the Indigenous music scene include rock guitarists Link Wray (Shawnee), Robbie Robertson (Mohawk and Cayuga), and Jessie Ed Davis (Comanche), Kaw and Mvskoke saxophonist Jim Pepper, Coeur d’Alene jazz singer Mildred Bailey, new-wave singer Debora Iyall (Cowlitz), and perhaps one of the most influential guitarists of all time, Jimi Hendrix (Cherokee).²² Even in just the last five years there has been an explosion of artists, such as Jeremy Dutcher (Wolastoqiyik), Mali Obomsawin (Odanak), Snotty Nose Rez Kids (Haisla), the Diné metal band Under Exile, Ya Tseen (Nicholas Galanin, Tlingit/Unangax), the psychedelic rock band OMBIGIIZII (Anishinaabe), Chuck Copenace (Ojibwe), Delbert Anderson (Diné), Julia Keefe (Nez Perce), Liv Rion (Quinault), the punk band Dead Pioneers (Greg Deal, Pyramid Lake Paiute) and Black Belt Eagle Scout (Swinomish/Iñupiaq), to name a few.²³ Furthermore, these are all American Indian artists, and the scholarship of Indigenous Sound and Music Studies engenders a capaciousness to include the ways that global Indigenous artists share experiences in sound and music, imbricated with but never defined by our experiences with colonization.

The simple fact is that we have always been making music, and like any art form, music has the potential to shift the parameters of what we think, know, and do. It does this in a pointed sense, through songs of resistance and struggle, but I am far more interested in Indigenous music *as* theory and praxis. Process over message. When we center Indigeneity in sound and music, so

²² For a more detailed discussion on some of these artists and more, see the 2017 documentary *Rumble: The Indians Who Rocked The World* and the playlist *The Indigenous Music Scene* included in this mixtape.

²³ Seriously, this is the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Each of these artists has released music between 2020-2025.

many fascinating questions, analytics, methods; in short, possibilities travel through air and reach our ears.

“Theory”

Music *as* theory. To some, this might be a provocation; I can hear my governance/politics-focused forebears scolding me for my investment in such perceived frivolity. Yet in the Indigenous world, the act of making music is replete with meaning, and the act of making meaning is replete with musicality.

In the following pages, you will become quite familiar with the work of Dian Million (Tanana Athabascan). Dian was one of my first teachers in the American Indian Studies program at the University of Washington, where I completed my undergraduate education, and the way I describe her influence on me to folks is that “if I can be half as good as Dian Million, I will be happy.” Dian is not a musician per se, but she is a poet, so I think she makes music in a sense. Among the many influences she has had on me, perhaps the one that sticks out the most in my mind is her approach to theory. This articulation comes from her essay *There is a River in Me:*

Theory From Life:

“Theories also realign felt imagination at the parameters of the way “things” are thought to be...[they] may “launch a counterinvestment.” This is not an act of accretion, but a strategic felt comprehension that has the power to change a paradigm, or reinvest a political movement with a new vision to act. This is the power of intense dreaming, of the felt intensification when boundaries shift and other views become available...I hold on then to the idea that theories are active felt-embodied narrative practices that inform mobile abstractions, traveling or migrating across certain kinds of seemingly reified knowledge domains, reorganizing boundaries as they go, claiming something—is something else. On that note, theory may also colonize.”²⁴

²⁴ Dian Million, “There Is a River In Me: Theory from Life,” in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Duke University Press, 2014), /z-wcorg/. 37.

I would not go as far as to simply replace the word “theory” with the word “music,” but I would be remiss to recognize the role that music plays in supporting felt comprehension, intense dreaming, reorganizing boundaries, and claiming something is something else. The musical act is most eminently a *doing*, an active process by which decisions are made by artists, communities, relatives, to compose, to transpose, to improvise. These processes articulate a variety of intersubjective relationalities, indeed some of them are colonizing forces. The approach to “music theory” that dominates the academy relies on an investment in the physical, material aspects of song as well as “what’s able to be written down.” This approach relies on an epistemological purification whereby “music theory” as a general category is conflated with “the harmonic style of 18th century European musicians.” Studies of the more “human” aspect of music theory are pushed to certain categories, like “musicology” or “ethnomusicology.” While I think the physical, material aspects of song do matter, the separation into categories and the subsequent denial of the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of song is a deeply positivist, colonial impulse. Our “new vision to act” must remember the sensorial as a part of our episteme, if that vision is to be commensurate with decolonizing/Indigenizing praxis.

Attuning to the sensorial requires an attunement to the density of Indigenous being/knowning/doing. According to Métis scholar Chris Andersen, attuning to “density” rather than “difference” requires an investment in *all* available epistemologies, not just ones that are contained to the politics of purity and authenticity. It is even more sophisticated than that — to ignore our density in favor of difference does not just create the implication of purity and authenticity, but it elides our unique position in the study of whiteness/colonization itself.²⁵ After

²⁵ Chris Andersen, “Critical Indigenous Studies: From Difference to Density,” *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2009), <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/csrj/issue/view/154>.

all, music is never created in isolation, it is an inherently relational practice, and ignoring those relationships is a mistake.

On “the North Pacific”

In Spring 2021 I was invited to be a graduate student coordinator for the Native North Pacific Studies Research Cluster at UC Davis, led by Dena’ina musicologist Jessica Bissett Perea. Among the key ideas coming from the research cluster was to decenter land in our conceptualizations of Indigeneity/Indigenous onto-epistemologies in favor of “hydrologics” or water-based knowledge systems of connection, relationality, and ways of doing. Of course, I cannot mention this research orientation without giving gratitude to scholarship in Pacific Studies, which was a major part of the genealogy of conceptualizing North Pacific Studies. Among the works in Pacific Studies that animated the research cluster were the 2001 issue of *The Contemporary Pacific*, “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge” by Vicente M. Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, a seminal collection of research “[triangulating] Pacific Studies, Native Studies, and Cultural Studies.”²⁶ Another special issue that outlined the orientation of the North Pacific was the *American Quarterly* “Pacific Currents” special issue, edited by Paul Lyons and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan. In the introductory essay, the authors open “a call for coalition building, solidarity among Oceanians and the peoples who encircle the ocean, that pays special attention to the place-based knowledge that emerges from the large and small currents of the Moana Nui (Pacific Ocean), including the dangers and opportunities for movement that currents

²⁶ Vicente M Diaz and J Kehaulani Kauanui, “Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 315–42, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2001.0049>. 315.

present.”²⁷ The most compelling visual representation of this call to relationality is the North Pacific Gyre, the nexus of ocean currents covering approximately 20 million square kilometers of ocean.

The Native North Pacific Studies Research cluster brought in scholarship from these currents, including Thomas Michael Swensen (Alutiiq), Jen Rose Smith (Eyak), E.J.R. David (Kapampangan, Tagalog), and Robin Gray (Ts’msyen/Mikisew Cree) and more. Situated in the Patwin territory, what is now known as Davis, California during the shelter-in-place order from the COVID-19 pandemic, and connected through fiber optic cables sending and receiving information to data centers that relayed back to show us our voice and image on the screen, the series was generative for thinking through how, like the ocean currents that animate so much of our epistemologies as Native people, we can be connected and in better relation despite the encapsulation of our relationalities to biopolitical mechanisms wrought by imperialism and settler colonialism. In the words of Lyons and Tengan, the “Asia Pacific Turn” involves “turning from the colonial/post-colonial dyad and towards situated, praxis-oriented, alternative, and grounded forms of analysis.”²⁸ This strategic turn emphasizes the convergence of distinctive yet related knowledge systems, for which currents act as lines connecting nodes between our hydrological relationalities. The ocean and the sky mirror each other, in the ways that ocean-faring ancestors navigated by the stars, and in the distinctively Nishnaabeg mode of thought forwarded by Michi Saagiig Nishnabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, which she calls “constellations of co-resistance.” To Betasamosake, these constellations are opaque to the colonizer senses, since they are informed by Nishnaabeg grounded normativity, or the emphasis

²⁷ Paul Lyons and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, “Introduction: Pacific Currents,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015).

²⁸ Lyons and Tengan (2015). 548.

on place-based praxis and reciprocities. The potentialities she outlines are “flight paths” out of settler colonialism: “The constellated and emergent relationships from within grounded normativity between radical resurgence, generative refusal, and reciprocal recognition, for instance, might create the potential for heightening nationhood, Indigeneity, and freedom.”²⁹ By centering the North Pacific in this way, we give precedence to our water ancestors, which include not just the human ancestors that relate to water, but the water bodies themselves as radically contingent ways of thinking outside of colonial logics.

Because I come from a seafaring community, the notion of hydrologics was compelling for me, as it fit naturally within the ways that I conceptualize home. To be kwinaył really means one simple thing - to be of the kwinaył kal, commonly known as the Quinault River. To be *of* a water body is not a mistake in grammar for people of the Coast Salish world. Many of the anglicized versions of Interior Coast Salish tribal names carry the suffix “-ish” which denotes a peoplehood *of* a certain place/water body. The water bodies that connect us, commonly referred to as the Pacific Northwest and the Salish Sea, are the networks by which we make relations, map the Coast Salish world, navigate, advocate, and make song. Conceptualizing the North Pacific is a strategic move away from settler logics of enclosure, with the ethic of being in right relation with our place and water-relatives. Within these chapters, that relationality is centered through the roots and routes of my voyages as a Quinault person from Taholah, on the Mouth of the Quinault River.

The Playlist (aka Chapter Outline)

²⁹ Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, Indigenous Americas (University of Minnesota Press, 2017). 213.

This dissertation as mixtape is replete with double entendre, generous critique, biting guitar sounds, virtuosic saxophone lines, songs older than we can possibly remember, caffeine, CBD, constant stank face, and of course, whales. I hope that you will seek out audio examples where present to listen to some of the sounds I write from, as they contribute so much more than the words that I use to make you hear things in your head. Some of those words come from Deborah Kapchan on “sound writing,” “the writer [listens] to and [translates] sound through embodied experience, the body [translates] the encounter between word and sound, and sound [translates] and [transforms] both word and author.”³⁰ Listening is ceremony precisely because of the ways that sound and music moves us; to act, to theorize, to remember, to know, to love, to laugh and to write. I hope these whales aid in the process of shapeshifting into new knowledge. I hope even more so, that this work responds to Craig Womack’s (Mvskoke) call for a “more, and funkier” Indigenous Studies.³¹

Chapter 1, “Ronald Olson’s Nonsense Syllables: Tracing the False Dichotomy Between Sonic Theory and Indigeneity in the Academy” is a work of polysemic play, an ironic treatise on the ways in which sound and music are conceptualized in the times of early ethnographers and the contemporary academy. Specifically, the chapter performs an archaeology of the invocation of the words “nonsense syllables” as used by Ronald L. Olson in his creatively named ethnography of Quinault Indians, *The Quinault Indians* (1936). The chapter is framed around the administration of justice in Coast Salish communities for calling a seafaring canoe a “boat” — being tossed into the water. While the work of the chapter implies the unequal power

³⁰ Deborah A. Kapchan, ed., *Theorizing Sound Writing*, Music/Culture (Wesleyan University Press, 2017).

³¹ Craig Womack cited in Jace Weaver, “More Light Than Heat: The Current State of Native American Studies,” *The American Indian Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2007): 233–55, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.2007.0026>.

relationships between ethnographers/the institution of music in the academy and Indigenous peoples, “tossing into the water” is a method by which we employ “ndn humor” to empower our communities and make light of these colonizing forces. The chapter is also my opportunity to contribute to a recent array of scholarship critiquing how music is situated in the academy, specifically around raciality/white superiority. This follows scholarship by Philip Ewell, Loren Kajikawa, Adam Neeley, Edward W. Sarath, David E. Myers, Patricia Shehan Campbell, Jessica Bissett Perea, and Gabriel Solis.

Chapter 2, “Elements of Coast Salish Music Theory” outlines the story of my first ever pull, 27 miles from La Push (Quileute Territory) to Waatch (Makah Territory) during the Paddle to Squaxin 2012. It is also a survey and history of the Annual Tribal Canoe Journey, a practice that stretches back thousands of years, but has its own recent history from the Paddle to Seattle in 1989 to what has become an annual event celebrating connections through ceremony across the North Pacific. This practice necessarily defies borders, with paddlers coming in from what is now referred to as “Canada” as well as some more recent participants from Aotearoa and Hawai’i. Moving through the Canoe Journey places/practices of the canoe, the ground crew, and the protocol tent, the chapter demonstrates the multisensorial and embodied practices of music theory, and the ways that they shift temporalities, allowing for us to be in conversation with our ancestors and future generations.

Chapter 3, “č̣int kẉiʔ kenaʔnəm KEXP: A Critical Indigenous Internet Study of KEXP In-Studio Sessions” utilizes theories and methods in Science and Technology Studies/critical internet studies to analyze KEXP in-studio sessions that I have hosted for KEXP’s YouTube channel. Each Indigenous artist represented in the videos brings about a distinctive Indigenous way of being/doing music, and the goal of the chapter is to demonstrate how our Indigeneity is

not subsumed by the structures of power and privilege that govern the internet space. This is accomplished by adding depth to the engagement of Indigeneity in internet studies as well as contributing to discussions on networked systems in Indigenous Studies. The artists represented come from Odanak (Abenaki), Cherokee, Tlingit, Haida and Siksika nations and play indie rock, doom metal, and funk/jazz fusion music. The structure of the chapter is to listen to each artist's music and lend further context/analysis to the interviews I conduct in the videos.

Chapter 4, "Whales On The Mouth: Indigenous Materialities and the Guitar as Relative" is my love letter to the guitar, a creative meditation on Indigenous materiality, industry, and the instrument itself. In it, I weave together my experiences with the instrument alongside my mother's cedar basket weaving to tell a story about our relationships to more-than-human relatives, what lies outside of Indigenous cosmologies as "things" or "objects." The purpose is not simply to refuse the conceptualization of "thingness" in favor of an "animistic" view of the more-than-human; it is to elucidate the guiding love that weaves our spirits into being, that necessarily involves the relationships we have to our creativity and materialities.

The conclusion, "skaallin's breath of air," brings my writing from Duwamish/Suquamish territories into conversation with the ocean air of Taholah, along with Stó:lō thought leader Lee Maracle's works on oratory and storytelling and the Tsotsil language concept of the "politics of the heart and spirit" practiced by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). The interplay between sound, air, oratory and Indigenous creative praxis articulate our spiritual connection to the homelands/waters we come from, and this process shifts the parameters of what we know and do, which gives rise to our futurities as Indigenous peoples.

The sites of sound knowledge that I present here, the academy, the Annual Canoe Journey, the Internet, and the more-than-human relationships to our materials and praxis, give

breath to the ways that our knowledges are collected, developed and disseminated, the sacred ways of being/knowing/doing that animate our place- and water-based relationships, our claim to art-making in the midst of a cyberspace that imagines a creativity without humans, and the loving relationships we have with materials, our kin, our more-than-human relatives. They demonstrate the ways that we, like our ancestors before us, utilize the aural to create kwinaył/Coast Salish/Indigenous worlds and transmit that knowledge to future generations, just as skaallin visited me in my dream to instruct me on all that I create. I hope that the auralities that I present are listened to thoughtfully and carefully, with an attunement to the sensorial and the embodied, as our memory of song allows for us to see/hear/know the world differently, through the sonicities of self-determination.

Chapter 1: Ronald Olson's Nonsense Syllables: Tracing the False Dichotomy Between Sonic Theory and Indigeneity in the Academy.

On the Journey,³² if one refers to a seafaring canoe as a “boat”, they *will* be thrown into the water.

Or so I have witnessed. A casual slip in language brings about the (literally) chilling consequences of being forcefully submerged into the icy waters of the North Pacific. Being thrown into the water is a playful reprimand for violating a simple axiom — we paddle in “canoes” not “boats.” Of course, we also *use* boats, specifically the “support boat”, an engined vessel that tags along for the safety of the paddlers. The reverence for the idea of a canoe and the irreverence for the idea of a boat shape a form of tacit knowledge by the community. The dimensions of this tacit knowledge are deeper than the sum of their parts; community self-determination, justice, refusal, and respectful acknowledgement of the canoe itself. The Journey is a sacred tradition, a (re)activation of the thousands year old practice of intertribalism, knowledge production, alliance making, feasting, and ceremony. The practices of both the Journey itself and the administration of justice based on what might seem a simple semantic mistake give form to Coast Salish self-determination. Words are uttered, as in, “sounded”, so when the unlucky soon-to-be-freezing violator of the axiom is subsumed by salt and sea, they can only place blame on their ignorance of the correct sounds to make. At least as they are negotiated by the community.

I am less interested in the axiom itself than I am in the administration of justice for its violation. There is a certain “tongue-in-cheek” coding to the action, which is reminiscent not of a gavel hitting the judges desk but a friend poking fun at another friend. This kind of “messaging

³² This refers to the Annual Tribal Canoe Journey (see Chapter 2)

around” was not created solely in the context of the Journey, it’s a humor that has developed according to our ancestors’ visions. Citing his White Earth Anishinaabe ancestors in *Native Provenance*, Gerald Vizenor describes the employment of Indigenous humor through the preeminent Trickster figure: “The trickster created a new earth with teases and stories, and the creation was irony, not liturgy.”³³ The tension between irony and liturgy, of playful openness and sacrosanct logocentrism is the subject of Vizenor’s critique, a way in which he explicates the inherent creativity not only in Indigenous storytelling, but Indigenous knowledge production. In a sense, Vizenor argues that non-Indigenous ethnographic researchers continually called the canoe a boat. In other words, the methods and models of cultural interpretation in anthropological training miss out on the inherently playful tacit knowledge developed through thousands of years of relations between Indigenous peoples and more-than-human relatives.

This chapter is a work of polysemic play, a double entendre, a work of irony in contrast to liturgy whose archaeology is the roots and foundations of ethnographic accounts of Indigenous peoples in the early 20th century, and how the attitudes, perspectives, and operating logics created the conditions for how music and sound are situated in the academy. The trickster sense, and thus the irony at root in these relationships is Indigeneity, a double entendre in itself because of its simultaneous immanence to the operating logics of settler colonialism and its constitution *through* them. The simple truth is that “Indigenous” is not how our ancestors referred to one another, the quality of *being* Indigenous necessitates a relationship with the *non-Indigenous*. The ontological tenuousness of Indigeneity (in contrast to the *slightly* more stable, “Quinaultness”) is perhaps its greatest strength — writing of Indigeneity “in articulation with”

³³ Gerald Robert Vizenor, *Native Provenance: The Betrayal of Cultural Creativity* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019). 2.

raciality and coloniality, Maile Arvin (Kanakanaka Maoli) explains that the different determinations of these categories “allows me to see [I]ndigeneity as not just a category determined by racism and colonialism but also by the knowledge and praxis of [I]ndigenous peoples.”³⁴ The implication of Arvin’s insight is that “[I]ndigenous knowledge and praxis can be either anticolonial or participatory in colonialism; similarly, it can be either antiracist or participatory in racism.”³⁵ Arvin refers to her method of thinking through these determinations as “Analytics of Indigeneity.” The present work takes as a guiding methodology “humor” as an Indigenous praxis, an analytic of the structures of raciality and coloniality that guided ethnographic research in the nineteenth and twentieth century, how music and sound are situated in the academy, and how they are mutually constituted.

Don’t Call It A Boat

One work of ethnography that is particularly relevant to the author, a Quinault Indian, is the creatively named ethnography of Quinault Indians, *The Quinault Indians*, by Ronald L. Olson.³⁶ On the centennial of this encounter between the Quinault and settler colonial worlds,³⁷ I am interested in teasing out the intersubjective ironies at play between the field ethnographer and the community member. Put another way, I would challenge whether Olson’s Quinault “interlocutors” were giving him what he perceived as an “account” or if they were “throwing him in the water.” What was Olson’s aim as a trained anthropologist from the University of

³⁴ Maile Arvin, “Analytics of Indigeneity,” in *Native Studies Keywords*, ed. Stephanie Nohelani Teves et al. (University of Arizona Press, 2015), 121.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Not a Quinault Indian

³⁷ While the publication *The Quinault Indians* was released in 1936, Olson’s first visit to Taholah was in 1925.

Washington, an institution that benefits from Coast Salish dispossession? What did the community members of Taholah think of Olson's methodology? What methodologies did they employ in turn? What knowledge was Olson ignorant to based on the development of cultural interpretation of the time? I am interested in attuning to the distinctively oral (and thus "aural") dimensions of Quinault/Coast Salish knowledge in order to refract from discourses around the ostensibly binary "oral vs. written" debate, and to investigate the history and philosophy of "ndn humor" as a critical Indigenous methodology.

Furthermore, this chapter will attune to sonicity as a domain of Indigenous onto-epistemology, an ardent refusal of the positivist subject/object relationship between researcher and the sound(s) researched.³⁸ To the ethnographic ear, the analytical logic of the subject/object relationship metamorphoses sonic Indigenous ways of knowing and being into, well, "nonsense." This was typically meant with the utmost seriousness, "nonsense syllables" was a common phrasing for ethnographers of the early 20th century, a scholarly tradition that engendered perspectives of white superiority to Indigenous peoples for whom they mined "knowledge" about in order to, ostensibly, preserve what they perceived as "dying cultures." This is the common operating logic of what has come to be known as "salvage ethnography." Salvage ethnography, the characteristic of alterity, and the characteristic of white superiority are the ironies from which I will be "teasing out" — not solely in the idiomatic sense of analysis, but in the playful sense of throwing Olson and his contemporaries in the water. These operating logics are not by any means hidden from view, which makes the humor ripe for the picking. On Quinault song specifically, Olson wrote this:

³⁸ For more on sound writing and positivism, see Deborah A. Kapchan, *The Splash of Icarus* in Deborah A. Kapchan, ed., *Theorizing Sound Writing, Music/Culture* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017). 10-33.

“The Quinault had only the drum and rattle for musical instruments. Accordingly they had no music beyond their songs. I obtained the notation of none of these and recorded the words of only a few. Almost without exception their songs involved at most a single repetition of the words, followed by almost endless repetition of the air accompanied by nonsense syllables, chiefly ho, o, and hai.”³⁹

Let’s talk a bit about how this is Olson calling a “canoe” a “boat.” Quinault songs typically, though not always, take names after a certain *activity*. On the surface level, this can be interpreted as a “paddle song” being about paddling in a canoe or a “prayer song” being about setting the intention in ceremony or articulating a relationship to a place or specific moment (such as before a memorial or dinner). I use the word “activity” intentionally here, not just to make a noun the “doing” of something like prayer or paddling, but to retain its verb form “to activate.” The best way that I can think of to describe *what* Quinault song activates is a set of relations; relations to the drum as companion to the song, relations of the method and practice of singing in a way shared by our ancestors and Coast Salish relatives outside of the community of Taholah, relations to the more-than-human that accompany us in prayer and paddling, and so on. These relationships exceed the context of their physically sonic elements: timbre, structure, frequency, etc. These are elements of Quinault music theory, which are discussed at length in chapter 2. Now, in a metaphorical sense, you now know what a “canoe” is, so let’s talk about a “boat.” Olson and his contemporaries relied on a particular orientation to sound that engendered a civilized/savage dichotomy in relation to Indigenous peoples. Tracing the history of literacy in Europe to the development of music as “high art” to the practice of ethnomusicological entextualization, Wendy Wickwire (1985) critiques the field of ethnomusicology following Stanley Diamond’s rhetorical question “How can we study others if we do not also study

³⁹ Ronald L. Olson, *The Quinault Indians*, Washington (State) University. University of Washington Publications in Anthropology. v.6, No.1, 194 p. (Seattle, Wash.: The University of Washington, 1936), 139. [//catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102471130](http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102471130).

ourselves?”⁴⁰ The entextualization of music became a rationalist and individual art form, the enlightened composer and his pen, as well as a method by which early anthropologists sought to “demonstrate scientifically that Western European man was superior to large portions of the world.”⁴¹ Wickwire continues, “Culture, it was argued, evolved in stages which could be mapped chronologically by comparing living primitive peoples to those who had “progressed.” Using the culture of European man as the key point-of-reference, the “gold standard of value.”⁴² The investment in entextualization is reflected in Olson’s methodology, to “obtain” notation of Quinault song (which he evidently did not). I would not suspect that Olson was necessarily trying to enact an imperialist project based on perceived white superiority per se. Rather, he was a complicit actor in a broader structure of imperialism based on perceived white superiority. I am also unsure of whether he liked boats, but he was evidently incredibly built and loved to log (as in, he was a logger) “[Olson] enjoyed the loggers life...the rollicking yarns of bunkhouse evenings, the carousing when a logger was paid off, with wine, women and fighting with heavy fists and caulked boots. Maybe some song, too.”⁴³ He definitely fit right in in Grays Harbor County.

What might it look like, then, for a Quinault scholar of Indigenous sound and music, who sometimes phrases things a bit more sophisticatedly than “nonsense” to toss Ronald Olson in the water a little bit for his transgression? In other words, how might ndn humor and critical

⁴⁰ Stanley Diamond in Wendy Wickwire, “Theories of Ethnomusicology and the North American Indian: Retrospective and Critique,” *Canadian University Music Review*, no. 6 [1969] (1985): 186. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014036ar>.

⁴¹ J.W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory*, Repr., 1. publ. 1966 (Cambridge Univ. Pr, 1981). Cited in Wickwire (1985)

⁴² Sylvia Wynter, “Ethno, or Socio Poetics?,” *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 2, no. 2 (1976): 82. Cited in Wickwire (1985)

⁴³ Philip Drucker, “Ronald Leroy Olson, 1985-1979,” *American Anthropologist* 83, no. 3 (1981): 605.

Indigenous sound and music studies, following Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd, “...contravene in, respond to, and redirect European philosophies [and] offer crucial new ways of conceptualizing an after to empire that does not reside within the obliteration of [I]ndigenous lives, resources, and lands[?]”⁴⁴ Furthermore, how might the operating logics of white superiority manifest in the ways that we engage sound and music studies in the academy, Indigenous or non-Indigenous?

That One Time Craig Womack Made Me Laugh Out Loud

I am very much not a vegan. In fact, I tell people that I am actually a “Daywalker” in the context of the eminent prestige cinema and comic book adaptation that is the movie *Blade* (1998). In *Blade*, Wesley Snipes plays a half-human half-vampire vampire hunter named, well, “Blade.” Blade is a Daywalker because despite his vampiric genetics he is able to take a sun-side stroll wherever he pleases. I interpret this to mean that he has all of the strengths (superhuman strength and speed, healing factor) and none of the weaknesses of a vampire (getting a bit “past tan” in the sunlight). My father is a hoquat, a white man, so I like to joke with people that my version of a “Daywalker” means that I have “all of the strengths of the white people (eat all the mac and cheese I want, grow the greatest beard in Indian Country) and none of the weaknesses.”⁴⁵ So, while I might call myself a “conscientious omnivore,” particularly due to the maltreatment of animals, the wastefulness of the food industry in the United States, the overall deliciousness of vegan food and that I grew up on salmon, I still cannot help but eat all the cheese I want, which is derived from animal products and thus not vegan.

⁴⁴ Jodi A Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

⁴⁵ I told my Samoan friend this joke one time and he said “Yeah but what about “generational wealth?” To which I realized I did not, in fact, have all the strengths of the white people.

Though, Craig Womack might have almost convinced me. Or, at least he made me laugh about it a little bit.

In his essay *There Is No Respectful Way to Kill an Animal*, Craig Womack (Mvskoke) uses two stories to highlight the inherently inequitable relationship engendered by hunting animals. The two stories are Salish and Kootenai novelist D'Arcy McNickel's *The Surrounded* and Gerald Vizenor's *Interior Landscapes*. The moral quandaries that the character Archilde in *The Surrounded* and Gerald Vizenor himself (*Interior Landscapes* is an autobiography) when hunting animals contrast with the trope that hunting is both an ancestral tradition and a practice that is our inherent (read: inexorable) right as peoples. Or rather, that ancestral traditions and inherent rights are meant to be followed uncritically and at the expense of the well-being of more-than-human beings. Womack's overall suggestions are that the ceremonies we enact when we hunt (for survival or for sport) mostly do work for our own conscience; we perform a hefty amount of intellectual labor to enact a relationship to a being that we quite literally cannot communicate with on the same terms of our perception as human beings. Womack is not shy about taking a stance about the killing of animals, admitting through the anecdote of a hunting story during a visit to Alberta that he won't eat meat as long as he has the choice not to.⁴⁶ The essay is compelling not just because it convincingly sets out a reason not to eat meat, but that it also overlays the possibilities of viewing our ancestral traditions with a critical lens. As a Quinault person of the cisgender male persuasion, cursed (blessed?) with soft musician hands (read: not fit for hunting), I can't help but find Womack's proposition to be an effective method by which we refuse to box ourselves into the trope of the "Indian hunter."

⁴⁶ Craig Womack, "There Is No Respectful Way to Kill an Animal," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 25, no. 4 (2013): 11, <https://doi.org/10.5250/studamerindilite.25.4.0011>. 13.

Of the arguments made in the essay, this one line sticks out to me the most: “I can at least think about the fact that my religion, a pretty old one, is called the Green Corn religion, not the breaded and fried pork chop religion.”⁴⁷ You see, his point still would have landed without the inclusion of “breaded and fried” in picturing the pork chop. That level of detail signals an oddly affectionate take on the pork chop (salivating with the imagination of breading and deep frying it) while also pointing out the pure banality of the ways that we treat the flesh of pigs. Also “breaded and friend pork chop religion” is an objectively funny phrase. It still makes me laugh when I read those words together. My intention in bringing up Womack’s essay here is not to make a claim one way or the other about eating meat, but that his humor, like our “tossing people in the water” says much about the limits of our ways of analyzing and interpreting the world. Ndn humor, and the absurdities that it invokes, tests boundaries and allows us to set new limits.

