Indigenous Presence in the US Imagination: A Study of Native American Representation in Cinema from the Myth of the West to Standing Rock

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**Abstract**

This study is concerned with how identity is given meaning as a discursive act within the cultural expression of cinema – as it broadly operates across popular, more independent, and indigenous filmmaking contexts. Starting with more mainstream and established cinematic approaches, I consider how Native Americans have been represented in Hollywood, the analysis reflecting less the pervasive influence of the Western film genre than working to focus on Eurocentric discourses of US identity, particularly via a constructed and performative Indian-ness. Next, I suggest an aesthetic occurs that opens to a filmic space of negotiation and resistance in which constructions of indigeneity and non-hegemonic cultural narratives can foster alternative knowledge systems across indigenous and independent filmmaking. In recent years, this has been compounded by the democratization of filmmaking through – relatively – inexpensive means. Smart phones and hand-held camera recorders are readily available and have been utilized to great effect in generating audio visual narratives that resist the political and cultural status quo, such as the actions seen at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in 2016 and 2017. Therefore, the final aspect of the thesis considers how political and environmental resistance combined alternative cultural narratives with film and new media technologies, thus offering an aesthetic through which to consider how film and ideology are constructed and produced. This also assists a consideration of how indigenous identities and traditional life ways are not only maintained, but also formed in the discursive acts at the point of filmmaking and in the affects of film viewing.

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## Acknowledgements

**Introduction: *The Warriors* (Hill 1979)**

In the 1979 Walter Hill film, *The Warriors*, a gang of teenage youths from Coney Island, Brooklyn, find themselves stranded in an unfamiliar part of New York City. This street-savvy collection of youths is mistaken for the killers of a prominent gang-leader: the Gramercy Riffs' Cyrus (Roger Hill). During a meeting of all the cities' gangs, Cyrus is shot by The Rogues' leader, Luther (David Patrick Kelly), who then frames The Warriors in the ensuing melee. The Warriors are then pursued through the Bronx and Manhattan by rival gangs out for blood to avenge Cyrus's death and the Warriors fight for their lives in order to return home to Brooklyn. The Warriors, as with the other gangs, all wear a very similar, yet stylized set of gang colours. The motif on the back of the Warriors' gang-vests is a white skull wearing a headdress; this motif is prominent throughout the film yet has an unsaid significance. All members of the gang wear one, the majority with nothing else on their torsos, and this forms an important aspect of their individual and collective identity.

There is no indication – other than their reluctance to forego their gangs' mark – of the significance of the head-dressed skull on the back of the Warriors' gang vests. The headdress on the rear of the Warriors' vests resembles the Plains warriors in the US cultural imagination, whilst the Warriors themselves play out the noble fighter whilst engaging in the military prowess that made Plains culture 'chiefs', like Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and Geronimo legendary. Of course, the link here to any notion of indigeneity is superficial, at least; and in fact, it could be argued that there is no relation at all. Rather it fits with a US cultural idea of the 'Indian', particularly as this figure appears in movies. A couple of the Warrior's members' even have names that directly link to icons of the US West, such as Cochise (David Harris) and Cowboy (Tom McKitterick), whilst the film's poster shows a collection of youths from all the represented gangs in the film. This imagery has even been flipped with the film's poster parodied on a T-shirt to include a collection of Native American figures headed by 'The Warriors' film logo. Created by artist Steven Paul Judd (Kiowa Choctaw), The NTVS ('The Natives') clothing brand essentially subverts the imagery of the male 'Indian' warrior in western pop culture by replacing cultural icons with Native Americans, such as 'The Indigenous Hulk', and warriors in full Plains regalia crossing the street made famous on the cover of The Beatles' *Abbey Road* (1969).[1]

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[1] Representations of indigenous peoples in popular culture perpetuate hyper-racialized and sexualized images. US settler colonialism requires indigenous people to fit within white heteronormative archetypes, such as the strong, homogenous masculine type – 'the Indian Warrior' being a recurrent convention in US popular culture and film. There are multiple identificatory categories of gender and

Left: The Warriors wearing their gang vests. Right: 'Yesterday' (Red Road) Steven Paul Judd Limited Tee: https://www.thentvs.com

But it is precisely these tropes of the 'Indian' and 'Indian-ness' in film that motivate this thesis. These tropes are simply a starting point of a cultural investigation that takes it cue not from the pervasive imagery of the 'savage Indian warrior' found in countless Westerns, nor even in the Western genre *per se*. Rather, this thesis is concerned with the broader brush strokes of cultural tropes found across a myriad of films. Of course, interaction with the Western is inevitable, necessary even. But the Western genre is more of a prism to view the contours of US national identity and mythology which have a direct relationship with the 'Indian'.

The point is, these filmic tropes may have become associated, established, even, by a mythic West, but they do not belong to this place. The continuous association of 'Indians' with the Western is ultimately problematic with regards Native American representation and, too often, is seen itself as an immutable trope, or the first point of reference when alternative cultural narratives are instigated. However, that is not to say that these tropes are being given an authentic position as a result of this thesis. This thesis does not see alternative representations in, for example, independent film as a simple response to the Western, but it is more concerned with why filmic tropes are seemingly constructed by such an association within wider cultural, political, and historical discourses. Ultimately the point is to question the ongoing effect these tropes have on the representation and identity of Native America in film.

The pervasiveness of a US history driven by conflict with a racialized 'Other', whilst implanting a sense of white patriarchal destiny in the Euro-American conquest of the North

sexuality within North American indigenous languages that defy binary logics and analysis. See: Joanne Barker (Ed.) *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press; 2017: 1-13.

American Continent, has forever found expression in a romanticised and mythological 'West', and constitutes a hegemonic cultural space that goes beyond film, but inevitably finds its quintessential expression in film. Therefore, US frontier mythology is an important starting point, as this mythic space is historically and culturally constituted as the place of conflict between white settler and indigenous peoples.

**Methodology: The American West, National Identity and 'Indians'**

Frontier mythology is central to US national identity and has typically found expression in the Western genre. The frontier, as Frederick Jackson Turner famously characterized it, is an integral part of the American experience: the place where the American became exclusive from Europeans via a violent interaction with the wilderness. The frontiersman, such as Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, and Natty 'Hawkeye' Bumppo, were the mythical embodiments of this national identity. Hawkeye represents the proto-American, a fusion of European identity and an 'Indian-ness' derived from settler interaction with the North American frontier, whilst Native Americans were positioned against this European-American character and – assumed – US destiny of conquest. Native Americans were considered a "special demonic personification of the American wilderness" in opposition to white settlers and 'civilisation'.[2]

The frontiersman is exemplary of this narrative, where US history becomes myth and has found expression within the medium of Native American cultural appropriation. Film has only contributed to such a mythical interpretation of US history, and its representations have generally consolidated this broader mythology. For example, Hawkeye (Daniel Day-Lewis), the adopted Mohawk in his iteration in Michael Mann's 1992 film version of *The Last of the Mohicans,* is elevated to the "quintessential American hero" by Hollywood.[3] Hawkeye must assume the "manner of an Indian" to rescue the Monroe sisters and defeat his enemy, the

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[2] Richard Slotkin *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2000 [1973]: 3-5. Developing these ideas further Slotkin argues that in this contest for space (land and resources), ultimately, meant coexistence with the Native American was impossible. Even after the closing of the frontier, the symbolic and mythical significance attributed to white dominance was perpetuated. In the white hero, archetypal representations of class, 'race', and gender, were contained, as was an ideological, political, and moral consensus on America. Slotkin uses the example of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, as an exemplification of this process of cultural mythmaking about the US West in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum; 1992: 13-69.
[3] Armando José Prats *Invisible Natives: Myth & Identity in the American Western*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; 2002: 200-203.

Huron warrior Magua (Wes Studi). In the end, however, Hawkeye is free to re-join white society and the film concludes with an ambiguous reflection on the fate of Native Americans.[4]

Native American identities have been appropriated by white Europeans since colonial times. Throughout US history, Native American dress and clothing offers a perceived authentic aboriginal Americanness that is central to the United States' historical narrative. During the Boston Tea Party (1773), playing 'Indian', as Philip Deloria (Standing Rock Sioux) notes, "offered proto-Americans a platform for imagining and performing an identity of revolution." This assumed hybridity would define the new American and offered a mask to perform as the 'Other' to carry out the transgressive act of revolution. Inherent in this narrative of American revolution is the presence, via mimicry, of the Native American.[5]

However, the power evoked through playing 'Indian' by the revolutionaries would not be inclusive; ultimately, the same power would also be denied to, and used against, Native Americans themselves by the US state.[6] Playing 'Indian' is therefore a useful recurring metaphor in examining the fundamental contradiction at the heart of US settler-colonial society, and within identity in the US.[7] The frontier hero's amalgamation of both

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[4] Peter Rollins and John O'Connor *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky; 2011 [1998]: 176-181. Philip J Deloria also agrees that Mann's version offers authenticity to those 'Playing Indian', in Cummings, Denise K, LeAnne Howe, and Harvey Markowitz (Eds). *Seeing Red: Hollywood's Pixeled Skins: American Indians and Film*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013: 65.

[5] Philip J Deloria *Playing Indian*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press; 1998: 1-14; 128-153.

[6] Deloria discusses how white American cultural and political identities are closely aligned with a long history of 'Indian' play. Deloria also illustrates how Native Americans have been present in these discourses, from the margins, influencing the resultant images of 'Indians', suggesting that these images of the 'Indian' are negotiable and manipulatable and do not simply fit into dominant cultural discourse, in *Playing Indian* 8-9. Richard Slotkin also considers the 'man who knows Indians' par-excellence manifested in Hawkeye from James Fenimore Cooper's 1826 novel *The Last of the Mohicans*'; adapted into film on numerous occasions, particularly Michael Mann's 1992 epic starring Daniel Day-Lewis as Hawkeye. Hawkeye embodies the 'irreconcilable worlds' of the white and the 'Indian', used the power of the 'Indian' in the pursuit of 'civilisation', but was not restricted from US civilisation due to his inherent whiteness. Wordsworth Editions 1993 [1826]. See: *Gunfighter Nation:* 10-16 and *Regeneration through Violence* 3-6; 311-314; 491-505. Armando José Prats suggests how the "Western presents its most complete Indian through the white hero" which, like the mythical conventions of the cinematic West, are gained via audience negotiation and consent built around a familiar language, identity, and discourse, in *Invisible Natives*, 174-175. These familiar constructions within US culture are maintained by the genre which repeats these tropes, but these are also familiar to other films that are not strictly 'Western' in description, as *White of the Eye* will exemplify in chapter one.

[7] Shari M Huhndorf discusses how film, in particular, *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990) offers similar narratives of colonial conquest and an appropriated 'Indian-ness' that, largely, supplements white ideals, white identity and white interpretations of indigenous peoples. Huhndorf continues and develops, via Antonio Gramsci's conception of cultural hegemony, this line of thought in *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; 2001: 199-202.

Americanness and Indian-ness offered a new and appropriated identity with which to conquer the 'wilderness', the land and its inhabitants, and assert white European-American hegemony.[8] The American West, or frontier discourse, can provide a frame when critically thinking about colonial notions of whiteness and the racialised discourses within Indian-ness and the gendered North American landscape, whereby the subjugation of indigenous peoples and the claiming of land went hand in hand. [9]

Jodi A Byrd's (Chickasaw) conceptualization of 'Indian-ness' suggests an historical object that oversignifies presence and creates a 'cacophony' that obscures the hegemony of US settler colonial discourse. However, Byrd argues that this "colonial cacophony" can be disrupted in evocative ways, as the complexity of meaning is not fixed to one representation of the 'Indian'. As Byrd points out: "[t]his will continue if the US continues to construct itself as the cowboy." [10] It is possible to perceive the 'Indian' as a textual construction which displaces the notion of indigeneity. As Gerald Vizenor writes:

> This absence is the presence of the 'Other'; a simulation containing the trace of a colonial identity, a construction that reflects the imagination of Indians in US culture. The movies representing frontier discourse whereby Indians are presented as the "antiselves of civilization".[11]

The cultural and political modes of 'Indian' are a construct of US settler colonialism. The 'Indian' is the originary concept that underpins US settler colonial logics. In this sense difference is policed via the indigenous body; that is, Western designs of the body are maintained by applying binary constructions of identity to representations of Native Americans.[12] Therefore, such interventions into the constructedness of Indian-ness in film

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[8] Slotkin *Regeneration Through Violence*: 311-314; 466-506.

[9] Matthew Carter discusses the pervasiveness of frontier mythology in the Western genre in *Myth of the Western: New Perspectives on Hollywood's Frontier Narrative*. Edinburgh University Press; 2014: 5. Richard Slotkin considers the frontier as concept and how this has impacted US culture and identity, and the interplay between them, in: *Regeneration through Violence* 3. Michael Taylor also argues that the pervasiveness of frontier mythology as central to this process, utilizing the frontier as a critical framework to consider the role of 'Indians' and 'Indian-ness' in US sporting mascots. See: *Contesting Constructed Indian-ness: The Intersection of the Frontier, Masculinity, and Whiteness in Native American Mascot Representations*. Lanham; Boulder; New York; Toronto; Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books: 2013: 11-13. Whilst Robert Warrior (Osage) sees the frontier as "an ideologically imbued term that has served as a primary weapon in the material oppression of Native people in the Americas", in *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; 2005: xxvi.

[10] Jodi A Byrd *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press; 2011: xvi-xxxvi; 158.

[11] Gerald Vizenor *Manifest Matters: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press; 1999: 7.

[12] Michael Taylor argues that cultural constructions of 'Indians' reflect the social, economic and cultural  investments of settlers consider the privilege this offers whites and how 'Indian-ness' is appropriated by white culture and identity, and for the purpose of masculine sports such as American football, the stereotypical image of the violent but noble savage 'Indian' is perpetuated for the purpose

offer significant sites to question the nature of settler colonialism and capitalism in their present iterations in the US, reflecting the social, cultural, and economic investments settlers have placed in the process of colonising the North American (and also broader American) continent.[13]

### Enacting *différance* and making 'Native Space' in film

As Natchee Blu Barnd observes in *Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism* (2017), indigenous peoples have the choice to employ "artistic activism" to resist US cultural hegemony. This strategy offers indigenous self-determination and cultural continuity through spatial reorganization to contest colonialism. Barnd sees what he suggests as "indigenous space-making" as less concerned with challenging cultural appropriation, as Deloria may identify it, than to contest the Eurocentric state logics of colonialism and capitalism by making meaning in relation to the land where indigenous bodies are situated. As problematic stereotypes attributed to Native Americans are still continuing through film, Barnd suggests indigenous people "play" on their indigeneity as a strategy against cultural hegemony and appropriation by "inhabiting Indian-ness". Whilst Barnd sees 'Native Spaces' as existing in perpetuity, they do not exist evenly as spaces of cultural resistance. Hegemony can operate through Indian-ness as its meanings often overlap, reinforce, or clash with one another.[14]

This thesis will consider how film maps out spaces to understand what discursive acts contribute to the investment and recovery of indigenous identity and, furthermore, operate as spaces of greater indigenous representation. For example, *Buffalo Dance* (Dickson 1894), a 16-second short, is one of the first pieces of film to feature Native Americans and can be interpreted as resisting the colonial gaze. Jeffrey Geiger writes that, rather than being captured by film, the Sioux dancers engage in "interactive performativity" as one of them stares directly into the camera - perhaps an act of defying or countering the camera and

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of representing these correct sorts of masculine traits for the sporting arena. See his *Contesting Constructed Indian-ness.* Whilst M Elise Marubbio considers cinematic images of Native women and illustrates how the 'Indian' and Indian-ness is intimately linked to US nation building and national identity, in *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film.* University Press of Kentucky; 2006: 1-21. Maureen Trudelle Schwarz's book employs a Gramscian analysis of the economic relationship between Native Americans and the images of 'Indians' within hegemonic culture. See: *Fighting Colonialism with Hegemonic Culture: Native American Appropriation of Indian Stereotypes.* SUNY Press; 2013.

[13] Taylor *Contesting Constructed Indian-ness*: 11-16.
[14] Natchee Blu Barnd *Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism*. Eugene: Oregon  State University Press; 2017: 1-5.

audience gaze. Geiger sees this as an "exhibitionist confrontation" as opposed to a moment that allows for audience "diegetic absorption". Geiger also writes more generally about how film, problematically and often in self-contradiction, might project a certain image or ideal of the US both to itself and to audiences abroad, though US films also reflect the irreducible nature of the imagined 'nation' itself, as suggested in the defiant direct look of the Buffalo Bill performer of *Buffalo Dance.* Related aspects of both imagined unity and self-contradiction can be found in the Western genre, where history and myth collide to paint a certain picture of the nation. This genre has an intimate relationship with regards to representation of Native Americans, and as noted above, representations of Native Americans in US film usually have come in the form of the mythified 'Indian'.[15]

But interactive performativity in film can also enact both a difference and deferral of meaning, or what Jacques Derrida posited as *différance*, a term enlisted by Vizenor in his analysis of indigenous Trickster tales, as will be returned to below. Whilst Derrida did not write about North American indigenous peoples, it is feasible vis-a-vis Vizenor to apply his theories of deconstruction to an analysis of film representations. This can be an important method in examining power relations in cultural texts. Fundamentally, for Derrida, if meaning is governed by the illusion of presence, then a way to critique colonialism is to unsettle dominant tropes of the 'Indian'. This is what Derrida sees as the play between absence and presence.

Derrida argues that the delay in meaning that is inferred by the term *différance* is built on the initial similarity of the verb 'to differ' which forms his intervention.[16] For Derrida, this deferral of meaning, or the animation of alternative readings, can undermine the seemingly fixed meanings within a cultural text (film). I use this term in the Vizenorian sense, who utilizes it to undermine the colonial narratives of dominance that have become a permanence in the cultural history of the US and their subsequent reanimation in popular history and culture, upon which interventions around the 'Indian' are based. Utilizing Derrida's term, it is possible to find 'movement' between the banal signification of the binary construction of white/ Indian. As Derrida writes:

> In the one case "to differ" signifies nonidentity; in the other case it signifies the order of the same. Yet there must be a common, although entirely differant [*différante*], root within the sphere that relates the two movements of differing to one another. We provisionally give the name *differance* to this *sameness* which is not *identical*: by the

[15] Jeffrey Geiger *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 2011: 33-35.

[16] Jacques Derrida *Speech and Phenomena: And other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Translated by David B Allison, Evanston: Northwestern University Press; 1973: 129-131.

silent writing of it's *a*, it has the desired advantage of referring to differing, *both* as spacing/temporalizating and as the movement that structures every dissociation.[17]

By considering film representations, and instigating an interpretation through *différance*, critics might defy conventional 'logocentric' meaning and develop an understanding of the facts of contemporary colonialism and the constructedness of the 'Indian'. The conventional meaning of the 'Indian' is created through film and other cultural artefacts, and in this process, displaces any notion of indigeneity. However, 'Indian' also contains the trace of indigeneity and it is here that the 'Indian' can be usefully disrupted.[18]

Film and the 'Indian' have an awkward relationship. Too often the Western has perpetrated negative stereotypes of Native Americans, and Native American film is presented or characterized simply as a response to these tropes. This thesis intends to think differently about these representations more generally. Non-Hollywood, independent and indigenous films offer platforms for intervention with regards dominant representations of indigenous peoples. But this interpretation goes further than just considering these as a response to Hollywood. Indigenous knowledge systems further offer a means to subvert or reimagine inherited colonial and capitalist roles and identities, particularly in the view of this thesis via the medium of film. For example, Zacharias Kunuk's *The Fast Runner* trilogy (2001-2008) offers visible and audible aspects of indigenous culture from the Inuit-Yupik-Aleut language family that has been recovered from western (European) imposed meaning, whilst it emphasizes the contemporary condition of indigenous people and indigenous film work in the wider film industry.[19]

**Using Native American epistemology**

Gerald Vizenor uses Native American knowledge as the foundation to undermine the concept of the 'Indian'. Vizenor continues: "Natives are in the book, the *différance* of motion in the literature of survivance."[20] Vizenor has animated indigenous Trickster tales as a representation of *différance* and a means to undermine constructions of the 'Indian'.[21] Vizenor has called the Trickster the expression of *différance*. I simply apply this logic to film in seeking out alternative representations, narratives and understandings which are obscured

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[17] Derrida *Speech and Phenomena*: 129-130. [Emphasis author's own]
[18] Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology* [Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak]. Baltimore: JHU Press; 1976 [1967]: 292-293.
[19] Barker *Critically Sovereign*: 130-133.
[20] Gerald Vizenor *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press; 1998: 65.
[21] Vizenor *Fugitive Poses:* 34.

by stereotypes, colonial ideology, and hegemonic discourse.[22] Vizenor's goal is similar to Derrida's, that is, working through an insistence on *différance* to break down binary oppositions by showing their mutual crossings and interchanges. Instead of reversing the hierarchy and granting 'Indian' a privileged position, Vizenor, by challenging the uneven relationship established between white and 'Indian' – which closely aligns with Derrida's deconstruction of the sign and the inherent uneven relationship which undergirds this construction – sustains a method through an insistence that such signs are simulations, and that the opposition white/ 'Indian' itself is untenable.[23]

Gerald Vizenor has called the constructed 'Indian' a "static constellation of tropes."[24] However, this thesis does not contend that indigenous representation within the US cultural milieu is simply a reductive act.[25] Parody of film tropes attributed to Native Americans can open a previously closed dialogue of indigenous history. Many indigenous films observe 'reservation jokes' that are self-deprecating and ironic in a way that "entertains and teaches".[26] This can be seen in such films as *Powwow Highway* (Wacks 1989), Chris Eyre's (Cheyenne and Arapaho) *Smoke Signals* (1998), and its 2001 follow up *Skins*, which knowingly plays on Hollywood tropes of the 'Indian': the most famous in *Smoke Signals* being the parody of *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990), and the undermining of John Wayne's cultural power by utilising a Native American song structure. This intervention, evoking Vizenor, can be seen as an aspect of Native North American Trickster tales, derived from the oral tradition, which is turned increasingly into a filmic device, as seen in *Smoke*

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[22] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: ix-xi, 15.

[23] Elvira Pulitano *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; 2003: 171.

[24] The literature on the constructedness of the 'Indian' and Indian-ness in North America is vast. As noted, Philip J Deloria's, *Playing Indian*. Building on this, but with a Gramscian analysis, is Shari M Huhndorf's *Going Native*. Whilst Robert F Berkhofer's *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. Vintage; 1978. Chad A Barbour's *From Daniel Boone to Captain America: Playing Indian in American Popular Culture*. University Press of Mississippi; 2016, focuses on comic books, and Taylor's *Contesting Constructed Indian-ness*, as noted, looks at the discourse of the frontier in the maintenance of patriarchal maleness in the context of American Football mascots. From a Canadian perspective is Daniel Francis' *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. Arsenal Pulp Press; 2012.

[25] Vizenor uses the Native American Trickster figure as a point of critical intervention to resist designs of the 'Indian' in the US cultural imagination. Vizenor sees the 'Indian' as an "immovable simulation"; that is, a construction of US popular culture which undermines the presence of indigeneity. As such, the Trickster for Vizenor plays on this construction in an ironic manner to reconsider representation and to animate "many Natives" as opposed to what he perceives as the static representation brought about by the 'Indian'. see: Gerald Vizenor *Manifest Matters: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press; 1999: vii-x.

[26] Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Rebecca Tillett *Indigenous Bodies: Reviewing, Relocating, Reclaiming*. Albany NY: SUNY Press; 2013: 8.

*Signals'* character of Thomas (Evan Adams) and *Dead Man*'s (Jarmusch 1994) character Nobody (Gary Farmer).[27]

Vizenor is quite right when he says, 'Indians' are immovable simulations. Vizenor's understanding of simulations comes from Jean Baudrillard's metaphor of the relationship between signification, meaning and reality in modern society. Baudrillard viewed 'simulacra' as a copy of something that does not just substitute, but becomes the reality of the thing that is being represented. However, Baudrillard never stated that these simulations functioned as a replacement of the thing, or to obstruct some true meaning, he writes: "[t]he simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true."[28] Therefore, Hollywood films and other US cultural constructions of 'Indians' have considerable weight in lending meaning to the reality they represent, whilst fundamentally misrepresenting Native American peoples by reducing them to a series of stereotypical tropes.

As such, Vizenor argues that the 'Indian' is a simulation in the US cultural imagination – and of US colonial dominance – which undermines Native American representation – pointing as it does to a cultural construction, as discussed above. Ultimately this undermines and erases Native American representation and reduces a large number of disparate peoples to stereotypes and tropes. To counter the simulated or essentially, culturally constructed 'Indian', as I employ it here, Vizenorian intervention insists on Native presence by playing ironically on culturally constructed 'Indians'; particularly with representations which counter the 'simulations of dominance', such as the cultural positioning of Luther Standing Bear and his writings, which he perceives as anticipating the 'post-Indian'.[29]

Another way of achieving this rupture with the 'Indian' is through the post-Indian, which Vizenor argues takes shape in the form of the Trickster figure. These story-telling figures counter – with humour and irony – the language of dominance, and the structural inequalities that westernized systems maintain via cultural hegemony. These aspects of indigenous knowledge and memories form a trace to other stories. As Vizenor continues: "Shadows and *différance* in other texts threaten the representations of presence and the run-on simulations." Vizenor deploys *différance* as a deconstructive strategy, whilst the shadows he refers to represent the consciousness of tribal knowledge, which can form active

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[27] Fear-Segal and Tillett *Indigenous Bodies*: 7-12.
[28] See Jean Baudrillard [Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser] *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press; 2000 [1981]: 1.
[29] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: 11-15.

ontological choices as an alternative to the "metanarratives of dominance."[30] As Vizenor continues: 'Natives and their stories actuate a presence, not an absence," as such, Vizenor advocates the ironic use of the term 'Indian' to subvert its (colonial) power. One way of doing this is through the animation of the Native American Trickster in cultural texts. Deconstruction as a tool can offer new meanings by interrogation of the logocentric dominance invested in terms such as 'Indian' and the hierarchies that such terms create and maintain them.[31]

Moving away from a dominant Westernized worldview is central to Linda Tuhewai Smith's (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou, Māori) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1998). Tuhewai Smith offers a critique of knowledge systems and cultural institutions that have privileged a Eurocentric worldview. Tuhewai Smith insists that a move towards decolonizing the world, or even, decolonizing the way people look at the world, is by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and practices into methodology, pedagogy, and praxis, in order to tell a 'global story'. When applied to film, this includes different ways of thinking about the films that are made, how audiences decode them, and fundamentally how audiences interpret the world through them. There continues to be a legacy of western(ized) knowledge systems that are hegemonic, whilst indigenous, traditional knowledge and cultural practice exist in the 'margins'. This thesis will continue Tuhewai Smith's commitment to sharing knowledge and factor in indigenous knowledge systems reflexively. This is done in order to think critically via the cinematic medium and address structural and historical relations of power in the context of the US settler-colonial state.[32] This thesis will employ Native American epistemology within its analysis, utilising Native American Trickster tales, indigenous writers, and indigenous spiritual knowledge and interpretations of the landscape, to invoke a more complex sense of how representation works, as well as providing alternative world-views, which will also be used as the basis to reconsider Hollywood imagery and tropes that are informed by the Western genre's iconography and US frontier mythology.

Parallel conceptual approaches have been important to indigenous filmmaking, which presents an alternative narrative to Hollywood's representation of Native Americans. But it goes deeper than this; for example, Chris Eyre's *Skins* subverts the dominant cinematic gaze

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[30] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: 67-71.
[31] Vizenor *Fugitive Poses*: 14-34.
[32] Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd.; 2013 [1998]: ix-xiv; 15-16; 214.

inscribed by the Western lens and naturalizes alternative world views. We know that colonial power relations animate notions of US identity and the racialized Other, the cowboy and 'Indian', the US self and its projections of indigeneity in film. Derrida's deconstructive model can be used to unpack such functions of power and embedded notions of identity and selfhood, seen as ongoing processes within the cultural artefact. Applied to film and visual culture, representation is an ongoing aspect of public discourse that is never fully realised, but subject to tropes that impact representation in a myriad of ways. These can be stereotypical, empowering, humorous, or negative, and all contribute to a discourse within the cultural formation of film.[33]

### Chapter Synopsis

This thesis will begin by considering, in chapter one, how Native Americans have been cast by Hollywood. The thesis begins by looking at *White of the Eye* (Cammell 1987), and the white protagonist who employs a quasi-Apache aspect to his identity. This section considers the relationship between the Western genre's iconography and playing 'Indian'. This is followed by an analysis of *Hidalgo* (Johnston 2003). This is considered to illustrate the political and cultural nature of frontier mythology and suggests a cinematic association that goes beyond the Western. At the same time, Native American knowledge will be applied to these readings to offer a means with which to critically assess how the discourse of colonial US society operates.

In chapter two, independent film is considered as an aesthetic and political response to Hollywood, but also as an expression of Native American identity and presence. The chapter

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[33] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts – not without irony in her translator's preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* – 'one reading is preface to the next', insisting against the fixity of meaning within the cultural text. In addition, the grammatological structure that Derrida advocates erases the aim of structuralist discourse which would conceive notions of the self and Other as binary opposites. Such discourses have conceived the 'Indian' as the Other to the US notion of the 'self'. Whilst, as noted, Derrida does not discuss the US, Rousseau features heavily in Derrida, and the binary discourse of the self and Other can be traced back to Rousseau's own designation of the 'Noble Savage'; one of the tropes that would come to define the simulated 'Indian': xi-xii; xxxix; xliii; lvii. Whilst Vizenor in *Fugitive Poses* writes: "Jean Jacques Rousseau issued the romantic simulation of the 'noble savage', the bright, untutored men of nature, to counter the onerous corruption of society": ix. In doing so, this positions the indigenous 'Other' – whilst romanticised – as ultimately in binary opposition to and thus a barrier to the progress of US civilization. However, as Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel illustrate, indigeneity is an identity that is signalled by a prior and enduring occupancy of the land. The construction of the 'Indian' already carries with it the 'trace' of this occupancy. This suggests the non-binding nature of the trope with regards representation in the cultural text, quoted in Colin Samson and Carlos Gigoux *Indigenous Peoples and Colonialism: Global Perspectives*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2017: 14. Therefore, the film trope of 'Indian' is not bound to a specific representation in the cultural text. These tropes are constituted by colonial contradictions, and can therefore not be 'fixed', but only deployed to naturalize or denaturalize narratives.

begins with *Dead Man* (Jarmusch 1994), which illustrates how filmic tropes are potentially disrupted by independent cinema and allows for an alternative interpretation of hegemonic film discourse. Subsequently, *Smoke Signals* (Eyre 1998) considers the critical role of the Native American storyteller and how this device can be transferred from the oral tradition and literature into the medium of film. Finally, Native American Trickster tales are employed in a subsequent analysis of *Winter in the Blood* (Alex Smith, Andrew J Smith 2012) as an expression of *différance*, and as a means to disrupt dominant cultural formations of identity but also as a means to signify Native American presence in film.

The final chapter contemplates the events which occurred at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in 2016 and 2017. These protests are considered in the context of Lakota history: from the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaties to Wounded Knee in 1890 and the Occupation of Alcatraz in 1969. Latterly, this is expressed in the documentary *Taking Alcatraz* (Ferry 2015). This film's analysis contemplates the significance of pan-tribal identity and indigenous activism as well as the naturalization of Lakota history, which reconfigures US history. The *Oceti Sakowin* Camp's resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) remains the focus for the rest of the chapter. *Dislocation Blues* (Hopinka 2017) presents a narrative which envisages the contemporary nature of indigenous identity, but also considers the ongoing problem of representation, despite increased agency gained from increased access to digital film cameras and other social media which have proved useful tools in establishing anti-colonial positions. Finally, this chapter studies *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* (Fox, Spione, Dewey 2017). This film emphasises the ephemeral nature of the camp but considers how physical place and film represent a recurring trope that offers an important intervention into the ongoing imposition of US colonialism on indigenous peoples fighting for human and land rights.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to offer a critical study of cinema which reveals textual narratives of US history and culture which both incorporate the 'Indian' whilst erasing indigenous peoples. But within this construction is the notion that indigenous knowledge systems can be animated to undermine stereotypical representations and present complex depictions of Native American life that also complicates and disrupts settler colonial narratives from the established patterns of dominance given expression through cultural formations. The Western presents a starting point but this is less so a criticism of genre and more a foregrounding of the genre's relation to the US frontier myth and the narratives of colonial dominance – and subsequently that of the historical and cultural role of the 'Indian' – contained therein.

**Chapter One: The Western, US Mythology and Indian-ness**

1: 'To Live in Indian-ness': *White of the Eye* (Cammell 1987)

i: Introduction: The Gaze of the Western

There is no denying the Western has been the representative cinematic genre of the US. The country's westward expansion has found perfect expression within the medium and the Western is seen as a typically American entity.[34] In a sense the exceptional narrative of white Europeans colonising the continent is typically one of a teleological celebration of the nation; one which marginalizes and 'Others' those people of colour and of perceived 'racial' differences. The frontier narrative is typically one which espouses the masculine and patriarchal aspects of dominance whilst it is also supported by European religious ideology and, of course, the logics of capitalist economic systems.[35]

In effect, the Western spatializes the cinematic gaze in a particularly subjective way, which reveals a Eurocentric cultural bias. That is, the imagery in film has been informed by hegemonic interpretations of the land and inscribed with US settler colonial meaning which is evoked through the persistent imagery of the West and the genre's own collusion with the frontier myth and the teleological narrative of 'manifest destiny'.[36] So much so that the Western remains largely the expression and space of white Anglo-European culture, with the 'Indian' a cultural and political device of US society on which colonial hierarchies are built.[37] Furthermore, the cowboy remains the avatar for this cultural space and is inimically tied to US national identity. The cowboy represents both the myth and real of the US' westward expansion, whilst also being a symbol of this narrative. The cultural influence of the Western genre on the myth of the American West cannot be understated.[38]

However, cultural discourse is not a one-way street. Subversive readings are possible within mainstream film. Films such as *Smoke Signals* (Eyre 1998) and *The Rider* (Zhao 2017) also undermine the iconography of the Western whilst also conforming visually to the traits

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[34] See André Bazin with regards this question: *What Is Cinema*? Vol. 2. [Translated by Hugh Gray] Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; 2005 (1971).

[35] See Richard Slotkin, amongst others, on the frontier and the narrative of (white/ European) exceptionalism and how this has found expression in US popular culture: *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum; 1992.

[36] Natchee Blu Barnd *Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism*. Oregon State University Press; 2017: 2-5.

[37] Jodi A Byrd *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press; 2011: xvi-xxi.

[38] Josh Garrett-Davis *What Is a Western? Region, Genre, Imagination*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2019: 10-12.

which make them popular. This combination of imagery with tropes that upset the established narrative provoke alternative readings which subvert the colonial narratives at play, particularly through the representation of Native Americans. Cultural representations of Native Americans are bound to the structures of US settler colonial society. Throughout this chapter, I regularly implement Gerald Vizenor's methodology to this end; he writes: "Native American Indians are the originary storiers of this continent."[39] That is, Native American stories, history and epistemology need to be used to renounce dominant narratives of indigenous tragedy and victimhood as well as re-vision the constructed 'Indian'.

Vizenor sees the 'Indian' as a simulation bearing no resemblance to indigenous cultures. The culturally constructed 'Indian' maintains the absence of a Native presence. Vizenor has devised the post-Indian as a device to counter what is essentially a linguistic system of cultural dominance. Rather than the static image of the 'Indian', the oral stories and knowledge of indigenous peoples animate "many Natives", which perpetuates *différance* – that is alternative meanings within the narrative or text, or purposely deferring the (intended) dominant meaning – approaching with humour, satire, and irony the simulations of the 'Indian' and the "metanarratives of dominance." For Vizenor, the 'Indian' was once a representational absence in mainstream films. As he states: "[movies] have never been the representatives of tribal cultures." This of course has changed, and films by, and about, Native Americans, such as *Smoke Signals* and *The Rider* have provided an opportunity for representation via cinema.[40] This offers a platform for representing and narrating the existence of Native identities. As Elvira Pulitano writes:

> [t]ranslated into a Native American context, Derrida's ideas help us understand, Vizenor suggests, how colonial dominance has applied the discourse of logocentric reason to Natives, who have become the absent Others in the Euramerican hierarchy of white/ indian or civilized savage.[41]

For the purposes of this section, the 'Indian' is considered as a construct of US imperial dominance and it forms a point of intervention.[42] Representations of the constructed 'Indian' can suggest much about a film's cultural context, particularly in highlighting the Western as a starting point, as many films in this genre have represented and revised the 'Indian' on countless occasions - but with stereotypes remaining, namely those of the 'noble savage' or

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[39] Gerald Vizenor *Manifest Matters: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press; 1999: vii.
[40] Vizenor Manifest Manners 6.
[41] Elvira Pulitano *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; 2003: 171.
[42] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*, vi-ix; 5-8; 15; 56-67.

the 'vanishing Indian'. Therefore, it is possible to identify how, largely, mainstream filmic representations of the 'Indian' are deployed in ways that maintain stereotypes or seek to deconstruct them.

French-Arab critical theorist Jacques Derrida did not write on the Western or indigenous representation, as noted in the introduction, but his approach is useful here as he questioned how language structured systems of dominance. Derrida's aims were to deconstruct the binaries of metaphysical philosophy and the asymmetrical hierarchies that this system (of language) maintains: i.e., speech over writing, man and woman, the self and 'Other', and so forth. This process of unpacking binaries is transferable to the myth of the West and US historical discourse, particularly the structural hierarchies it creates through the cowboy and 'Indian' binary. I employ his writings here and read them in this context, particularly because of the similarity of Vizenor and Derrida in their approaches. Vizenor has used the presence of the Native American Trickster figure as an animator of alternative narratives, and indigenous identity, in an ironic and humorous manner which deconstructs the 'Indian'.

Vizenor has succinctly argued in many of his works how the 'Indian' is a construction, or simulation, with no referent to real Native American cultures. Vizenor calls this an 'absence presence'. Vizenor has argued that these constructions in US popular culture, from film to football mascots, have distorted and replaced images of Native Americans. Therefore, using the concept of the 'Indian' as a point of intervention, Vizenor approaches these constructions with irony, humour, and stories that relate to actual Native American culture and history. His writing seeks to replace the presence of the 'Indian' with the presence of Native Americans, and to undermine colonial dominance, tragedy, and victimhood inherent within the conventional figure of the 'Indian'.[43]

My starting point is the Western, but this is less so a focus on the genre, and rather on how aspects of the Western bleed into other film forms and expressions. Whilst also illustrating the relationship between the genre and its depictions of 'Indians', I consider how representation of Native Americans has maintained cultural stereotypes, as well as how film contributes to the phenomenon of playing 'Indian', a practice of cultural appropriation that has been a factor in US culture and history since the Colonial era. This chapter intends to engage with the Western as a concept and its interrelation with film, US identity and the

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[43] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: vii.

'Indian'.[44] Typically the Western is inscribed with a dominant (i.e., mythical, celebratory) narrative of US history, such as the frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner and the concept of 'manifest destiny'. It is the aim of this section to reveal the relationship these hypotheses have with the concept of the 'Indian', and its persistence within US cultural discourse and its relationship with national identity.

Following the methodology of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, I make use of indigenous knowledge, stories, biographies, and other key cultural elements, as well as employing the opinions of indigenous writers and filmmakers. This is not simply to undermine the images on screen, but to animate other areas of thought and discourses which have been marginalized by the dominance of Eurocentric culture; to question the cultural context in which these films are made and reveal the dominant discourse therein. This chapter is less interested in exposing hackneyed portrayals of Native Americans, but more in what such representations reveal about US society and the role of film in cultural discourse.[45]

This chapter begins with *White of the Eye* (Cammell 1987), which contemplates the influence of the Western and the frontier myth beyond the genre. Whilst the majority of white protagonists' playing 'Indian' occurs in a temporal and spatial film past, this film sees the protagonist draw on Apache legends to bolster his identity and power in the contemporary US. Following *White of the Eye* is *Hidalgo* (Johnston 2004), and an analysis of how the white protagonist's relationship with Indian-ness continues to inform the dominant discourse of the frontier in an international context. The subtext of this film, considering contemporary events, is the US-backed invasion of Iraq, and the cultural hegemony contained within this film's narrative, which continues to use Indian-ness as a pretext for 'Othering' peoples of colour.

ii: 'Mythogenesis'

Donald Cammell's *White of the Eye* is not a Western.[46] It does not need arguing if *White of the Eye* is a Western or not. What is central to this statement is the inference that

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[44] Robert F Berkhofer discusses how images of the 'Indian' in US popular culture has reflected white identity as opposed to representing Native cultures, in *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Vintage; 1978.

[45] Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd.; 2013 [1998]: 110-111.

[46] Western tropes have been repurposed for political and cultural purposes prior to the advent of cinema: Roosevelt's early 19th century 'Rough Rider's' being a prime example, as well as the so-called 'cowboy' presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George Bush Snr., in 1980 and 1988, respectively. Whilst the frontier has animated political discourse in other ways, primarily John F Kennedy's 1960 'New Frontier' speech, when Kennedy makes reference to the nations pioneers to take up in their

cinematic tropes pertaining to the Western are not restricted to the genre. The Western sets up an origin mythology that permeates (white) US culture, meaning that the concept of the 'Western' transcends the genre boundary.[47] With this in mind, *White of the Eye* opens somewhat intimately with a series of establishing shots of Monument Valley, on the Arizona-Utah border, the same landscape which features so prominently in John Ford, so that Monument Valley in his films doubles as shorthand for what is perceived to be the 'West'.



Monument Valley doubled for the 'West' in many Westerns, particularly the work of John Ford, so much so there is a vantage point in the valley named after the director. Above left: Monument Valley in *The Searchers* (Ford 1956); above right: the similar desert-aesthetic in *White of the Eye* (Cammell 1987).

The red sandstone pillars feature in many Westerns and create a series of visual and thematic tropes, including Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *Fort Apache* (1948), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *The Searchers* (1956) and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). Monument Valley has also appeared in non-Westerns as diverse as *2001: A*

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ancestors' stead. Scholarly work is just starting to move beyond the boundaries imposed by working within the confines of film genre. See: Josh Garrett-Davis who argues that that the term is difficult to define, that it should in fact, form a concept which presents the term to form an open-ended consideration. In fact, mainstream Western's present an opportunity to decentre the narrative. To shift the frame, Garrett-Davis formulates the borderlands, as opposed to a frontier, which forms a more fluid and multicultural space of investigation. This incorporates Gloria Anzaldúa's 'frontera' and Louis Owens' 'Zone of the Trickster', in *What Is a Western? Region, Genre, Imagination*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2019: xii-xiv; 8-12. I simply use the prism of the 'Indian' and, building on Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonial methodology, indigenous knowledge systems as a way to decentre the discursive aspects associated with the Western; whilst adding much needed play to mainstream films by incorporating positions informed by non-Eurocentric epistemology, including, what Gerald Vizenor calls 'Trickster discourse'.

[47] See Richard Slotkin with regards the mythological interpretation of the US' frontier past and how it shaped national identity; the frontier forming a 'contact zone' between white European and Native American. See: *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2000 [1973]: 3-5; and *Gunfighter Nation,* 10-12. Michael Taylor's *Contesting Constructed Indian-ness: The Intersection of the Frontier, Masculinity, and Whiteness in Native American Mascot Representations* (Lanham: Lexington Books: 2013) is probably the best piece of scholarship which considers constructions of Indians in context of American Football mascots but frames the analysis with US cultural discourse that has constructed the 'Indian' as a mythological aspect of American identity that is employed as a privilege of patriarchal whiteness. There are, however, numerous studies on the 'Indian' mascot question, in general, C Richard King's work, in particular: *Unsettling America: The Uses of Indianness in the 21st Century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield; 2013, amongst others.

*Space Odyssey* (Kubrick 1969), *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis 1994), and *Mission Impossible 2* (Woo 2000), which suggests the power of these visual tropes in other genres which utilise the formulaic structures of the Western.[48]



In the first victims' house, the juxtaposition of desert and civilisation, at first in stark contrast at the beginning of the film, dissolve into one another. Above: the desert becomes a part of the house, where the killer is already present and stalking his 'prey'.

In *White of the Eye*, Cammell makes use of close ups and wide angles to emphasise the relationship between the desert and the town of Globe, Arizona, the settings of the film. At the film's opening, the camera establishes the opposites that this film deals with, particularly the binaries of civilization and nature and the contrasts between them which serve as a play on the film's title throughout, at first in the point of view shots of the hawk hunting and, shortly after, in the stalking of a woman shopping. The close ups of the hawk suggest the relationship between animal hunting for sustenance and the fetishist nature of human civilization and consumption in order to fulfil – what is perceived as – a fundamental urge or need. The relationship between this duality is played out through the protagonist, Paul White's (David Carradine) identity as both a casual hunter but also the 'provider' for his wife and daughter, whilst he also is a serial killer. Paul leads a double life: on the surface he is a family man who runs a high-end stereo-fitting business; on the other, animated by Apache legends, Paul draws of the power of the Apache association with the landscape to create a self-styled hunter persona who preys on the largely rich, female clientele he caters for.[49]

The opening sequence exemplifies the structure of city and landscape, but also hunter and hunted, which the audience perceives from the point of view of the hawk. The camera

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[48] Carter *Myth of the Western*: 30.

[49] Described in a review by Philip French for *The Guardian*, Paul is described as an "edgy, troubled outsider fascinated by black holes, Apache legends and sexual ambiguity." See: "*White of the Eye* DVD Review – Philip French on the last, explosive horror film of the late Donald Cammell", 30 March 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/mar/30/white-of-eye-cammell-dvd-review accessed 14/03/2021.

follows the hawk in flight; the consequent close up of its eyes, referencing the title, and also the hawk stalking its prey, mirror the subsequent murder scene which follows the opening in quick succession. The undertones of instinct versus desire here are evident as the camera transitions from eagle and snake to the killer and his victim. In this transition, the camera switches from the desert and the point of view of the eagle to track a woman who has just finished shopping. The camera follows the woman's legs walking to her car. The woman has already been rendered by the camera as a sexual object by focusing on her in this way. Furthermore, not unlike the opening titles of *Vertigo* (1958), the camera divides the woman into body parts, underlining the fetishistic nature of the camera's gaze. This is further linked to the opening shots and Paul's desire, when the point of view of the hunter switches from hawk to human, as the woman falls under the killers' gaze when she returns home and Paul is already lying in wait for her.

This transition between spaces is achieved when the point of view camera substitutes the hawk's eyes for the killer's. Although not identified at this point as being Paul's, the camera's switch in point of view still points to the camera's presence, and by extension, the gaze of the audience. This ambiguity is deliberate, as Cammell plays with the idea of the director as being an extra-diegetic accomplice to the killings, also implying the complicity of the audience in the violence.[50] The camera tracks a woman's legs, suggesting Paul's fetishization of female body parts; the screen offers a visual division of the woman, whilst being objectified by a young man who is taking the woman's newly-purchased goods to her car. The preying aspect is apparent, as the woman is wearing snakeskin shoes, and a jacket with a snake emblem on the back. The clue is unembellished: hawks hunt snakes, whereas Paul pursues rich women.[51] In this transition, Cammell owes a debt to Alfred Hitchcock. The parallel between the opening of *White of the Eye* and *Psycho* (1960) and the supposed randomness of the camera placement and movement as well as the voyeuristic themes of both these films is stark in these opening moments. Central to Cammell's narrative, as with Hitchcock and *Psycho*, is the complicity of the audience with the violence in the film. But also, the division between the town and the natural world: that is, the 'real' world of the city/ cultured space and the mythical/ transgressive space of the hunter/ killer, the latter being the desert. In the Western the desert has huge significance as the 'frontier' space where violence is meted out and transgressive acts occur, as it does in *White of the Eye*.

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[50] This technique of highlighting voyeurism is also used in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960).
[51] Steven Jay Schneider 'Killing in Style: The Aestheticization of Violence in Donald Cammell's *White of the Eye*.' *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies* 2004: 4-8.

This image-association of the desert and the Western is immensely powerful as a self-perpetuating filmic device, but it is also one which plays on the Western genre's familiarity with the landscape of the West. As Josh Garrett-Davis writes: "The Western's genre has exerted such a powerful cultural influence that much of the West's landscape alludes to it."[52] Via the Western genre, cinema gave the American West a true aesthetic dimension. As Western film scholars George N Fenin and William K Everson further clarify, the "Western was a genre of the American cinema."[53] The relationship between the cinematic West and the US public was, and is, massively symbolic – and symbiotic. US institutions, tropes from Westerns in compounding American idealism and myth making have an important relationship in American history and on the US cultural imagination. The Western forms part of the shared language and culture of a majority of Americans.[54] As Richard Slotkin observes:

> For most Americans – to the perpetual dismay of westerners – the West becomes a landscape known through, and completely identified, the fictions created about it. Indeed, once that mythic space was well established in the various genres of mass culture, the fictive or mythic West became the scene in which new acts of mythogenesis would occur – in effect displacing both the real contemporary region and the historical Frontier as factors in shaping the on-going discourse of cultural history.[55]

Ultimately, as the previous quote illustrates, the myth of the frontier depends on simple and recognizable meaning which reinforces rather than challenges US social beliefs.[56]

However, *White of the Eye* presents a multi-layered landscape. This is the case because of the film's similarity to the Western as opposed to creating an alternate universe. This liminal generic world marks the place in film where the frontier narrative gives way to a a more nuanced 'frontera', as seen in Westerns such as Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985), *Lone Star* (Sayles 1996), and *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (Jones 2005). The 'frontera' or border town presents a place of contact between white, Hispanic, African American and Native American people, suggesting the racial, cultural and linguistic complexity and versions of history of the region whilst also considering the arbitrary nature of the notion of the border, and a place where binaries of good and bad are dissolved and

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[52] Garrett-Davis *What Is a Western?*: 49.
[53] George N Fenin and William K Everson *The Western*. Middlesex: Penguin; 1978 (1962): 8.
[54] Fenin and Everson *The Western*: 8-12; See also Andre Bazin *What Is Cinema*? Vol. 2.
[55] Slotkin *Gunfighter Nation*: 61-62.
[56] Will Wright *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1977: 6; 23.

presented as complex as the human relationships - and the fluidity of identity and culture - themselves.[57] These Westerns, and associated ideas of culture and identity, go against the collective and homogenising myths of the frontier, lending further fluidity (as in the prominent trope of the Rio Grande in *Lone Star*) to the labelling of Westerns as 'classic', 'revisionist', and so forth. Tension and movement in these representations offer an alternative image of the West, but also an alternative interpretation of the West and the Western, without being restricted to the rigid confines of genre.[58]

Despite the departure from the Western in this sense, the relationship between town and the desert remains stratified through the naming of the landscape. The 'Apache Mountains' form the backdrop to the setting of *White of the Eye*, maintaining the perceived division between town/ white civilization and the notion that Native Americans exist in the natural world. This continues to spatialize the land in a particular way whereby indigenous geographies are submerged through the structuring binary of city and landscape, whilst there is a perceived sense of ownership of the surrounding mountains by those who live in Globe.[59] Paul's appropriation of the landscape maintains US settler colonial constructions of the US wilderness in that it is perceived as the domain of the white male, whilst it is also given authenticity due to the region's association with the Apache tribe, offering the landscape an Indian-ness which is subsequently appropriated by Paul.[60]

Director Cammell chose the location of Globe, Arizona, for its apparent exoticism, perhaps feeding into European notions of the American West, but also for its association with the Apache.[61] He commented:

> I'm European, and Arizona looks very exotic and a little surreal when I'm confronted by it. …My main set piece is a run-down mining town called Globe, which is on the edge of an Apache reservation, where a crumbling civilization has this uneasy coexistence with violence – *pagan* violence.[62]

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[57] Jennifer L Jenkins 'Framing Race in the Arizona Borderlands: The Western Ways Apache Scouts and Sells Indian Rodeo Films.' *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 14, no. 2 (2014): 75. See also: Rebecca Tillett, who writes on these themes in the context of Leslie Marmon Silko in *Otherwise Revolution!: Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*. London: Bloomsbury; 2018.

[58] Neil Campbell *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press; 2008: 7; 29.

[59] Natchee Blu Barnd *Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism*. Eugene: Oregon State University Press; 2017: 1.

[60] Joy Porter *Native American Environmentalism: Land, Spirit, and the Idea of Wilderness*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press; 2014: 12; 36.

[61] See: W J T Mitchell *Landscape and Power*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. 1994.

[62] Steven Jay Schneider 'Killing in Style…': 6. [Emphasis in original]

Whilst Cammell acknowledges the town of Globe as being located near the San Carlos Reservation, the reservation and its people are liminal in the film, only animated through Paul's appropriation.

Globe represents wealth and consumption whilst the landscape is very much identified as being the space of the natural world, maintaining an uneasy coexistence of binary oppositions. As Cammell mentions above, the 'pagan' violence continues such an association of the landscape as dangerous and other-worldly, bordering on the supernatural, even evoking the expressionist and night-time spaces of *Psycho*; the film regenerates the mountains as the space of the white hunter in the form of Paul. However, the imagery and symbolism of the film makes this problematic, as it is Paul's misogyny and violence which is combined with the identity of a hunter who draws on 'Apache legends'.

What legends these are it is not clear, and open to debate; but obviously the film is appropriating an idea of the Apache, as per Cammell's admission, situated awkwardly within the realm of the white hunter/ killer, who uses this 'Otherness' to define his identity and justify his acts of violence. Despite *White of the Eye* not being a Western, there persists a certain look and relationship between the landscape, masculine identity, and a perceived Indian-ness. This, of course, maintains dominant cultural formations of the 'Indian' within these associations. This association further maintains a binary relationship of white/ 'Indian' which continues to privilege the white in this relationship, whilst 'Indian' elides formations of indigeneity.