The saying goes that “laughter is medicine.” My saying goes that I “laugh to cope.” The genealogy of ndn humor lives in the stories of our ancestors; Olson himself notated the existence of “the joker” in our communities (and other communities in our part of the North Pacific). According to Olson, there was ordinarily “but one [joker] in the tribe,” and when they died (or shortly before), “someone else merely began to rib people and he thereby came to be regarded as the successor.”⁴⁸ I know for a fact that Olson was wrong about there being just one joker per tribe because I could name at least three in my graduating class. More recent ancestors of ndn humor include the late Vine Deloria Jr., (Standing Rock Sioux), who penned the chapter *Indian Humor* in his now classic monograph *Custer Died For Your Sins*. Deloria nods to the ways that humor adds a needed sense of qualifying humility to the development of collective desire:

⁴⁷ Ibid. 25.

⁴⁸ Olson (1936). 96.

“Gradually people learned to anticipate teasing and began to tease themselves as a means of showing humility and at the same time advocating a course of action they deeply believed in. Men would depreciate their feats to show they were not trying to run roughshod over tribal desires. This method of behavior served to highlight their true virtues and gain them a place of influence in tribal policy-making circles.”⁴⁹

The influence of Deloria on ndn humor is undeniable, and one could say that the present chapter is directly influenced by his chapter in “Custer,” *Anthropologists and Other Friends*. Though he is but one of many funny ndns that I’ve had the pleasure of knowing in real life and intertextually. Tiffany Midge (Standing Rock Sioux) is another favorite of mine, and in addition to her pathbreaking philosophical treatise *Bury My Heart at Chuck E Cheese’s*, she wrote a great blog post where she argues how humor cuts through the austere “noble savage” stereotype, as well as serving as a mobilization of “intergenerational joy” amidst a complex of practices and narrativity that focuses so much on our pain.⁵⁰ “Ndn humor” with the stylization of “Indian” is a way of invoking the inner-ear of the reader; “ndn” is a pronunciation that satirizes the stereotypical “rezzy accent.”

If humor is a way of testing limits, then this chapter is a way of testing the limits of Olson and the project of anthropology of the early twentieth century’s tiny, tiny imagination, and how that imaginary has led to the proliferation of raciality and coloniality in the academy. One such way that that imaginary has manifested itself is through the presumed sovereignty over words. This next section is about two words in particular.

⁴⁹ Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 3. print, Norman, Oklahoma (University of Oklahoma Press, 1969). 147.

⁵⁰ Tiffany Midge, “In The Good Way: Looking at Tribal Humor,” IPP, July 19, 2023, <https://www.indigenouperformance.org/post/in-the-good-way-looking-at-tribal-humor>.

Teasing out the caucacity⁵¹ of the presumed sovereignty over words, I would like to turn our attention to nonsense, or rather it's rowdy cousin, "noise." Specifically, I want to talk about "who" gets to decide what is and is not "noise," and what a sound or a piece of music is if not "noise." Working from R. Murray Schafer's conception of acoustic ecology and Barry Truax's elaboration on soundscape, John-Carlos Perea (Mescalero Apache, Chicano, German, Irish) outlines the "University Soundscape Ecology" to understand the hierarchical relationships that exist within soundscape ecologies, namely the University, in contrast to the "noises" that his powwow performance class created on the San Francisco State University campus. To Perea, "the university campus is a socially constructed sonic environment"⁵² for which the powwow class is amidst already existing sonic interactions. What makes these interactions "hierarchical" are the ways in which expectations for the university soundscape ecology are politically mediated. Remembering his experience as an undergrad under the tutelage of Dr. Bernard Hoehner, a "respected Lakhóta elder, singer, powwow emcee, and Northern Traditional dancer," Perea witnessed confrontations between Dr. Hoehner and university faculty and administration for "making too much noise" when he used the drum to teach.⁵³ The specific invocation of the word "noise" relies on 1. the supposed authority to name what a sonic event can be called and 2. the specific rendering of the powwow drum (and thus powwow music) as undesirable or at least disruptive to the (again, supposed) equilibrium of the university soundscape ecology. Perea takes

⁵¹ A portmanteau of "caucasian" and "audacity," popularly disseminated through memes on the internet and colloquial discourse.

⁵² John-Carlos Perea in Victoria Lindsay Levine and Dylan Robinson, eds., *Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America*, Music/Culture (Wesleyan University Press, 2019). 144.

⁵³ Ibid. 145.

these political orientations further through the use of the term *unexpected* — powwow music on campus “confronts expectations of Native assimilation and disappearance that continue to manifest in our media and academic landscapes.”⁵⁴

David Novak’s (2015) discusses noise as a “material aspect of sound” that is “discussed as a generalized property of sound (as “noisiness”); as a distinct sonic object within music, speech or environmental sounds (as “a noise”); or as a totalizing qualifier for emergent styles (e.g. “that hip-hop stuff is all noise”).⁵⁵ In all definitions, Novak continues to elaborate that:

“Noise is an essentially relational concept. It can only take on meaning by signifying something else, but it must remain incommensurably different from that thing we do know and understand. Even in the fundamentally relativistic context of musical aesthetics, noise is defined by its mutual exclusion from the category of music. Yet noise is inherent in all musical sounds and their mediated reproductions; it has been used as musical material and can even be considered a musical genre in itself.”

I don’t necessarily listen to noise rock, but I’m fascinated by “noise” as a relational concept, much how “colonialism” and “Indigeneity” are relational concepts. Like how university administrators were able to suppose the disruption of their soundscape ecology, Olson and his contemporaries were able to suppose their judgement of Quinault/Indigenous song as “nonsense.” This process is of course, inherently political and thus inherently bound by the politics of raciality and coloniality. After all, the practice of powwow singing, like the drums and rattles that make up Quinault song in Olson’s time (and now), are sounds we’ve made since time immemorial. The discourse of alterity employed by Olson and university administrators actually says more about their operating logics than it does our relative ability to make sounded meaning.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 144.

⁵⁵ David Novak in David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, eds., *Keywords in Sound* (Duke University Press, 2015). 125.

Tossing them in the water involves a subtle reorientation in analysis, described by musicologist Ana María Ochoa-Gautier in her monograph *Aurality*:

“I prefer to understand [the colony] as a contested site of different acoustic practices, a layering of contrastive listenings and their cosmological underpinnings. The different practices through which such listenings have been historically inscribed, in bodies, on stone, on skin, and on paper, through rituals and through writing, are to be sure, marked by highly unequal power in the constitution of the public sphere. But that does not mean that their significance disappeared or was completely erased.”⁵⁶

To be so quick to render Indigenous song and sound simply as “noise” is to make audible the cosmopolitics of noise. The cosmological underpinnings of the colonial project of the time (and how it manifests in the university soundscape) are an investment in expansion. That is, the destruction or assimilation of Indigenous peoples to make way for settler ways of life/knowing. Thus, the demarcation of Indigenous expressive praxis to the dismissive realm of “noise” enables the myth of white superiority to ring true, and thus the dispossession of land and life is justified. But the main point of Ochoa-Gautier’s “contested site of different acoustic practices” is that the significance of Indigenous acoustic practices has not disappeared. In fact, the juxtaposition between the university soundscape (as one example among other settler colonial soundscapes) and Indigenous acoustic practices reinscribes those practices as an analytic of coloniality and the cosmopolitics of sound therein. This logic follows the questions that Perea poses throughout his analysis of the university soundscape. Working through Michel Foucault’s analysis of the Panopticon, specifically its qualification of the sonic as “surveillance in silence,” and through Brandon LaBelle’s research on the silence in solitary confinement in Auburn State Prison in New York, Perea asks:

⁵⁶ Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*, Sign, Storage, Transmission (Duke University Press, 2014). 4.

“Does powwow musicking represent a disturbance in the signaling system of the university because it interrupts the transmission of knowledge? Or does powwow musicking represent an interruption in an educational system that has normalized Native American disappearance as a consequence of genocide and forced assimilation, making the contemporary performance of that music a radical act on campus?”⁵⁷

For this next section I want to bring into conversation sounded forms of raciality and coloniality and how they have subsumed Indigenous music to the dichotomy of traditional/modern, or non-western/western in the academy. Specifically, I will analyze the development of the operating logics of music programs situated in the academy, and how they interact with what is perceived as racialized/colonized subjectivities.

Music Theory Is Racist

I have been a fan of the music theory YouTuber Adam Neeley for a few years now. His video essays explore a vast array of topics, from the mythical construction of the “A 432hz” tuning to be “in better tune with the universe”⁵⁸ to the evidently false story that the “tritone” in music was associated with “summoning the devil” in the western musical past.⁵⁹ He is a hoquat from Maryland, and he is quite aware of that fact, since he is a jazz bass player he makes a point to center jazz as a Black art form. In 2020, he released a video with the title *Music Theory is Racist*⁶⁰ which dives into the work of music theory scholar Philip Ewell, specifically his article *Music Theory and the White Racial Frame*.⁶¹ The video performs an archaeology of the

⁵⁷ Perea (2019). 152.

⁵⁸ <https://youtu.be/EKTZ151yLnk?si=NUBs22QoUq9EjFQk>

⁵⁹ <https://youtu.be/3MhwGnq4N9o?si=70Dw36w24b194kdq>

⁶⁰ Neeley has since changed the video title to “Music Theory and White Supremacy.”

<https://youtu.be/Kr3quGh7pJA?si=v7jxpm37NxNda1YC>

⁶¹ Philip A. Ewell, “Music Theory and the White Racial Frame,” *Music Theory Online* 26, no. 2 (2020),

conflation between “Music Theory” and “the harmonic style of 18th century European musicians,” the politics that perpetuate that conflation, how they are mobilized by white supremacy, and how they are vehemently defended by music theory programs in the academy. The video was released at a critical moment in the academy of music and music studies, which followed works by Loren Kajikawa (specifically “The Possessive Investment in Classical Music” from the edited volume *Seeing Race Again*)⁶², and the Sound Studies blog post, “On Whiteness and Sound Studies”⁶³ by Gus Stadler. In addition to these works were critical studies in Indigenous Sound and Music Studies, including Dylan Robinson’s (Stó:lō) monograph *Hungry Listening* (2020) and Jessica Bissett Perea and Gabriel Solis’ co-authored paper “Asking the Indigeneity Question of American Music Studies”⁶⁴ (2019).

In Neeley’s video and Ewell’s paper, a good amount of analysis is spent on the work and study of Heinrich Schenker. Specifically, analysis of Heinrich Schenker’s vehement racism and German nationalism, and how his views are whitewashed to support what Ewell calls the “white racial frame” in music theory.⁶⁵ What is notable about Ewell’s analysis are the logics employed by music theorists to intentionally obfuscate Schenker’s overt racism. Schenkerian music theorists intertextually make excuses for Schenker, citing his music theory as being “not at all

https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.ewell.html?fbclid=IwAR1dSc4pSk6bBaW79vRFPJbLFMF1tXsr79t4iSorWnm_OU3lpJ9EnWGcd20.

⁶² “The Possessive Investment in Classical Music: Confronting Legacies of White Supremacy in U.S. Schools and Departments of Music,” in *Seeing Race Again*, 1st ed., ed. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw et al., with Loren Kajikawa (University of California Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvcwp0hd.12>.

⁶³ Gus Stadler, “On Whiteness and Sound Studies,” *Sounding Out!*, July 6, 2015, <https://soundstudiesblog.com/2015/07/06/on-whiteness-and-sound-studies/>.

⁶⁴ Jessica Bissett Perea and Gabriel Solis, “Asking the Indigeneity Question of American Music Studies,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 4 (2019): 401–10, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196319000348>.

⁶⁵ Ewell (2020).

logically dependent” on his “extramusical views,”⁶⁶ or they qualify Schenker’s views as “dark humor.”⁶⁷ To Ewell, these methods of whitewashing are meant to protect the white racial frame, the definition quoted from sociologist Joe Feagin: “to rationalize and insure white privilege and dominance over Americans of color.”⁶⁸ Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Schenker’s views that Ewell brings into the conversation is from a letter written by Schenker praising Adolf Hitler:

“Hitler’s historical service, of having got rid of Marxism, is something that posterity (including the French, English, and all those who have profited from transgressing against Germany) will celebrate with no less gratitude than the great deeds of the greatest Germans! If only the man were born to music who would similarly get rid of the musical Marxists; that would require that the masses were more in touch with our intrinsically eccentric art, which is something that, however, is and must remain a contradiction in terms. “Art” and “the masses” have never belonged together and never will belong together. And where would one find the huge numbers of musical “brownshirts” that would be needed to hunt down the musical Marxists?”⁶⁹

One of the most widely used methods of “music theory,” Schenkerian Analysis, is the intellectual production of a racist zealot *who praised Hitler*. Ewell’s intervention calls attention to Schenker’s fixation on “German genius” and how that affected his music theory.⁷⁰ To be clear, Ewell is not even advocating for the cessation of teaching Schenkerian analysis altogether; rather, he is pointing to what is both a clear bias in music theory and a vehement opposition to deconstruct and/or change that bias. It’s “boats” all the way down.

Here is where I would like to ask some Indigeneity questions of my own. Ewell has made it quite clear that not all musical breakthroughs were created by white male composers. The ostensible “purification” of “music theory” (whereby it becomes synonymous with “the harmonic style of 18th century european musicians), is not based in an objective reality, but an

⁶⁶ John Rothgeb (2001) cited in Ewell (2020) 4.3.2.

⁶⁷ Nicholas Cook (2007) cited in Ewell (2020) 4.3.4.

⁶⁸ Joe Feagin (2013) cited in Ewell (2020). 2.1.

⁶⁹ Heinrich Schenker cited in Ewell (2020). 4.3.5.

⁷⁰ Ewell (2020). 4.5.3

insistent epistemological hegemony reinforced by the structures and institutions of music theory in the academy. These logics undergird the cosmopolitics of noise in the university soundscape, the denouncement of Indigenous song as “nonsense” and the mechanisms of erasure and assimilation wrought by Ronald Olson and his contemporaries. But what would it look like to center Indigeneity in the music academy? It might look like having a meaningful investment in student-led Indigenous events, like the student run powwow, with a commitment to adding Indigenous (or vetted allied) scholars of music to teach about powwow in a good way. It might mean recognizing music as a relational act; not exiled from social, political, and historical critique but constitutive of a multiplicity of knowledge systems. It might mean knowing the names of the Indigenous peoples the institution that houses music programs has displaced. It might *not* mean learning about their music, because not everything is meant to be known by everyone.⁷¹

To close this line of inquiry, I want to apologize, because this chapter isn’t actually that funny.

Ten years before *Music Theory is Racist*, I was a seventeen-year-old undergraduate at the University of Washington. I painted my nails black and had grown out my hair, and I brought my Epiphone Les Paul and my incredibly cheap sounding Crate GX-15 Solid State⁷² amplifier to my dorm in the now demolished 11th floor of Terry Hall in UW’s south campus. Armed with my autodidactic investment in “music theory,” I was determined to live in UW’s music building, situated in the northeast corner of the Quad, a few hundred feet from what would become the site

⁷¹ See the conclusion of this chapter

⁷² Two channels of pure teenage angst, equally as grating to the ears.

of the wələbʔaltxʷ, (“Intellectual House” in Lushootseed) UW’s “longhouse style building.” It sadly didn’t work out for seventeen-year-old me; while I was able to take elementary music theory courses and pass easily, there was a certain barrier of entry to a music program — sure, anyone could “audition” for the programs in theory, but growing up in Taholah with no semblance of a music program, I didn’t feel like it was a space where I belonged, so to speak. The “collegiate gothic” architecture of the building, with its towering sharp edges and austere gray-tan color seemed like it jutted out of a foreign world for me.

Which, in a way, it did.

Reflecting on that time fills me with a bit of what Haunani-Kay Trask (Kanakanaka Maoli) would call “righteous anger.”⁷³ UW School of Music is not some exalted institution that appeared as a beacon of knowledge in an otherwise ignorant world. It’s a structure built on the graves of Coast Salish peoples, perpetuating a system that celebrates a musical canon with documented racist impulses. I may have been able to do the thing that I (still) love, which is to play the guitar, but how would a music education in a place like that affect *my ears*?

Conclusion: No Seriously, We’ll Toss You In The Water

Perhaps the greatest irony of all, my last joke amidst this treatise of music and play, my own personal conjuration of the trickster figure, is that I have never received a formal music education, musicology or otherwise. That is, the practices of theory and method that inform my work do not come from the wellspring of the musicological or musical canon. I am also hardly a “musician” in the sense of having a formal music instruction, regular experiences playing with

⁷³ Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai’i* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2005).

trained musicians, and being able to “read music” in the form of sight reading the commonly used musical notation methods. My teachers were internet based guitar columns, a friend’s thrash metal loving father’s drum set, hours and hours of listening to my old CD player turned mp3 player turned smartphone turned streaming service. It was also a perception (that I didn’t necessarily learn in the academy) that every musical act is essentially relational, and that the potentialities of that can, like theory, shift a paradigm or reinvest in a movement. My investment in the sonic is through the sheer force of will, and the responsibility to my relations from the ocean that permeates Quinault eardrums to the intertribal communities across the continent (and beyond). If the tables were turned and I was asked to take part in the historically, socially and politically mediated life of a musician/music scholar, perhaps *I* would be the one that inadvertently calls a “canoe” a “boat.”

None of this is to be self-deprecating about my qualifications or authority as a scholar of sound and music. To the contrary, my experiences being a *kwinaył s̓əgwəlm̓iš* from Taholah lends a distinctive voice to engaging sound and music with a density of praxis that is so neglected in the institutions and perspectives highlighted in this chapter. This silencing did not happen in a vacuum. One of the most laughable lies Olson and his contemporaries told themselves in their time was that Indigenous cultures will inevitably die out. Much further than that, the processes of creating a cultural memory in the United States education system is itself an active agent of Indigenous erasure. Such logics are reflected not only in racist mascot images, little to no Indigenous representation in media, curricular foci that forgets the land was stolen, the geographic sequestration of Native communities to reservations, and/or the constant uphill battle for Indigenous Studies as a field to assert itself on university campuses, but in the cosmopolitics of sound and music itself.

For this conclusion, I would like to turn to critical scholarship on music education and ask some Indigeneity questions about the attempts to redefine music studies. The text I will use to analyze attempts to redefine music studies is none other than *Redefining Music Studies In An Age of Change: Creativity, Diversity and Integration* by Edward W. Sarath, David E. Myers, and Patricia Shehan Campbell. The specific methodological task of “asking Indigeneity questions” comes from the article written by Gabriel Solis and Dena’ina musicologist Jessica Bissett Perea (2019), where the authors ask: “what happens to American music studies when you put Indigeneity at its center?”⁷⁴ Though in the spirit of calling a “canoe” a “canoe” I will specifically center Coast Salish ways of knowing sound and protocol in the analysis.

Redefining Music Studies in An Age of Change came about from a manifesto authored by the Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major, *Transforming Music Study From Its Foundations*. In the “Diversity” section of the manifesto, the authors gesture towards the “ethnocentric orientation of music studies” with the goal of rectifying the disproportionate investment in the European classical repertory by “[engaging] a cultural expanse that is as broad as possible.”⁷⁵ The approach to this, according to the authors of the manifesto, is to “[incorporate] capacities for assimilation and synthesis of diverse influences that nurture intimate connections, rather than a distanced fascination, with the rich diversity of the musical world.”⁷⁶ The problem seems to be simple — if the engagement with the classical European repertory is lopsided, and an intimate connection with diverse musics would create a more holistic “emergent

⁷⁴ Jessica Bissett Perea and Gabriel Solis, “Asking the Indigeneity Question of American Music Studies,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13, no. 4 (2019): 401–10, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196319000348>. 401.

⁷⁵ Ed Sarath et al., *Redefining Music Studies in an Age of Change: Creativity, Diversity, and Integration* (Routledge, 2017). 61.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

artistic voice⁷⁷,” then music studies should be indiscriminate in the “assimilation” of diverse influences.

Spoiler alert: it is not that simple.

How could we do music studies that both centers Indigeneity and is practiced on stolen land? These two ideas should be co-constitutive, as in, “just” centering Indigeneity is a shallow “incorporating” or “integrating” of Indigenous ways of knowing for the sake of “diversity” and the latter is just the current status quo. “Casting a wide net” to benefit just an individual (“the emergent artistic voice”) is a deeply colonizing impulse. It implies that all musics are ripe for the picking, that the engagement lives only within the sonic context of the works and not with the ways of knowing/being/doing of the communities that they come from. To be clear, I am not saying that the academy should not engage Indigenous music *at all*; there are plenty of examples of Indigenous-led and institutionally sanctioned engagements with Indigenous music in the academy.⁷⁸ The better question to ask is not how “diversity” makes us better individually, but how power is constitutive of relations in the academy itself already, and providing alternatives to colonial epistemologies can (and should) better serve the communities from which the sounded protocols/intellectual properties come from. This also includes the attunement to the idea that some music is *not meant for everyone*. This assumption that everyone could learn and know everything is white agnatology. To explain further, I will turn to Coast Salish protocols and how they should not be a part of an academic music program without meaningful, active and robust engagement with tribal peoples from the communities who are represented in the songs.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Perea’s powwow performance class is one such example. Another example is the University of Washington’s intertribal Canoe Family, čawaʔaltxʷ ʔiṣəd, “Shell House Family” in Lushootseed, the language spoken by interior Coast Salish tribes of the Salish Sea.

Coast Salish peoples have a protocol of sonic relations. This is reflected in the performance of song and dance during the Annual Tribal Canoe Journey, which is literally called “protocol.”⁷⁹ Songs are composed by individuals, yes, but for songs that are gifted to individuals, they are not to be taken into certain contexts without permission. That’s bad protocol. The permissions typically come from individuals themselves (the ones who gifted the songs) or from families of that individual (if they, for example, have passed on). That is not to say that no songs could (or should) ever be shared, but engaging Coast Salish song requires extra effort on behalf of the curious party about the music. This effort is seldom practiced by institutions that house stolen relatives across the United States for the ostensible investment in knowledge for “posterity” (in which case “human” is always politically constituted). Engaging Indigenous music in a protocol of right relations requires a fundamental shift in how music is engaged in general, a repatriation of land and life, a shift in context that uplifts Indigenous ways of knowing/being/doing.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Elements of Coast Salish Music Theory

“Tor, let’s go.” Was the phrase that shook me awake in my tent, pitched atop a small grassy hill in the small village known as La Push, Quileute Territory (Figure 2.1). La Push is a geographically close coastal neighbor to Taholah, so I could hear the roaring of the North Pacific in the dark of early morning. I zipped open my tent and was greeted by the chill of the humid coastal winds, which did not do much for my relative wakefulness. DeWayne, the culprit behind my sleep deprivation, walked with me towards the water. “You’re the thruster today, along with Rome.” I knew two things that morning: that it was my first time embarking on a pull in a cedar canoe, and that we were still a few stops along the peninsula to our destination at Squaxin Island, the host of that year’s Annual Tribal Canoe Journey. Somewhat sheepishly, I stepped into the back of F.D.’s canoe and sat next to Jerome, my co-thruster for the day. I remarked on the feeling of safety that came after everyone boarded and the vessel was balanced. Our skipper started singing, and we were off into open ocean.

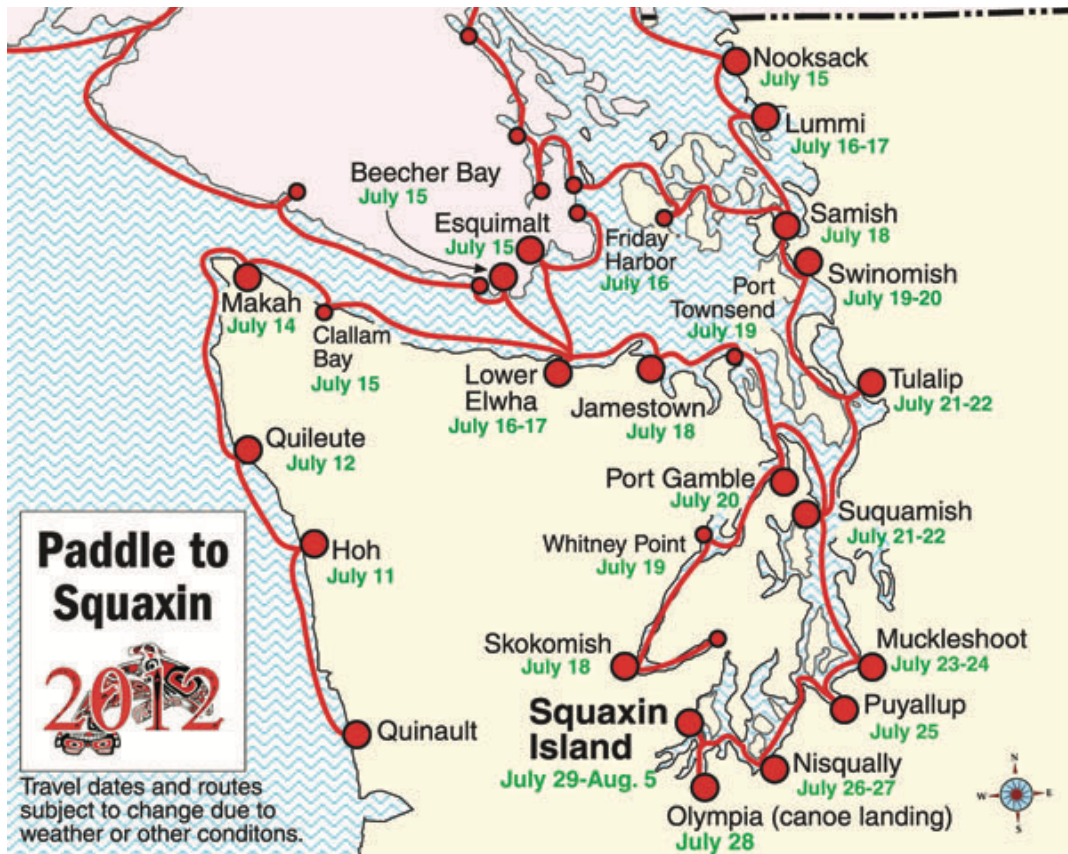


Figure 2.1 The Paddle to Squaxin map for lower Coast Salish territories. Waatch is barely south of Makah. Arwyn Rice, Peninsula Daily News, 2012.

A few hours and sore muscles later, we drifted across an expanse of ocean for a brief respite from the pull. We ate a few modest Wonder Bread sandwiches and baked in the summer sun that also reflected off of the open water. The expanse of ocean started to become populated by brown-green, bulbous, slimy beings, a few became many and then many became a forest. A kelp forest, to be precise. It was beautiful to behold — the contrasting blue-green of the water reflecting sky reflecting kelp, the way the bow of the canoe split parts of the forest in two as we passed by, and the shoreline, just off in the distance, unpopulated by humans but replete with driftwood, rocks, and tree relatives. The ocean does not see that kelp forest and its place within the water in any novel fashion, but it was my first time experiencing a kelp forest from that

distinctive point of view. The ocean, after all, has always had a way of keeping the processes of relating to kelp, to canoes, to Quinaults, well within its scope of recognition. Perhaps in response to the ocean's process of relating, or perhaps for the kelp, or perhaps for a multi-temporal connection to our Quinault ancestors, or perhaps just because it felt right, my fellow tribal member and owner of the canoe we inhabited, F.D., began to sing. Later on, I was exhausted but attentive to the shoreline of Waatch ("why-atch"), our destination which might be described as a "township" rather than a "village" or a "town", as it houses not much besides the Makah Tribal Administration building. Sitting in F.D.'s canoe, I waited as a microphone was passed between the multiple canoes we brought to shore, as each had the responsibility to ask permission to come ashore, a thousands year old protocol of relating between distinctive tribal nations. My cousin Titus was next, so he grabbed the microphone, threw on his best impression of a "Quinault man asking permission to come ashore" and he asked.

That day, I pulled 27 miles. I could have removed myself from the canoe in favor of the support boat, but I chose to remain boarded. If memory serves, it was not because I felt like I had something to prove, it just felt right to do the voyage in its entirety. What ended up making my arms so sore that I couldn't fall asleep in my tent was worth it in my mind; for the laughter, the joyful naivety of my first time pulling, and of course the songs. Later on F.D. would tell me that *his* song "came to him" on that pull.

For the rest of the Journey, I sat comfortably situated in the "ground crew," which was an array of community members that utilize the road to get from destination to destination.

Distinctive from the paddlers, yet equally as engaged in sound, much of the time in ground crew involved listening to music in the van. The family I traveled with was multigenerational and mostly male, so the music tastes were all over the map, if disproportionately masculine — hip-

hop/rap (A\$AP Rocky, Tech N9ne, Kendrick Lamar), Pacific Northwest Grunge (Alice In Chains, Nirvana, Soundgarden), 70s/80s Rock and Thrash Metal (AC/DC, Metallica, Iron Maiden), and Virtuoso guitar music (Steve Vai, Guthrie Govan, and Paul Gilbert). This eclectic soundtrack comprised our aural memory of the Journey itself. It accompanied us and it grated against our ears, it guided us and it supported the new ways that we were relating to each other as community members from Taholah and Quinault people more broadly. It also welcomed new relatives, upon hearing of the passing of the family dog Karma, Jerome ended up adopting a pit bull who he promptly named Blaze. Blaze has a golden coat and white spots that resembled the number “7” on his chest.

Our final destination was what is referred to as “Kamilche, WA”, Squaxin Territory. Squaxin Island Tribe was the host of the Journey, and their accommodations were plentiful. We enjoyed a spacious camping area with plenty of room to roam around. The Protocol tent was only a short walk away from our tents. Delicious food was available all throughout the day, including biscuits and gravy, scrambled eggs, sausage and bacon for breakfast, barbecued hot dogs and hamburgers with potato salad and baked beans for lunch, and for dinner it was salmon, of course, typically served with potatoes or rice, frybread, and some kind of vegetable. The bounty of food reflected the wealth of the Squaxin Island Nation. Indeed, Squaxin was colloquially known in our camp as a “rich tribe” mostly due to the success of their casino, Little Creek Casino Resort.