Ceremony and ritual have been important aspects of Apache life. However, despite Paul's preoccupation with Apache legends, their representation on screen bears little resemblance to how their ceremonies and rituals are conducted. There is no preliminary ceremonial smoking, prayer, and songs in the film. Supernatural power for the Apache exercises control over worldly affairs, which filters through the hands of man, and comes forth from certain channels, usually through natural phenomena such as lightning or the sun, or animals, principally the bear, snake, owl, or coyote, and also through plants and other natural objects. However, anything is a potential conductor. As M E Opler writes:

> One point which should be emphasised is that every Apache, man or woman, is a potential recipient of supernatural power. Theoretically, at least, no one knows in advance what power may be offered to him or when it may be offered. Then one day a person may have "something speak to him." It may be a dream; it may be when he is

alone in camp; it may be when he is with a crowed of his fellows. The words or the vision are for him alone. Others, though present, will not see or hear them.[63]

Whilst a majority of these ceremonies would be preoccupied with healing, childbirth and coming of age aspects of life, Paul's appropriation seems governed by a violent masculinity, and the fact that he takes female body parts illustrates Paul's misogyny in these acts which is a reaction against what he perceives as threatening and dangerous. In the film Paul rages that woman are equal to a "black hole" and also "the most destructive thing in the universe". His assertions of such pseudo-scientific "fact" are means to validate his own prejudices (and violence) against women.[64]

Paul's 'calling' would feed into his own self-Othering, in that he perceives his destiny has been received rather than appropriated, through a self-induced vision: Paul perceives himself as "chosen".  Paul expresses a desire to achieve mastery over his surroundings and the people within them by manipulating both space and people with his supposed supernatural powers. Of course, the problem arises given the fact that as a white man he is procuring this power, and for nefarious means, as a force of anti-life, as opposed to the life bearing powers and their benevolent uses granted to the Apache. Paul's masculine appropriation is further problematic: within Native American cultures, particularly Plains cultures, women could also receive visions, even if the vision quest itself was traditionally a component of a masculine gender role.[65]

Paul's ritualized trophy-taking of female body parts also illustrates how he is performing an Indianized hyper-masculinity as a type of challenge or sport in order to dominate his friends and family, as well as the natural environment. This is in direct opposition to the purpose of indigenous hunting: the insinuation of *White of the Eye* is that through Paul's performative appropriation of Indian-ness, the hunt is an expression of the colonial sense of male ritual. As Standing Bear, in *My Indian Boyhood*, accentuates, one of the first lessons of the Lakota lifeways is trapping for survival, but not for sport.[66] Paul's hyper-masculine identity maintains the savage warrior trope associated with culturally

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[63] M E Opler 'The Concept of Supernatural Power among the Chiricahua and Mescalero Apaches' *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 37, no. 1, 1935: 65-70.
[64] Schneider 'Killing in Style…': 4; 9-11.
[65] Sabine Lang *Men as Women, Women as Men: Changing Gender in Native American Cultures*. Austin: University of Texas Press; 1998: 321.
[66] Standing Bear *My Indian Boyhood*: vii.

constructed representations of indigenous masculinities, such as those predominantly seen in the Western, but also located in other aspects of US culture, such as sport.[67]

iii: 'To Live In Indian-ness'

Playing 'Indian' still has pertinence to transgressive acts carried out today by white protestors, as the US Capitol riots of January 6th, 2021, illustrate. As with the act of dumping tea by the Sons of Liberty dressed as Mohawks into Boston Harbor in 1773, which anticipated the American War for Independence, a shirtless Jake Angeli entered the US Capitol building dressed in a horned helmet to protest the election result of 2020, in which incumbent Donald Trump lost in his bid for a second term. Playing 'Indian' in this context, a white male appropriating aspects of a simulated and constructed Indian-ness is an insistence of nationalism; Jake Angeli's performative resistance to Donald Trump's so-called 'stolen election' is a feature of US politics that Vizenor describes as the most "monotonous simulation of dominance."[68] As Joseph Pierce clarifies:

> Angeli is not just attempting to replicate an Indian image, but to live in Indianness as a statement of a right to the land, this place, this country. But what he does not realize is that this claim to aboriginal belonging is only possible because of the violent seizure of Indigenous lands, and less as any indigenous representation of Native American culture.[69]

This is a 'violent appropriation' of Native American culture in which white supremacists pose as 'Indians' to create an image of themselves as inseparable from the land. The 'Indian' is the symbol of US' contradictions in terms of identity and cultural hegemony. As Pierce continues: "[t]hey imitate indigenous people and they justify their actions by imagining themselves as the natural heirs to a land retroactively emptied of Native Americans."[70]

However, playing 'Indian' has also been used by Native American people as a way to play on their 'Indian-ness' to disrupt cultural hegemony. It goes beyond parodying the

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[67] For example, the 'Indian' warrior trope has often been used by US sporting teams, and it is typically masculine, such as the Washington Redskins, Kansas City Chiefs, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, and so forth. See: King 2005 and Taylor 2013 on how the trope of the warrior male has been used in white culture to foment an ideal of bravery and warrior-esque masculinity. The 'savage' aspect has also been a trope of the Western through its various iterations, from John Ford's depiction of the cruel Geronimo in *Stagecoach* (1939) to the savage/ noble binary in *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990) and back again to the bloodthirsty monster in *Bone Tomahawk* (Zahler 2015).

[68] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: 59.

[69] Joseph Pierce 'The Capitol Rioter Dressed Up as a Native Is Part of a Long Cultural History of Playing Indian. We Ignore It at Our Peril.' News.Artnet.Com. 18 January 2021 https://news.artnet.com/opinion/native-capitol-rioter1937684?utm_content=buffer6f344&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=news accessed 10/03/2021.

[70] Pierce Ibid.

simulation of the 'Indian' and has been an important strategy in maintaining tribal and pan-tribal indigenous identity and a form of empowerment as well as of control of images for business and for socioeconomic gain. Many Native Americans have made use of their natural resources and tribal industries, such as ski resorts and casinos, and combined with Indian-ness make them marketable to consumers who have a preference for the 'Indian'.[71]

The image of the 'Indian' has been further appropriated in an anti-colonial manner by Palestinian people who used as an ironic display of anti-US sentiment to protest Condoleezza Rice's visit to the Hawara Checkpoint outside Nablus, West Bank on January 14, 2007. Employing the 'Indian' in this anti-colonial way undermines the appropriation of Indian-ness to consolidate US state power (by proxy in this instance) that for example Jake Angeli, or the colonial revolutionaries, employed it for: that is, to bolster white supremacy. Thus, 'Indian' and Indian-ness are powerful yet contested symbols in an economic and cultural context which can have important political and anti-colonial uses and are not simply simulations of representations. Finding alternative and indigenous meanings in these images continues to insist on drawing on modes of complex intervention such as *différance*.[72]



Palestinians dressed as Native Americans in the West Bank, Jan. 14, 2007.

The irony of playing 'Indian' suggests what Vizenor calls 'manifest manners': the language and simulations of dominance, of what the 'Indian' is a part. In the US cultural imagination, the generic category of the 'Indian' is revered more than individual nations and tribes, and often used as short-hand to homogenize diverse peoples. As Ying-Wen Yu writes:

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[71] See: Maureen Trudelle Schwarz *Fighting Colonialism with Hegemonic Culture: Native American Appropriation of Indian Stereotypes*. Albany NY: SUNY Press; 2013: 3-4; 22.

[72] See: Susan Kollin 'Remember, you're the good guy: *Hidalgo*, American Identity, and Histories of the Western.' *American Studies*, 51: 1/ 2, 2010. Native Americans have also expressed solidarity with Palestinian people, see: 'Native Americans stand with Gaza https://muslimvillage.com/2014/08/11/56760/native-americans-stand-gaza/ 11/08/2014. Accessed 19/12/2021.

It is ironic that the manifest manners of performance are honoured more than the real native peoples. Tribal identities thus have been misconstructed as the Other and authenticated as simulation.

'Indian' is a word with no reference to North American tribal cultures. It has become a pronoun for all Native Americans. These 'Indians' have become imagined as a projection of the dominant culture, and a simulation of that desire in the images people see onscreen in Westerns.[73]

In *White of the Eye*, Paul's appropriation of Apache culture illustrates more about his own identity and indicates less any indigenous representation of Native American culture.[74] Whilst there are no Native American characters in the film, Paul's identity and behaviour, his family and friends and his relationship to the surrounding environment is dominated by his playing 'Indian'. Therefore, the cinematic 'space' is configured not by indigenous invisibility, but through what Armando José Prats calls "the visual and immediate presence of an Other."[75] Playing 'Indian' is not a new concept and has been used throughout US history and culture as an act of appropriation, as well as in acts of political protest and agency. The power of the 'Indian' is utilised by the white dissenter, but the same power has also been used by the US state to deny Native Americans equal rights and representation.[76]



Paul's (David Carradine) transformation from blue-collar worker and father to 'Indian'-esque murderer in *White of the Eye* (Cammell 1987).

In *White of the Eye*, Paul essentially plays 'Indian', or 'goes Native', but it is in a very different sense to characters such as Jack Crabb (Dustin Hoffman) in *Little Big Man* (A Penn 1970) based on Thomas Berger's 1964 book of the same name; or John Dunbar (Kevin

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[73] Ying-Wen Yu 'Playing Indian: Manifest Manners, Simulation, and Pastiche' in Gerald Vizenor. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press; 2008: 91-93.
[74] Berkhofer *The White Man's Indian*: 3-4.
[75] Armando José Prats *Invisible Natives: Myth & Identity in the American Western*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; 2002: 5.
[76] As Philip Deloria discusses, white American cultural and political identities are closely aligned with a long history of Indian play. Deloria also illustrates how Native Americans have been present in these discourses, from the margins, influencing the resultant images of 'Indians'. See: *Playing Indian*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press; 1998: 8-9.

Costner) in *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990), adapted from the eponymous 1988 source novel by Michael Blake; and Hawkeye (Daniel Day-Lewis) in *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann 1992), adapted from James Fenimore Cooper's' 1826 literary epic *The Last of the Mohicans*. Like Paul, these characters become 'Indianized' in a frontier space of arcadian design with no real concrete referent. However, Paul's appropriation takes place in the present-day US, whilst, of course, still being surrounded with imagery associated with the Western. As with the Western trope of playing 'Indian', the white protagonist is typically inducted into Native American society and becomes more 'Indian' than the Native American.

Kevin Costner's John Dunbar exemplifies this trope of metamorphosis. In *Dances with Wolves*, Dunbar joins Sioux society, and ends up showing the Sioux how to hunt buffalo. This is, of course, an aggrandizement of Costner's abilities which undermines Sioux cultural knowledge. Indeed, Sioux writer Luther Standing Bear wrote on the traditional lifeways of his people and dedicated the longest chapter in the book to hunting and fishing, illustrating the centrality of the hunt and buffalo to Sioux economy and culture.[77]

In the 'revisionist' Western, the protagonist becomes more 'Indian' than the Native American, as noted above in such titles as *Little Big Man*, *Dances with Wolves*, and *The Last of the Mohicans*. Armando José Prats suggests how the "Western presents its most complete Indian through the white hero" which, like the mythical conventions of the cinematic West, are gained via audience negotiation and consent built around a familiar language, identity and discourse.[78] This in turn feeds into cinematic myth-making, and the culturally acquired abilities that enabled white males to assume mastery over their surroundings, and by extension over the peoples within them.[79] The violent appropriation by Paul of Apache-ness

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[77] See: Luther Standing Bear *My Indian Boyhood*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; 2006 [1931].
[78] Prats *Invisible Natives*: 174-175.
[79] Slotkin discusses the 'man who knows Indians', and one of his key case studies remains the character of Hawkeye from James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, the adopted son of the Mohawk, Chingachgook, a white man who appropriates indigenous culture but is not, ultimately, removed from white society. See: *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2000 [1973]: 313-314; 484-485; 493. As noted, Philip Deloria has called this 'playing Indian'. The white hero 'playing Indian' has been written about in film contexts by Armando José Prats, who argues that the "Western presents its most complete Indian through the white hero" in *Invisible Natives: Myth & Identity in the American Western*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; 2002: 174. Deloria has also written about the 1992 Michael Mann adaptation of *The Last of the Mohicans* and continues the thesis that 'playing Indian' lends authenticity to white identity. In Denise K Cummings, LeAnne Howe, and Harvey Markowitz. *Seeing Red: Hollywood's Pixeled Skins: American Indians and Film*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013: 65-68. In the same text, Clifford E Trafzer discusses Davy Crockett with regards to the white 'taming' of the frontier: 44-48; whilst James Riding In considers 1990's *Dances with Wolves*, concerning how Kevin Costner's John Dunbar 'teaches' the Sioux how to shoot and hunt: 89-95. See also Chad A Barbour *From Daniel Boone to Captain America: Playing Indian in American Popular Culture*. Oxford: University Press of Mississippi; 2016: 54, and Ward Churchill *Fantasies of the*

or Indian-ness would seem to be a cultural motif predicated in maintaining masculinist and misogynistic hierarchies.

Though showing overt sympathy in its relationship to Native American cultures, *Dances with Wolves* similarly still leaves stereotypes largely intact, particularly through the representation of the 'noble' Sioux and the 'savage' Pawnee. Despite the romanticised or stereotypical portrayal of Native Americans in such 'revisionist' Westerns, these historical films rarely succeed in contextualising the period in which they take place. For example*, Dances with Wolves* does not consider Lakota understanding of space and time, or present a history prior to white arrival.[80] As Shari M Hunhdorf states, these stereotypes "remain more or less incidental to the story." The focus is on the central hero figure, who joins Sioux society but retains a cultural superiority. Huhndorf continues: "[a]lthough the film manifests some sympathy towards Indians, its primary cultural work in fact is the regeneration of racial whiteness and European-American Society." As it transpires, Costner's appropriation actually reinforces cultural hierarchies predicated on 'race' and gender.[81]

As with the revisionist trope of playing 'Indian'/ going 'Native', Paul's Indian-ness is something that is bestowed upon him by association with a Native American character. Mike (Alan Rosenberg) claims to be of a mixed heritage, including part Native American. Although this seems dubious, it is no more tenuous than other filmic associations in which the protagonist appropriates Native American culture, such as *Little Big Man*, *Dances with Wolves*, and *The Last of the Mohicans*. Paul met Mike and his then girlfriend Joan (Cathy Moriarty) ten years earlier, when they both became stranded in Globe after having had car trouble. Paul helps them both with the car repairs and in the time they spend together, Cathy rejects Mike and falls for Paul. Mike would later maintain to Cathy that she became infatuated with Paul when he "laid his eyes on us." Mike would later explain to Cathy: "Apaches call it the white of the eye." In a similar fashion then, Paul's Indian-ness is imparted through the character of Mike, as well as Paul's appropriation of the landscape via his hunter identity. Paul then engages in his final physical transformation on-screen towards the culmination of the movie.

In this final act of the movie, Paul's murderous transgressions are unmasked at the same time he adopts a loose 'Indian' costume. There is a parallel between Paul in *White of*

*Master Race: Literature, Cinema, and the Colonization of American Indians*. San Francisco: City Lights Books; 1998: 231-241.

[80] Jean Fisher 'Dancing with words and speaking with forked tongues.' *Third Text* 5, no. 14, 1991: 33.

[81] Huhndorf *Going Native*: 2-3.

*the Eye* and the character of Sport (Harvey Keitel) in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), itself loosely based by Paul Schrader on *The Searchers*. Sport's deportment and costume are an obvious construction of Indian-ness, and, like Paul's, it is one that has been appropriated to instil a sense of hyper-masculine dominance for himself and to use this to control others. Similarly, Robert DeNiro's Travis Bickle also appropriates a Native American appearance in order for him to carry out his final act of rebellion. During the culmination of the movie, Bickle cuts his hair into a 'Mohawk' style, echoing the Mohawk disguises of the Boston Tea Party Revolutionaries.[82] The Mohawk haircut provides him with the necessary 'Otherness' to engage in the transgressive act of killing Sport in order to 'save' the object of his desire, the young sex worker Iris (Jodie Foster). This sequence is mirrored during the ending of *White of the Eye*: Paul – playing 'Indian' like Sport and Travis – is wearing red "war-paint" covering the bottom half of his face, and dynamite strapped to his bare chest in an apparent allusion to *Pierrot Le Fou* (Godard 1965).

Cammell's use of red is reminiscent of the Italian cinema masters, such as Dario Argento's aesthetic backdrop in *Suspiria* (1977), representing a troubled mind; or Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* (1969), a stylistic portrayal of a sick society in the grip of nationalistic fervour. This has the same symbolic value as in Cammell's film, intimating as it does a decayed social body. In perhaps in offering a nod to these Cammell is hinting at the troubled mind and body of his protagonist. In each of these directors' works, red forms an important aesthetic backdrop, particularly the dance academy in *Suspiria* which forms a bright red palace. Also, the excessive use of fake blood in *Suspiria* was heavily criticized, and perhaps Cammell again plays on this during the first murder scene in *White of the Eye*.



The aestheticized first murder scene where a manner of liquids replace the blood of the victim; first tomato sauce, then wine.

The crime scene has symbolic qualities commensurate to Paul's misogynistic delusion, but also his frustration. The absence of actual blood during the first murder, instead

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[82] Deloria *Playing Indian*: 12.

replaced by red wine, red roses, and tomato sauce, all emphasise Paul's desire but also his lack: that is, he cannot bleed, or, rather, menstruate.[83] This desire would seem evidenced by Paul's subsequent collecting of female body parts, which are later found by his wife Cathy. That the crime scene is also referred to as a "work of art" by the investigating policemen also hints at the aesthetics of violence in Cammell's work and its giallo stylings.

In the film, Cammell presents the opposites of violence and beauty, civility and wildness, and nature and culture, whilst the feminine in *White of the Eye* is structured in stark opposition to Paul's hyper-masculinity. Paul's assumption of the hunter persona exemplifies what he perceives as a masculine right and also reveals colonial constructions of gender. The inevitable result of Paul's appropriation is to maintain Native American stereotypes, but it also consolidates settler heteropatriarchy, and systems of masculine dominance in general. This continues to shape the indigenous body in the settler image and in a male-gendered and aggressive way.[84] Contained within this narrative is the Eurocentric binary notion of gender, which has been historically relied upon to destabilize indigenous identities in the maintenance of filmic Indian-ness.[85]

iv: Finding 'Native Space'

Settler geographies and indigenous geographies exist unevenly, and formations of power in the US continue to hinge on colonial era land claims, and can vary and shift in relation to white narratives of possession. As Natchee Blu Barnd points out: "land is the most immediate mechanism and the core point of contention for colonizer and colonized."[86] Film can obviously affect ideas of identity and the interplay between them in cultural spaces as they are represented on screen. Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* (1998) illustrates this in its famous lampooning of *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990) by protagonists Victor (Adam Beach) and Thomas (Evan Adams). This satirizes the cultural construction of the 'Indian' but also insists on a form of *différance* by offering a relationship in which Native Americans are privileged and contextualized within indigenous and US culture.

An obvious further point of reference in a filmic context which exemplifies this is Eyre's subsequent film, *Skins* (2002). *Skins* takes the protagonist Rudy Yellowshirt (Eric

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[83] Theresa Baughman 'Defiance: Seeing Red – Mark Rothko and Suspiria' 7 August, 2020, https://www.whatsleepsbeneath.com/movieblog/suspiria-red accessed 09/07/2021.
[84] Sam McKegney *Masculindians: Conversations About Indigenous Manhood*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press; 2012: 3; 76.
[85] Nancy Marie Mithlo *Our Indian Princess: Subverting the Stereotype*. Santa Fe: SAR Press; 2009: 2-11.
[86] Barnd *Native Space*: 11.

Schweig) to the Black Hills in South Dakota, where Mount Rushmore is located. Rudy gives US President George Washington's likeness a bloody nose/ red tear, which can be seen as a filmic process of reinscribing meaning on to Mount Rushmore, which is a sacred location known as *He Sapa* to Lakota peoples. Visually, Rudy's act forms a representational graffiti, and the effect is striking. The symbolism of the red paint emphasises a Native presence: not one where this presence has disappeared, but where it has been given an alternative, counterhegemonic cultural meaning against the inscription of the presidents' likenesses on *He Sapa*. The bloody nose/ red tear also makes a symbolic link to the Red Power movement which staged protests at the site of Rushmore in the 1960s. Rushmore does not continue to insist on its inscribed colonial meaning. Rather, it animates alternative (indigenous) meanings in the landscape which undermine the inherited relationship between white hegemony and 'Indians' by asserting a Native presence.[87]

The US procurement of the Black Hills region has long been perceived as a theft, abrogating as it does the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty.[88] 'Rushmore' had meaning before it was spoilt by the faces of US presidents. As Luther Standing Bear wrote:

> Of all our domain we loved, perhaps, the Black Hills the most. The Lakota had named these hills He Sapa, or Black Hills, on account of their color… According to a tribal legend these hills were a reclining female figure whose breasts flowed life-giving forces, and to them the Lakota went as a child to its mother's arms… Two lovely legends of the Lakotas would be fine subjects for sculpturing – the Black Hills as the earth mother, and the story of the genesis of the tribe. Instead, the face of a white man is being outlined on the face of a stone cliff in the Black Hills. This beautiful region, of which the Lakota through more than any other spot on earth, caused him the most pain and misery. These hills were to become prized by the white people for reasons far different from those of the Lakota.[89]

The pattern of finding mineral wealth on other lands deemed indigenous in perpetuity, or later on acting as reservations, would continue. The motivations for the establishment of Globe, Arizona, was for mining the region's mineral wealth. Again, this was on Apache land. This has significance as the setting for *White of the Eye*.

In 1875, silver was discovered on the San Carlos Apache Reservation in Arizona, and then, in 1878, copper was found. This was the mineral wealth on which the town of Globe

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[87] See: Sam Hitchmough 'Columbus Statues Are Coming Down – Why He Is So Offensive to Native Americans' 2020, https://theconversation.com/columbus-statues-are-coming-down-why-he-is-so-offensive-to-native-americans-141144 accessed 20/08/2020.
[88] See: Jeffrey Ostler *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2004. I discuss the context of the Fort Laramie Treaties in more detail in chapter three.
[89] Luther Standing Bear *Land of the Spotted Eagle*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; 2006 [1933]: 43-44.

was founded. The town of Globe is known in Apache as Besh-Ba-Gowah, which translates as "metal among/ between/ around the houses."[90] At the time of the founding of Globe, the concept of the reservation was unappealing to both the Apaches who were concentrated there, and to the white settlers – inflamed by newspaper headlines – who imagined that the Apache stood in the way of 'progress'.[91]

The actual reservation is not named in *White of the Eye*; however, the trace of the reservation remains. Indigenous absence is evoked through the naming of the mountains and Paul's 'Indian' play, but it is a wholly imagined Indian-ness. This legitimizes Paul's 'Indianization' but also polices difference in a white and masculine sense, particularly given the context of the movie. By not being seen, the reservation maintains a Native absence and a simulation of the 'Indian' via Paul's appropriation. This affirmation maintains the 'racial' and gender hierarchies on which the US is predicated. In a sense, Paul represents the patriarchal capitalism which is in Andrew Jackson's assumption of guardianship over Native Americans, particularly when thinking about white appropriation and the capitalist division of town and country. Within this gesture are the colonial binaries which a critical intervention such as *différance* insists on undermining.[92]

As such, the town of Globe, Arizona, has continued to memorialize the Apache presence in its street names, but also in the landscape surrounding the town and reservation, such as 'Apache Leap', and the dark obsidian glass found in the surrounds, called 'Apache tears', which offers instances where colonial naming and the romanticised 'Indian' meet. This animates the 'Indian' in a neat way for colonial understanding, undermines the indigenous relationship with the land as white place names are privileged, whilst glossing the removal of Apache peoples for the sake of white pursuit of mineral wealth in the region.[93]

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[90] Wilbur A Haak and Lynn F Haak *Globe – Images of America*. Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing. 2008: 83-84.

[91] Richard N Ellis 'The Apache Chronicle.' *New Mexico Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (1972): 276-280. Much of the newspaper criticism fell upon the army in the area: the Ninth Cavalry, a black regiment who were subject to racial slurs, but primarily its commander Colonel Edward Hatch. In his failure to capture Victorio, the Silver City *Daily Southwest* baited Hatch with the headline: 'Hitchity Hatch-ity, here I come. Old Vic's after me, but you must keep mum.' Newspapers in the region often depicted exaggerated stories of Apache warriors running amok and burning frontier settlements. There even circulated rumours of an Apache journal, which boasted of Mexican collusion and payment for US soldiers' scalps; that the incompetence of the Ninth Cavalry was effectively supplying Victorio's warriors' fresh horses and munition, whilst reservations were being used by Apache's as neutral field hospitals.

[92] Jean Fisher 'Dancing with words…': 37-38.

[93] Legend has it, that Apache warriors facing defeat by US cavalry leaped to their deaths rather than surrender, from 'Apache Leap', near Superior. When the women collected the bodies their tears grew hard on the ground and formed the dark glass 'Apache tears'. David William Samuels. *Putting a Song on Top of it: Expression and Identity on the San Carlos Apache Reservation*. Phoenix: University of Arizona Press; 2004: 43-44.

Whilst this appropriation does not disclose a true indigenous identity within the narrative of the film, it offers a thread to pursue, provoked by Paul's appropriation, as it reveals the type of dichotomy which *Skins* engages with. As David William Samuels writes:

> The story of Globe is a story of ascendancy, of developing Arizona's mineral riches for the good of the community and the nation. But for the people on the San Carlos Reservation, history isn't about ordering events chronologically in order to explain an outcome. Rather, it is about topography and feeling, especially the feelingfullness of expressivity.[94]

This emphasises the contradiction evident in the different social structures of white settler and indigenous in the US South-West. The relationship the Apache had with the area is significantly different when considering Apache geographical understandings.

The indigenous understanding is that geography does not simply equate to place, rather marks belonging and relationships to the land, and ways of understanding the world.[95] This is in opposition to the Eurocentric/ white history of controlling the land, particularly for pecuniary wealth.[96] However, the representation of the landscape in *White of the Eye* offers a filmic space that does not simply naturalize the neat teleological narrative of US history. It is the protagonist drawing on Apache legends which makes the film problematic. It takes indigenous knowledge and uses this power for the malevolent white anti-hero, creating a static 'Indian' by rendering Native Americans powerless by reducing references to white identity and violence. Yet within this representation of the 'Indian' is the possibility for inscribing the land with alternative meanings and insisting on indigenous *différance*.[97]

For Apaches, appropriation of the landscape is known as "speaking with names." This works in an accumulative process between speakers, encouraging others to open their minds, whilst over-speaking can seem derogatory to the imagination of others in the act of communication. The place references within Apache speech would be heavily laden with meaning over the generations, containing humour, or perhaps offering a cautionary tale. The places would be associated within stories that current generations would have heard countless times. These stories form a vital aspect of Apache tribal heritage and suggest the new and different ways that the landscape can be studied, and how alternative meanings are yet to be animated. This is something that is often missed in film: particularly in the Western genre,

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[94] Samuels *Putting A Song on Top of it*: 46.
[95] Barnd *Native Space*: 1.
[96] Luther Standing Bear *My Indian Boyhood*. University of Nebraska Press; 2006 [1931]: x-xi. See also: Joy Porter *Native American Environmentalism: Land, Spirit, and the Idea of Wilderness*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press; 2014: 5.
[97] Campbell *The Rhizomatic West*: 8.

which has such an emotive connection to white progress, white place names, and perpetuating the simulated 'Indian' through the naming of locations.

Place names, as Keith H Basso comments: "are arguably among the most highly charged and richly evocative of all linguistic symbols." [98] The naming and renaming of toponyms take on additional meaning in the colonial context. The intimate link between people and the land is one that is structured by language and mutually held ideals of what the landscape actually is, which will be heavily influenced by culture. Apache knowledge can obviously offer a way of understanding the landscape which has been inscribed by white settlers and also insist on a version of what we are here calling a process of *différance*. This is particularly true of those tropes within the US cultural imagination, rendering the filmic images a static association of colonial capture. What is clear is that the audience's gaze is meeting with a construction of the landscape which reveals a Eurocentric bias within the narrative, particularly through the film's juxtaposition of Globe with the surrounding country, and the intimation of the Apache within the film's narrative.[99]

Western Apaches have a deep and primordial attachment to places, as indicated by their storied relations with the landscape, which is informed by an intimate arrangement of cultural histories, memories, aesthetics, and ethics. In these poetic imaginations of place, the hegemonic power of Anglo-American epistemology is deconstructed, due to the interpretive and ambiguous nature of the language and stories through word play, verbal art and puns that form these stories of place, but also that mark the everyday experience of conversation. This is a way of maintaining history and cultural sovereignty through placenames in the Western Apache language. This can be a useful strategy to resist the arbitrary nature of colonial naming, and the romanticised appropriation of indigenous peoples through the colonial naming of places, such as 'Apache leap', noted above. As David Samuels points out: "San Carlos Apaches make sense of their world by playing parodic tricks with the symbols of domination." [100] This latter technique comes from more recent misunderstandings of place naming between Apaches and white settlers. The power and potential for this in popular film is arguably yet to be taken advantage of in this context.

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[98] Keith H Basso 'Speaking with names: Language and landscape among the Western Apache.' *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 2, 1988: 101-123.
[99] W J T Mitchell *Landscape and Power*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press; 1994: 10-11.
[100] David Samuels 'Indeterminacy and history in Britton Goode's Western Apache placenames: Ambiguous identity on the San Carlos Apache reservation.' *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 2, 2001: 278-281.

Whilst anti-colonial practice is an important part of what it means to be indigenous in the US, it is relevant to consider how indigenous communities and individuals have maintained their identity, culture and sovereignty, despite being reduced to the 'Indian' in the US cultural imagination. This can be disrupted in ways that animate the Native presence by playing on the notion of the 'Indian', even in the context of *White of the Eye*, which is 'externally imposed and mythological'.[101] Native Americans are deferred through the presence of the Indian and Indian-ness within US discourses of empire. Indigenous peoples become a trace of the constructed signifiers such as the 'Indian' and are therefore not fully represented, thus perpetuating US colonial structures.[102] As Barnd elaborates:

> Indigeneity requires some engagement with the related concept of Indian, a racial construct that has long facilitated the dispossession, subjugation, and attempted incorporation of Native peoples into the United States… Indianness encompasses a dialectical and sometimes oppositional set of understandings about Native peoples in what is now the United States. Indianness references indigenous self-definitions as well as definitions that are externally imposed and sometimes mythological. It refers simultaneously to the supposedly self-evident identity category of 'Indians' as well as the varied meanings generated within and across diverse and complicated Native communities and histories.[103]

The lack of fixed meaning, whether established from the outside or between Native cultures, offers a point of intervention. Interrogating the discourse that consolidates US colonial structures through such notions of the frontier and 'manifest destiny', and by animating and interrogating the 'Indian', counters the hegemonic discourse that reified subjects inhabit and intervenes critically at the site of colonialism. And, of course, helps to approach appropriation with a sense of irony.[104]


v: Conclusion: Beyond the Western Gaze


Regardless of the insistence of the film, Apache meaning has not gone anywhere: it has just been elided through colonial naming practices and other forms of appropriation. The structuring practices of language always seek to resolve an indeterminacy of meaning. The location of Apache toponyms renders the white naming of place in tension, lending new meaning and understanding to the landscape. However, *White of the Eye* does not deliberately respond to white appropriation of the land, nor evoke any of these Apache toponyms,

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[101] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: 3.
[102] Byrd *The Transit of Empire*: 7-9.
[103] Barnd *Native Space*: 4.
[104] Warrior: xxiii-xxv.

although, as intimated, the potential is always already there for utilising alternative meanings, thus deferring the inscribed colonial meanings. This film does illustrate how colonial discourse continues in film beyond the Western genre. However, that does not mean that this interpretation is fixed. Moving beyond the genre sets the tone to play on meaning that is perhaps fixed by the Western's associated imagery. As the protagonist inhabits a constructed Indian-ness, whether by procuring the landscape, the places he deems his hunting grounds, or evoking Apache spirituality as a perceived ability to see beyond, the identity he constructs for himself is unstable, based on the simulated 'Indian.'[105] The 'Indian' can be used as the basis for an intervention to invoke patterns of *différance* by following the simulated Apache in this context and seek out the alternative narratives of place and of being.

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[105] See Gerald Vizenor's *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence.* Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press; 1998 and *Manifest Matters: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press; 1999, amongst his many other works, which plays on colonial discourse, animated the Trickster, and deconstructs the 'Indian'.

Chapter 1.2: 'Scenes from a Western Movie': US Frontier Mythology and *Hidalgo* (Johnston 2004)[106]

i: Introduction: 'Myth of the Western'

*Hidalgo* tells the story of Frank T Hopkins (Viggo Mortensen), who, along with his horse, Hidalgo, undertakes a 3000-mile endurance race across the Arabian deserts called the 'Ocean of Fire'. However, the setting for *Hidalgo* does not remain in the US West. The film undergoes a spatial and temporal transfer of the US frontier to the deserts of Arabia. The 'frontier' is referenced through its association with the Western genre, serving a political purpose, and underlines the Western as a genre which reflects social contexts as well as leaning heavily on the myths of the West.[107] The narrative of the frontier is a distillation of the salient effects of a culture and identity that has been driven by the process of westward expansion. White settler interaction with the North American 'wilderness' in the legitimization of the US state is animated by the cultural myths that have sprung up around it as much as any historical truth, which includes the influence of the Western.[108]



The deserts of Arabia have a familiarity with the imagery of the Western. Above: Still from *Hidalgo* (Johnston 2004) showing Frank Hopkins (Viggo Mortensen) with Hidalgo undertaking the 'Ocean of Fire' race.

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[106] The title is taken from a poem by Cynthia Huntington in 'Scenes from a Western Movie.' *New England Review and Bread Loaf Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1990): 244-47. It is a playful title in the context of this section and is used to evoke the idea of a Western in a film which animates Western mythology in a different spatial and temporal location, suggesting something other than the West of the Western, but how the ideology of the film treads similar paths in the sense of US colonialism/ imperialism.

[107] Carter *Myth of the Western*: 5-7.

[108] See: Richard Slotkin *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2000 [1973] and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum; 1992.

As with the previous section, this analysis of *Hidalgo* continues the consideration of the relationships between the Western and the 'Indian'. In this instance, how imagery of the West is transported to the Middle East and contextualizes the 2003 US and UK backed invasion of Iraq, doubling as imperialist ideology in the process. The 'Indian' continues to constitute the racialized 'Other' whilst the white cowboy/ frontier hero in the shape of Hopkins also draws on his own Indian-ness to succeed in the 'Ocean of Fire'. As before, this section considers how the imagery associated with the US West continues to naturalize the myth of the frontier. However, within *Hidalgo* is also the opportunity to reveal the hidden narratives which defer the teleology of the frontier narrative and emphasise that the represented 'Indian' continues to form a point of intervention to defer the narrative of the dominant ideology through invoking a process of *différance*.

 Of course, the Western has celebrated the US's frontier past, but the genre has also reacted to the mythical narrative. What defines the genre is that it has grown out of the myth. The varied themes within the genre are more to do with changing social, historical, and cultural contexts and attitudes as opposed to any evolutionary pattern; i.e., that the Western is progressing and developing as a cultural and aesthetic commentary. Typically, Westerns are forced to fit into classifications of 'classic'/ 'revisionist'/ 'post-Western', and so forth, which ultimately fail to speak for the whole genre, and lead to problematic assumptions that revisionism is the real West and the classic Western a distortion.[109] This also does not account for particular films that contain elements of these seemingly contradictory but nuanced characteristics of the Western, such as William Wellman's experimental *Track of the Cat* (1954), which focuses on the matriarchal homestead as much as the wilderness, the cinematography perfectly expressionistic as primary colours are often bleached out and offer an ethereal quality to the landscape. The film focuses on the family's frontier ranch as a beacon for civilization whilst the action in the snow-filled landscape often feels like an inconsequence. *Track of the Cat* offers a counterpoint to John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), which creates a juxtaposition of the homestead as a complex expression of white civilization but with a majority of the action taking place in the wild.[110]

The protagonist in the latter, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) is more of an outsider and anti-hero than a simple champion of white civilisation, and its downbeat ending which casts

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[109] Carter *Myth of the Western*: 19.
[110] See: Will Wright *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press; 1977. Wright's study encompasses – largely – the so-called 'Classic' Western era, and the variations of theme and structure differ radically during this era (the post-Silent era until the late 60s/ early 70s), particularly pages 29-125.

the protagonist out of domestic and civilized space means that it does not fit seamlessly into the 'classic' Western mould. However, the action takes place in a metaphoric space. That is, the film is set in southwest Texas, but the enduring image – like so many Ford films – is that of Monument Valley in Utah and Nevada. Furthermore, the ranch on which the Edwards family live is supposedly a cattle ranch – yet there is no grass anywhere, it is desert: the stock visual trope of the West, particularly in John Ford films.[111]



*The Searchers* (Ford 1956). The uniform look of the deserts of the Western genre are consistent in comparison with *Hidalgo* (see above).

Therefore, attention must be paid to the era in which it was produced, to find meaning in the context of a captivity narrative which is a veiled commentary on the US' 1950s 'race' war, where 'black' is replaced with 'red' on the screen, as opposed to a political allegory of mid-19th century Texas.[112] Although this transference, along with the 'red-face' in the film, perhaps only further elides the Native American within the metaphorical and literal space.[113]

What *The Searchers*, John Ford, and the Western genre in general has achieved is to locate the frontier in a particular time and space; an important reference for this would be John Ford's recurring use of Monument Valley as the setting of the West in ten of his films,

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[111] Carter *Myth of the Western*: 85.

[112] Brian Henderson "The Searchers: An American Dilemma." *Film Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1980): 9–23.

[113] Carter *Myth of the Western*: 84-85. As Carter continues: In the case of the Western, that it 'evolved' during the course of the twentieth century from a rudimentary simplicity (the silent era) towards formal, thematic and ideological coherence ('classical'), and finally towards introspection, fragmentation and incoherence ('revisionist') – leading towards its demise ('post'). Under direct scrutiny is the suggestion that the classical Western is ideologically monolithic, that it always promoted a specious myth-historical memory aimed at Anglo-American 'self-definition', which justified a 'violent response to difference', *Myth of the Western*: 4.

including *The Searchers*.[114] It is used so much so that it has become a self-referential trope of the genre itself. Monument Valley is the West in the US cultural imagination. This is also the time of increased appropriation of indigenous lands, white settlement of the West and the so-called 'Indian Wars'; and the building of railways, the mining rushes, cattle drives, and spread of farming through significant anti-indigenous legislation such as the Dawes Act, also known as the General Allotment Act (1887). This is the raw material of the Western, which is drawn from this particular period in American history.[115] As such, *Hidalgo*'s aesthetic – through its evocation of the time period and its uses of the Arabian desert setting – resembles the imagery of the US West in the Western, i.e., Monument Valley.



The 1887 Dawes Act divided up tribal lands for white and indigenous – forcing the latter to adhere to a capitalist relationship with the land.

*Hidalgo* takes place around 1890-1891. This is the period which witnessed the 'official' closing of the frontier, according to Frederick Jackson Turner, as well as the Wounded Knee massacre, both of which have significance to *Hidalgo*. The idea of the 'frontier' is referenced via *Hidalgo*'s title, which brings with it the image of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty was signed in 1848 and signalled the end of the US-Mexican

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[114] Darko Nanevski 'Monument Valley: The Area that John Ford made his own' 5 October, 2017. https://www.abandonedspaces.com/public/monument-valley-the-area-that-john-ford-made-it-his-own.html  accessed 29/03/2021.

[115] Jim Kitses *Horizons West: Anthony Mann, Bud Boetticher, Sam Peckinpah – Studies of Authorship within the Western*. London: Secker & Warburg/ British Film Institute; 1969, in Carter *Myth of the Western*: 7.

War.[116] The era forms an important backdrop to *Hidalgo*, especially in terms of westward expansion, western mythology, and the interrelationship between these with regards to contemporary US imperialism. The treaty itself added nearly two million square miles to the US, including present-day California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and New Mexico, as well as parts of Colorado and Wyoming.[117]

This expansionism was spurred on by the belief in 'manifest destiny': the supposed God-given right to inhabit the continent and spread democracy and freedom that had instigated the war with Mexico, in May 1846, in the first place; and particularly the ideology of expansion and growth, espoused by thinkers as diverse and Andrew Jackson and Walt Whitman, who advocated bringing civilization to "the lesser peoples of the region."[118] This continues the ideological purpose of films such as *Dances with Wolves*, which maintains racialized and gendered hierarchies. A climate of uncertainty during the George H W Bush-era and need to shore up a sense of American exceptionalism and chauvinistic privilege (the 'white teacher' of Natives in *Dances*) through a middle eastern conflict and 'small [overseas] war' could be seen to be repeated in the post-9/11 era, and reinforced in *Hidalgo* in a similar way to *Dances with Wolves*.

In *Hidalgo*, we further find a spatial and temporal projection the US frontier on to the Arabian desert. The filmic space is in fact neither the Arabian desert nor the US frontier (filming locations included Morocco), but it is a filmic approximation of both, revising both US history and politicising US intervention in Iraq in the process. *Hidalgo,* seemingly, extends the US frontier by moving beyond the borders imposed by history and geography. It is, perhaps, no accident that Wounded Knee is referenced in *Hidalgo*, as this event signalled the end of the so-called 'Indian Wars'. Furthermore 1890, as per the US census, was the year the frontier officially closed; however, the frontier's ideological, political, and cultural significance in the US imagination was crystallized by this idea that the frontier period was now over. That is, the notion of the frontier was increasingly mythologised and romanticized as part of the nation's past. The suggestion that Native American resistance to colonial encroachment ended around the time the frontier officially closed is structured by the US'

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[116] Jon Michael Haynes 'What is it about Saying We're Sorry-New Federal Legislation and the Forgotten Promises of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo', *Scholar: St. Mary's Law Review on Minority Issues* 3, no. 2, 2001: 231-266.

[117] US National Archives Catalog 'Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo'. Created 02/02/1848. Series: *Perfected Treaties, 1778-1945*. Record Group 11: General Records of the US Government, 1778-2006. National Archives Identifier: 299809. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/299809 accessed 27/03/2021.

[118] Richard Griswold del Castillo 'Manifest Destiny: The Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,' *Southwestern Journal of Law and Trade in the Americas* 5, no. 1, 1998: 31-44.

own master narrative of history. Further stressing the teleological nature of the US project, and like the film *Hidalgo*, this process discretely co-opts Native Americans and insists on reducing them to tropes within a revisionist narrative, maintaining an Indian-ness that is not representative, but also appropriated by the white hero, Hopkins. Thus, a film such as *Hidalgo* naturalizes aspects of the US' own sense of itself: the same projected image that has been informed by the Western offering a mythologized narrative of the West in which the 'Indian' continues to be referenced as part of a particularly white imagination of US history.

ii: Rough Rider

America in the 1890s witnessed an economic downturn. The closing of the frontier meant that the safety valve of 'surplus' western lands were no longer able to be called upon for the swelling population; this was further fuelled by a flood of immigration, rapid urbanization, violent strikes, and racially motivated attacks (such as the Wilmington, NC, massacre of 1898) which were a feature of the late 19th century US. The era saw the emergence of a rhetoric of the West and the frontier to smooth over the country's domestic malady and celebrate her expansions abroad. The US's military involvement in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in 1898 was largely a reaction against these domestic ills, the frontier myth adapted for these imperial designs, but dressed up in the mass media as a heroic and paternal, "civilizing" imperative as opposed to the colonial land grab of old by European powers.[119]

Borrowing the name from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, the Rough Riders were based on the cowboy as the symbol of US national identity. Bill Cody birthed the cult of the cowboy, a particularly domestic US cultural identity, which was seen as the perfect antidote to the softening effects of civil society. Many of these tropes of US identity came from US cultural constructions. Pre-cinematic Western tropes have been used for political purposes throughout US history, particularly in times of economic, political, or military crisis for the country, in order to strengthen the US' image of itself both at home and abroad. Future-President Theodore Roosevelt was inspired by Frederick Jackson Turner's statement in 1893 that the Westward Movement had made the American. Anticipating the domestic crises which jeopardized the nation – and US national identity – at the turn of the 20th century,

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[119] Jeffrey Geiger *Facing the Pacific: Polynesia and US Imperial Imagination* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press; 2007: 48-50.

Roosevelt created the First US Volunteer Cavalry Regiment to fight in the US-Spanish war of 1898.[120]

Playing on the masculine social trajectory outlined in Slotkin's *Gunfighter Nation*, which sees violence at the core of America's development, Roosevelt looked to the myths of the West for social cohesion and national unity. As Christine Bold writes:

> The move into overseas lands can be interpreted as an attempt to find a substitute frontier for the landed one: new spaces to fill, new resources to exploit, new markets to supply and new savages to conquer.[121]

They were the most famous of the fighting units in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, and whilst they saw action, for Roosevelt it was an exercise in image management which would serve him well for his future political career. Roosevelt had resigned from the Navy to organize the Rough Riders and, due to Roosevelt's involvement, received more publicity than any other regiment. Roosevelt sculpted the deeds of the Rough Riders during the Battles of San Juan Hill and Kettle Hill against Spanish forces so that in the public's mind they were "the true inheritors of the cowboy tradition of white, aggressive, armed nationalist manhood."[122] He even was an early exploiter of cinema for propaganda purposes: it was said that Roosevelt halted his march up San Juan Hill in 1898 to hold a pose for the Vitagraph camera.[123] As Bold continues:

> In the late nineteenth century, America displayed a new imperialistic mood and a heightened desire to impress her independence upon Europe when she embarked upon a number of military adventures in the Caribbean and Pacific. During the same period, there appeared a new popular hero – the 'Rough Rider' – who derived from the Western frontier but expanded the field of heroic action well beyond the shores of America.[124]

Buffalo Bill Cody identified the battlefield as an extension of the frontier. Whilst he did not participate, he did re-enact the Battle of San Juan Hill, replacing Custer's Last Stand in his Show, hiring Roosevelt's veterans to do so. The 'Indians' who were victors in the previous feature were now dressed as Spaniards and, in this context, vanquished in Cody's own image of frontier mythology.

What Cody did do was take frontier life and history, mythologise it and make it palatable for millions who came to his show. The cowboy is simply the chivalrous knight of

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[120] David Roos 'How Teddy Roosevelt Crafted and Image of American Manliness' 2018 https://www.history.com/news/teddy-roosevelt-american-manliness-rough-riders accessed 28/03/2021.
[121] Christine Bold 'The Rough Riders at Home and Abroad: Cody, Roosevelt, Remington and the Imperialist Hero.' *Canadian Review of American Studies*. 18:3 1987: 321.
[122] Roos Ibid.
[123] Geiger *American Documentary Film*: 123.
[124] Bold Ibid: 322.

old transferred to another time and place. This underlines the myth-making process of the Western, and the associated narrative of the frontier, and the tropes of civilization in the form of the cowboy and his horse in this context. The mustang represents the free-roaming horse of the American west, mirroring the same freedom presented in the American hero.[125] Taking into context *Hidalgo*'s historical and social meaning, it could very well be that the chivalrous hero was required to be reinstated at a time when American political values needed to be reaffirmed, when faced with an international terrorist threat in the early 2000s.

The Rough Riders were the culmination of masculine identity associated with the cowboy and frontier society myth-making. For Roosevelt, the transformation of his own self-image from an asthmatic weakling to a cowboy soldier was a reaction to what he perceived was the softening of US civilization. However, it also proved great propaganda: within Roosevelt's Rough Riders was the insinuation that westward expansion went beyond the borders of the North American continent; this ultimately further imbued a racial aspect to US imperialism.[126] The US framed the use of force as a moral imperative, based on this unique blend of frontier heroism, just as it would in 2003, when it called Iraq a "just war." Rather, claimed the US, to not intervene would be the transgression,[127] contending it was preventing future acts of terrorism against the US and elsewhere, thus replaying the US' own heroic image of itself as the standard-bearer of democracy and justice overseas.[128]

*Hidalgo* could easily be a metaphor for the trajectory of the history of the US from conquering the West to imperial power. As Susan Kollin writes:

> In staging the race between cowboys and Arabs, *Hidalgo* enters discussions about American national identity and foreign policy, particularly the nation's post-9/11 role in the Middle East as Americans struggles to make sense of the nation's new mission in the world.[129]

It is this very success in the race by Hopkins and Hidalgo which allows the narrative of American exceptionalism to triumph over the other competitors. The competition ultimately establishes the white cowboy's apparent racial superiority. This type of race was also a

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[125] Kollin 'Remember, you're the good guy…': 14. As Fenin and Everson continue: [t]he cowboy, itself derives from the English term 'lads', and many fought on the side of the crown during the Revolutionary Wars'. However, it was during the Western Movement, between 1770 and 1820, that the cowboy became a quintessential symbol of America, *The Western*: 3-4.

[126] Carter *Myth of the Western*: 15.

[127] Carter *Myth of the Western*: 38.

[128] See Nipunika Lecamwasam 'Iraq Invasion: A 'Just War' or Just a War?' *E-International Relations*. 6 June 6, 2013. https://www.e-ir.info/2013/06/06/iraq-invasion-a-just-war-or-just-a-war/ accessed 28/03/2021, and Whitley Kaufman. 'What's Wrong with Preventive War? The Moral and Legal Basis for the Preventive Use of Force.' *Ethics & International Affairs* 19, no. 3, 2005: 23–38.

[129] Kollin 'Remember, you're the good guy…': 7.

feature of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Whilst there were cowboys and Native Americans, the Wild West Show also included Arabs, Turks, Gauchos and Cossacks, all of whom displayed their horse cultures. The 'race between races' ultimately became one of national pride, and in the context of the Wild West Show, the cowboy usually won.

These racial tropes are played out in *Hidalgo*. As Kollin continues: "the codes and conventions of the Western… produce an American orientalist discourse that help resolve threats to US national identity."[130] These threats may be internal – as seen recently with the Capitol rioters playing 'Indian' – and may also be external: such as the seeming threat to the US that was posed by international terrorism, compounded by the events of September 11th, 2001. As in 1898, the imagery of the West and the 'rough riders' – those cowboy soldiers on horseback – had a part to play in 2003. *Hidalgo* is the perfect cultural expression of this in a familiar Western context.



Viggo Mortensen as Frank Hopkins the cowboy in *Hidalgo*; this moniker is used as an insult by his adversaries, although this does not appear to affect his mild character.

This is further emphasised in Hopkin's appearance (see above). He carries a Colt revolver, a sidearm which has culturally determined connotations of the US West. Used by Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba, this sidearm makes a further reference to the Texas Rangers, who employed it for conflict against Native Americans; the revolver was created for use on horseback, primarily for the pursuit and engagement of those tribes that were far more skilled at riding and fighting in this particular style, in comparison to white soldiers and lawmen.[131] The Colt revolver also emphasises the theme of modernization and the US involvement in the region, juxtaposed against a society which is supposedly in decay, which

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[130] Kollin 'Remember, you're the good guy…': 13.
[131] Walter Prescott Webb *The Great Frontier*. University of Nevada Press; 2003 [1952]: 242-244.

speaks to a contemporary audience and acts as propaganda for the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The suggestion in *Hidalgo* is that only collusion with the West will bring the Arab world out of its seeming malaise.

Time, as well as location, is an important factor in *Hidalgo*. The closing of the frontier, as per Frederick Jackson Turner's 1890 pronouncement, means that Frank and Hidalgo are presented as an anachronism, particularly when located in Arabia. Whilst criticism of his cowboy appearance does not seem to affect Hopkins, suggesting his own individualism and resilience, what does is disparaging remarks about his horse, Hidalgo. This is when Frank is presented as the everyman. When he knocks out a man with a punch for mocking Hidalgo, the audience are further assured of Frank's character. He who would defend an animal is obviously worth championing. Hopkins does not seem to care for the opinions of others with regards his lifestyle, apparently happiest drinking in solitude, or in the companionship of Hidalgo, who he considers better company than the average human being. Hopkins regards Hidalgo as his "brother"; further intimating the cowboy's mythological association to the horse and the moralistic code by which the cowboy lives. As Fenin and Everson write:

> It was to his horse that the hero perennially returned, after he had disposed of the villain whose intentions concerning the girl were either dishonest or immoral or both. Occasionally, particularly in the older Westerns, the hero would ride off on his horse alone, the essence of Western *camaraderie*; but a romance of which there had been no sign throughout the action would frequently blossom in time for the fadeout. Under such circumstances, it became somewhat of a cliché for the horse to give its blessing to the union in one bit of "business" or another. The most common of these little routines was for the understanding horse to nudge his very bashful master, and in doing so force him into the arms of the girl.[132]



Hopkins (Mortensen) with his horse in *Hidalgo* (2003). Mortensen developed a relationship with the animal and later adopted TJ, the horse who played Hidalgo.

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[132] Fenin and Everson *The Western*: 30.

The status of the cowboy in *Hidalgo* is not simply a given, despite being an accepted trope within the US cultural imagination; this again assists the audience in siding with the cowboy as he is positioned as an outsider, both in the US and when he travels to Arabia. He is never at peace in the world of the aggressive white soldier; Frank's association with the Sioux also consolidates the audience's identification with Native Americans.

This is further emphasised when Frank is in the presence of questionable Arabian characters, ensuring Native Americans are more identifiable to Anglo-American audiences. Frank's association with the Sioux means they have been incorporated into the US Western narrative, very much akin to *Dances with Wolves*. The non-diegetic context of the Sioux being the 'noble' – or civilized – tribe of the cinema, as per *Dances with Wolves*' revisionism, is further extended in *Hidalgo*. The soldiers in both *Dances with Wolves* and *Hidalgo* occupy the revisionist trope, forming the 'uncivilized' aggressors as they have done in such films as *Soldier Blue* (Nelson 1970) and *Little Big Man*. In both films the expression of military massacres has less to do with historical atrocity against Native Americans and more to do with the contemporary context of the Vietnam conflict. The further insinuation is that the Arabs take the role of the uncivilized in *Hidalgo*, as the Pawnee do in *Dances with Wolves*.