When it was our turn to perform at the protocol tent, we received a warm welcome from the MC of the day because the following year we would be hosting the Canoe Journey in Taholah. I was too shy to participate, so I stood in the bleachers while Quinault took the floor. As the men in the group started singing a paddle song, they carried in a cedar canoe with a bit

less than a dozen people on either side, hoisted onto their shoulders. They slowly made their way to the periphery of the floor, while Quinault women danced their way in with paddling motions. The men were mostly shirtless wearing basketball shorts, the de facto leg wear of the Rez. Though some men also wore vests made with the common materials of our regalia. Sparsely interspersed were men that wore “war paint,” cedar headbands, and cedar caps in the style so familiar to Coast Salish peoples of this area. The women wore these caps as well as regalia in dark blacks and reds, adorned with abalone and decorated with animal designs in formline. Accompanying their dance which resembled paddling in a canoe, the women carried paddles of various sizes, materials and colors. These paddles would be gifted to Elder attendees to commemorate the penultimate Journey before the 2013 Paddle to Quinault. As everyone slowly gathered onto the floor, they formed a circle. The women stayed on the perimeter while the men huddled into a drum circle. The canoe now sat in front of Squaxin Island Tribe’s council members because it would later be introduced not only as a gift from the Quinault Indian Nation to the Squaxin Island Tribe, but a piece of “artwork that [turned into] a living being.”⁸⁰

On Worldview

What I have just described to you is music theory. My Quinault ancestors, and more broadly the ancestors of Coast Salish peoples across the North Pacific learned and transmitted sounded processes that are necessarily multisensorial and embodied. In other words, the pull itself, the inter and intratribal community engagement, the practice of protocol, and relationships

⁸⁰ This is a quote from Quinault protocol during the Paddle to Squaxin, said by Shakey Jackson. *Quinault Protocol 1 of 2*, directed by Squaxin Tribe, 2013, 48:56, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVzOA0z7cRs>. 19:10.

to place are inextricable from the Canoe Journey's sonicity. While academic purveyors of this thing called "music theory" have normalized a materialist and objectifying eurological worldview of sonic "content," a "god trick"⁸¹ to separate the sonic from the humans and more-than-humans who sound it, the multisensorial embodied aspects of Coast Salish music theory exceed a cursory analysis of the harmonic, timbral, rhythmic, and structural characteristics of song. Song and sound create Quinault and Coast Salish worlds by composing relationships. They are created through movement in accompaniment and improvisation with our more-than-human relatives. Enacted through the pull, the literal traversal in a cedar canoe, Quinault song is a multitemporal process that oscillates circularly to the time of our Quinault ancestors, to our time now, and to our future generations. This resurgent aural praxis is not essentialized nor static, but an active process by which we utilize the voice of our ancestors and enact relationships to distinctive places in all of their density: the topographical, the hydrological, the organic, the material, and the metaphysical. Such is the way of knowing-being for Coast Salish peoples, for the Canoe Journey and the aural practices it engenders reflect an enduring thousands year old protocol.

My approach to "music theory" as it presents itself in Coast Salish ways of knowing sound is indebted to the work of Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million, who intervenes into the logics of theory in the realm of academia and the broader settler colonial institutions that uphold them. One provocation that she makes is that Indigenous storytelling is itself a form of theory, even if Indigenous stories might not be legitimized in the academy. She further contends that Indigenous peoples "have always had theories about their worlds and their lives and their

⁸¹ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988). 581.

communities, regardless of the disruption people suffered in confronting unprecedented change.”⁸² The opening narrative of this chapter about my experience during the 2012 Paddle to Squaxin is one such story. It is an invitation to engage with my first-person account of the Canoe Journey, which invokes the intersubjectivity and intimacy of knowing experiences with paddling in the canoe, witnessing Coast Salish methods of composition and protocol as a Quinault person. My intention for inviting this kind of engagement is to refuse a logic of analysis that purports to conduct an “objective” survey of information about a series of events and the people involved in them. I am one Quinault person among thousands of enrolled members and thousands more relatives that are nurtured outside of the politics of racialization, blood, and the anthropocentric. Simply put, I am not interested in studies “about” Coast Salish peoples. Rather, I hope to cultivate what Dena’ina musicologist Jessica Bissett Perea calls a “sonic Indigenous vernacular,” a radical and relational analytic that “keep[s] us receptive and responsible to our human and more-than-human kin.”⁸³ I do not aspire to a sonic Indigenous vernacular as a critique of music theory for critique’s sake. Rather, I deliberately choose to center Indigenous conceptions of sonic life in order to add depth and complexity to the theories and methodologies of Indigenous Sound and Music Studies, which are always imbricated with settler colonial forms of knowing sound and the institutions that manufacture, process and distribute them. Though Indigenous knowledge systems are never idly subsumed by colonizing forces. The gifts bestowed upon us by our ancestors and more-than-human relatives are simultaneously dynamic and indelible. For this analytic I turn to Million on theory once more:

⁸² Dian Million, “There Is a River In Me: Theory from Life,” in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014). 35.

⁸³ Jessica Bissett Perea, *Sound Relations: Native Ways of Doing Music History in Alaska* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). 244.

“Theories also realign felt imagination at the parameters of the way “things” are thought to be...[they] may “launch a counterinvestment.” This is not an act of accretion, but a strategic felt comprehension that has the power to change a paradigm, or reinvest a political movement with a new vision to act. This is the power of intense dreaming, of the felt intensification when boundaries shift and other views become available...I hold on then to the idea that theories are active felt-embodied narrative practices that inform mobile abstractions, traveling or migrating across certain kinds of seemingly reified knowledge domains, reorganizing boundaries as they go, claiming something—is something else. On that note, theory may also colonize.”⁸⁴

It is my responsibility as a Quinault musician scholar to attune to the sounded knowledge domains of Quinault, in particular, and Coast Salish sonic life more broadly. This attunement requires a reorientation of the aural focus and a deep listening to Quinault/Coast Salish/Indigenous lifeways, as they have existed in this part of the North Pacific since time immemorial. This listening, which makes more sense in *kwinaył*, is *kenaʔanəm*, “listening” that derives itself from Quinault/Coast Salish intelligence. Centering Quinault/Coast Salish sonic life continues the mobilization of this intelligence into theory, methodology, story, ethics, and values. Or, what Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson simply calls “brilliance.”⁸⁵ Simpson narrates her experience of being shown Nishnaabeg brilliance from Elders in her community, “They pulled me into an alternative Nishnaabeg world existing alongside the colonial reality I knew so well.”⁸⁶ The Annual Tribal Canoe Journey, for Quinault and Coast Salish peoples, is where we board a canoe and *pull* these worlds into being. This worldmaking process has every bit as much to do with the aural as it does the act of traversal; the songs and the canoes both *do* things. They create relations with other Indigenous communities. They set and push the boundaries of spiritual creative praxis. They articulate Indigenous Law

⁸⁴ Million (2014). 37.

⁸⁵ Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, Indigenous Americas (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). 15.

⁸⁶ Simpson (2018). 16.

and intellectual property. They outline our obligations to one another and to our more-than-human relatives. And, they map our material, spiritual, hydro- and topographical worlds through ceremony.

The work of translation necessarily displaces. The reality of settler colonial imposition on Indigenous communities, including the discourse communities who review academic literature, creates conditions through which this work is rendered insufficient for certain decolonizing praxes. I would prefer to be communicating to you, the reader, in *kwinaył tək* (the Quinault language), but our language revitalization program is in its infancy and there are no living fluent *kwinaył* speakers. However insufficient this work may be in some ways, its methodology is a motley of theory and praxis on decolonization/Indigeneity that pays attention to the density of Quinault/Coast Salish being, the logics underpinning settler colonialism and our ability to know/refuse them, and frameworks of resurgence that are always at play in Indigenous life.

“Play” is important to think through more extensively here, specifically as a mode of performance in Quinault/Coast Salish ways of knowing/being. I invoke “performance” as an Indigenous praxis whereby we both reflect *and* create Indigenous worlds. The Canoe Journey is eminently an ancestral practice, but there are many pitfalls when viewing the ancestral as static, anachronistic, and linear, as has been documented through settler logics of salvage ethnography and authenticity. Rather than viewing the Canoe Journey as an isolated event where we “perform” how our ancestors lived once a year and then go about our otherwise less ancestrally infused lives, I instead feel and hear the Canoe Journey as a continuation of our ancestors ardent hope, which is ontologically Indigenous and consisting of people trying to live on in the best ways they could.

Stephanie Nohelani Teves (Kanakan Maoli) asserts that performance “creates and sustains identities, rather than [searches] for a subject that existed prior to the performance...creating new subjectivities.” Working through J.E. Munoz (1999), Teves continues this definition outlining the capacity for performance to transform both artist and spectator, “enabling new possibilities which may transform social realities.”⁸⁷ This framework is useful for understanding how the Canoe Journey reflects our ancestors’ realities of hydrographic traversal, feasting, song and ceremony, articulates our continuation of those realities, and asserts our distinctive ways of activating Quinault/Coast Salish ways of knowing/being. These embraided processes do not endorse a “pure” and “authentic” Quinault/Coast Salish past and present, but rather they refract from the temporal containment operating under settler colonial logics. The Canoe Journey, as a way of knowing the world, being in the world, and creating our worlds, necessarily critiques the imposition of neoliberal capitalist political economies.

While it happens only “once a year”, the Canoe Journey disrupts conceptions of settler time by (re)mapping our relationships to sound, to each other and to our more-than-human relatives. In this sense, Canoe Journey is cartographic — it creates our social realities by mapping our relationships to our slice of the North Pacific. “(Re)mapping” as I use it here, follows Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman, who articulates the unsettling potential of (re)mapping as “the simultaneously metaphoric and material capacities of map making, to generate new possibilities.”⁸⁸ The cartographic relationship of the Canoe Journey is shaped

⁸⁷ Stephanie Nohelani Teves, “Indigeneity and Performance,” in *Routledge Handbook of Critical Indigenous Studies*, by Brendan Hokowhitu (editor) et al. (Routledge, 2020). 482.

⁸⁸ Mishuana R. Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013). 3.

through distinctively sonic practices.⁸⁹ In a simplistic sense, we traverse along the lands and waters of the Salish Sea in order to meet up and trade songs with each other. In Quinault/Coast Salish logics, this song traversal manifests in three distinctive arenas during the Canoe Journey: the canoe, the ground crew, and the protocol tent. Much like my experience traveling from La Push to Waatch to Kamilche, these three arenas deserve their own analysis.

The Canoe

Ocean-faring cedar canoes possess intelligence and spirit outside of their material structure and use cases. They are teachers, relatives, and accompanying instruments to the creation of Quinault/Coast Salish song. More than a mode of transportation, the relationships that are made through paddling an ocean-faring canoe are distinctively artistic, recalling Shakey Jackson's (Quinault) quote that the canoe gifted from Quinault to Squaxin in 2012 was "art that [became] a living being." Twenty three years prior to the Paddle to Squaxin, in the same Quileute territory where I had my first real pull, paddlers readied for their voyage to Seattle in what would be the genesis of the Canoe Journey.⁹⁰ The 1989 "Paddle to Seattle" marked the resurgence of the canoe journey, and thus the resurgence of the inextricability of life and art for Coast Salish peoples. Emmett Oliver, a Quinault tribal member, director of Washington State Indian Education, and organizer of the Washington State Centennial Commission advocated for

⁸⁹ For a more detailed analysis on Indigenous embodied practices as mapping spatial realities (specifically in a Kanaka Hawai'i context), see Renee Pualani Louis, *Kanaka Hawai'i Cartography: Hula, Navigation, and Oratory* (Oregon State University Press, 2017), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/56394/>. 1.

⁹⁰ "Tribal Canoes Participating in the Paddle to Seattle Arrive at Golden," accessed April 16, 2025, <https://www.historylink.org/file/20269>

the inclusion of ocean-faring canoes during the state centennial celebration. He embarked on an arduous bureaucratic process to revitalize the practice of carving ocean-faring canoes using old-growth cedar. With permission from the U.S. Forest Service under the 1978 Native American Religious Freedom Act, Emmett initiated what would become an annual practice by a multiplicity of tribes, from the Salish Sea to global Indigenous communities, including Aotearoa, Hawai'i and Central/South America. Importantly, it was not Emmett's advocacy alone — the Heiltsuk Nation skipper Frank Brown extended the invitation for Washington's tribes to Bella Bella for the 1993 Journey.⁹¹

What is striking about the story of the Canoe Journey's inception is Emmett Oliver and Frank Brown's (as extensions of Quinault and Heiltsuk Nations) refusal of colonial nation-state logics in favor of Indigenous conceptions of kinship and protocol. White settler histories of Washington State's relationship to cedar relatives, referred to as "timber," operate under the logics of opportunism, emerging technologies, harvest, decline and eventual regulation through environmentalist advocacy.⁹² These logics engender a eurological worldview that objectifies relationship between human beings and cedar trees, and perpetuates itself through entitlements to Indigenous land. This constitutes what Métis Scientist Max Liboiron succinctly describes as "bad relations" or in other words, "colonialism."⁹³ The advocacy of Emmett Oliver is a

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² Connie Y. Chiang and Michael Reese, "Evergreen State: Exploring the History of Washington State's Forests," Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, accessed April 16, 2025, <https://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Curriculum%20Packets/Evergreen%20State/Section%20II.html>.

⁹³ Max Liboiron, *Pollution Is Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021). 5.

Two important truths about being Quinault from Taholah are that 1. we grow up in a rainforest and 2. we have self-sufficient enterprises that include timber sales and harvest. I invoke Liboiron's definition of colonialism not to foreclose the possibility that Quinault peoples can perpetuate (and have perpetuated) colonial relations, but rather I privilege an analysis of the

“revitalization” not because it is simply a new instance of an old practice. The Paddle to Seattle’s significance lies in the ways it catalyzed a recursive activity of practices and relations. Since those first pulls in 1989, new generations were taught how to carve ocean faring canoes. Decades of intertribal gathering has been both spiritually potent and economically beneficial. Countless Coast Salish and international tribal communities have traded food, dance, and song.

In short, Emmett Oliver facilitated the creation of a *movement*. Not just in the sense of a social/political mobilization but a renewal of literal ocean-faring practices that have existed since time immemorial yet are shaped through our engagement with our ancestors, present communities and future generations. Selena Couture, thinking through Sara Ahmed, posits that “one of the methods of colonization was to create private property and mark [reservations] as the only places for authentic Indigeneity in order to make spaces through which Indigenous peoples could not move.”⁹⁴ The settler colonial logic of temporal fixity and enclosed/surveilled authenticity is not just metaphorical. Settler imposition initiated policies and procedures to control Coast Salish life through the establishment of the reservation system, which had grown from the federal government-to-government relationship and, specifically for Quinault, the Treaty of Olympia. The establishment of the reservation system thereafter placed borders (and thus limits) on what is considered “Quinault land” AND Quinault waters — the borders from which we are able to harvest fish, crab, and other seafood are also adjudicated. This system shifted the parameters of whom we get to decide is a relative. What was once a part of the North

density of structures that make up Quinault Indigeneity as they have existed as continual processes since time immemorial. For more analytics of Indigeneity/logics of settler colonialism see Maile Arvin, “Analytics of Indigeneity” in *Native Studies Keywords*, Teves et al. eds. (2015) and Andersen (2009).

⁹⁴ Selena Couture, *Against the Current and Into the Light: Performing history and land in Coast Salish territories and Vancouver’s Stanley Park*. McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019. 56.

Pacific that carried distinctions but was still a place of relation to other peoples and more-than-human relatives became what it looks like today, a tribal polity that decides its membership through constitutional governance, descendancy⁹⁵, and self-determination. This is part of why the practices/performances the Canoe Journey enacts needed to be revitalized in the first place. Attuning to Coast Salish music theory is an Indigenous praxis that has existed long before colonial structures. The Journey makes this audible through the relations between our distinctive tribal communities and the canoes themselves.

One of the hallmarks of being in the canoe is that we sing to endure the physical intensity of the pull. Paddling in a cedar canoe, even with a crew of ten or more people is intense work, as is evidenced by the vivid memory of my sore arms in Waatch in 2012. The songs are motivating certainly because of their rhythmic and timbral qualities — to match the loudness of the ocean we are paddling, paddle songs require a heavy use of the diaphragm to project each note in between strokes. But, even more importantly, paddle songs are discursive; not in the sense that we shape them through discourse, but rather our perspectives are a part of a collective organic, hydrographic, topographical, and temporal discussion. In other words, our voices are simply a

⁹⁵ It's important to note here that even just 3 years ago this would have said “blood quantum,” the policy that tribal enrollment is decided based on “percentage Indian blood” - which, while carrying a long and arduous discourse and critique, is still utilized by some tribes today to decide membership. Quinault changed the policy to “descendancy” in 2023. This is mostly celebrated as a win in Taholah, because blood quantum policy's telos is a nation unable to enroll new members due to thinning bloodlines through intermarriage. Descendancy, however, is still an imperfect solution because though it relies on familial ties (which makes sense, to “know who you are and who claims you”), it is determined by the Dawes rolls, where “Indian blood” was determined in a eugenicist colonial policy meant to establish legal supremacy and control over Indian populations. For more on this see Melissa L. Meyer, *American Indian Blood Quantum Requirements: Blood Is Thicker Than Family* in Valerie J. Matsumoto et al., eds., *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West* (University of California Press, 1999). 231-244 and Alexandra Harmon, “Tribal Enrollment Councils: Lessons on Law and Indian Identity,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2001): 175, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3650772>.

few of the many. Our ancestors, future generations, and more-than-human relatives are always in accompaniment. This exceeds the common ethnographical impulse to render our voices as “vocables” or “nonsense”⁹⁶ by making audible the radical and resurgent praxis of seafaring. Each pull, each note, each knot⁹⁷ sends us through time and space, where we connect with our relatives without the destination in mind, but the journey itself. This is a distinctively Indigenous epistemological understanding of the voice, which contrasts with Western and metaphysical traditions, which view the idea of the voice “as the guarantor of truth and self-presence, from which springs the familiar idea that the voice expresses self and identity and that agency consists in having a voice,” and that “sonic and material aspects of the voice are separable from and subordinate to its referential content or message.”⁹⁸

The Ground Crew

I originally titled this chapter *Elements of Coast Salish Musicking Theory*. My intention in invoking Christopher Small’s (1998) conception of “musicking”, that is a “musical doing” or in Small’s words, “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.”⁹⁹ Small’s verbification of “music” into “musicking” is subtle, but the capaciousness engendered by thinking of music as an “activity” rather than a “thing” is useful in myriad ways. A musical activity, as in a participatory act, evokes the

⁹⁶ See chapter 1.

⁹⁷ As in “nautical mile per hour.”

⁹⁸ Weidman, Amanda in *Keywords in Sound*. Novak, David, and Matt Sakakeeny, eds. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2015. 233.

⁹⁹ Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown, CT. 06459, Wesleyan University Press.

collective “DJ’ing” between what feels like the whole village of Taholah at my mom’s house during a party just as much as say, the long hours of practice a cellist puts in before a symphony show. The politics laden between these two musical acts matters, as Small would contend,

“[To] ask “What is the meaning of music?” is to ask a question that has no possible answer. Scholars of Western music seem to have sensed rather than understood that this is so; but rather than directing their attention to the activity we call music, whose meanings have to be grasped in time as it flies and cannot be fixed on paper, they have quietly carried out a process of elision by means of which the word *music* becomes equated with “works of music in the Western tradition.” (emphasis in original)

In conjunction with my commitment to Indigenous-led, Indigeneity-centered theorizing, I turn attention to the seemingly innocuous relationships articulated on the Canoe Journey during the “ground crew” - a serious term for what constitutes the much more modest goal of simply following the paddlers from each location and transporting the camping supplies. The density of practices that animate the ground crew betray its seeming innocuity. I use the term density as it is theorized by Chris Andersen (Métis) through Robin D.G. Kelley:

“The temporal and epistemological complexity of our relationships with whitestream society means that Indigenous studies must counter hegemonic representations of Indigeneity which marginalise or altogether ignore our density. Following the footsteps of Geonpul scholar [Aileen] Moreton-Robinson’s pathbreaking work, I argue that Indigenous studies’ study of both Indigeneity and whiteness must use *all* available epistemologies, not just those which apparently distance Western disciplines from Indigenous studies analysis.”¹⁰⁰ (emphasis in original)

I use density to reflect the generosity that Andersen shares with Kelley, an intellectual call for capaciousness and interdisciplinarity in contexts where the futurity of settler colonial operations of subjugation necessitate theoretically constraining us to the discourse of racialization. This is not to repudiate entirely the effect that these discourses have had on present-day tribal membership, which includes our sovereign right to decide who is and is not “Quinault”, but to

¹⁰⁰ Chris Andersen, “Critical Indigenous Studies: From Difference to Density,” *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2009), <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/csrj/issue/view/154>. 82.

attune to the ways that we practice and inculcate Indigenous praxis as an analytic of statehood, cartography, sound and intertribalism. In the ground crew, while traveling across (mostly) what is referred to as the “Washington State Peninsula,” these dimensions give presence and meaning to our listening practices.

In 2012, when we were on our way from campground to campground with the final stop being Kamilche, our playlist was very hip-hop heavy. While I wouldn’t place myself within the cadre of hip-hop artists/enthusiasts, it makes a lot of sense that it would be popular on the rez. Hip-hop has become synonymous enough with the experience of growing up in the village that it inspires deep affection and occasionally resignation; although most acknowledge and appreciate the investment in anti-establishment music, some are critical of the ways that hip-hop is potentially (mis)appropriated in the reservation context. The perception seems to be that reservation life is fundamentally different to Black experiences in the city, which leads some to believe that we are participating in a form of cultural appropriation by engaging a distinctively Black art form without being in active relation with those communities. A phenomenon that’s closer to home is that, at least in my generation, aspiring hip-hop artists are mocked for this seeming disconnect between experiences, articulating the sentiment that “we don’t need another Soundcloud rapper, we need Tribal leadership.” I am quite disappointed that this latter form of self-enclosure is why I do not have a specific artist from Taholah whose music I can demonstrate for this section. However, the capaciousness of musicking allows for us to take a deeper listen to these perceptions and reveal the density laden within them. In other words, musicking allows us to see *listening itself* as a way of being in relation to hip-hop as an artistic practice. Attuning to the density of listening practice, the perceived (mis)appropriation of hip-hop music has a tenuous correlation to the reality at best. We are not passive bystanders to the ways that music cultures

are developed and disseminated. Rather, we each have our own experiences engaging any art form as a way of shifting the parameters of our ontologies and epistemologies. While I am not claiming that the preconceived notions about engaging hip-hop from the rez are completely unfounded and never true, the attunement to listening as practice says specific things about how songs travel and move through us. Attempting to encapsulate a particular musical experience along such strict boundaries of critique encloses the dynamism of listening practice, which consequently encloses the emergent properties of identity formation and every day expressive practices shape them. In the words of musicologist David Samuels, “Traditions are not simply handed from one generation to the next. Part of their enduring power comes from the possibility for their strategic reinvention in order to speak strongly in new social and political contexts.”¹⁰¹

During the Paddle to Squaxin 2012, my time was mostly spent on ground crew with the family whose home is across the street from where I grew up. They had a turquoise Toyota Sienna that transported us from destination to destination. Ground crew was delightfully low-impact work; most of the time was spent setting up camp and generally visiting with each other and other campers/people from each reservation community we camped at. On the road the A\$AP Rocky album *LIVE.LOVE.A\$AP* (2011) pretty much lived in the van’s CD player, which matched the general rap/hip-hop heavy atmosphere, interspersed with some grunge-era artists such as Alice in Chains, Nirvana, and Soundgarden. These sounds had embedded themselves so deeply into the musical lexicon of the group, all Quinaults from Taholah, that it was almost as synonymous of a musical engagement as the Journey itself was. Writing on the ways that popular song’s materiality enables the production of “hybrids under very different historical and political

¹⁰¹ David William Samuels, *Putting a Song on Top of It: Expression and Identity on the San Carlos Apache Reservation* (The University of Arizona Press, 2004). 5.

circumstances”¹⁰² specifically between European romanticism and Hispanic nineteenth-century nationalism, Ana María Ochoa-Gautier names five factors: 1. the capacity for mobility 2. the heightened orality of poetry with the aurality of music 3. the malleability of song into other kinds of media, such as movies or CDs 4. the adaptation to temporal changes, i.e. how songs can be brought into temporal contexts while eliciting another temporal period and 5. the ways that songs are affective.¹⁰³ While the ground crew has little to do with European romanticism or Hispanic nineteenth-century nationalism, the hybrids produced according to Ochoa-Gautier’s analysis might instead be the socially and historically mediated engagements with hip-hop and grunge music in the village of Taholah encountering the historically and socially mediated forms of Quinaltness, which aside from being imbricated with the settler colonial politics of travel in a place that is now called “Washington State” are given a particular potency by the fact that we were essentially enacting Quinalt music theory while engaging these other kinds of musicking.

The Protocol Tent

We name what we’re doing upfront.

Each year of the Canoe Journey has a specific host tribe as the final destination for all paddlers. Upon arrival to the host community, after asking for permission to come ashore, paddlers and community members perform embodied and sounded practices commonly known as “protocol.” The sharing of creative praxis is both the responsibility and the celebration. Tribes that pull the farthest typically go first in protocol, but of course not before feasting, sorely needed

¹⁰² Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*, Sign, Storage, Transmission (Duke University Press, 2014). 80.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

after paddling a few dozen miles in an ocean faring canoe. Each host tribe is responsible for providing food and spaces to camp for the influx of tribal peoples, predominantly from communities on the coast of the Washington State Peninsula, the Salish Sea, and Vancouver Island – but more recently, Indigenous peoples from international tribal communities have joined as well. Host tribes take part in the practice of gift-giving, not only in the form of performance but also material gifts that are meant to demonstrate wealth and reciprocity. Hosting the Canoe Journey is a multi-million-dollar event; after all, dozens of canoes and their motorboat safety crews make their way to the shore, along with the families of paddlers making their way via road.

In 2012, when we arrived to Kamilche and set up camp, the next activity (after grabbing some barbecued hamburgers, hotdogs and of course salmon and rice) was to gather in the protocol tent. Walking in, we could see a wash of red and black,¹⁰⁴ faces of people who look like this and that someone from the village, and the frantic, sibilant fanning of paper dinner plates, a futile counter to the sweltering heat of the tent from the summer and the bodies. The community that traveled the farthest claimed their spot at the top of the easel pad in the corner of the tent, crossed off one by one as each community completed their performance. Arriving at the destination and engaging protocol is a ceremony, a protocol of relations between diverse Coast Salish communities, a requirement to dance and to sing our distinctive worlds into being. If paddling in the canoe and camping traces the points between nodes in a constellation, protocol is what gives us the ability to sense its shape. It is common during protocol for the representative from each Nation to name and cite the songs that are being performed. This is not simply a way

¹⁰⁴ Mainly because it's the primary colors of our regalia, but also because it's people's favorite colors to wear.

of orienting the listener to the context of the song, it is an articulation of the origin of the song, which typically comes from an individual and a specific community. For example, one might say that “this song was gifted to me by (x name) and it comes from Quinault.” Another word for this articulation is intellectual property. Another word for that is Law. Coast Salish relationships to place, and the claims that come with that relational accountability/responsibility are activated by the songs and dances. In the context of the protocol tent, “paddle songs” or “salmon songs” or songs of gratitude reinscribe themselves from being done in “a” community to being witnessed among many. This difference is assuredly subtle, but when accounting for the ways that those songs are animated by the more-than-human, the witnessing of our relations to that multiplicity of kinship ties takes on a strategic and theoretical meaning — we are not *from* a place, we are *of* a place. This recognition *by* the lands and waters of the North Pacific *through* the viewership of those in the protocol tent is animated by this witnessing. It is a distinctive way of mapping place in these waters that has existed long before the logocentric confines of “litigation” and “adjudication” as they are known in the courts of colonizers. The important distinction to make between Coast Salish and settler law is that we do not simply articulate the principle and let it be. Instead, the law itself is *performed* in the act of ceremony for all to witness. This is a lived structure of aural memory; witnessing encompasses the information that demands one’s attention for the later transmission of knowledge. In utilizing the voices and practices of our ancestors whether the sound utterances are in our languages or English, witnessing is also animated by the ways that the knowledge is felt, voiced, and transmitted.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Such is the witnessing process that Stó:lō scholar of music Dylan Robinson calls “feeling beyond fact.” See Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, Indigenous Americas (University of Minnesota Press, 2020). 52-53.

The “performance” of law through the ceremonial embodied praxis of protocol finds valence in its remixing of temporalities; we are enacting a thousands year old practice, with the ardent promise of extending that practice to future generations (such is the trope that tribal communities wax poetic about “the Elders and the youth”)¹⁰⁶. In performing *law*, we are extending that law, that rite of relationality towards future generations with the insistence of our relationships with our ancestors. In highlighting the productive tension between a “doing” and a thing “done,” Diana Taylor signals the distinctively embodied transmission of knowledge through performance:

“[P]erformance also works across time in intriguing and powerful ways. Instead of the once, the act that bursts on the scene only to vanish, we can also think of performance as an ongoing repertoire of gestures and behaviors that get reenacted or reactivated again and again, often without us being aware of them. If we learn and communicate through performed, embodied practice, it’s because the acts repeat themselves. We recognize a dance as a dance, even when the moves and rhythms change. In this sense, then, performance is about past, present, and future.”¹⁰⁷

The practice of protocol is eminently about past, present and future. Our repertoire is both the physical and sounded acts that we perform and the ever-present relationalities that are less about the facticity of how performances are *seen* and more about how they are *done* – they are animated by our commitments to each other and our more-than-human relatives that have existed and will exist despite the attempted erasure of our Indigeneity.

Conclusion: Sound Healing

Academic discourse on the Tribal Canoe Journey remarks on its healing potential and its ability to “revive culture.” In terms of healing, the “canoe revival” has “come into open

¹⁰⁶ *I’m* allowed to make fun of us.

¹⁰⁷ Diana Taylor, *Performance* (Duke University Press, 2016). 10.

competition with gang culture that has penetrated several reservations.”¹⁰⁸ Johansen also points to the Journey’s potential to engender sobriety among canoe paddlers. While I can attest to the results of these theories (with the exception of the “gang culture”) simply by discussing the experiences with my Coast Salish relatives, I am skeptical of these frameworks for the ways that they focus on the neoliberal “therapeutic framework” of Indigenous healing.¹⁰⁹ To examine the source of my skepticism, I turn to Million’s critical analysis of the tension between our positioning in the neoliberal politics of trauma and healing and our decidedly *real* continuation of practices that are based on thousands of years of living a relational-spiritual Indigenous ethic:

“Healing as community health and revitalization is an experiment — with uneven results. Native peoples participate in programs to holistically envision their nations. They do so utilizing a bevy of self-practices that are indicative of the particular form of governance particular to neoliberal ethopolitics. They also imagine and act on their own Indigenous spiritual and communal practices that mitigate the medico-moral affective valences that form neoliberal subjects... [But] we are also continuously assailed by the ongoing damages that are wreaked by racism, gender violence, political powerlessness, and the continuing breakdown of our affective networks, our communities, and our families.”¹¹⁰

While gang culture and substance misuse may be legitimate concerns of tribal nations, prescribing “culture” as a means of addressing it without critiquing the underlying structures of settler colonialism that may lead to those behaviors has questionable efficacy; we live with those structures every day of our lives, and the Tribal Canoe Journey only lasts a summer. On the subject of “reviving culture,” I am suspicious of the ways in which the Tribal Journey has been represented as a decolonizing practice because it has been practiced before colonization.¹¹¹ I

¹⁰⁸ Johansen, Bruce. “Canoe Journeys and Cultural Revival.” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 36, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 134.

¹⁰⁹ Million, Dian. *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 20.

¹¹¹ Daehnke, Jon D. “A Heritage of Reciprocity.” *The Public Historian* 41, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 64–77.

would put pressure on this notion by entertaining Patrick Wolfe’s famous metaphor that settler colonialism is a “structure, not an event,”¹¹² but with a twist – if settler colonialism is a structure, and the Tribal Canoe Journey is an event, how do we make the Canoe Journey and its array of practices a structure? To begin, we need to resist the impulse to forward ancestral knowledge systems as the sole method by which we decolonize. Robert Warrior (Osage) recognizes this in his foundational text *Tribal Secrets*. He asserts that we must “critically [read] our own tradition, [which] allows us to see some of the mistakes of the past as we analyze the problems of the present.”¹¹³ Following Warrior’s call for critical thought, I would forward a reorientation away from canoe “revival” toward the canoe (and the other aspects of the Journey) as a resurgent aural praxis. This is not to say that the Journey is *only* about the aural. But, situating the aural as an Indigenous resurgent praxis 1. reorients the parameters of what the aural *has always done* in the context of the Journey and 2. enables novel ways of attuning to conceptual frameworks not necessarily seen/felt/heard as associated with the aural, thereby de-centering the ocularcentrism of the settler colonial episteme. The former is what makes up the elements of Coast Salish music theory, and for the rest of this conclusion I will attune to the latter by highlighting three works in Indigenous Sound and Music Studies that exemplify compelling ways of “bringing us back to sound.”¹¹⁴

The first example I want to highlight is Dena’ina musicologist Jessica Bissett Perea’s conceptualization of “Indigelogics.” Bissett Perea articulates Indigelogics as “aesthetics and sonic vernaculars [that] center kinship and space, and thus stylistic developments by Native

¹¹² Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387–409.

¹¹³ Warrior, Robert Allen. *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, 2.

¹¹⁴ Jennifer Foerster (Mvskoke), personal communication. 2022.

American musicians over time are the product of real-time improvisations in space.”¹¹⁵

“Indigelogical” is a riff on George Lewis’ articulation of Afrological and eurological ways of engaging the aesthetics and values in music, specifically the stylistic developments by African American musicians as real time improvisations in the midst of the “neoliberal insistence on being free from memory or willful ignorance of the past.”¹¹⁶ The addition of space/place lends a distinctively Indigenous logic, which Bissett Perea follows from Vine Deloria Jr.’s assertion that Indigenous worldviews center space while Western worldviews center time/temporalities.¹¹⁷ This is not to say that Indigenous logics *do not* concern time/temporality, but rather that the epistemological orientation to space is centered in the improvisations of Indigenous musical and aesthetic praxis. Indigelogics are how we make music in accompaniment with our ancestors and future generations as well as our more-than-human relatives. In short, the songs that we make during the Journey are instantiated through the processes we participate in: paddling in the canoe, visiting at the camp grounds, witnessing protocol. My interest in Indigelogics is to build off the onto-epistemological orientation Indigenous musicking and the practical potential of improvisation and accompaniment as specific actions of Indigenous musicality. This opens a speculative potential of Indigelogics, a “Native way of doing music futures.” This speculative practice harnesses what Cortiel, Hanke, Hutta and Milburn refer to as “Affirmative speculation,” or the “habits and practices opening towards a future that is not only uncertain, but radically contingent: a future that is not turned into an extension of the present, but that bears the promise

¹¹⁵ Perea, Jessica Bissett. 2021. *Sound Relations: Native Ways of Doing Music History in Alaska*. New York: Oxford University Press. 259.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

of genuine novelty and difference in relation to what can presently be known and predicated.”¹¹⁸

In this way, Indigenous musicking can be employed to imagine just futures for Indigenous peoples outside of settler colonial onto-epistemological formations.

The next example I want to highlight is Trevor Reed’s (Hopi) conceptualization of Yeewa (Collaborative Creativity) as Methodology, outlined in his contribution to the edited volume *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Research Methodologies*. Reed’s principal argument is that “collaborative creativity opens up generative spaces where creators, performers, and audiences are required to confront, negotiate, and often act together through media that may be ontologically diverse, potentially doing transformative work within intersecting political, social, and environmental networks.”¹¹⁹ A professor of Law, a musicologist, and a trained composer, Reed’s work is interested primarily in the nature of ownership of “intangible cultural expressions like Indigenous songs.”¹²⁰ Introducing readers to the Hopi soundscape, Reed describes his work with Hopi yeewa Clark Tenakhongva in their bidirectional project of musicking (both in a Hopi way and ‘traditional’ composition) and legal research to assert Hopi sovereignty through creative praxis. A part of Reed’s work with Tenakhongva was witnessing the actors, both human and more-than-human, in Hopi territory. This led to Reed’s realization of the embeddedness of creativity in Hopi articulations of territorial sovereignty and relationality. Through musicking, Hopis are able to “make things happen,” that is, they create meaning, catalyze environmental

¹¹⁸ Cortiel, Jeanne, Christine Hanke, Jan Simon Hutta, and Colin Milburn, eds. 2020. *Practices of Speculation: Modeling, Embodiment, Figuration*. Edition Kulturwissenschaft, volume 202. Bielefeld: Transcript.

¹¹⁹ Trevor Reed, “Yeewa (Collaborative Creativity) as Methodology,” in *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Research Methodologies: Local Solutions and Global Opportunities*, ed. Elizabeth Sumida Huaman and Nathan D. Martin 2020. 204.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

change, or assert territorial authority.¹²¹ This bidirectional learning between Reed and the Hopi yeewa demonstrates what to Reed is a central proposition of Indigenous Sound and Music Studies: "...sound is a domain of Indigenous knowledge and relationality, not simply an object through which knowledge is derived or through which meaning is generated."¹²² Reed's work is exemplary in showing how the Indigelogics of Hopi musicking has created generative, transtemporal and onto-epistemologically diverse conditions for engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems. By engaging the transtemporal act of Hopi song making, Tenakhongva and Reed sounded Indigenous practices that have existed since time immemorial. Distinctly landed in its focus, the Yeewa as methodology approach created space for intersectional transformational work that is steeped in Hopi musicality. In a Quinault context, musicking or collaborative creativity as methodology could create the conditions for self-determining creative praxis and remixing musical styles alongside what, for example, we listened to in the ground crew and what is heard and shared as "Quinault song."¹²³

The last example I want to highlight works along the intersections between Indigenous Sound and Music Studies and Critical Improvisation Studies. Specifically, I want to turn to John-Carlos Perea's analysis of Indigenous activist histories, specifically the proposition that improvisation in those histories is "a way of being in the world¹²⁴." Perea implies a musicality to the seemingly "extramusical" practice of Indigenous activism. Critical Improvisation Studies scholars Fischlin, Heble, and Lipsitz posit that improvisation is more than an artistic conceit, but

¹²¹ Ibid. 223.

¹²² Ibid. 210.

¹²³ This is a somewhat selfish proposition, since I have a vested interest in guitar-based and heavy music. But, another character in this story, my friend DeWayne, has told me for years that he wants to integrate Quinault song into metal compositions, so I guess it isn't that selfish.

¹²⁴ Perea, John-Carlos, and Jacob E. Perea. 2019. "Unexpectedness: 'What the Music Could Be' - Revisiting the Unexpectedness of Jim Pepper." *Kalfou* 6 (1). 89.

rather “the creation and development of new, unexpected, and productive co-creative relations among people.”¹²⁵ Viewed in this way, improvisation is less about the instantiation of ‘newness’ in music than it is about the relationality between people and ideas. Considering the positioning of music in Indigenous knowledge systems, improvisation becomes productive of relations to people, ideas *and* place. The dialogue between Indigenous Studies and Critical Improvisation Studies reinscribes the ‘extramusical’ by exemplifying sounded and musical engagements with issues that are important to Indigenous life. In writing about the legacy of Kaw and Mvskoke jazz saxophonist Jim Pepper in conjunction with the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz Island by Indians of All Tribes, John-Carlos Perea demonstrates that Jim Pepper was not only groundbreaking because of “who he was when he was but also who he is and who he can become as we continue to discuss and learn from and about him.”¹²⁶ This move is intentionally imbricated with Lipsitz’s concept of improvisation as articulating what “the music could be” but applying it to a seemingly ‘extramusical’ context – the classroom and the Indians of All Tribes occupation. In other words, Jim Pepper’s legacy is both not limited to his musical legacy and bound with it. The ways that we speak, write, listen and learn about Jim Pepper emanate from the pages of Perea’s article, and are constantly engaged in a process of knowledge transmission that reach anyone who reads Perea’s work, learns about, or importantly, listens to Jim Pepper himself. The way that Perea chooses to illustrate this concept is by interviewing his father, Dr. Jacob E. Perea, about the occupation, which Dr. Jacob E. Perea was involved with at the time. John-Carlos Perea inquires about the role of improvisation in the strikes that led to the

¹²⁵ Fischlin, Daniel, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz. 2013. *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Improvisation, Rights, and the Ethics of Cocreation*. Improvisation, Community, and Social Practice. Durham: Duke University Press.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 95.

occupation. Dr. Jacob E. Perea simply states that “In every moment it was an improvisation.”]¹²⁷ Following Philip Deloria’s concept of “expectation” and “anomaly,”¹²⁸ the Pereas arrive at the idea that specific power dynamics beget specific types of improvisations – for Indigenous activists of the time, they had to adapt to an unjust world and create visions of a new world at the same time. This practice was distinctly improvisatory and laden with musicality.

While the conversation between the Pereas and Jim Pepper’s legacy reveals the musicality of Indigenous histories, there are still many generative conceptualizations in conversations between Critical Improvisation Studies and Indigenous Studies. One particularly useful concept is Lipsitz and Tomlinson’s incorporation of empathy within musical accompaniment. To Lipsitz and Tomlinson, accompaniment is a “commitment based on a cultivated capacity for making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them.”¹²⁹ While their analysis is steeped in the musical traditions of jazz music, the authors’ implicit assertion is that there are no strict boundaries between what we consider musical accompaniment and empathy as it is practiced by individuals and collectives. This theory of accompaniment is particularly useful in its potential for mobilizing some theories in Indigenous Studies into practice. Taking for granted the shared experience of settler colonialism, we can create space utilizing accompaniment’s potential for Indigenous resurgence through radical empathy. By mobilizing onto-epistemological practices of Indigenous musicking in accompaniment with one another, we exercise a creative praxis that has existed since time immemorial. Furthermore, Indigenous musicking in accompaniment with other Indigenous

¹²⁷ Ibid. 102.

¹²⁸ See Deloria (2004).

¹²⁹ Tomlinson, Barbara, and George Lipsitz. 2019. *Insubordinate Spaces: Improvisation and Accompaniment for Social Justice*. Insubordinate Spaces. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

nations has pre-existed conceptions of tribal nations as a polity, the false dichotomy between urban and reservation communities, and nation-state borderlands. Thus, creative practice through musicking can be a way of expressing diverse Indigenous worldviews outside of neoliberal settler state politics. This practice is something that we have done, something that we are currently doing, and something that we will always do.

The year following the Paddle to Squaxin 2012 was the 2013 Paddle to Quinault. The Quinault Indian Nation administration¹³⁰ had remodeled what was historically a small United States military structure, Pt. Grenville. To prepare for the hundreds of canoes and campers, the Tribe cleared away the remnants of the military structure to make space for our relatives coming in from all across the North Pacific. In addition, the Tribe commissioned the carving of a totem pole and the construction of a canoe shed, with the main use case being a revitalization of canoe carving practices. The plans for accommodating all of the people is a logistical challenge that costs millions of dollars, but while the work is difficult, it is worth the investment for the relations that it creates and the ways that it gives weight to our thousands year old practice of ceremony. That year, I volunteered to drive the shuttles between the gravel parking lot and the protocol tent. While I don't remember the tribal affiliation of the youth that I drove on the first day, I'll always remember how one of them said to me "you're like, a cool guy." Later on, while watching Swinomish perform in the protocol tent, my college friend (now a Swinomish councilmember), saw me in the bleachers from the dance floor. The upcoming song was an invitational, so she made me move (reluctantly) from my bleacher seat to the floor for a

¹³⁰ I will be referring to the administration as "the Tribe" from this point on, it's the colloquial term that we use in Taholah to talk about the QIN administration. "I got a job at the Tribe" is an example.

friendship dance. Despite my reluctance, I knew that the proper protocol is that you can never refuse a dance at a jam (or in protocol). To do so would be a bit like calling a “canoe” a “boat,”¹³¹ an utterance that would emphatically demand punishment.

These quotidian acts of relating to one another reflect a way of knowing/being/doing that exceeds recorded time. While the imposition of structures of settler colonialism have indeed shifted the ways that we communicate and relate to each other, the preeminent relationality between each other, our more-than-human relatives, and our auralities especially as they are animated through being in or near the water, in or near the canoe, is our gift from our ancestors to be transferred lovingly to future generations. These are the things we write songs about.

¹³¹ See chapter 1.

Chapter 3: čınt kwı? kena?nəm KEXP: A Critical Indigenous Internet Study of KEXP In-Studio Sessions

I would be lying if I told you that I didn't spend too much time planning an outfit. In late Fall 2024, I was about to leave my apartment in North Beacon Hill to host my first ever in-studio session with the anticolonial doom metal band Divide and Dissolve at KEXP, Seattle's nonprofit, music focused radio station. I decided that if I am going to be on KEXP's YouTube channel that I must (1) learn how to introduce myself in kwınaył tək - the proper name for the Quinault language; and (2) highlight a Native clothing brand. So, I chose my one-of-one sage-colored crewneck with a formline graffiti design by HstryMkrs (pronounced "history makers"), based in Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish territories commonly known as "Vancouver, British Columbia." I am particularly fond of this crewneck not just because green is my color, but because it is the only one of its kind. HstryMkrs posted the crewneck in an ad on Instagram for a limited time, and since I happened to be looking at my phone when it was posted, I was the first one on their website to purchase the garment, which features the art of Haılzaqv (Heiltsuk) Nation artist K.C. Hall¹³². As a clothing brand, HstryMkrs is known for designs showcasing the persistence of Coast Salish peoples in the midst of Canada's settler colonial project. The spirit of this ethic is precisely what I wanted to broadcast to KEXP's subscribers on YouTube, such that maybe the humble crewneck chose me. Either way my outfit was decided and I set out to catch the bus to KEXP.

I was hired at KEXP, along with Kevin Sur (Kanaka Maoli), to host the Global Indigenous Radio Show, *Sounds of Survivance* in July 2023. A veritable giant of Pacific Northwest public media, boasting (at the time of this writing) 3.6 million subscribers on

¹³² https://www.instagram.com/kc_hall_art/?hl=en

YouTube, broadcasting to hundreds of thousands of radio receivers across Duwamish/Suquamish territories (what we now call “Seattle”) at 90.3FM and recently acquiring a radio tower in Huichin and Yelamu, Ohlone territory more broadly, at 92.7FM (in what we now call the “San Francisco Bay Area.”) KEXP has also cultivated a global listenership through the internet at kexp.org. Situated in Seattle’s Queen Anne neighborhood, my commute to the radio station follows the entire route of the King County Metro 8 bus line, from Mount Baker Station in Seattle’s Southend¹³³ to Seattle Center. The Seattle Center campus contains some of Seattle’s most iconic cultural milieu, including the Pacific Science Center and the Space Needle. The radio station has garnered its own iconicity within the cultural milieu of Seattle and the Pacific Northwest more broadly. KEXP started as a humble college radio station, KCMU, named for its placement in the Communications Building at the University of Washington, and has grown into a globally renowned radio station due to its importance in getting that “Seattle Sound” to the airwaves. The co-founders of SubPop Records, Jonathan Poneman and Bruce Pavitt, along with the Soundgarden guitarist Kim Thayil, have roots at KCMU.¹³⁴ And, there’s a famous story that Kurt Cobain (of arguably the most influential grunge band of all time, Nirvana) sent the band’s

¹³³ I capitalize “Southend” here out of respect for the peoples that have shaped this part of the city. With some of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country, Seattle’s Southend contains the lives and livelihood of a multiplicity of BIPOC communities, who are both contributors to Seattle’s vibrant music scene and culture more broadly but also those most affected by gentrification wrought by Seattle’s ongoing tech boom. While it is true that every neighborhood in this city benefits from the dispossession of Coast Salish peoples (Duwamish/Suquamish specifically), I am as much a kwinaył guest in Duwamish/Suquamish homelands as I am a guest in the Southend. The capitalization signals the density of relations that have shaped this part of Seattle, centering the relationalities between racialized peoples existing within structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy. (insert statistics or something else to point to these dynamics as a source)

¹³⁴ <https://magazine.washington.edu/feature/uw-had-a-big-role-in-sparking-the-seattle-sound/>

demo “Love Buzz” to the station, where it initially didn’t receive airplay until Kurt called the station to put in a request at a gas station payphone.¹³⁵

Sounds of Survivance owes its existence to the advocacy of Seattle-born Ethiopian-American hip-hop artist and former KEXP DJ Gabriel Teodros. As the story goes, Gabriel was leaving Daybreak Star Indian Cultural center on Indigenous Peoples’ Day one year and decided to dedicate his entire set to playing Indigenous music. This was unheard of at KEXP, which has a majority white audience and an administrative demographic that inevitably perpetuates the same mechanisms of erasure that push Indigenous music to the periphery. Gabriel’s advocacy represented an intertribal defiance of that erasure, which stands as a continuance of Seattle’s Indigenous activist histories - the takeover of Fort Lawton (which led to the construction of Daybreak Star), the establishment of the American Indian Women’s Service League, and the coalition to change Seattle’s “Columbus Day” to “Indigenous People’ Day” in the first place. In a cosmic stroke of synchronicity, Gabriel’s home neighborhood happens to be Beacon Hill in the Southend which aside from being the neighborhood where I start my commute to KEXP, has become so important to my roots in this city as a kwíṇaył visitor of interior Coast Salish homelands.

Booking Divide and Dissolve for my first in-studio session did not follow the same protocol as many of the artists who secure in-studio sessions at KEXP. Typically, record labels will send in requests to our video team on behalf of the artists, mostly when they are arriving in Seattle to play shows. Other methods include working with KEXP’s estimated 45 DJs and its 2 Music Directors, who are the main folks responsible for shaping the sound of the station. For this

¹³⁵ <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/music/how-to-build-your-bands-brand-upstream-workshop-aims-to-help-emerging-artists/>

session, I reached out to Takiaya Reed (Black/Cherokee), the guitarist for Divide and Dissolve herself, on Instagram after seeing that the band would be in town for a show that Fall. After a few email exchanges with our video team, the date was set and we were scheduled for a video shoot.

Knowing that I was going to make my YouTube debut, I joined a video call with my sister, a former language apprentice for the Quinault Indian Nation language program. A true language apprentice at heart, my sister requested that we do a video call so she could teach me the proper pronunciation of the words in kwinaył tək. Our mini-lesson followed a call and response, whereby my sister would have me pronounce part of the introduction and then would either respond with “ee?” the kwinaył tək affirmative, or she would have me repeat the introduction. The full version of the introduction with English translation reads:

siokwıl gwalci tamıW čınt kwı? kena?nəm KEXP. hınc DJ Tory J kwinaył sləgwəlmiš tul' štaχola čınt kwinaył kal. hınc ko?olo nuggwamci əl nis yəχuč čınt siokwıl nəl kena?anəm.

Thank you for welcoming me on Duwamish land, and you're listening to KEXP. I'm DJ Tory J, a Quinault tribal member from Taholah on the Mouth of the Quinault River. I'm happy to speak to you today and thank you for listening.

A longer version of the introduction includes the naming of my parents and grandparents - a common method of demonstrating the peoples and places we belong to in both Coast Salish territories and many other places in Indian Country. But, knowing that the videos are focusing on the music, and thus our administrators at KEXP press us for time in our interviews, I decided that just introducing myself was sufficient. Interestingly, “tamıW” does not directly translate to “Duwamish land” - the actual phrase is “here,” as in “in this place.” My sister's explanation of

this, coming also directly from our language department, was that being welcomed “here” in what is *de facto* “Duwamish land” is already always self-evident, particularly in kwinaył tək. After all, my ancestors walked the same earth where KEXP sits, and while there is no written record of the last time kwinaył tək was spoken in those lands, I know in my heart-mind that kwinaył tək was among the many Coast Salish/Indigenous languages that were spoken in the area pre-contact.

When I arrived at the station on the day I would host Divide and Dissolve, I ordered a 20oz drip coffee and the 50mg CBD “mixer” to go along with it. Somewhere between the injection of stimulants and the counter-intuitively relaxing dose of CBD would be the place I would stop being such a nervous wreck. As the recording time grew closer, I introduced myself to Takiaya, and gave her a copy of my “one-sheet” or the notes for the session along with the questions I would be asking (Figure 3.1). Just before start time, I went into the KEXP live room’s control booth, where the editors have access to state of the art mixing hardware and software. Peering through the soundproof window, I saw Takiaya plug into her quadruple (!!)

stack HiWatt amplifier. Sufficiently blown away by the sheer power of wattage, I took my seat in the live room, did a quick mic check, and waited for Takiaya to pick up her saxophone.

- Sylvie is not in the band anymore as of 2022
- *Gas Lit* and *Systemic* are produced by Ruban Nielson of *Unknown Mortal Orchestra*

Setlist:

1. Monolithic (new album)
2. Provenance (new album?)
3. Indignation (Systemic)
4. Derail (Systemic)

Questions:

1. Those last two songs were from your album *Systemic*, which, in your words "examines the systems that intrinsically bind us and calls for a system that facilitates life for everyone." These themes are familiar for those who know your catalogue. How would you describe the role of sound and music in both the examination of oppressive systems and the generation of structures outside of oppression?
2. Speaking of themes in your own words, I often read your statements verbatim for my show, *Sounds of Survivance*, because I think they encapsulate how I feel through and engage Indigenous music past, present and future. You have also said that ironically, you don't listen to a lot of heavy music, and that the music of Divide and Dissolve comes from moments of being in relation to others, as well as more-than-human beings like water, foliage, etc. I think you've found the perfect word for that process - dreaming - can you attempt to describe what the process of dreaming feels, looks, and sounds like? (connect to BBES: It's a process that reminds me a lot of Black Belt Eagle Scout, the band fronted by Katherine Paul, the Swinomish tribal member.)
3. I loooooove your music videos! They are not only well-fitting for the music, but they elicit their own mix of feelings, concepts, themes, and responses. Who is involved in the process of making those videos, and what is the process like?
4. "The first two songs, Monolithic and Provenance, were on your new album (album title)" What can fans of your music and new fans alike come to expect from (album title)? What else do you have in store for us (that you're able to talk about?)

Figure 3.1 Divide and Dissolve in-studio one-sheet. 2024.

For this next part I would like to ask for your participation. Open your internet browser of choice, go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and in the search bar type "Divide and Dissolve." After subscribing to the Divide and Dissolve channel (if you are logged into your Google/YouTube account), click on

the video titled “Divide and Dissolve - Full Performance (Live on KEXP).” Take some time to listen to parts of the session and focus on what you see, hear, imagine, and feel during the performance and interview. Notice the timbral qualities of the instruments and voices, how they are sculpted and mastered to maintain a quality standard of clarity and aural separation. If possible, drink a large cup of coffee infused with at least 50mg of CBD to put yourself in my shoes.

This chapter critically examines the situated/embodied performance of Indigenous music, music spectatorship, auralities of Indigenous song, and how they all relate to this thing called “the internet.” Specifically, I take an Indigeneity-centered approach to examining the aural, digital, and technoscientific aspects of being *kwinaył s̓əgwəlm̓iš* and hosting artists from Odanak First Nations (Abenaki), Cherokee, Siksika, Haida, and Tlingit nations on dispossessed Coast Salish lands with the specific intention to record a musical performance and post it to KEXP’s YouTube channel. The three artists for whom I have been given the opportunity to interview are the doom metal duo Divide and Dissolve, the indie-rock band Deerlady, and the funk/jazz big band *Khu.éex’*. Each artist represents a density of Indigenous ways of being/doing and carries their own distinctive place- and relationally-based knowledge systems. To represent the sonic density and relational ethics of each artist, I am dividing the frameworks of analysis through three major themes that shaped the conversations in each video/interview with each respective artist. These themes are dreams as praxis for the Divide and Dissolve session, generative refusals for the Deerlady session and sounding Indigenous forms of riffing and desire-based ironic play in the *Khu.éex’* session. The video formula for a KEXP in-studio session follows the following format: an introduction in *kwinaył tək*, a musical performance of typically four or five songs, and then an interview with the artists who wish to speak for the band. My

responses will emphasize the music in the videos as well as some of the topics of discussion for the interviews.

Why Critical Indigenous Internet Studies?

The ostensible innocuity of sending a DM on Instagram, taking a language lesson via video call, filming/recording video and audio for the purposes of uploading to a YouTube channel, and querying a search engine to find those uploads shape a nexus of exchange between our embodied/multisensorial experiences and the networked relations of the internet. In the words of feminist digital media studies scholar Taina Bucher these “programmed forms of sociality” are not inconsequential, but “mediated, augmented, produced and governed by networked systems powered by software and algorithms.”¹³⁶ To Bucher, these networked systems carry their own kind of embodiment, an “ensemble of strategies, where power is immanent to the field of action and situation in question.” Following Michel Foucault, Bucher continues to assert that “...power helps to produce certain forms of acting and knowing, ultimately pointing to the need for examining power through the kinds of encounters and orientations algorithmic systems seem to be generative of.”¹³⁷ These encounters and orientations appear at all points of the network: from the technologies that shape information systems, the data centers that exist physically in landed and water-based infrastructures, the human embodied experiences of utilizing peripherals and seeing/hearing/feeling through information on the screen, and the socio-political and historical contexts that shape the ways we conceptualize all of these dimensions.

¹³⁶ Taina Bucher, *If...Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). 3.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

It is from the relationships between these dimensions where the theory and methodology of this chapter emerges. The notion of a “critical Indigenous internet study” is given weight by the interdisciplinary exchange between science and technology studies, critical internet studies, and of course Indigenous studies. While the foci of these studies tend towards the criticality of examining the structures of oppression/power/privilege/colonization (a method that is both compelling and necessary), this chapter aims to contribute to studies that center and uplift Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. The analysis of how power manifests in networked systems will shape the history and context of my analysis, but the central focus will be the ways Indigenous peoples exercise self-determination despite power exercised through coloniality and mechanized through logics of containment, measurement, authenticity, extraction and dispossession.¹³⁸ Recalling the encounters and orientations suggested by algorithmic systems in an Indigenous context, my work at KEXP might be described as “intervening in the process of signing up for in-studio sessions by DM’ing Indigenous artists,” “learning a thousands year old language via zoom conference with a kwinaył relative,” or “sharing a musical experience/recording of a kwinaył person in relation to Indigenous artists/music/sound/video.” While these encounters are always imbricated with the politics of networked systems, and thus with the place-based/embodied/multisensorial politics of land dispossession, racialization, and coloniality, my work at KEXP and the work of the Native artists that I am in relation to is not passive but *disruptive* of the structures of power that engender networked systems. In other words, the structures of Indigeneity that we continue through the time of our ancestors and future

¹³⁸ For a more detailed analysis of settler colonial/racialized politics of sound and music, see Bissett Perea (2021). A preeminent discussion on the politics of authenticity can be found in Teves (2018). A compelling study of the development of network systems co-constituting projects of Indigenous dispossession can be found in Duarte (2017).

generations are not subsumed by their context within a networked system that was not built for Indigenous expressive praxis. Rather, the modes of being in relation to one another in intertribal and multisensorial/embodied contexts exceed the media by which they are produced, consumed, and disseminated.

The focus on sound and music specifically follows critical Indigenous research methods that situate experiences of settler colonialism as embodied and felt. To put it simply, sound *does things* - it reaches the “places the words can’t reach¹³⁹,” it travels across temporalities to create relationships with our ancestors and future generations, it sets the terms by which we determine our self-interests in audiation, and it gives sound to our survivance - or the survival and resistance to structures of settler colonialism. The sound and music represented as structures of *Indigeneity* follow non-essentialist principles of density, refusal and generation. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson puts it aptly: “I don’t experience a division between “tribal” and “new.” I don’t just renounce. I refuse and I continue to generate. Tools do not necessarily define process, and while we have added “new” tools for storytelling within our embedded practices, we can also remain rooted in our deeper philosophical and aesthetic understandings to generate meaning. There is no hybrid.”¹⁴⁰ The nexus of data, instruments, recording gear, amplifiers, screens, phones, servers, routers, WiFi, etc. are prostheses by which we do not capitulate to settler ways of being/knowing/doing, but give form to our presence and persistence as Indigenous peoples.