The Western typically features the hero, in the form of the cowboy or gunman, and is usually pitted against the bloodthirsty 'Indian' or the outlaw, the primary conflict of the Western being the tale of struggle between civilization and savagery. In the genre, the West is represented as wild space, the domain of a savage nature and unruly 'Indians', both of which must be tamed by the hero. In *Hidalgo*, the uncivilized 'Indians' are replaced by Arabs, forcing a new perspective on the frontier and film as a space of myth-making.[133] As Jim Kitses writes:

> [T]he Western myth also provided, in Richard Slotkin's phrase, 'one of the central tropes of American ideology' with 'Westward expansion as a metaphor for America's rapid rise to industrial world power'.[134]

Kitses expresses the trope of the civilization/ savage binary played out as ideology, with Westerns such as *Little Big Man*, *Dances with Wolves*, and perhaps, *Hidalgo*, references to contemporary conflicts – and the inferred racial dimensions within – as much as 'Revisionist' pieces which treat the Native American less subjectively.

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[133] Kollin 'Remember, you're the good guy…': 9; 17-20.
[134] Jim Kitses *Horizons West: Directing the Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood*. London: Bloomsbury/ British Film Institute 2004 [1988].

Though superficially rendered, *Hidalgo* offers characters who are split into two distinguishable groups. Although within those racialized groups the actions of both are morally questionable, the hero will usually occupy the position of the redeemable and, ultimately, white saviour. This illustrates how the binary of the cowboy and 'Indian' continues to manifest in the Western genre, and beyond. This, of course, fits into a mythical narrative history of the US' projected national self-identity, i.e., the cinematic and constructed image of itself that it projects through film and popular culture. In this the 'Indian' has a role to play.

iii: Cowboy Democracy

The crisis of a rapidly modernizing America was emphasised at the 1893 World's Fair, held in Chicago. At the same Fair, Frederick Jackson Turner gave his 'frontier thesis' speech to the American Historical Association, who raised concerns about the US self in the context of the closing of the frontier and the implications this would have now that America had lost its excess land 'safety valve'. Of course, the suggestion that free and surplus land ever existed removed the Native American from the debate. Despite the contemporary crisis that Turner envisioned, William Cody responded by setting up a circus next door to the Fair, which he titled: 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World.' Cody enticed some of the Fair's twenty-seven million visitors to his own show, thus beginning the mythologising of the West which would only grow in the cultural imagination as Cody took it around the US, and later, Europe.[135]

In his travelling show, Cody would become a superstar. He played on the US's past experience, but also the nostalgia for a shared memory of the West and the cowboy, and ultimately, the 'Indian'. 'Indian' play would be a way for the those in the rapidly modernising US to get back to nature and reject the excess of modern civilisation by becoming a 'noble savage' in the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls in the early 1900s, and 'Indian Guides' movement starting in the 1920s, all of which, like the Tea Party Mohawks of the Revolutionary era, occupied both modern and primitive: rejecting the worst aspects of a modernizing US by juxtaposing it with an escape via a regression to an Indianized state.[136] Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, ultimately, laid the foundation for the Western genre, and a narrative of both past and present in that the Western animates the past, or the myth of the

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[135] Bold 'The Rough Riders…': 323-324.
[136] In 1920 YMCA executive Harold Keltner set up the 'Indian Guides' movement with Joe Friday, an Ojibway hunting guide. See: Deloria *Playing Indian*: 109-115.

West, in the context of the present. Furthermore, the cinema, as escapism, is the perfect recreation of the Wild West which allows the audience to roleplay, occupying both the primitive and modern in the same expression.[137] Indeed, as mentioned above, the Wild West Show lies at the heart of the emergence of cinema, with performers appearing in some of the earliest cinematic productions produced W K L Dickson and the Edison Company for the kinetoscope.

As *Hidalgo* recreates, the Wild West was a circus of horse and rider, of rodeo skills and shooting prowess. But it soon became a mirror of the US' own history. *Hidalgo* illustrates this by immediately following the Wounded Knee scene with Cody's re-enactment of the event. *Hidalgo*'s Wild West Show sees Cody tell the audience how the Seventh Cavalry were outmanned at Wounded Knee Creek but acted valiantly whilst also taking revenge for the murder of Custer, changing the narrative of history to suit his own retelling – as *Hidalgo* also does. As Cody further states in the film, he was rushing to Custer's aid at the earlier encounter at the Bighorn, where Custer met his end, but failed to get there in time.

However, it is not just the 'truth' that is played with, but representation. In his Wild West show – staged for a film in this context, no less – 'Cody' is able to change the course of history. *Hidalgo* also takes these historical liberties, but, again, is designed for a contemporary audience, as with *Soldier Blue*, *Little Big Man* and *Dances with Wolves*. As Jean Fisher writes: "a nation's popular culture often presents, in allegorical form, a clearer sense of its aims, fears and aspirations than the duplicity and mystification of political rhetoric." This idea further engages with a particular right-wing appropriation of the idea of multiculturalism, which President George Bush (senior) along with Karl Rove championed in order to enhance the GOP vote beyond its traditional loyalties, at the same time as discussing the role of the US during the 1990/ 1991 Persian Gulf conflict.[138]

At the time of *Hidalgo*'s release in 2003, the world had witnessed the US-backed invasion of Iraq. Perceived to be thinly-veiled vehicle for US ideology, it was criticised for its depictions of Arab peoples, and commentators suggested that *Hidalgo* carried a political message.[139] The pattern of American military involvement in Vietnam in the 1960s and

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[137] Carter *Myth of the Western*: 8-9.
[138] Fisher 'Dancing with Words…': 28-30 In referring to the Persian Gulf conflict and not a war, I agree with the late Bill Hicks' assessment of the conflict, that: "[a] war is when two armies are fighting…." See: Chris Bould *Bill Hicks: Revelations* UK; 1993. See also Gary Gerstle 'Minorities, Multiculturalism, and the Presidency of George W Bush' in *The Presidency of George W Bush*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2010: 252-281.
[139] See: Michael Saba 'The Real Meaning of the Movie Hidalgo' 13/03/2004 http://www.arabnews.com/node/245729 accessed 26/04/2019.

1970s and Iraq in the 1990s and 2000s also coincided with films with a sympathetic treatment of Native Americans, such as *Soldier Blue*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Forman 1975), *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann 1992) in allegorical reference to these conflicts. Thus, these films were extending the idea that spreading mainstream US cultural ideology is ultimately for the greater good, despite the violence and cultural demise that occurs alongside the advancement of 'civilization'.

In *Hidalgo*, the frontier narrative is reinvigorated for a new US-civilizing mission in Iraq. This comes complete with cultural formations fomenting US hegemony and an idealism of exceptionalism via Westerns and the war film, and the imposition of a mythical telling of Hopkins' triumph over the Arab desert (and its inhabitants). If Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) takes a Western and transplants the US ideology of exceptionalism into a represented (a Europeanized and Americanized) Vietnam, then *Hidalgo* takes a Western and reanimates the frontier myth for ideological purposes of war with Iraq (a war that was predominantly represented through the media). The Vietnam jungle replaces the US 'wilderness' in *Full Metal Jacket*, whilst the desert of Arabia is a simulacrum of the US West in *Hidalgo*. This process of the extension of (US) civilization/ democracy emphasises how the frontier myth is transposed across genres and – cinematically – across borders, as it is in *Hidalgo*. As a mythical space in film the frontier (and its myth), according to Vincent Jaunas, "has gained strength as pure representation."[140]

These films also suggest instances of Hollywood orientalism, which in large part deems all Asians and 'Indians' as one homogenous 'enemy' to be eradicated, but also suggests the endurance of the frontier myth. Orientalist discourse associated with the frontier also corresponds to the cultural production of the 'Indians' within the North American continent. Making this connection between Plains Sioux and Arab peoples in *Hidalgo* is not a leap of the imagination. In context of the film, it would not be hard to imagine at all in 2003 how the 'Other' was constructed in a way that reflected designs of civilization and of 'race'.[141] In writing of the US frontier in 1952, Walter Prescott Webb wrote: "[o]ccupying the

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[140] Vincent Jaunas 'We'll let the gooks play the Indians. The Endurance of the Frontier Myth in the Hyperreality of Full Metal Jacket (Stanley Kubrick, 1987).' *Miranda. Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone/Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-speaking world* 18, 2019: 2-13.

[141] This is referencing the term 'Orientalism' by Edward Saïd, whose work illustrated how cultural artefacts such as literature contain narratives of dominance as cultural hegemony. That is, the relationship between imperialism and imperialist and colonialist ideology embedded within cultural texts. See: *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books; 1993: 71.

Great Plains from Mexico to Canada, were all Bedouins." [142] In historical discourse, 'Indians' were all culturally homogenised as Plains' tribes. Many of the stereotypes attributed to Native Americans in the Western genre, such as living in tepees, hunting buffalo, scalping, dressing in feathers, and so forth, were gestated in the Wild West shows, and garnered from the Plains region, as the majority of those in Cody's employment were Lakota performers. [143]

But these cultural constructions of a racialized 'Other' go beyond the US nation. Zane Grey's literary Westerns frequently referenced Arabs. Whilst Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1867) described the inhabitants of the Middle East as "ill-clad and ill-conditioned savages, much like our Indians." [144] *Hidalgo* is a film which illustrates that the domestic and foreign spaces in which a US exceptionalist ideology associated with the Western genre and beyond exists, are actually quite close together within the dynamics of imperial expansionism and rely greatly on the frontier myth to animate the ideology and cultural hegemony contained within their narratives.

In the Western genre, the Native American is represented in a particularly stereotypical manner. It frequently occupies the trope of the 'red-skinned menace', and has been a persistent feature of the Western, and features as the antagonist in films as diverse as John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) and more recently, *Bone Tomahawk* (Zahler 2015), which offers a horror/ Western crossover with the introduction of zombie 'Indians'. Although this association is again skewed in the US cultural imagination, and in a sense, the Western connection with the antagonistic 'Indian' is itself a stereotype and is mostly attributed to the bulk of b-movie Westerns which relied on this trope to animate its plot. As Fenin and Everson point out: "the Western very rarely relied on Indian aggression for its sole action" more notably they were presented as "warlike children as opposed to human beings" and a "convenient mass enemy" like the one evoked, with obvious irony, in *Full Metal Jacket* by referencing "gooks" and 'Indians' as interchangeable adversaries. [145]

The continued racialization and dehumanization of the 'Indian' in the Western genre, as well as the continued animation of the cowboy-Indian binary can be characterized as the

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[142] Walter Prescott Webb's analysis of Native American culture and resistance to colonialism does not go much farther than a footnote to his study that states: I am ignoring the scattered Indian population who did present some resistance but where not a major problem except for the few people who were in contact with them on the farthest fringes of settlement. In the present area of the United States the Indian population was probably not more than 500,000, one Indian to about six square miles. See: *The Great Frontier*: 3.

[143] Brian Young 'Why I Won't Wear War Paint and Feathers in a Movie Again' time.com June 11th 2015 https://time.com/3916680/native-american-hollywood-film/ accessed 07/04/2021.

[144] Kollin 'Remember, you're the good guy…': 6.

[145] Fenin and Everson *The Western*: 37.

US' own internal 'orientalist discourse'. This has huge significance, as Fenin and Everson continue: "Indian changed from descriptive noun to adjectives of automatic infamy in many areas of world and cinematic affairs."[146] This vilification of the 'Indian' figure in need of vanquishing thus continues to haunt even those film texts where the Indian is less explicitly evoked. In the time-honoured tradition of contemporary wars referencing past conflicts in US culture, the Persian Gulf conflict of the early 1990s served as the exorcism of the US military defeat in Vietnam. As Jean Fisher writes: "as if these conflicts involved the same homogenous horde", illustrating some of the problematic racialized discourse of films such as *Full Metal Jacket* and *Hidalgo*, and the continued perception of the 'Other' in Hollywood. [147]

These filmic narratives of peace and justice have been highly discriminatory in the context of the US' imperialist designs. It is possible to perceive the continuance of the ideology of the frontier in *Hidalgo*, as a political mode to justify the invasion of a country by the US, predicated on extending democracy. Talking about the invasion, Bush senior also spoke of a 'New World Order' (previously invoked by Ronald Reagan), whereby different nations were drawn together under the universal banners of freedom and democracy. Bush's speech presented the US as the beacon of light in the world and preserver of these idealisms, reflecting the ideology of Kennedy's 'New Frontier' speech, and the earlier era where the frontier was animated via Roosevelt's Rough Riders. As Fisher continues:

> The wide disparity between democratic principle and conduct leads us to the somewhat cynical view that the rhetoric of democracy lacks consciousness of both history and the realities of the present; that 'democracy' is, perhaps, a myth of modernity, the most recent in a history of self-serving 'theologies', among which can also be numbered manifest destiny and evolutionism's racial superiority.[148]

Whether the implications of irony towards dominant masculinity and dehumanizing militarization in the film goes far enough, or are even suppressed in these final scenes, is a question that underlies the film's manifest message.[149]

The 3000-mile 'Ocean of Fire' race in *Hidalgo* sees Hopkins encounter a test of endurance, and of the will, with only the chosen achieving success. In *Hidalgo*, the audience witnesses Hopkins' defeat of the Arabs in their own horse race, in their own country. In *Dances with Wolves*, John Dunbar (Kevin Costner) plays a white soldier who defects from the army. In the film, Dunbar is able to rely on the power of his association with the Sioux,

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[146] Fenin and Everson *The Western*: 40.
[147] Fisher 'Dancing with words…': 27.
[148] Fisher 'Dancing with words…': 28.
[149] White 'Male bonding…': 128-130.

without, ultimately, sacrificing his inherent whiteness – or indeed – American-ness. *Hidalgo*, via Frank Hopkins, offers the same gendered and racialised ideal through the construction of the cowboy. Hopkins extends this ideology to the deserts of Arabia – and by inference the present-day Middle East – also through his Indian-ness by drawing on his own association with the Sioux. The cowboy hero is here occupying the same position as other Indianized white heroes, seen ranging from *The Searchers'* Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) to *The Revenant*'s (Iñárritu 2015) Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio).[150]

Near the end of the film, Frank, and Hidalgo, exhausted and injured, collapse from fatigue. The blue skies of the desert are broiling with grey storm clouds, hinting at what is to come. The scene is particularly intimate, shot entirely in close-up of Frank and Hidalgo. Frank is framed from below, whilst Hidalgo is framed from above, firmly establishing horse and master. Frank whispers in Sioux – it is not discernible what he says, and there are no subtitles – to Hidalgo as he pulls out his pistol and aims it at Hidalgo's head with the intention of putting the horse out of his misery (and it is assumed, bringing the same weapon on himself quickly afterwards).[151]



Hopkins praying during the 'Ocean of Fire' race. Ghost Dancers appear as apparitions to assist the fatigued horse and rider.

Clearly, this is not an easy decision for Frank, but a necessary one; they are not able to continue: both are injured and they have – effectively – lost the race. Something makes Frank resist pulling the trigger; looking up into the haze, three Ghost Dancers emerge in his frame of vision.

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[150] Shari M Huhndorf *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; 2001: 4-7.

[151] The Sioux language is not translated on-screen, and the script states Frank "speaks in Sioux" John Fusco *Hidalgo* (Johnston 2004) Script http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/h/hidalgo-script-transcript-viggo-mortensen.html accessed 27/10/2019.

As the dancers appear in front of Frank, the camera pans from left to right, from east to west. Snow begins to fall in the desert. The Ghost Dancers signifies Frank's spatial transfer back to the American West. Like Frank, the viewer is also transported through the mechanism of cinema. This re-establishes the link between Frank and the West and serves as an ideological inference for the viewer. As snow begins falling in the desert, as it did during the earlier scene depicting the massacre at Wounded Knee, this moment also links Frank intimately to the Sioux, and an unsaid strength. In this moment of fetishized Indian-ness, Frank's resolve is regained, and he finds the will to finish – and win – the race. Frank, the former army despatch rider that had carried those fatal orders to Wounded Knee, is renounced of his guilt. The ghosts of Wounded knee have been exorcised by Frank succeeding in this context; embedded is a more contemporary message that suggests the greater good of transferring democracy to the Middle East. In both instances, whether through military transgression (Wounded Knee) or superiority in other means (Ocean of Fire), the racialized Other is tamed for the good of (white) US society.

As meanwhile, his main competitor in the race, Prince Bin Al Reeh (Saïd Taghmaoui) appears in Frank's view. This is no mirage, and the Prince informs Frank that he has failed. The camera tracks Bin Al Reeh's astonished expression, as out of camera shot Hidalgo has stood up behind Frank. Undeterred, the Prince warns Frank that he will not be defeated, as he was "born of a great tribe, a people of the horse", to which Frank responds, "So was I!" When Hidalgo and Frank continue the race, the camera lingers in the place they have just vacated. Here in the desert is Frank's cowboy paraphernalia: his hat, holster, and gun. The suggestion is that the tools with which the frontiersman tamed the American West are also here in the sands of Arabia, representing the potential springing forth of democratic ideals left by the benevolent cowboy. This is further signalled shortly after by his release of Hidalgo to a wild herd. The final symbol of Frank's cowboy identity has been shed. Hidalgo, running free, gestures to the triumph of the American self within Frank. He has survived the frontier and returned to the green prairie of the US. They have all gained their 'freedom'.

This reflects the myth of the frontier and Roosevelt's 'winning of the west', here with the imperial defeat of a racialized enemy beyond its domestic borders. Hopkins is allowed to succeed because of his racial superiority harnessing the superior character of the American pioneers, as well as an imagined Indian-ness. By the end of the film, despite having returned to America, the message could not be clearer.[152] As Susan Kollin writes:

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[152] Jaunas 'We'll let the gooks…': 7.

In discussing American encounters with the Middle East in contemporary Hollywood cinema, critics often note how the Western has been mobilized as a means of framing these relations.[153]

*Hidalgo* extends the US frontier into the Arab world and with this the US expansionist aspect of the myth in the name of democracy and freedom. The Western's imagery is metonymically associated with the imagery of the deserts of Arabia. The Arabian desert extends the frontier, and by implication the diegesis of the Western's frontier mythology beyond genre and cinematic borders via a protagonist who plays 'Indian'.

iv: 'Indian' Interventions

Little is actually known about Hopkins' life, both as a rider and as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, although that did not get in the way of John Fusco's script, and the film's posters to claim that *Hidalgo* was "based on a true story." It has since been found that Hopkins had no direct association with Buffalo Bill, and that Hopkins' writings are simply a fiction.[154] Philip Deloria was deeply critical of Hopkins' personal writing on Native Americans, and how they have, in turn, been crafted into a revisionist American history. Hopkins claimed to have had a Lakota mother and a white father, whilst *Hidalgo* contrives for Hopkins a direct association with the Sioux Nation. He is also seen with the Sioux at Wounded knee, and during his time travelling and performing as part of William 'Buffalo Bill' Cody's Wild West Show. As noted above, at the culmination of the 'Ocean of Fire' race, near the end of the film, Sioux Ghost Dancers – in the form of ghosts or visions – come to Frank and Hidalgo's aid.[155]

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[153] Kollin 'Remember, you're the good guy…': 11.
[154] Juti A Winchester 'Weaving A Cinematic Web: Hidalgo and the Search for Frank Hopkins' centerofthewest.org https://centerofthewest.org/explore/buffalo-bill/research/frank-hopkins/ accessed 11/04/2021.
[155] Michael Saba 'The Real Meaning of the Movie Hidalgo' http://www.arabnews.com/ Updated 13/03/2004 http://www.arabnews.com/node/245729 accessed 26/04/2019.
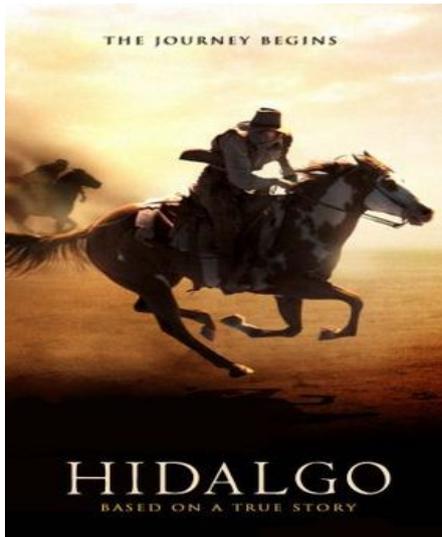
The Theatrical Poster for the US and UK were accompanied by the line stating that *Hidalgo* was "[b]ased on a true story."

In *Hidalgo*, the life story of Hopkins is also heavily imbued with myth, his diegetic association with the Wild West Show only compounding his own part in the myth of the American West. *Hidalgo* benefits from the same myth-making that Buffalo Bill relied on to build his Wild West Shows. John Fusco, *Hidalgo*'s screenwriter, defended his script and the authenticity of Hopkins' life story. Hopkins's credibility, particularly his participation in the 3000-mile 'Ocean of Fire' race, was questioned by a number of commentators and historians. He set out from Aden in 1890 and, 68 days later, crossed the finishing line just north of what is now Saudi Arabia, 33 hours ahead of the next rider. This and other aspects of his life were called into question by Vine Deloria Jr., who wrote:

> Hopkins' claims are so outrageously false that one wonders why the Disney people were attracted to this material at all – except of course the constant propensity to make money under any conditions available. One need only peruse the mass of material purporting to deal with the Oglala Sioux and Hopkins' claims regarding them to see that almost anything can be acceptable to the money-mad titans of Hollywood. Hopkins should have been awarded the World's Greatest Liar award.[156]

Of course, as Fusco insisted, *Hidalgo* was just a film, a defence that is not satisfactory in the context of indigenous representation or historical accuracy. Although with regards the Western, historical fact has seldom stood in the way of a good story. Just like *Little Big Man*'s Jack Crabb (Dustin Hoffman), *Hidalgo*'s Hopkins is drawn from a mixture of myth, history, and imagination. Disney certainly thought they had a hot product, with a budget of

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[156] Long Riders' Guild (The) '*The Hopkins Hoax: Disney Versus the World*' thelongridersguild.com http://www.thelongridersguild.com/disney2.htm accessed 29/03/2021.

some $80 million, particularly with Mortensen as protagonist, on the back of his success with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003).[157]

Frank Hopkins' tale begins in *Hidalgo* as a despatch rider attached to the Seventh Cavalry. In late December 1890, he finds himself in the vicinity of Wounded Knee Creek, near Pine Ridge. He arrives before any hostilities have occurred and the US army are depicted, correctly, as the aggressors.[158] In the film, the army have their weapons trained on the camp, and despite jittery pronouncements by the soldiery that the Sioux are on the verge of an "uprising", Frank contends otherwise. Here the official narrative of the newspapers of the time, which issued warnings that the teachings of Wovoka would lead to a rebellion by the Sioux bands, is directly contested by the hero, offering a more sympathetic – i.e., 'revisionist' – interpretation of events. Frank tells the soldier that he is witnessing a Ghost Dance, and the Sioux are, essentially, praying.

At the time, the newspapers and periodicals were quite damning of the Sioux. Newspaper headlines in general were provocative and called for a military solution, planting false stories of violence at Pine Ridge between 'Indians'.[159] The most striking aspect is the way those involved in the massacre are treated as less than human. As it transpired, commander of the Seventh Cavalry, Colonel James Forsyth, was subject to a court martial not because of the unarmed men, women and children that were butchered in the snow, but because a quota of indigenous peoples killed was breached when in the process of "apprehending" them.[160]

Forsyth's decision to search the Sioux for arms was criticised by General Nelson Miles, who rounded on him and argued that Forsyth be subject to a criminal investigation. Secretary of War Redfield Proctor wrote:

> The President has heard with great regret of the failure of your efforts to secure the settlement of the Sioux difficulties without bloodshed…. The President hopes that the report of the killing of women and children in the affair at wounded knee is

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[157] Peter Harrigan '*Hidalgo: A Film or Flimflam*?' Arab News 13/05/2003 https://www.arabnews.com/node/231641 accessed 29/03/2021.

[158] See: Charles A Eastman Ohiyesa *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*. Lincoln and London: Bison Books; 1977 [1916]; Jeffrey Ostler. *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2004; also, David Treuer *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present*. London: Corsair; 2019; and James Welch *Killing Custer: The Battle for the Kittle Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians*. New York; London: W.W. Norton and Company; 1994. These are all examples of treatments of this event which do not present it in terms of indigenous victimhood.

[159] See: Kevin Abourezk 'From Red Fears to Red Power: The Story of the Newspaper Coverage of Wounded Knee 1890 and Wounded Knee 1973', PhD Dissertation, University of Nebraska, 2012: 25.

[160] Peter R DeMontravel 'General Nelson A. Miles and the Wounded Knee Controversy.' *Arizona and the West* 28, no. 1, 1986: 33.

unfounded, and directs that you cause an immediate enquiry to be made and report the results.[161]

This contradicted what was initially claimed: that events at Wounded Knee had passed 'without bloodshed'. Moreover, Wounded Knee was described as a 'battle', and that events turned as a result of the actions of Big Foot's followers, according to *Far and Near*, a periodical of the time:

> A large contingent under Big Foot were surrounded and apparently reduced to submission…Half through treachery and half through fear, however, these latter turned on their captors and in a sudden attack killed a number of the advance battalion.

This infers that it was followers of Big Foot that were the aggressors, and the US military had no choice but to apprehend them. *Far and Near* summed up events by concluding: "such is a brief history of a peaceful war."[162]

It was, in the end, claimed that Colonel Forsyth had been responsible for the deaths of twenty 'Indians'. However, he was only culpable for five of those as a condition of the armed forces, which states: "to capture one hundred Indians by approved methods, only fifteen should be killed".[163] Forsyth's suspension was not met well amongst the officer corps. And the behaviour of the soldiers reflected the low regard for which the general public and the press held Native Americans. Miles was forced to offer a neat solution to the affair that absolved Forsyth from having disobeyed orders and saw him reinstated. Miles was warned by General Sherman to ensure that the Sioux not interfere with "the progress of this country."[164] At the same time, the *Army and Navy Journal* urged that Forsyth and the Seventh be given commendations for their bravery and for the "sound thrashing" they gave the "bloody Sioux." [165]

Marking Frank's time with Bill Cody, played in the film by J K Simmons, is the Wild West Show's recreation of Wounded Knee. An accompanying title card states that a period of eight months has passed since the Wounded Knee massacre. A voiceover announces: "Twenty-seven Congressional medals of honour were given to soldiers after the events of Wounded Knee Creek," illustrating the historical 'white-wash' which *Hidalgo* is interpreting

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[161] DeMontravel 'General Nelson A. Miles…': 34.
[162] 'Far and Near' *Women's Periodicals: Social and Political Issues*. University of Essex: Gale Primary Sources/ Archives Unbound. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** accessed 01/07/2020.
[163] 'Far and Near' Ibid.
[164] DeMontravel 'General Nelson A. Miles…': 35-38.
[165] DeMontravel 'General Nelson A. Miles…': 44.

in the special treatment being given out to the Seventh Cavalry. The white of the falling snow of the previous scene dissolves into the vibrant red of the inside of Cody's bull-horn. That we see Cody's mouthpiece front on suggests Cody is re-telling history. The audience have been, as Frank has, sympathetic spectators to the massacre.

*Hidalgo*'s narrative of the Wounded Knee massacre is, ultimately, framed as a misunderstanding. In the film, Frank corrects the soldier (Chris Owen) to the fact that what is being witnessed is not an act of aggression by the Sioux, without actually contextualizing what the Ghost Dance actually was. Frank has left the camp when the army move to disarm the Sioux, which distances him – and the viewers – from the actions of the soldiers. A deaf Sioux warrior, Black Coyote (David Midthunder) scuffles with a soldier whose orders he cannot hear and his rifle is fired by accident. This is the moment that the hair-trigger situation needs. Meanwhile, the US Cavalry soldiers are depicted as less of a lawful militaristic presence to ensure the safety of life, and more as a trigger-happy collective that harbour an historical acrimony towards the Sioux, namely with respect to Custer and his Seventh Cavalry which were defeated at the Little Big Horn.[166]

In this context 'Indians' form the essential link between colonialism, imperialism and the projected image of the US. In both cases, as with other Westerns, frontier logics deny the reality of imperialism. [167] As Robert Warrior (Osage) illustrates, the frontier is "an ideologically imbued term that has served as a primary weapon in the oppression of Native peoples in the Americas."[168] The frontier 'Master Narrative' presents a neat re-telling of US-history and of US-Indigenous relations from initial contact and the tale of Thanksgiving. This mythical narrative interacts with and consolidates US history and its own self-image. It is possible to draw a line from this first encounter to present day 'imperial' projects, and the US

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[166] Custer's story has already been retold countless times. Both championed and criticised in films such as *They Died with Their Boots On* (Walsh 1941), in which he was presented as a brilliant soldier, sympathetic to Native Americans, simply the victim of political machinations. In *Santa Fe Trail* (Curtiz 1940), Custer was played by Ronald Reagan and took on his personality. Whilst *Fort Apache* (Ford 1948) and *Little Big Man* (A Penn 1970) were more critical; a victim of his own political machinations and outright vanity, see Fenin and Everson, 11. The film also projects different ideas of civilization; of white society and Native American. Jack Crabb is raised by the Cheyenne after the murder of his parents. The audience gets a view of the West prior to the white man and the film culminates with Custer's demise. See: Roger Ebert 'Little Big Man'. January 1st, 1970, rogerebert.com https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/little-big-man-1970 accessed 02/04/2021. Although latterly, in Thomas Berger's 1964 novel of the same name, the version of Custer changes considerably from redeemed hero to parody in director Arthur Penn's thinly veiled attack on the Vietnam War, See: Paul A Hutton 'From Little Bighorn to Little Big Man: The Changing Image of a Western Hero in Popular Culture.' *The Western Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 1, 1976: 19-45, and Brian W Dippie 'Jack Crabb and the Sole Survivors of Custer's Last Stand' *Western American Literature* 4, no. 3, 1969: 189-202.
[167] Byrd *The Transit of Empire*: xxxv-xxxvi; 4-5.
[168] *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction.* Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press; 2005: xxvi. See also: Rebecca Tillett *Contemporary Native American Literature.*

extending its frontier overseas. The ideological nature of US culture and references such as the 'wilderness' and the 'frontier' are a 'state-ism'; that is the power of US myth-making has laid the groundwork for US economic, political and cultural hegemony, both domestically and internationally.[169]

In *Hidalgo*, Wounded Knee is recreated as a visual referent, but in its representation, the meaning is not stabilized through cultural hegemony. The process is not simply a consolidation of US cultural dominance, it also brings it into question as well. *Hidalgo* leans heavily on the 'classical' tropes of Western myth-making, but also uses the 'revisionist' aspects that offer increased representation to indigenous peoples, particularly in its re-staging of Wounded Knee. In *Hidalgo*, the tension is palpable moments before the Wounded Knee massacre. An army corporal (Todd Kimsey) informs Chief Big Foot (Philip Sounding Sides), and reminds the audience, that the Sioux are facing the Seventh Cavalry. The corporal, referring to the defeat of the Seventh by Sioux and Cheyenne at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876, sneers at Chief Big Foot: "you probably ate his liver". The insinuation by the corporal is that the Seventh are desperate for revenge.

The disastrous disarming of Black Coyote is juxtaposed with a shot of Hidalgo: seemingly alerted to the events, the horse rears up. Frank returns to the carnage to find the Sioux dead or dying. Frank's field of view incorporates bodies littering the now-burning camp. Snow begins to fall, and whilst winter has tinged the early part of the film, it comes on in earnest, a metaphor for the dead and buried, but also of the 'blurring' of history that is taking place on screen. It is no surprise the camera rests on a reconstruction of the famous photo of Chief Big Foot – but in *Hidalgo* Big Foot is holding a flag that is not in the original still, fluttering in the wind. This flag emphasises the historical movement here within the trope of the 'dead Indian', a cultural artifact once frozen in time and fixed by the colonial gaze. However, in *Hidalgo*, the incorporation of the flag into the reconstruction also arguably enacts a visual *différance* to a static photograph and insists on an alternative narrative that was excluded from the original: that the Sioux were not aggressive, rather they were peaceful and dealt with in an overly vicious manner by the US military.

v: Conclusion: Owning Indian-ness

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[169] See Jimmie Durham in Lucy R Lippard (Ed) *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native Americans*. The New Press; New York. 1992: 8.

This chapter has enlisted some of Derrida's notions to suggest that the film, as cultural text, is open to myriad of interpretations. Furthermore, the colonial capturing of the 'Indian' in film is not static but visually animated, that is, the original meaning is no longer fixed in place, thus opening up film to critical enquiry. I argue that the reproduction of the Wounded Knee massacre in *Hidalgo* is played on by including the white peace flag with the body of Big Foot. In this way the cinematic moving image offers the once static and colonially captured image of Big Foot an opportunity to be seen differently. Therefore, it could be said this gesture suggests a *différance* with which to view what was once an image of the dead Big Foot. The tragic 'Indian' trope becomes a point at which to reconsider Big Foot's journey, and therefore does not remain hidden in the snow. In conclusion, the 'Indian', as Vizenor has argued, offers a point of intervention with which to disrupt the US' teleological frontier narrative and the ideology and iconography which is played out through the Western; these are cultural forces which have continuously abrogated Native Americans only to replace them with simulations. Overall, this suggests that there is plenty of work to do with regards to film as a medium of representation, particularly in terms of Western mythology and imagery, and its relationship with the 'Indian'.[170]

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[170] Durham in Lippard (Ed) *Partial Recall*: 54-58.

**Chapter Two: Subverting the Colonial Gaze in Independent Film**

1: 'Shades of Grey':  Western Tropes and *Dead Man* (Jarmusch 1994)

i: Introduction: Revisiting the Western's Frontier Discourse

The Western is seen as the complete cultural expression of the US' frontier past.[171] George Fenin and William Everson claim that the "Western was a genre particular to American cinema."[172] In this respect, the 'Wild West' is the perfect stage for the collision of myth and reality. Sensational tales of the cowboy-outlaw, reported in newspapers and their deeds retold in Dime novels, meant that history never got in the way of a good story.[173] Cinema, like other media, was complicit in the animation of the US' frontier past and the public, with the keen interests of newsprint and comic books, consorted with the medium. Whether for the sake of pure entertainment or the legitimacy it appeared to give to the winning of the West, the public played along with filmmakers' deliberate manipulation of the nation's history. As noted in the previous chapter, the US' 'grand narrative' of the frontier permeates through, and beyond, the genre, but it is not immutable. Especially as this chapter reconsiders how the Western is thought of conceptually, as a discursive cultural text, and not just as film genre.[174]

The primary focus of the previous chapter was less on the Western genre, than on the discourse associated with that genre. It was shown that film 'Indians' and tropes of Indian-ness feed into US narratives that conspire with its own historical and cultural mythmaking and speak more of white American identity and, subsequently, constructions of 'Indians' in the US cinematic imagination.[175] The Western genre, and its subsequent cultural influence,

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[171] André Bazin considered cinema to have given the conquest of the West a true aesthetic dimension, quoted in George N Fenin and William K Everson *The Western*. Middlesex: Penguin; 1978 (1962): 8.

[172] Fenin and Everson *The Western*: 9.

[173] This aphorism is attributed to cinema, and John Ford's Western *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962), Ransom Stoddard (James Stewart) delivers the line: "When truth becomes legend, print the legend." It is possible to see a development in Ford's work that offers more rounded representations of the West, *per se*. I am cautious here in this application, but I do not think John Ford rejected the overall mythologems of the West as he developed as a filmmaker, rather reacted to the changing social context and the myth's perception in US society, see Carter *Myth of the West*.

[174] Fenin and Everson *The Western*: 8-10.

[175] For example, the pragmatic utilization of Mohawk costumery by white revolutionaries during the Boston Tea Party. Moreover, how this interpretation of Indian-ness reflects US identity, and, in this instance, fits the needs of US cultural, historical, and political designs, without effectively incorporating the Native American into the same narrative; but a narrative that continues to animate notions of the 'Indian', particularly with regards to white mimesis. As Philip J Deloria (Standing Rock Sioux) discusses in *Playing Indian*, white American cultural and political identities are closely aligned with a long history of 'Indian' play. Deloria also illustrates how Native Americans have been present in

configures a cinematic gaze that reveals a Eurocentric bias which maintains a Native American absence. Gerald Vizenor has noted that representations in the Western have perpetuated the absence of 'Indians'. He writes:

> This absence is the presence of the 'Other'; a simulation containing the trace of a colonial identity, a construction that reflects the imagination of Indians in US culture. The movies representing frontier discourse whereby Indians are presented as the "antiselves of civilization".[176]

Moreover, 'Indian' and Indian-ness are not attributed to Native Americans, but as has been suggested, are socially constructed concepts that can be utilized in a myriad of ways. Film is bound to cultural discourse, and therefore, representations of 'Indians' are bound to US colonial structures, therefore representations of 'Indians' and filmic tropes of Indian-ness can reveal much about a film's cultural context.[177]

As noted in the previous chapter, hackneyed portrayals of Native Americans can be deployed to maintain stereotypes, but also to deconstruct them. Film, particularly those associated with the Western, have been seen to offer narratives that consolidate but also challenge frontier discourse; although Hollywood's Westerns have maintained and challenged the notion of the 'Indian' in equal measure. Films ranging from *The Searchers* (Ford 1956), *Soldier Blue* (Nelson 1970) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann 1992) to *The Revenant* (Iñárritu 2015) and *Hostiles* (Cooper 2017) can be seen as offering nuanced, but often contradictory, representations.[178] Therefore, this thesis is more concerned with what

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these discourses, from the margins, influencing the resultant images of 'Indians'. See: *Playing Indian*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press; 1998, 8-9; with regards the American Revolution and playing 'Indian', see chapter one of the same text.

[176] Gerald Vizenor *Manifest Matters: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press; 1999: 7.

[177] Michael Taylor's *Contesting Constructed Indian-ness: The Intersection of the Frontier, Masculinity, and Whiteness in Native American Mascot Representations*. Lanham; Boulder; New York; Toronto; Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books: 2013, is probably the best piece of scholarship which considers constructions of Indians in context of American Football mascots but frames his analysis with US cultural discourse that has constructed the Indian as a mythological aspect of American identity that is employed as a privilege of patriarchal whiteness. There are, however, numerous good studies on the Indian mascot question, in general, C. Richard King's work, in particular: *Unsettling America: The Uses of Indianness in the 21st Century*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield; 2013, amongst others.

[178] Matthew Carter discusses the pervasiveness of frontier mythology in the Western genre in *Myth of the Western: New Perspectives on Hollywood's Frontier Narrative*. Edinburgh University Press; 2014: 5. Richard Slotkin considers the frontier as concept and how this has impacted US culture and identity, and the interplay between them, in: *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2000 [1973]: 3. Michael Taylor considers the privilege this offers whites and how 'Indian-ness' is appropriated in white culture and identity; that cultural constructions of 'Indians' reflect the social, economic, and cultural investments of settlers. Taylor also considers the pervasiveness of frontier mythology as central to this process, utilizing the frontier as a critical framework, in *Contesting Constructed Indian-ness: The Intersection of the Frontier, Masculinity, and Whiteness in Native American Mascot Representations*. Lanham; Boulder; New York; Toronto; Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books: 2013: 11-13. Robert Warrior (Osage)

filmic representations reveal about US society and considers the role of film as a cultural mediator, particularly with regards to representations of Native Americans.

This chapter first utilizes the film *Dead Man* (Jarmusch 1994) to illustrate the link between non-indigenous and indigenous independent film that can impose alternative narratives to those found in Hollywood. However, as noted, the Western is a starting point, and not an end point, and is here thought of more as a concept; but its influence as a particularly American film genre is also important. The switch to independent and indigenous films in this chapter is to consider more deeply films and filmmaking out-with mainstream filmmaking contexts, as explored in chapter one. This is to contemplate how indigenous independent filmmakers have responded to Hollywood, presenting an alternative visual narrative, whilst also drawing on themes that make films popular to the Western genre. Moreover, this looks at how these films contest the stereotypical 'Indian', and, ultimately, how these films challenge dominant discourse of US interpretations of history via the frontier, the mythical West and 'manifest destiny', whilst – importantly – offering an expression of indigenous identity and continuous Native American presence in the US cultural imagination.

This chapter then progresses through a series of films about indigenous peoples. Succeeding the analysis of *Dead Man* is *Smoke Signals* (Eyre 1998), which considers the role of the storyteller in indigenous tradition and the transference of this character into an on-screen variation that effectively disrupts dominant tropes of the 'Indian'. This is followed by *Winter in the Blood* (Alex Smith, Andrew J Smith 2013) which contemplates the transference of the Native American Trickster figure which has been animated in contemporary literature and film, and a figure who has roots in the indigenous oral tradition. This combination of indigenous knowledge systems will emphasise the increasingly important role they can play in film narrative.

ii: Framing an Alternative West

sees the frontier as "an ideologically imbued term that has served as a primary weapon in the material oppression of Native people in the Americas", in *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press; 2005: xxvi. Whilst M Elise Marubbio considers cinematic images of Native women and illustrates how the 'Indian' and Indian-ness is intimately linked to US nation building and national identity, in *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*. University Press of Kentucky; 2006: 1-21.

The most obvious thing about *Dead Man* is that it is shot in black and white. This provides a symbolic movement from obvious cinematographic binaries structured by the Western genre's formalism: that of the triumph of good versus evil; of civilization over the wilderness; or of cowboy and 'Indian'.[179] The suggestion, by moving away from colour, is that *Dead Man* offers the audience very deliberate "shades of grey."[180] The protagonists, Nobody (Gary Farmer) and William Blake (Johnny Depp), occupy ambiguous positions that reflect the tone of the film. It is perhaps the first feature film shot in this manner that treats Native Americans in an even and representational manner, more closely allied to a film such as *The Revenant* (Iñárritu 2015) in terms of ambiguity than its 'Revisionist' contemporaries. *Dead Man* has arguably aged better than its mainstream counterparts, such as *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990) or *The Last of the Mohicans* (Mann 1992), neither of which contain an ounce of irony; both are reflective of the late- 'Revisionist' era's elegiac and romanticised portrayal of the 'Noble Savage Indian', whilst they preserve the problematic 'white saviour' narrative, as the focus falls largely on the protagonist. This device continues to marginalize Native presence in film.[181]



Johnny Depp as Tonto in Gore Verbinski's *The Lone Ranger* (2013).

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[179] See Richard Slotkin with regards the mythological interpretation of the US' frontier past and how this shaped national identity; the frontier forming a 'contact zone' between white European and Native American. See: *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2000 [1973]: 3-5; and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum; 1992: 10-12.

[180] Christine Plicht 'Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man Revisited: Still Thwarting All Cultural and Cinematic Notions of Alterity.' In *Mediating Indianness*, edited by Cathy Covell Waegner (Ed): 127-44 Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press; 2015: 131.

[181] Denise K Cummings 'Accessible Poetry? Cultural Intersection and Exchange in Contemporary American Indian and American Independent Film.' *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 13, no. 1 (2001): 57-58. *Dead Man* was – arguably – ahead of its time in terms of indigenous representation and occupying a position in film – and scholarship – which is only really catching up with presently. The use of indigenous language as seen in *The Revenant*, as well as the deconstruction of Western genre tropes, gathering pace in the last twenty years with films such as: *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee 2005), *No Country for Old Men* (Coen 2007) *Meek's Cutoff* (Reichardt 2010), *The Rider* (Zhao 2017) and *The Sisters Brothers* (Audiard 2018). Of course, *The Revenant*, and Scott Cooper's *Hostiles* (2017) for example default to the white protagonist; the latter of which lends the cannon absolutely nothing at all.

Of course, Depp's performance in *Dead Man* is not without problems. Depp has stated on many occasions that he is part-Native American (either Cherokee or Creek but is uncertain of this exactly) and is an honorary member of the Comanche Nation, who have given him the name of Mah-Woo-Meh (Shape Shifter), although his actual heritage remains ambiguous. Since *Dead Man*, Depp has also turned in a (arguably and widely critiqued) racist performance as Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* (Verbinski 2013) and undermines the ironic play on identity of *Dead Man*. *The Lone Ranger* presents a particularly stereotypical representation of a Native American man which harkens to an earlier period in cinematography and radio depictions, when Native Americans spoke in pidgin English and were often naked, aside from a breechcloth. Moreover, through various iterations be it film, radio, television series or comic book adaptation, the character of Tonto usually bolsters white masculinity by complementing, in this instance, the Lone Ranger, and by emphasizing specific traits that exemplify manhood, such as horse riding and shooting prowess.[182]

Tonto's portrayals have been historically racist and, to an extent, unsalvageable. Furthermore, they are ideologically aligned with US originary myths, which, to an extent, frames the Tonto-sidekick as sidekick to whiteness and ultimately consolidates US notions of gender and 'race'.[183] Jesse Wente *et al.* reflect how this film in particular evokes the ideology of the nation:

> Because of the nature of the Western, its ties to the idea of nationhood, particularly the US…, [t]hese stories were, with Manifest Destiny, fundamental nation building [myths] for the US. If you think about the classic era of the Western, from the early '30s to the '50s, it came when the States was still a very young country and still needed to tell itself the story of its own origins, and this was the story it told. Unfortunately, it was told at the expense of the first inhabitants of this land because it altered the history. The truth of what happened. To me this film recalls a lot of those issues.[184]

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[182] Chad Barber *From Daniel Boone to Captain America: Playing Indian in American Popular Culture.* Oxford: University of Mississippi Press; 2016: 35.

[183] I refer to Shari Huhndorf's reading of *Dances with Wolves*, and how this film aligns with readings of US history/ white identity and constructs the Sioux and Pawnee as opposites in a noble-savage binary. Ultimately that film ends with the 'vanishing' Sioux and, as Huhndorf writes, protagonist John Dunbar and his love interest Stands with a Fist (Mary McDonnell), as the "heirs of Indian-ness." Shari M Huhndorf *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; 2001: 3-5.

[184] Jason Bailey, Aisha Harris, Adrianne Keene, Jesse Wente 'The Real Problem With a Lone Ranger Movie? It's the Racism, Stupid.' Indian Country Today, 8 July, 2013. https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/the-real-problem-with-a-lone-ranger-movie-its-the-racism-stupid, accessed 30/07/2021. This same article reflects on the progressive 'sidekick' in *Dead Man* and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Eastwood 1976).

The film can be seen as further illustrating the link between the Western, pop-culture and the 'Indian' in the wider discourse of US nation building and reflecting an inherently and historically racist ideology. That is, such film characterizations depict the white colonizer concept of Native Americans, which are recognized as 'Indians'. This creates, as Raul Chavez writes, a "visual imagery of Indian-ness that fits the national conscience."[185]  As will be shown in *Dead Man*, the role of Nobody is not to secure Blake's masculinity or keep his savagery in check by presenting a moral warning via the 'Indian'. So, in this respect, the aspects of US national identity that usually come to the fore through the frontiersman (e.g., Dunbar, Hawkeye) playing 'Indian', are not as much complemented by Nobody as they are challenged, at least in the context of the film. Whilst Native American tropes are present in the film, such as being at one with nature, and being more enlightened, *Dead Man* does go to lengths to destabilize even these more 'positive' stereotypical portrayals.[186]
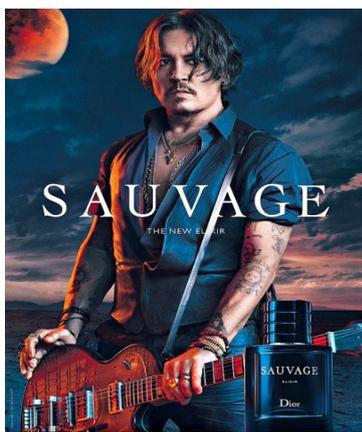


Depp in the Dior Sauvage Christmas 2021 campaign; He plays The Troggs 1960s hit 'Wild Thing' on guitar (aping Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones style of playing) and is surrounded by a group of wolves.

As well as *The Lone Ranger*, Depp has been associated with the Dior fashion house as the face of its 'Sauvage' cologne since 2015. The Sauvage advertisement sees Depp playing a man who is disillusioned with society and the accoutrements of material possessions, who hot-tails it in his muscle car into the desert in search of an identity stripped of these trappings. As Dior stated of the campaign, it tells the story of "an authentic journey deep into the Native American soul in a sacred, founding, and secular territory" which sounds like the musings of

[185] Raul S Chavez *Childhood Indians: Television, Film and Sustaining the White (Sub) Conscience.* 2006: 167-168.
[186] Jennifer L McMahon 'I'm not Nobody: Dead Man, double negatives, and transcending stereotypes of Native Americans.' In *Proceedings of the Ninth Native American Symposium* 2012: 49-56.

John Muir.[187] Whilst this campaign has been recurring since 2015, one 2019 advertisement was pulled by Dior because of its problematic depiction of Native Americans. The withdrawn advertisement shows Canku One Star (Rosebud Sioux) performing a warrior dance, in complete traditional wardrobe, but it was filmed on the ancestral lands of the Utes, the Apaches, and the Navajo peoples. This connotation has been criticised for its cultural insensitivity; mainly for the association of Native Americans and the 'savage' stereotype. Yet, the Sauvage campaign continues with Depp as the frontman.[188]

The obvious correlation this has with film is the continued undermining of discrete Native American identities which have been subverted for the sake of a narrative which, ultimately, profits from these images. This further suggests that the 'Indian' in the US cultural imagination continues to maintain an indigenous absence, particularly when coupled with images of the 'West' and white people playing 'Indian'. As Kim Tallbear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) writes:

> Indigenous peoples' erasure in the dominant US racial imaginary exists alongside our actual survival as peoples that refuse to be fully absorbed into the political and physical bodies of others.

These images of 'Indians' and white "pretendians" constitute what Tallbear calls a "colonial theft". Hence this illustrates the ongoing debate of cultural appropriation and indigenous identity theft and its close ties with the denial of indigenous presence in the US.[189]

There is no denying Depp plays 'Indian' in *Dead Man*, but Jarmusch's film also complicates this by offering Gary Farmer's Nobody a prominent role as dual-protagonist. Whilst Nobody moves freely in the forest, and acts as a guide to Blake, it is also part of a journey, in which in this instance, the Native American leads the white man. In a filmic sense this reversal disrupts the typical journey of the white frontiersman/ hero, both narratively and symbolically. In example, *The Searchers* presents Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) moving from the family homestead, which acts as a metaphor for civilization, into a dangerous desert land occupied by murderous Comanche. Whilst in *Dances with Wolves*, Costner's John

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[187] Alex Peters 'Johnny Depp's Dior Sauvage Campaign Pulled after Racism Backlash' dazeddigital.com 02/09/2019. https://www.dazeddigital.com/beauty/body/article/45829/1/johnny-depp-dior-sauvage-campaign-pulled-after-racism-backlash accessed 21/12/2021.

[188] Lindsay Weinberg 'Dior Cancels Johnny Depp Sauvage Ad Amidst Backlash for Native American Depiction'. The Hollywood Reporter 30 August 2019, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lifestyle/style/dior-deletes-johnny-depp-sauvage-ad-backlash-native-american-depiction-1235733/ accessed 26/07/2021 accessed 30/07/2021.

[189] Kim Tallbear 'Playing Indian Constitutes a Structural Form of Colonial Theft, and It must be Tackled' 10 May 2021, https://kimtallbear.substack.com/p/playing-indian-constitutes-a-structural accessed 26/07/2021.

Dunbar is integrated into the Sioux tribe and, in becoming more 'Indian than the Indian', begins to teach them how to shoot and hunt. In both instances, each protagonist becomes a master of their new-found environment, with, very arguably, absolutely no hint of irony.

In *Dead Man*, this too is represented via the protagonist's interactions with the landscape. Of course, often in the Western the 'Indian' is associated with the landscape/ wilderness. Typically, in film 'Indians' are seen occupying the frontier space, such as the desert or forest, which forms Slotkin's 'contact zone'; that is, the imagined, mythological meeting space between whites and Natives. In this space, the hero is the representation of the US nation and a metaphor for its class, gender, and 'racial' hierarchies.[190] Nobody could be seen to occupy the role of the Native American Trickster whose presence disrupts these hierarchies. The ironic presence of the Native American Trickster disrupts not only the concept of the 'Indian' but also questions the hierarchies which the white frontiersman/ hero constitutes. In this way, *Dead Man* actively questions the absence of 'Indians' in Westerns by reconstituting Nobody's relationship with the hero as well as with the environment and forming an active indigenous presence.[191] *Dead Man* also continues to undermine the Western trope of presenting a narrative that is positively heroic. Whilst a modern Western such as *The Revenant* in some ways follows the white narrative, there is nothing positively heroic in the story.[192]



Depp as William Blake breaking the fourth wall in *Dead Man* (Jarmusch 1994).[193]

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[190] Slotkin *Regeneration Through Violence*: 6; 311, and *Gunfighter Nation*: 10-14; 57-58.

[191] Vizenor *Manifest Manners* ix; 7.

[192] *The Revenant*'s protagonist, Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio) looks directly into the camera at the end of the movie. It appears as if Glass is imploring the viewer to ask itself the questions that the film raises about colonial society, masculinity, indigenous victimization and violence against women, particularly indigenous women. This is plausible, as in *The Revenant*, the agency delivered to Powaqa (Melaw Nakehk'o) by killing her rapist is immensely symbolic. See Sasha Lapointe 'Bring Me The Girl: Why The Revenant was hard for My Friends and Me, 3 February, 2016. https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/bring-me-the-girl-why-the-revenant-was-hard-for-my-friends-and-me accessed 21/12/2021.