¹³⁹ Joy Harjo in Gabriela Raquel Rios, “We’ll Get There With Music:” Sonic Literacies, Rhetorics of Alliance, and Decolonial Healing in Joy Harjo’s *Winding Through the Milky Way*, from *Indigenous Pop* (University of Arizona Press, 2016), 113

¹⁴⁰ Simpson, Leanne. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. Indigenous Americas. Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, 196.

This work has a two-pronged approach: to add complexity to Indigenous studies discourse about the internet/networked systems and to contribute Indigenous-led and Indigeneity-centered analyses to critical internet studies. As is true in all studies that I conduct, the peoples/places/projects that shape this work are articulated in intersubjective relation to my positionality as a *kwinaył s̓əgwəlm̓iš*. Fitting for a study of networked relations, the networks that shaped me involve those seemingly benign elements described in the introduction section of this chapter. On the surface level this includes the neighborhoods, bus routes, clothing choices, caffeine, CBD, my smart phone and research laptop. Far less obvious and arguably much less benign include metaphysical dimensions, including the place- and water-based relations that permeate Quinault life, the human relationships that are cultivated through the process of intertribal kinmaking, and the ethics that inform my relationship to unceded Duwamish/Suquamish territories. From these foundations springs the analytical toolkit that shapes the contours of this work.

A plethora of critical studies examining networked systems, the internet, capital, and colonialism precede and give shape to this work. Particularly salient works examine political economies, structures of racialization and colonality and network systems, including surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019), data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias 2019), race as a technology/the “new Jim Code” (Benjamin 2019), and the programmed forms of sociality cited from Bucher earlier (2018). These studies are useful for understanding the politically mediated aspects of networked technologies, where end-users’ data are rendered raw materials, race and colonality are programmed to perpetuate structures of inequity and dispossession, and that it all happens in quotidian fashion via what has become our inexorable relationship to our mobile devices. Indigenous peoples, as in any discourse, have not stayed silent (or disconnected) to

these issues. The works by Indigenous peoples on technology deserve their own discussion, so I will turn to them here.

This work aims to contribute to Indigenous protocols of relating to networked systems specifically and technoscience more broadly. Two seminal works in this area are the roots from which this analysis has grown, *A Yupiaq Worldview* by Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (Yup'ik) and *Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace* by Loretta Todd (Cree/Métis). The former text is a guidebook on community-based learning infused with distinctively Yupiaq philosophies. It foregrounds its aim as an educational guide under the conditions of Yupiaq life after “the incursion of Western society.”¹⁴¹ Though instead of creating a binary “before/after” or “either/or” analysis of Yupiaq life, it postulates genuine possibilities for Yupiaq continuance both amidst settler incursions and *among* the philosophies and worldviews wrought by colonization. This latter point is particularly useful for understanding how Indigenous knowledge systems can add depth to technoscientific projects (and thus networked relations). Kawagley’s word for this is “soft technology” - a method of developing technologies that “[tempers] Western technology and [uses] it as a tool for adaptation to local culture and ecology.”¹⁴² While the terms of engaging KEXP’s YouTube channel are set by the radio station (and not the Indigenous artists represented) and mediated through the network infrastructures in the physical and digital spheres of YouTube’s internet space, the topics of conversation discussed in the videos and our immanent relationality as Indigenous peoples could give rise to new possibilities when it comes to sharing Indigenous music and arts with the world. *Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace* contrasts with Kawagley’s view considerably, it is more of a philosophical treatise on the

¹⁴¹ Oscar A. Kawagley. *A Yupiaq Worldview: A Pathway to Ecology and Spirit*. 2nd, Originally published in 1995. ed. Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, Inc., 2006. 1.

¹⁴² *ibid.* 92.

potential *incompatibilities* between certain ontologies of cyberspace and necessarily landed and embodied Indigenous ways of being. Todd describes a cyberspace that "...[duplicates] what already exists - with virtual malls, as constructed by the world of commerce, and virtual museums, as constructed by the academy, or virtual arcades, as constructed by the entertainment industry" that, as Todd reminds us, started its construction through the "western military."¹⁴³ The prescience of this version of cyberspace is palpable, given the overtaking of the internet by corporations such as Amazon, Alphabet, Meta, and Apple, as well as the proliferation of internet-based media streaming services.

These two approaches to Indigenous thought vis-à-vis technology form two ends of the spectrum of works that have come into being since. In the past few decades since these texts were authored, other Indigenous (and Indigenous-allied/anti-colonial) scholars have placed themselves along the spectrum between disaggregate/decolonize/deconstruct and reaggregate/Indigenize/generate in discourses on technology. Such a dialectic is familiar to those in the field of Indigenous Studies, as this same approach animates an interactive distinction between decolonizing and Indigenizing projects. I would say that I err towards Kawagley's position; I would rather see Indigenous futures where technology is reappropriated, remixed, regenerated, and representative of our self-determination.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps I owe my own loyalty to the potentialities of utilizing technology in this way to my upbringing - when forming my earliest memories I had the fortune of having a tech-loving tinkerer of a father and a DSL internet

¹⁴³ Loretta Todd. "Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace." in *Immersed in technology: art and virtual environments*. Moser, Mary Anne, and Douglas MacLeod, eds. A Leonardo book. Cambridge, Mass. London: MIT, 1997. 180.

¹⁴⁴ For more of a discussion on reappropriating technology, see Ron Eglash, ed. *Appropriating Technology: Vernacular Science and Social Power*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

connection. Or perhaps, following Gender and Sexuality Studies scholars Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, I view each fortunate rez kid, each Indigenous artist, each decolonial end-user as contributors to “dissident technological imaginaries” that “explore the possibilities of technology to break from historically sedimented dynamics of freedom and unfreedom woven into the fabric of technological modernity.”¹⁴⁵ The dissident technological imaginary that I forward here is distinctively musical. Amidst Todd’s claim that space and time in virtual environments are “no more than 1s and 0s organized in front of our eyes.”¹⁴⁶ I argue that the ways that sound is mediated through technology/networked systems transduces affective practices of Indigeneity that are necessarily anti-colonial, such are the “sounds” in our “survivance.”

Another two-pronged approach to critical Indigenous network studies that animates this work is Marisa Duarte’s (Yaqui) *Network Sovereignty*, which aside from being localized toolkit for understanding Indigenous communities’ relationships to information and communication technologies (ICTs), lends a distinctively Yoeme reading of Actor Network Theory, though I would be careful to emphasize her method of “Indigenous reading” of Science and Technology Studies discourse:

“Though actor network theory finds its origin in a very different genealogy of ideas than do Native and Indigenous concepts of relationality, reciprocity, and reverie, it is because of my own attentiveness to moments of inspiration and reverie - a Yaqui (Yoeme) attentiveness to the blossoming and unfolding that occur when worlds, *aniam*, come together - that I breathed an Indigenous reading into actor network theory.”¹⁴⁷ (emphasis in original)

¹⁴⁵ Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robots, and the Politics of Technological Futures, Perverse Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019). 23.

¹⁴⁶ Todd (1999). 191.

¹⁴⁷ Marisa Elena Duarte, *Network Sovereignty: Building the Internet across Indian Country, Indigenous Confluences* (University of Washington Press, 2017). 4n.

Attending to the assemblages of networked systems in tandem with structures of Indigeneity requires an acknowledgement of the knowledge systems we carry as they are informed by distinctive peoples, places and projects. While I am not purporting to be well-versed in the knowledge systems of the peoples and places represented in this work, specifically Odanak (Abenaki), Cherokee, and Siksika, Tlingit, and Haida, the methodological orientation of this work produces knowledge through my positionality as a *kwinaył sɛgwɛlmɪʃ* in relation to these peoples, while simultaneously examining our relations to the digital sphere and the Coast Salish territories for which the musical performances were recorded. The capaciousness of Duarte's method is evident in her use of the term "Indigenous reading" rather than singularly Yaqui. In a later chapter, Duarte explains this further using the concept of "network thinking" - not only in the sense of thinking through networked systems in their technical and material capacities but in their socio-historical imaginaries.¹⁴⁸ Such historical imaginaries are co-constitutive of the material and technical histories. Duarte points specifically to the ways that development in communications technologies gave rise to the colonial practices of subjugating land and the Indigenous peoples of those lands, but with the important theoretical orientation towards our precedent methods of networked thinking and our utilization of networked systems to mobilize Indigenous praxis.¹⁴⁹

If Duarte's *Network Sovereignty* outlines the ways in which we utilize networked systems as an Indigenous praxis, Abdilla et al.'s position paper *Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence* places Indigenous theory into the *creation* of networked systems. The position paper

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.* 9.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* 11-12, 18.

explores the theoretical valence of *Indigenous protocols* in what seems to come directly from Kawagley's philosophy:

"...we are concerned that Western rationalist epistemologies out of which AI is being developed are too limited in their range of imagination, frameworks, and language to effectively engage alone with the new ontologies created by future generations of computational systems. If we insist on thinking about these systems only through a Western techno-utilitarian lens, we will not fully grasp what they are and could be."

Abdilla and colleagues' intervention into the discourse of AI carries renewed importance due to the proliferation of generative AI systems manifesting in a variety of technological spheres.

While the implications of this proliferation merits its own study, particularly about the environmental impacts of AI, the ethics of AI in writing and plagiarism, and the adherence of tech companies to an array of physical and coded practices to accommodate these new technologies, the principles of the position paper are helpful for understanding the possibilities of developing technological/networked systems expansively under Indigenous protocols, while refusing to foreclose the possibilities of Indigenous self-determination in the construction of these systems.

Before the invention of networked systems like we know them today, Coast Salish people's predominant networked systems were the waters that connected us. (insert write-up on servers and end-users and canoes and water names and all that). Now that we understand the roots and routes of understanding networked systems as they exist in Indigenous thought, our next paddling destination will be the digital sphere of KEXP's YouTube channel and the Indigenous performances that give breadth to that library.

On Dreams and Doom Metal: Divide and Dissolve



Figure 3.3 The author with Sage Paden (left) and Takiaya Reed (right) of Divide and Dissolve.
KEXP/Brady Harvey. 2024.

“Divide and Dissolve's music is an acknowledgement of the dispossession that occurs due to colonial violence, it honours ancestors, opposes white supremacy and calls for [I]ndigenous sovereignty. Strapped with thunderstorms of crashing cymbals, crunchy feedback, stomach-churning riffs and neo-classical inflections, the new collection delves into the idea of freedom through impermanence and destruction vs compassion, an urgent call to imagine a better world before it's too late. Listen to it, digest it, and become insatiable.”¹⁵⁰

The live on KEXP version of *Provenance* by Divide and Dissolve (stylized as D//D) begins in Takiaya's signature compositional fashion - she layers saxophone melodies running through the signal chain into a looper pedal and a pitch shifter, which allows for a creating an almost synth-like soundscape across a wide frequency spectrum. The pitch shifting and looping technologies that Takiaya uses for D//D are digital signal processors encased in floor units that

¹⁵⁰ “Divide and Dissolve - Insatiable,” Bella Union, <https://bellaunion.com/products/divide-and-dissolve-insatiable>.

are operable via foot switches. The initial frequencies start from the body - the saxophone is a wind/breath instrument and the pitches are manipulated and shifted (in an analog sense) by pressing the keys of the instrument to cover and uncover different tone holes, which produces different sound frequencies. This analog signal coming from Takiaya's body through the saxophone are then captured by a Shure SM57 microphone that is connected to Takiaya's pedalboard and that frequency is converted to a digital signal that outputs through the amplifier (and in the case of the video, KEXP's mixing board, audio interface, and other recording peripherals). Pitch shifting as an effect has evolved quite significantly in tandem with digital technologies; what was at one point the physical manipulation of reel-to-reel magnetic tape recorders (as in, audio engineers would literally speed up and slow down the tape)¹⁵¹ has led to some famous (and infamous) use cases, including the advent of "auto-tune" vocals, and in more dramatically, composing entire songs on a guitar with varied pitch shifting that would be impossible to play live without utilizing a Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) device output.¹⁵² Takiaya's approach is sophisticated in its simplicity. Starting with a harmonic minor melody in E flat that shoots up a fifth to B flat and hangs on to the note, Takiaya has her first loop. Then, she accompanies the initial melody with a polyrhythmic combination of a quickly oscillating arpeggio and the aforementioned pitch shifted saxophone line accentuating the slower melody, endowing it with a feeling (to my ears) of being submerged in water. At this point Takiaya has her soundscape, which accompanies the programmed red lights in KEXP's live room with its staccato polyphony. But this is only one half of the D//D sound. In the video,

¹⁵¹ "A Brief History of Pitch Correction in Music," <https://www.izotope.com/en/learn/a-brief-history-of-pitch-correction-in-music>.

¹⁵² One of the most creative examples of this use case is in the music of Swedish progressive metal band vildhjarta, whose 2025 album + *där skogen sjunger under evighetens granar* + uses MIDI pitch shifting in almost every track (see the intro to the track + *sargasso* +)

Takiaya sets down her alto saxophone altogether in order to pick up her Fender Telecaster, which she notably plays “upside down,” what is meant to be a right-handed guitar she plays left-handed. Patiently situating herself and letting the loop fill the room, Takiaya takes her HiWatt off of standby mode and rolls up the volume knob on her guitar, signals to the drummer, Sage Paden (a session/live drummer and not a permanent band member of D//D) and a wall of guitar distortion rumbles the entire room.

What comes next is the signature Divide and Dissolve sound. The label the band is signed with, Bella Union’s description of “stomach churning riffs and neo-classical inflections” is quite apt. Sage takes a minimalist approach to the drum kit, mainly utilizing his wide crash cymbals and hitting the snare with an intensity matched by Takiaya’s refrigerator-sized speaker stack. The rest of the song follows a collection of three droning guitar riffs, two of which are two diatonic chord tones to contrast the third riff, which descends in the same harmonic minor key that colored the saxophone intro. Characteristic of “doom metal,” the song’s tempo betrays the staccato rhythms of the arpeggiated saxophone parts, emphasizing length and contributing to the feelings of dread brought on by the heaviness of the riff. To illustrate the responses to the full video performance, I will turn to the beacon of veracity and scientific method, the YouTube comments section (Figure 3.3).

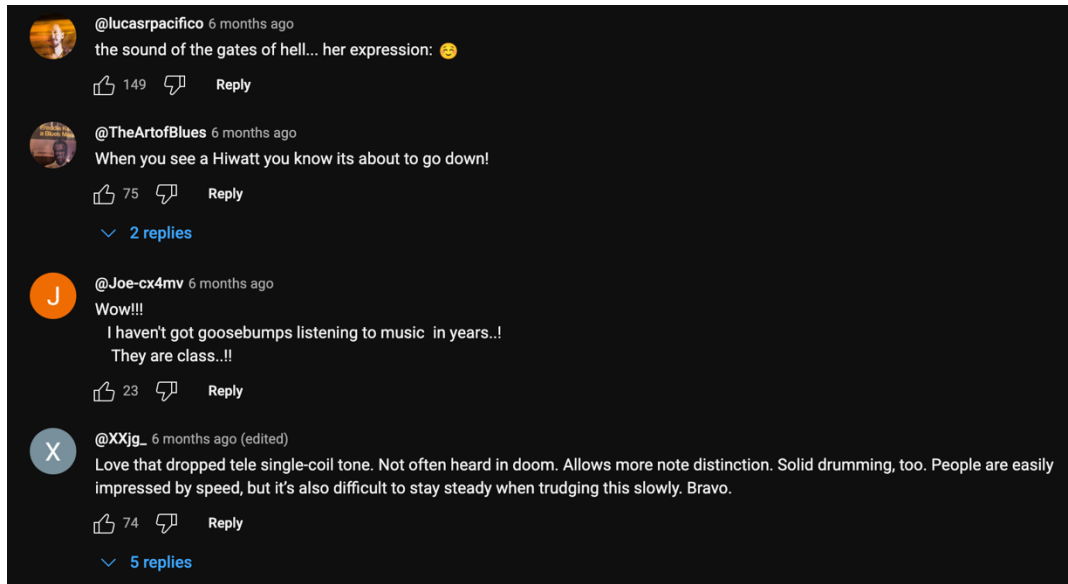


Figure 3.4 Positive reception to the Divide and Dissolve in-studio session. YouTube comments, KEXP. 2024.

A particularly important element to this session was the discussion that Takiaya and I had about dreams. Before the session started, when I gave Takiaya my one-sheet, we talked a little bit about dreaming and how that relates to Indigenous knowledge systems, specifically through the work of Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million. In her article *Intense Dreaming*, (2011) Million offers a somewhat simple yet elegant proposition for Indigenous peoples: “What is our particular experience?”¹⁵³ The analysis of this question that Million conducts emphasizes the interrelated experiences of critical thinking, theorizing, narrative, and dreaming as being not mutually exclusive. Meaning making for Indigenous peoples is always imbricated with politics of coloniality but not constitutive of politics alone. We come from places and peoples and relations with more-than-human relatives, that are informed by our imaginative experiences just as much as they are informed by the material realities of, in Million’s words, “[touching] fire.”

¹⁵³ Dian Million, “Intense Dreaming: Theories, Narratives, and Our Search for Home,” *American Indian Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2011): 313, <https://doi.org/10.5250/amerindiquar.35.3.0313>. 314.

The distinction here is that being burned is an experience that is collectively and individually mediated.¹⁵⁴ Those collective and individual experiences are given form by our relations; to each other, to our homelands/waters and to our more-than-human relatives. Before we get into my question and Takiaya's response about dreaming, I would like to quote Million's article at length:

"I hope that this conversation has been suggestive and works as a source of varied meanings (rather than its momentary reception in terms of this or that message), that it aids in perception (rather than any accumulation of knowledge). I seek to honor and have allegiance to holism, to all my relations (rather than compartmentalization). I hope for my reaching for knowing to have interpretive power."¹⁵⁵

Million's conversation, a work of theory, stands to contribute to a multiplicity of ways in which Indigenous peoples *have always* dreamt up Indigenous worlds. The plurality of our experiences are not meant to be contained, but to contribute to an always already present valence of Indigenous knowledge. It is a project that is not meant to ever be "finished" in the similar sense of playing an instrument. This is how I view my guitar playing, but also how I view the interviews for the KEXP YouTube channel. The interview is an improvisatory act that seeks, like Million, to honor the relations between me as a kwinaył sɔ́gwəlmɨ́š sitting in a room whose earth recognizes Duwamish/Suquamish relatives, while activating a dreamed/felt process of music making with artists that we host at the station.

So, after D//D's set in the live room, at some point¹⁵⁶ I ask, "...can you attempt to describe what the process of dreaming looks, feels, and sounds like to you?" Here is Takiaya's answer transcribed:

"That process is so wonderful to experience. [But] oftentimes I will be having a dream. Sometimes it's quite literal - I will wake up out of my sleep because I've heard a whole entire

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 315.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 331.

¹⁵⁶ 21:47 in the video, if you'd like to follow along.

song and I will sing it into my, my phone and be like “OK, this is a song” [laughs] and a couple of these songs that y’all heard were songs from my dreams. And they were just written, immediately. And I, I don’t know it’s just been happening to me since I’d been a kid. Or, sometimes this other thing would happen when I was in band and I would not practice a song, but in my dreams I would learn the song, and then I’d wake up and I’d know how to play it. [But] I feel deeply connected to my dream world and the earth, and the songs that I hear, and I’m always just like, “OK, cool, I need to honor this.” I know it’s like, really hard to get up, it’s three thirty in the morning and I haven’t slept that much, but I need to write this down because it felt so clear. And I always try to honor my dreams but especially when I have like, extremely clear communication about what I’ve just like, heard in them.”¹⁵⁷

Takiaya’s relation to dreams is inextricable from the music. Those dreams are guided by the ethic that the band embodies through their words as well as their sounds. In another part of the interview, I say that I often read Takiaya’s words verbatim on *Sounds of Survivance*, the epigraph of this section consists of one such statement, describing D//D’s music “[as} an acknowledgement of the dispossession that occurs due to colonial violence, it honours ancestors, opposes white supremacy and calls for [I]ndigenous sovereignty.” Bringing these ideas to sound does not necessarily require lyrical content, as Divide and Dissolve is an instrumental band.¹⁵⁸

The ways that these ethics are brought to sound are, as Million would say, “strategic comprehension[s].” A verb, a doing. Indigenous artists, by recognizing the relationality between us along with the places and spaces that shape the more-than-human world, are able to create anti-colonial works not through an essentialist racialized discourse but through *activating Indigenous presence*. In the interview, I make correlations between Takiaya’s process and the ways that songs “come to” people in Quinault/Coast Salish logics of song-making.

¹⁵⁷ *Divide and Dissolve - Full Performance (Live on KEXP)*, directed by KEXP, 2025, 31:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmmIS3UQa1E>, 21:53.

¹⁵⁸ A common trope for those who are not attuned to ancestrally-tuned music is that “if the songs are spiritual, then how does [God] know what you’re saying?” Because the songs do not have “words” per se, the trope is that they are thus uncommunicative. This trope misses the investment in process and relationality that goes into the act of *doing* song as the communication towards multitemporal relations. This could be also true for Divide and Dissolve’s music, even though it also does not have words.

The ideas outlining the Divide and Dissolve album *Insatiable*, unsurprisingly, came to Takiaya in a dream as well. For the last question in the video, I asked Takiaya what fans of Divide and Dissolve can expect from the album:

“*Insatiable* is, well, first of all I think about the word “Insatiable” and I think about how the colonial project has... it is insatiable. It will continue to commit genocide and continue to rape and murder us as much as it possibly can. That is unable to be satiated. But, on the other side which is my focus, is the love that is required in order to overcome these systems that feel so impossible. But then if you have love and hope you can remember what your ancestors were going through, and how things have changed because of the perseverance involved and how their desire for you to have a better life, even if it’s not in their lifetime was available in their hearts and how so many amazing things have happened. And that is the point of the album. That is insatiable, the love is insatiable and the strength that comes from that. And when you feel like there is not any hope anymore, finding the remnants of that because the strength from that is also insatiable.”¹⁵⁹

The bidirectional process that Takiaya gestures to here, that the insatiability of the colonial project should incite us to attend to the insatiability of love and desire in our ancestor’s time to now, mirrors Million’s investment in Yellowknives Dene political theorist Glen Coulthard’s notion of “transformational praxis.” Speaking on Coulthard’s analysis of the incommensurability between political recognition and liberation (as argued by Charles Taylor (1992) in an Indigenous context (specifically First Nations in what we now call Canada), Million calls for us to recognize our power in these relations: “I see the multiplicity of effects and affects of our attachments to hegemonic narratives and discourses in play. We need to recognize our own power to reposition these, to reattach and play new meaning to old horror, to renarrate, to restory our attachments, and certainly to live them differently, to speak to power differently.”¹⁶⁰ Our power to recognize and reposition these narratives and discourses, according to Coulthard and Million, require a conscious and purposeful examination of our own subjectivities. As Million

¹⁵⁹ *Divide and Dissolve - Full Performance (Live on KEXP)*, directed by KEXP, 2025, 31:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmmIS3UQa1E>. 28:28.

¹⁶⁰ Million (2011). 328.

(through Coulthard) puts it simply, “...Indigenes do not need recognition from the state to articulate our being.” Divide and Dissolve’s music, to certain ears, might be heard affectionately as an “acquired taste.” Without affection, it is heard in ways that are articulated again in the YouTube comments section (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.5 Negative reception to the Divide and Dissolve in-studio session, YouTube comments, KEXP. 2024.

I sarcastically positioned the YouTube comments section as a beacon of veracity earlier. But this is not to imply that I do not think that it doesn’t actually *say things* about the hegemonic/neoliberal subjectivities that Million describes. YouTube as a platform articulates their mission thusly: “To give everyone a voice and show them the world.”¹⁶¹ While implying the altruistic goal of connectivity that so many social media companies purport to work towards, the openness of YouTube’s platform creates the conditions for the cultivation of digital discursive enclaves. This is supported by the platform’s algorithmic recommendation systems, which rely on users creating a Google account before watching videos, so the algorithms can

¹⁶¹ <https://www.youtube.com/howyoutubeworks/>

decide for you what you would like to watch. This is illustrated compellingly by visiting [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) in Google Chrome’s “Incognito Mode,” which is a method of browsing the internet that does not save cookies or other website data (Figure 3.5).

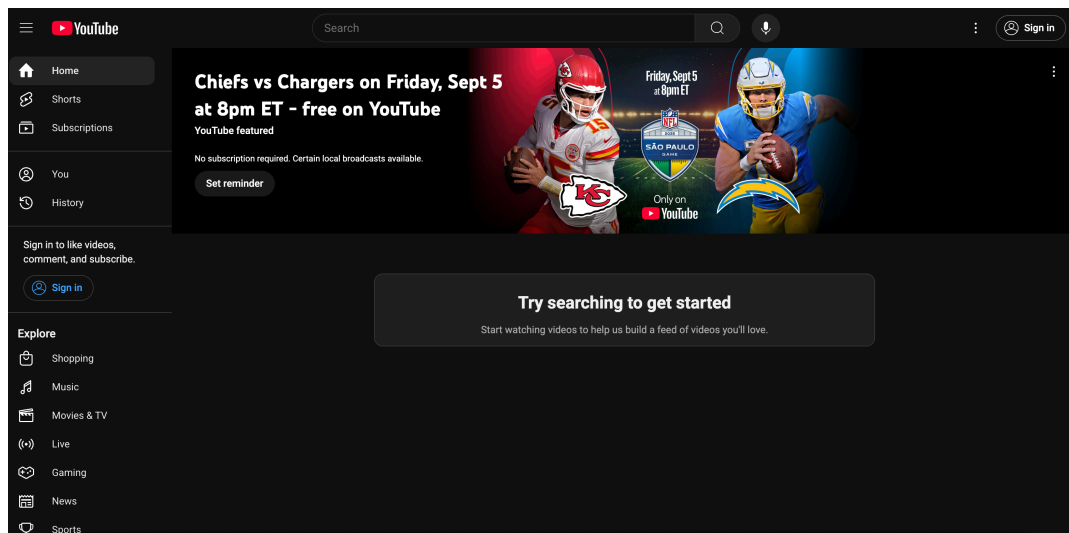


Figure 3.6 YouTube homepage unaffiliated with a Google account in incognito mode. 2025.

The algorithm does not just keep track of what you watch. Google (and thus YouTube) also tracks demographic data like one’s gender, age, and spoken languages, as well as your online activity like ads clicked, location services, and recorded audio into their voice activation features.¹⁶² This is a method of algorithmic curation, and why everyone’s YouTube feed will look distinctive. The technologies of surveillance that Google/YouTube utilize are elaborated on later in this chapter. For this section and D//D’s performance specifically, I propose that the YouTube video and its comments section are a microcosm of the hegemonic narratives that Million describes. Conversely, when a *kwinaył słəgwəlmış* and an anti-colonial Doom Metal band take part in this platform, we can potentially mobilize processes of renarration and

¹⁶² <https://www.youtube.com/howyoutubeworks/recommendations/>

restorying. This is why in the video I bring attention to the band's opposition to white supremacy and settler colonialism. The effects and affects of our attachment to hegemonic systems are illustrated by the words of these users (Figure 3.6).

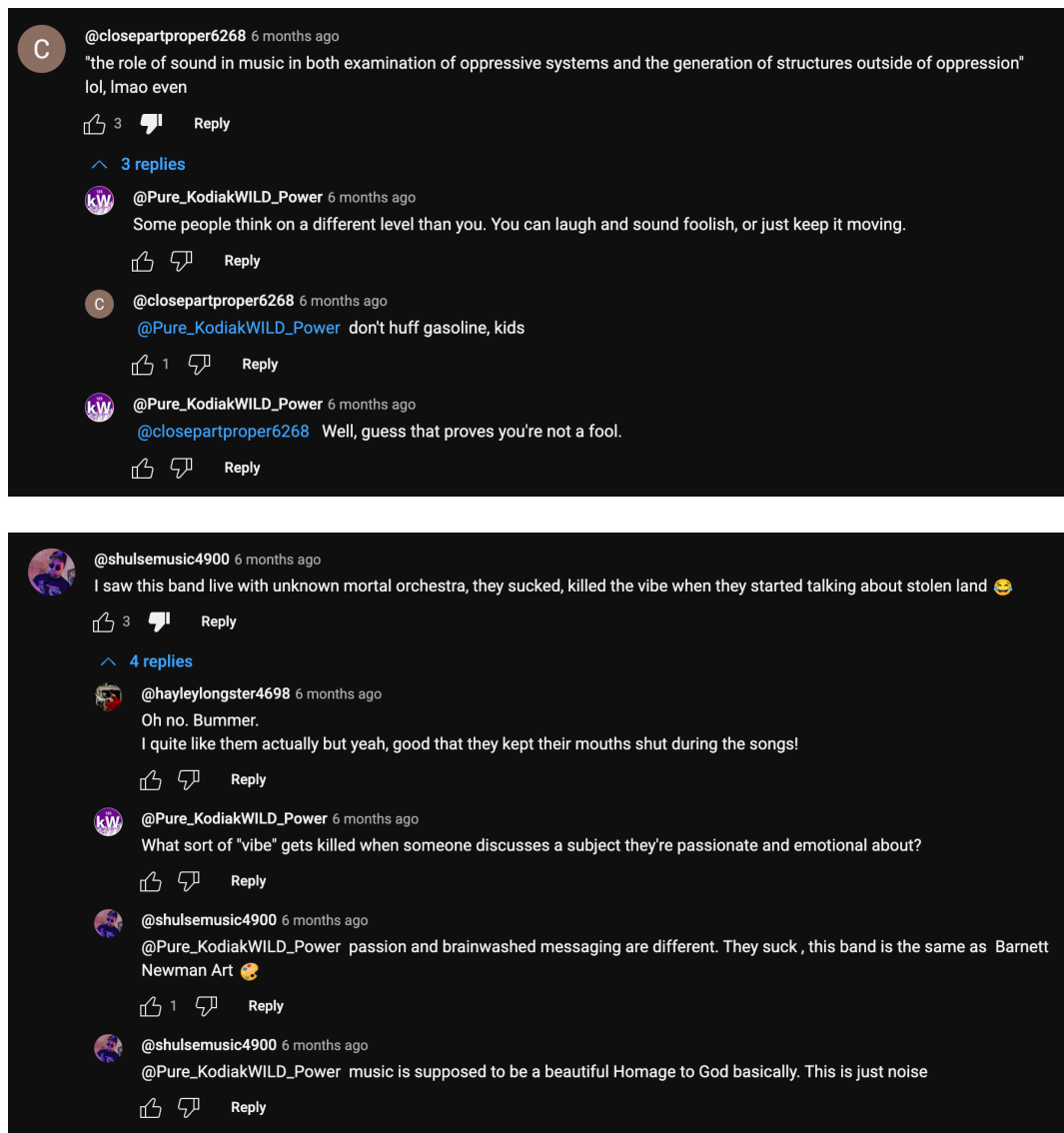


Figure 3.7 Responses to Divide and Dissolve and the author's interview section of the in-studio session. YouTube comments, KEXP, 2024.

I often say (in the video and just in general) that song-making is a gift from our ancestors. The continuance of Indigenous sound and music is engendered by our capabilities to activate the love that Takiaya mentions as insatiable. The music of Divide and Dissolve contains all dimensions of that love, along with both the rage at systems/structures/logics that necessitate our erasure as Indigenous peoples and our refusal of those systems.

“Headbang While You Weep”¹⁶³: Deerlady



Figure 3.8 Left to right: Mali Obomsawin (Odanak), Magdalena Abrego, the author, and Evan Woodle. KEXP/Brady Harvey. 2024.

¹⁶³ A comment from Lars Gotrich’s review of the song *Masterpieces* by Deerlady, featured in the video.

Lars Gotrich, “Kim Gordon Raps Her Shopping List — It’s Hot and Terrifying,” Music, *NPR*, January 25, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/25/1226899024/8-tracks-kim-gordon-shangri-las-pernice-brothers-jlin>.

Deerlady is a relatively new band. A duo consisting of Odanak/Abenaki multi-instrumentalist and composer Mali Obomsawin and professional guitarist Magdalena Abrego, “Deerlady” as a name came later, as Magdalena quotes Mali in the video “It’s Native AND pronounceable.”¹⁶⁴ Amusingly, Magdalena also added that they decided that “Magdalena Abrego and Mali Obomsawin” doesn’t fit on a marquee. Describing their sound, Magdalena continues: “We actually met, like as friends through the making of this record. Mali was looking for a guitar player that loved My Bloody Valentine and Ornette Coleman and...yeah [Mali cuts in] “That was you. Found you.”¹⁶⁵ The eclecticism of Deerlady is easily tracked on their debut record *Greatest Hits*. Amidst quiet and contemplative tracks like *There There* (which was also featured in the hit FX TV series *Reservation Dogs*) are moments that fit right into the Seattle soundscape, such as the angsty guitar driven track *Bounty*. After all, KEXP broadcasts directly from the birthplace of the grunge music scene of the late 80s and early 90s. I had already known Mali by reputation at that point - she was the only artist in common that Kevin Sur and I shared in our demos in the initial hiring process at KEXP. Of course, my knowing Mali beforehand was partly from hearing her music in *Reservation Dogs* but I actually found out about Mali because she was cited for her critical take on Woody Guthrie’s song *This Land Is Your Land* in the introduction to Dena’ina musicologist Jessica Bissett Perea’s book *Sound Relations*. Deerlady having an in-studio at KEXP, to Kevin and I, was a foregone conclusion. We both felt like it was necessary for us to advocate for them and make it happen. My one-sheet for the Deerlady session included some “joke questions” that are not meant to be asked for the interview, mainly as a way of

¹⁶⁴ *Deerlady - Full Performance (Live on KEXP)*, directed by KEXP, 2025, 31:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awDJYushbzA>. 20:10.

¹⁶⁵ *Deerlady - Full Performance (Live on KEXP)*, directed by KEXP, 2025, 31:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awDJYushbzA>. 20:20.

having a laugh and calming my nerves before the session. I also had a feeling that Mali would appreciate them (Figure 3.7).

General notes:

Deerlady -

Deerlady is Mali Obomsawin and Magdalena Abrego. On the duo's debut album *Greatest Hits*, we feel tremors and transformations in a perfectly-crafted universe of experimental shoegaze. In eight songs, we witness a precious softness that emerges from seas of rage and heartache – a throughline of hope that seems to flower over a bedrock of anti-colonial collaboration.

Mali -

- Avid podcast listener lol

Magdalena -

- "queer experimentalism" - cool af

Questions:

1. So, Deerlady is a relatively new musical venture - I was able to see the shift from Mali Obomsawin and Magdalena Abrego to Deerlady proper - I'm curious about how the band started, how did you two meet? What about your musical chemistry brought Deerlady into being? (possible fun tidbit the Deerlady episode of rez dogs)
2. Bringing things over to *Greatest Hits* - you've described the album as "[witnessing] a precious softness that emerges from seas of rage and heartache" and "a throughline of hope that seems to flower over a bedrock of anti-colonial collaboration" - aside from being heard on the album and in-studio today, how do these themes and collaborations shape the broader ethic of Deerlady and your personal compositional perspective?
3. Both of you are prolific and multidisciplinary when it comes to music composition - from film scores to big bands to free jazz to grungy rock - What are some of the prides and pitfalls of "wearing many hats" in this industry, and how do you hope to push past boundaries and boxes in your musicianship? (also, queerness and Indigeneity, while we're asking...)
4. Finally, what can we expect from both of you, as well as collectively as Deerlady?

Do not ask:

1. What is your signal chain and who are your favorite pedal companies?
2. How many mfs you gotta slap when you're expected to explain what "Indigenous music" is?
3. What do you have to tell those little rez kids that aren't being listened to?

Figure 3.9 Deerlady in-studio one-sheet. 2024.

Because I am a gear nerd, before the session I made a point to check out Mali and Magdalena's pedalboards. Most of the pedals were from the Blackfeet owned guitar pedal company Native Audio (Mike Trombley, the founder, is Blackfeet from Browning, Montana). I haven't tried out their pedals before but our banter about them led to a nice exchange with Mike himself on Instagram, where I got to tell him about Deerlady's and my mutual love for pedals and Native Audio pedals specifically¹⁶⁶ (Figure 3.8). Compared to Divide and Dissolve, Deerlady had a relatively modest setup, our sound engineers simply mic'd their guitar and bass amps, which were fed by their Native Audio heavy pedalboards. Their drummer was a local session drummer named Evan Woodle, who, as the live session went on, proved to be amazingly deft in his keeping rhythm. This was evident in the first song, *Seeing Two*, whose drum composition involves an incredibly groovy 3 over 4 polyrhythm, accentuating the catchy 6/8 time guitar riff written by Magdalena. The song crescendos into an improvised guitar solo, which shows the jazz influence that Magdalena brings to the group. Lyrically, *Seeing Two* elicits a somber tonality, residing in an ambivalence between a perceived intrusion and how that intersubjectively influences the singer¹⁶⁷'s veil between desire and undesire. The first verse sets the stage for this, "seeing two / slipping through / passing by a line uncoiling / snow above and in-between." The chorus is where this theme is given weight: "dragging your dirty boots through my head / making my mind out like it's your bed / laying in it." The third verse highlights the ambivalence of intrusion with the undeniability of its presence in the singer's "self": "from my mouth an unfamiliar voice screams / meanwhile / we are effacing time / through the revelation of

¹⁶⁶ Native Audio as a brand has made a name for itself in the guitar pedal marketplace, which would merit its own study in terms of Indigenous representation in the industry, concepts of materiality and marketing involving Blackfeet knowledge systems, etc.

¹⁶⁷ I choose an omniscient "singer" here like how a poem is read not "in" the author's voice *per se*, but as existing in the poem itself.

your country / measuring me by the tape of your fantasy.” The band has said that the album’s main theme is “intimacy under colonialism” (which the band later reframed, the politics of that shift is discussed below). These lyrics seem to be in tune with that theme, oscillating between the ambivalence of being/doing/existing in a condition that invited itself unannounced and the need for desire and rest: colonization has drug in its dirty boots, but we really are still “laying in it.”



Figure 3.10 Instagram comment exchange between the author and guitar pedal company Native Audio. 2024.

The first thing I want to highlight with the Deerlady interview actually comes from an *unsaid* moment in the interview. During the 26:28 mark, after talking about the reframing of *Greatest Hits* from “intimacy under colonialism” to just being about “intimacy,” Mali alludes to the politics laden within the presentation of one’s work as a native person: “Intimacy under colonialism is an elevator pitch to non-colonized people. For non-colonized people to kind of, see if they can get it... this is just music for us.”¹⁶⁸ My response to this insight was to laugh, because I had experienced that exact same political relationship of framing Indigenous experiences of colonialism in terms that non-Indigenous (mostly white) people could understand. Specifically, that is an extra form of labor that I have had to do at KEXP, as a radio station with a white-majority audience and administrative demographic. In the video I say that Mali and I could “geek out about that” but I decide to go to the next question, knowing for whom those conversations should (and shouldn’t) be meant. In this section of the chapter, I will turn to geeking out about that.

Why must Mali create an elevator pitch for non-colonized people? What are the expectations laden within our relationships as Indigenous peoples to non-Indigenous peoples? How are the terms of engagement with the colonizer/colonized relationship situated in the whitestream lexicon? These questions passed over me in an instant during the interview with Deerlady, and since they deal so intimately with the subjectivities of everyone in the room and beyond the screen, I really couldn’t do anything else besides laugh. But, what Mali has done in creating an elevator pitch, and what I have contributed to with my nervous laughter points to some of the evolutions of discourse between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in

¹⁶⁸ *Deerlady - Full Performance (Live on KEXP)*, directed by KEXP, 2025, 31:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awDJYushbzA>. 26:28.

remarkable ways. A part of this evolution is due part in parcel to the dissemination of knowledge and understandings of colonialism, our distinctive experiences as Indigenous peoples existing in a colonizer world, as well as an overall cultural climate that co-opted and vilified Critical Race Theory, decried dismissively as “wokeness” or “wokeism.” The latter relationship has created the conditions, particularly in white, affluent, politically liberal spaces (like KEXP and Seattle more broadly), in an attempt to distance themselves from those who decry critical thoughts on race/coloniality, for there to be people who may or may not satisfy Mali’s expectations for someone to “get it.” Yet, even if non-Indigenous peoples “get it” there is a fundamental difference between understanding Indigenous liberation from colonialism in theory and understanding *what it takes*. This is the frustrating thing about working at a globally renowned radio station that is uncritical of its privilege within the colonial project as well as the ways it not-so-subtly refuses to create space for Indigenous artmaking (*Sounds of Survivance* airs from 3am to 5am on Mondays, a deliberate choice that my friends and colleagues have criticized heavily).¹⁶⁹

Frustrations aside, I view the moment of laughter and Mali’s wry tone during the interview in this section as a generative form of refusal. We didn’t end up talking about that part of the interview later on, but there was an implicit understanding between us as Indigenous peoples in a white, politically liberal, affluent space — instead of submitting to the frustrations of having to, in effect, educate white people, we acknowledged the extra labor that we are sometimes subjected to while also moving forward while not dwelling on it. When Mali says that the music of Deerlady is “just music for us,” it denotes another kind of refusal, an active choice to orient Indigenous art making in a self-determining fashion. While I would not say that Mali

¹⁶⁹ I have told people that they “put us on the reservation,” a kind of aural sequestration.

(and any other Indigenous artist) wants to make music *only* for Indigenous peoples, there is a certain way of *experiencing* Indigenous music that is suggestive of these refusals and a way of listening that we can be empowered to articulate for ourselves.

Excuse Me While I Recover From My Constant Stank Face: Khu.éex'



Figure 3.11 Left to right: Gene Tagaban (Tlingit), Denny Stern, Edward Littlefield (Tlingit), Sondra Segundo (Haida), the author, Preston Singletary (Tlingit), Gordon Brown, Kate Olsen, Jason Cressey, Tim Kennedy, Rob Ludgate (Siksika). KEXP/Brady Harvey. 2025.

Sometime in 2024, walking from Westlake Station in downtown Seattle, I took the streetcar bound for South Lake Union. Lake Union is one of the city's most beautiful water bodies, from certain parts of the lake you can see the skyline with the Space Needle jutting out from its home in Seattle Center. To the north, you can see Gasworks Park, the iconic now-defunct coal gasification plant that has become iconic in its representation in the film *10 Things I*

Hate About You and for me, as the historical site of the UW Powwow's "49." I was on my way to a seemingly intentionally hidden private art studio run by Tlingit glass artist, bass player, and band leader for the jazz-infused funk/rock fusion band Khu.éex', Preston Singletary. Finding my way to the alley where the studio is situated, I met Preston outside and he gave me a tour of the place; I saw some of his "minions" working the kiln, taking the red-hot glass and forming it into one of his signature vase-like shapes as well as the plans for new art pieces. Preston's work was all over the studio, the glass visiting with us like beings (or band members) in themselves. After the tour, we went upstairs to Preston's office, where he kept, in addition to the overflow of Khu.éex' vinyl, a computer and a bass guitar.

Preston and I were meeting to talk about getting Khu.éex' into KEXP for a live in-studio session. It made sense for the band, as a bunch of Seattle locals made up of Tlingit, Haida, and Siksika relatives, to come in and film for our YouTube channel. During our meeting Preston said something that really stuck with me — that despite his relative fame in the glass-world, his true investment was in the music. As he framed it, "The glass funds the music habit."¹⁷⁰ Khu.éex' had already made quite a splash in the Native music scene, and they even had an established relationship with KEXP already. The way I saw it, it was the perfect time to plan logistics because so many things fit perfectly; I am KEXP's only Coast Salish DJ (though to be clear I am not Duwamish/Suquamish), Khu.éex' makes a point to be in good relation the Coast Salish homelands where we all live, *Sounds of Survivance* was starting to get some wind in its sails in terms of listenership and renown. So, the live in-studio, in my view, was a foregone conclusion.

Khu.éex' is a big band. Not in the sense of "big band jazz" but that they have a ton of members and for their 2025 in-studio brought in local musicians from Seattle's jazz scene

¹⁷⁰ Preston Singletary (Tlingit), personal communication (2024).

(including a whole brass section!) I had already connected with Rob, the guitarist of the band, on Instagram because he runs the official Khu.éex' account and we've traded stories and generous critique of how Native music lives in the industry, scenes, etc. through DM's. Rob was jazzed (no pun intended) to finally get our in-studio session recorded, and we chatted about how the Native guitarists in Seattle need to start a Zoom call. I was truly in the spirit, because I was wearing the official merch of my favorite Diné metal band, Under Exile. An hour or so before the session, I printed a few copies of my one-sheet and brought it to the folks in the green room. Our video manager, Jim Beckmann, suggested that I ask the band to choose a representative to introduce the band after the performance ended and everyone got situated. Of course, they all nominated Preston.

Our video recording of *Love Birds* from Khu.éex's album *Red Cedar in the Hour of Chaos* takes full advantage of the brass section – after a brief count-in from the drummer Ed Littlefield, the brass plays in unison to Preston's bassline, which shapes the main structure of the song. Sondra starts singing in Haida language in a repetitious verse-melody that is the main earworm of this track. The second verse features Gene Tagaban (filling in for Arias Hoyle, the main rapper/MC of the group, who could not make it to the recording) rapping in Tlingit language to the verse riff. The chorus follows a chromatically descending bassline that the brass section embellishes with a countermelody. The verse riff transitions to a B and a C riff that serves as the harmonic backdrop to the band's improvisation, with the band's guest trombonist Jason Cressey and guest saxophonist Gordon Brown taking solos before ending the performance with a final chorus.

A bit of insider information — when we record the in-studio performances, after each song we take a beat for the camera operators to point the lens in my direction so I can introduce

the song that was played and the album it came from. After *Love Birds*, my reaction when the camera hit my face was simply “excuse me while I recover from my constant stank face.” The main reason for this, to my ears, is surely because of the added brass section, but the main source of “stank” for me was definitely Ed Littlefield’s drumming – he has an incredible ability to play just behind the beat, an adherence to time that does not sit in a strict and clinical fashion that is referred to by jazz musicians as “pocket playing.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Some of my favorite explanations of musical time that doesn’t adhere to strict and clinical measures are featured throughout Dan Charnas, *Dilla Time: The Life and Afterlife of J Dilla, the Hip-Hop Producer Who Reinvented Rhythm*, First edition (MCD / Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022).

Khu.éex' In-Studio One Sheet

1. You've said that *Red Cedar in the Hour of Chaos* is a reference to Public Enemy's *Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos* – aside from the titular nod, what are some of the important intersections of Public Enemy's music and message that shape what you were going for with the album?
2. Your last album, *Siyaadlan*, sounded Urban Indian experiences in this city, which are shaped by both a history of Indian relocation and activism. *Red Cedar in the Hour of Chaos* seems much more intertribal in its approach, specifically highlighting the cyclical nature of colonization and our resilience through those cycles, like cedar trees. How important is it to pay specific attention to our resilience – a sort of cedar tree being – in a society that focuses so much on our pain?
3. As an intertribal band I love that you signal your protocol of relationality to the peoples that have shaped this place we call "Seattle" – what does it mean in your words to make music and be in relation to Coast Salish peoples and dispossessed Coast Salish lands?
4. *Khu.éex'* has a few songs in both Tlingit and Haida languages. Indigenous languages don't just shape our identities, they also form our philosophies and distinctively place-based relations. How would you describe the importance of speaking/uttering/sounding Indigenous languages in *Khu.éex'*?

Figure 3.12 Khu.éex' in-studio one-sheet. 2025.

For the interview recording, we had the entire band, including the session musicians, stand across from me so they can be in view during the interview. Khu.éex's album, *Red Cedar*

in the *Hour of Chaos* would be where most of the setlist came from and was the main point of conversation for the interview. The album title is a reference to Public Enemy's *Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos*. When I asked about this connection, Khu.éex' guitarist Rob Ludgate remarked:

"...I think probably like a lot of folks, I was in junior high school when *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* came out, so it was pretty [mind-blowing] and one of the greatest sign of the times albums of that era, and not just being influenced by Public Enemy, but in the way that they, [through] aural history really covered what was going on with the crack era, how that impacted society, what was going on in the Black community in the 80s...it just so masterfully illustrates that. It's like a time capsule, you can go back and listen to that record and understand at least partly what was going on and I think looking around at the cycles that we live in and you know, whereas in the 80s it was the crack era and now we're in the midst of the fentanyl era and just how many deaths were going in the crack era and how many deaths are going on in the fentanyl era that we're in and it just, I think I just kept coming back to that. It reminded me so much like we're stuck in this cycle every 20, 30 years, where portions of society just get attacked and are hit so hard with colonization, with its rerun [laughs] it's like we're in the Nick at Night era of colonization. So we ran with it and a lot of the stories on the album really reflect what's going on right now and like you can record an album and have it be a time capsule and kind of a history lesson that you can communicate not just to the people that are listening to you today, in 2025, but you can help people like in 2050 and 2060 understand what life was like in Native community at this point in time...something that we cycle back to a lot is just, you know, speaking "one day we're going to be the ancestors" – talking forward, not just reflecting right now."¹⁷²

Khu.éex's music making, as a form of aural memory, not only riffs off of the politically conscious Hip-Hop music of Public Enemy here but the *practice* of making aural memory through music itself. The distinctively Indigenous method here is the band's recognition of our becoming "future ancestors," a process that Cherokee literary scholar Daniel Heath Justice describes aptly:

"The past carries wisdom, tempered and sometimes shrouded by grief and great suffering; the future offers us hope, but with no certainty of anything but struggle. Where we are today, in all the possibility of *now*, is the delicate bridge between. We're the ancestors of future generations, just as the ordinary people of the past times became the ancestors to whom we now look for good guidance and cautionary example. We hope that the work we do today makes life better for those

¹⁷² *Khu éex' - Full Performance (Live on KEXP)*, directed by KEXP, 2025, 47:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSDb6I58RwY>. 30:58.

in the future, but the how of it, especially for those of us who are largely untethered from the cultural continuity of traditions and ceremonies, is a challenge to realize in the everyday.”¹⁷³

I would argue that while an inter-tribal jazz/funk band would not necessarily constitute the “continuity of traditions and ceremonies,” Khu.éex’s citation of Public Enemy constitutes another form of continuity that is just as important – the ways that we, through music and through knowledge, make intertribal relations (not just within the category of “Indigenous peoples”) to reflect the grief and the ardent hope that follows. The starting conversation on Public Enemy and the “Nick at Night” era of colonization segued nicely into that hope. The second question I asked followed the band’s turning towards the red cedar tree as a symbol of resilience in Native communities. The video is edited such that you cannot see the chuckles from the artists in the room and I, as Rob pointed to Gene and said “this sounds like a Gene question.” The humor of that made so much sense to me – even though I had not heard Gene speak aside from introducing ourselves before the session, I could tell from how he expressed himself in the music and through his demeanor that I would be regaled in a kind of “uncle” way that, while difficult to describe in writing, embodies our playful and empowered satirization of the serious, “Noble Savage” stereotype. Gene started his answer:

“We talk about decolonization so much and I like to actually refer to it as re-Indigenization and that resiliency lives in each and every one of us. You know we see it in our children. Our children are resilient as they’re raised and this time right now, you know, I mean, our ancestors dreamt us into existence, you know, we are a product of those dreams and those prayers and here we are. With the music we’re playing right now, we’re dreaming those future generations into existence right now. And, the cedar tree, part of the forest, I was always told with the trees that the trees hold the remembering. If you want to remember, go to the trees. And once you step off the trail and into the forest, you’ve stepped into the threshold of spirit, and into the water, and our ancestors knew that and sometimes here in this world, in this urban world today, we just get away from that stuff, and all we have to do is just step outside and breathe, and that’s our connection...if you ever feel the cedar tree too, it’s soft. It’s very soft, you know, it’s plush as well, just like us as [ndn] people we’re very soft and plush, yeah we’re good lookin’ people too

¹⁷³ Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Indigenous Studies Series (Wilfrid Laurier university press, 2018). 114.

you know, and yeah...so many people talk about the hurt, harm, pain and wounds and trauma, but I mean, here we are. We got our love, we got our wisdoms, we got our knowledge, we got that perseverance, we got that joy as well. Our ancestral wisdoms.”¹⁷⁴

Gene’s humor was welcome, especially as ndn humor specifically tests limits (see chapter 1). In the case of the YouTube session, the humor employed by Gene and the nod to resiliency signals a self-awareness about the site from which Khu.éex’s sound knowledges would be presented. In other words, I would contend that Gene (like I knew) knew the politics of being presented on a YouTube channel whose demographic is overwhelmingly non-Native. The irony that he employed played with that tension. Another intervention that Gene made in his interview response was an uplifting of our self-determined prerogative for joy, wisdom and love. Like Takiaya’s flipping of the insatiability of coloniality towards the necessity for the insatiability of love and relationality, this signalled a form of “desire based” narrativity for Indigenous peoples, articulated by scholar Eve Tuck (Unanga̓x̓) as a refusal of damage-centered narratives.¹⁷⁵

Conclusion: The Case For Digital Indigeneities

My mom, siblings and I all have the same cheeks. They are slightly bulbous, and may be responsible for how people can always tell that we’re related. I had called them “Chenois”¹⁷⁶ cheeks” for the longest time, until I took a photo with my Google Pixel phone of an older framed photo at my mom’s house in Taholah. Now buried in my Google photos app, the photo depicts my great-grandfather, Daniel Chenois standing with my great-grandmother, Edwina Chenois.

¹⁷⁴ *Khu éex’ - Full Performance (Live on KEXP)*, directed by KEXP, 2025, 47:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSDb6I58RwY>. 34.07.

¹⁷⁵ Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409–28, <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.3.n0016675661t3n15>.

¹⁷⁶ This is my Quinault family name, and is pronounced činus or “chin-oose”

While I don't know much about my grandma Edwina, aside from the fact that she was enrolled in the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians as a "full blood" Indian¹⁷⁷. But I would recognize her cheeks every time I see myself in the mirror, or hang out with my mom and siblings. So, what were once "Chenois cheeks" are actually "Curl cheeks" in a sense, as that was my grandma's name before marrying my grandpa Dan (Figure 3.13, 3.14).

¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, the Federal Reserve document of 1955 lists my aunts and grandmother, but lists them as "1/2 blood" - a consequence of the simple mathematics used to decide someone's genotype. The math is tenuous at best, especially considering (aside from the sheer diversity of potential genotypes through intermarriage relations) that my grandfather Daniel is also listed as a "full blooded Indian" on the Dawes rolls.

"Federal Register," *The National Archives of the United States*, August 17, 1955. Volume 20. Number 160. University of Michigan Library Catalog.



Figure 3.10 Edwina (left) and Daniel Chenois (right). n.d.



Figure 3.11 Family Photo at the 2023 Quinault Indian Nation General Council Meeting. Left to right: Julie Burnett, Kiwi Chenois, the author, Alyssa Johnston, Tyson Johnston. 2023.

When uploading a photo to Google photos, it is stored in the cloud through the app's backup system. People often think of cloud computing as some kind of magic, but the data from a photo (or anything else uploaded to a cloud computing system) actually does exist in a physical place. In the case of the photo of my great grandparents, it exists in a global network of data centers owned by Google. These data centers are physical spaces where data storage hardware, networked systems, and servers interact to handle online traffic and data storage. They are connected via Google's global fiber-optic network, so the data storage hardware units do not even have to be in the same room as the servers. These systems handle storage in a variety of ways, including individually encrypted parts of files stored in different machines in potentially different regions (Google calls this the "Colossus level"), through single region storage (for high

performance) and multi-region storage (for high availability) or a mixture of these methods.¹⁷⁸

The oversimplified way of imagining this process is that the photo I took of the physical photo in my mom's house lives in any number of Google's data centers in North America, South America, Asia and Europe.¹⁷⁹ The access to the photo (if it is not written into my phone's internal storage) uses an mobile or WiFi network to "recall" the data from Google's data centers and show me the photo on my phone screen.

Google's first data center, poetically, was constructed in what is now referred to as "The Dalles, Oregon." A hub existing on what is commonly referred to as the "Columbia River," The Dalles is a nexus of tribal territories including the confederated Grande Ronde, Umatilla, Warm Springs, and the tribe my great-grandmother was enrolled, Siletz tribal nation.¹⁸⁰ Google emphasizes its presence in The Dalles (and anywhere else they have data centers) with social, economic, and environmental impact reports that show monetary investments in job growth, philanthropy, and environmental/renewable energy policies.¹⁸¹ The efficacies of these investments, how they weigh against the nexus of practices that engender data center societies/localities, how they relate to Alphabet's (the parent company of Google) over 2 trillion dollar market cap, and how those political economies are constituted through technoliberalism merits its own study.

¹⁷⁸ *How Does Storage Work across Google Data Centers?*, directed by Google Cloud Tech, 2021, 04:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=073GYKU5z60>.

¹⁷⁹ Google doesn't disclose the specific location of user data (insert source)

¹⁸⁰ It is important for me to note that I do not claim to have any authority to speak on land claims in this area - that would be up to the self-determining bodies of these confederated tribes themselves. For the purposes of this chapter, I am utilizing a radical orientation of place/space that centers relations (to the human and more-than-human) rather than land claims.

For this conclusion, I want to focus on the *relations* that give rise to Google's data center practices and how they elide meaningful investment in Indigenous communities/self-determination by obfuscating Indigenous relations to the lands and waters where those data centers are built. The second aim of this section is to call for a meaningful engagement with, by and for Indigenous peoples offline through the physical infrastructures of data centers AND online through the principles and projects mentioned in this chapter. For the latter project, I will highlight a few attempts by Indigenous peoples/organizations to engage a meaningful and ethical internet regarding Indigenous knowledge systems/intellectual property.

Amidst Google's attempts to contribute "locally" to The Dalles/Oregon is a set of assumptions and entitlements to land that normalize settler colonial relationships to place. Writing on pollution that occurs through the plastics industry, Max Liboiron (Métis) discusses the basis for "colonial land relations, the assumed access by settler and colonial projects to Indigenous lands for settler and colonial goals."¹⁸² Working in their Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR), Liboiron emphasizes *anti-colonial* ways of doing science, which centers land and takes action against colonizing processes as a "set of contemporary and evolving land relations that can be maintained [even] by good intentions and even good deeds."¹⁸³ In the example of Google's data centers, the philanthropic, social and environmental investments may *sound* beneficial. Though, to *whom* are they beneficial? "The Dalles" as a concept relies on the displacement of the confederated tribal nations mentioned earlier. Each of these tribes maintains their own self-determination that is, through the

¹⁸² Max Liboiron, *Pollution Is Colonialism* (Duke University Press, 2021). 5.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 6.

reservation system, geographically sequestered and bound by the bureaucratic processes of the federal government-to-government relationship.

Furthermore, Alphabet and its subsidiaries, Google and YouTube, ascended to an over 2 trillion dollar market cap in no small part due to what Shoshana Zuboff calls *surveillance capitalism* - a method by which Alphabet (and its “Big Data” counterparts, Amazon, Meta and the like) have transitioned data technologies into miners of the “raw materials” of human behavioral surplus, much like Bucher’s (2018) programmed forms of sociality. To Zuboff, the “instrumentarian power” enacted by Google and other surveillance capitalist corporations is to direct our very behaviors and render them into raw materials for markets involving traders of these future behaviors. They are primarily enacted through social media, algorithmic recommendation, end user license agreements (EULA), which are deeply inequitable socio-technological contracts that are incredibly difficult to disengage from.¹⁸⁴ The modes of relating in surveillance capitalism extend the entitlement to land into an entitlement to behavior, which echoes the constitution of genres of humanity¹⁸⁵ as well as the paternalistic relationship engendered by the “trust responsibility” - which very simply means that reservation lands are not “owned” by respective tribal nations but “held in trust” through a legal responsibility of the federal government. This doctrine, and the federal government’s acquiescence to the whims of the private sector are what led to protests such as Standing Rock and Idle No More. The relations animating these protests have been covered in a plethora of interdisciplinary studies.¹⁸⁶ For the purposes of this conclusion, I claim that the assertions of sovereignty that are inherent in these

¹⁸⁴ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, First Trade Paperback Edition (PublicAffairs, 2020).