[193] Jarmusch, via Depp, is perhaps imploring the viewer to question what they have seen, and consider the Western, and its associated imagery, in new ways. See also: Tom Brown *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema*. Edinburgh University Press; 2012.

In *Dead Man*, Blake, now dying, also gazes candidly into the camera, imploring the audience to question each and every impression of the film.[194] In addition, whilst *The Revenant* went to great lengths to offer a realist feel to the locations by using natural lighting – also often filming in places where there was enough snow – it goes to great lengths to conceal this "staged authenticity".[195] Thinking of this space in this way aligns with the perception of what the West was and is in the US' cultural imagination, as discussed in chapter one. *Dead Man*'s post-modernistic designs perhaps also suggest that Blake's character, in breaking the fourth wall, is drawing attention to this aspect of the film – something that *The Searchers* and *Dances with Wolves* do not do with their restaging of Monument Valley, or the Great Plains, respectively. Latterly, these films present the 'West' as an entirely authentic rendition.



Three stills from Jarmusch's *Dead Man*. Note the intimacy with which co-protagonist's William Blake (Depp) and Nobody (Gary Farmer) are framed against the landscape. The direction of travel at the onset of their journey is also significant: they travel left to right (eastwards) across the screen, and only turn 'westwards' as they near their goal. Surely this play with the directions is intentional on the director's part?

Furthermore, the landscape in *Dead Man* is not subservient to the gaze as seen in most other Westerns. Whereas films such as *The Searchers* and *Dances with Wolves*, and to an extent, *The Revenant*, uphold the Western's visual affectation of the land, *Dead Man* resists the Western cliché of wide-angled takes of natural imagery. Taken together, the lack of conventional and mythic representation suggests that the space is not the perceived place of the 'Indian' lurking in the wilderness. In *Dead Man*, the woods are as temporary a space for Nobody as they are for Blake. As Blake can only barely survive in this terrain his reliance on Nobody plays on the Western's cultural signifier of white masculine dominance, particularly in the frontier space. Nobody's commanding of the white protagonist jars the diegesis of the

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[194] Plicht 'Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man…': 138.

[195] Kim Masters 'How Leonardo DiCaprio's *The Revenant* Shoot Became A Living Hell' *Hollywood Reporter*, 22 July, 2015 https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/how-leonardo-dicaprios-revenant-shoot-810290/ accessed 01/08/202. Also, Dean MacCannell. 'Staged authenticity: Arrangements of social space in tourist settings.' *American journal of Sociology* 79.3 (1973): 589-603.

Hollywood Western and the frontier narrative; whereby the trope of the Western in which the plot is primarily driven by the white protagonist is undone.[196]

There are undertones in *The Searchers* of the celebratory frontier narrative, but not without leaving a sense of injustice at the perceived methods employed.[197] *The Searchers* is stark in its treatment of white settlers and indigenous peoples, and the morals of Ethan Edwards are as questionable as Scar's; both commit atrocities for the perceived benefit of their own peoples, whilst the narrative does raise the question of how and why the Western space in film has been overtly dramatized and romanticised.[198] *Dances With Wolves* offers a binary of the noble Sioux and the savage Pawnee, which is obviously problematic as it demonizes one group over another. *The Revenant* reverses its depictions of the Pawnee, but it could be argued that the Arikara occupy the savage trope of other Westerns. However, *Dead Man* ignores these tropes associated with Western presentations of peoples and land by deliberately breaking with the cinematographic takes which are a feature of the Western and metonymically associated with the frontier narrative.

In *Dead Man*, the route which Nobody and Blake travel forms a subconscious westward journey which mirrors the US' westward expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, the direction of travel in *Dead Man*, whilst it ultimately leads to the Pacific Ocean, is always in the opposite direction to the journey 'West' i.e., the direction of geographical west in films, implying that the roads taken to link the North American Continent from 'Sea to Shining Sea' were not inevitable. For example, the insertion of Nobody's vision quest reinforces a lack of linearity, both in terms of topographical and narrative direction. So, whilst the journey is a westward journey, it is figuratively a new path because it is being framed in an alternative manner. Materially, this path is trodden which denies the often-pursued end goal of the Western of accessing and mapping 'virgin' territory. This is also symbolically realised when the protagonists reach their destination. This is again ironic, as in the Western, it is the land that is the culmination of any journey westward. Again, settler colonial attachment to land is undone, whereby the viewer in the closing scenes is offered a

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[196] Plicht 'Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man…': 139.

[197] James Cox 'Muting White Noise: The Subversion of Popular Culture Narratives of Conquest in Sherman Alexie's Fiction.' *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 9, no. 4 (1997): 52-53.

[198] Likewise, Kevin Costner's Lieutenant John Dunbar assumes a mediated position between white and Sioux society. To the extent he is no longer recognised by his white associates. However, Costner's transformation visually, which happens in a matter of frames – in a film which runs over three hours – is paced terribly. In fact, the scene which cuts to him on horse-back, wearing a Siouan chest-plate and a feather in his hair, borders on the ridiculous.

shot of the Pacific Ocean – the natural and true border of Turtle Island and not the arbitrary ones forming the borders of the US constituted through purchase, claim and treaty.[199]



The Comanche tracking their pursuers in *The Searchers* (Ford 1956). Note the Comanche warriors remain in the distance, separated visually from their white foes. The Huron warriors tracking the British flight from Fort William Henry in Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) are 'heard' before they are seen and move silently through the wooded area.

The mise-en-scène of the Western is restaged in *Dead Man* but is distorted. In context of the Makah Village at the end of the film, *Dead Man* situates a Native presence in a typical habitation, unlike 'Indians' who appear in Westerns as an affectation of the wilderness, or as part of a noble/ savage binary.[200]  For further emphasis, consider the imagery in *Dead Man*'s contemporary *The Last of the Mohicans*. Michael Mann's 1992 retelling of James Fenimore Cooper's literary epic opens with a visually stunning (shot in Panavision colour by Dante Spinotti) hunt sequence through woods which follows the white frontiersman Hawkeye (Daniel Day-Lewis), and his adopted Mohawk father Chingachgook (Russell Means) and brother Uncas (Eric Schweig). Their presence in, and the swiftness with which they move through the woods, expertly tracking a deer, establishes both Native American – and the adopted white Hawkeye – as masters of their surroundings. Hawkeye's dominance in particular also fits in with the mythical frontier narrative in which the white 'Indian' represents the future of the US civilization, as, at the end of the film, only the elderly (and now heirless) Chingachgook remains. In the final shot, Chingachgook is visually separated from his adopted son and his white love interest, Cora Munro (Madeleine Stowe). This could be read as suggesting the elegiac notion of the vanishing 'Indian' in that the white couple are not only the 'heirs of Indian-ness', but of Native lands and resources, whilst also signifying white superiority and the mythical and real boundaries separating white and Native American societies.[201]

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[199] Plicht 'Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man…': 136-137.

[200] The lack of population in the Makah village at the end of the film was a budget concern. Gary Farmer lends the  film cultural integrity, speaking of the film he said: "I guess that's why we try to maintain our own vision in filmmaking…. Although Jim [Jarmusch] is better than most, way better." Sara Piazza *Jim Jarmusch: Music, Words and Noise*. London: Reaktion Books; 2015: 197-198.

[201] Huhndorf *Going Native*: 3-5.

Additionally, the forest in *The Last of the Mohicans* is the location of a key battle-scene later in the film between the British soldiers and Magua's (Wes Studi) Huron band. This latter scene in particular illustrates that the forests of the New World were dangerous places and the domain of Natives, who seemingly move spontaneously within them, emerging from them to confound their enemies with guerrilla combat which confuses the well-drilled military manoeuvres of the British troops. In *Dead Man*, Nobody does not play to those filmic associations with the wilderness (see figures), in fact, his presence there is confounded by revelations of his eastward travels and European education, which only further critically plays on the concept of the 'Indian' and their stereotypical filmic association with the land, and their being of a particular space and time. The land is neither repopulated with Native Americans nor idealized, and to be fair, if it were, this would be a huge exaggeration on Jarmusch's part.[202]

The same is true generally of the trope of civilization and the wilderness, which again is inverted, calling into question whiteness, and capitalism. The town of Machine is presented as being wilder than the wilderness. Machine, whilst it represents white civilization, in its staging Jarmusch presents a montage of death, as opposed to the actual machinery of industrialization and capitalism, which is represented in its brutal extreme. As Denise Cummings illustrates:

> The film then enacts a series of alternating shots – medium shots of Blake to point of-view shots as Blake surveys his environment. Emblems of death surround him: he passes men handling crudely  fabricated caskets, another peddling or collecting animal and human skulls. In one point-of-view shot, a woman and an infant are captured and the camera then tracks right to left, revealing a nearby baby carriage filled with skeletal remains. Blake's facial expressions indicate incredulity, disgust, shock – each look registering that much of what he sees is either new to him or disquieting.[203]

These specific shots, and Blake's reaction to the scenes of death – and the moral corruption of capitalist society – in the frontier town of Machine at the beginning of the movie resonate with the Makah village at the end of the film.

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[202] Cox 'Muting White Noise…': 59.
[203] Cummings 'Accessible Poetry…': 68-69.

Rather than just reverse the civilization/ savage binary, the representations of Machine and the Makah village present a visual juxtaposition that offers an opportunity to consider the meaning of these terms.

This makes an obvious reference to the impact European colonization has had in North America. The Makah village represents Native American genocide and death, the inference being the capitalist/ industrial cultures elimination of the indigenous, and if it is disquieting to Blake, it should be perturbing for the viewer. The lack of population in the villages was partly due to the film's budget, but its deliberate emphasis in the film helps with the feel and look of the place. What extras are on hand look ghostly, reflecting the symbolism of death in and around the village. *Dead Man*, in presenting the civilization/ savagery binary in this manner, whilst not wholly achieving an alternative as a reversal of meaning, does take a well-used Western trope and inverts it in this instance.[204]

iii. Playing on the 'Indian'

The tropes of Westerns are based on a shared language and identity. Therefore, to include these symbolic references would engage with an audience that is largely accustomed to the Westerns of John Ford and John Wayne. In *Dead Man*, Jarmusch approaches these tropes in a stylistically different manner, to play on the imagery of the Western more generally: such as having an 'Indian' protagonist. These non-typical aspects of the narrative are figured against more typical features of the Western in *Dead Man*, such as the trope of the gunfighter. As Denise Cummings points out in her analysis of *Smoke Signals*, which conventionally follows the narrative of the road trip/ buddy movie – suggesting its mass appeal – but within this framework, alters the trope of the 'Indian'. Thus, typical associations are destabilized within the narrative familiarity of a 'typical' genre film.[205]

There are elements of the movie that do not go against the grain of the US frontier myth, such as the gunfighter and the symbolism of the cowboy, expressed in William Blake's

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[204] Piazza *Jim Jarmusch*: 198.
[205] Cummings 'Accessible Poetry…': 59.

perfect aim. However, the stereotypical assured cowboy is destabilized through Blake's ambiguous identity created by his name, and his own lack of knowledge of his namesake, the English poet. Blake does not at all identify with playing 'Indian' because Nobody undermines this trope by his own presence which reminds the audience that Blake is out of place.[206]

It is the mimetic process that registers Blake's sameness and difference, the process being central to his identity. Nobody keeps Blake's sense of self in check by ironically insisting on his difference: that he is a poet and not an accountant-cum-gunfighter. If the frontier is the space of white regeneration via playing 'Indian' to purge the self of the tainting shackles of modern life, then Jarmusch occupies this space with an insistence on forms of what I have previously defined as a deconstructive *différance*, which plays on the Western's cinematographic tropes whilst also asking questions about frontier discourse.[207] Blake's white identity does not seek to acquire the power of the frontiersman, thus removing the West in *Dead Man* of the symbolic power of playing 'Indian'. The power of the 'Other' is differed by *Dead Man*'s constant insistence on the instability of meaning animated by the ambiguity of Blake's identity. This also removes the cultural – that is, 'regenerative' – power of the frontier, namely for the white male playing 'Indian'.[208]

If Blake 'plays Indian' it is not willingly. Nobody may prepare him for his inevitable death by encouraging him to fast and paint his face, and Blake is primed for the playing Indian trope, but Nobody's presence here undermines the classical Western association. Blake follows Nobody willingly, even if it is initially in bewilderment and revilement of his own actions; he accepts the inevitable. Blake becomes the person he is both accepting and

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[206] Plicht 'Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man…': 131-132.

[207] Michael Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. Routledge; 2018 [1993]: 96-105.

[208] Richard Slotkin discusses the power of the white frontiersman 'Playing Indian' as being a central aspect of frontier mythology and US national identity. In the contest of space, that is, the frontier being the place where white and indigenous came into contact, the idea of coexistence was deemed impossible. Slotkin also considers the 'man who knows Indians' par-excellence manifested in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*' Hawkeye; however, Hawkeye also embodied the 'irreconcilable worlds' of the white and the 'Indian', used the power of the 'Indian' in the pursuit of 'civilisation', but was not restricted from civilisation due to his inherent whiteness. Wordsworth Editions 1993 [1826]. See also: *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum; 1992: 10-16. See also: *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2000 [1973]: 3-6; 311-314; 491-50. Jeffrey Ostler discusses the irreconcilable differences between US capital designs on the land and the alternative political economic systems of indigenous peoples, particularly the Plains tribes in *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2004: 13-15. Armando José Prats suggests how the "Western presents its most complete Indian through the white hero" which, like the mythical conventions of the cinematic West, are gained via audience negotiation and consent built around a familiar language, identity, and discourse, in *Invisible Natives: Myth & Identity in the American Western*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press; 2002: 174-175.

denying. The play of alterity is evident through Blake's wanted poster which displays his likeness, but is forever increasing in value, adding a heavy dose of irony to the proceedings. Nobody pauses on this and delivers the comedic line, "not a bad likeness." In this – deliberately ambiguous – statement, Nobody does not confirm or deny Blake's identity. This defers Blake's identity; the poster mirrors his own self but the signifier on the poster does not remain static. Whilst the further joke in the poster is that Nobody does not actually pay any attention to Blake's rising bounty value. It is simply the 'price' on Blake's head – but not the accountant – the outlaw, who he is now perceived as.



William Blake (Depp) and his 'wanted' poster in *Dead Man*.

Nobody denies Blake's Indian-ness, as much as he confirms it with his face-painting and ritual fasting, through the equally constructedness and ambiguity of language. Whilst Blake understands English, he cannot grasp what Nobody wants to say, whilst Nobody often maintains this ambiguity with a quote or a saying. As Plicht observes:

> The multiple layers of language in, and its use, emphasize how much attention *Dead Man* plays on such issues, neither relying on language itself, nor on its application in creating an understanding between two parties, whether they are foreign or known to each other. We have to consider, however, that we can never be certain about Blake and Nobody's awareness of these issues. It seems they develop some kind of insight, yet are somewhat stuck, which underlines once again that active negotiation is required at all times.[209]

Indeed, much of the play between the leads relies on this interaction, supported closely by the visual imagery, which itself is tied intimately to Neil Young's sparse electric guitar score.

As well as the play with Western tropes visually and of language and identity, *Dead Man* would also seem to be a reaction against the soaring soundscapes that are prominent in

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[209] Plicht 'Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man…': 139-141.

Westerns in general. Most Western musical scores tend to uphold audience preconceptions, such as the rousing soundtracks to *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, whereas *Dead Man* is musically bare. Jarmusch successfully subverts the Hollywood rules of postproduction in creating evocative soundscapes by rejecting elaborate sound design. As Danijela Kulezic-Wilson illustrates:

> It is telling, though, that in most cases this practice has been inspired by music itself and is related to an approach to film which recognizes the musical potential in the rhythmic, kinetic and affective features of a number of film's constituent elements – structuring, editing, camera movement, movement in the diegesis, speech, etc. – and which deploys them with the intention of utilising their musical properties. In the context of this approach, sound has a special place not only because it carries the strongest musical potential, but it is also most capable of bringing out and realising this potential from film's visual components.[210]

Similarly, *No Country for Old Men*'s (Ethan Coen, Joel Coen 2007) composer, Carter Burwell, used as little music as possible in the Coens' 'neo-Western'. By doing so, Burwell exploits the musical potential in other aspects of the film. In effect, the mise-en-scène of *Dead Man* becomes the visual accompaniment to Neil Young's sparse electric guitar punctuations. Jarmusch has argued that Neil Young's electric guitar is both an emotional response to the source novel, but also, the nondiegetic guitar riffs offer a commenting function on the narrative of his film.

This is another of the key departures within *Dead Man* from the Western genre. The brash guitar offers what Roman Mauer has called "punctuation marks". [211] This also references Jarmusch's editing style, which he uses as a method of punctuation and transitioning from scene-to-scene, again contributing to the sombreness of the film.[212] Whilst Neil Young's guitar can be seen as an additional character to protagonists Nobody and William Blake whilst adding a further dimension to their dialogue. Music tends to suit the western audience, particularly through the deployment of European musical styles. *Dead Man*'s music never intensifies or pampers the viewer, as it does with (late) 'Revisionist' titles such *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, whose elaborate scores dictate and direct the audience, offering an epic accompaniment to the visual diegesis.

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[210] Danijela Kulezic-Wilson 'Sound design is the New Score.' *Music, sound, and the Moving Image* 2, no. 2, 2008: 127-128.

[211] As Kulezic-Wilson continues: "[c]onventional music scoring has a tendency to obliterate any semiotic space that might exist between the visual and musical content, and to direct the viewer towards only one type of interpretation or type of experience" in 'Sound design…': 130.

[212] Frank Olson 'Dead Man', 2014 https://www.joylesscreatures.com/reviews/dead-man accessed 23/03/2022.

*Dead Man* offers a subtle and emotionally ambiguous soundscape, and, as a result, a different imagination of the 'West'. Young saw the film as a rhythm section, his guitar adding melody, with the intention of emphasising certain aspects of the protagonists' physical and temporal movement. The journey West signifies Blake and Nobody's spatial journey; that they are leaving behind civilization and metaphorically going back in time. This is emphasised by Young's chords and notes which accentuate the idea of departure as opposed to regression. But Young's chords are never allowed to end; his melodies are built on by another chord representing another departure as opposed to an end. This is represented in Blake and Nobody's journey, with Young's riffs playing over the imagery: "it is a chord that does not close, does not present an end, but opens a new cycle, a new beat, a new journey." In this, perhaps, is intimated the Native American concept of the circularity of existence, and a reimagining of a frontier space conceptualized by an alternative worldview and not the mythology associated with US dominant culture.[213]

The journey which the protagonists take can be seen making efforts to fit with the Native American concept of space and time, which is often presented as an achronological narrative in literature: for example, N Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) or James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974). As Paula Gunn Allen writes:

> In them the protagonist wanders through a series of events that might have happened years before or that might not have happened to him or her personally, but that nevertheless have immediate bearing on the situation and the protagonists understanding of it.[214]

*House Made of Dawn* and *Winter in the Blood* both have endings which mirror the beginning. In *House Made of Dawn*, narrator/ protagonist Abel is seen running, whilst in *Winter in the Blood*, the un-named narrator returns to the earth. At the end of *Dead Man*, Blake is ceremoniously given a sea burial by Nobody, mirroring the film's opening where he is travelling to Machine with an offer of employment as an accountant, when the train's boiler-man (Crispin Glover) speaks to Blake:

> [l]ook out the window. And doesn't it remind you of when you're in the boat, and then later that night you're lying, looking up at the ceiling, and the water in your head was not dissimilar from the landscape, and you think to yourself, 'Why is it that the landscape is moving, but the boat is still.[215]

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[213] Piazza *Jim Jarmusch*: 163.
[214] Paula Gunn Allen *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press; 1992 [1986]: 147-148.
[215] Justus Nieland 'Graphic Violence: Native Americans and the Western Archive in Dead Man' *CR: The New Centennial Review* 1, no. 2, 2001: 171-172.

The whimsical metaphor suggests the blurring together of past and present for Blake. Like the narratives of *House Made of Dawn* and *Winter in the Blood*, *Dead Man*'s narrative is decidedly unconventional, and Blake and Nobody's phantastic westward journey through the wilderness sees them pursued by bounty hunters and Blake, by accident, becoming a gunfighter of repute. As Sara Piazza writes:

> The Native American concept of the circularity of existence, as embodied by Nobody and experimented by the young bookkeeper from Cleveland, who by the end of the film has adopted the look both physically and mentally of a native American and prepared himself for the journey 'beyond the mirror', is not so far from that of the real William Blake. [216]

This comes close to Gunn Allen's above point about the interplay between person and event, whilst the a-chronology of narrative in *Dead Man* can be seen to reflect those in Native American literature.

Furthermore, the dialogic play found in oral stories and literature, which relies on ambiguity and metaphor, takes on an extra dimension when transferred to the screen in this instance. This is extended into film language, be it via the imagery of Blake's face-paint or the symbolism of Blake's wanted poster. Thus, the stereotypical Indian-ness, which Depp does present, so often associated with the protagonist, is destabilized through both metonymic recognition and disavowal of the typical tropes of the Western and through the ambivalence of the performances of the protagonists in *Dead Man*. In this way, Nobody denies Blake's Indian-ness as much as he confirms it with his face-painting and ritual fasting, offering visual ambiguity to tropes commonly associated with the Western.

The poster is Blake's own simulacra; it is constantly deferred as both the protagonist and the value of the poster are in a state of flux. Ultimately, Blake accepts this identity when he gifts the wanted poster to Nobody, but the document that Nobody accepts is no longer a reflection of Blake, precisely through this act of giving; the meaning of the wanted poster is not as a wanted poster, but as a gift to a friend. Derrida's metaphor of 'the gift' considers the metonymic effect of the act which displaces meaning in the subject-object. In the repetition (of giving) the subject-object is no longer accepted in the way it is intended. The originary intent – or meaning – is deferred in this process. This logic, applied to cultural phenomena reconstitutes what is being represented by metonymy.[217]

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[216] Piazza *Jim Jarmusch*: 166.

[217] Jacques Derrida [Translated by Peggy Kamuf] 'Given Time: The Time of the King.' *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992): 161-87; 172-174.

Blake is the simulation of William Blake that Nobody constructs out of his own relationship with the English language and the poetry of William Blake. This, as mentioned above, was garnered from Nobody's own travels, but it has leant him an outsider status amongst his own people. In *Dead Man*, there is no predefined thesis or antithesis in the characters of Blake and Nobody; both characters display an in-betweenness, an ambiguity, which plays with the concept of the 'Indian'.[218] This can be seen in Nobody constructing Blake's own identity through his knowledge of poetry as well as in Nobody's perceived 'Indian' wisdom. When referring to Blake's wanted poster, he accedes that Blake cannot change the outcome in relation to the events that led him to become the Blake on the wanted poster. Whilst Blake is Othered, alterity is deferred through the material fact of the poster and the events that led up to it, reflecting his own fluctuating identity while also confirming it as an accumulation of events and experiences.

In this way, Blake is the colonized individual, as Nobody holds the cultural capital. When Nobody observes: "[t]he eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn from the crow,"[219] he confirms this reversal. Furthermore, this sounds like 'Indian' wisdom – in which Nobody does also indulge – but, in this instance, it is actually the work of the English poet, William Blake, which Nobody knows verbatim; the irony is, both are equally unfathomable to Blake. This further deconstructs the composition in the Western of the 'wise Indian' by making Nobody seem knowledgeable, but knowledgeable in a way that is more subtle and profound than would be the remit of most western, conventionally 'civilized', audiences. This knowledge echoes yet challenges the 'tragic wisdom' seen in films such as *Little Big Man* and *Dances with Wolves*, which Gerald Vizenor describes as characterizing the stereotype of the 'Indian'. This representation thus allows further probing of the subjectivity of the 'Indian' in US cultural discourse. Nobody assumes a critical position because he denies the absence of the 'Indian' in film and is what can be seen as an example of the 'post-Indian'. The post-Indian, "absolves by irony the nominal simulations of the Indian, waives centuries of translation and dominance, and censures the ontic significance of Native modernity." The 'post-Indian' counters the absence of the 'Indian' by insisting on a diverse Native presence.[220]

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[218] Plicht 'Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man…': 132-134.
[219] Cummings 'Accessible Poetry…': 67.
[220] Gerald Vizenor *Manifest Matters: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press; 1999: viii. This is why this thesis is committed to utilize indigenous knowledge in its analysis, as per the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith. See: *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd.; 2013 [1998].

Indian-ness in *Dead Man* is applied in a variety of ways, from imposed to self-determined; but there is no authentic portrayal of Indian-ness, ultimately it is constructed and filtered through cultural texts. This active mediation can effectively expose the invention of Indian-ness.[221] Ultimately, dominant narratives that appear fixed and static are vulnerable to parody. Utilizing Native American epistemology can disrupt this in meaningful ways, particularly through the process of alterity. The same process of playing 'Indian' that draws power to the white via mimesis can also be applied to the 'post-Indian', which draws on the power of pre-colonial indigenous stories. As Vizenor continues:

> Native American Indians are the stories of presence, the chroniclers in the histories of this continent…. Native stories are communicative, autonomous creations, and the traces of a 'second nature'.[222]

The allusion to the Western's mythology, and the discourse that shapes it in *Dead Man*, is neither parody nor interrogation. Rather, Jarmusch – a confessedly "countercultural" director – revises and subverts tropes whilst emphasizing the destructiveness of misrepresentation, all whilst holding language to account.[223] This also can be seen to map on to Vizenor's deconstruction of the Absent Present 'Indian', based as it is on an intervention into the metaphysics of language – or logocentrism – which maintains the cultural absence. To this, Vizenor insists that the Native American Trickster forms an intervention via *différance*.[224]

iv: The Native American Trickster

In *Dead Man*, Nobody is untypical of the 'Hollywood Indians' seen in, primarily, the Western genre.[225] The deployment of dual protagonists, both displaying aspects of Indian-ness, but without a static identity, could represent the dualism of the Trickster. As in Native American mythology, the Trickster is both creative and destructive.[226] There is the question

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[221] Homi K Bhabha *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge; 2004 [1994]: ix-xi.
[222] Gerald Vizenor *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press; 1998: 1.
[223] See: Juan A Suárez *Jim Jarmusch*. Bloomington: University of Illinois Press; 2007.
[224] Cox 'Muting White Noise…': 64-66.
[225] 'Hollywood Indians' is the term given to representations in mainstream Hollywood film. The term is a little one-dimensional, and it is used here with caution; it is likely to perpetuate the concept it is attempting to criticise. However, I employ it as shorthand here, but as illustrated above, Hollywood representations of 'Indians' are to be used as a starting point and a concept, not as descriptive of, at times problematic representations of 'Native Americans'. See: Peter C Rollins and John E O'Connor. *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky; 2011 [1998].
[226] Charles Ballard 'Inquiry into Native American Literature and Mythology.' *Wicazo SaReview* 9, no. 2 (1993): 15.

whether Jarmusch, as a non-Native, can be true to a Native audience, but it is clear he uses the genre just for that purpose, as within *Dead Man* there occurs an abstract and de-centred narrative that both plays on the Western genre and frontier mythology but interrogates these cultural constructions by doing so. Jarmusch - the 'countercultural' thinker who has extensively cited the influences and tropes of alternative and World cinemas - draws on the cultural currency of American history, violence, and guns fused with the poetry of William Blake and close cultural and societal criticism, all within the "subtle fabric" of *Dead Man*.[227]

Nobody can be seen as a Trickster, whose role, essentially, is to illustrate what a 'cultured' society should not be. As Charles Ballard points out, the "Trickster draws on the weakness of the grand scheme".[228] The Trickster is being used as a mimetic representation of Native presence but is also questioning the structural relations of colonialism within film.[229] As Barbara Babcock illustrates:

> It may well be that the mediating figure of the Trickster does not represent a regression to a period of undifferentiated unity but is created in response to a present and constant perception of opposition, of difference essential to human constructs.[230]

It is feasible then, in this instance, to use the presence of the Native American Trickster to negate the US metanarrative of the frontier and to critique the present-day structures of settler-colonialism. Whilst *Dead Man* presents the primitive and anarchic world of white America in the town of Machine, it asks questions about the historical conditions of inequality without presenting Native Americans as victims, as so many Westerns do.[231]

In *Dead Man*, the white protagonist is no longer the central focus of the plot or narrative. Both men are disassociated from their cultures, and this appears deliberate on Jarmusch's part. Nobody is the 'Indian that knows the white man', reversing Slotkin's trope of the 'man who knows Indians'. This is invariably a white protagonist who has 'gone Native', and is seen in a myriad of Revisionist works, from *Little Big Man* to *Dances with Wolves*. Rather than the white man showing the 'Indian' how to be this trope, so overt in the Western, this indicates a process whereby the genre's internalized racial assumptions are

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[227] Cummings 'Accessible Poetry…': 66. It is worth noting that Jarmusch worked as an assistant under Nicholas Ray while studying at New York University, and Ray himself of course arguably figured as a 'trickster' director who helped to shift and undermine the tropes and conventions of the Western in psychologically rich films such as the gender-inverting performativity of *Johnny Guitar* (1956). See: Suárez *Jim Jarmusch*.
[228] Ballard 'Inquiry into Native American…': 15.
[229] Gerald Vizenor *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press; 1998: 28.
[230] Quoted in Ballard 'Inquiry into Native American…': 15-16.
[231] Cummings 'Accessible Poetry…': 67.

reversed here.[232] Blake has not a clue to his situation, and it is up to Nobody to assist him in his travel, and it is this that also emphasises a reversal: during their journey West, Nobody tells Blake of his own travels to the East. It is during this tale that Nobody reveals he 'mimicked' the white man in order for them to lose interest in the 'young savage'. *Dead Man* strives to overturn stereotypes as a way of effectively engaging with the dominant culture, what Gerald Vizenor calls 'fugitive poses.'[233] The effectiveness of *Dead Man* in doing so does also rely on Jarmusch's own marginalized status as a maverick/ independent director.[234]

Nobody's Trickster identity is revealed here as he states in the movie that he 'mimicked the white man too well'. That having rejected his Crow identity in his travels, when he returned to his people, they no longer recognized him. Nobody is scorned by his tribe when he tells them of white atrocity, as he himself bears the burden of this brutality.[235] This also defers Nobody's alterity. It is Nobody's revelation of the reality of white society that lends him the inevitable position of being both Crow but not a part of the tribe, and at the same time, not white enough to be accepted in white society. Thus, Nobody's position represents a duality that is both creative and destructive: a trope that has been represented in filmic Trickster figures. The Trickster assumes a parodic position whilst linking past with present. As shown in in films such as *Skins* and *Winter in the Blood*, the latter which is discussed later in this chapter, the Trickster is also pertinent to present-day realities that many Native Americans face.

v: Conclusion

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[232] Cummings 'Accessible Poetry…': 69.

[233] These allow Native Americans to counter colonial dominance through insisting on Native presence through a parody of the 'Indian' or the ironic play on the 'Indian' through the figure of the Trickster Vizenor *Fugitive Poses*: 34.

[234] *Dead Man* remained quasi-independent; Jarmusch avoided productive and post-production interference in this project and was only purchased by Miramax in post-production. See: Cummings 'Accessible Poetry…': 69-73.

[235] The allusion in the film may refer to the malaise that affected the Crow after they were confined to a reservation. Once an affluent society of nomadic hunters, the Crow were first faced with the threat from the Sioux and Cheyenne who were forced westward due to white encroachment. This was one of the primary reasons the Crow sided with the US government, with their land reduced, numbers depleted, and inter-tribal warfare now forbidden, the Crow willingly moved onto the Agency in the 1880s'. Traditionally important events around which life was structured, and gave life meaning, no longer occurred. The Crow were a dispirited nation, as Lear writes: During the period of vibrant nomadic life, everything was somehow related to hunting and war. All the rituals and customs, all the distribution of honor, all the day-to-day preparations, all the upbringing of the children were organized to those ends. See: Jonathan Lear *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press; 2006: 2-27.

It is possible to perceive in *Dead Man* a cultural aesthetic that is not necessarily hegemonic but suggests a deliberate cultural fusion; a correspondence between indigenous film and mainstream Hollywood: the place where a semi-independent film like Jarmusch's *Dead Man* operates. *Dead Man*'s role in the deconstruction of the Western's dominant visual tropes via Jarmusch's play on how language and cultural signifiers enforce colonial norms, offers further investigation of the discursive nature of the Western. *Dead Man* also emphasizes the spectrum of functions that Indian-ness can be utilized for; mainly for a critical intervention which may not have a deliberate cultural or political agenda. Of course, whilst not entirely resolving indigenous stereotypes and the white hero playing 'Indian', Indian-ness is deployed in *Dead Man* in a more positive manner. Whilst in the interim where there has been a praxis of representation offered by indigenous movies, Jarmusch's *Dead Man* also suggests an implicit link between independent film and Native American film through its rendering of the Western scene, in its spatial, topographical, narrative, and sonic openness, and in the Trickster figure of Nobody. Although it seems to be the purpose of *Dead Man* is in setting an alternative narrative approach, the film can also be considered importantly as addressing and working against settler cultural norms. It could be said that *Dead Man* offers a point of departure in film that had important repercussions for independent and indigenous film.

2: 'Like a Damn Medicine Man': The Indigenous Storyteller in *Smoke Signals* (Eyre 1998)

i: Introduction: Interrupting the Western's Mouthpiece

In the opening scene from *Smoke Signals*, during the fourth of July bicentennial celebrations of 1976, Arnold Joseph (Gary Farmer), asks his son, Victor (Adam Beach) who his favourite Indian is, only for Victor to reply "Nobody". This plays on the word 'Indian', but also is a non-diegetic reference to Gary Farmer's Nobody from *Dead Man* (Jarmusch 1994). When Joseph asks his son who his favourite 'Indian' is, it has been ventured that he is asking the audience – predominantly the white audience – to think about what an 'Indian' is.[236] Whilst 'Nobody' could quite easily be Victor's favourite 'Indian' in a filmic sense, this play on the word further features throughout *Smoke Signals*, particularly as how co-protagonist Thomas' identity is equally informed by film 'Indians'. This is illustrated by a later scene in which the two friends are travelling by bus. Victor tells Thomas he is not 'stoic' enough, that he has to look "like he has just returned from hunting a buffalo." Thomas amusingly informs Victor that the Coeur D'Alene tribe did not hunt buffalo, that they were fishermen, again playing with the filmic trope that seems to situate all 'Indians' as nomadic Plains hunters.

The discussion which instigates the scene is Thomas talking incessantly – as he does throughout the film – much to Victor's chagrin, sounding as he does: "[l]ike a damn medicine man or something." This is Thomas playing on his own identity which has been informed by the Western genre's Indians, clearly mocking what would largely be most of the audience's knowledge of Native Americans. In an ironic turn, Victor continues to ridicule Thomas' perceived lack of Indian-ness as opposed to any reference to their own cultural identity, by insisting that Thomas' idea of an 'Indian' is still influenced by *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990). Of course, references to film 'Indians' is a recurring joke of the film and is essential to the film's play on hegemonic cultural tropes.[237]

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[236] It has been said that if *Smoke Signals* were to be released today, it would be a disappointment, as it simply plays with dominant tropes of Indian-ness. It would seem that this point would reflect on the fact that Americans *per se* have not become any more aware of Native Americans, rather, more aware of the tropes of the 'Indian' and Indian-ness in film. See: Jason Asenap *'Smoke Signals' Was Needed, but It Doesn't Hold Up*, 2019 https://www.hcn.org/issues/51.18/tribal-affairs-smoke-signals-was-needed-but-it-doesnt-hold-up accessed 30/03/2020.

[237] Jhon Warren Gilroy 'Another Fine Example of the Oral Tradition? Identification and Subversion in Sherman Alexie's Smoke Signals.' *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 13, 2: Representations of American Indians in Contemporary Narrative Fiction Film 2001 no. 1: 23-42.

Ultimately, there is a tale of indigenous 'survivance' in *Smoke Signals*. This might be marked in that the film seeks to address some of the stereotypical representations of Native Americans by creating an indigenous presence in mainstream cinema and renounce indigenous victimhood.[238] The irony of making a film within the confines of a culture that is also repressive is not lost, as *Smoke Signals* playfully reflects on that very same culture. Whilst it has been noted there are no 'cowboys' in *Smoke Signals*, the notion of the cowboy is played upon through references to John Wayne and George Armstrong Custer.

After the bus that Victor and Thomas are travelling on stops at a rest area, two white men take their seats. Verbal remonstration with the men has no effect, and Thomas and Victor are relegated to the back of the bus, with Thomas reflecting: "Geez, Victor… I guess the warrior look doesn't work every time." Subsequently, a sound bridge offers recourse to the present social repression of Victor and Thomas, as well as referencing the past military encounters between indigenous peoples and the US military. The Irish song *Garryowen* is used ironically and has been used in a similar fashion in *Little Big Man* and *Follow Me Home* (Bratt 1996), as well as in *The Searchers*.

The tune is associated with the US Cavalry. Apparently, it was George Armstrong Custer's favourite song, who adopted it as a mascot for his own division, the Seventh Cavalry, and was the last song played before his fateful encounter on the Rosebud.[239] The companions move to different seats, with Thomas reflecting on the – seemingly inevitable – triumph of 'cowboys' over 'Indians'. But as the sound bridge has already intimated, Victor continues the deconstruction of the cowboy. Ernest Stromberg reflects:

> Thomas's litany of cinematic cowboys emphasizes the ways in which the image of the cowboy has been constructed as the heroic avatar of triumphant civilization in a conflict in which the Indians are always losers.[240]

This plays on the mythical, patriarchal, and masculinist version of US history, whereby the cowboy/ frontiersman is the embodiment of US civilization triumphing over the North American wilderness and its inhabitants.[241]

As physical confrontation would be futile and a negative reaction to the 'cowboys' who have ousted them from their seats, Victor begins a '49' chant about 'John Wayne's

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[238] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: vii.

[239] Joanna Hearne 'John Wayne's Teeth: Speech, Sound and Representation in 'Smoke Signals' and 'Imagining Indians'.' *Western Folklore* 64, no. 3&4, 2005: 194-196.

[240] Ernest Stromberg 'Out of the Cupboard and up with the Smoke Signals: Cinematic Representations of American Indians in the 'Nineties.' *Studies in Popular Culture* 24, no. 1, 2001: 33-46: 42.

[241] Slotkin *Regeneration Through Violence*: 5-6.

Teeth', commenting that "it's weird when you never see a guy's teeth." In doing so lands a blow on the cultural 'mouthpiece' of the US' mythologised Western past.[242] As Joanna Hearne points out:

> The Hollywood style of 'speaking' about Indians through the 'teeth' or mouth of the figure of John Wayne, on the medium of film itself as a source of information and history, is rendered suspect.[243]

Wayne's cultural power is undermined, and along with it the strength of the frontier narrative. When the friends start up a chant on the bus this positions the audience in alliance with Thomas and Victor, and the presence of John Wayne is defamiliarized. *Smoke Signals* takes the tropes of the Western but does not leave the film merely in an oppositional relationship to hegemonic culture. *Smoke Signals* effectively reinterprets that culture and then uses its position to represent the past.

This strategic cultural positioning can affect the stereotypes of hegemonic ideology and offer indigenous people visual sovereignty. Which is in effect a way for indigenous filmmakers and storytellers to re-interpret cultural meaning. This link between indigenous storytelling and film narrative is one of the strategies indigenous filmmakers have engaged with, to counter damaging cultural constructions of their identity. Indigenous film can be seen often to rely on the techniques of the documentary tradition, neo-realism, and Third Cinema.[244] These approaches are transmitted at least in part by employing non-professional actors, emphasizing tribal idioms, utilizing location shooting, in addition to using unscripted or untranslated indigenous languages, as well as in stylistic film devices – such as the long shot – which are attributable to documentary traditions.[245]

Making use of these stylings in independent cinema lends the narratives of these films further impressions of authenticity. As will be shown, documentary has been employed, whilst engaging with Hollywood stereotypes of indigenous peoples, to defy dominant approaches, but not simply to respond to film representations of Native Americans. Chris

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[242] Monica Reiser 'John Wayne's Teeth Grinds up Eurocentrism in a Brotherhood Movie', 2016. https://xuengl359.wordpress.com/ accessed 05/03/2020.

[243] Hearne 'John Wayne's Teeth…': 198.

[244] Third Cinema can be attributed to Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino who felt that cinema had the potential to be truly representative of mass culture and politics, as opposed to films – particularly those coming out of Hollywood – which had dominated cinema but were typically benign of social and historical context and amounted to no more than a consumer good. Solanas and Getino felt that a more representative Third Cinema could be created which dealt with social injustice whilst standing in political and cultural opposition to US film hegemony. See: Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino 'Toward a Third Cinema' *Cinéast* Vol 4 No 3; Latin American Militant Cinema (Winter 1970/ 1971).

[245] Hearne 'John Wayne's Teeth…': 203.

Eyre's follow up to *Smoke Signals*, *Skins* (2002), splices documentary footage with feature film, offering an aesthetic that points towards a means to resist colonially imposed meaning, joining indigenous epistemology with innovative cinematic techniques.

The result is a contemporary and palpably authentic indigenous presence in cinema which offers a platform with which to (re)construct and represent Native American identities. The influence of film as a story-telling medium on – particularly, young - indigenous people, is significant when considering the role of oral narratives as cultural revitalization. Films such as *Smoke Signals* reinvent the idea of tradition by reframing discourses of authenticity in US popular culture. Indigenous film can therefore offer a means of intervention into dominant cultural systems, and as such, counter the "intrusive ideologies of Westerns and other Hollywood and media images of Indians."[246]

ii: Stories of Presence

The 'Bus Scene' considered above evinces how Thomas' identity is structured by both indigenous tradition and US culture. This illustrates how the concept of 'Indian-ness' is both constructed and culturally mediated, and can be utilised in a myriad of ways, not just stereotypical ones.[247] Whilst revisionist stereotypes from *Dances with Wolves* are deconstructed to a degree, it is not the director's intention to dismantle them completely, as these dominant cultural stereotypes and media representations have an important role to play in shaping Native identities, as illustrated not only by Thomas's speech, but in reaction to the film since its release.[248]

Thomas is a storyteller and is also funny. When the pair first set off on their journey to Arizona to collect Victor's father's ashes, they are offered a lift by Lucy (Elaine Miles)

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[246] Hearne 'John Wayne's Teeth…': 189-190.
[247] See Jodi A Byrd *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press; 2011. Chickasaw writer Byrd's peerless study into the limits of Indian-ness within the colonial context is illuminating, but has been criticised for its negative application of the term. For a study on the positive application of Indian-ness, see Cathy Covell Waegner (Ed) *Mediating Indianness*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press; 2015.
[248] Jennifer Menness 'Smoke Signals as Equipment for Living' in Meta G Carstarphen and John P Sanchez (Eds) *American Indians and the Mass Media*. University of Oklahoma press; 2012. This line of thought taps into the work of Stuart Hall who focused on post-colonial identity construction. As Stuart Hall points out, with regard identity, it "is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" in 'Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation.' *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36, 1989: 68-81. Meredith McCarroll follows a similar line in *Unwhite: Appalachia, Race, and Film*. Athens: University of Georgia Press; 2018: 15-16. Through cultural positioning against the film text, the images on screen offers a sense of self.

and Velma (Michelle St John), in exchange for one of Thomas' stories. This story makes Victor's father, Arnold, the butt of the joke, but it has a serious point. Thomas' punchline to the girls is also directed at the audience. That Thomas's claim that Arnold served two years in prison for the crime of "being an Indian in the twentieth century" of course is very quickly dismissed by Victor, however Lucy and Velma determine that it is a fine example of the oral tradition. Importantly, Thomas is reflecting on the of the social realities of being 'Indian' in the contemporary US in an amusing way, as the film so often does. The serious point being that Native Americans, forming less than 2% of the population, are over-represented in the criminal justice system of the US.[249]

What makes *Smoke Signals* so meaningful, particularly for indigenous audiences, is the accessibility of the two lead characters, Victor and Thomas. Their identities, in the context of this film, are fundamental in critically engaging audiences. One of the reasons *Smoke Signals* was a success was that it was so readily identified with; even white people might be identifying with common representations of the 'Indian'. Audience familiarity with classical Hollywood narrative modes offers viewers access to the narrative of *Smoke Signals*, and also provides a platform to alter the master narrative, as Jhon Warren Gilroy explains:

> The film's indigenous epistemological origins then re-configure the meanings of classical Hollywood tropes, altering the outcomes of a viewer's attempts at fabula construction. … At key moments, the film's narrative plays off these stereotypes by misdirecting the mainstream viewers' attempts to construct fabula that are based on their pre-conceptions of 'Indians'.[250]

Playing with the concept of 'Indian' as well as the protagonists' Indian-ness is an important aspect of *Smoke Signals*: this disruptive play not only impacts upon US cultures' image of indigenous peoples but also Victor's and Thomas's ideas of their own identities. In *Smoke Signals*, this is informed by references to their tribal traditions but also by references to US popular culture, particularly the investment of 'Indians' in the Western genre. Such a prominent cultural construction is there to be played with because of the immense cultural

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[249] The numbers held, as of June 2018, are that 401, per 100,000 population of Native American and Alaskan Natives are held in jails. Twice the incarceration rates of white and Hispanic people. The statistics do not tell the full story, however. Much crime reporting is voluntary, and because of the lack of justice – those perpetrators are tried for their crimes – most victims of crime do not report them. Furthermore, the data behind crime statistics does not actually distinguish between tribes or used to help Native communities in resolving cultural and socioeconomic barriers that perpetuate crime. Furthermore, Native Americans are often put into a category which includes Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians, which obscures the difference between these groups. See: Roxanne Daniel 'Since you asked: What data exists about Native American people in the criminal justice system?' *Prison Policy Initiative* 2020.
[250] Gilroy 'Another Fine Example…': 26.

significance it has. Of course, films such as *White of the Eye* have already illustrated the persistence of Western imagery, conceptions of 'Indians' and ideology associated with hegemonic narratives of US history beyond the genre, particularly with regards visual iconography of place and peoples.

Whilst *Dead Man* deconstructs the Western genre, *Smoke Signals* plays on the buddy comedy/ road trip format. Furthermore, Thomas's role as narrator/ storyteller informs this process, as he is constantly commenting on what an 'Indian' is. This allows the director a space of intervention but assumes a discussion of the Western genre's tropes via a different type of film. Eyre presents a formalism via the genre of the road trip/ buddy movie that instantly feeds into US cultural/ film sensibility recognizable to audiences and offers a platform for Native Americans without the structuring absence of Hollywood representations. This was an influence of the literature of *Smoke Signals*' writer, Sherman Alexie, who deliberately moved outside of the narrative and traditional formats of representation to extend the story-telling device via his own literary input.

Latterly, this also feeds back into a point made in chapter one, that genres are insecure because of such formalism, and thus the opportunity is present to use US pop culture as currency to achieve an audience but then interrogate such cultural norms, as illustrated by *Powwow Highway* (1989), which also plays on the same film format as *Smoke Signals*.[251] As Jhon Warren Gilroy continues:

> By creating a film steeped in classical Hollywood norms, yet rooted in an American Indian epistemology, the filmmakers have created a space that invites Euramerican [sic] viewers in and then uses humor as a tool for incisive political commentary. The palliative effect of humor works to dissolve racist stereotypes even as it softens the blows of social commentary.[252]

In *Smoke Signals*, akin to *Dead Man*, a cinematic space is mapped out which does not resemble the territory of the Western, but rather a frontier informed by Native American culture which plays on the conventions of the buddy movie already interrogated by *Powwow Highway*.

*Powwow Highwa*y opens with the problematic image of the 'Indian' in headdress on horseback, an image which is ingrained in the American consciousness, both white and indigenous. Of course, as a result of the Western, this again compresses the identities of Native Americans into a particular region and era. However, the film, by not being a

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[251] Cummings 'Accessible Poetry…': 61-65.
[252] Gilroy 'Another Fine Example…': 25.

Western, brings Native Americans into the contemporary US frame and potentially disrupts the embedded tropes of the 'Indian'.[253] Consigning the film as historical document only continues to elide Native Americans to an allochronic space-time of otherness. An important example here is *Buffalo Dance* (Dickson 1894), a film as discussed above which seems to capture three Sioux dancers: Last Horse, Parts His Hair and Hair Coat. However, it also reveals other meanings: one dancer directs his challenging gaze into the camera, which could be interpreted as a disruption to the capturing device of the camera, similar to the way Geronimo disrupts the colonial gaze by staring into the camera in the many instances he was 'captured' by its gaze in portraits by Edward S Curtis and others.[254] In this way, cultural norms can be denaturalized, as well as rearticulated through popular culture; in this instance, the visual text is unfixed in its meaning and alternative meanings – or a *différance* - that subtends dominant modes of consuming images can be invoked.[255]



Chiricahua Apache Geronimo seemingly contesting the 'colonial' gaze.

In this way, Hollywood convention might be upheld but also broken. *Powwow Highway*, according to Eric Gary Anderson, "Americanizes Native Americans and Native Americanizes the movies," whilst maintaining enough cultural continuity so as to not alienate the audience. However, there are instances where *Powwow Highway* updates, or simply

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[253] Ward Churchill *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema, and the Colonization of American Indians*. San Francisco: City Lights Books; 1998: 231-241.

[254] See Jimmie Durham in Lucy R Lippard (Ed) *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native Americans*. New York: The New Press; 1992: 54-58.

[255] Judith Butler *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London and New York: Routledge; 2011 [1993]: 88-91.

emulates, 'revisionist' Westerns, too often deploying the 'drunken Indian' stereotype as a plot device without digging deeper into the structural issues that perpetuate Native American poverty, alienation, and substance dependence.[256] However, *Smoke Signals* begins to further restructure these stereotypes. It also refrains from painting some form of indigenous idyll, or the type of romanticized interpretations of 'Indians' so prevalent in the Western genre's revisionism. More than this, it deals up close with issues relating to indigenous peoples in the contemporary US.

There is a further cinematic link in *Smoke Signals* to *Dead Man* and *Powwow Highway*'s Gary Farmer. In *Powwow Highway*, Farmer's Philbert Bono presents the audience with a non-conventional 'Hollywood Indian'; this theme is continued in *Smoke Signals*. In *Powwow Highway*, the narrative fluctuates around conventional comic asides whilst presenting a road movie, and in so doing reveals the multitude of ways Philbert interacts with the world. This complexity of characterization is key when understanding how many independent movies have moved away from the conceptualization of the 'Indian' in Westerns. Again, Farmer is presented as a real person, with Native American actors filling Native American roles in a film that spans multiple genres. Furthermore, the film signals the undermining of the mythic narrative of 'manifest destiny' as seen by the progress into the West as presented in Hollywood. In *Powwow Highway*, there is no (obvious) conflict between the cowboys and 'Indians', although this trope is riffed upon in *Smoke Signals*, to great effect.[257]



Victor (Adam Beach) in S*moke Signals* (Eyre 1998), where hair is immensely symbolic, particularly when he cuts it, lending to  the visual significance he has already stressed regarding his 'warrior hair' to Thomas.

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[256] Eric Gary Anderson 'Driving the Red Road: *Powwow Highway*.' In *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film,* edited by John E O'Connor and Peter C Rollins, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky; 1998: 137-152.

[257] *Smoke Signals* offers a more substantial and less cliched plot than *Powwow Highway*, but as Anderson points out in the aforementioned text, the complexity of the source novel for *Powwow Highway* was largely discounted, whereas Sherman Alexie worked closely with *Smoke Signals* director Chris Eyre. Gilroy, Jhon Warren 'Another Fine Example of the Oral Tradition? Identification and Subversion in Sherman Alexie's Smoke Signals.' *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 13, 2: Representations of American Indians in Contemporary Narrative Fiction Film, no. 1, 2001: 23-42.

*Powwow Highway*'s Philbert and *Smoke Signals*' Thomas are juxtaposed against their more warrior-esque compatriots. Philbert's friend Buddy (A Martinez) is a Vietnam veteran and engaged political activist, in the tradition of the American Indian Movement, whereas Victor is sportier and dresses like a typical teenager in comparison to Thomas and his suit and thick-rimmed glasses. [258] Victor also wears his hair down, stating: "An Indian man ain't nothing without his hair." Victor's hair is representative of his spiritual journey, as well as the physical journey, with his hair becoming a trope for his moods. In the bus scene it configures his and Thomas's masculinity, as a device with which to transform themselves into 'warrior' types to counter the 'cowboys', which again works spiritually instead of just physically. Later, upon receiving his father's ashes, he cuts his hair, representing forgiveness and renewal; the physical journey has taken its toll, physically, but, again, spiritually, it is a chance for (re)growth.



The spiritual Thomas is juxtaposed against Victor, who irritates him with his storytelling suggesting his role is not only narrator but as a trickster entity, both criticising and assisting Victor in equal measure.

In *Powwow Highway*, Philbert is presented as a spiritual warrior, very much akin to *Smoke Signals*' Thomas. Philbert's traditionalism is emphasized in the movie by his own tribe's indifference to his spiritual practices, which is seen in *Smoke Signals* through Victor's frequent criticism of Thomas' story-telling asides. During the bus scene, rather than being a defect in the narrative by telling rather than showing the audience, this is also reaffirmed by Victor, who comments on Thomas's ongoing storytelling:

> I mean, you just go on and on talking about nothing. Why can't you have a normal conversation. You're always trying to sound like some damn medicine man or something. I mean, how many times have you seen *Dances with Wolves*? A hundred, two hundred times?

This reference to 'medicine men' and to *Dance with Wol*ves is performative, and extremely funny. It plays with the dominant cultural conception, but it is also firmly rooted in the

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[258] Anderson 'Driving the Red Road…':  147.

indigenous story-telling tradition, further offering an image of indigenous identity as opposed to simply playing on stereotype.