¹⁸⁵ See Benjamin (2019). 32.

¹⁸⁶ (list some of them here)

protests are possible to assert in a digital space. It would require an incredible amount of work and the repatriation of lands out of settler hands, but I would like to turn to some examples that are particularly useful for understanding digital Indigeneities.

So, where might we go from here? Recalling the ethics proposed by Abdilla et al., and the philosophical spirit of Kawagley's Soft Technology, one way that Indigenous peoples engage online is through the conceptualization and development of technology for uses that center an Indigenous worldview and/or Indigenous prerogatives. Quite simply, despite the fact that we are assumed to be left out of technological development, we have always had our own technologies and have utilized new ones as well.¹⁸⁷ This process is evident in the KEXP in-studio sessions, where Indigenous artists represent their survival and resistance to settler colonial systems through our intense dreaming, our conceptualizing of what art and relating to one another "could be," and the ways that sound, music and the internet enable the awakening of our Indigenous languages. While these efforts are not say, reappropriating data economies towards Indigenous ends or repatriating lands and resources owned by Big Tech, they still signal an investment in our liberatory futures as Indigenous peoples persisting like our ancestors did. To put it simply, we need *all of it*. We need the art that challenges people, we need to be disruptive in systems not built for us, and we need to think deeply about the possibilities of our own networked systems and infrastructures that are guided by Indigenous knowledge systems. For this latter point, to end my interview, so to speak, I would like to highlight two particular online spaces that are meaningfully engaging Indigenous protocols in a digital space. These digital spaces are Mukurtu (MOOK-oo-too) and the University of British Columbia Press's Ravenspace.

¹⁸⁷ See Eglash 2004. 181.

Mukurtu is an online Content Management System software (CMS, think WordPress or Microsoft SharePoint) providing a free and open-source platform for Indigenous communities to manage and share digital cultural heritage.¹⁸⁸ Its core features are Traditional Knowledge (TK) labeling of digital public domain materials, a “cultural protocols” system that allows communities to define ranges of access on materials, a community records function that allows for multiple perspectives on digital heritage items, and the “roundtrip” feature, which allows for the editing of metadata on a digital heritage item for export while simultaneously keeping the original metadata intact. The features of Mukurtu are not only valuable for their community focus and democratized access, but the thought that went into them elucidates tribally specific protocols that respect the distinctiveness of tribal nations, their sovereignty to control their information, and the notion that not all things are meant to be known for all people, which I think Daniel Heath Justice puts quite nicely:

“It’s also good to remember that not all things are meant for all people. There are boundaries to some forms of knowledge; to insist that all things should be available without limit to everyone is to exercise a particularly corrosive kind of universalizing colonialist privilege; claiming entitlement to all peoples’ knowledge is, after all, just one of the many expropriating features of settler colonial violence.”¹⁸⁹

Mukurtu provides a technical solution to the democratization of information that the Internet (in)famously allows. The platform adheres to the prerogatives of distinctive community-based intellectual properties and gives important context beyond the presumed “end user” as a “knowing subject” unbound by the protocols of relation to knowledge. These contexts are inextricable to the relationships and responsibilities that the users of the platform (read: Indigenous peoples, tribal nations, cultural practitioners) have to their homelands and waters.

¹⁸⁸ “Home,” Mukurtu CMS, <https://mukurtu.org/>.

¹⁸⁹ Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Indigenous Studies Series (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier university press, 2018). 25.

The second website I want to bring attention to is RavenSpace. RavenSpace, founded by UBC Press, is a digital content publishing website that aims to give free access to interactive, peer reviewed, community vetted digital books. As of right now, the website has one digital book up, *As I Remember It: Teachings from the Life of a Sliammon*¹⁹⁰ Elder. Clicking on the link to the book brings the user to an agreement, “Protocol for being a respectful guest.” Users must click on one of two options, to either “come ashore” or “[go] back to cyberspace.” The guest-host protocol, as explained by RavenSpace and Elsie Paul, follows a *laʔamun* way of being in relation to visitors. This way of relating demands an identification of ourselves, our relationships to the host, clearly stated intentions, and permission to come ashore. When invited to come ashore, guests are “fed and well treated, their obligations are explained to them, and for the duration of their visit they abide by *laʔamun* laws.”¹⁹¹ Finally, the agreement reminds users that the stories, photos, videos and language shared on the site are not simply content or information, but rather they are the intellectual property of Elsie Paul and *laʔamun* peoples in general. My intention to focus on this agreement is to demonstrate how the “protocol” as it is presented in *As I Remember It*, despite its appearance as an Internet gatekeeping tool (think how sites are mandated to tell you that they are collecting “cookies”), its use is primarily concerned with Indigenous ontological and epistemological notions of mutual respect, reciprocity, and generosity. The agreement is not like an end-user license agreement (EULA) or an acknowledgement of terms of service, (TOS) which are notorious for obfuscating the intentions of corporate interests-cum-for-profit data mining. Zuboff refers to the EULA and TOS as

¹⁹⁰ An anglicization, phonetically the tribe is also referred to as “*laʔamun*”

¹⁹¹ “As I Remember It: Home,” *As I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw)* from the Life of a Sliammon Elder, accessed April 20, 2023, <http://publications.ravenspacepublishing.org/as-i-remember-it/index>.

“contracts of adhesion” and “click-wrap” for their take-it-or-leave-it conditions that users are stuck with whether they like it or not and the phenomenon where people simply click “I agree” without ever actually reading the agreement.¹⁹² While these agreements clearly lack meaningful consent, their use and the consequences of that use are still upheld in U.S. courts.¹⁹³ EULA’s and TOS, unlike protocols to come ashore, are in service of the entanglement between neoliberal market based politics, settler colonial legal entities, and the degradation of human expression and behavior into data. Protocols for being a respectful guest both precede the logics of the EULA and TOS and exceed them epistemologically. Clicking “I agree” on *As I Remember It’s* protocols brings the user into the website, where a video of Elsie Paul filleting a Salmon with her family members greets the visitor. The digital book starts with the epigraph “It’s very important, our taʔaw. ‘taʔaw’ means ‘the teaching.’ Utilizing the digital platform, the book includes photos, videos, and audio recordings along with text. It is separated into four chapters, “Territory,” “Colonialism,” “Community,” and “Wellness.” Each chapter has between nine and eleven “pages” which are full length articles that Elsie shares with her readers. The articles range from laʔamun practices of root digging, fishing for salmon, berry picking in the Territory chapter; residential schools, segregation, and work in the Colonialism chapter; Old-Timers, Learning by example and Standing up for What I Believe in in the Community chapter; and finally, Spirit Cleansing, Offerings for the Ancestors, and Self-Care in the Times of Grief in the Wellness chapter. The digital book uses tools from Mukurtu in its infrastructural elements, including the tags system to signal important traditional knowledges that should not be shared, detailed metadata and citations for the photos, audio and video included in the book, and maps for seeing

¹⁹² Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, First Trade Paperback Edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020). 55.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

the places that are described in the book. The site also features links to articles written by the co-authors explaining their process and to a page on Sliammon language. RavenSpace shows us that the Internet is not just a place where we have increased access to information. It is also a tool that can follow protocols of Indigenous ways of relating to one another for the benefit of all. Further, it demonstrates how Indigenous peoples are using technology to advance tribally focused, self-determined prerogatives.

Amidst the technoliberal climate of the ostensibly inexorable investment in AI models, that plagiarize words and art, it is more important than ever that we employ technologies of our own. Surely, in the sense of Oscar Kawagley's "soft technology," we should integrate Indigenous ways of knowing/relating to the world in technoscientific projects. But, another array of technologies that we should continue are our capacities for dreaming, our generative refusals, and our methods by which we test limits and bring our self-determined desires into being. It is clear that "digital Indigeneities" are much more than numbers in a code or images on a screen, they are an imperative to forwarding our investments in just futures and our commitments to being good ancestors. Our approach to data should align with a robust engagement with both the material and the metaphysical, a remembering of our responsibilities to our more-than-human relatives and to each other. Along with dreaming new online spaces into being, we must continue to serve as a disruption in the machine of settler coloniality, as we have done since creating our own and adapting to technologies for generations.

Chapter 4: Guitar as Relative: A Creative Meditation on Indigenous Praxis and Materialities



Figure 4.1 The author in his bedroom on Snob Hill in Taholah. 2008.

I love this photo of me. It depicts a time when I was around fifteen years old, standing in the bedroom that was also my guitar practice room. The box spring-less twin bed unadorned with bedsheets, the empty Gatorade bottle, the articles of clothing and shoes strewn about, at least four pillows that are probably older than I am in the photo, the issue of *Guitar World* right next to my bed. These elements lend a rezziness to the mise-en-scène. My guitar strap depicts a lightning bolt, because of course it does. Equally rezzy is my outfit, a cotton long sleeve shirt with the sleeves rolled up and some basketball shorts.¹⁹⁴ My “heritage cherry sunburst” Epiphone Les Paul was my first “real” guitar, and the pickups were the Seymour Duncan SH5 in the bridge and the SH2N “jazz model” in the neck. Notably, I am not holding any particular “shape” on the guitar, the purpose of me holding it is specifically for posing for a photo. This is reflected in my facial expression, which is less of a “smile for the photo” and more of an expression mid-sentence “did you take the picture yet?” If you look closely, you can see that the guitar is actually plugged in, so my hand placements were cutting off the sound signal of the guitar in addition to creating the pose. I still have access to the guitar, but I gifted it to my nephew on his tenth birthday, so it lives ten minutes outside of Taholah at my sister’s house in Pacific Beach.

I often tell people that I play the guitar because my mother weaves cedar baskets (Figure 4.2). This is true, because she wove my creative spirit into being. But the more concrete story is that I play guitar because my uncle Chris married a Navajo woman. My auntie Edcelena’s brother Al-jay picked up my mom’s acoustic guitar on a visit and started playing the same riffs that every millennial who picked up the guitar at the time played – Nothing Else Matters, One, Fade to Black, all by Metallica from Ride the Lightning, ...And Justice For All, and the Black album. I was 10 at the time, and I thought it was the coolest thing in the world. The guitar ended

¹⁹⁴ This is the de facto uniform of the rez.

up becoming what is one of my longest loving relationships. It has become something I do even when I don't particularly like it, but I have to do it anyways. My newfound love evolved at a serendipitous time, for what we lacked in any semblance of a music program in Taholah, or even the general community initiative to support the arts, we made up for by having a DSL connection. I grew up on Snob Hill with nerdy introverted hoquat father after all, so I was privileged enough to have a PC in the home. I learned some fundamentals of western harmony as they are applied to the instrument through tabs and forums on ultimate-guitar.com. I was a very loyal student to (username) ZeGuitarist's *Ultimate Guide to Guitar* or (UGG).¹⁹⁵ Playing in my headphones, if I had to guess for the time, was a whole lot of System of a Down and Linkin Park, two artists that were essential to my musical genealogy.

¹⁹⁵ I am so delighted to share that this column still exists:

https://www.ultimate-guitar.com/lessons/the_guide_to/the_ultimate_guide_to_guitar_chapter_i__1_introduction_-_the_guitar.html



Figure 4.2 A collection of baskets woven by Kiwi Chenois on the dining room table of the author's childhood home. n.d.

Also germane to that genealogy was the music enjoyed by family members - my mother's favorite band of all time is Earth, Wind & Fire; my father listened to classic rock and religiously watched the music video to "Dreams" by Van Halen featuring the Blue Angels, the U.S. Navy flight squadron (as the story goes, he "jumped out of planes in the army"); my brother listened to a lot of Janet Jackson, which segued nicely to his current fixation with pop music, and my sister listened to gangster rap and any kind of "recent" R&B music. Each of these vignettes of musicality woven into my family unit possess a multidimensional relationship with sound, place, and memory. My mother had a deep nostalgia for the dance hall, which she mobilized in those moments when we'd listen to her music in the house (and I would subsequently refuse to dance). My father was deeply introspective, and I think his engagement with music was less about remembering his glory days and more about the desire to stop thinking altogether. My brother uses music to connect with people. Not in the sense that he listens to what's popular for the sake of it, but that the iconicity of the artists he loves represents his attunement with the socialities they give rise to. My sister used music to protest, to feel empowered to live with her most authentic self. I was the observer of the family, and the only metalhead, or at least the only one for whom it evolved into something that I currently enjoy. System of a Down, an Armenian American metal band, sounds a certain radicality as artists committed to speaking truth to injustice, most notably the Armenian genocide. They also have an affinity for the weird and esoteric, which as an observer I felt resonated with me deeply. If System was a band that sounded responses to external phenomena for me, Linkin Park is the band that forced me to turn inward. Chester Bennington was a one-of-a-kind vocalist, making audible such deeply personal angst and anguish.

As I grew older, I became more and more fixated on guitar-centric music. I spent hours listening to Steve Vai's *Passion and Warfare* and perusing the last.fm app for Xbox, where I discovered the guitar virtuoso Guthrie Govan, who is responsible for completely shifting my musical world, mainly because he was my personal gateway to jazz guitar. At this point I was becoming more invested in the didactic elements of the guitar, which made me feel challenged to learn how to appreciate technically complex music. I don't view this as a challenge for the sake of it, but a natural evolution of seeing my family's investments in sound, place and memory come into being. To me, the esoteric, eclectic and technical are ways that music can articulate deeply what no other art form can. I hunger for being able to make music that expresses increasingly complex emotions, that shifts boundaries and eschews paradigms. I don't think that it will be a project that's ever finished, and that's the essence of joy that surrounds all of it.

I imagine that my mother felt a deep and creative satisfaction in anticipating the cut of cedar strips, soaking freshly peeled bark in the bathtub overnight, quietly working the weave, and taking trips to Shipwreck Beads in Nisqually territory, what is commonly known as Lacey, WA for raffia and beads for her necklaces and earrings. Her version of expressing herself in the weave was her signature "salmon and net design," which had become an icon in itself for those familiar with her weaving which also became the design for our school gymnasium's bleachers upon remodeling. While I don't know my mother's exact perspective on this, I find it notable that her weaving was simply a part of her. It seems less that she is an artist commanding the practice as it seems that the art itself tells her to be. This is what became of my relationship to the guitar. It is so synonymous with my ways of knowing and doing things, that when I am not actively practicing or playing every day, I know that I am not in a good place. This reflects that same creative satisfaction my mother feels, though instead of the preparations to weave baskets, I

feel it imagining the feeling of a bend, constructing a riff that I'm proud of, planning a signal chain/building a pedalboard, and improvising alongside a backing track or a full band.

I wouldn't say that playing guitar *is* weaving. But playing guitar, like weaving, *is* praxis. While we can trace weaving back to our ancestors, including the materials from which we made baskets, the guitar is a much newer form of praxis. I wouldn't foreclose the possibility of the guitar as an instrument (no pun intended) of *kwinaył* praxis, despite its newness in the grand scheme of Quinault ways of doing. This would mean foreclosing our Indigeneity as a process of being and becoming, rather than existing as a static identity.¹⁹⁶ It would also limit our potentialities for adaptation, which is the always ever present process of Indigenous being and doing. Dynamism is our resistance to structures and logics that would contain us to the politics of purity and authenticity, which are co-constitutive of the enterprise of colonial assimilation and erasure. No, the telos of Indigeneity is not disappearance, it's resurgence: the ways in which we activate the fluidity of time immemorial, thinking/feeling/weaving/playing *kwinaył* logics and praxis into being, through our distinctive and thoughtful relations to our sonorous ancestor, the North Pacific, amidst too many relatives to name. Resurgence is a generative process that finds valence in our everyday acts of defiance to the colonial project. It is not raucous, it is gentle. The parameters of our resurgence are not brightly colored explosions of unjust systems. They are a love for our spirit, nurtured through the body and perceived through the mind, deeply felt and sensed relationships between countless generations that have come before us, and all who will come after. The proposition that I want to make here is that the tools by which we enact that resurgence are neither unchanging nor inanimate. They are as active in the relationships between

¹⁹⁶ See Jessica Bissett Perea, *Sound Relations: Native Ways of Doing Music History in Alaska* (Oxford University Press, 2021). 26-28.

past and future generations as our human and more-than-human relatives. The focus on process and intention are what matters here, as much as the technoliberal machine moves voraciously towards the prospect of creativity without humans.

This chapter is my love letter to the guitar. I engage the instrument not solely out of my close and loving practice, but through the Indigenous knowledge systems that animate the interplay between the organic and the material. Situated within the concept of relationality, I play the instrument to foreground the ways that the guitar (and sound and music more broadly) harmonize with Indigenous spirituality as well as the abstractions of musical commerce, industry, and popularity. My trajectory in highlighting this instrument will follow a creative meditation of its fundamental body parts - the body, the neck, the bridge, and the pickups¹⁹⁷. Just like the weaver's cedar, raffia, water, and scissors, each body part of the guitar is constitutive of a whole, which through interaction with the human body, becomes a piece of art that becomes a living being. Especially in the right hands.

I extend my gratitude for the methodology of a “creative meditation” to Nimipu/Tejana literary scholar and professor emerita of Native American Studies at UC Davis, Inés Hernández-Ávila. In her essay, *A Creative Meditation on the Aesthetics of Mestizaje*, Hernández-Ávila weaves together personal narrative and theory to explore Xicanx Indigeneity, responding to two questions: “How does Indigenous knowledge renarrative mestizaje differently than how it is inscribed in Chicanx studies?” and “How can the aesthetics of mestizaje and Xicanx Indigeneity be informed/transformed by more engagement with the work of Native American and Indigenous

¹⁹⁷ I'm choosing an electric guitar rather than an acoustic here so I don't have to choose “sound hole” as a metaphor.

Studies scholars?”¹⁹⁸ The crux of this work is the narrativity of Hernández-Ávila’s decades long experience as a scholar of Native American Studies at UC Davis and founder of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, or NAISA. The chapter is also animated in no small part by Hernández-Ávila’s positionality as a Xicanx/Nimipu scholar and visitor on Patwin territory, where UC Davis is based.

My guitar playing is, to reiterate, animated by my mother’s basket weaving practice. It is also a way to sound relationalities between the materials used to make the instrument(s), the songs and conventions that constitute my guitar study, and the lands and waters of the North Pacific that find their way into everything that I have created and ever will create. Taking the guiding questions approach, the investigation of this chapter might be “How does the guitar tell a story about weaving baskets?” and “How does creative praxis tell a story about our relations to the human and more-than-human?” The gratitude that I have for Hernández-Ávila’s work is not just a scholarly inspiration/citation. I owe my foray into the world of Indigenous Sound and Music Studies to the graduate seminar in Native American literature that Hernández-Ávila taught in Fall 2019. We had a discussion in seminar about Joy Harjo’s poem *She Had Some Horses*, which is made up of a repetitious rhythm: “She had horses who were bodies of sand / She had horses who were maps drawn of blood” etc.¹⁹⁹ The rhythm in itself implies a call and response, an interplay between each stanza and subsequent idea that weaves the poem together. My reading of the poem was somewhat monotonous, an almost clinical reading of each repeating idea, “she had some horses...she had some horses...” etc. Part of the discussion of the poem was

¹⁹⁸ Inés Hernández-Ávila, “A Creative Meditation on the Aesthetics of Mestizaje,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 46, no. 2 (2021): 221–33, <https://doi.org/10.1525/azt.2021.46.2.221>. 222.

¹⁹⁹ Joy Harjo, *She Had Some Horses* (Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1997).

to listen to the audio recording of the musical arrangement for the song from Harjo's album *Letter From the End of the Twentieth Century* (2003). Listening to the musical arrangement completely shifted how I experienced the poem. What was a repetitious, monotonous reading found an infectious groove: the song starts with an off-beat centric guitar accompaniment and trades solos between guitarist Larry Mitchell and Joy's signature saxophone playing. The shift in experience between poem and song was so inspiring to me I ended up writing an essay about the poetry of Harjo's music and the music of Harjo's poetry. Everything I have done since in music theory can be traced back to that point.

The Body



Figure 4.3 The guitar body of the author's Strandberg Boden Plini Edition. 2025.

The body of a guitar the main point of contact for the artist. In electric guitars, the interior of the body houses the potentiometers, switch(es), connecting wires, ground wire, and pickups; transducers that convert the vibration of the guitar strings to an electric signal. The exterior of the electric guitar houses the peripherals that interact with these internal components. These include the tone and volume knobs, the pickup selector switch, the exterior of the pickups, and the bridge, which connects the guitar strings sometimes but not always through the neck into a headstock. Functionally, these components alter the guitar's tone in significant ways. The tone knob is a low-pass filter, when rolled back it filters out treble frequencies, lending a warmer sound to the guitar. This sound is effective for playing in contexts that demand accompaniment and/or subtlety. If you add a high-depth high-speed low frequency oscillator (LFO), from a chorus pedal (for one example), you can sound like you're playing is submerged in water. The volume knob might seem self-explanatory, when rolled all the way back the signal of the guitar does not come through the amplifier at all. But there are creative uses to self-imposed absence — if you utilize a high-gain overdrive or distortion pedal, you can roll back the volume knob almost all the way to clean up your sound, which can add contrast or crescendo by rolling the volume knob with the high gain distortion or overdrive back up for certain parts of the musical composition/performance. The pickups are magnetic transducers that converts the vibration of the strings of the guitar to an electric signal. This signal is “picked up” electromagnetically and sent to the amplifier through a 1/4 inch tip-sleeve (TS) or tip-ring-sleeve (TRS) cable. Each pickup and pickup maker tunes them to distinctive characteristics, and apart from the amplifier used and signal chain, the pickups have the greatest effect on the overall sound of the guitar. Most electric guitars have two pickups, the “bridge” and the “neck” pickups, named for their proximity to those parts of the instrument. The neck pickup has a

warmer sound and is typically used to play rhythm guitar. The bridge pickup has much more pronounced treble frequencies and can lend an aggressive edge to the tone for rhythm playing or be used as the primary pickup for “lead playing,” which listeners would recognize as the “guitar solo.” Finally, the bridge is the piece of hardware that connects the guitar strings to the body. My preferred guitar comes from a Swedish guitar builder called Strandberg Guitars, so the body has a unique shape compared to the more classic “super strat” style.

Thinking about the body sends my mind (a part of my body) reeling in all kinds of directions. In basket weaving/essay writing, Elissa Washuta (Cowlitz) and Theresa Warburton use the idea of an “exquisite vessel” to articulate Native non-fiction writers “delicate balance between beauty and pain”:

“The “exquisite” character of this vessel invokes simultaneously an exquisite work of art and the exquisite ache of an intense sensation. By bringing to the fore a focus on form, in both the structure and the concept of the collection, we use the term exquisite vessel not just to name the work done herein but to draw attention to form as a creative and literary practice of reverence for the exquisite in its most literal sense of something carefully sought out.”²⁰⁰

When I think of my mom’s baskets I can’t conceptualize that she would go into it without a plan for the body. That is, a plan for the design of the basket. I’ve seen her weave her signature “fish and net” design, whales, canoes, trees, all kinds of relatives depicted in the exquisite vessels that she creates. The “seeking out” as Washuta and Warburton describe, is not contained by what will be placed into the basket, but in the process of weaving itself. If I’m being honest, I wouldn’t describe the guitar body as an exquisite vessel as much as I’d describe *the human body* as such. The ways to inflect a note, the relentless noodling, the careful construction and

²⁰⁰ Elissa Washuta and Theresa Warburton, *Shapes of Native Nonfiction: Collected Essays by Contemporary Writers* (University of Washington press, 2019). 10.

articulation of a riff, are all instantiated not necessarily in a thoughtful experience but improvised through the act of play itself. The creative act as an embodied practice is reflected in the ways that my Quinault ancestors harvested cedar to make clothing, wall planks, house posts, roof planks, canoes, boxes, cradles, arrow shafts, and and of course, baskets.²⁰¹ Cedar trees are some of our oldest relatives, though many of them have been chopped down by the imposition of the colonial thirst; the translation of relation to value that happens in the racial capitalocene.

Acts of creation live in the body. And the body has its own intelligence. In the introduction to *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: On the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*, Véronica Gago interplays with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's decolonial philosophy of the body:

“[Silvia] When you write, breathe deeply. It is a craft, it is a gesture of a worker. And when you read what you’ve written, go back to breathing this way, until you feel like there is a rhythm. Texts need to learn to dance.” [Veronica] Again, we come to the question of *rhythm* that considers epistemology an artifact of the corporeal. Above we explained that looking with the whole body as another way of mistrusting ocularcentrism brings other organs into place, to the point of fine-tuning the gaze and lateralizing it toward that which stays hidden: [Silvia] “It is about knowing with the *chuyma*, which includes your lungs, heart, and liver. Knowing is breathing and beating. It involves a metabolism and a rhythm with the cosmos.”²⁰²

The “epistemology [as] an artifact of the corporeal” finds resonance with me here, as I think about the ways that knowledge is transmitted through the body²⁰³, and how our embodied practices articulate law and belonging in a place, no matter how many signs are affixed to paper.²⁰⁴ Cusicanqui's invocation of the breath calls forth the relationship with cedar as well. For thousands of years, our breath exchanged with cedar trees (among many other relatives) using their own body-intelligence to give us oxygen. I would contend that our “cosmic rhythms” as

²⁰¹ Jacqueline M. Storm et al., *Land of the Quinault*, ed. Pauline K. Capoeman (Quinault Indian Nation, 1991).

²⁰² Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Molly Geidel, *Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: On Practices and Discourses of Decolonisation*, Critical South (Polity, 2020). xxviii.

²⁰³ See Taylor (2016).

²⁰⁴ See Chapter 2.

Cusicanqui describes them, includes our cosmologies. Baskets do have value in their aesthetics, but the practice of weaving is a reflection and an assertion of distinctively Quinault cosmologies. This includes my mother's relationship with Beatrice Black, her weaving teacher, as well as too many generations to count before her.

Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor posits that performance is an embodied form of knowledge transmission²⁰⁵. Weaving, like guitar playing, transmits these knowledge systems through affective mobilizations, or what Dian Million (Tanana Athabascan) calls "dreaming."²⁰⁶ Writing in the context of the residential school system, Million forwards affective mobilizations as a response to another kind of affective/epistemic violence, the medicalizing of Indigenous "trauma" wrought by historic systems that inculcated profanity into Indigenous life (the physical/emotional/spiritual violence of the residential school system), and the "emotional habitus" that arose from such treatment.²⁰⁷ My mother has told me the story of how my great-grandfather Daniel escaped one such institution around the age of ten. His affective mobilization led to family mantras like "grandpa Dan valued education." His dreams unfurled into my mother's weaving practice and what became this work of writing in the context of scholarship/the academy.

In the electric guitar, the body is the vessel for the technologies that make it sing. In a sense, the affective potential of the instrument itself lives in the components that create a physical signal, which is then amplified into sound. Mobilizing dreams, taking the electric guitar

²⁰⁵ Diana Taylor, *Performance* (Duke University Press, 2016). 36.

²⁰⁶ Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (University of Arizona Press, 2014). 50.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 49.

as a teacher, involves the interplay between the physical natures of our material relatives and the sovereignty of our desire.

The Neck



Figure 4.4 The neck of the author's Strandberg Boden Plini Edition guitar. 2025.

The neck of the guitar consists of a fingerboard, (optional) inlays, the frets, and (optional) a headstock. The guitar's strings run along the length of the neck, perpendicular to the frets. It's common for guitars to have a total number between 21 and 24 frets, depending on the make and model of the instrument. The neck is where the fretting hand manipulates the pitch of the instrument by holding down the string at the different fretting positions (this is literally called "fretting a note"). If there were a human body part that had the closest relationship with the neck (aside from the hands), it would probably be the eyes, because the neck/fretting hand positioning are what the guitarist looks at the most. This makes sense because the fretting hand affects the key the guitar player is playing in, the shapes that create chords and melodies, and any simple misplacement could cause the guitar to do something the player doesn't want it to do. Frets are made typically with nickel, but many guitar makers use stainless steel for its superior durability and aging. Frets also come in different sizes, from narrow to "jumbo." When the frets are larger/thicker, it makes performing a "bend" where the strings are bent to ascend the pitch much easier. Narrow frets have advantages as well, particularly for the feel of the neck and for performing "slides" where the finger stays in contact with the fretboard but slides up or down from note to note. The physical properties of the strings also matter. The "gauge" of the string is measured in thousandths of an inch. The first three strings, the "high E" B, and G strings are all unwound, while the D, A, and E (and B and F#, if the guitar has 7 or 8 strings), are all wound around the core with metal wire. Arguably the most common string gauges are (from high to low) .009 .011 .016 .024 .032 .042. The colloquialism for this string gauge size is "nines," dictated by the size of the high E string. This gauge is great for retaining a loose feel while also tuning to "standard tuning" which from low to high is EADGBE. Thicker gauge strings are less

likely to break with dramatic bends, and also enable guitarists to “down tune” to lower-pitched tunings. Though thicker strings might not feel as good to the guitar player, especially for beginners. Most guitar companies make “coated” or “treated” strings, where the strings are coated in a thin layer of polymer. The polymer coating protects strings from corrosion, making them last much longer than uncoated strings. Behind the fingerboard, the neck has a distinctive “profile” that describes the shape of the wood where the thumb rests on the neck. Standard profiles are “D” and “C” shaped, and can vary in thickness. Some necks are made of “roasted maple” in a process where the entire neck is “cooked” in an oxygen-free oven to aid in stability, since wood is pliable, necks tend to bend in the changing of weather patterns/humidity. The roasting makes the wood harder and less prone to bending. My specific guitar has a roasted maple neck, and a unique neck profile, patented as “EndurNeck,” which is a trapezoidal neck profile that is radically different than the standard neck profiles. Some people don’t like it, but I adapted to it immediately and love how it feels.