There is a further point in making cross-cultural references in a humorous way, particularly when Victor is incredulous when Thomas (by his facial embarrassment as opposed to actual verbal confirming) admits he really has seen *Dances with Wolves* hundreds of times. The point is laboured, but deliberately so, under the heavy weight of Hollywood representations of Native peoples, Victor concludes: "[d]o you think that shit is real? Do you even know how to be a real Indian?" The irony of the 'Indian' is played with via Victor's statement, as it continues to animate the filmic 'Indian'. But with respect to Victor's irony and in the context of their location in Coeur d'Alene Reservation, northwest Idaho, this playfulness with notions of identity presents a meaningful indigenous presence with which to reconsider and remould the concept of the 'Indian'.

Thomas is deliberately provocative as a storyteller, willing to engage with these notions head on, but his stance also forms a mode of indigenous survivance and maintenance of Native American identity that works to exist beyond US cultural tropes. Like Philbert, Thomas occupies the position of the indigenous storyteller. This is not without humour, such as criticising the filmic medicine man and the notion of inherent wisdom, and with it, the culturally constructed 'Indian'. Indeed, Thomas might be seen as the spiritual heir of the medicine man, but without the shackles of US cultural stereotypes.[259] Thomas holds the awareness and acuteness of the indigenous storyteller that Luther Standing Bear writes intimately about. In the section on 'Indian Wisdom' in *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, he comments:

> Indian boys, who are naturally reared, are alert to their surroundings; their senses are not narrowed to observing only one another, and they cannot spend seeing nothing, hearing nothing, and thinking nothing in particular. Observation was certain in its rewards; interest, wonder, admiration grew, and the fact was appreciated that life was more than mere human manifestation; that it was expressed in a multitude of forms.[260]

Of course, Standing Bear was discussing these qualities in the context of male Lakota youths, but it has parallels to Thomas and the indigenous storyteller, which has further significance. As Gerald Vizenor writes: "Native American Indians are the stories of presence, the

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[259] This is the feature of the paradoxical situations the Trickster's own actions leads him into or out of, and usually into another quandary which would represent a moral tale for the listener. See, for example, Paul Radin *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian History*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972 [1956].

[260] Luther Standing Bear *Land of the Spotted Eagle*. University of Nebraska Press; 2006 [1933]: 195.

chroniclers in the histories of this continent."[261] Thomas, in *Smoke Signals*, revises this traditional role and forms a filmic space for the expression of indigenous identities which counter the colonially and culturally constructed 'Indian'.

It is also possible to perceive Thomas as Trickster, and because of this position as neither 'Indian' but an ironic representation of film 'Indians', he himself arguably represents the 'post-Indian'. Thomas plays on the 'Indian' whilst reaffirming his own indigenous identity. He renounces the simulation of the 'Indian' in his performative play on filmic representations whilst evoking his own culture. And despite the cultural genocide against Native Americans in the US, the persistence of Native American stories insists on an indigenous presence.[262]

### iii: Re-Spatializing the Reservation

*Smoke Signals* also taps into the reservation as both Western trope and a physical space unique to North America. Like the Native American, the reservation is a place often misunderstood or ignored by white America.[263] Whilst there are exceptions, the reservation forms a space of shared experience for many Native Americans.[264] From the wider perspective, the reservation falls foul of the discourses of tragedy and poverty, but is also shrouded in nobility, which continues to frame an 'Indian'-white binary in a problematic way, typically involving historical injustice against Native Americans balanced by what white society has gained and might gain from Native Americans.[265]

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[261] Vizenor *Fugitive* Poses: 1;14.
[262] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: 4-6.
[263] There are roughly 310 Indian reservations in the United States, though the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) doesn't have a sure count of how many reservations there are (this might say something about the BIA, or it might say something about the nature of reservations). Not all of the 564 federally recognized tribes in the United States have reservations. Some Indians don't have reservations, but all reservations have Indians, and all reservations have signs. There are tribal areas in Brazil, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, among many other countries. But reservations as we know them are, with the exception of Canada, unique to America David Treuer *Rez Life: An Indian's Journey Through Reservation Life*. New York: Grove Press; 2012: 2-3.
[264] Jennifer Meness 'Smoke Signals as Equipment for Living.' In Meta G Carstaphen and John P Sanchez (Eds) *American Indians and the Mass Media*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2012: 97.
[265] A typical cinematic example lies in the trope of the native 'soothsayer' found in cliches such as the Navajo Warren Red Cloud in *Wild at Heart* (Stone 1994).

The Coeur d'Alene Reservation in *Smoke Signals* (Eyre 1998).



Left: Thomas and Victor as youths, suggesting the strength of their friendship. Right: Tantoo Cardinal as Thomas's mum Arlene making frybread; the frybread tale which Thomas recounts resembles the biblical story of Jesus feeding the five thousand.

In *Smoke Signals*, humour is directed at the reservation in order to make serious points regarding Native American poverty, lack of employment, education, and indigenous substance abuse, but without being sentimental. This is emphasized by the mise-en-scène of the opening shots of the reservation: of prefabricated homes, of trailers and wrecked cars. In particular, there is a sign that states: '[w]elcome to the Coeur d'Alene Reservation. Population: Variable.' But these shots of the landscape are juxtaposed with many moments of intimacy, of community and family that structure the narrative, whilst also weaving around the material conditions of the Coeur d'Alene Reservation. Painting the reservation as another aspect of Indian victimhood is a fallacy. As David Treuer (Ojibwe) writes: "[w]e love our reservations."[266]

The reservation forms a space of the 'Indian' in the mainstream US cinematic imagination. The significance of the frontier myth and the impact of ideological constructions such as 'manifest destiny' cannot be discounted when representations of the reservation are made on film. In *The Searchers* and *Little Big Man*, the reservation is represented as a liminal space; this would be the effect because of the nomadic nature of the Apache and Cheyenne tribes in these films (and the films' preoccupation with Plains/ desert dwelling inhabitants). The reservation is primarily a place of 'savagery', located in the frontier space in film, in that

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[266] Treuer *Rez Life*: 6.

it is seen as an extension of the wilderness and therefore uninhabitable (for white people). However, by extension, in a cinematic sense, all Native Americans are rendered inhabitants of this kind of 'savage' environment, which is primarily a Plains/ desert eco-system, seen in *The Searchers* or *Dances with Wolves*, or dense woods, as seen in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Revenant*.[267]

This perpetuates the reading of the reservation as an 'environmental hell', unfit for white habitation but suitable for 'Indians'. The assumption is that all Native Americans are reducible to this cinematically imagined space with its negative connotations: the bleak environment, historically banished to the margins, with crushing poverty and alcoholism in their contemporary iteration in the US imagination.[268] Latterly, the reservation has featured as a space of indigenous identity in both *Skins* and *The Rider*, which presents a more positive, familial space. *Skins* sheds light on the poverty and substance abuse in this space, woven into a wider narrative, but also emphasises the contexts of family and its meaning while considering  structural issues for the failings of these spaces. *Skins* goes to great lengths to suture the reservation to the rest of the US, and not to continue to let it be represented as some marginal space beyond the realms – and imagination - of the rest of the country.


iv: Conclusion


Whilst tragic events unfold in *Smoke Signals*, particularly the fire which claimed Thomas's parents, the reservation is a vibrant place full of life. Eyre plays with the tropes of the 'Indian' through the characters of Thomas and Victor in a humorous way, with instances of self-referentiality to US pop culture which has important implications for Native American identity. Importantly, Eyre does not frame the Coeur d'Alene reservation as a marginalized space. Whilst there are abusive relationships and drunkenness, amongst the wrecked and burnt-out cars there is community and family, a theme which he continues in his follow up, *Skins*. The reservation in *Smoke Signals* is not an extension of the wilderness, as seen in the Western; nor is it the peculiar dwelling of the savage Huron band in *The Last of the*

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[267] Robin L Murray and Joseph K Heumann *Gunfight at the Eco-Corral: Western Cinema and the Environment*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 2012: 3. The kinship and family warmth of *Smoke Signals* is lost in Murray and Heumann's environmental reading of the film. Whilst they note the communality played out in *Smoke Signals*, the Coeur d'Alene band came late to the reservation system, after the Dawes Act. The Natives Americans removed during this period in question were not the subject matter of *Smoke Signals* and therefore risks repeating the teleological nature of frontier history which affected indigenous peoples in multitudinous inhumane and violent and ways over a large timescale.
[268] Murray and Heumann *Gunfight*: 186.

*Mohicans*, nor is it again the otherworldly, abandoned places of the Arikara as in *The Revenant*. Whilst *Dead Man* presents the Makah villages as otherworldly, there is also a play with the typical representation of the town and reservation; the violence witnessed, alongside the coldness William Blake receives in Machine, allows the viewer to question these spaces which are typically framed within the civilization/ savage binary. In *Smoke Signals* the filmic space of the reservation is permeable for the Coeur d'Alene people, and  does not function as a binary to US 'civilization'. In the US' cinematic imagination Native Americans are almost always confined to certain spaces, and are almost always seen in a 'past' historical context. In film, the reservation was almost a forgotten space, and films such as *Smoke Signals* and *Winter in the Blood* have offered these spaces new, and importantly, a contemporary meaning and presence.

3: 'I was as distant from Myself as a Hawk from the Moon': The Trickster in *Winter in the Blood* (Alex Smith, Andrew J Smith 2013)[269]

### i: Introduction: Trickster Hermeneutics

James Welch's 1974 novel 'Winter in the Blood' was part of a movement which helped establish indigenous writers in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the North American literary canon. The Native American literary modern renaissance is judged to begin with N Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), deemed the point when Native American writers found their way into the US mainstream. This literary stem is both essential for Native American intellectual well-being and for building a critical consciousness in the midst of contemporary crises affecting Native American people.[270] Native American literature draws on oral tradition but also presents a call for liberation and survivance.[271] In this vein, Welch's novel tells the story of a thirty-two year old man who it is suggested is of mixed white and Native American heritage and finds himself trapped between these distinctive worlds; it is a novel that is, according to Kenneth Lincoln, "Indian in subject, but modern and essentially human, an integration of red and white laments."[272]

This dichotomy is played out in the film, through Virgil First Raise's, played by Chaske Spencer striving to make sense of his own fractured identity. It has been noted that indigenous authors draw from different archetypes, as do white writers, and Welch makes clever use of the Trickster in *Winter in the Blood*. As Alan Velie acknowledges:

> The trickster is an archetype universal among Indians, and in most tribes the most important mythic figure. Every tribe has many stories about the trickster, who plays a diversity of roles in tribal mythology, ranging from creator and savior to obnoxious, amoral violator of taboos, and buffoon or clown.[273]

The figure of Trickster generally motivates the plot in many of the world's myths and legends.[274] In Native American storytelling, Trickster has an important historical and cultural

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[269] This section references both the film *Winter in the Blood*, by the Smith brothers, and the source novel by James Welch; to avoid confusion only the film will be in italics whilst the novel will be written 'Winter in the Blood'.

[270] Robert Warrior *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press; 2005: xiv-xxii.

[271] Warrior *The People and the Word*: 6.

[272] Kenneth Lincoln *Native American Renaissance*. University of California Press; 1985: 153.

[273] Alan R Velie 'Indians in Indian Fiction: The Shadow of the Trickster.' *American Indian Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1984): 324.

[274] Each culture usually focuses on one or two characters who turn up in a myriad of disguises and situations. In Germany, it is Till Eulenspiegel; in France they are Reynard the Fox and Gargantua and Pantagruel; in Greece, Karagöz; and in Turkey it's Nar-eddin, the *hodja* (clown-priest), whose antics are passed on from generation to generation. Loki is the mischief-making sky traveller in Norse mythology, and the famous Punch and Judy puppet shows performed in French parks and country fairs

role. [275] The Trickster, in the form of Virgil First Raise, makes cultural and inter-textual leaps through the narrative of the film adaptation *Winter in the Blood*.

## ii: The Cinematic Trickster



The 'First Raise' rifle, which Virgil finds pawned by Alice (left), is a symbol of Virgil's masculinity, but also links to his deceased father (Richard Ray Whitman) and brother Mose, played by Yancey Hawley (centre) and his maternal grandfather (right) Yellow Calf (Saginaw Grant).

The similarities between the Blackfoot Trickster tales and Virgil's own narrative are conspicuous. In one tale, Blackfeet Trickster Old Man Napi chooses a wife, which ultimately leads to his rejection because of his pride. This same tale echoes in *Winter in the Blood* when, at the beginning of the film, Virgil wakes up with a black eye having passed out drunk in a ditch. On returning home he finds that his new wife, a Cree girl called Agnes (Julia Jones), has abandoned the house he shares with his mother and grandmother, and taken his electric razor and rifle. These artefacts are prominent symbols of his manhood. By taking these items, Agnes has emasculated Virgil. The same happens to Old Man Napi when Chief Woman chooses another mate and solicits the tribe to reject him. Old Man Napi is ultimately cast out, without mate and left to fend for himself. Whilst the gun is also a link to his deceased brother and intimates his own lineage within the wider narrative of the film and remains a prominent motif for Virgil's own quest. Furthermore, the loss of these artefacts hint at Virgil's fractured identity and emphasises a man who seems to have little control over his life. However, this loss motivates Virgil, more so than the pursuit of Agnes, which remains ambiguous. In the process of doing so, he uncovers revelations concerning his own lineage which offers recourse from his shattered identity.[276]

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were really Trickster tales played out in a domestic situation. See Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz *American Indian Trickster Tales*. New York: Penguin; 1998: xiii.

[275] The Trickster figure in Native American storytelling is typically a personification of an animal. Coyote is a character that features heavily across Native American mythology. Virgil suggests a character very much living and surviving like Coyote. As Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz emphasise: "Just as in real life Coyote survives and thrives in spite of traps, poison, and a rancher's bullets, so the Coyote of legend survives the onslaught of white American culture." *American Indian Trickster Tales*: xiii-xiv.

[276] Garan Santicola 'The Brothers Smith On Winter In The Blood.' *Literature/Film Quarterly, 42*(3); 2014: 497-514; 507.

After another drunken escapade, Virgil First Raise wakes up in an unfamiliar setting and immediately checks his manhood, referencing the Trickster narrative of being guided by his sexual desires.

Old Man Napi, as Virgil does in the film, occupies the dual character of wisdom and foolishness that are common to Trickster tales. Like many Native American Trickster figures, many occupy the role of creator as well as destructor, with similarities and dissimilarities across different groups.[277] This lack of a fixed meaning is essential to the role of the Trickster, and the literary play that it facilitates. The tales of the Trickster animate and enact, having the power to shape and re-shape the world, particularly through the instability of meaning in language.[278]

This is why Gerald Vizenor adopts them, particularly to animate a cultural commentary in literature and film. As I have been emphasizing, Vizenor argues that the Trickster represents a *différance*, or a deconstruction of the cultural absence of indigeneity perpetuated by the 'Indian':

> The simulation of the *Indian* is the absence of the native, and that absence is a presence of the *Other*, the eternal scapegoat, but not a native past; the native is a trace of the presence. The *Indian* is the absence of the native, but the native is the presence of the *Indian* in name.[279]

Vizenor's 'trickster hermeneutics' offers a multiplicity of meaning. 'Indian' is invested with the discourse of colonialism, and whilst the simulated 'Indian' is immovable, it does not mean that it cannot be used as a basis for intervention.[280]

The exaggerated style of the film fits the stories of the A'aninin Trickster Nixant, again echoing the lineage of the source novel's writer. Like Nixant, Virgil is seen engaging in

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[277] Erdoes and Ortiz *American Indian Trickster Tales*: 206-209. Like Vehoo, the Cheyenne Trickster, Napi is also the term for 'white man'.
[278] Erdoes and Ortiz *American Indian Trickster Tales*: xvi-xix.
[279] Vizenor *Fugitive Poses*: 35.
[280] David J Carlson 'Trickster Hermeneutics and the Postindian Reader: Gerald Vizenor's Constitutional Praxis' *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 23, no. 4, 2011: 13-47.

variety of escapades that leaves the viewer feeling both sorry for him and disgusted by him. That Virgil's story revolves around scenes of embarrassing sexual exploits. In one particular instance sees him waking up and begin rifling through his lover's possessions to have enough money to make it home, but his conscience is swayed when he realizes the woman's child is watching him, revealing the moral tale at the heart of the incident. However, this underlines how Virgil is guided by his baser desires as a form of closure, whilst another Trickster tale recalls how a talking penis humiliates Nixant. This is also played out in the movie. In a scene in a bar toilet, Virgil looks up at some graffiti which reads: "what are you looking up here for – the jokes in your hand". This moment not only mock's Virgil's manhood but the fact he has lived his life guided by his penis, as Nixant does, which leads to their humiliation.[281]



After relieving himself Virgil looks at himself in the bathroom mirror and points at his reflection as if in positive affirmation.

The scene with the 'Airplane Man' (David Morse) offers a particularly bizarre story within the wider arc of Virgil's narrative. Airplane Man is on the run from the FBI, and the whole episode surrounding Virgil's involvement with this character fits with the non-linear narrative but is also stylistically Gonzo, being exaggerated and subjective. It has been posited that this character is purely a figment of Virgil's imagination with the two pursuing FBI agents (the 'Suits') being so monstrous as to be something out of a David Lynch movie.[282] The directors explain:

> [W]e broke it down into what was present, what was past, and then what we called the other, which could be real, could not be real. The Airplane Man and the Suits, Yellow Calf, and the Barmaid and her son were all in the category of the other, where it sort of is happening or not. I mean it's happening in his timeline, but is it happening in the real timeline?[283]

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[281] Nixant engages in sexual adventures that are totally self-serving. In one tale he tricks two women into having sex with him by pretending to be a woman. See: Erdoes and Ortiz *American Indian Trickster Tales*: 160-163.

[282] See Katie Walsh '*Review: Beautiful and Unique Winter in the Blood*' 2014, https://www.indiewire.com/2014/08/review-beautiful-and-unique-winter-in-the-blood-273336/ accessed 22/01/2020.

[283] Santicola 'The Brothers Smith…': 505.

The aspect of a story within a story emphasizes the cyclical dynamic that occurs within the oral tradition, reflecting the ever-malleable interpretations of stories across generations. This reflects in the general non-linearity of the film's plot, interspersed with dream-like sequences and flashbacks. Furthermore, follows the work of writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), whose *Ceremony* (1977) and Craig Womack's (Creek/ Cherokee) *Drowning in Fire* (2001) are both lyrical whilst being illustrative of the performative nature of Native American oral stories which adapt throughout time according to the changing needs of the audience.[284]

This was a deliberate act on the filmmaker's part, too. The film begins with Virgil in the dirt, and at the end of the film, he wrestles in the mud to save a cow from drowning. This "literal immersion in the land" emphasises the cyclical nature of Virgil's tale and reflects Welch's line in the novel which ends the first chapter: "[d]irt is where dreams must end." Of course, this act in the film sees Virgil silent until he asks for help. In the book the scene is punctured by his internal monologue. The weight of the visual and the simple delivery by Chaske Spencer, given the context of Virgil's struggles, is revelatory. However, at this point Virgil speaks to himself over the multiple timelines of the movie, and is clearly asking for help for the boy that could not earlier ask, after the death of his brother Mose. In the novel, this is the point of selflessness which earns the narrator his name. [285]

Moreover, the potential trip of Virgil and the Airplane Man echoes the actual flight of Sitting Bull and Chief Joseph's Nez Perce to Canada. This is an ironic play on US-indigenous history, an indigenous person helping a white man reach Canada, whereby historical roles have been reversed.[286] Within the context of *Winter in the Blood*, this suggests a filmic extension of the literary play advocated by Gerald Vizenor to subvert the colonising discourse of the 'Indian'. Virgil increasingly offers a dynamic and adaptive identity which does not merely subvert dominant narratives but confronts them, as the film proceeds by presenting a varied and complex culture that is not elided by the 'Indian.'[287]

iii: An 'Inverted Western'

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[284] Joseph Bauerkemper 'Narrating Nationhood: Indian Time and Ideologies of Progress' *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Series 2, 19, no. 4, 2007: 27-53: 28-29. See also Tillett *Contemporary Native American Literature*. Edinburgh University Press; 2007.
[285] Santicola 'The Brothers Smith…': 509-510.
[286] Lincoln *Native American Renaissance*: 155.
[287] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: vii.

Indigenous stories and knowledge systems present an opportunity to create a presence connecting to indigenous tradition.[288] 'Winter in the Blood' was part of the literary canon which contributed to indigenous cultural expression in the late 1960s and early 1970s. *Winter in the Blood* follows in the tradition of Welch's novel, in that scenes seem to bleed into one another, and the narrative is beset by metaphor and symbolism, including aspects of Gros Ventre and Blackfeet identity, reflecting Welch's own cultural heritage. Fundamental to Welch's narrative/ narrator is a description of a world in small detail, and this is based on Welch's own Blackfeet origins: "[t]his Indian No-Name describes a world of minute detail for the reader to see and hear, as older Blackfeet tellers drew an audience into the performing experience of a tale."[289]

The employment of these aspects of detail and performance is confirmed by Louise Erdrich (Chippewa)  in her introduction to 'Winter in the Blood', who states "small gestures tell big stories."[290] *Winter in the Blood*'s directors, Alex and Andrew Smith, have obviously paid attention to the detail of the source novel, particularly within the imagery and symbolism of the film.[291] This could, obviously, be described as filmic mise-en-scène, which it is. However, the indifferent reviews of the film, which discussed the confusing nature of the unconventional plot, illustrate an unfamiliarity with the film's lack of convention. The film pays homage to Welch's source novel that overall offers a subtlety that is perhaps overlooked and builds on the non-linear and place-based characteristics of Native American literature.[292]

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[288] Gerald Vizenor's work follows in the oral tradition of the Anishinaabe Trickster Nanabozho. Nanabozho is a much more serious and formidable figure relative to other Native American Trickster's. See also Erdoes and Ortiz. As many stories crossed over between different groups across the North American continent many Trickster figures are strongly related to one another. This is partly because Native peoples never ruled out the veracity of things they did not adhere to, unlike Europeans. See: *Manifest Manners*: xv-xvi.

[289] Lincoln *Native American Renaissance*: 156.

[290] Louise Erdrich, 'Introduction' in James Welch *Winter in the Blood*. New York: Viking-Penguin; 1986 [1974]: x.

[291] Alex and Andrew Smith are not of Native American origin, nor did they grow up on a reservation. They did live in rural Montana and their parents were friends of James and Lois Welch. Of the novel, Alex Smith comments:  " [t]here's no fancy language. It doesn't get super poetic or anything. What it's about thematically is very complicated, but the iteration of it is very accessible, so I think that's something that stuck with us too." See: Santicola 'The Brothers Smith On *Winter In The Blood*' *Literature/Film Quarterly, 42*(3), 2014: 497-514.

[292] Writers for the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* offered generally favourable, but slightly perplexed reviews. See: Jeanette Catsoulis 'Montana Skies, Childhood Wounds' *The New York Times Movie Review.* 19 August, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/movies/8216winter-in-the-blood8217-a-drama-about-alcoholism.html?_r=0 and Mark Olsen. Review: 'Winter in the Blood' a Tale of Losses, Including the Audience. *Los Angeles Times*. 30 October, 2014. http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-winter-in-the-blood-review-20141031-story.html [both] accessed 24/02/2020.

This early scene is a flashback sequence, which sees Virgil dancing with his wife Agnes (Julia Jones).

It is these dream sequences, memories, and flashbacks which punctuate the movie and offer a narrative that is akin to the source novel. It is also possible to perceive the influence on the film's narrative not just from Welch's blend of myth and realism but from the influence it has had on contemporary writers such as Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) and Louise Erdrich, who combine narrative with the a-chronological tradition of Native American storytelling.[293] Welch successfully blends myth and realism in 'Winter in the Blood', whilst also taking up the maverick tendencies of modernist writers such as James Joyce.[294] The a-chronological narrative of the novel is referenced in *Winter in the Blood* in what could be perceived as a filmic tribute to Welch. Whereby the surreal poetry of the novel is continued in the narrative and the visuals of the film.[295]



Note the dissolved frame, and the Virgil from the ditch is still inhabiting the shadowy later Virgil, who is bent over and out of focus, further stressing his duality.

This informs several timelines based around Virgil's memories. When Virgil and his brother Mose (Yancey Hawley) stop to admire a Gene Autry cowboy costume in a store, the

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[293] Louis Owens 'Earthboy's Return: James Welch's Act of Recovery in Winter in the Blood' *Wicazo Sa* Review 6, no. 2, 1990 27-37: 28.
[294] Velie 'Indians in Indian Fiction…':  327.
[295] Lincoln *Native American Renaissance*: 155.

road behind the brothers is reflected in the window. A car passes and goes 'through' Mose's reflection, the red taillight shining like blood on his body (he is also wearing a red scarf). It is not intimated at this point in the movie that Mose had died in a motor-accident, but this scene has additional power if the viewer is familiar with Welch's narrative. The film is clearly making a link between the original source text and the filmic adaptation. Whilst Mose's death is revealed early on in the source novel, it is deferred in the film for dramatic effect. The irony of the admiration of the cowboy by the First Raise brothers and the alluded death of the 'Indian' suggests the complexity of meaning in the film's symbolism. These techniques also infer a link between US frontier history and contemporary culture, as well as revealing the ongoing influence of frontier discourse and cultural elision; together they emphasise the continued effects of colonialism and US popular culture on Native American identity.



(Left) on the day of the accident, Mose is woken by his father, and he is wearing red pyjamas on a red bedspread intimating his blood which will be spilt later that day. (Right) Mose wearing a red scarf when he and his brother stop to admire a Gene Autry costume in a shop window, which continues this imagery.



This sequence is seen in the reflected window, again hinting at Mose's death, but also the costume of Gene Autry remains visible, drawing a correlation between death, cowboys and 'Indians'.

*Winter in the Blood* is essentially a film of identity lost and regained. It takes Virgil's acceptance, primarily of his brother's death, to realize this. In the film, he muses at being "caught in the in-between space." Whilst these words are reflective of the duality of Virgil's identity, and of Welch's to an extent, it is the imagery that is associated with these words that remains powerful. The film looks like a Western, in a sense. But it is more akin to Terrence

Malick's water-coloured *Days of Heaven* (1978), the feel of *The Reflecting Skin* (Ridley 1990), and the sheer beauty of *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee 2005). This is a permutation that is also prevalent in *The Rider* (Zhao 2017), one that is not romantic but offers a spartan beauty which reflects the source novel, in this instance. This look, feel, and connection to Virgil is also congruent to Welch's imagery in the book.

For Welch, the landscape is the central character in his work, and the Smith brothers draw on this, and the Western genre's characterisation of the landscape, for the film. This makes it familiar to the audience attuned to the Western, but then the directors' invocations ultimately work to use the landscape differently. This strategy, as with *Dead Man*, is something that provides an inverted image of inherited convention. Virgil is more closely aligned with the landscape; there are no searching panoramas of wide-open spaces, as the film offers a more claustrophobic feel, intimating Virgil's own inner state. And in a similar way to *Dead Man*, the Smith brothers saw the music as another character. The music was conceived through a personal exchange with the band, Heartless Bastards. The music was deliberately stripped down to suggest the melody or harmony that Virgil is searching for but is having difficulty locating. Singer Erica Wennerstrom's voice offers a tactility and multiplicity to the landscape whilst connecting to the Old Woman's – Virgil's grandmother – singing.[296]



Virgil always seems to be on the edge of danger or involved in violence. Above right: walking in the middle of the road; left: after a bar-room altercation, with Marlene (Lily Gladstone) who offers comfort.

In addition, Virgil always seems on the point of peril, either by his actions or his interactions with others. He awakes in a ditch, having passed out drunk. This, in different circumstances, claimed his father's life. He spends a lot of his spare time in bars drinking and fighting; he is seen sporting a black eye in the early part of the film that is not wholly explained, rather it is a feature of his troubled existence. Of course, mirroring his father's life also informs Vigil's identity, and the notion that he feels "as distant from Myself as a Hawk from the Moon", caught as he is between the white world and that of his Blackfeet ancestors. In this way, Virgil has no intimacy with the landscape in the stereotypical spiritual or

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[296] Santicola 'The Brothers Smith…': 509.

environmentalist fashion of the 'Indian', but awareness of his surroundings is something that grows as he assumes his identity and breaks away from his self-destructive behaviour.

This intimacy suggests a narrator that works to inform us of Virgil's outlook both inner and outer. Whilst the directors wanted to follow Welch's intimate yet non-stereotypical portrayal of the landscape, landscape is also central to Virgil's identity, therefore the inversion of these common tropes of the land reveal more than simple transpositions. Andrew Smith comments:

> So in our conception of the film as an inverted western, playing up some of those tropes of cowboys and Indians and then trying to turn them on their head – a cowboy who is an Indian, etc. – certainly we needed scenes of scenic importance, so his moving through the landscape becomes important.[297]

Of course, playing with the trope of the 'Indian' offers an intervention into US frontier discourse via the Western, and the established meaning behind the US 'master narrative' and the continued effect this has on Native American identity.

In the scene in which the boys are viewing the Gene Autry costume, again told in flashback, present-day Virgil narrates that he and his brother "always wanted to be cowboys", which draws attention to the conflicted nature of indigenous identity seen in both the novel and film. With reference to the movies, their father John (Richard Ray Whitman) insists, that the cowboys were always victorious against 'Indians'; despite the First Raise family being of Native American descent, they do not identify with the on-screen 'Indians'. This latter sentiment is paralleled by Thomas in *Smoke Signals* during the bus scene where they end up being moved out of their seats by 'cowboys'. John – like Virgil - suffers alcoholism and was constantly shifting between the border towns and its white inhabitants and the reservation. He could never reconcile these aspects of his identity. This establishes the generational removal of Virgil and John from their indigenous identity, and the pattern of alcoholism which has affected two generations and their general rootlessness. This is expressed through the cultural trope of the 'Indian' which has informed their identity to the point that they reject it and want to be the cowboy.

The geographical and cultural setting of the film is akin to the world of Chris Eyre's *Skins* (2002). Like Momaday and Welch's influence on Native American literature, Eyre has been charged with setting the groundwork for a renaissance in indigenous cinema that goes beyond the borders of the US. This cinematic movement has been essential in making Native American peoples on the screen altogether human, believable, and complex, whilst forming a

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[297] Cited in Santicola 'The Brothers Smith...': 507-508.

sense of self and group consciousness. This has been an effective strategy in countering the colonial gaze, and the ongoing stereotypes generated by the Western genre. The continued association in film, as with literature, is the connection to indigenous heritage in narratives such as *Smoke Signals* and *Winter in the Blood*. The Trickster figure can be utilized in this instance to move beyond Native American identities structured by the 'Indian' and the Western genre. [298]

In *Skins* the Trickster figure moves beyond 'Indian' stereotypes by insisting on their presence in the contemporary world, and here director Eyre deliberately offers Iktomi, the Lakota Trickster spirit, a realistic foundation, as opposed to an otherworldly presence. This is achieved by *Skins* "ultrarealistic" stylistic approach. Eyre augments his narrative with news clips and voiceovers, and the power this lends to the narrative is further enhanced through documentary aspects of this film, and the seeming authenticity this brings. Moreover, the setting for *Skins* is the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. This real world setting also allows for the power of Iktomi representing the traditional and contemporary, and involves the audience in making these leaps between the worlds of oral history and film.[299] In a similar manner the locations for *Winter in the Blood* of the Fort Belknap and Peck Reservations, in Montana, form the backdrop to the ranch where Virgil lives, which offers a solid grounding for the play of surreal imagery and undergirds the flashbacks and dream sequences which take place throughout the narrative.[300]

In both *Skins* and *Winter in the Blood*, the Trickster lends the protagonists a means to achieve reconciliation in the themes of death and identity by offering more than just pyrrhic victories against a society which has contributed to individual and collective malaise. The bloody nose/ red tear given to Washington's likeness on Mount Rushmore in *Skins* underlines the elision of Native Americans in US nation building whilst it suggests a link to the Red Power movement and the protests staged there in the 1960s.[301]

[298] Ludmila Martanovschi in Cathy Covell Waegner (Ed) *Mediating Indianness*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press; 2015: 145-148.
[299] Lee Schweninger 'In the Form of a Spider: The Interplay of Narrative Fiction and Documentary in Skins' In *Imagic Moments: Indigenous North American Film*, 158-72. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press; 2013: 158-163.
[300] Santicola 'The Brothers Smith…': 508.
[301] Schweninger 'In the Form…': 171-172.

Left: The 'bloody nose'/ 'crying blood' defacement of George Washington at Mount Rushmore, as seen in *Skins* (Eyre 2002). Right: protestors during a 'Red Power' protest at Mount Rushmore, 1970. The significance of He Sapa is discussed in chapter one.

Likewise, this anti-colonial theme remains a central message in Welch's novel. Welch is insisting on how the biggest joke is not on the readership being fooled by the Narrator's exterior, but by the readership being "taken in" by US society. Welch writes:

> The biggest joke – can't you see that he's a joke, a joker playing a joke on you? Were you taken for a ride! Just like the rest of us, this country, all of us taken for a ride. Slack up, Slack up! This greedy stupid country.[302]

This is the joke that Welch plays on the readers; the perceived state of Virgil at the beginning of the story allows the writer to construct a veiled criticism of the US, this only being revealed at the height of the novel. This also expresses the circularity of the source novel, a feature of Native American thinking which is informed by the oral tradition and itself informs contemporary literature and film. The fact that Virgil begins and ends the film 'in the dirt' but has grown as a person suggests this, but also confirms the moral tale prevalent in many Trickster tales. In a sense, it is where Virgil dies, but is reborn finally being able to reconcile his Blackfeet identity.

iv: 'Backbone of the World'

Archaeological, genetic, and linguistic evidence suggests the Niitsitapi, the group of peoples to whom the Blackfeet belong, have occupied territory between the Saskatchewan River and the Missouri River for thousands of years.[303] By the 1800s they were a powerful Confederacy deeply tied to hunting of buffalo, with much of their livelihood based on the resources of the mountains and eastern foothills of the Glacier area.[304] However, by the late

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[302] Welch 'Winter in the Blood': 133.
[303] David R Craig, Laurie Yung, and William T Borrie 'Blackfeet Belong to the Mountains: Hope, Loss, and Blackfeet Claims to Glacier National Park, Montana' *Conservation and Society* 10, no. 3: 2012: 232-42.
[304] The Blackfoot Confederacy consisted primarily of the Northern Blackfoot (Siksika), Blood, and Piegan bands along with allies the Gros Ventre and Sarcee. See William E Farr 'When We Were First

1800s, with their numbers in decline, having being forced onto a reservation would only exacerbate problems associated with disease, famine, and warfare.[305] The Blackfeet now largely reside on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana.[306]

Early on in the novel, Welch writes how these series of events were directly responsible for creating distance between people, as well as distancing individuals' senses of self. This theme runs through the novel, the film, and through the First Raise family, generationally. The Montana landscape symbolises the histories of the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre – or A'aninin – peoples, which in turn offer a backdrop for Virgil, signifying a brooding admission of his own inner turmoil.[307] This haunts Virgil, as it haunts the viewer, and troubles his memories of his past. In the film he replays the night before the day of his brother's death. As their father prepares the young boys for their first hunt, Virgil and Mose are getting ready for bed. Virgil is wearing white pyjamas and Mose red, illustrating how deep the memory of death is in Virgil's life and its continual recurrence in the narrative of the film, serving as a constant reminder for the protagonist and audience.

However, the theme of death is not sustained in a morbid fashion, rather it is a metaphor for the survival of Native Americans, despite Virgil later acquiring the knowledge that relocation and subsequent starvation had almost killed his grandmother (Cynthia Kipp). Virgil's grandmother, known as 'Old Woman' is confined to a chair, and whilst she is static throughout the novel her presence is both animated and humorous, which the film goes a long way towards capturing. The irony of the Old Woman is presented not in her age but in her death, when she becomes still and undisturbed. Louise Erdrich discusses the significance of this character: "[s]he is the presiding spirit of both anguish and tenacity, and she stands for the mysterious and undestroyable will of a people."[308]

Virgil's grandmother recounts to Virgil the brutal treatment of her people as their "camps were dismantled" and the Blackfeet were "driven like cows" from their ancestral homes to their reservation in the middle of a freezing winter. Virgil carries this knowledge and guilt and is only able to find solace in destructive behaviour until his split from Agnes

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Paid: The Blackfoot Treaty, The Western Tribes, And The Creation Of The Common Hunting Ground, 1855.' *Great Plains Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (2001): 131-54; and Colin G Calloway 'The Inter-Tribal Balance of Power on the Great Plains, 1760-1850.' *Journal of American Studies* 16, no. 1, 1982: 25-47.
[305] Mark David Spence 'Crown of the Continent, Backbone of the World: The American Wilderness Ideal and Blackfeet Exclusion from Glacier National Park' *Environmental History* 1, no. 3, 1996: 29-49.
[306] Craig *et al* 'Blackfeet Belong…': 234.
[307] As Louis Owens writes (of the novel's protagonist): "within this drought-stricken landscape, mirroring in its sterility the inner state of the narrator." 'Earthboy's Return…': 27.
[308] Erdrich, 'Introduction' in Welch 'Winter in the Blood': xxii.

sets off a chain of events towards his own epiphany. The significance of the rifle that Agnes takes from Virgil, later revealing that she pawned it "for a drink", links Virgil to the day his brother died and the point where his relationship with his father ended. The boys, in a rush to get their cows transferred to a different field in the promise John would take them hunting afterwards, end up being involved in a collision with a car which kills Mose and gives Virgil a lifelong leg injury.

After Mose's death, Virgil, like his father, engages in ever-increasing bouts of self-destructive behaviour. The use of red and the rifle in the film link the death of his brother and father together, and join up Virgil's own regret with the ostensible possibility that he is heading in the same direction, due to his own alcoholism. The key to both Virgil and John's drinking is implied in the wider societal and historical influences, but the film does not position either as victims by a direct relation to social causes. The symbolism of red is replayed throughout the film, linking red with the 'blood' of the title, the blood which flows in Virgil's veins, but is also frozen and thus still. Whilst 'winter' symbolizes Virgil's own decay and depression, but also the destruction of his identity due to the fractured past, both through personal tragedy and that of his peoples, which has a direct link to his own family, through his blind and speechless grandmother.

The overt symbolism of the red wine bleeding into the white of the snow also represents the history of the Blackfeet, whilst this metaphor is tied to Mose through the associated red motif attributed throughout to his character. The latter further suggests Virgil is carrying the guilt of Mose and John's deaths and the complex relationship he has with his own Native American identity. These motifs present a generational leap from grandmother, who had lived a traditional Blackfeet life. In the film, Old Woman recounts the story of the night the "long knives came." That this story is told without flashback suggests the permanence and contemporary significance this story has on the two characters. That his grandmother is largely ignored in the household, whilst Virgil's own purpose in the First Raise family home is becoming redundant through the introduction of his mother Theresa's (Casey Camp-Horinek) new husband, Lame Bull (Gary Farmer), implies the intimacy grandmother and grandson share throughout, and the centrality of the Old Woman to Virgil's own personal resolution.

The rifle, which Mose inherited from John, becomes a motif for Virgil's path to transformation, and his ability to reconcile his father and brother's deaths. In the film, he reflects that John had "never taken them hunting." This loss of an important rite of passage for young boys, and the regret of this loss, further lends Virgil to despair. Emphasis is given

here to the break with Blackfeet tradition and the lack of reconciliation Virgil has with his past and his identity, concluding: "[w]e never made it to the mountains. Never made it to the Backbone of the World" – the sacred hunting grounds of the Blackfeet. But his quest to reclaim his rifle is an act that would lead to a revelation about his own identity. As it transpires over the course of the movie, John First Raise was found dead in a ditch, after a drinking session, accompanied by a wine bottle with its red contents spilling onto the snow. Virgil, waking up in a ditch at the beginning of the movie is later paralleled in one of Virgil's memories of his own father and reiterates the destruction of two generations of Blackfeet through alcoholism. At the beginning of *Winter in the Blood*, echoing the events of the novel, the audience is furnished with a stereotypical image of another 'drunk Indian', but this trope is played with, as the context of Virgil in a ditch is symbolic of his own personal journey, which ends with him pulling a stuck calf out of a sink hole, prior to the key revelation with regards to his own lineage.

Whilst the historical treatment of the Blackfeet can be seen as an excuse for both Virgil and John First Raise's past and present misery, Virgil has to assume responsibility for his current malady, though this is never expressed in stereotyped liberal humanist terms, rather this is done with respect to confronting and engaging with traumatic experience. Indeed, each man has not taken responsibility for their position, even if re-imagining conventional notions of responsibility is challenging. The film illustrates how John navigated the "shadow world of white people" through his use of alcohol. Virgil sees himself occupying the same space as his father, and the same odds face him in attempting to change his future by facing up to the past. The suggestion in both novel and film was that whilst John kept the company with white men who drank, they were able to leave the bar and function even where he could not; and whereas John found solace in his drinking, this pattern of isolation, alcohol abuse, and identity crisis would also be perpetuated in Virgil. It would be up to Virgil to break the cycle of drinking, but it would not simply be through an acknowledgement of his own morose soakings, but through a reconciliation and reflective revisiting of his own past, his father's and brother's deaths, and acceptance of his own self in relation to spheres of both Blackfeet and white cultures. The quest to find his rifle simply precedes the chain of events towards his epiphany.[309]

v: Virgil First Raise: 'Post-Indian' Warrior

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[309] Owens 'Earthboy's Return…': 30.

The narrator in Welch's novel is nameless, whereas in the film he is known as Virgil First Raise. However, his name is never spoken, and purely for script-writing purposes he was known as Virgil – or the guide. Whilst given a name for presumably filmic purposes, it still offers the protagonist a mediator or liminal role between worlds, as Virgil metaphorically flits between the white world and time spent on the reservation; he is taking the viewers with him on his excursions between these worlds. *Winter in the Blood* tells of the protagonist's own journey in the film, and the name Virgil may be playing on how Virgil's *Aeneid* imitated Homer's *Odyssey*. The Smith brothers have hence transformed Welch's novel into their own vision.

The etymology of Virgil comes from the Latin meaning 'staff-bearer', and this follows as his character is the focal point of the narrative, the one the viewers hold on to and connect with on his journey. This first name may not be incidental. Furthermore, this lies in conjunction with his surname, which is also revealing. The first word in his surname, First, can conjure up the first person, in this instance, the narrator of the film. Whilst the second word, Raise, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means of course to "lift or move to a higher position or level". Via Virgil, the reader is shifted into a literary narrative or a kind of sur-textuality that goes beyond the familiar, as both novel and film borrow from English literature and indigenous story-telling traditions. Moreover, if it feels that the reader/ viewer is looking down on Virgil, it is only because of his sorry position in life; and, as illustrated, that is the initial trick Welch plays on his readership. The novel is very much a fusion of literary traditions of modernist writers who are presenting a cultural critique, at the same time drawing on further links to indigenous oral tales, as well as on the moral stories prevalent in Trickster narratives.[310]

His namelessness in the novel, though, could be because Blackfeet names are only given to those that have achieved significant acts. Welch updates the Blackfeet tradition of not speaking one's name. This is a device to see through the book's narrator and glimpse into indigenous culture, and thus creates the sense of an indigenous presence. As Kenneth Lincoln illustrates:

> 'No-Name' first and finally serves as the reader's mask, a participant-observer in Indian storytelling tradition, who takes on the narrator's pain. The reader looks

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[310] Santicola 'The Brothers Smith…': 511. See also: Erdoes and Ortiz *American Indian Trickster Tales*: xiii-xiv and Gunn Allen *The Sacred Hoop*: 4; 15-16.

through this 'first' person, akin to anterior anonymity, rather than looking at and labelling him.[311]

This corresponds with the perception of the character at the beginning of the film. At the opening of the film the narrator has forgotten his heritage and has very few future prospects. Emotionally crippled by the deaths of his father and brother, he is a borderline alcoholic and stumbles through a series of failed relationships.[312]

The nameless narrator in Welch's novel emphasises his own distanciation from others, and from his own identity. This illustrates the Blackfeet men "[w]ho have ceased to know themselves or their places in the world."[313] As mentioned above, Welch writes in the novel of the narrator: "I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon."[314] The unnamed narrator is without identity and frozen in time, as the blood is frozen in his own self. The novel, as with the film, tells the story of his own journey towards self-knowledge. As Louis Owens writes: "[n]ameless and without identity, the narrator is frozen in time, caught up in a wintry dormancy as he moves tentatively and tortuously toward a glimmer of self-knowledge."[315]

However, despite his wretched condition the named character in the film, Virgil, offers a critical intervention into dominant filmic stereotypes of Native Americans and illustrates the indigenous presence in the world, particularly through the animation of the Trickster figure through the narrator:

> [P]resence demands, cries for, compassion and generosity toward existence itself. Trickster is a celebrator of life, a celebration of life, because by rallying against him a community discovers its own resistance and protective skills.[316]

*Winter in the Blood*'s protagonist fits this archetype and is evident in the bar-hopping but ultimately reborn narrator's "amoral appetite and wandering needs."[317]

A parallel can be made with *House Made of Dawn*'s Abel, the protagonist of N Scott Momaday's 1968 novel, which itself was also adapted into a film. Both Abel and Welch's narrator appear to be outsiders in both white and indigenous societies. Like the narrator in

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[311] Lincoln *Native American Renaissance*: 153.
[312] See: Alan R Velie 'The Use of Myth in James Welch's Novels' in Alan R Velie and A Robert Lee (Eds) *The Native American Renaissance: Literary imagination and Achievement*. University of Oklahoma Press; 2013: 89.
[313] Owens 'Earthboy's Return…': 28.
[314] Welch 'Winter in the Blood': 2.
[315] Owens 'Earthboy's Return…': 27.
[316] Erdoes and Ortiz *American Indian Trickster Tales*: xxi.
[317] Lincoln *Native American Renaissance*: 161.

Welch's novel, Abel is "irresponsible" and "footloose".[318] As Welch writes in 'Winter in the Blood' of the narrator, he is characterized by his amoral nature, and how he expresses "no love, no guilt, no conscience."[319] This is evident also in the duality of the father, John First Raise, and his own precarious position as he searches for meaning and identity in the Hi-Line of Montana. This is very much also a feature of the narrative of the film, as the viewer follows Virgil in a series of dream-like and a-chronological undertakings. However, despite some of his reprehensible actions, Virgil is not a victim, and neither are the Native peoples he interacts with.

After Virgil is beaten in a bar by his estranged wife's brother, Marlene (Lily Gladstone) offers Virgil comfort. This ultimately leads to a bedroom altercation which reflects elements of the Trickster Nixant's sexual hunger as well as Virgil's own selfishness. The moral aspect of the Trickster tale is evident in this sequence, despite the fact Virgil slaps Marlene after she asks him to engage in oral sex with her.[320] Louis Owens (Choctaw, Cherokee) offers an interpretation of this aggressive behaviour by Virgil:

> [H]is sense of her vulnerability and innocence all suggest that he is regressing toward the womb, that his fascination with Marlene is that of a child with mother. Her words are thus traumatic. [321]

Actress Lily Gladstone, who played Marlene, saw the character as a mirror of Virgil.[322] And the Marlene character appears to reaffirm that Virgil did not like what he saw in himself. Rather than victimise Marlene, the film offers her commensurate agency with Virgil during their tryst. Marlene begs Virgil not to leave as long as he promises not to hit her gain. To his regret, he admits, "I might, Marlene." On leaving, he leaves his hipflask on the bedroom dresser, a symbol that he is prepared to leave his alcoholism behind and purge his blood of whiskey. The flask offers a motif of Virgil's dependence, much like the rifle reflects his link to his father and brother.

Whilst Virgil's behaviour is reprehensible, at the heart of Trickster tales are stories of growth and development. This final lapse leads Virgil to confront his brother's death,

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[318] Momaday's novel was written in the context of the Korean or Vietnam War and the experience of Native Americans in the military, as when they were discharged many where disorientated. This account, partially, for the non-chronological narrative and sequence of events. Ironically, the sheer numbers of veterans on the reservations have countered these traumatic experiences, lending further weight to the discussion of the reservation as a space of caring and support in *Smoke Signals* (above). See: Velie *American Indian Quarterly*: 324-325.

[319] Welch 'Winter in the Blood': 2.

[320] Welch 'Winter in the Blood': 123.

[321] Owens 'Earthboy's Return…': 33.

[322] Santicola 'The Brothers Smith…': 502.

regressing back to his childhood and the twelve-year-old boy who could not prevent Mose's accident. This, ultimately, forestalls his final confrontation with Yellow Calf (Saginaw Grant), to have the rifle mended. Yellow Calf declares the rifle broken, a metaphor for the broken Virgil. However, on closer inspection is the revelation that there is something "stuck deep inside" the rifle, and Virgil had caused the blockage in the hours after his brother's death, further indicating the burying of the traumatic event.[323]

In this moment Virgil realises Yellow Calf is his grandfather. This is unsaid but is revealed in the symbolism of the scene. Saginaw Grant insisted to the Smith brothers that he would take his braided hair out "only in grief." After Yellow Calf is informed, in passing conversation with Virgil, of the Old Woman's death, Yellow Calf is seen slowly unwrapping his braids. This revelation ultimately reconciles Virgil's past and his link to his identity, through the realisation that he is of full Blackfeet and Gros Ventre descent, and not half white. At this point of understanding in the novel, a magpie arrives to observe Virgil:

> Trickster, in the form of a magpie, has shown up to view the transformation. It is trickster's role to challenge identities, to trick and probe and question and, above all prevent stasis and stagnation. [324]

However, the magpie is simply a metaphor for Virgil's own self. In the film, the Trickster leaves him. Virgil has achieved renewal and transformation and instead of the departing magpie, Virgil's old self departs, as he is now in a position to grow as a person and become a meaningful whole. Within Virgil is Vizenor's 'post-Indian' warrior, a formation that is reliant on Trickster discourse, and he becomes the narrator of indigenous presence:

> [P]ostindian warriors encounter their enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horse, and they create their stories with a new sense of survivance.[325]

Virgil regains his tribal identity over the course of the film, offering a story that fits the needs of Native American men who find their identities displaced and removed from contemporary society. It also offers a departure in a filmic sense, reflecting the influence of Welch's literature and the intimate manner in which the Smith brothers utilize the source novel and the have worked closely with their Native American actors.


vi: Conclusion

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[323] Owens 'Earthboy's Return…': 36.
[324] Santicola 'The Brothers Smith…': 503.
[325] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: 4.

The Trickster figure plays an important role in the book in the form of a magpie. In the film, Virgil manifests the Trickster figure, due to the similarities between Napa and Nixant and his own character. These ingredients are obviously key in Welch's construction of No-Name, and the protagonist occupies this position in the film, particularly focalizing the moral aspect this allows. Virgil can look to the future whilst acknowledging the importance of history and the refusal that indigenous peoples would need to succumb to it, just as Vizenor has discussed the use of the Trickster to counter the elision of the Native American self via the constructed 'Indian' in history. In the film this is done through the use of flashforwards and flashbacks, and in these sequences, we might glimpse that there is the hope of reconciliation. The Trickster figure offers a means to come to terms with indigenous history, to critique contemporary conditions, and move forward despite the mainstream United States' biased treatment of indigenous peoples in legal, political, and social arenas.

In the following chapter these ideas are developed through close examination of Native American films that can be seen in the documentary tradition of filmmaking. These suggest almost in the moment, off-the-cuff filming, and use more recent ways of making and approaching film, such as the use of digital cameras and drones. This has lent filmmaking in this context a 'guerrilla' feel, but also reflects a stark picture of the event in time, also offering an opportunity to combine these methods with other technological developments in mass media, such as social media, to present a complex social commentary of protest in the 21$^{st}$ century. This is significant as it offers a means with which to counter and disrupt mainstream film and media, but also offers an important indigenous presence and intervention to ongoing issues of human and land rights.

**Chapter Three: Documentary Film and Native American Activism**

1: Standing Rock and its Ancestors: Filmic Interventions and Disruptions in *Taking Alcatraz* (2015)

i: Introduction: The Lakota

By the mid-1800s the Lakota were a strong and independent tribe.[326] The Lakota people (Nation, tribes, *Oyate,* or society) comprise the *Oceti Sakowin* or Seven Council Fires. They number between 100,000 and 150,000 people in the US and between 6000 and 10,000 people in Canada. They reside today on lands encompassing Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. The Standing Rock Sioux Reservation are inhabited by Lakota/ Teton peoples who were largely Plains warriors and hunters. Lakota peoples began life further east in Minnesota, but warfare with other tribes, and European expansion, brought them west to the Plains region.[327] For the Lakota, the centrality of the nomadic-hunting lifestyle is expressed in Luther Standing Bear's *My Indian Boyhood*. The longest chapter in the book is dedicated to 'Hunting and Fishing', underscoring the prominence of these means of sustenance to Lakota life, society, and culture.[328]

Whilst cultural collision with other tribes meant a natural progression west for the Lakota, the rapidity of European-American encroachment had a tremendous impact on their nomadic-hunting lifestyle:

> [H]ordes of immigrants trekked through Sioux county and laid waste to a swath of land for several hundred miles on both sides of the Platte River. They killed or drove away game, their cattle consumed the grass, their fires eliminated the woods, their garbage littered the trail, and their diseases killed Sioux.[329]

The Lakota sought reparations for the damage to grass and livestock by the settlers. Conversely, white settlers felt they were being extorted by the Lakota and called for the authorities to intervene. White emigrants began to flow across the continent in search of California gold in the late 1840s which further undermined any notion of a 'Permanent Indian Frontier' as a requirement of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. The region west of the

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[326] Luther Standing Bear *My Indian Boyhood* University of Nebraska Press; 2006 [1931]: 2.

[327] Judith Walker and Pierre Walter 'Learning About Social Movements through News Media: Deconstructing New York Times and Fox News Representations of Standing Rock' *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37, no. 4, 2018: 402.