An isthmus is a narrow strip of land between two water bodies, a “neck” of land, so to speak. This place commonly referred to as “Seattle” is an isthmus, to the west it is held by the Salish Sea (or what is commonly known as the “Puget Sound”) and to the east it is held by what was referred to by Duwamish ancestors as *šačuʔ*, or “big lake,” now referred to as Lake Washington.²⁰⁸ The name in Lushootseed credited with Seattle proper is *dʒidʒəlalič*, which translates to “little crossing over place.” I have lived in this city on and off for about eleven years (at the time of writing), and I have grown particularly fond of the Southend, which is both historically and contemporarily the home of BIPOC communities amidst Seattle’s reputation of

²⁰⁸ “Chesheeahud,” Duwamish Tribe, <https://www.duwamishtribe.org/cheshiahud>.

“NIMBY white folks” and “tech bros.” The Southend has changed quite a lot over the last ten years due to the imposition of tech industry induced gentrification. Its music scene has stayed resilient through a grassroots movement of musicians with deep ties to this city/neighborhood and each other, at least in my experience of going to local venues in Columbia City and North Beacon Hill.

My work at KEXP has led to meeting the most talented musicians I have been able to know (see Chapter 3). These folks typically, though not always, have at least one guitarist in their lineup. Central District/Southend music communities reflect the density of relations of the neighborhoods themselves, though the folks I choose to know come from queer and BIPOC communities. The network of relations typically come with a particular orientation to place; I have seen musician friends at anarchist book fairs, queer open mics, Indigenous art gallery openings, and some have even come to my talks for university related events and/or other kinds of public scholarship. The ethic isn’t politics, it’s community. And while the guitar isn’t the only instrument represented, it is my foray into conversation with folks about music, in addition to scholarship or DJ’ing. These conversations are not necessarily didactic, theory focused or radical, but they animate a certain presence of mind between musicians; the craft of making guitar music, the joys of celebrating a particularly well-written composition, or the improvised solo that stands out in a particular show or jam session. The articulations of musicianship are inextricable from our relationalities to place/practice/community, through an intertribal relationship building praxis focused on speaking truth to our relationalities and our fraught relationship with gentrification, white supremacy, queer-phobia, and settler colonialism. A separation between the “musical” and the “political” would be irresponsible here. It would be

more accurate to say that being in relation to each other and these lands and waters *makes* the musical didactic, theory focused, and radical.

Basket weavers in Coast Salish territories and the broader North Pacific have made similar intertribal relations. This is true in the sense that there is an active Basket Weavers Association in the area, but I am curious to speculate how ancestors from a multiplicity of tribal nations met and traded techniques, stories, politics, and design philosophies for the baskets here, like I do as a guitarist with my musician friends. Writing specifically about Ts’msyen chilkat weaving, Robin Gray (Ts’msyen) articulates the creation of artistic works as “[asserting and validating] history, kinship, prerogatives, responsibilities, governance, and politics.”²⁰⁹ Gray further elucidates the intertribal relationalities within the histories of chilkat weaving between Ts’msyen and Tlingit weavers. The weaving practice was revitalized in 1999 through a potlatch ceremony in Prince Rupert. While chilkat weaving is not a specifically Duwamish/Suquamish weaving practice, the principles in the relations between Ts’msyen and Tlingit weavers (validating kinship, etc.) manifest in this part of the North Pacific, the isthmus that situates what we call “Seattle.” Furthermore, tribes of southeast Alaska have made relations to this place for generations due to relocation programs, such that Seattle is what I call a “*de facto* Alaska Native city.”

Historian Coll Thrush demonstrates the importance of basket weaving as a marker of trade in this region:

“Weaving was not just a metaphor for what happened on this coast. Like canoes and totem poles, baskets were both product and symbol of Seattle’s Indian hinterland. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, sidewalk encounters between Indian vendors and white customers were a part of everyday life in Seattle...No need to go to Neah Bay, Prince Rupert, or

²⁰⁹ Robin R. R. Gray, “Rematriation: Ts’msyen Law, Rights of Relationality, and Protocols of Return,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 9, no. 1 (2022): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nai.2022.0010>. 7.

Sitka; the hinterland came to Seattle, bringing touches of distant nature to the heart of urban America. And, in fact, most of the basket vendors on Seattle streets at the turn of the century were not from Puget Sound. According to the [Seattle] *Post-Intelligencer*, many were Makah or Nuu-chah-nulth from Vancouver Island.”²¹⁰

Basketry as a product and symbol created a nexus of practices that brought folks from far away lands to engage the art form and participate in commerce. While today’s version of this certainly includes the imposition of tech cultures and the displacement that follows, basketry and musicality echo this relationship to dʒidʒəlalič as a gathering place of a multiplicity of peoples and practices. It is important to note that these relationships *have* displaced Duwamish/Suquamish peoples. Even though Quinault is considered Coast Salish, I still consider myself a visitor in these lands/waters. But, displacement does not dismiss the possibilities for being in right relation to the peoples, places, and practices that animate the isthmus. Creative praxis like guitar playing and basket weaving gives weight to these responsibilities through our conscientious efforts at making community, visitors and all.

The Bridge

²¹⁰ Coll-Peter Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-over Place*, Second edition, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books (University of Washington Press, 2017). 152-153.



Figure 4.5 The bridge of the author's Strandberg Boden Plini Edition guitar. 2025.

The bridge is typically a metal component that holds the tension of the strings and connects them to the body of the guitar. Far from simply connecting the string between two points, the bridge is important for shaping the intonation of the guitar, or the relative pitch stability between each string along the length of the instrument. In other words, the intonation makes the overall string (without affecting its pitch) “longer” or “shorter” in order to stay in tune at different parts of the neck, relative to the overall guitar's set intonation. Other bridge mechanisms include a “floating bridge” that uses a cavity in the back of the guitar to house a spring loaded mechanism that splits tension between the bridge and the strings while being able to be moved vertically or horizontally. This allows for players to use a “whammy bar” to manually pitch shift notes up or down. Some famous bridges include the Tune-O-Matic, the

Floyd Rose, the Bigsby, and the Hipshot. The Strandberg guitar that I use has a proprietary floating bridge and intonation system.

Under the Bridge by Red Hot Chili Peppers²¹¹ is one of the most famous guitar riffs/rites of passage for a guitarist to know. The riff might be interpreted as a simple “vamp” between two different chords, D and F# with a few embellishments played between each chord. Though, the choice of using an F# in the key of D major is interesting, since F# is not “in the key” of D major per se, F#m is the typical diatonic choice. This constitutes a form of “modal interchange” where a chord is “borrowed” from another key to give a distinctive “non-diatonic” sound to the chord melody. The embellishments deserve attention here as well. John Frusciante, influenced by the guitar playing of Jimi Hendrix, was known to arpeggiate the chord melodies and reach chord extensions while holding the chord triad in place, which gives a distinctive “movement” to the riff and sound a bit like a hybrid between melodic and rhythmically-based guitar playing. Melodically, these embellishment techniques are used to create a “call and response” between the two chords, separated by Frusciante playing single note melodies to lead-in between the chords.

My first songs on the guitar were, in addition to the Metallica riffs you’re already familiar with, in the vein of popular rock/punk/emo artists like Chiodos, Green Day, My Chemical Romance, etc. This shouldn’t be too surprising. Some of my earliest memories of learning were how I could mimic the outro riff to Green Day’s *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*, which I

²¹¹ I am well aware of Anthony Kiedis’s cringy “new age” pretendian spirituellism, as well as some other disturbing...proclivities involving younger women. I choose to center John Frusciante in invoking Red Hot Chili Peppers simply because of the impact he has made on the popularity of the guitar.

immediately had to show my mom, to which she nodded approval but immediately went back to focusing on her basket table. Learning a song is a way of connecting to a plethora of dimensions. You transport, through transposition, to the places where artists write from — the musical dimensions of their life experiences, the songs that shaped them, the conventions and styles that from which are also derived from a conventions and styles stretching back in time. Of course, you also commune with the piece of music itself. This includes the ways that it relates to your experiences, the ways that it says things that words cannot.

One might think that this is a dimension where guitar and weaving diverge: in weaving, the materials and practices come from a distinctive place. The cedar used comes *from* somewhere. Although I would argue that the ubiquity of the guitar as an instrument does not foreclose this possibility. Songs also come *from* somewhere, they are shaped by a line of influences and sonic conventions that *also* denote specific locations. Music is not born from a purely human experience, it is informed by the places that shape the desire for the artist to compose. That is why we have genre naming conventions like “Delta Blues” or “Bay Area Hip-Hop.” The engagement with the sonic, albeit not necessarily in metaphysical relation to the more-than-human, is still *landed*.

I have been a bad son. My mother tried to teach me how to weave at certain points in my life, but I didn’t really “take to it” so to speak. While there is always time to learn, I have admittedly resigned myself to learning how to weave guitar compositions more than cedar baskets. But perhaps that is my bridge to Indigenous creative praxis in itself. We are not beholden to any singular method of creative composition. While this might seem like an essentialized notion “I’m a Quinault guitarist because I’m Quinault and play guitar,” it is much more complicated than that. *Being* Quinault is equally a process of becoming as it is a process of

being *in relation*. A more proper (though no less confusing) way of saying it might be “I am a Quinault guitarist because I am in relation to Quinaultness and guitar has become a relative in that endeavor.”

My ancestors had relationships with instruments as well. A non-exhaustive list of instruments might include drum and the rattle, the voice, the canoe, the paddle, and the dances. Each of these instruments are catalytic in pulling Quinault worlds into being, activating through space and time our responsibilities to one another and to our past and future generations. If the neck of the guitar is where the physical pitches are shifted, where the scales live, where songs find their identity, then the bridge is the place where those markers of distinctiveness find their stability in relation to the tonality, intonation, and tuning of the instrument. The neck might be a weavers cedar strips, and the bridge is where the finished basket becomes a vessel. The didactic elements of weaving, like the didactic elements of learning an arpeggio, chord voicing, or riff, are transmission of embodied knowledge both sounded and physical/material. Practice creates the conditions for a reciprocal exchange between our human bodies and the materials we use to be in relation to the world. In other words, our sensorial engagement with materials changes the materials themselves but it also *changes us*.

The Pickups



Figure 4.6 The pickups of the author's Strandberg Boden Plini Edition guitar. 2025.

The pickups are rectangular magnetic transducers that convert the vibrations of the guitar strings to an electric signal, which is sent through the guitar cable into the amplifier. Passive pickups (the more popular type) have magnetic pole pieces that match the number of strings on the guitar (most commonly six but sometimes seven or even eight). Active pickups have

a built-in preamp and use a 9V battery to boost the signal of the guitar further, which leads to a more pronounced and “clear” sound. Neither type of pickup is better than the other, the sound relies on the preference of the guitar player. Pickups, like some microphone and telephone technologies, have “coils” that combined with a magnet and a magnetic body (in this case the guitar strings), produce an electric current in the coil. The ways that the coil is wound (and the number of times it is wound) matter, which has led to the creation of “boutique pickup makers” that hand-wind or customize pickups based on the specifications of the player. Pickups have the most drastic effect on the guitar’s sound, so often guitarists will purchase a guitar and if they like the feel but are unsatisfied with the sound, a change in pickups can make a remarkable difference. The type of magnet used in a pickup matters as well, and the most popular kinds of pickups use a certain type of alnico (a portmanteau of aluminum (Al), nickel (Ni), and cobalt (Co)) magnet while others use ceramic magnets. Some of the most popular pickup brands include Seymour Duncan, Suhr, EMG (active), Fishman (active), and DiMarzio. The Strandberg guitar that I play has Suhr SSV in the neck position and the Suhr SSH+ in the bridge position.

My mother takes orders for her baskets. Among her more popular design philosophies are the “earring and necklace sets” — small baskets that are meant to be worn as earrings with matching beaded basket necklaces. This design philosophy leads to limitless possibilities for color matching, designs, materials, etc. Like tuning a particular pickup set to the specifications of an artist, the earring and necklace designs allow for a truly individualized set of baskets. I am not nearly famous (or wealthy) enough to commission a signature pickup set, let alone a whole signature guitar. But, popular artists tuning to their specifications for the commission of an instrument (or instrument components like pickups) is a popular way for guitar brands to sell

gear. The manufacturing, sale and distribution of instruments and music gear relies on mass-market sales philosophies, which, like in what has been critiqued in the business sector as “green capitalism” creates a set of relations that is less concerned with the materials used to make the instrument as more concerned with the bottom line. I am not so cynical that I would say that *all* guitar companies are like this, nor that *all* attempts at increasing sustainability of guitar products constitutes “green capitalism” over a genuinely well-intentioned market philosophy. However, the fascinating thing about manufacturing in the guitar world is that it necessarily follows an economic set of relations. This sounds obvious or potentially benign, but I am curious about what would happen if we treated the materials of the guitar like Quinaults treat cedar trees — as relatives, rather than material means to an end.

Take for example, the canoe. Canoes are, according to artists that make them, are living beings. The materials used for the canoe matter, but what matters more are the ways that we as Quinault/Coast Salish people *use* the canoe to make relations with each other, our waters, and the more-than-human world. Canoes certainly *are* a means to an end in certain ways, but the orientation of relationalities between the canoe and the people that use it are not the same as say, a corporate guitar chain.

Guitar companies vary in size, from large-scale operations from the most commercially available brands, Fender and Gibson, to the more niche, “boutique” custom guitar shops like Aristides, Strandberg, Rick Toone, Caparison, Mayones, and others. Common wood materials for building electric guitars include maple, alder, mahogany, basswood, and swamp ash. Many guitar companies offer options for more “exotic” woods like wenge and bubinga from Africa, Australian blackwood, koa from Hawaii, pale moon and macassar ebony from southeast Asia, etc. Companies often offer these options as selling (and price) points; the type of wood used for

the body of the guitar affects the sound of the instrument in controversially subtle ways.²¹² The sourcing of these tonewoods engenders concerns about the sustainability of manufacturing, since guitar bodies require old-growth timber to build.²¹³ In addition to these concerns, guitar manufacturing also raises questions about the relationships between the communities from which the tonewoods are sourced and the (mostly) American companies that make use of them. One example, following environmental anthropologist Jose E. Martinez-Reyes, traces the power relations laden in the extraction and production use of mahogany in Gibson guitars through the imposition of colonial governments from what was once known as “British Honduras” (current day Belize) into Fiji bearing the seeds of mahogany trees native to Mesoamerica.²¹⁴ Martinez-Reyes follows the globalization of mahogany production, emphasizing the ways that it gave rise to colonial governance, fueled by the demand for mahogany itself, which grew into the demand from guitar manufacturers (his specific example is Gibson).²¹⁵ The labor required to produce guitar bodies out of mahogany can be precarious, and the end product (the finished guitar’s) value is extremely disproportionate to the wages given to Indigenous laborers in the manufacturing facilities. Specifically, in the community where Martinez-Reyes researched, Indigenous laborers were paid just \$7 per neck blank and \$5 per body blank for guitars that would end up costing anywhere between \$1000 and \$7500.²¹⁶ This case shows that mahogany is

²¹² Such is the great “tonewood debate” where guitarists on one side argue that the type of wood doesn’t actually make a discernible difference, and on the other that the type of wood matters quite a lot to get a satisfactory sound.

²¹³ “The Guitar Industry’s Hidden Environmental Problem — and the People Trying to Fix It,” May 29, 2021, <https://cosmosmagazine.com/earth/sustainability/the-guitar-industrys-hidden-environmental-problem-and-the-people-trying-to-fix-it/>.

²¹⁴ Jose Martinez-Reyes, “Mahogany Intertwined: Enviromateriality between Mexico, Fiji, and the Gibson Les Paul,” *Journal of Material Culture* 20, no. 3 (2015): 313–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183515594644>.

²¹⁵ Ibid. 320.

²¹⁶ Ibid. 321.

a kind of “boundary object” — an object that carries different meanings between different groups in relation to the object.²¹⁷ Mahogany carries the seeds of coloniality, the relations between Indigenous laborers, the heritage of rock and roll music/Gibson guitar’s legacy, all within the grain of the wood and the nexus of practices it animates.

The environmental humanist in me beckons towards an examination of the socio-political structures of neoliberal capitalism and globalization that animate these economic projects. The extractive logics and presumption of access to materials by (mostly) American companies reflects a consequence of privatization and globality that destroys ecosystems, pollutes waterways, and marginalizes Indigenous laborers that make these relations possible. It is particularly ironic that many guitar manufacturing companies espouse the “American made” attitude towards manufacturing as a selling point while most of the raw materials that make the manufacturing of guitars possible are extracted from abroad.

The Quinault guitarist in me, however, is curious about what the relations between materials *could be*. In the time of my Quinault ancestors, commerce was based on mutual exchange and the strength of relationships between things traded. Our specific trade emphasized the Blueback (sockeye) salmon, which we traded with other peoples for certain goods, particularly dentalium shells, whale blubber, trade blankets, etc. Trade was not based on the model of accumulated wealth and exponential growth, but on the specialties in each community, emphasized by our thoughtful relations with the things we traded.²¹⁸ In guitar commerce, the investment in “tonewoods” is a social construction that relies on a specific attunement to guitar

²¹⁷ Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39,” *Social Studies of Science* 19, no. 3 (1989): 387–420.

²¹⁸ Jacqueline M. Storm et al., *Land of the Quinault*, ed. Pauline K. Capoeman (Quinault Indian Nation, 1991). 46, 77.

music, a specific way of listening that is invariably political. I can hear now the guitar traditionalists with their six figure vintage collections decrying our presumption to taint the legacy of these great companies, as is the American commitment to tradition devoid of social-political-historical context. What might happen if we take seriously the agency of the materials used in our instruments? How would a shift in focus towards relationality affect the constellation of practices animated by guitar manufacturing? How might a reorientation towards Indigenous ways of knowing/doing create generative relationships between material/object, trans-Indigeneity and intertribalism? I would not purport to act as if I am embodying these principles necessarily, all of my guitars are built by companies that rely on the systems mentioned above. But, my ardent hope is that Indigenous epistemologies of materiality and commerce can vibrate, be picked up by a magnet, converted into an electric signal, and amplified towards just futures for our more-than-human relatives.

Conclusion: Guitar As Relative

Recalling the photo that starts this chapter, I start to remember the formative aspects of my relationship to the guitar. So many hours were spent with my window wide open, playing as loud as my horrid Crate GX-15 solid state amplifier would go, for anyone on Snob Hill that would listen. I lived alone during that time, my mother moved in with my father after he lost his job and started community college in Olympia, during the 2008 financial crisis. My brother and sister were in Seattle to attend the University of Washington, an institution where I would eventually become a part-time instructor of American Indian Studies. That year, I was obsessed with learning licks from Steve Vai's *Passion and Warfare* (1990), and I was determined to be

able to play the solo to *For The Love Of God* by the time I was 21.²¹⁹ Those hours spent playing the guitar were responsible for making the instrument a relative. My accompaniment during those practice hours was the sonority of the North Pacific, its gentle roar made less gentle after a good rain. This is how, I suspect, my ancestors made music. Not playing through a window alone per se, but through the sonicities engendered by the relations between each other and our more-than-human relatives, and the instruments for which they made their sound worlds come alive.

There are ghosts from that time that still find their way into my mind-body today, which can fill me with uncertainty, fear, doubt, pain. But one thing that stays with me is the intimate time I spent with the guitar. The relationships that we have to our more-than-human relatives should be that intimate. Even back then I knew that my mind would be the primary way I would engage this world, and I spent those times lovingly committing songs to memory, building bridges and neural pathways between our ancestrally gifted ability to make sounds make meaning. Our art is our gift, and mine just happens to involve the body, the neck, the bridge, and some pickups, amplified through a signal chain, bringing worlds into being.

²¹⁹ To this day I still cannot play that solo.

Conclusion: skaallin's breath of air

I write from the Indigenous territories of the Duwamish and Suquamish nations, situated in what is now referred to as “Seattle, WA.” As a Quinault person, I have always known that I am a visitor in these lands and waters, the precedent sovereignties of these nations (and their broader human and more-than-human relations) is something that I keep in mind/heart/spirit while I live in this place. The weather here is pretty similar to Taholah, where I grew up. I typically call Taholah’s weather “Seattle’s plus or minus fifteen percent, rain or shine.” However, I would be lying if I did not say that I miss the air where I am from. Seattle almost gets there. With the cool of the water bodies of the Salish Sea surrounding the city and the temperate weather from our position along the earth, the air here does feel much different than the arid climate of Patwin territory, where the University of California is based, the home institution for my graduate program. However, when I travel back to Taholah, I am reminded of air that you can feel, as cold humidity of the North Pacific to the west envelopes my body. This is the weather that we paddled through for thousands of years. This is what keeps Quinault people from Taholah bragging about our “ocean air,” the nexus of relationships between the North Pacific, the humidity, and the oxygen that allows for us to breathe. The songs that we have created for thousands of years are drawn from that breath, in a felt, discursive relationship between our ancestors, our creative practice, our lands and waters, and our ideas. This is the same air that skaallin breathes after that whale-sleep, which is more like half-sleep, as whales are involuntary breathers.²²⁰

²²⁰ <https://us.whales.org/whales-dolphins/how-do-whales-and-dolphins-sleep/>

I like to think that this same air breathed life into Lee Maracle's words when she wrote *Dancing My Way to Oratory*, from her collection of written oratories, *Memory Serves*. While I am well aware of the likelihood that Maracle was in fact writing these words from Toronto, her positionality as a Stó:lō thought leader is animated by ancestral territories bearing similar experiences of the "ocean air" to mine. The chapter/oratory begins with an epigraph from Bruce Miller (Skokomish), a Salish orality instructor at Evergreen State College in 2002. "*Everything begins with song*"²²¹ (emphasis in original). Indeed, in Taholah whenever we are about to begin a memorial, a dinner, a ceremony, or an important council meeting, we start with a prayerful intent through the voice, the syllabic timbres of our ancestors. The chapter/oratory itself is a collection of reflections from Maracle as a storyteller. Surely in the Stó:lō tradition of storytelling, but also as a published author of fiction. Quite intentionally, she weaves Stó:lō practices of story, song, dance, law, and the scribal together towards "Governance [as the] spirit-to-spirit relationship about travelling to the good life."²²² Maracle continues, "They are about our energy harnessed from the cosmic spirit world, the living world, the natural world and the world of our ancestors, and using this energy to guide us to good being, good conduct and the purity of emotional and spiritual investment that will lead us to this spirit-to-spirit relationship."²²³ Maracle harnesses this energy through story, but perhaps more importantly through the creation of stories. She intentionally creates characters for which this commitment is present. In this way, Stó:lō and I would argue Indigenous creative praxis broadly, is not simply making something out of thin air. Instead, creation is a catalyst by which we channel the complex metaphysical dimensions that

²²¹ Lee Maracle, *Memory Serves: Oratories, Writer as Critic* 13 (Edmonton, AB: NeWest Press, 2015). 217.

²²² Ibid. 221.

²²³ Ibid.

Maracle reminds us of. We are the lands and waters where we come from. The lands and waters speak through us. And the air of our home enables us to draw breath.

A few hundred miles away, in a decidedly different climate, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) harmonizes nearly in unison to Maracle's reminder. In the forward to *Autonomy is in our Hearts: Zapatista Autonomous Government through the Lens of the Tsotsil Language*, John P. Clark elaborates on the "Politics of heart and spirit." Clark delineates the "dialectical reversal" in the history of the formation of the EZLN. Before the formation of EZLN there was the Forces of National Liberation (FLN), a vanguardist organization that focused on the seizure of state power and the centralization of the economy.²²⁴ Following the inheritance of this authoritarian model, a small group of FLN militants were sent to Chiapas to organize the peasants to this ideology. Instead, the organizers were reorganized, recognizing that revolution is "a socially and ecologically regenerative activity that is deeply rooted in history, tradition, culture, and place."²²⁵ In fact, as Fitzwater points out, in the Tsotsil language the term "ichbail ta muk" is a convergence of ichil (to bring) ba (one another) ta muk' (to greatness), and "implies the coming together of a big collective heart."²²⁶ According to Fitzwater, this can simply be translated to "democracy." Though in contrast to the western liberal tradition of "democracy," the Zapatista concept recognizes the social-ecological aspects of such a democracy. In other words, ichbail ta muk recognizes the spirit-to-spirit relationship between the Zapatistas, their community, and their more-than-human relatives. Mobilizing this concept, like how Lee Maracle creates characters in her work, depends on a creative "politics of poesis." To express this

²²⁴ Dylan Eldredge Fitzwater and John P. Clark, *Autonomy Is in Our Hearts: Zapatista Autonomous Government through the Lens of the Tsotsil Language*, Kairos (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2019). xiv.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid. xvii.

concept, Fitzwater brings attention to the Tsotsil term for “political struggle and revolution,” pask’op, which brings together pasel the verb to do, make, create, or produce with the word k’op, which means word, language, or speech.²²⁷ This invocation of creative praxis as a means of mobilizing Indigenous-led social-ecological-political revolution leads us outside of the notion that we are seeking an idealized past, but rather it articulates an exploration of tradition that gives rise to radical creativity, agency, and autonomy.²²⁸ This centers an Indigenous futurity through creative revolution. The nuance of this conception of ‘futurity’ compliments Noelani Goodyear Ka’ōpua’s insight on Indigenous futurity: that it is not synonymous with “future” but rather about the “ways that groups imagine and produce knowledge about futures.”²²⁹

In my line of creative work, mixing and mastering is a complex project that demands an engagement with the intersubjectivities of sound. To put it simply, a mix requires the placement of distinctive instruments in a concatenation of sound – a bringing together of distinctive voices in order to harmonize on the most abstract sonic levels, with considerations of timbre, attack, pitch, and frequency. If mixing is the process that recognizes the “parts,” mastering is the process that recognizes the “whole.” Considering a finished mix, mastering adds volume and brightness to emphasize certain elements of the music, and considers the entire project, whether it is a song, an EP or an album. I am very open about my affinity for music(king) metaphors when thinking about abstract philosophical concepts. Though, I tend to say this with a slight tinge of irony – not because I do not believe in the compatibility between metaphors of the complexities of music creation and other forms of creative/political practices, but rather that I have reservations when

²²⁷ Ibid. xxii.

²²⁸ Ibid. xxiii.

²²⁹ Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, N. (2018). Indigenous oceanic futures: challenging settler colonialisms and militarization. In L. T. Smith, E. Tuck, & K. W. Yang (Eds.), *Indigenous and decolonizing studies in education* (pp. 104–124). New York: Routledge.

using the word “metaphor.” When I consider EZLN notions of the politics of poesis, however, I begin to realize the deep relationalities between musicking, creation, autonomy, spirituality, and sovereignty. It is no wonder that so many Indigenous scholars are not just “academics,” but also creative peoples – poets, musicians, singers, drummers, dancers, etc.

In this mixtape, I sought to bring attention to the concatenations of sound in addition to, as Maracle would put it, of “community” and of “spirituality.”²³⁰ Orating on poetry, Maracle posits that “each story, each poem, builds upon the original song and original story, and serves to deepen the values of the people.”²³¹ These values are not then stowed away and forgotten, but transmitted through creative praxes to future generations. Deepening values is an inherently creative, intellectual, emotional and spiritual process. I have attempted to demonstrate the ways that sound and music give breath to the ways that our knowledges are collected, developed and disseminated, the sacred ways of being/knowing/doing that animate our place- and water-based relationships, our claim to art making in the midst of a cyberspace that imagines a creativity without humans, and the loving relationships we have with our materials, or kin, our more-than-human relatives. I center two Indigenous knowledge systems that are thousands of miles away to demonstrate both the density of our ways of being and the ways that we create worlds, works, whales, in tandem with each other, as we give breath to Indigenous sonic life.

When I was in early high school, I used to bring my acoustic guitar to school and play in the commons, the neutral space in Taholah School that is situated in the middle between each “wing,” the administrative offices, and the cafeteria. Our principal at the time, Rick Lindblad, would leave his office and comment affectionately about my commitment to playing guitar.

²³⁰ Maracle (2015). 171-172.

²³¹ Ibid. 170.

After a few weeks of bringing it to school regularly, it dawned on Mr. Lindblad that perhaps Taholah needed a music program. For the following years, Taholah School would hire a few music teachers who would unfortunately have low enrollment in the classes. Still, I took advantage by consulting with Mr. Lindblad and other teachers to purchase music equipment for the purposes of practice. At one point, after the school purchased a drum set, I was the only high school student enrolled in any kind of music class. I used that time to absolutely thrash the drums that the school purchased, which, to my rezzy teenage naivete I did not feel bad about.

I have made it clear by now that my investment in the sonic is owed to the sonority of the North Pacific. But it is equally true that my investment in the sonic is for the kwinayl peoples who are like me at that age (whether they are high school aged or not), sitting in Taholah right now wishing there was a drum set that they can thrash. Taholah is a place where the perceived value of investment in our “sovereignty” begets a necessary investment in the fields of law, governance, health, education, and natural resources. This is important, because Quinault Indian Nation, as a municipality, sovereign nation, enterprise, and governing body has a genuine need for educated and trained Quinaults, if not just to keep things going then to continue the legacy of Quinault leadership who has been present for so much of Indian Country’s biggest battles with the paternalistic, colonial nation-state, the United States federal government. However, as I hope this dissertation has shown, sound and music carries potent worldmaking capabilities that beckon us to question what we know about our value systems, our knowledges, our relations to one another, and our ways of being in the world. Sound and music helps us dream worlds outside of labor, outside of politics, outside of business as usual, and outside of the binds of coloniality that suppress our creativity through deep shame. I know that shame because I have felt it.

Another conundrum for our community is how we can bridge the gap between what we know “culture” and what we do in the council chambers. The simplest truth of all of our inquiries is that our ancestors understood what we have come to know as “creativity” and “artmaking” as a fact of life, a way of being, something that was *needed*, not just an accessory or an extracurricular activity. With this mixtape, I hope that future generations of kwinaył s̱əgwəlm̱š revisit our imperative to sing, to know, to play, to love. While sound and music may not be the only way we enact these processes, the sonic and what it brings to us and our relatives is a breath of fresh air after contemplating slowly and lovingly in the deepest of ocean like skaallin, the whaleshifter, that being-relative that has instructed me to listen and attune to its breath.

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