[328] Standing Bear *My Indian Boyhood* viii.

[329] As Walker and Walter write: "[t]he word 'Sioux' is a misnomer derived from the French version of Chippewa (Ojibwe) but has been adopted by many bands". 'Learning About Social Movements…': 416.

Mississippi was set aside in perpetuity for 'Indians', and was as much to separate Native Americans from the alcohol and diseases being chartered west by whites. Following Jefferson's policy of removal, in which many Native Americans died in the journey's westward, and continuing white encroachment, the 'Permanent Indian Frontier' was abandoned, and Plains tribes were forced onto Reservations. This was underwritten by the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie.[330] As Walker and Walter continue:

> In 1851, the First Fort Laramie (Wyoming) Treaty was signed by Sioux representatives and others, allowing passage of migrants and land concessions in exchange for government compensation for destroyed lands. This was followed by a flood of settlers and US military incursions into Sioux territories, vicious 'Indian Wars' against the Sioux and others, and eventually the Second Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. The second Treaty established in perpetuity the Great Sioux Reservation, comprising lands from the Missouri River to the Big Horn Mountains, including the Black Hills, the Badlands and all of South Dakota west of the Missouri. However, in 1874, George Custer, among others, violated the Treaty and led a military expedition to the Black Hills where they discovered gold. The USA then tried to buy the Black Hills, the Sioux refused, and in 1875, the government ordered all Lakota to travel to designated reserves or be declared 'hostiles'. Several major battles followed, ending in 1876 with the Battle of Little Big Horn, in which Custer and 267 men were killed by Lakota warriors led by Crazy Horse (Oglala Lakota), with support from spiritual leader Sitting Bull (Hunkpapa Lakota). Crazy Horse later surrendered to the US military and was bayoneted, and the US Congress voted to unilaterally take over the Black Hills.[331]

The Black Hills have long been deemed a theft from the Lakota, in this respect.

In mid-2016 to early 2017, indigenous peoples and their allies gathered at Standing Rock to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which was encroaching on Lakota land and further undermining of the 1851 Treaty. This was captured by a number of documentary filmmakers, including Sky Hopinka (Ho-Chunk/ Pechanga-Luiseño) and Myron Dewey (Newe-Numah/ Paiute-Shoshone). This final chapter considers Standing Rock as a cultural and political event mediated by film. Standing Rock is contemplated in the context of key moments of US-Siouan history: from the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaties (1851 and 1868) to Wounded Knee in 1890, and the Occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, with these events forming an ongoing discussion throughout the chapter. This is considered in the documentary *Taking Alcatraz* (Ferry 2015) in this chapter's first section.

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[330] See: Jeffrey Ostler *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2004: 32-36.
[331] Learning About Social Movements: 417-418.

Standing Rock represents an important political and cultural intervention against US colonialism and capitalism for the preservation of Sioux land rights and was the focus of indigenous documentary filmmakers. These include Hopinka and Dewey, who directed *Dislocation Blues* and *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock*, respectively, which together with *Taking Alcatraz* provide a critical dialogue around indigenous activisms. Focusing on *Taking Alcatraz*, this section examines the documentary form with regards indigenous representation and highlights how film contributes to the revitalization of indigenous knowledge systems abrogated by dominant US culture. The stress here is on ways documentary film continues to animate political and cultural discourse, forming a space of critical intervention into US settler-colonial society.

*Taking Alcatraz* is a documentary account of the 1969 Occupation of Alcatraz Island by the Indians of All Tribes (IoAT), and illustrates the significance of pan-Tribal organisation, as well as how film can animate indigenous history which reconfigures colonial history. Arguably, low-budget activist documentaries such as *Taking Alcatraz* offer a means with which to disrupt settler-colonial discourse and open up previously closed dialogues of indigenous history. Engaging with the Western genre as a point of departure as opposed to a point of critical enquiry will only naturalize the process that any filmic intervention seeks to achieve. Moving away from a Eurocentric interpretation is central to this process, by considering indigenous epistemology and alternative meanings which filmic constructions can animate.

These readings will be supported by Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou, Māori) methodological commitment in employing indigenous knowledge. Tuhiwai Smith argues that alternative knowledge systems can be used to counter colonial imaginings, adopt non-Eurocentric narratives and form a part of environmental praxis.[332] Therefore, this chapter will make use of the work of early twentieth century Lakota writers Charles Eastman Ohiyesa and Luther Standing Bear in its analysis and consider how indigenous epistemology responds to US narratives of progress, of limitless growth and the weight of European imperialism and colonialism as precursors to contemporary globalization.

*Taking Alcatraz* is a film that engages with historical factors to establish and ground a counter-narrative to nation-forming and celebratory hegemonic narratives of the US colonial state. *Taking Alcatraz* takes the historical referent of the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and

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[332] Linda Tuhiwai Smith *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 2013 [1998]: 1-5.

1869 and re-signifies them via filmic repetition and metonymic association. Arguably, then, filmic tropes present an opportunity to establish an intervention into imposed colonial narratives, with cultural constructions of the 'Indian' forming a useful starting point. However, these cultural formations are not solely derived from film, but reflect US discourse. That is, frontier mythology has continually pitted the 'Indian' against the US self, e.g., the cowboy.[333] These notions, whilst finding expression in popular culture, go beyond cultural formations, seeping into the very fabric of the US nation. However, these cultural constructions have found expression within film, particularly in Hollywood, to the detriment of Native American representation. This section will consider how the documentary form can offer an alternative vision of the US, and has served as a cinematic mode that has been an important aspect of indigenous filmmaking.

The Standing Rock – or *Oceti Sakowin* – protest camps set up in 2016 to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) remain the focus for the rest of the chapter. In the second section, *Dislocation Blues* (Hopinka 2017) presents a narrative which contemplates the contemporary nature of indigenous identity. Hopinka's short also considers the ongoing problem of representation, despite increased agency gained from improved access to film cameras and other social media which have proved useful tools in forming anti-colonial narrative positions within film and other audio-visual media. Finally, this chapter studies *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* (Fox, Spione, Dewey 2017). This film emphasises the ephemeral nature of the *Oceti Sakowin* camp but considers how place in film represents a recurring trope that offers an important intervention into the ongoing imposition and contradictions of US colonialism on indigenous peoples fighting for human and land rights. As Myron Dewey reflects in his film: "[t]his is just one of many corporate attacks currently occurring in every Indigenous community globally", especially as history, in terms of economic and cultural imperialism against indigenous peoples on the North American continent, tends to repeat.

These documentary films offer a means with which to disrupt settler-colonial discourse and open up previously closed dialogues of indigenous history. In some ways, these play on stereotypical Hollywood representations of Native Americans, but more importantly,

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[333] See, for example: Richard Slotkin *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum; 1992: 10-13. Whilst Robert Warrior (Osage) also notes that the frontier has been weaponised as discourse against Native Americans. Calling the frontier 'an ideologically imbued term that has served as a primary weapon in the material oppression of Native Americans in the Americas.' In: *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press; 2005: xxvi.

are linked with indigenous tradition and epistemology. Engaging with the Western genre as a point of departure as opposed to a point of critical enquiry will only naturalize the process that any filmic intervention seeks to achieve. Moving away from a westernized interpretation is central to this process, by considering indigenous epistemology and alternative meanings and the possibility of *différance* – that is, a deferral of inherited and secure meaning – which filmic constructions can animate and move beyond the stifling culture created by representations of 'Indians'. These strategies offer a means to counter colonially imposed signification, as will be emphasised with reference to key moments in US-Siouan history, and consider Native American presence in film, too often misrepresented within film and cultural discourse.

ii: The Historical Site as Film Trope

In terms of indigenous political resistance and protest against US colonial structures, the period after the Second World War up to the late 1960s saw a focus on decolonization and indigenous sovereignty. Events staged by the Red Power Movement between August 1970, June, and July of 1971 and again in July 1976, contested both the public space and the memories attached to them.[334] Many of the events acted as an ironic counter-commemoration of the nation's past. Events that occurred at national places of identity making, such as Mount Rushmore, a site where settler-colonialism was sustained and memorialized, were interventions both literal and symbolic.[335]

Cheyenne and Arapaho director Chris Eyre's 2002 film *Skins* references such real-life locations to create a powerful symbolic effect. In the film, Rudy Yellowshirt (Eric Schweig) gives George Washington's likeness at Mount Rushmore a bloody nose, echoing the Red Power Movement's earlier activism. Eyre makes use of the documentary form to add

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[334] The example of protests held at Mount Rushmore, which ultimately "invert the sacred symbols of settler American identity and colonialism" whilst challenging "the real and symbolic erasure of indigenous peoples." Sam Hitchmough 'Columbus Statues Are Coming Down – Why He Is So Offensive to Native Americans,' https://theconversation.com/columbus-statues-are-coming-down-why-he-is-so-offensive-to-native-americans-141144 accessed 20/08/2020.

[335] The late 1970s witnessed a shift in the Red Power Movement's focus to the environment and museum activism. The historical narrative of Red Power is focused primarily on this middle period and defined by such events as the Occupation of Alcatraz. For this reason, understanding of the classic Red Power movement lacks nuance. Furthermore, lesser-known or 'failed' events, such as the takeover of Ellis Island, may remove the physicality of the event but not the ideology. These 'utterances' achieve something. As the Indians of All Tribes would later proclaim: "[w]e came to Alcatraz with an idea. We would unite our people and show the world that the Indian spirit would last forever… The idea was born and spread across this land, not as a fire of anger, but as a warming glow." See: Attic (The). *We Hold the Rock!* https://www.theattic.space/home-page- blogs/indiansalcatraz accessed 27/10/2020.

authenticity to his film, splicing archival and news footage within the narrative. This strategy lends authenticity to the images within *Skins* and suggests a link between film, documentary, and indigenous activism that is key to *Taking Alcatraz*. Eyre, essentially, lends an alternative meaning to Mount Rushmore, one which has been abrogated by US history, connecting the space to indigenous activism, and leaving the historical meaning open to reinterpretation. The 'bloody nose' given to Washington could be seen as a red tear, representing the blood of indigenous peoples. Rather than maintaining Mount Rushmore as a site of US colonial dominance, the Black Hills have been re-inscribed by Rudy's red paint.

*Taking Alcatraz* confronts the viewer in precisely this manner.[336] By re-articulating the significance of the Occupation of Alcatraz, it asks the viewer to interact with US-Sioux history, and thus invites the viewer to consider the production of discourse and meaning. As such, this film offers an engagement with a narrative thread of US history linked to indigenous political intervention into US historical discourse; one that is not as congruent to the ideas of the nation, and nation building. As Jeffrey Geiger reveals:

> [d]ocumentary does not just reflect or engage with national consciousness, it helps us to imagine ideas and futures beyond its immediate framework and subject matter; it has the potential to transform the experience and comprehension of the national imaginary.[337]

Film, in particular the Western genre, has contributed to ideas about America that reflect dominant discourse, such as the progressive narrative of the frontier.[338] The Western genre's dedication to projecting images of 'Indians' in romanticised forms or as a savage enemy of progress has reinforced these ideas. However, documentary has proved a powerful tool for filmmakers to disrupt dominant discursive narratives and the images that support them.

Hollywood depictions of Native Americans have never been representational of tribal cultures. Rather the 'Indian' is a simulation expressive of the histories of dominance and  the 'Indians' of the movies illustrate 'encounters with the anti-selves of civilization.'[339] In this sense, 'Indians' are a construct of the US' imperial designs. This is congruent with Thomas Jefferson's ideology of the republic that hinged on expansionism and the potential of building

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[336] The film transposes the viewer back to the reservation era and places the narrative on the significance of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. *Taking Alcatraz* is a 40-minute documentary that had a budget of around $10,000, and, in director Ferry's own words is meant as a 'primer'. 'Director Biography - John Ferry.'   https://filmfreeway.com/423513 accessed 07/11/2020.
[337] Geiger *American Documentary Film*: 5.
[338] See Slotkin *Gunfighter Nation*: 10-13.
[339] Gerald Vizenor *Manifest Matters: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press; 1999: 4-7.

a democracy on indigenous lands.[340] Ferry's documentary can offer insight into the contradictions of US 'manifest destiny' and the smooth narrative lines of history that accompany liberal state policy.[341] *Taking Alcatraz* also provides a movement through static moments in history, between the visual referents of Alcatraz Island and the earlier period of indigenous resistance (the so-called Indian Wars), by emphasising the solidarity between multifarious tribes in the late 1800s and again in the 1960s. The last time indigenous peoples unified in such a way was against General George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry, at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, and Alcatraz notwithstanding, would not do so again in such great numbers until Standing Rock in 2016.

Recognition of cultural referents in film is ultimately open to interpretation and decoding. In fact, re-staging events in film undermines any notion of fixity, if this were even possible, as the originary event is ultimately displaced by its reproduction and the original meaning is deferred, as per Derrida's logic. Of course, Derrida's trace remains in this filmic context, be it the trace of The Fort Laramie Treaties, Wounded Knee, or the Occupation of Alcatraz; previous historical events are ultimately represented and informed by other happenings i.e., the Fort Laramie Treaties have continued historical significance at Alcatraz and Standing Rock. In addition, repetition of historical narratives in film thus challenges established meaning which can be deferred through form and context. This emphasises how metonymic reproduction contributes to the process of naturalization and denaturalization; but the 'trace' in this instance offers a point of critical enquiry via the audio-visual reference in Ferry's film.[342]

iii: Indians of All Tribes (IoAT) Alcatraz Proclamation

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[340] See, for example, Ostler's *The Plains Sioux*: 13-17.

[341] Jodi A Byrd *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis/ London: University of Minnesota Press; 2011: xx-xxvii.

[342] Jacques Derrida [translated by Peggy Kamuf] 'Given Time: The Time of the King. *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2, 1992: 161-87.

The Indians of All Tribes Proclamation. Thanks to John Ferry, director of *Taking Alcatraz* and producer of LilliMar films; subsequent images in this section were supplied by Ferry.

*Taking Alcatraz* director John Ferry has worked in documentary film since 1975, and has directed and produced a number of films, including *Sitting Bull: A Stone in My Heart* (2006) and *Contrary Warrior: The Life and Times of Adam Fortunate Eagle* (2010). The subject of the latter is the artist and activist Adam Fortunate Eagle, author of the 2008 account of the Occupation of Alcatraz, *Heart of the Rock* (2008). Born Adam Nordwall to a Swedish father and Ojibwe mother, Fortunate Eagle, along with Richard Oakes (Mohawk), was part of the early organisation to establish an 'Indian' presence on Alcatraz Island. Nordwall had apparently alerted the media to the first occupation of Alcatraz in 1964, which stands as a precursor to the 1969 occupation.

Evidently, the 'dismissive' reporting of a 'Wacky Invasion' was Fortunate Eagle's doing, and not the media's slippage into facetious stereotypes. However, such context could potentially reaffirm historical and cultural stereotypes of Native Americans. An activist whose specialism was publicity stunts, Fortunate Eagle had achieved just that, but the chemistry was not quite right for a successful occupation at this time. However, the anti-colonial ideology, and use of humour and irony, incorporated into public acts of indigenous protest remained, and has always been a feature of indigenous political activism. Notably this was seen in 1968, when Columbus' discovery of America was re-enacted with boy scouts dressed as Native Americans. In protest at this, Fortunate Eagle 'scalped' event organizer Joe

Cervetto, flicking off his toupee with his ceremonial stick, much to the assorted amusement and chagrin of the crowd.[343]

The use of humour and satire can be further illustrated by the original declaration that was presented at the onset of the Occupation of Alcatraz on the 20 November 1969 by a group of 78 Native Americans. The 'Indians of All Tribes' Proclamation, composed by Fortunate Eagle, stated:

> We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for twenty-four dollars ($24) in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man's purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago. We know that $24 in trade goods for these 16 acres is more than was paid when Manhattan Island was sold, but we know that land values have risen over the years. Our offer of $1.24 per acre is greater than the 47¢ per acre that the white men are now paying the California Indians for their land.[344]

The original statement is reproduced on the *History Is A Weapon* website in 2020. This again suggests the urgency in not consigning history to the past, but ensuring it remains part of everyday discourse, especially where historical transgressions have occurred. This offers an important aspect of cultural and spiritual renewal for indigenous peoples, and an important point of agency within the confines of a US historical narrative. *Taking Alcatraz* takes up these narrative threads of history.

The Proclamation has a playfulness, speaking to and representing an alternative take on a history that is usually presented as progressive and for the benefit of white Europeans under the auspices of a 'manifest destiny'. This animation of a less triumphant version of the US' strategy of land acquirement during the early colonial period offers a deferral of the dominant narrative. Furthermore, the use of humour and irony offers a non-aggressive route with which to consider the structural and historical power relations of the US, whilst animating pre-colonial indigenous knowledge and identities. Alcatraz Island opened up a 'Native Space' in film with which to rethink the colonial landscape.[345] The emergence of pan-Tribal identity at Alcatraz evokes a collective indigenous identity with which to counter

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[343] See: Sam McManis 'Adam Fortunate Eagle Nordwall: Bay Area's Trickster Grandfather of Radical Indian Movement' https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/PROFILE-Adam-Fortunate-Eagle-Nordwall-Bay-2781588.php accessed 07/11/2020.

[344] 'History Is A Weapon' *Alcatraz Proclamation and Letter* (1969) https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/alcatrazproclamationandletter.html accessed 20/08/2020. All subsequent references to the Proclamation are taken from this webpage.

[345] Barnd discusses the submerged 'Native Spaces' which can be deployed strategically by inhabiting – or playing – on indigenous identity to contest colonialism. This includes using the concepts of the 'Indian' and Indian-ness, as cultural constructions as a site of investigation and disruption. Natchee Blu Barnd, *Native Space: Geographic Strategies to Unsettle Settler Colonialism*. Eugene: Oregon State University Press; 2017: 1-5.

cultural stereotypes perpetuated globally, not least in Hollywood. Moreover, these tropes were also played on at Alcatraz, in order to deconstruct colonial logics that underpin dominant discourses, as opposed to simply counter filmic and cultural stereotypes.[346]

Furthermore, the Indians of All Tribes' Proclamation were underpinned by the Fort Laramie Treaty, that demands all surplus property be returned to indigenous peoples: that is, a clause in the treaty which refers to all unused and unceded lands be returned to the original indigenous owners. From this the organisers took their cue and reclaimed the site of the former prison which had closed in 1963. The power of the action was not simply in the act of occupation itself, but in the actions the occupiers took whilst on the island, such as cleaning up, and converting the disused buildings into a site of education and training. Crucial to this action was the construction of an Indigenous Cultural Centre, and the establishment of a Central Council, which, as was stated, was 'not a governing body, but an operational one'.[347]

These acts on the Island established an indigenous presence, one which was firmly situated in the contemporary US. This Native American 'space' may have been ephemeral, but the documentary 'capturing' is a form of confrontation rather than absorption. Film animates the space once physically occupied; that is, whilst the occupation has long since ended, its reference in the cultural text of film continues to animate this particular period in history, offering movement to a time and space that has ceased to be in physical terms. Furthermore, the ironic references to Manhattan Island, that was seemingly 'bought' by the Dutch West India Company in 1626 with $24 worth of trinkets, continues the performative and ideological goals set out in the Proclamation, revealing an 'interactive performativity' but also highlighting the tradition of indigenous storytelling at the heart of the Proclamation's narrative.

This continuum in literature/ storytelling is perhaps best expressed in Tommy Orange's (Cheyenne and Arapaho) 2018 *There There*, which references the OoA. Orange's *There There* not only presents an indigenous interpretation but offers presence to indigenous people through representation, continuing the work of Native American cultural commentators, artists, writers, and filmmakers. Orange's *There There* offers a literary supplement to the visuals presented in Ferry's *Taking Alcatraz* and provides cultural continuity of indigenous presence. It is these representations that counter dominant cultural formations that are animated by US constructions of the 'Indian'.

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[346] Byrd *The Transit of Empire*: xxx.
[347] Source: 'History Is A Weapon' *Alcatraz Proclamation and Letter* (1969) https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/alcatrazproclamationandletter.html accessed 20/08/2020.

Orange's novel deals primarily with urban Native Americans who are disillusioned with the life that was forced upon them as a result of Termination and Relocation, which is played on at Alcatraz, and those urban Native Americans finding conditions in the cities no better than life on Reservations. The Proclamation goes on to state that Alcatraz Island is 'more than suitable for an Indian Reservation, as determined by the white man's own standards', further concluding that the population of the island have been held as prisoners and dependents, with Alcatraz serving as a perfect metaphor and microcosm for US-indigenous relations.

iv: *Détournement* and *Différance*

The IoAT Proclamation can be considered a rhetorical *détournement*, that is, a document which presents a subversive reading of dominant historical discourse with scepticism and irreverence as a decolonial strategy. Ferry's images of the OoA provide a visual aesthetic expressive of the pan-Tribal identity established by the Occupation and strategized by its leaders. Whilst Alcatraz was unfit for human habitation, the occupiers immediately refashioned the buildings into a functioning community. Alcatraz Island's resemblance to the Reservation illustrates again the arbitrary manner in which colonial practices have affected Native Americans. As Casey Ryan Kelly writes:

> The IOAT Proclamation exemplifies the radical potential of détournement. Leading up to the occupation, movement leaders emphasized the importance of collectively reading the key texts used in defense of colonialism to expose their contradictions.[348]

The declaration at the onset of the occupation with the IoAT leaders laying claim to the former federal prison "by right of discovery" is deeply ironic. Playing on Columbus' declaration that he had 'discovered' America, when it had been occupied for thousands of years, illustrates the deployment of *détournement*, and a way to re-read the white Euro-

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[348] Casey Ryan Kelly 'Détournement, Decolonization, and the American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island (1969–1971)' *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44, no. 2, 2014: 168-90. *Détournement* was a strategy advocated by the Situationist International, a small collective of artists and intellectuals which formed in Paris in 1957, known for its avant-garde theory and influence on the 1968 student and worker movements. The strategy, as noted, was to subvert dominant ideologies through a shift in the context of the cultural text. *Détournement* comes close to Derrida's *différance*, which is a deferral of meaning, or interruption of the (cultural) text. 'Detours' in phrase and syntax are suggested by Derrida in his essay *Différance*, in *Speech and Phenomena: And other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* [Translated by David. B Allison] Evanston: Northwestern University Press; 1973: 134. See also: Jan D Matthews 'An Introduction to the Situationists.' *theanarchistlibrary.org*, 2005, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jan-d-matthews-an-introduction-to-the-situationists accessed 24/08/2020.

American colonial 'discovery' and occupation of America. Moreover, what the IoAT did do exceptionally well was make their presence known, not only to the local San Francisco Bay Area, which would be a vital source of supplies in the coming 18 months, but to the world's media.[349] This strategy, whilst initially caught in print media, and illustrated by *Taking Alcatraz*, forms and contributes to an ongoing media performativity that relies on a myriad of audio-visual imagery and cultural commentary in film, literature and other media to undermine colonial discourse.
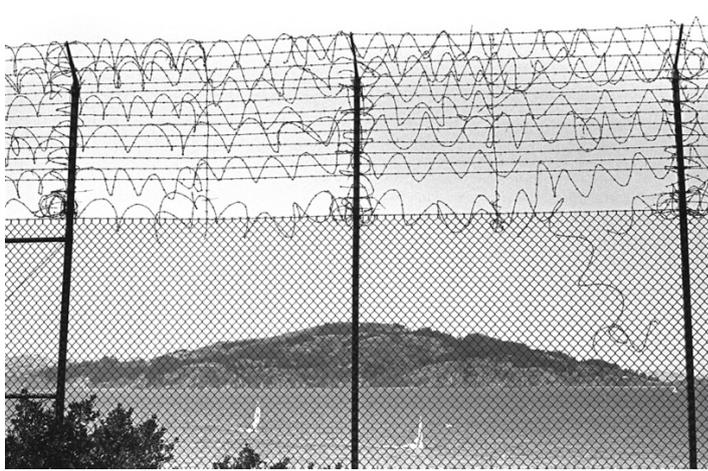


The Occupiers' view from Alcatraz Island.

The IoAT, who were not all representative of the Plains tribes, effectively drew on cultural signifiers that had crossed between Native and white peoples via film and television, particularly the Western genre. Cultural motifs, typically attributed to the Plains tribes, such as the headdress, bow and arrow, tepee, and beating drums were utilized as a visual backdrop to the IoAT on Alcatraz, as can be seen in the documentary footage that *Taking Alcatraz* weaves into its narrative. A mid-shot of some of the activists in front of the derelict buildings of the prison which were resurfaced with graffiti, stating that the prison and island were now 'United Indian Property', emphasises how pan-Tribal indigenous identity played a part in the Occupation of Alcatraz. Prominent anthropologist and cultural critic Margaret Mead described how this strategy affected the public consciousness, describing the Occupation of Alcatraz as "a magnificent piece of dramatization."[350]

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[349] However, as David Milner argues, the occupation gathered momentum through the print media, whilst a large collection of televisual news has been largely overlooked. See 'By Right of Discovery: The Media and the Native American Occupation of Alcatraz, 1969-1971' *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 33, America in the 1970s, no. 1, 2014: 76.

[350] See: Attic (The) *We Hold the Rock!* https://www.theattic.space/home-page-    blogs/indiansalcatraz accessed 27/10/2020.

Satire and humour are important aspects of storytelling, which has been reused to great success by director Chris Eyre, as well as modern works of literature by James Welch (Blackfeet and A'aninin) and Tommy Orange, among others. Such narratives have been used as gestures of 'survivance', and a means with which to offer an indigenous presence within US culture and society. For Gerald Vizenor, the 'Indian' represents the absence of real natives and symbolizes the simulations of colonial dominance.[351] Irony and humour, which is part of the indigenous storytelling tradition, offers an epistemological system with which to reconsider dominant discourse within cultural formations. The IoAT Proclamation, and the graffiti that remained at the site for years after the actual occupation of Alcatraz ended, played on notions of the 'Indian' and re-inscribed the historical narrative with Native American presence, as seen via film representations in *Taking Alcatraz*.[352]

The strategy of *détournement*, building Linda Tuhiwai Smith's critical methodology of decolonization, offers an ideological underpinning to counter colonial practices. *Détournement* proposes an approach with which to engage with, and act upon, Euro-American history, and the ongoing practices of capitalism and colonialism. In the above instance, the IoAT's declaration evokes the Declaration of Independence, as well as US originary narratives and concepts, such as the frontier and 'manifest destiny'.[353] As Kelly confirms: "[b]y arranging iconic selections of sacred Western political texts in a subversive parody, the IoAT illustrated how most Euro-American political texts are quite amenable to the colonial mentality."[354] This strategy undermines the hegemony of US mythology and dominant white structures that have been naturalized within dominant cultural texts, such as the Declaration of Independence.

In addition, the satirical reference to the purchase of Manhattan Island, in the IoAT's 'Proclamation to the Great White Father' set the tone for the Alcatraz action, and a determined counter-colonial strategy based on non-violent protest, indigenous knowledge, and playing on stereotypical tropes of 'Indians' in contemporary culture and the mainstream media. These strategies would come into great effect again at Standing Rock.[355] These

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[351] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: 1-16.
[352] See, for example: Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa 'Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Island.' *Annals of Tourism Research* 30, no. 2, 2003: 386-405, and Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo 'Holding the Rock: The 'Indianization' of Alcatraz Island, 1969-1999.' *The Public Historian* 23, no. 1, 2001: 55-74; also: Dean Rader *Engaged Resistance: American Indian art, literature, and film from Alcatraz to the NMAI*. Austin: University of Texas Press; 2011.
[353] Tuhiwai Smith 'Decolonizing…': 173-174; 183.
[354] Kelly 'Détournement…': 175.
[355] Milner 'By Right of Discovery…': 75.

ideological animations are not only based on dominant texts, but work through popular culture to establish a 'Native Space' in film and counter-hegemonic narratives that denaturalize white patriarchal interpretations of history.

### v: The Fort Laramie Treaties and (De)Naturalizing Dominant Discourse

Politically, the treaty of 1868 signalled the end of 'Red Cloud's War', begun in 1866. This era witnessed the Sioux and Cheyenne allies lead a series of sieges against the forts of the Bozeman trail: Fort Reno, Fort Phil Kearney, and Fort C F Smith, in response to gold-driven white encroachment in the Black Hills. The result of the treaty and the cease of hostilities persuaded the government to close the road to public travel. This did not stop goldminers from traversing the Bighorn Mountains; neither did it prevent their deaths at the hands of the area's indigenous inhabitants. The legal boundaries of the Great Sioux Reservation were established as part of the signing of the second Treaty of Fort Laramie in the spring of 1868, which affirmed indigenous hunting rights and signalled the military withdrawal from the Bozeman Trail forts. As Castle McLaughlin writes:

> In the spring of 1868, Red Cloud and his allies signed a treaty at Fort Laramie in which the United States established legal boundaries for the Great Sioux Reservation and affirmed Indian hunting rights to both the Powder River country and the Republican Fork of the Smoky Hill River, in present-day Kansas. In exchange, the war leaders agreed to cease hostilities.[356]

Whilst the Fort Laramie Treaty, historically, signalled the beginning of a chain of events that would lead to the diminishment of Sioux lands and their economic and cultural systems, the narrative established by *Taking Alcatraz* disrupts this historical interpretation commonly referred to as the end of the so-called 'Indian Wars' and indigenous resistance.[357]

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[356] Castle McLaughlin *Lakota War Book from the Little Big Horn*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; 2014: 27.
[357] Indigenous resistance to US colonialism persisted and adapted to the conditions of the early 20th century and the period of assimilation. Luther Standing Bear's life and writings are a perfect example of this. See: Louis S. Warren *God's Red Son: The Ghost Dance Religionand the Making of Modern America*. London: Hachette UK; 2017. See also: Jenny Tone-Pah-Hote *Crafting an Indigenous Nation: Kiowa Expressive Culture in the Progressive Era*. Greensboro: University of North Carolina Press; 2018.

'This Land Is My Land' sign resisting US colonialism at Alcatraz.

The Fort Laramie Treaties form the context of John Ferry's film. *Taking Alcatraz* takes the viewer 'back' in time – in Ferry's own view – forcing the viewer to consider dominant cultural and historical narratives of 'progress'. This visual recreation, essentially, questions the viewer's material relation to the referent; that is, the representation is never fully realised because of the metonymic chain, leaving the trope inherently unstable; one through which the narrative can be denaturalized or rearticulated.[358] Donna L Akers (Choctaw) makes reference to the US 'Master Narrative' and its function in historical discourse to present an unfettered image of the white American past that procured former indigenous lands through purchase.

Fitting into this over-arching mythology is the notion that the method of treaty making between white and indigenous was sound and identical to international treaty protocol. However, this was not the case. As Akers writes:

> These treaties were almost without exception procured through corrupt and dishonourable practices sanctioned by the highest levels of the U.S. government. Treaty making between the United States and Indigenous nations was unique and distinct from the methods and practices used in international diplomacy; indeed, it constitutes a completely different system, one plainly designed to conform only to the outer appearance of treaty making.[359]

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[358] Judith Butler *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London and New York: Routledge; 2011 [1993]: 88-89.

[359] Donna L Akers 'Decolonizing the Master Narrative: Treaties and Other American Myths', 2014, *Wicazo Sa Review,* 29(1), 58-76.

Treaty making was a major tool of Euro-American conquest of the North American continent and fits with the celebratory narratives of US nation building and the triumphant dialogue of the mastery over the wilderness and frontier mythology, as well as the legal legitimation set down by the Doctrine of Discovery.

The influence of such US originary discourse continues to affect representation of Native Americans. The 'master narrative' of the US, whilst a conflation of many aspects of nation building, continues to abrogate the Native American, undermine indigenous presence, and paint a celebratory master narrative. Filmic representation is always open to movement, enabling challenges to dominant tropes and ideology. As noted, the representation of Big Foot in *Hidalgo* expresses *différance* perfectly, as the recreation of the photograph within the cinematic image divides the referent and blurs the boundary between recreation and representation.[360]

The photograph of this moment 'freezes' Big Foot in the bleak snow where he was left to die; the cinematic recreation offers literal movement to the image, but also figurative. Rather than Big Foot being a victim of the US military in perpetuity, his filmic representation recovers his narrative 'lost' in the snow, of his identity and the other so-called victims of Wounded Knee, as an inevitable consequence of the cultural clash between the US and Native North America.[361] This interpretation illustrates how reading against the grain can undermine the celebratory historical narratives attributed to US nation building and offer presence to a history and culture that has nullified its indigenous peoples and replaced them with tropes that represent the triumphant nature of the teleological narratives of the US.

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (Salish and Kootenai) has used similar images in her artwork to the same effect, most notably, *See Red: Target* (1992), which is an eleven-foot mixed media piece utilising paint, photography and newspaper cuttings capturing historical and popular images of Native Americans in US culture, and topped with a dartboard with darts placed to represent a headdress. The effect of this work is comparable to the effect of film. It is a cultural mashup that refuses to freeze the 'Indian' in time. In fact, addressing cultural stereotypes is essential to the narrative of the piece, as Quick-to-See Smith observes: "Native people are often left without a voice. Native people must decide to take up space – to use our voices in the most powerful way we can think of." Ironically, the piece was first

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[360] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology*. JHU Press; 1976 [1967]: xi-xii; xxxix; xliii; lvii.
[361] Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology* [Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak] JHU Press; 1976 [1967]: 144-5.

commissioned in 1992 as a response to the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the US and a commentary on the commodification of Native Americans.[362]

It is this ongoing conversation about the foundations of the US that is critical to the discourse on Native American representation. As Quick-to-See Smith continues: "[i]t's like we don't exist, except in the movies or as mascots for sports teams, like the Washington Redskins or the Cleveland Indians." Quick-to-See Smith's words reflect the ongoing concern of US society's obsession with the 'Indian', a facet of the colonial logic of US settler society. *See Red: Target* re-signifies tropes of Indian-ness by illustrating their centrality to US society, juxtaposing historical images with cultural references. The piece itself reflects on the cultural oppression faced by indigenous North American peoples, and their environmental loss. Other contextual issues of the contemporary period have prompted acquisitions by the National Gallery of Art, including the Black Lives Matter movement and the 2020 presidential election. Smith also cites Standing Rock as being part of that same influence helping to challenge mainstream curatorial practice.[363]

This animation of history is seen in the opening scenes of *Taking Alcatraz*. The grainy cinematic pan across rows of white tepees which establishes the narrative context of *Taking Alcatraz*'s opening moments builds a connection between representation and the ongoing issue of indigenous land rights and environmental destruction. The conical tent being the dwelling of the indigenous Plains tribes, further determines historical and cultural context. The tepee also forms a visual link between the Reservation era and the Occupation of Alcatraz, maintaining a continuum in indigenous resistance, and emphasising the presence of Native Americans in US history, society, and culture, in a similar way to Quick-to-See Smith's *See Red: Target*. In the documentary a sole tepee can be seen against the backdrop of the Bay Area. This visual image disrupts not only the historical narrative but situates a Native American presence in contemporary America, whilst also establishing an important political and ideological permanence in the US psyche.

Whilst the physical presence of indigenous peoples on Alcatraz Island would be temporary, the ideology of resistance – and indigenous social, political, and cultural presence – persists in the US cultural imagination. *Taking Alcatraz* accentuates the effect the OoA had

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[362] Justin Kamp 'The U.S. National Gallery of Art acquired its first painting by a Native American artist', 2020 https://www.artsy.net/news/artsy-editorial-national-gallery-art-acquired-first-painting-native-american-artist accessed 06/01/2021.

[363] Nadja Sayej 'It's like we don't exist: Jaune Quick-to-See Smith on Native American artists', 2020 https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jul/29/jaune-quick-to-see-smith-native-american-art accessed 06/01/2021.

on the wider perception of Native Americans, working to reverse the narrative of colonial occupation to one in which the indigenous peoples were the occupier, drawing attention to the plight of Native Americans in the contemporary US. However, it is important not to overstress the message of a 40-minute documentary film. *Taking Alcatraz* takes up the narrative, but also empowers the viewer to continue this trend in rethinking history. *Taking Alcatraz*'s title suggests not a documentary review of a fixed moment in time, but an on-going fluid interaction with the historical record.

*Taking Alcatraz* also provides a movement through static moments in history, between the visual referents of Alcatraz Island and the earlier period of indigenous resistance (the so-called Indian Wars), by emphasising the solidarity between multifarious tribes in the late 1800s and again in the 1960s. The Occupation of Alcatraz is one of the few unifications of a mass indigenous movement between the Battle of Little Bighorn, and the resistance to the pipeline at Standing Rock in 2016. The portrayal of the occupation in *Taking Alcatraz* centres on a collective indigenous identity and ideology that is disrupted by negative media reporting. The press was reactionary in their reporting of the Ghost Dance religion, and again, a negative rendering of Native Americans was perpetuated by mainstream news media at Standing Rock. [364] Alcatraz also suffered from the news media's default representation of Native Americans. Although the movement gained earlier support, this negative representation was significant, and will be discussed further later in this chapter.

By underscoring the continuation of indigenous presence in US history and society, *Taking Alcatraz* undermines filmic stereotypes of the Western genre, particularly that of the 'vanishing Indian': the trope that consigns indigenous peoples to a particular history, as the noble, if inevitably defeated, opponents to civilisation. *Taking Alcatraz* has the potential to question historical power asymmetries within the US, particularly those created by the cowboy-Indian binary. The fixity of meaning of dominant historical narratives is disrupted by re-considering the historical event. This is achievable through representation in film; subsequent translation, and thus agency, is delivered via the viewer's interaction with the text. *Taking Alcatraz* re-narrates the notion of indigenous resistance that was seemingly 'ended' at Wounded Knee in 1890, whilst destabilising cultural formations of indigenous stereotypes that are perpetuated in mainstream film. This illustrates how representation is an ongoing aspect of discourse, and visual culture can impact and contribute to the investment

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[364] See, for example: Christopher Wetzel 'The Dilemma of Differential Mobilization: Framing Strategies and Shaping Engagement in the Occupation of Alcatraz.' *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 30, 2010: 239-70.

and recovery of indigenous identity, as opposed to the stifling cultural appropriation and mainstream media images of 'Indians' which perpetuate, via stereotypes, negative images of Native Americans.

### vi: The Big Foot Ceremonial Riders

By the end of December 1890, the Ghost Dance was losing momentum. The Ghost Dance was a pan-tribal spiritual movement promoted by Northern Paiute shaman Wovoka, who, as a result of a vision, witnessed the destruction of the white man, and the lands of the contemporary US being returned to Native Americans. Many tribes adopted aspects of Wovoka's vision to their own spiritual foundations and endorsed a quasi-religious movement. The military campaign against the Ghost Dancers – which culminated with the Wounded Knee massacre – was an overreaction, and only indicative of the historical treatment meted out to indigenous peoples by the US state.[365] Similarly, Sioux physician and writer Charles Eastman Ohiyesa (Santee Dakota) notes in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916), that such a religious craze was foreign to Native American philosophy which was dubious of this acceptance of a "red Christ". Yet, in his writings he regarded that those assigned to the Ghost Dance held no threat; nor was there evidence of a wider plot. Ultimately, the concern was that the presence of troops may provoke conflict in the tinderbox atmosphere of the Pine Ridge Agency, as indeed was the case: US troops opened fire on the unarmed, tired, and hungry followers of Big Foot.[366]

Charles Eastman Ohiyesa advocated education for his people, much like his contemporary Luther Standing Bear, both of whom lived at the Pine Ridge Agency in the early 1890s. Eastman practiced medicine on the Pine Ridge Reservation and was known as the "white doctor who is an Indian." This comment emphasises Eastman's own character and advocacy.[367] As evidenced by Eastman's *The Soul of the Indian*, the two life-altering

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[365] Stanley Vestal *Sitting Bull: Champion of the Sioux*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; 1989 [1932]: 276.

[366] Charles A Eastman Ohiyesa *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*. Lincoln and London: Bison Books; 1977 [1916]: 92-99.

[367] Like Luther Standing Bear, Eastman was a prolific writer, writing eleven books in total, arguably his most prominent work being *The Soul of the Indian* 2003 [1911], whose title echoes the title of African American author W E B DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903. DuBois discussed a 'two-ness' of the African in America, of their own and others' perception of themselves. Eastman also discusses how the Native American functions between 'two worlds' whereby in adapting to white culture they also retain aspects of their Native American identity; they can effectively manipulate white society. See also: Eastman *The Soul of the Indian*: vii-xix.

incidents to occur in his life were meeting his wife-to-be Elaine Goodale (they married in 1891), and Wounded Knee, which occurred in December 1890. After the troops opened fire on the Lakota band, comprising Miniconjou and Hunkpapa men, women and children, Eastman, and his wife, who travelled to Wounded Knee as part of a rescue party, discovered the two hundred "frozen, brutalized bodies scattered for miles across the prairie" of the followers of Big Foot.[368]

Weeks prior to the massacre, the death of Sitting Bull had impelled Big Foot's band of Ghost Dancers from the Cheyenne River Reservation to join their Sioux allies at the Pine Ridge Agency. The US authorities were concerned about the spiritual and cultural power of Sitting Bull and during his arrest, he was shot and killed. This prompted Big Foot to travel to Pine Ridge.[369] The press reported the coming together as an "Indian uprising" and Major Whiteside was given orders to intercept them, surround them and train their Hotchkiss guns on the beleaguered band, few of whom were themselves armed. Eastman recounts:

> I counted eighty bodies of men who had been in the council and who were almost as helpless as the women and babes when the fire began, for nearly all their guns had been taken from them. A reckless and desperate young Indian fired the first shot when the search for weapons was well under way, and immediately the troops opened fire from all sides, killing not only unarmed men, women and children, but their own comrades who stood opposite them, for the camp was entirely surrounded.[370]

However, in what is generally felt was an overreaction, the agent at Pine Ridge nervously called for US troops to attend, fearing an 'uprising'. Despite this, as Stanley Vestal and other critics agree, the Ghost Dance was not an act of aggression nor was even a military movement, but one of cultural regeneration to assist the tribe with the hopeless conditions the Sioux were now dealing with. As Vestal explains further, the Sioux:

> [k]new they were hopelessly outnumbered, and war was far from their desire…had war been their plan, why put Ghost Shirts on women and children?... [I]t was only propaganda got up to save the face of a corrupt Indian Bureau, to camouflage an

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[368] Eastman also wished, as with Standing Bear, to document the true place of the Native in American history, a struggle that is arguably at the heart of political and cultural practice against the US state up to and including Alcatraz and Standing Rock Eastman's *The Soul of the Indian* 2003 [1911] documents important ethnographic aspects of Sioux lifeways, such as the Sun Dance, religion, and the role of US capitalism and the military in the downfall of the indigenous nations: 7-17.

[369] See: 'History of Big Foot's Journey to Wounded Knee' https://healingheartsatwoundedknee.com/25-year-reunion-ride/history/ accessed 09/11/2020. This website documents the inception and purpose of commemorating the Wounded Knee Massacre. There are differing stories as to why Big Foot took this course of action. One tale recalls how he was invited by Chief Red Cloud, another claims that he was fleeing for protection for himself and his followers. They travelled mostly at night during freezing winter conditions over five days between the 23rd and 28th December and, on arrival, ordered to camp near Wounded Knee Creek.

[370] Charles A Eastman Ohiyesa *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*. Lincoln and London: Bison Books; 1977 [1916]: 102-112.

unnecessary Indian campaign. The Indians feared the troops would massacre their families. And they were right.[371]

The events at Wounded Knee would signify a conclusion to the so-called 'Indian Wars', after which assimilation would gather pace. However, this only offers a neat and teleological retelling of history, again fitting with the US grand narrative.

Assimilation had already begun earlier in the 1800s through initiatives set up by Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson, of course, like Rosseau, saw Native Americans as a reflection of the true nature of man, and true citizens of the American republic. In this expression, a contradiction exists, and illustrates how the 'Indian' was and is perceived in the US cultural imagination. Jefferson's praise of Native Americans, again, as with Rousseau, also provided the rationale for their removal. Jefferson and Rousseau embraced the binary of civilization and savagery, within which Native Americans represented an earlier stage in human development and thus displaced them from contemporary society.[372]

American political theorists, such as Thomas Jefferson, were committed to unlimited US expansion, which envisioned an empire with no place for the continent's indigenous inhabitants. As the nation's population increased, settlers would occupy new lands in the West. Territorial expansion was key to the vision of the republic that Jefferson, and the other 'founding fathers', held. The organising principle of this expansionism was essentially capitalistic, based on the ownership of land. This model of political economy could not tolerate the coexistence of alternative forms of social arrangement. As Jeffrey Ostler writes:

> A society organized on the basis of widespread individual ownership of property did not simply suit the temperament of a particular people; it was the highest form of civilization, one that represented humanity's advance beyond primitive forms of social organization. According to this theory, Indians had no right to continue wasteful and inefficient uses of land or to perpetuate barbaric social and religious practices once civilization made its demands. Thus, although U.S. policy recognized Indian tribes as nations with limited sovereignty and made treaties with them, American leaders envisioned nothing less than the eventual extinguishing of all tribal claims to land.[373]

This quotation feeds back into US mythology of the frontier and the inevitable pitting of settler versus indigenous in contention, and the triumphant march of civilization that Jefferson advocated and has found expression within cultural discourse and US history.[374]

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[371] Vestal *Sitting Bull*: 276-277.
[372] Peter S Onuf 'We Shall All Be Americans: Thomas Jefferson and the Indians.' *Indiana Magazine of History* 95, no. 2, 1999: 103-41.
[373] Ostler *The Plains Sioux*: 13-15.
[374] See, for example: Slotkin *Gunfighter Nation*: 10-13.

The significance of the Congressional Medals of Honor, given out to the soldiers for their actions at Wounded Knee, exemplifies how history deemed the soldiers that day to be on the correct side: they were acting with jurisdiction, and they were not the aggressors. In 1990, on the centenary of the massacre, a formal apology was made by the US to the Sioux Nation, but the 20 Congressional Medals of Honor, given out to the troops for their actions that day, have not been rescinded, despite requests. Since 1990, the Chief Big Foot Band Memorial Riders have ceremonially restaged Big Foot's journey to commemorate the dead of 1890. The primary focus of this ceremony is to heal and renew, and engage in prayer and readings, much like to the spiritual significance of the Ghost Dance.

The message of the Riders is to "end the transmission of wounding." That is, to end the victim status applied to the original fatalities of Wounded Knee. As the Ceremonial Riders state:

> Four times, we rode. Four years we remembered and prayed and sacrificed. We are relatives. Let's walk together and lose no more. Let us tell the world that we lived and we will continue for the next seven generations. We will wipe the tears of our Nations.[375]

Wounded Knee is a historical site, but also a space of cultural resistance. It is also mediated as a filmic trope with which to respond and deconstruct hegemonic narratives invigorated by the US state.

The significance of Wounded Knee, as place, and cultural trope, continues to have relevance to the study of indigenous peoples and their ongoing resistance to US colonialism, but also to a US history that abrogates the Native American voice. Whilst US treaty discourse and frontier mythology formulate celebratory originary narratives and legal frameworks established by vague notions attributed to the Doctrine of Discovery, media such as film offer a point of intervention and question a history that continues to suppress indigenous land rights, and self-sovereignty.

vii: The Second Occupation of Wounded Knee (1973)

Fundamentally, at the root of the Occupation is the question of land, and the perception of Native Americans in US history. In context, the Occupation of Alcatraz engages directly with the dominant narrative of US history, as told in newspaper media at the

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[375] See: 'History of Big Foot's Journey to Wounded Knee' https://healingheartsatwoundedknee.com/25-year-reunion-ride/history/ accessed 09/11/2020.

time, and with the curation of cultural artefacts that invigorate the frontier narrative of progress, with indigenous people presented as an obstacle to civilization. To further emphasise this point, consider the 'siege' of Wounded Knee, during the site's second occupation by American Indian Movement (AIM) activists in 1973.

In 1968, several members of the Ojibwe Nation, including Dennis Banks, Clyde Bellecourt and George Mitchell, amongst others, founded the American Indian Movement in Minneapolis. AIM opened Indian survival schools and staged protests at abandoned military facilities, national parks, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), sustaining the decolonial ideology that was a feature of the protest.[376] This event, which is seen as a starting point for many with regards to indigenous activism, is actually the latter phase of ongoing indigenous resistance in the post-Second World War period, and forms a link to the earlier events at Wounded Knee in 1890.

However, it is the discursive nature of the performance, as opposed to the political, that serves as the focus here. Importantly, the staging of Wounded Knee relied heavily on the earlier event. Elizabeth Rich explains:

> [t]he staging of the event was based on a rhetorical trope in which the place Wounded Knee came to stand for simply the site of the 1890 Big Foot massacre in which many of Big Foot's people died, running from the advancing US cavalry. The invention of *Wounded Knee* marks a new effort to organize discursively as well as politically. An analysis of *Wounded Knee* as a site, an event, and a trope, reveals an agonistic approach to organizing that has become increasingly linguistic and symbolic since 1973.[377]

Wounded Knee thus became a rallying call for Native Americans and served as a metonymic reminder for injustices served upon indigenous peoples by the US Government, and a cultural and political means to challenge 'official' history.

This is evident when considering *Taking Alcatraz*'s metonymic association with Wounded Knee via the Fort Laramie Treaties and the narrative of the Plains wars and indigenous resistance. In the same way, the Ceremonial Big Foot Riders want to engage with the symbolic image and remembrance of Wounded Knee by re-animating the narrative as a yearly event with the purpose of engaging with the colonially imposed narrative. Rich continues:

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[376] Casey Ryan Kelly 'Détournement, Decolonization, and the American Indian Occupation of Alcatraz Island (1969–1971)' *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44, no. 2, 2014: 168-90.

[377] Elizabeth Rich 'Remember Wounded Knee: AIM's Use of Metonymy in 21st Century Protest' *College Literature* 33, no.3, 2004: 71. [Emphasis in original; in order to distinguish the place from the trope.]

Almost a century after the Big Foot massacre, AIM was confronted with embracing an identity that the colonial imagination could easily twist into its own, namely, the stereotypes that include tags, such as, "child-like, "simple," and "ignorant" at best and "uncivilized," "savage," and "hostile" at worst. Digging out of the rubble of these images by using, as tools the language and logic of the colonizers meant having to re-think, re-name, and re-write identity and history in a way that would problematize colonial codification.[378]

These problems would have to be addressed in order that the fundamental issues of land could be revealed and not concealed within media reportage. These tropes that are typically associated with the filmic 'Indian' were engaged with at Alcatraz.

Nevertheless, these were played on performatively within the wider language of the Proclamation, and the imagery of the site, such as the donning of headdresses. The 'language and logic' of colonialism is directly engaged with via the trope of Wounded Knee, de-stabilizing the colonially imposed meaning behind the event. Through a re-staging, animation through remembrance effectively re-codifies meaning by engaging with static depictions of history and culturally imposed stereotypes found in film.[379]

Wounded Knee, instead of being a static trope of indigenous victimhood, becomes a moment of strength, renewal, and spiritual resistance. Wounded Knee has become a symbolic trope representing Native American peoples and informs the legacy of resistance of AIM and beyond. In this manner, as Nick Estes writes:

Wounded Knee has come to represent the millions of Indians who died at the hands of the United States and it represents all that is wrong with the United States' past. It represents the indigenous condition throughout the world.[380]

Whilst meaning via cultural discourse is complex and unstable, it is precisely these factors that offer Wounded Knee such discursive and political power when cultural difference and cultural hegemony are brought to bear; Wounded Knee ceases to be a static, 'historicized' event.

*Taking Alcatraz*'s visual imagery of the Plains wars era and context (via the historical documents and political inferences of the Fort Laramie Treaties) establishes a link to the colonial underpinnings that formulate discourses of victimhood and images of 'Indians'. As Elizabeth Rich explains: "[i]t makes a space to articulate a different vision and story in order to establish a ground from which to make political, ethical, and spiritual judgements". The

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[378] Ibid.

[379] Rich 'Remember Wounded Knee…': 70-91.

[380] M Gonzalez & E Cook-Lynn quoted in Nick Estes 'Wounded Knee: Settler Colonial Property Regimes and Indigenous Liberation' *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 24, no. 3, 2013: 190.

site of Wounded Knee is continuously animated in this manner, and re-configured through cultural, spiritual, and political engagements, and is not historicized as a 'single' event. As Rich concludes:

> Since the 73-day standoff at the Wounded Knee site in the winter of 1973 and 1974, Lakota resistance and calls for liberation of their homelands served as vehicle for mobilizing worldwide Indigenous independence struggles. Yet, the AIM takeover and standoff with federal and tribal authorities is but one event in the longer history of Lakota and Indigenous resistance to settler colonial invasion and occupation. After the Wounded Knee siege, for instance, AIM and many tribal activists and peoples gathered in Standing Rock, South Dakota, in 1974, for the first ever IITC meeting, which spearheaded the initial charges of genocide and human rights violations against the US and its coconspirators against Native and Indigenous peoples.[381]

This suggests the "flexibility and adaptability" of Lakota tradition that lays the foundation for politicized and spiritual movements. Linking events such as the theft of the Black Hills, the Fort Laramie Treaties, and their subsequent contravention to Alcatraz and the American Indian Movement, sheds light on past injustices whilst directing present and future activism. Thus, articulation takes the form of informative, linguistic, and aesthetic protest as opposed to the physical and militaristic confrontations between the US and the Lakota during the mid- to late 1800s. Furthermore, it shows how dominant cultural tropes can be used to engage directly with colonially imposed narratives by thinking differently about the world and the discursive structures dominated by Eurocentric, patriarchal hierarchies, and underlines the role of documentary in achieving this.

viii: Alcatraz Revisited

In the immediate post-Second World War period, the US Government ratified House Resolution 108, which was to 'terminate' federal supervision of Native Americans and anticipated their relocation from the reservations to eight main cities in the US, including a total of 42,000 in the Bay Area; laterally this was a feature of the Relocation Act which followed the Termination resolution. Termination would continue the policy of assimilation, but rather than focus on tribal sovereignty which had been a feature of the New Deal era, a rhetoric of 'individual rights' was espoused. Federally recognized tribes were disbanded, ending federal assistance, and removing fishing and hunting rights. This affected five of the

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[381] Nick Estes 'Wounded Knee: Settler Colonial Property Regimes and Indigenous Liberation' *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 24, no. 3, 2013: 200.

largest nations, the Flathead, Klamath, Menominee, Pottawatomi, and the Turtle Mountain Chippewa. As Casey Ryan Kelly observes:

> [T]ermination reversed decades of policies that enabled tribes to recover millions of acres of land…By individualizing ownership, termination opened tribal lands and assets to private sale and commercial development, frequently against the expressed interest of the tribe in question.[382]

Of course, of significance to this enquiry is the question of land rights and resources which were lost to tribes. Furthermore, the arrival of thousands of Native Americans to major cities would have a significant impact on protest and political organisation, particularly during the Occupation of Alcatraz and subsequent actions by AIM. Belva Cottier, an Oglala Sioux, was interviewed in the *San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle* in December 1969, stating:

> The last Bureau of Indian Affairs count was 2500, just in the Bay Area. There are many more down in the Los Angeles area…. The whole idea of relocation in the first place was to get the Indian to assimilate, but it has had just the opposite effect. We have turned more Indian in the city than we were back on the reservation.[383]

Whilst Alcatraz is deemed to be the "cradle" of the American Indian Movement, the cultural ties and social activities to those given one-way tickets to the cities forged a pan-Indian bond and inter-tribal identity which would be key to the IoAT at Alcatraz, and which would continue at Standing Rock in 2016.



Four Occupiers on Alcatraz raise their fists in solidarity. Credit: Ilka Hartmann; source: John Ferry.

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[382] Casey Ryan Kelly 'Orwellian Language and the Politics of Tribal Termination (1953–1960)', *Western Journal of Communication*, 74:4, 351-371, 2010: 352. See also: Donald L. Fixico. *Termination and relocation: Federal Indian policy, 1945–1960*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press; 1986.

[383] Jerry Kamstra 'The Grim Plight of the Indian' (Pt. 1) *The San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle* (California), 07/12/1969: 22.

Cottier continues: "I think it has been the touch with the outside society and the disappointments we have run into, and some subtle form of discrimination" that contributed to pan-tribal solidarity.[384] The irony of relocation and termination is in the fact that, whilst having the desired effect in destabilizing indigenous links to their lands and traditions, the coming together of thousands of Native Americans in the cities accelerated their politicization. It is also interesting that Cottier refers to the 'Indian' becoming more 'Indian', and, rather than being assimilated, finding themselves at odds with the asymmetries of US society more than ever.

In July 2017, a discussion of *Taking Alcatraz* was held by the California Historical Society, featuring Fawn Oakes, Richard Oakes' (Mohawk) daughter and Sacheen Littlefeather (Apache). Littlefeather, who was a student at the time, and a visitor at Alcatraz, would be cast into the mainstream media's perception after she refused, on his behalf, Marlon Brando's Oscar for *The Godfather* (Coppola 1972) at that year's ceremony. This was a strategy to gain recognition for the Occupation at Wounded Knee in the early 70s, noted above, and the wider American Indian Movement. Littlefeather was pressurised at the ceremony with arrest if she went over 60 seconds, and despite the audience's negative reaction, she remained composed and dignified throughout. Littlefeather even recounts being backstage after giving her speech and John Wayne having to be held back by six security men. More sinister was her retelling of how the FBI hounded her afterwards and effectively destroyed her media career.[385]

The *Taking Alcatraz* panellists discussed openly the context of the 1960s and Alcatraz. Movements for civil and human rights had begun in the US, alongside fervent anti-Vietnam demonstrations. There was an awakening for Native Americans across the country and "Indian Rights" came to the fore in the context of 60s' activism and affected those Native Americans who had relocated to the cities. Whilst the Red Power Movement has been reconsidered as a continuum of phases of indigenous resistance, Alcatraz brought world-wide media attention and dissemination of the plight of indigenous peoples in the US, just like the Black Power movements which highlighted the racial injustice towards African Americans in the US, whilst the anti-Vietnam war protests would rock the political establishment.

Ironically, the visuals presented by Ferry's *Taking Alcatraz* of the IoAT would capture the public's imagination probably because of the cultural referents to 'Indians' as

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[384] Jerry Kamstra 'The Grim Plight…': 22.
[385] See: 'Taking Alcatraz Film Screening and Discussion'. *YouTube*, 2017 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLRXwK-o4qw accessed 05/11/2020.

seen in film and television, which were now being seen in visual and print media reporting of the Occupation. Very much as Vine Deloria Jr. in *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), wrote:

> The more we try to be ourselves the more we are forced to defend what we have never been. The American public feels most comfortable with the mythical Indians of stereotype-land who were always THERE.[386]

Deloria refers not to the images projected by the media of the time, which were, as noted, largely positive during the early part of the siege. Rather, he refers more to the reality of Native Americans engaging in political discourse, occupying a public space, and having contemporary concerns which were aligned with other civil and human rights groups at the time.

Whilst the coverage of the Occupation was initially – uncharacteristically – sympathetic, by the end of the 19 months, views towards those on the island hardened, and news broadcasts reverted to type, and representations of "warlike, violent Indians reminiscent of earlier colonial reporting had emerged". [387] It would seem that the occupiers' early use of satire was key to winning favourable perception with reporters and those witnessing and perceiving events as conveyed in the media. Significantly, an earlier attempt to occupy the island in 1964 by a group of Lakota was treated as a 'joke', with the *San Francisco Examiner* calling the action a 'Wacky Indian Raid'. However, this appears to be a deliberate ploy attributed to Fortunate Eagle, as previously noted. As David Milner continues:

> Acutely aware of the media's tendency to trivialise minorities (and protest), the 1969 occupiers sought to gain as much control over their representation as possible. Like those who had printed the Cherokee Phoenix, the world's first Indian newspaper, in 1828, they attempted to circumvent the established press where possible, printing their own newsletter on the Island and broadcasting 'Radio Free Alcatraz' across FM airwaves. Nevertheless, the majority of the Bay Area residents received their news of the occupation from mainstream sources. This time, however, the 'joke' would not be on the protestors, but on the government, Manifest Destiny and the society that had spawned the reservation system.[388]

This strategy of controlling representation by offsetting the mainstream media would prove, initially, a success at Alcatraz, and would prove significant at Standing Rock in 2016-17. Furthermore, the historic pattern of reporting was ruptured and expressive of the context of

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[386] David Treuer 'How a Native American Resistance Held Alcatraz for 18 Months' 2019 https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/us/native-american-occupation-alcatraz.html accessed 27/10/2020.

[387] David Milner 'By Right of Discovery: The Media and the Native American Occupation of Alcatraz, 1969-1971' *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 33, America in the 1970s, no. 1, 2014: 74.

[388] Milner ;By Right of Discovery…': 75.

more progressive attitudes towards 'race' in the US, at the time due to civil and human rights movements during the 60s. Milner concludes:

> The Alcatraz protestors rode the tide…fortuitously taking advantage of a rare, opportune moment in which the press, public and political pawnbrokers were demanding more favourable coverage of minorities than the established norm.[389]

As *Taking Alcatraz* illustrates, the Occupation of Alcatraz brings Native Americans into the consciousness of contemporary America and deconstructs cultural and filmic stereotypes by presenting an indigenous presence.

It is possible to witness the naturalization and denaturalization of dominant tropes of the 'Indian' being played with at Alcatraz, as evidenced in *Taking Alcatraz*'s visuals, as the island's occupants play humorously on their filmic stereotypes in order to gather attention. Timm Williams of the Yurok tribe, who participated in the Occupation, is often seen wearing a Plains-style headdress. The Yurok peoples are an indigenous group from the Pacific coast, and whilst they had ceremonial items such as headdresses, they differ from the feather headdresses of the Plains tribes in construction and form. The Yurok headdress is constructed of a broad band of deerskin decorated with the red scalps of the woodpecker and is visibly different to those tribal headdresses associated with the Sioux, Cheyenne, and others of the Plains region.[390] Williams' adoption of the Plains headdress suggests that film representations of indigenous identity can offer a starting point; that is, they can trigger a cultural intervention of homogenized stereotypes in this ironic manner, which engages with designs of the 'Indian' in the cultural imagination but politicizes them, drawing awareness to the wider significance of contemporary concerns which affect indigenous peoples. Of course, the problem also illustrates the two-way nature of discourse, that, in replicating these stereotypes, the danger is that they may consolidate the image in the wider US imagination. The political task is to reveal the colonial structures and discourses undergirding such designs. It is clearly a question of strategy in utilizing stereotypes and cultural/ textual tropes in this manner, and further outlines how such images function in the process of naturalization.

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[389] Milner 'By Right of Discovery…': 79.
[390] For an example, see Edward Sheriff Curtis' 1923 photogravure, at the Portland Art Museum's online collection (see Bibliography, Filmography, and Other Sources). For a photo of Timm Williams wearing the Plains-style headdress see also: Treuer, 'How a Native American Resistance…'https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/us/native-american-occupation-alcatraz.html accessed 27/10/2020.

John Trudell speaking to the Press. The US Press tended to focus on certain individuals.

By the end of the Occupation of Alcatraz, negative stereotypes in reporting returned and representation reverted to historical norms. The press had a hand in the undermining of the Occupation, through their focusing on certain activists such as Richard Oakes and John Trudell. This follows the historical edifice of the 'chief', which was often an artificial construction with whom Europeans could conduct business. This trope, imposed by outside media, continued to be deconstructed at Alcatraz, and again at Standing Rock, and further emphasises how representation is affected by the naturalization and denaturalization of historical narratives that have placed indigenous peoples in stereotypical roles associated with constructed tropes of the 'Indian'. Of course, gains in representation can be made and affected because meaning is always in a state of flux. That makes representation powerful but also vulnerable. Meaning is never fixed, and whilst this can be a liberating prospect, it is only through repeated insistence on *différance* that the hegemony of unrepresentative colonial narratives is undermined.

ix: Conclusion

This section suggests the fluctuating nature of the filmic trope concerning representations of Native Americans. *Taking Alcatraz* determines links between contemporary indigenous protest and the historical event, which reveal the sedimented discourses associated with US colonialism. This imagery is all the more powerful for establishing that link and emphasising the importance of contemplating colonial structures when investigating filmic representations of Native Americans. By underscoring the continuation of indigenous presence in US history and society, *Taking Alcatraz* undermines

filmic stereotypes of the Western genre, particularly the trope of the 'Indian' which consigns indigenous peoples to a particular history. The documentary medium has the potential to question historical power asymmetries within the US, particularly those animated by the cowboy-Indian binary. *Taking Alcatraz* narrates the notion of a perpetual indigenous resistance that was seemingly 'ended' at Wounded Knee in 1890, via the destabilising of cultural formations of indigenous stereotypes. Representation is an ongoing aspect of discourse, and visual culture can impact and contribute to the investment and recovery of indigenous identity, as opposed to the stifling cultural appropriation and mainstream media images of 'Indians'.

3.2: Re-storying the (Digital) Landscape in *Dislocation Blues* (Hopinka 2017)

i: Introduction: The Sacred Hoop and Indigenous Storytelling

Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) in *The Sacred Hoop* (1986) writes how indigenous storytelling is closely associated with the oral tradition and is primarily used to teach life lessons through stories which reflect contemporary social realities. This practice has been evidenced in the writings of James Welch, considered in the previous chapter, whose novel *Winter in the Blood* contemplates alcoholism, premature death, psychological trauma, and cultural identity. Gunn Allen describes how storytelling connects the spiritual and material worlds as well as for remembrance of people, places, and historical events. Humour is an important aspect of these tales; whilst also fostering important connections between individual, community, land, and place. Storytelling remains a vital tool of indigenous expression and resistance as it confronts dominant narratives to reclaim identity, culture, and history.[391]

In this context, this section will consider the thread of storytelling that can be traced from the indigenous oral tradition through to contemporary writing and filmmaking, with a particular focus on Sky Hopinka's *Dislocation Blues* (2017). This film, described as a 17-minute audio-visual poem, engages with colonial tropes of the landscape in a figurative manner, particularly those established by the Western genre. Whilst non-native filmmakers have taken strides to re-interpret the visual imagery of the Western, most notably Chloé Zhao's *The Rider* (2017), as well as films by indigenous filmmakers such as Chris Eyre's *Skins* (2002), Hopinka's *Dislocation Blues* is a documentary short that relies heavily on its strategy of a fragmented narrative to disrupt culturally imposed tropes of the landscape, and thus focuses on indigenous relationships with the land, as opposed to perceived relationships based on Hollywood representations. The fragmented narrative has been used in indigenous literature and is also evident in the film version of *Winter in the Blood* (Smith 2013).

This section considers contemporary indigenous storytelling in film, and, via Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop*, underlines how indigenous interpretations of the world can undermine colonially imposed meaning. Hopinka works extensively across the media of film, video, art installations, photography, and writing, which, according to his website, "centers

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[391] Paula Gunn Allen *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press; 1992 [1986]: 4-15.

around personal positions of Indigenous homeland and landscape" and "particularly how culture is mediated through these forms."[392] *Dislocation Blues* continues the artist's practice of combining the visual image and spoken word. Hopinka has been described as a landscape artist who engages with a very different notion of the US landscape in film. His focus is less the wide-open locations represented in the Western genre, but rather speaks to an indigenous relationship and interpretations of the land, connecting peoples to the land in a more intimate way through layered editing.

Film has been deployed as an effective tool for representing indigenous activism and reinvigorating historical events, as noted in *Taking Alcatraz*. By creating metaphorical spaces via the cultural text, new films allow for renewed critical engagement with established tropes and narratives. As Janelle Cronin emphasises:

> Storytelling is a tool of resistance since it challenges the dominant narrative and is space to reclaim identity and history. The resistance can be identified in the aspects of truth telling that challenges the accuracy of history, assumptions and stereotypes surrounding Native identity and through the connection of traditional knowledge on current events.[393]

This has always been at the heart of the documentary film, particularly through the potential of the form to directly address social issues, and, increasingly, its own accessibility through the evolution of technology. Documentary film can be thought of in the same way as storytelling in the metaphorical creation of space, particularly when thinking about *Dislocation Blues*.

In the film, Hopinka reflects on the shared experience of Standing Rock, meditating on whether or not his experience is accurate or if it was a fiction. He concludes that it is both: it happened and was also invented, fluctuating to the needs of those in the camp.[394] Standing Rock will be a key case study that will be returned to throughout the remainder of this chapter. Between mid-2016 and early 2017, Native American and non-native peoples came together at Standing Rock Sioux Reservation to resist the building of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). This activist camp remains the largest gathering of Native American peoples since the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876.

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[392] Sky Hopinka *Personal Website of Artist* http://www.skyhopinka.com accessed 11/11/2020.
[393] Janelle Cronin 'Living in a Liminal Space: Standing Rock and Storytelling as a Tool of Activism' Master of Sciences thesis, Purdue University, 2018: 21; https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/dissertations/AAI10810337/.
[394] Jason Fox 'Can Documentary Make Space?,' Panel Discussion, Camden International Film Festival, Camden, ME, 13 September, 2019. *Film Quarterly*, January 2020; https://filmquarterly.org/2020/01/04/can-documentary-make-space/ accessed 11/11/2020.

ii: Native Space at *Oceti Sakowin*

As discussed previously, the events at Wounded Knee are not isolated. Wounded Knee carries the 'trace' of indigenous resistance in the US. Opposition to colonialism is in a permanent state of flux, which, as was shown with regards *Taking Alcatraz*, and incorporated the ideology of earlier Siouan defiance, creating the notion of a permanent and fluid resistance. These strategies are dynamic, vital, absolutely necessary, and are tied to the land as much as a people, as underlined by Nick Estes: "[s]uch collective experiences build up over time and are grounded in specific indigenous territories and nations", as the example of Wounded Knee emphasises.[395] The visuals of the film very much accentuate the gathering and the communal feel of *Oceti Sakowin*; the accompanying narrative by Cleo Keahna underscores how it was only after he had left the camp that he began reflecting on the individualistic nature of wider society, whereas, as he reflects, Standing Rock camp was full of people "all having the same dreams."



These stills from *Dislocation Blues* suggest as a sense of place and purpose. However, the delicate mirror-like image of the camp in the third figure, which opens Hopinka's film, setting the stage for a play on reproduction and representation.

Keahna's commentary to *Dislocation Blues* is supported by beautiful wide shots of the camp, the tents, signs, and temporary structures with the landscape lending an almost water-colour feel to the background. These shots also suggest the size and weight of the camp, and it seems imposing within the frame of the picture, seemingly stretching onwards. This underlines the strength within the camp, as these wide landscapes often cut to interiors of people in tents, sitting in circles, singing, chanting, drumming and engaged in prayers. Notably, Hopinka almost always uses low angled shots, or side-on shots, when treating the camp members, particularly in this context. This again emphasises size and strength, reflected in the camp community. It is also respectful as many of the faces are in shadow, which only adds to the mystery and poetry of Hopinka's camerawork.

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[395] Nick Estes *Our History Is the Future*. London; New York: Verso; 2019: 21.

This was clearly a strategy that was informed by Hopinka's reflection on the camps and their historical significance. Hopinka reflects on the gathering of peoples at Standing Rock in 2016/ 2017, in relation to *Dislocation Blues*:

> They said there hasn't been a gathering this large of Native people sustained for this long since the late 1800s. Maybe that's true, maybe it's not. Because and despite of that, it was hard to shoot this footage from my time at Standing Rock. It was also hard to edit this footage after I left. Not only was I aware of my presence, as an Indigenous person at the camp, but also as someone holding a camera. Before I went I was really captivated by the idea of the camp itself. The awe at the size of the community, the duration, the focus, all stirred something deep within that I hadn't thought about since I was a child.[396]

The space created, and mediated, by Hopinka muses on the scope of the camp. Slow pans illustrate the *Oceti Sakowin* camp's breadth, but the work is also rhythmical and philosophical, even to the point of being over-romantic, as Keahna reflects. However, Hopinka refuses to tell a story, because *Oceti Sakowin* represents everyone's story, and not just his own. Hopinka deliberately creates a space in his film to engage and interpret, but one which deliberately lacks context, as a strategy for resisting cultural appropriation of indigeneity. Through this approach, *Dislocation Blues* negates the formerly predatory appropriation and consumption of indigenous representations in Western culture (and film). As Jason Fox writes:

> Hopinka says that finding the formal logic of *Dislocation Blues* in the editing process was an attempt to locate and reproduce the internal energy that was particular to the Native peoples at the camp's political and physical center, and to give it a second life through its circulation of work as a video. He does so by way of the fragment, gathering and juxtaposing bits of audio interviews and handheld video images; brief encounters that only take shape as they accumulate, much like the camp's infrastructure. It's a formal strategy arrived at in part by the long history of appropriation of indigenous representations by colonizers.[397]

The fragments that are referred to in the above quotation are more difficult to appropriate, from the colonial point of view, as *Dislocation Blues* is not arranged to portray Standing Rock as a homogenous event. One of the interesting things when viewing this film is the lack of imagery pertaining to cultural stereotypes of 'Indians'.

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[396] See: 'Sky Hopinka Introduces His Film *Dislocation Blues*' 2017 https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/sky-hopinka-introduces-his-film-dislocation-blues accessed 24/08/2020.
[397] Jason Fox 'Can Documentary…'.

The screen within a screen lending a 'deconstructive' aspect to the nature of film as a medium and indigenous representation. That is, there seems to be intimacy and intertextuality but at 17 minutes long with virtually no exposition, is deliberately open ended.

This is clearly not an accident, as the camp shows normal people occupying a space to support Sioux claims to the land; however, even by considering this film by comparing the footage with other documentary films and drone footage from the camp, which has appeared on countless YouTube videos as well as in print news, there are very few references to 'Indians' – even in an ironic way. One corresponding image that does emerge at the end of Hopinka's film is when a group of mounted protestors is seen riding over Blackwater Bridge, but the horse and rider are blacked out, seemingly presenting an image that does not even try to recontextualize the horse and rider, as perhaps the opening of a film such as *Powwow Highway* suggests. Although *Powwow Highway*'s horse and rider are metonymy for the present-day road movie that proceeds to take the viewer on a journey, *Dislocation Blues* is in no way ironic in this sense and the image, the black on blue shadow, is deliberately open-ended, which would be in keeping with Hopinka's visual narrative.
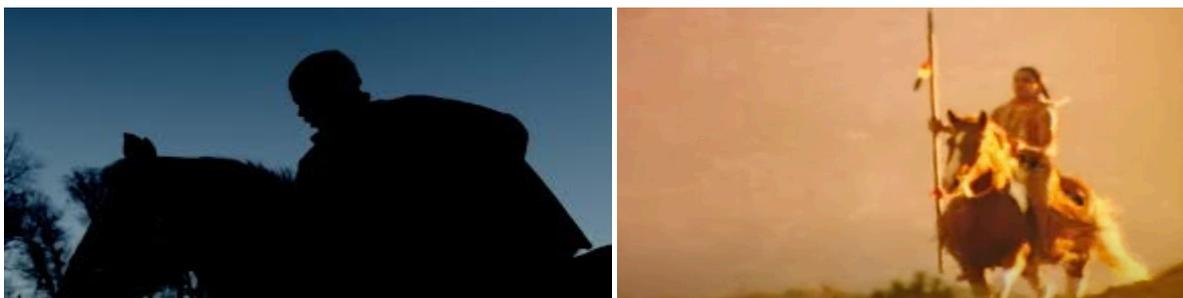


Horse and rider in *Dislocation Blues* compared with horse and rider in the opening of *Powwow Highway* (Wacks 1989).

In this sense, the 'Indian' was perhaps not animated in a similar way to those tropes instigated at Alcatraz; Hopinka avoids this in his film of Standing Rock. Even at protests which took activists to towns and cities in support of the movement at Standing Rock, there was very little play on Indian-ness at all. One exception to this is the action in which the Standing Rock Sioux, along with other advocacy groups, led the Native Nations Rise march in Washington in early 2017, erecting a tepee at the Trump International Hotel *en route* to the

White House. This was clearly deliberate and playful, juxtaposing a tepee with the billionaire Trump's hotel highlighted the poverty encountered by many Native Americans as a result of US capitalism. The fact that Trump is a shareholder in Energy Transfer Partners (the company behind the DAPL's construction) may even have prompted this, as well as that he was the newly sworn in President of the US, who on his second day in office rescinded Barack Obama's commitment to a review of the Standing Rock environmental case. More prominently, the Native Nations Rise marchers did tap into Sioux mythology to criticise the pipeline, as they can be seen holding aloft a long, black, fabric snake with the words 'No pipeline' spray-painted down the side. The 'Black Snake' is foretold within Sioux and other indigenous prophecy to bring death, with the activists representing the warriors who would rise to defeat it. The potential for environmental damage by a crude oil spill from the pipeline was one of the key concerns of the Standing Rock Sioux.[398]

The narratives of indigenous *différance* prove a useful decolonial tactic. Hopinka's work "foregrounds Indigenous languages, spiritual teachings, and notions of personhood amid a cultural landscape that has, for centuries, denigrated and denied their importance."[399] As illustrated by Gunn Allen above, and thinking with the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's, this accentuates how indigenous knowledge systems can be used as part of a decolonial methodology across a myriad of cultural media to destabilize stereotypical tropes of 'Indians' in film. In a similar manner, the fragmentary nature of *Dislocation Blues* interrupts filmic stereotypes by resisting visual referents established by the Western genre, offering Standing Rock as a represented space and filmic trope with which to critically intervene in narratives naturalized within cultural discourse. It does this by questioning the very nature of the US colonial system; a system which is undergirded by Eurocentric cultural norms established within language. Being in this 'Native Space' has the potential to craft an indigenous identity via film free from the shackles of hegemonic culture and cinematic representations of the 'Indian'.

Hopinka's fragmentary style is not limiting in terms of those who will interact with the text. As with *Taking Alcatraz*, Hopinka states that *Dislocation Blues* is for "anyone that wants to engage with it." This avowal very much mirrors the stated purpose behind John

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[398] Cajsa Wikstrom 'Native Nations Rise brings DAPL protest to Washington', Al Jazeera News 2017; https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/3/11/native-nations-rise-brings-dapl-protest-to-washington accessed 07/01/2021.

[399] Dessane López Cassell *Poetry That Pulls at the Seams of Colonial Power and Memory* 2020 https://hyperallergic.com/595185/sky-hopinka-perfidia-excerpt-wendys-subway-ccs-bard/ accessed 14/11/2020.

Ferry's film. *Taking Alcatraz,* whilst presenting a linear narrative of the Occupation of Alcatraz compared to Hopinka's abstract retelling of Standing Rock, remains no more or less contextualized for the uninformed viewer. This is all part of the approach of Hopinka, utilizing a myriad of cultural forms and methods. His recent feature-length film, *malni - towards the ocean, towards the shore* (2020), illustrates a more linear narrative style, as opposed to the "dense, syncretic visual [poetry]" he has created with *Dislocation Blues*, but his position is consistent within the text.[400]

*malni* continues the decolonial methodology of mining indigenous language and mythology to contemplate life's meaning, an approach gleaned from the indigenous oral tradition and established in contemporary literature. Hopinka reflects on *Dislocation Blues* with regards his concern for how language structures memory:

> I believe it functions in the same way, where the acquisition and preservation of language is best engaged through its utility rather than as an abstracted idea. How are people speaking in ways that are just as much about resistance as they are acts of asserting their presence? The through-line between previous works and this one is that the focus is on the stories that people tell and on allowing a place for those stories to be told. The voice of the oppressed is always weighted and burdened by the expectations of the oppressor, and I'm always interested in hearing those who wish to speak without regards for those expectations; thoughtfully, deliberately, and without shame.[401]

Comparatively*, malni* uses both English and Chinuk Wawa which destabilizes filmic tropes attributed to mainstream cinematic depictions of indigenous peoples. The use of Chinuk Wawa also makes use of indigenous knowledge systems to displace the signifiers of European language and epistemological systems as structuring and informing cultural signifiers.

Whilst contemporary Hollywood films, such as *The Revenant* (Iñárritu 2015), for example, were championed for making use of indigenous languages, they tend to still be hampered by the white saviour narrative and issues pertaining to representation of certain groups. As Jesse Wente suggests, *The Revenant* is a "[g]randiose frontier epic [that] never escapes colonial gaze of the Western genre."[402] However, Hopinka's *malni* suggests there is still an issue in the subtitling of Native American languages in film. In *malni* "[t]he fact that both languages are subtitled calls into question the opposition of ideas of a 'native' versus a

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[400] Sky Hopinka does not capitalize *malni – towards the ocean, towards the shore*.
[401] Carly Whitefield *Sky Hopinka: Dislocation Blues* 2018 http://www.vdrome.org/sky-hopinka accessed 16/11/2020.
[402] Jesse Wente The Revenant is not an indigenous story. CBC News, 14 January, 2016, updated 15 January, 2016, https://www.cbc.ca/news/aboriginal/the-revenant-not-an-indigenous-story-1.3404007 accessed 28/11/2019.

'foreign' language."[403] Such representations can continue the naturalization of stereotypes pertaining to Native Americans in film.

Cultural stereotypes effectively contribute to discourses of racial Otherness. Underlying Hopinka's narrative in *malni* is the question of how certain belief systems become hegemonic, and ultimately, can only be reclaimed through an investigation of language. Hopinka allows the viewer to question their own familiarity (or, indeed, unfamiliarity) with the on-screen referents and the *différance* in meaning between signifier and signified. This results in a critical space being established within his film. *malni* marks a place of *différance* via the insistence of indigenous language and the audience's relationship with it – a relationship that is established and reiterated by the audio accompanying the visuals in his film.[404]

iii: Addressing Margins at Standing Rock

The visuals of *Dislocation Blues* are informed by the narrator in a similar manner. The film opens with the laptop that Keahna will be communicating through. Hopinka seems all too aware of the mediated nature of cultural commentary, and there is perhaps an irony in *Dislocation Blues'* first shot being that of a laptop (see above). Hopinka, cautious of how the camera structures representation, and as a direct reaction to the number of cameras and documentary crews at Standing Rock, offers Keahna and co-narrator Terry Running Wild a place to offer their own perspective. Thus, in Hopinka's words, *Dislocation Blues* removes "the burden of representation" which "is often the case for anyone that's historically Othered."[405] This is one of the challenges of Hopinka's work: to question what still needs to be done. One of the key concerns of the narrative of *Dislocation Blues* is the perpetuation of hierarchy in the Standing Rock camps. Hopinka's apprehension was with sullying what was essentially a positive environmentalist movement and coming together of peoples, and the video call between Hopinka (off camera) and Keahna, is filmed and forms part of the film's narrative.

[403] Ela Bittencourt *Mining Indigenous Myths and Languages to Contemplate Life's Meaning* https://hyperallergic.com/540757/mining-indigenous-myths-and-languages-to-contemplate-lifesmeaning/?utm_campaign=sf&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter accessed 14/11/2020.
[404] Spivak in Derrida *Of Grammatology*: xiii-xvi.
[405] Carly Whitefield *Sky Hopinka: Dislocation Blues* 2018 http://www.vdrome.org/sky-hopinka accessed 16/11/2020.

*Dislocation Blues* continues to use ambiguous, out of focus images or images-within images to stress the historical problems of representation, but also to avoid placing limits on, and within, the film.

One of the key aspects *Dislocation Blues*, which Hopinka describes as "[a]n incomplete and imperfect portrait of reflections from Standing Rock", is the continued marginalization of gender inequalities and the perpetuation of patriarchy at Standing Rock.[406] Whilst this gender imbalance has been imposed arbitrarily as a result of US colonial systems, it has, nevertheless, displaced traditional aspects of many indigenous US tribes whose social structures were matrilineal in pre-colonial times. The sacred hoop that Gunn Allen refers to is the centrality of women to indigenous tribes, and within tribal customs, rituals, and traditions. Gunn Allen comments: "[t]his spirit, this power of intelligence, has many names and many emblems. She appears on the Plains, in the forests, in the great canyons, on the mesas, beneath the seas." The sacred hoop is apparent in all life: humans and animals, as well as plants and inanimate objects.[407]

As such, *Dislocation Blues* questions the nature of indigenous identity, whilst at the same time interrogating colonial structures:

> "Two-spirit" roles, as the narrator calls them, are about more than sexuality. Indigenous peoples who feel and live their genders in ways that are unreadable to the aesthetics of the colonial gender binary, and whose sexualities have limitless possibilities resulting from other-worldly genders, occupy a specific, lineal space in community. At protest sites I've learned that as a result of gender diverse knowledges being withheld by settlers and Indigenous communities alike, in the absence of teachings, two-spirit peoples teach one another. Every action and expression in the metaphysical space Indigenous peoples occupy together as "community," by a two-spirit person, is a precedent and a teaching.[408]

Gender and sexuality have an essential place in indigenous sovereignty. Effectively incorporating indigenous knowledge systems advocated by Tuhiwai Smith can work to disrupt heteropatriarchy and dislocate political boundaries imposed by the US state.[409]

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[406] See: Sky Hopinka *Personal Website of Artist* http://www.skyhopinka.com accessed 11/11/2020
[407] Gunn Allen *The Sacred Hoo*p: xii-xiii; 1; 11; 13.
[408] Lindsay Nixon 'Wistful, Wayward Warriors: Post-Movement Fatigue and Dissociative States in Sky Hopinka's Dislocation Blues' 2018. https://contemptorary.org/wistful-wayward-warriors-dislocation-blues/ accessed 24/08/2020.
[409] Joanne Barker (Ed) *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*. Duke University Press; 2017: 12.

However, issues of 'leadership' based on gender arose within the camp, as with the mainstream media's reporting of *Taking Alcatraz* and assigning certain individuals with a title which followed the historical trope of the 'Indian' chief, or the dominant male/masculine warrior figure. At Standing Rock, in the portrayal by the mainstream media, as well as in social media, life within the camp had an undue focus on certain individuals:

> What of the individuals who "took up too much space," as the narrator puts it? The warriors on the front lines making the most noise in the media and on social media, often invisibilizing the daily labors undertaken by women, and gender variant and sexually diverse community members, such as cooking, caring for children, and managing the site. The narrator continues to tell the viewers that social media helped spread versions of events at Standing Rock that never happened or were just plain untrue (or perhaps placing undue importance on the aforementioned warrior figures).[410]

In the film, Hopinka's conversations with Keahna and Running Wild are featured, the former taking the form of a video call and the latter an audio interview which is weaved into the fragments of *Dislocation Blues*.

These conversations situate the narrative, reflecting the textual nature of film, and of the deconstructive model. That said, following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reading of *Of Grammatology*, each reading of a text also offers its own authenticity. This is perhaps the only ironic intervention Hopinka does make: stressing the mediated nature of film as cultural text and the unfixidity of meaning; those interpretations are affected by Hopinka's film and the subsequent intervention Hopinka and Keahna make in *Dislocation Blues* via the 'film within a film' positioning of Keahna on Hopinka's laptop. The laptop and the video-call draw further attention to the mediation of representation, inferring the problem this may pose with regard to US culture and indigenous representation through the myriad ways the author and audience can respond to a cultural text.

This is perhaps why there is a latent focus on the warriors on horseback, left until the conclusion of the film, as noted earlier. This is shot from the back of a truck containing Hopinka's filming equipment; the rear window, set against the black interior, looks like a cinema screen. Clearly Hopinka is making a point about the focus on the warriors in the camp, and the associated cinematic image of 'Indians', matched by the mass media's focus on these mounted warriors wearing headdresses. The ironic play is evident in Hopinka's film, without devoting too much time to it; the reference to cinematic 'Indians' informs an ironic

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[410] Lindsay 'Nixon Wistful, Wayward Warriors…'

coda of the film, which perhaps reflects the tiresome implications of such labels and representations within the media and how easily they are adopted.

However, *Dislocation Blues* fails to turn its attention fully to notions of gender, and the positive images of indigenous women warriors and 'Water Protectors' that were also harnessed by the camp's media output and caught by the mainstream mass media. The No DAPL had origins in women's activism, in the form of Takota Iron Eyes, a Lakota youth leader of 'Rezpect Our Water', who, at the age of 12, is credited with starting the No DAPL movement.[411] In addition, there were many prominent women amongst the leadership, who supported the No DAPL movement as spokespersons, such as Krystal Two Bulls (Cheyenne and Lakota), who helped start the Global Solidarity Campaigns, and Sweetwater Nannauck (Tsimshian and Tlingit), the executive director of Idle No More, an indigenous sovereignty group which started in Canada in resistance to fossil fuel extraction. Both of these women are inspired by indigenous Black Snake mythology which led to their participation, and a material commitment to repelling the pipeline.[412]

*Dislocation Blues*, whilst reflective of indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, particularly that of the Black Snake, does not provide an easy narrative; it requires the viewer to consider the idea of knowledge and accessibility. Whilst mediated through Hopinka's camera, the slices of landscape in *Dislocation Blues* are imbued with a sense of memory, by situating the narrative on Standing Rock as an event and not privileging indigenous culture by focusing on those aspects of 'Indians' and Indian-ness that would situate the narrative as a response to US culture. Rather it offers its own significance outside the binaries of representation forming the 'Indian'/ white narrative. This again stresses Hopinka's refusal to put boundaries on identity and representation by framing the events in ways that imply a reaction to the Western, that perhaps *Powwow Highway* represents.

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[411] Natasha Rausch 'Who is Takota Iron Eyes and why did Greta Thunberg come to the Dakotas to see her?' https://www.grandforksherald.com/news/government-and-politics/4710375-Who-is-Tokata-Iron-Eyes-and-why-did-Greta-Thunberg-come-to-the-Dakotas-to-see-her accessed 07/01/2021.

[412] Saul Elbein 'These Are the Defiant Water Protectors at Standing Rock' https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2017/01/tribes-standing-rock-dakota-access-pipeline-advancement/ accessed 07/01/2021.

Representation, perhaps liminal, and even ephemeral, in *Dislocation Blues*, offers an intervention by not inserting itself into the white/ 'Indian' cultural narrative.

This approach has been described as 'ethnopoetic' by Almudena Escobar López and is a direct challenge to the ethnographic gaze that has long defined indigenous peoples. Rather than being interpreted and defined by the white social anthropologist, ethnopoetics reframes the context of this gaze. As López explains:

> Ethnopoetics confronts ethnography through poetry and the capacity of learning from a point of not-knowing, without trying to master culture. It is a process more focused on the sensitive, emergent, and open-ended qualities of exploration, begging for questions rather than answers.[413]

Hopinka realizes this with *Dislocation Blues*' abstract interpretation of events. The 'fragments' that Hopinka reveals pose more questions whilst expressing cultural pluralism as opposed to film tropes that infer cultural assimilation and hegemony.

However, the general feeling of the narrative is one of celebration, presenting a life at Standing Rock where the majority live in common cause and communality, resisting the urge to assume a leadership based on the cult of personality or on one individual. As Keahna reflects, in the Standing Rock camps, "no one person is the authority on anything." This seems important as Keahna repeats this twice at different points in the film. This stresses the earlier deliberations on the communal nature of the *Oceti Sakowin* camp and accompanies the poetic visuals that inform the subject with strength, scope, and vitality. Keahna reflects how *Oceti Sakowin* was one big family, and that criticism of the camp was hard because of how the camp made him feel. He reflected the sense of community, but also how he felt an affinity with a sense of place that was not alien to him. In the film, Keahna reveals how, in the wider world, society caters for white people.[414] The *Oceti Sakowin* camp had roads and houses but,

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[413] Almudena Escobar López 'Ethnopoetics of Reality: The Work of Sky Hopinka' *Afterimage* 45, nos. 2&3, 2017: 27-31.

[414] White is a loaded term bound by representations of whiteness in visual culture. Thus, whiteness offers privilege and power for that group in the cultural realm, which is also expressed in other areas of

as Keahna reflects, they were physically different to the rest of the country. It would seem that Keahna also reproduces Hopinka's criticisms, but fails to articulate them fully, admitting there is a habit in remembering the camp with "rose-coloured nostalgia."

Interestingly, the camp, with its coming together of Natives and non-natives, serves as a microcosm of the world (within a world), and speaks to the nature of *différance* and the role the cultural text has to play in identity formation:

> Hopinka's film work scrutinizes the layered structure of identity in relation to homeland, landscape, and language. Like puzzles, his films are constructed with fragmented and superimposed images. Watching them is like experiencing memories inside of a dream, their fragments recomposed without any particular order by the unconscious. This does not make the result less truthful; quite the opposite, it is more real than ever. [415]

The result in *Dislocation Blues*, as Hopinka confesses, is to stress the nature of community whilst interrupting what López calls colonial 'totality'.

The above quotation also considers the nature of truth as a problematic transcendental signified, and perhaps extends Derrida's own suspicion of the conception of truth. Whilst Derrida did not write on indigenous peoples, he was concerned with systems of power built on language; hierarchies and social structures maintained by Eurocentric notions and ideas of categorization and socially constructed terms such as 'race' and 'gender'. These systems are a function of power and knowledge systems that express 'truths' of human evaluation as a 'will to power', such as the 'truth' expressed in a term like as 'manifest destiny' in the US-indigenous context.[416]

*Dislocation Blues* presents the camp which exists as a natural part of the environment. Or, at least, more natural than the trucks, armed police, and barbed wire; particularly when considering Hopinka's depictions of the camp and contrasting these with footage from *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock*. The latter juxtaposes peaceful and prayerful protests with jarring night-time images of police brutality. Hopinka does not create an opposition in this sense; the police do not cast such a visual presence, not to the same extent as in *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock.*

Hopinka does not present an essentialized indigenous culture or search for authenticity, but rather, in *Dislocation Blues*, portrays an evolving narrative that expresses

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society, be it political, economic, etc. See Richard Dyer *White*. London and New York: Routledge; 1997.

[415] Dessane López Cassell *Poetry That Pulls at the Seams of Colonial Power and Memory* 2020  https://hyperallergic.com/595185/sky-hopinka-perfidia-excerpt-wendys-subway-ccs-bard/ accessed 14/11/2020: 27.

[416] Spivak in Derrida *Of Grammatology*: xxii-xxiii.

indigenous adaptability and vitality – as Luther Standing Bear and others did – whilst he refuses to be drawn on a single cultural 'repertoire' with which to fashion his narrative expression. *Dislocation Blues* anticipates a filmic space across cultural lines and traditions, and emphasises a new creative space where identity is not fixed by the medium, but rather calls it into question. This would potentially address the problematic notion that consistently arises when considering notions of colonial systems being 'replaced' by returning to pre-colonial systems as opposed to addressing colonialism in the present by utilizing a hybridised culture to challenge western ways of doing things.

Utilizing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the 'rhizome' as a non-hierarchical model for representation to suggest that culture (and identity) have no absolute point of origin or authenticity would have practical application here. The problem of returning to some *a priori* notion of pre-colonial times suggests anoriginary position of culture which, as with notions of an absolute 'truth' and/ or a transcendental signified that Derrida, as noted previously, remained sceptical of.

With *Dislocation Blues* we have a hybridized film which illustrates how stories evolve and change to circumstances, further suggesting their adaptability and strength; further illustrated by Vizenor's Trickster tales, which are, as discussed, are derived from the indigenous oral tradition, but applied to modern life can prove absolutely fundamental. The application of this hybridity in narrative film has proved vital in the collaborative *Winter in the Blood*. This has commensurate power when applied to documentary forms of film, as Hopinka does. In this way, *Dislocation Blues* maintains not just a decolonial narrative but creates a filmic space to engage with the nature of indigenous culture and identity.[417]

iv: Performing Indigeneity and Creating 'Native Space'

After Wounded Knee (1890), indigenous bodies became a site of colonial control, but also disruption. The assimilation era would witness indigenous bodies becoming a focal point of the US' colonial agenda. Assimilation would challenge indigenous identity, whereby the land in which they occupied, the cultural practices tied to the land, as well as notions of kinship and language became a site of struggle. One of the fundamental ways the assimilation of Native Americans occurred was at the Carlisle School where indigenous peoples became

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[417] Neil Campbell *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press; 2008: 239-242.

'domestic subjects'. At Carlisle, and other 'Indian' schools like it, the English language was taught, and Christianity advocated, whilst an individual's hair was cut, and the indigenous children sent there were made to wear 'westernized' clothes. The "manipulation and social engineering" of the assimilation era fundamentally reshaped a hunter-gatherer society for inclusion in a capitalist one. As Beth Piatote (Nez Perce) affirms:

> The family is God's unit of society…the tribal organization, with its tenure of land in common, with its constant divisions of goods and rations per capita without regard to services rendered, cuts the nerve of all that manful effort which political economy teaches us proceeds from the desires of wealth.[418]

Principally, indigenous political economy was incongruent to the needs of US capitalism. Indigenous children and young adults at the schools were given a western education and learned manual labour skills. On this, the notion of US 'citizenship' hung. The Burke Act, amending the Dawes Act – or the General Allotment Act (1887), which broke up communal indigenous land and distributed it to individuals – was based on a quantitative notion of 'competence'. The measure of competence was judged by the Indian Agent on the reservation, which, more often than not, resulted in fraud and land loss.[419]

Essentially, 'competency' hinged on these bodily submissions and on "domestic inventories that measured citizenship through the specific, gendered forms of homemaking and land management."[420] These schools imposed a Western/ European gender binary and reshaped indigenous gender roles, towards a more Westernized/ European patriarchal familial structure.[421] However, as with Standing Bear, whose life knitted indigenous and westernized aspects of identity and performative displays of Indian-ness, via Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, into a larger narrative of American identities, such a performative characteristic of indigenous identity suggests a resistance to the aims of the US state-sponsored colonial domesticity of the 'Indian' schools.[422]

Hopinka expresses the effect of colonialism on indigenous family structures as well as the relationships between peoples and things in *Dislocation Blues*. This can be considered in the context of Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop*, which insists on the matriarchal lineage of

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[418] Beth H Piatote *Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship, and Law in Native American Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press; 2013: 6; 109-115.
[419] James Welch's *Killing Custer* (1994) deals with the US policies of assimilation with regard the Plains tribes. This book can also be seen as a response to the exile of the Native American in their own land. As with his other works, including *Winter in the Blood*, this book deals with the disintegration of the indigenous self in the face of arbitrary policies of the colonial US.
[420] Piatote *Domestic Subjects*: 111.
[421] Ibid:
[422] See, for example, any of the numerous autobiographical works on Standing Bear's life referenced in this thesis, such as *My Indian Boyhood* or *Land of the Spotted Eagle*.

indigenous gender roles. Hopinka reflects on the implications European-American assimilation has had on indigenous identity in this context:

> *A dislocated wild is still the wild. It exists in a place described by movements and overlapping layers of memory. Remembrances come together to finish the whole—a whole incomplete for so many mother, father, daughter, son, and other relationships fraught with history and everything standing in the way of healed joy and the permission of soft whimpers lamenting unknown infants—still without voice—and unknown grandfathers—still, abandoned, gentle, quiet. We'll roam those wilds, lesser than what we dreamt they'd be, but a wilderness nonetheless.*[423]

Hopinka stresses the 'dislocation' indigenous peoples feel towards their own selves, their sense of place in a colonial landscape, and contemplates the effects of assimilation on the indigenous self.

Beth Piatote's work has shown that indigenous identities adapted during the assimilation era but did not disappear. At the time, reformers argued that 'show Indians' would be lost to assimilation, but the life of Luther Standing Bear illustrates that this was not the case. Standing Bear's writing reflects this adaptation in that he effectively moved between worlds whilst performatively playing on his own 'Indianized' identity as a member of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.[424] Standing Bear, through his life and writing, suggests but never reveals "the organizing principle of identity as a cause."[425] The performative nature of indigenous identity can be empowering, linking past with present and offering contemporary renewal. As Gerald Vizenor observes:

> Standing Bear seemed to envision the onset of post Indian warriors of simulations; that sensation of a new tribal presence in the very ruins of the representations of invented Indians.[426]

In a similar fashion, the fragmentation of narrative in Hopinka's *Dislocation Blues* achieves the same plurality of cultural expression that Standing Bear performed and that Vizenor advocates.

Furthermore, *Dislocation Blues*, in representing a fragmented, deconstructed vision of the US landscape, interacts with hegemonic and cultural association of a landscape fomented in the cultural memory via film, particularly the Western genre: a landscape typically associated with narratives of progress, the frontier and 'manifest destiny', and an indigenous

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[423] 'Sky Hopinka Introduces His Film *Dislocation Blues*' 2017 https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/sky-hopinka-introduces-his-film-dislocation-blues accessed 24/08/2021. [Italics in original]

[424] This is also the main theme of James Welch's *Heartsong of Charging Elk*, also about a performer in the Wild West Show when it was travelling through France.

[425] Judith Butler *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge; 2002 [1990]: 124-5; 185.

[426] Vizenor *Manifest Matters*: 3.

absent presence established by metonymical association between the land and the 'Indian'. However, Hopinka's film makes the link between indigenous self in the contemporary US whilst referring to traditional familiar structures which elide constructions of the 'Indian', and suggests how these have persisted despite attempts at indigenous assimilation to eradicate traditional aspects of Native American lifeways.

As noted, Hopinka's concern is with the structuring influence of language within his wider work, and *Dislocation Blues* suggests that simply asserting a presence within the cultural medium can move against the language of dominance. Indeed, his focus on Standing Rock as a visual poem, with a dream-like feel, invests the film in a tradition of storytelling that represents indigenous culture through those visionary aspects that link the human and non-human, as well as the physical and non-physical worlds, investing his narrative with wonder and mystery.

This is accomplished by the non-linear narrative structure to his film. There is not a natural progression to the images, and the commentary by Keahna and Running Water refuses to offer context. Hopinka does not directly engage with the 'Indian', but he does consider the landscape and indigenous identity, as cultural formations that renounce the constructions of colonial dominance. The wide-lens landscape shots in *Dislocation Blues*, accompanied by low-angled shots of activists emphasise the size, scope, and strength of the *Oceti Sakowin* camps, are an intimate portrayal of indigenous peoples and their affiliation with the land. They effect a physical presence in place that is constituted by the filmic medium.

Many tribal interpretations of the landscape emphasize the relationship between the material and non-material, and human and nonhuman worlds. This is exemplified in the particular context of the Sioux in the writings of Standing Bear and Eastman, as well as the work of Gunn Allen. Whilst indigenous interpretations of the land counter the images offered in the Western genre, indigenous epistemology does not simply indicate a response. Siouan mythology affords a means with which to understand contemporary society and culture, particularly when thinking about the DAPL and the Black Snake. This suggests the overlap of mythological and oral narratives between different tribes, whilst speaking to a traditional cultural aspect of North American indigenous peoples' relations with the land. As Gunn Allen writes:

> They believe that all are linked within one vast, living sphere, that the linkage is not material but spiritual, and that its essence is the power that enables magical things to happen. Among these magical things are transformation of objects from one form to another, the movement of objects from one place to another by teleportation, the

curing of the sick (and conversely creating sickness in people, animals, or plants), communication with animals, plants, and nonphysical beings (spirits, katsinas, goddesses, and gods), the compelling of the will of another, and the stealing or storing of souls.[427]

Hopinka's reflection on the landscape and the relationship between things is a central aspect of *Dislocation Blues*. Hopinka effectively creates a non-linear narrative visual poem which interacts with colonially imposed systems of identity. The film offers an indigenous interpretation of events that not only establishes traditional narratives, but also counters the cultural hegemony of the US. In this way, Standing Rock's activism against the Black Snake DAPL not only offers a political intervention, but also offers a means with which to understand the world, and distinguishes events within a narrative framed by indigenous epistemology, again, resisting both 'Indian' simulations and the cultural fetishization of the 'Indian' in hegemonic culture.

Moreover, *Dislocation Blues* has a deliberate dream-like feel, emphasising the connection between the human and nonhuman worlds, as discussed by Gunn Allen above. Hopinka mediates on the place and space of Standing Rock and the historical associations Native Americans have with the land, not just as a symbol of US colonialism and assumptions about the advance of civilizations and progress over the 'wilderness' but including the underlying geology that is more profound than human endeavour and the metanarratives of dominance. Hopinka stresses the duality of thinking, expressed in the work of Luther Standing Bear, as an indigenous person engaging his meditations on landscape. In *The Land of the Spotted Eagle* a central theme is the destruction of the natural environment and its effects on indigenous peoples, Standing Bear wrote:

> The Natural Environment of the Indian having been destroyed, his natural. Reactions have ceased to function, and the industrous regime of an open, free and hardy life has disappeared under influences that are alien to all his traditions.[428]

*Dislocation Blues* can be seen as a narrative of 'survivance', in that it denaturalizes tribal oppression and offers representations that deal with contemporary indigenous reality. [429] Responding in part to the environmental concerns and fragmentation of indigenous identity that has dovetailed with destruction of the natural environment during the course of US-indigenous history, *Dislocation Blues* issues a commentary and declaration on this aspect of indigenous life and culture that remains central to surviving the effects of settler colonialism.

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[427] Gunn Allen *The Sacred Hoop*: 22-23.
[428] Standing Bear *Land of the Spotted Eagle*: 43.
[429] Vizenor *Manifest Matters* 38.

This process in *Dislocation Blues* is returned to in Hopinka's 2019 art exhibition, *Cloudless Blue Egress of Summer*. This installation ponders the contingency of memory in the same fragmentary and cryptic style of *Dislocation Blues*, in which "the land and its description, are constantly shifting and being reconfigured." As Shane McAdams observes:

> When the US was busy carving up North America in the 19th century, a 'landscape' aimed to permanently fix sublime fantasies into place, discarding alternative viewpoints and inconvenient narratives. The land Hopinka inherited a century-and-a-half later is covered with the desublimated fault lines of that troublingly oversimplified past.[430]

This quotation underscores how *Dislocation Blues* reconfigures colonial interpretations of land which have been naturalized in cultural memory and how the US landscape has been interpreted as a crucible of white progress and destiny that sublimates the indigenous presence.

Through Hopinka's myriad interventions, be they visual, spoken word, in art or the moving image, his fragmentary reiterations achieve the sublimation of US narratives of progress, of the frontier and 'manifest destiny', where knowledge has been used as a means to appropriate and conquer. As discussed in the previous section with regards Gayatri Spivak's reading of *Of Grammatology*, his work realizes the 'play' in the world of signs, playing with the language of dominance – be it visual or spoken. The cultural text's interaction with the world does not strive to reveal some truth or origin, but provokes active interpretation and representation. As Derrida reasons, "language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique."[431]

This potential point of critical intervention is found within questioning the narratives of dominance which naturalize indigenous oppression.[432] As Almudena Escobar López illustrates:

> Hopinka's films foreground the ways in which speakers learning a language not only access a full set of grammatical rules and usages, but also enter into the social space of the language and its cultural context. Therefore, grammar should not be understood only in linguistic terms, but also as a familial structure that determines the political conditions of its community. Dance, dreams, perception, and other expressive forms are part of this grammar that constitutes the identity of a community. In contrast to the static, standardized concept of grammar, this immaterial spiritual quality of language and culture is in constant movement because it is being lived.[433]

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[430] Shane McAdams *Sky Hopinka's Meditations on Place and Space* 2019 https://shepherdexpress.com/arts-and-entertainment/visual-art/sky-hopinka-s-meditations-on-place-and-space/ accessed 15/11/2020.
[431] Spivak in Derrida *Of Grammatology*: xiii; xxii-xxiii.
[432] Vizenor *Manifest Matters*: 86.
[433] Dessane López Cassell 'Poetry That Pulls at the Seams of Colonial Power and Memory'

Therefore, in this sense, *Dislocation Blues* expresses this movement between text and social and cultural space that is constitutive of the very thing Hopinka's work seeks to define. Resultantly, *Dislocation Blues* is a hybridised film that challenges Eurocentric ways of doing theory, again by emphasizing the lack of audio-visual narrative structure within the film.

*Dislocation Blues* is inflected with an indigenous sense of community, revealed by the many shots of community, signs, and structures that render Standing Rock as an indigenous place: from the banners and flags that lined the route into the camp, emphasising peoples of all tribes and nations – indigenous and non-indigenous – to the messages of solidarity on graffiti walls by different peoples, and through the camps' central milepost that indicated the distance and geographic position to other indigenous tribes, and non-native peoples around the world. Also presented in Hopinka's film is the avowal by activists in creating a space that was infused with indigenous ways of doing things: from daily prayers, to chanting and drumming.

*Dislocation Blues* also considers the very meaning of community, by reflecting on the space of Standing Rock as a physical manifestation; but also on the abstract idea of identity and its construction, through mediated cultural formations and the structuring influence of language.[434] The indigenous body in *Dislocation Blues* influences the spatial and temporal boundaries imposed by the US state. In this case it offers a supplemental identity within the framework of the state, forming a space which plays on colonised notions of identity through an animation of *différance*.[435] Hopinka's refusal to contextualize, through visual context and narrative form, in his film is a strategy to secure against colonial appropriation of indigenous identity. The *différance* that Hopinka enacts offers an engagement with colonial tropes by insisting on the presence of indigeneity.[436]

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2020 https://hyperallergic.com/595185/sky-hopinka-perfidia-excerpt-wendys-subway-ccs-bard/ accessed 14/11/2020: 27.

[434] Jacques Derrida *The Truth in Painting* [Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod] Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press; 1987 [1978]. This offers movement to the cultural medium and, resultantly, representation is never fixed by the cultural text, be it literature or film, for example. This provides a 'parergon' or 'supplement' –defining neither the work or the outside of the work; rather describes the 'frame' or the surrounds of the work. This metaphor illustrates the importance of considering cultural formations within their context, be it historical, political, social, and so forth, 6-11.

[435] Gayatri Spivak in Derrida *Of Grammatology*: xxviii-xxx.

[436] Gayatri Spivak's reading elucidates on Derrida's meaning of the term 'presence' and how this is structured through an insistence on difference. This is part of the process of the naturalization/ denaturalization of social and cultural phenomena in language, and why language (*différance*) as Hopinka states in his film, is crucial to thinking differently about the world: xliii; lii; lv.

Also, this insistence of *différance* maintains indigenous traditions in the face of hostile assimilation programmes and provides a performative play on identity. This contingency is effectively built on US colonial structures, as Kevin Bruyneel points out: "[t]he condition of the Indians in relation to the United States is perhaps unlike that of any other two people in existence".[437] This is because of the legacies of a domestic/ foreign binary forced upon indigenous peoples as a result of rulings such as *Cherokee V. Georgia* (1831), which effectively rendered indigenous peoples wards of the state.[438] Therefore, as Bruyneel concludes, "Indigenous political identity is a fundamental challenge to the American nation's sense of belonging in North American space and time", simply because it questions this very binary.[439]

This is the reason Jimmie Durham has refused to acknowledge his own tribal identity, despite the contention surrounding his Cherokee heritage. A prolific artist across a variety of forms and media, he has frequently been given space within the artworld to huge exhibitions, notably his *Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World* retrospective at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 2017. The art world has continued to deny the work of indigenous artists, particularly in mainstream galleries. Of course, the ambiguity surrounding Durham's origins also problematize this. Whilst evidence of his Native American heritage has circulated within the artistic and academic community, Durham himself, in 1993, stated he is not Native American – but this statement does not dismiss his origins, it dismisses what US law perceived to be "Native"; e.g., the aspect of citizenship laid down by parameters set by colonially imposed designs of citizenship (*Cherokee V. Georgia*) and a policy of assimilation which constrains indigenous agency, in this respect.

This is why Durham's position remains necessarily ambiguous and a critical statement, both materially and ideologically. Because Durham has no tribal affiliation, he cannot actually benefit financially from his work in the US. Whilst his exhibitions remain a feature in mainstream galleries, they are not for sale – because of course this would be illegal. Through his artistic exhibitions, Durham draws attention to the ongoing contradictions of US colonial structures, and to the US interpretation of 'indigeneity'. By refusing his own identity, he is occupying a space outside of US political formations: the 'Native Space' considered

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[437] Kevin Bruyneel *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of US-Indigenous Relations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; 2007: 3.
[438] Beth H Piatote *Domestic Subjects: Gender, Citizenship, and Law in Native American Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press; 2013: 4-5.
[439] Bruyneel *The Third Space*: 9.

above. Moreover, whilst not being formally affiliated with a tribe, he is one of the few people who is actually occupying physically and aesthetically a third/ Native space.[440]

v: Conclusion

The simulation of the 'Indian' offered Standing Bear a way with which to engage with his own indigeneity through metonymy, whilst manipulating the textuality of the metaphor of the 'Indian' as cultural positioning and opening up spaces of critique. Standing Bear did this during a period of assimilation that is essentially closed off to interpretation through the 'manifest manners' of dominance that Gerald Vizenor warns of. This era is known for its aggressive acts of assimilation by the US state, particularly towards indigenous children who were removed from their families and placed in 'Indian' schools. However, as the life of Standing Bear and the work of Beth Piatote demonstrate, during the era of assimilation, Native American bodies subverted the public and private sphere; maintaining indigenous lifeways, whilst performing aspects of an American identity to function in the white world by playing on the constructed 'Indian' identities allotted to them. This aspect of indigenous identity effectively sees the body, and the assimilationist era, as a site of colonial resistance, as much as control.

Indigenous identities, such as those presented in Sky Hopinka's *Dislocation Blues*, and their relationship to the land, emphasise the performative nature of identity, and the filmic spaces that remake colonial-imposed boundaries imposed by the structuring influence of language. This is the challenge of Hopinka's film: to consider an indigenous identity that has been sublimated and appropriated by the US colonial state; but it is not an identity that is permanent and static. To render indigenous identity as such would animate simulations of the 'Indian'. This can also be linked to the work of postcolonial thinkers, such as Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, in that indigenous peoples are the symbol of settler society's origins and contradictions; as are tropes of the 'Indian', which contain the colonial trace of this contradiction within a colonial metanarrative. This fluctuating identity advocated by *Dislocation Blues* anticipates the interstitial future, in between the past and the injustice of

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[440] Sheila Regan 'Jimmie Durham Retrospective Reignites Debate Over His Claim of Native Ancestry' https://hyperallergic.com/387970/jimmie-durham-retrospective-reignites-debate-over-his-claim-of-native-ancestry/ accessed 06/01/2021. The debate around his identity is also the reason Durham fell out with members of the AIM.

US settler society on Native Americans, which is intimately balanced with the needs of communities in the contemporary US.

3.3. Social Media and Reframing Stereotypes in *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock*
(Dewey, Fox, Spione 2017)

      i: Introduction: The Sacred Stone Camp

      In early 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe founded the Sacred Stone Camp to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). The pipeline was intended to move highly flammable shale oil from North Dakota to Illinois – over 1100 miles away – with the route running under Lake Oahe, which flows into the Missouri River, the Standing Rock community's main source of water. Advocates of the pipeline argued that opposition would increase the US' dependence on foreign oil, whilst the Sioux and their allies reasoned that issues of water safety and the preservation of tribal land made the pipeline dangerous.[441]

      The DAPL project was accused of foregoing consultation with the Sioux to these ends, as well as avoiding in-depth environmental assessments.[442] Resistance was met with official violence and suppression of the voices concerning the impact of the pipeline with regards environmental, land-rights, and indigenous self-determination. At the site, crude barricades were erected by state police preventing lawful and peaceful protests.[443] These issues stemmed from a long history of colonial violence perpetrated against tribal lands, and primarily, contravened the 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie Treaties.[444]

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[441] Ryan Eichberger 'Maps, Silence, and Standing Rock: Seeking a Visuality for the Age of Environmental Crisis' Commun. Des. Q. Rev 7, no. 1, 2019: 9–21.

[442] James Popham, Latasha VanEvery, and Laurier Brantford 'Representing Indigenous Protest on Twitter: Examining the Social Media Dialogue That Accompanied a Single Image of the Dapl Protests at Standing Rock.' *The Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research* Volume 7, 2018: 149. There was a period from early December 2016 to the 23rd of January 2017 in which Barack Obama's 35-page legal opinion was in force mandating reviews of both indigenous land rights and the environment. This was overturned by Donald Trump's Executive Order, but current court cases have ensured that the Executive Order is not the last word.

[443] See Colin Samson and Øvyind Ravna 'Civil Liberties of Indigenous People Have Long Been Suppressed at Standing Rock' https://theconversation.com/civil-liberties-of-indigenous-people-have-long-been-suppressed-at-standing-rock-69817 accessed 03/02/2019.
There was even an instance when surface-to-air missiles were deployed at the site by the National Guard. See: David Axe. National Guard Deploys Missile Launchers to Dakota Access Pipeline to 'Observe' Protests https://www.thedailybeast.com/national-guard-deploys-missile-launchers-to-dakota-access-pipeline-to-observe-protestors accessed 06/01/2021.

[444] See Nick Estes *Our History Is the Future*. London; New York: Verso; 2019: 2; and Dorothy Kidd 'Standing Rock and the Indigenous Commons.' *Popular Communication* 18, no. 3, 2020: 233-47. The Doctrine of Discovery is fundamental to capitalist exploitation of the natural world and the violent displacement of indigenous peoples in North America. Legally, the US adheres to a fifteenth century concept of the Doctrine of Discovery to invalidate indigenous land possession. On this matter, see Carla Fredericks, Rebecca Adamson, Nick Pelosi, and Jesse Heibel 'Indigenous Rights of Standing Rock: Federal Courts and Beyond' *ABA Human Rights Magazine* 43, no. 1, 2017: 1. Also, Judith Walker and Pierre Walter. 'Learning About Social Movements through News Media: Deconstructing New York Times and Fox News Representations of Standing Rock'

This section will illustrate how the DAPL protests were maintained in both physical and digital space, and what differences changes in media, particularly the internet and social media, have had on indigenous activism. Furthermore, many ingenious applications of modern technology, such as drone footage, captured by filmmaker Myron Dewey (Newe-Numah/ Pauite-Shoshone), and disruption of mainstream media narratives via the use of social media, were deployed by indigenous activists and filmmakers, which also informed the narrative of Standing Rock in the mainstream media in ways impossible in earlier protests. Desiree Kane, a media coordinator at Standing Rock commented:

> Part of what makes this historic is that one of the weapons we have now is our own cameras and our own internet connections to tell our own narratives and stories without having to bow to traditional media outlets that maybe aren't friendly to the cause.[445]

This emphasizes the agency social media and documentary footage offered filmmakers and activists at Standing Rock. As such, the mediated nature of this event will be contemplated by an examination of *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock* (2017), one which offers a wider illustration of the events at the camp and the actions of activists and state police, and how these were reported. Demonstrating how documentary film, coupled with social media, informed dissemination from the camp, both as imagined and real space; forming a complex audio-visual production of Standing Rock.

If film, as a form of mass communication, offers a means to project ideas of national identity – as the Western genre has done with regards US national identity – then film also opens to a space of identity negotiation. Hollywood representations have not always been congruent to indigenous communities' self-definition, but rather have spoken to a constructed Indian-ness that corresponds to hegemonic narratives of the US, contained within discourses of the frontier and the progress of white civilization. As Geiger writes: "[f]ilm *reflects and refracts* national consciousness – it can help create a sense of national belonging through the national narratives and myths it (re)produces."[446] The Western has been a viable vehicle for this process for years. As a result, indigenous representation in mainstream film has typically been compressed at best, and stereotypical at worst.

*International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37, no. 4, 2018: 401-18, which offers a history pertaining to the treaties.

[445] Dorothy Kidd 'Standing Rock and the Indigenous Commons.' *Popular Communication* 18, no. 3, 2020: 240.

[446] Geiger *American Documentary Film*: 3.

Documentary can have an impact on these images of mainstream cinema and impose narratives that are perhaps not so congruent with the wider narratives of European American identity.[447] This section will consider the effect *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* has on dominant narratives of indigenous representation, whilst also considering the protests as an ongoing aspect of indigenous activism which reflect Native American teachings at the same time as creating a cinematic record of an important political and environmental intervention. Made by three filmmakers, two American, Josh Fox and James Spione, and one Native American, Myron Dewey, this film is told in three parts and offers a candid documentary observation of life and events at Standing Rock. The film's narration by Floris White Bull (Standing Rock Lakota), is informed by Lakota knowledge of the landscape and signals an interpretation of the event which offers a departure from mainstream media descriptions of Standing Rock.

This section will further extend its discussion of Vizenor's application of Derrida's *différance*, and indigenous epistemology to consider a decolonial reading of *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock. Awake*, *A Dream from Standing Rock*, already suggests an alternative form of storytelling from its title and bridges the epistemological and ontological gaps between the physical and spiritual world, as well as between the human and non-human. *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* focuses on the land rights of the Sioux peoples, whose claims to the land, as per the Treaties of Fort Laramie, are being abrogated by the US state, the US Marine Corps, and a private fracking company – Energy Transfer Partners – who are constructing the DAPL.

Considering how the DAPL protests were maintained in physical and digital space, *Awake*, *A Dream from Standing Rock* forms a distinct cinematic departure of the landscape and representations of Hollywood. Fundamentally, at the heart of the Standing Rock Lakotas' protests is their legal entitlement to inhabit the land, as per the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. But the film also captures the profundity of the *Oceti Sakowin* camps. It is also inclusive of all people: simply put, water being universal to the survival of all living beings. It is not simply about taking on and exposing corporate giants and their stakeholders, which included then President Donald Trump. As will be clarified, Standing Rock is part of the wider historical and global movement for indigenous rights, with *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* forming a visual reminder of this. *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* signals the potential for indigenous representation beyond Hollywood stereotypes, which cuts into

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[447] Geiger *American Documentary Film*: 2-3. [My emphasis]

contemporary US discourse by reconceptualizing space and history, via film, and making visible what settler colonialism has obscured.[448]

ii: Mainstream Media Representation

Resistance to the DAPL is entrenched in a wider US historical trajectory of dispossessing indigenous peoples of their land.[449] As such, mainstream media reporting of events has not always favoured indigenous peoples and fits with the colonial agenda, as Laura Ashley and Beth Olsen observe:

> The ideology funnelled through the media is likely to include emphasis on the legitimacy of the state and established class institutions, delegitimation of challenges to the social order, and discontent and frustration towards non conformists.

Whilst it has been found that the mainstream media may not be that successful in teaching the populace what to think, it does seem to have a profound effect on public opinion.[450] Therefore, mainstream media has the potential to consolidate dominant narratives by placing disruptive protestors (particularly 'Indian' ones) in opposition to the state. In fact, it could be argued that the pejorative view of activists at Standing Rock, whether indigenous or not, were made 'Indian' in the public imaginary as the Standing Rock Lakota and their allies interfered with imperial designs, their actions inconsistent with narratives of white progress and democracy as obtained from the acquisition of indigenous lands – as had happened in the past.[451]

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[448] Byrd *The Transit of Empire*: xxx.
[449] Mary Louisa Cappelli 'Standing with Standing Rock: Affective Alignment and Artful Resistance at the Native Nations Rise March.' *SAGE Open*, 2018: 1.
[450] Various earlier studies were used in Walker and Walters analysis, ranging from 1974 to 2008. Walker and Walter's study focused on *Fox News* and the *New York Times*, which they and the public deem as authoritative and consistent outlets, at least from a liberal and conservative perspective. What is not disputed is the media's importance on shaping public discourse: in other words, from a Communication Studies perspective, media matters as it shapes public opinion, and directly and indirectly influences political outcomes and public policy. That is, news media teaches people what is important, and can influence what they think about political and social issues. Quoted in Judith Walker and Pierre Walter 'Learning About Social Movements through News Media: Deconstructing New York Times and Fox News Representations of Standing Rock'
*International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37, no. 4, 2018: 404-406.
[451] Byrd *The Transit of Empire*: xx.

The bridge in *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock* (Dewey, Fox, Spione, 2017) seems like a metaphor for the white/ 'Indian' binary that US discourses of indigenous representation hinges on.

A study of print and visual media can illustrate this. For example, the *New York Times* was largely sympathetic and neutral, and *Fox News*, whilst focusing on the violence and conflict at the camps, did frame the struggle as relatable to the general populace. However, the primary default for both outlets was the focus on law and order over activism and the privileging of legal arbiters over grassroots activist voices. As Walker and Walter observe:

> Unsurprisingly, we see marked differences between the two media representations, with Fox more explicitly perpetuating the myth of white US corporate land ownership over Indigenous sovereignty, and the rule of colonial law and order trumping long-standing land claims. While less direct in its endorsement of settler narratives, NYT [New York Times] generally highlighted issues of justice that do not fundamentally question capitalist colonialist frameworks, such as: promoting the idea of moving the pipeline rather than questioning the very existence of it, depicting the state's legal apparatus as an unproblematic neutral arbiter, focusing on celebrity endorsements and at times privileging allied voices who know little of the Sioux experience, sometimes focusing on the movement primarily as an 'anti-oil' or environmental movement, and focusing mainly on current injustices without often historicizing the colonial legacy of land dispossession, genocide and racism against First Peoples.[452]

As the quotation illustrates, both outlets undoubtedly tapped into the inherent biases of their readers/ viewerships; however, these news media outlets' treatment of events at Standing Rock was illustrative of state liberalist discourse.[453] As Casey Ryan Kelly observes: "[h]istory does not exist outside of discourse but rather is concerned with tropes, arguments, and other devices of language used to write history and persuade audiences."[454]

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[452] Judith Walker and Pierre Walter 'Learning About Social Movements through News Media: Deconstructing New York Times and Fox News Representations of Standing Rock' *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37, no. 4, 2018: 414.
[453] Byrd *The Transit of Empire*: xxvi.
[454] Casey Ryan Kelly 'Rhetorical Counterinsurgency: The FBI and the American Indian Movement', *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, 10:1, 2007: 223.

Nick Estes (Lower Brule Sioux) confirms the negative portrayal of activists at Standing Rock. Politicians commenting on the events called those at the camp 'hippies'. Furthermore, TigerSwan, a private security firm hired by the DAPL, circulated false reports on social media comparing the water protectors to Jihadist insurgents.[455] Neither of these positions was fair or truthful, and the term 'Jihadist' is particularly loaded. This has been the case since the events of 9/11, and the subsequent 2003 invasion of Iraq, as well as the term's association with the military insurgents of the so-called 'Islamic State' and is typical of the incendiary language that seeks to create opinion through oppositional constructs. Labelling Native American activists as 'Jihadists' creates a binary in opposition to the US, and firmly squares indigenous peoples as the enemy of the US state.
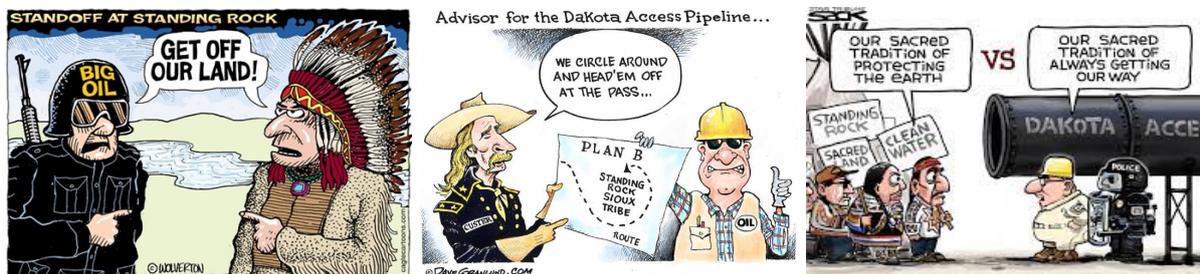


Mediated images of the pipeline standoff, including the above cartoons, illustrate the binary opposition that is maintained through the media between the US military/ police/ big business on one side and indigenous peoples and their allies on the other.

Moreover, the purpose of the security firm, TigerSwan, as revealed on the journalism website *The Intercept* was that:

> TigerSwan's internal reports and the intelligence briefings shared with law enforcement name dozens of DAPL opponents. Some of those named are well-known activists, while others have minimal public affiliation with the water protector movement. The reports' authors often comment on camp dynamics, including protester morale and infighting, and speculate about violent or illegal actions specific individuals might take and weapons they might carry. The documents reveal the existence of a "persons of interest" list as well as other databases that included identifying information such as photographs and license plate numbers.[456]

The Orwellian language of the quotation reflects how TigerSwan focused on what could be perceived as potential terrorist activity: in a similar vein to the methods the Federal Bureau of

[455] Nick Estes *Our History Is the Future*. London; New York: Verso; 2019: 3; 6.
[456] Alleen Brown *et al* '*Leaked Documents Reveal Counterterrorism Tactics Used at Standing Rock to Defeat Pipeline Insurgencies*' Updated 27/05/2017. https://theintercept.com/2017/05/27/leaked-documents-reveal-security-firms-counterterrorism-tactics-at-standing-rock-to-defeat-pipeline-insurgencies/ accessed 09/09/2020.

Investigation utilized to diffuse the American Indian Movement, the Black Power Movement, and other 'radical' organizations.[457]



Putting differences aside: the *Oceti Sakowin* Camp was represented by indigenous peoples in the US, and globally from supporters, who all arrived at the camp in solidarity.

Whilst divisions in the camp did exist, the nature of media reporting, by focusing on identity politics, glosses over what Nick Estes describes as "meaningful solidarities" created in resistance to settler colonial violence.[458] This is shown in *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock*, particularly in its depictions of camp solidarity in everyday tasks, but also in showing that the preparation of those tasks was an opportunity to not only think differently about the world but actually demonstrate how people can interact with the world in a distinctive capacity.[459] *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* suggests on many occasions the humanity and – even in the face of brutal police violence – human compassion which the camps' occupiers express, even towards the police and security forces exacting the violence on the protestors. The film itself is a lasting documentation to a physical camp that is no longer present. Standing Rock achieves an ongoing sense of presence through film, one which has been compounded by social media.

iii: Social Media

Navajo journalist Jason Begay spent time at the camp around the Labour Day weekend of 2016. He and his research students found that the main source of information

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[457] Casey Ryan Kelly 'Rhetorical Counterinsurgency: The FBI and the American Indian Movement', *Advances in the History of Rhetoric*, 10:1. 2007: 226.

[458] Estes *Our History Is the Future*: 7.

[459] The struggle on the ground to educate left-leaning, non-Native protectors in a politics of decolonization – a different register of anti-statist or anticapitalist critique – was one of the most meaningful practices of solidarity work within the camp. Dana E Powell and Ricki Draper 'Making It Home: Solidarity and Belonging in the# Nodapl/ Standing Rock Encampments.' *Collaborative Anthropologies* 13, no. 1, 2020: 1-45.

pertaining to the camp by the camp's inhabitants was obtained via social media. At that time, *Democracy Now!* was the only broadcast media present at the camp and this anticipated the build-up of journalists from traditional news media that occurred later; particularly in response to the state violence of Thanksgiving weekend 2016, or what would come to be known as 'Blackwater Sunday'.[460] Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Facebook Live offered a fundamental real-time capacity and utilitarian purpose which offered the camp's inhabitants 'immediate' news of such things as roadblocks which were preventing access to the site.[461]



In case you missed it [hashtag]: News from Standing Rock was still reported in a biased way via traditional outlets, and social media usefully disrupted these narratives.

Social Media also illustrated the usefulness of communicating state action against the camp's inhabitants by law enforcement. Supporters were asked to 'check-in' virtually via Facebook to Standing Rock to show solidarity and curb police surveillance which provided "a disembodied presence and lent visibility to the bodies on the ground in a very particular local place."[462] In this manner, the digital presence remains a reality long after the formal structure of the camp receded. In this way, there remains a 'clue to the truth' in the simulated representation of Standing Rock in *Awake*, *A Dream from Standing Rock*. The film is representing a space where the physical becomes abstract, but the trace of materiality remains. The (repeated) visual reference to the now-disbanded camp becomes its own referent as subject and meaning become interchangeable.

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[460] Dana E Powell and Ricki Draper 'Making It Home: Solidarity and Belonging in the #Nodapl/ Standing Rock Encampments." *Collaborative Anthropologies* 13, no. 1, 2020: 7.

[461] Jason Begay *Standing Rock and the Media* Vimeo, 2017  https://vimeo.com/205575141 accessed 08/08/2020.

[462] Dorothy Kidd 'Standing Rock and the Indigenous Commons.' *Popular Communication* 18, no. 3, 2020: 240.

Therefore, *Awake*, *A Dream from Standing Rock* offers a context that constantly re-establishes itself, and as a cultural text is open to a myriad of meaning via *différance*. In this way, film has the potential in destabilizing hegemonic narratives and binary constructions of 'race' and gender that structure cultural representations and inform gestures of identity, by presenting a Native American presence. In this sense, *Awake*, *A Dream from Standing Rock* presents a radical play with the construction of the 'Indian'. It is not necessarily replaced with something else, rather, texts like *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* simply break the established chain of signification.[463]

Opposition to the DAPL from the Standing Rock Sioux had been consistent in the period preceding the protests beginning in 2014, but it was in the event of such protests, relayed through social media platforms that mainstream media and public attention was gained. As depicted in *Awake*, *A Dream from Standing Rock*, when water cannons were used on protestors, in sub-zero temperatures, the images went viral.[464] This was in a large part to the social media posting on these events, as opposed to traditional media outlets. As Hopke *et al*., describe:

> Mainstream media largely ignored the concerns of demonstrators on-the-ground and their supporters until participation in the protests became disruptive, facing crackdowns by authorities and sparking a greater volume of social media posting.

It was found that 13.5 million tweets were sent between April 1, 2016, and March 31, 2017, by examining a database of keywords concerning Standing Rock. In addition, Twitter use spiked around late 2016 and early 2017, illustrating the correlation between social media activism, state violence and mainstream media attention, which also corresponds with Google-search peaks. They state:

> The highest spike in post volume, which was also the highest point of US press attention, occurred in December 2016 when the Army Corps of Engineers denied the easement to complete the pipeline. Similar to the Standing Rock dataset, less than one percent of the posts were from North Dakota. Tweets came all 50 states, with California (18%), New York (10%), and Texas (7%) ranking highest. Globally, 20% of posts originated outside the United States.[465]

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[463] Spivak in Derrida *Of Grammatology*: lxiv-lxvi.

[464] Colin Samson and Øyvind Ravna 'Civil Liberties of Indigenous People Have Long Been Suppressed at Standing Rock' 2016 https://theconversation.com/civil-liberties-of-indigenous-people-have-long-been-suppressed-at-standing-rock-69817 accessed 03/02/2019.

[465] Jill E Hopke, Molly Simis-Wilkinson, and Patricia A Loew 'Social Media in Agenda-Setting: The Elsipogtog First Nation and Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.' *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Social Media and Society*, Copenhagen, Denmark, Association for Computing Machinery; 2018: 310-313.

Representations of indigenous peoples were largely affected by such social media coverage, particularly the use of Twitter.

As social media was used in an effective manner to generate information and gather wider interest in the protests, the images from Standing Rock could not always provoke positive discussion. Representations of Standing Rock subsequently aligned with mainstream media depictions of criminalized activism, such as that related to the stand-off at Wounded Knee in 1973, and the subsequent trial of Leonard Peltier, evidencing how such historical and cultural references become tropes, or a shorthand, and can be used to perpetuate stereotypes of violent protestors. This was largely in the mainstream (traditional) media outlets' persistence in projecting and maintaining the image of the hostile 'Indian' and its connection to historical, but also contemporary stereotypes such as drug use and gang violence.

Whilst the use of social media in this sense drew attention to Standing Rock, it cannot be assumed it rendered positive images. Another study found that social media is informed by 'media packaging'. Media packaging continues to frame Native Americans in the past tense, perpetuating cultural stereotypes and reflecting a historical discourse of negative representation through the culturally loaded term of the 'Indian'. Focusing on alleged activist transgression at Standing Rock ultimately diverts public discussion from the central issue of environmental justice and Native American land rights; that is, it makes the issue about Native Americans hypothetically breaking US law as opposed to the contemporary effects of US colonialism on indigenous and human rights.[466]

Taken together, the study emphasises that continued misrepresentation of indigenous peoples may result from social media usage. It was felt by the instigators of this particular study this was due to previous 'digital invisibility'; but also associated misrepresentations in US culture, film, and ongoing media stereotypes. Significantly:

> Social media commentary is character-limited and popularity-motivated, frustrating public engagement in discussions about the historic relations leading up to this moment and the broader legal discourse between the state and SRST [Standing Rock Sioux Tribal] leadership. [467]

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[466] Gregory D Smithers 'Beyond the Ecological Indian: Environmental Politics and Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Modern North America', *Environmental History*, Vol 20, Issue 1, 2015: 83-111.

[467] James Popham, Latasha VanEvery, and Laurier Brantford 'Representing Indigenous Protest on Twitter: Examining the Social Media Dialogue That Accompanied a Single Image of the Dapl Protests at Standing Rock' *The Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research* Vol 7, 2018: 149-157.

Ironically, despite the real-time uses of such social media, the limited nature of Twitter may perpetuate a digital presence that continues to misrepresent indigenous peoples. The limits of Twitter, then, suggest that it is a potential medium – in conjunction with others – for affecting awareness and impacting on historical and cultural representations; but it can also consolidate previously-held opinions. Ultimately, as with traditional media, the naturalization of stereotypes can occur, as much as social media can be used to deconstruct them.

Regardless, Twitter remains an important and influential platform for communicating the sentiments of the public. Whilst Twitter offers a limited and truncated narrative – given the nature of the micro-blog that it outputs – accompanying visual images have become a way of representing opinion and ideology. This illustrates the discursive limits of social media, and that affecting representation is dependent on more than an answer to media stereotypes. Popularization of indigenous issues on social media may amplify the perspectives of dominant groups and marginalize and stigmatize indigenous peoples further, in ways discussed above.

However, as the authors of the study found, visual imagery, along with responsible commentary, can improve public discourse on issues relating to decolonialization: the Idle No More movement is an example of the interaction between the physical (protests), the digital (social media) and public perception and traditional media discourse.[468] As Dorothy Kidd emphasizes:

> By the fall of 2016, as many as 20,000 Indigenous and non-Indigenous supporters had joined them to form three collectively governed camps, with over 1.5 million people actively participating in hundreds of cyber spaces. Led by the Standing Rock Sioux, the land- and cyber-based encampments were supported by every single Native American tribe, hundreds of other Indigenous nations from across the Americas and northern Europe, US Military veterans, and a very wide coalition of environmental and social justice movements.[469]

Of course, the success of such social movements does not entirely hinge on social media; contextual awareness of the issues within social media messages is necessary, which, again,

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[468] The Idle No More (INM) movement was organized by four women in Saskatchewan, Sylvia McAdam, Jess Gordon, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean, to provide information to communities about proposed legislation by the Canadian government on indigenous rights, water, and environmental protection. INM gathered momentum in late 2020 and early 2013, across North America and gained international recognition. See: Ionut Nicolescu 'Cases of Equality: Idle No More and the Protests at Standing Rock' *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 27, no. 2, 2018: 1-13.
[469] Dorothy Kidd 'Standing Rock and the Indigenous Commons.' *Popular Communication* 18, no. 3, 2020: 233.

is affected by public and wider media discourse, as well as cultural constructions in film, but admittedly not through film alone.[470]

The environmental threat to the Standing Rock Sioux is part of a larger historical narrative of expansionism and continued threat to indigenous lands, culture, and human rights in the face of settler colonialism. Social media had an important role to play, by the time of increasing violence and media blackouts that conspired against the Standing Rock camp in late 2016. As Kidd continues:

> However, by that point, the water protectors had over a million active followers on their social media accounts, a powerful force in refuting the narrative provided by the police and then echoed by some of the dominant media.[471]

Such applications of social media were absolutely necessary in order to emphasise state violence at Standing Rock perpetrated against the Water Protectors. As Colin Samson and Øvyind Ravna illustrate:

> A plane continuously circled the camps, flying at night without lights. NBC reported what many water protectors were saying; that the mysterious plane had been jamming signals so that witnesses could not disseminate what they saw, heard and felt. Several people mentioned in the NBC report as well as one of our party had their mobile phones rendered permanently unusable, possibly through interference of this kind.[472]

The suppression of news of state violence emphasises the colonial maintenance of a physical act of disposition against tribal peoples.

This is one of the quiet punctuation marks in *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock*: that of the constant aerial surveillance of the camp by planes and helicopters. The narrator does not mention them, or discuss what they are doing, but their presence forms a continuous backdrop to the events. Of course, the issue of police harassment and intimidation is met head on in the narrative of the film, but it is also a part of the film's backdrop. State violence takes many forms, from the physical and overt, such as the use of water cannons on peaceful, prayerful protests, to the constant silent surveillance from aircraft that quietly makes its

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[470] The dual physical/ digital movement is emphasised in its origins. As Kidd continues: In April 2016, the Indigenous youth group ReZpect Our Water started a social media campaign to stop the proposed Dakota Access Oil Pipeline (DAPL), which was threatening to harm their water sources and sacred sites (thus the hashtags #StandingRock, #NoDAPL, #mniwiconi and #waterislife). Soon after, Standing Rock Sioux historian LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, her grandchildren, and other women leaders set up the camp of the Sacred Stones on their traditional territory as a center for direct action, spiritual resistance, cultural preservation and defense of Indigenous sovereignty, in 'Standing Rock…': 240.

[471] Kidd 'Standing Rock…': 240.

[472] Colin Samson and Øvyind Ravna 'Civil Liberties of Indigenous People Have Long Been Suppressed at Standing Rock' 2016 https://theconversation.com/civil-liberties-of-indigenous-people-have-long-been-suppressed-at-standing-rock-69817 accessed 03/02/2019.

presence felt through the sound of helicopter blades or engine hum which punctures the commentary. Film offers a powerful visual in this respect when the stark images and audio are accompanied by a temperature gauge informing the viewer of the night-time temperature of 26-degrees Fahrenheit.



Water Protectors being sprayed with water cannons during a freezing night.

In a further example, The *Democracy Now!* footage revealed security dogs attacking protestors during the Labour Day weekend.[473] The Labour Day events, shared widely on Twitter and Facebook Live, look 'chaotic' to outside parties as they lack sufficient context. As a result, the images can be easily manipulated by an audience looking to criticise what is perceived as indigenous people's aggression, playing into the cultural formation of the hostile, racialized 'Other'.[474] Whilst this can naturalize such stereotypical representations of Native Americans, it can also have the opposite effect. As Cody Lucich, discussing Standing Rock in his documentary film *Akicita: The Battle of Standing Rock* (2018) in *Filmmaker Magazine* states, the chaos is the context, and it is important to emphasise that: "[T]here was beauty in the chaos and the film speaks to that. It captures what it felt like to be there."[475]

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[473] Alleen Brown *et al* 'Leaked Documents Reveal Counterterrorism Tactics Used at Standing Rock to Defeat Pipeline Insurgencies.' Updated 27/05/2017 https://theintercept.com/2017/05/27/leaked-documents-reveal-security-firms-counterterrorism-tactics-at-standing-rock-to-defeat-pipeline-insurgencies/ accessed 09/09/2020.

[474] Jason Begay *Standing Rock and the Media*, Vimeo 2017 https://vimeo.com/205575141 accessed 08/08/2020.

[475] Lucich shot between 1500 and 2000 hours of footage at Standing Rock, some of which made the final cut of *Akicita*. Additional footage has been uploaded onto YouTube and emphasises the guerrilla process to his filmmaking/activism: "I was at the complete mercy of the story. There was no planning or control. I couldn't go out and plan a shoot, or figure out when the story was over. I had absolutely no idea how long "production" was going to go for. While we battled a pipeline at camp, I shot for eight months straight. I lost four or five drones during that time that were either shot down or taken over. I was maced, hit with rubber bullets and I have no idea how my little Sony AS7 camera survived through all of it; all I know is its still caked with tear gas and mace. Many times when I was filming, I would

Lucich arrived at Standing Rock with the intention of using his film-making skills to support the camp. His intention was to film short clips of what was happening and post them on social media, but which ultimately turned into the documentary *Akicita: The Battle of Standing Rock*. The creation of a feature-length documentary was not Lucich's initial intention when he began documenting the camp, as this meant holding onto the footage and not utilizing it for its primary purpose: to spread immediate awareness of the camp. *Akicita: The Battle of Standing Rock* was shot on a Sony AS7 DSLR camera and the final edit cut completely on Adobe Premier Pro.[476] In addition, Lucich used a Canon C300 for the follow up interviews and he relied on a DJI Drone to capture ariel shots and observe police violence.[477]

This suggests the changing nature of film and filmmaking, particularly when thinking about the digital revolution and the advent of social media. After all, cinema has transformed dramatically, at first by both television and video and the rise of the internet at the end of the twentieth century. This points to a new territory in film and filmmaking. As D N Rodowick points out: "it is increasingly rare to find a moving image entirely unaffected by digital practices."[478] Moreover, this relatively inexpensive approach by Lucich also reflects an increasing ability to make film and access media in alternative contexts. This equipment is both readily and inexpensively available to filmmakers and non-filmmakers alike; all can make use of the simplicity of point-and-shoot cameras and with relative ease the footage can be edited and transmitted via social media.

Indeed, digital cinema can be seen as the future of cinema, without actually engaging in traditional aspects of film-making (the lack of film being the most obvious). Film making in the digital age represents both a continuation in filmmaking and a departure for cinema. Digital cinema, or what Michael Brown calls 'non-cinema', suggests that this evolution may be beneficial for those mis-represented by cinema. As Brown writes:

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shoot with the camera, put it down, fly the drone and then come back to the camera. Getting there in August, I don't think any of us knew what the movement would turn into. So I just kept fighting and filming." This quotation appears in Filmmaker Magazine. *I Have No Idea How My Little Sony As7 Camera Survived*: 'Director Cody Lucich *Akicita: The Battle of Standing Rock*' 2018 https://filmmakermagazine.com/104677-i-have-no-idea-how-my-little-sony-as7-camera-survived-director-cody-lucich-akicita-the-battle-of-standing- rock/#.X1ONgS2ZM1I accessed 05/09/2020.

[476] Megan Keane *Cody Lucich Brings an Insider's Perspective to Akicita: The Battle of Standing Rock* 2018 https://theblog.adobe.com/cody-lucich-brings-insiders-perspective-akicita-battle-standing-rock/ accessed 05/02/2019.

[477] Chris O'Falt *Sundance 2018: Here Are the Cameras Used to Shoot This Year's Documentaries* updated 22/01/2018 https://www.indiewire.com/2018/01/sundance-documentary-camera-films-non-fiction-1201918709/2/ accessed 05/09/2020.

[478] D N Rodowick *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge & London. Harvard University Press. 2007: 94.

Non-cinema as a concept might also help us to understand films that do political work, e.g. films that bring to screens representations of that which is often un-, under- or even mis-represented in mainstream media, including the plight of racial, sexual and other minorities across a variety of contexts. This is also tied in part to technology, for digital cameras allow for cheaper films, which in turn free film makers for the commercial obligations of mainstream cinema and the risk-aversion that sees the mainstream tend to avoid non-mainstream topics.[479]

As illustrated by Lucich's *Akicita: The Battle of Standing Rock*, Myron Dewey's drone footage of the 'Black Snake' and his Digital Smoke Signals company which he regularly engages with on Twitter, alongside his work on *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock* and social media activism, suggests a tangled, but creative space of digital media that forms a complex intervention with regard Native American representation and important implications for indigenous culture and identity via film.

Whilst film may be disappearing into "an aesthetic universe constructed from digital intermediates and images combining computer synthesis and capture"[480], to the disconcertion of purists and cinephiles, the potential for this to filmmaking and representation in the indigenous-documentary context appears to add a dynamism and vitality to both. The link between culture and identity on the one hand is compounded by the question of representation in film which, in the Native American context, is made questionable by the dominance of mainstream (Hollywood) filmmaking as well as the interplay of US culture and settler colonial and capitalist hegemony. The practical application of digital capturing and social at Standing Rock were largely positive vis a vis indigenous representation, and perhaps suggest something about how Native Americans can create greater representation (and thus authenticity) through this media, particularly in engaging with hegemonic culture and the logics of this settler colonial culture and it is driven by capitalism. Given the advent of more positive representations in the narrative fiction genre, via such films as *Songs my Brothers Taught Me* and *The Rider*, the filmic landscape has further potential here.

*Akicita*: *The Battle of Standing Rock*, was the only Native-made feature-length film to come out of Standing Rock, so, Lucich felt responsible for the narrative and the content. He commented:

I think everyone who was there realized how important it is for Native Americans to regain control of their own storyline and history…. I hope my people can watch this

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[479] William Brown 'What is non-cinema?' Edinburgh University Press blog, 2016 https://euppublishingblog.com/2016/02/24/what-is-non-cinema/ accessed 24/04/2022.

[480] Rodowick *The Virtual life of Film*: 163.

and learn from it, what we did right, what we did wrong, and that we may respect the diversity of tactics and learn to work together if we are to achieve our goals.[481]

*Akicita*: *The Battle of Standing Rock* potentially disrupts filmic representations of the 'Indian' by engaging not simply with representations directly, but questioning the colonial discourse that defines them, the latter being what sustains the simulation of the 'Indian'.[482]

Issues of colonialism were shunned from mainstream media examples, which pursued a more liberal agenda which continues to contain and construct indigeneity as the colonial 'Other'.[483] Indeed, to address the elision of the colonial narrative in mainstream media, the third section of *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock*, which was primarily directed by Myron Dewey, is accompanied by an intertitle stating:

> Indigenous people's authority over their lands has been interpreted by the United States Supreme Court to be the same as the wildlife – the right to the landscape for "occupancy and use" ... Furthermore, the Court has created the colonial-imposed Plenary Power Doctrine to allow the perpetual and continuous theft of natural resources protected by treaties which are binding by the US Constitution.

The intertitle card goes on to refer to the Fort Laramie Treaties, again centring on Lakota land rights and the injustices of US colonialism. The suppression of indigenous peoples' voices in mainstream media continues the ethnocentric cultural ideology of colonialism and perpetuates narratives of 'frontierism' and 'manifest destiny' which elide colonial violence. Film has the potential to create an alternative narrative. By combining indigenous epistemology with cultural commentary, films like these can provide an ongoing narrative which insists on an indigenous presence in the US cultural imagination.[484]

iv: 'Survivance'

In *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock*, Floris White Bull concludes that what is present at *Oceti Sakowin* is "something new but yet very old" and suggests that the inhabitants of the camp are "warriors of peace", as opposed to warriors such as Sitting Bull who engaged in military campaigns against the US state. The film combines the old and the new, which White Bull discusses. Sitting Bull is quoted in *Awake: A dream from Standing*

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481 Megan Keane *Cody Lucich Brings an Insider's Perspective to Akicita: The Battle of Standing Rock* 2018 https://theblog.adobe.com/cody-lucich-brings-insiders-perspective-akicita-battle-standing-rock/ accessed 05/02/2019.
482 Vizenor *Manifest Matters*: vii.
483 Edward W Saïd *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books; 1993: xii-xiii.
484 Lisa Lowe *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham and London: Duke University Press; 2015: 2.

*Rock,* stating: "[i]f a man loses something, if he goes back to it, he will find it." This inclusion signifies the link between indigenous identity and place, traditional and contemporary activism. This again identifies with Vizenor's postmodern and postcolonial theories of 'postindians'. Vizenor offers this term as a replacement of the 'Indian'. Vizenor references Luther Standing Bear, calling him:

> A postindian warrior who had encountered the enemies of native cultures with wit and courage, countered the manifest manners and conceit of dominance, and created his own stories of survivance.[485]

Fundamentally, *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock,* presents a new form of narrative, a new form of thinking, of protest, and a new conception of the world: one which is indigenous in its nature. This is emphasised in a key scene during which a Water Protector points to the police occupation of the sacred burial grounds and reflects that "these are our synagogues, Eiffel Towers, our pyramids." The description of the Lakota burial grounds in such a manner offers the viewer a reference with which to consider the cultural significance of the site.

*Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock,* reconfigures the colonial narrative, presenting the *Oceti Sakowin* from an indigenous perspective and contextualizes it in a wider world movement for human, cultural and environmental rights, whilst creating power and counter-hegemony for indigenous land concerns.[486] *Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock* does not present itself as a struggle within the US state, but as part of the world movement for indigenous rights. In this way, the narrative constructs the position of indigeneity within a wider movement, not confining it to the politics of the US. As Kevin Bruyneel suggests: "Indigenous political identity is a fundamental challenge to the American nation's sense of belonging in North American space and time."[487] *Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock* continues the creation of this notion of Standing Rock as cinematic event. As both imagined and real space, Standing Rock extends through cultural discourse beyond the physical manifestation of the camp forming a complex audio-visual production of the *Oceti Sakowin* camps.[488]

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[485] Vizenor *Fugitive Poses*: viii.
[486] Byrd *The Transit of Empire*: xxvi.
[487] Bruyneel *Third Space*: 9.
[488] With regards cultural output and colonial discourse, see: Byrd *The Transit of* Empire: xxx.

Prayer was a central aspect of the Oceti Sakowin camp.

Myron Dewey, via Twitter and the film production company *Digital Smoke Signals*, actively engages in disrupting colonial narratives. Through *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock*, he emphasises indigenous epistemologies, which can form the basis of a decolonial narrative. Dewey discusses how Standing Rock becomes a place of learning, of reconnecting with the earth, and a place in which to relearn indigenous values at the camp. Religious ceremonies were an important aspect of life at Standing Rock, and were informed by Lakota protocols and traditions, which took the form of a more pan-Native American practices such as sweat lodges and round dances. There are many instances where *Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock* depicts how activity in the camp – whether it be engaging in protest or the construction of toilets – is paused or prefigured by prayer. An alternative way of doing and being is projected. Alternative lifeways and knowledge systems are evoked. The staging of *différance* continues to 'dissolve' the polarities of opposites present in the colonial configuration of indigeneity, but it is fundamentally so much more.[489]

The colonial narrative of a static indigeneity was questioned by Standing Rock, underlined by its historical significance in being the largest North American indigenous protest in decades. As Greg Johnson and Siv Kraft write:

> As the pipeline protest became publicly visible, protestors expanded the range of their concerns, giving voice to a host of grievances. Claims about indigenous sovereignty were foregrounded, with regard to land rights and treaty histories, but also in a more general and philosophical sense of self-determination vis-à-vis the forces and

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[489] Spivak in Derrida *Of Grammatology*: xxviii-xxix. The construction of indigeneity is discussed by Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, they write Indigenousness is an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism. The communities, clans, nations and t ribes we call *Indigenous peoples* are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous people from other peoples in the world. In Alfred and Corntassel 'Politics of Identity - ix: Being Indigenous:  Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism' *Government and Opposition* 40, no. 4, 2005: 597-614.

representatives of settler colonialism, which included nature – in this case water, in particular – among its victims. Inter-connections, rights, and moral standing were continually advanced in the camps, most emphatically in ritual settings at the grounded end of the spectrum, but also through social media going outward from the camps, and including short films and music videos at the electronically mediated end of the spectrum.[490]

Via *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock*, the *Oceti Sakowin* camp continues to preserve an indigenous presence: a representation of the physical space once occupied. This is an ongoing process whereby to stress the form and presence of indigeneity, offering a 'Native Space' in film and a dialogue with which to deconstruct colonially imposed constructions of the 'Indian'.[491]

In *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor discusses how 'survivance' offers a strategy to maintain indigenous presence, which includes renouncing colonial dominance and narratives of tragedy and victimhood. However, the 'Indian' remains a site to question US colonial discourse, as opposed to being a negative stereotype. To dismiss it wholly as such would be to continue to naturalize colonial discourse. The 'Indian' is invested with a complexity of meaning that contains the trace of colonialism and as such its signification and meaning must be interrogated. In the present day, the 'postindian' offers a new formulation with which to reinterpret cultural practice, identity, and history. [492]


v: Water Protectors


The indigenous perspective, organization, practice, and agenda was front and centre in the daily life of the Standing Rock camps. *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock* demonstrates how silent prayer and smoke ceremonies were a central aspect of daily camp life. As Floris White Bull reflects in the film: "[a]bove all else, we pray". There are many

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[490] Greg Johnson and Siv Ellen Kraft 'Standing Rock Religion(s): Ceremonies, Social Media, and Music Videos', in *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*. Vol. 65; Issue 5-6. 2018: 502. As Johnson and Kraft continue: Direct actions took place at the margins of the camps and aimed for global audiences. Like most non-violent protests, the direct-action repertoire of Standing Rock was scripted in the sense of main tactics and performances (e.g., roadblocks and sit-ins by the construction site), while allowing for (and dependant on) improvisation and creativity. What was commonly referred to as 'protocol' positioned protestors in the role of protectors, insisted on non-violent tactics and responses, and drew heavily on religious forms and registers: "this is ceremony, act accordingly," "we are prayersome and peaceful," "go in ceremony," "act in ceremony," "be in ceremony." Repeated on banners, on action guidelines posted around the camps, in speeches by elders, and in social media stories, references to ceremony in this context, as at the camps, came in a narrow and broad sense: 512.
[491] Gayatri Spivak in Derrida *Of Grammatology*: lii.
[492] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: vii.

shots of the Water Protestors' prayers, singing and drumming, juxtaposed with acts of aggression by the police, making visible the intertextual relations between historical narratives and lived experiences; the voiceover references traditional narratives such as the Black Snake, whilst cultural practices and prayer are juxtaposed with peoples going about daily camp activities. In this way, *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock* reconceptualizes space and history and makes evident what settler-colonialism has obscured.[493]



Above left: A Water Protector in traditional dress. Note the line of heavily armoured police behind him. Above right: Life in the camp also went on as normal; the construction of toilets seen here, like prayers and protest, were a collective practice.

This is framed at the onset of the film. The film opens with overlapping shots of flowing water which lasts for over a minute. This reference makes stark the essentialness of water to every human being, to life itself, not just to the activists at the *Oceti Sakowin* camp. Following this introduction, the picture dissolves to Floris White Bull, a tepee and night-time. This filmic transition foreshadows the subsequent images and voiceover. White Bull discusses her concerns for the future of her children and the future of the earth, which she sees as interlinked, whilst emphasising the matrilineal world view of many indigenous tribes.[494] The voiceover is matched with images of nature, wildlife, the land, stars, and life. This is starkly paralleled against images of threats, earlier foreshadowed by the arrival of night, including natural and man-made ecological disaster, police, and technology, which White Bull labels as "the fear that contaminated the world". These opening three minutes set the narrative of the film and the confrontation as microcosm, and Standing Rock as a metaphor for the earth, but one which has historical significance for peoples worldwide in its concerns for water.

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[493] Byrd *The Transit of Empire*: xxviii-xxx; 17.

[494] See: Paula Gunn Allen *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press; 1992 [1986].

*Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock* also depicts men, women, and children, indigenous and non-native, all participating, sharing, and donating to the well-being of the camp. Again, Floris White Bull reflects on life at the camp, illustrating a worldview that speaks more to indigenous communalism as opposed to US capitalism: "[n]o money, no electricity, fear, hate, starvation, homelessness…", and reflects on the dream-like feel of the camp that Sky Hopinka also articulates in *Dislocation Blues* (2017).[495] Floris White Bull states how it was easy to lose track of days because time was not mandated by a clock or a calendar. This again emphasises the decolonial structures in place in the camp. Lakota people interpret time with regards to community and place, closely understood by geographic locations in relation to seasons and food supply, as opposed to how time in the western sense structures daily life: from waking up, to going to work.[496]

The presentation of the Water Protectors in *Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock*, also undermines the stereotypical projection of the aggressive 'Indian' protestor in the mass media which maintained the position of indigenous people as deviant outsiders. In response to this labelling, the occupants of Standing Rock identified themselves as 'Water Protectors'. The process of naturalization occurs in this narration of deviant and outsider, sustaining the discourse of the colonized 'Other' by preserving simulations of the tragic, violent, and primitive 'Indian'. *Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock* counters this contrivance by preserving Native American ritual as part of daily life at *Oceti Sakowin*, offering a perceived and imagined presence of indigenous peoples that connect traditional stories of occupancy with the contemporary issue of Native American land rights.[497]

The word 'protestors', particularly with its use in the media and associated 'media packaging', framed the occupiers at Standing Rock as the film observes as, "an active force against the mainstream", as well as legal 'occupiers'. The use of 'Water Protectors' was an ingenious strategy to disarm the rhetoric of mainstream media who had so often maligned protestors of any sort. As a result of media connecting activism and peaceful protest with anti-state sentiments, "protestor" is increasingly pejorative in its meaning, particularly in this context, as Dallas Goldtooth reflects: "[i]t makes Native people seem angry and violent for protecting their resources." Furthermore, according to a BuzzFeed headline quoting a Native

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[495] Jeffrey Ostler discusses the irreconcilable differences between US capital designs on the land and the alternative political economic systems of indigenous peoples, particularly the Plains tribes in *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge and New York; 2004: 13-15.

[496] Raymond J DeMallie 'Community in Native America: Continuity and Change among the Sioux' *Journal de la Société des américanistes* [En ligne], 95-1, 2009: 187-191.

[497] Vizenor *Manifest Manners*: vi.

woman in a video, the word protestor "is a colonized term for standing up for what's right."[498]

Additionally, this positioning by the mainstream media separated the protestors' lawful cause from the US judicial and political systems and the question of colonial imposition.[499] The camps were on Lakota lands underpinned by the 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie Treaties.[500] The aims were to resist the occupation of these lands by the US Army Corps of Engineers and the oil pipeline company Energy Transfer Partners, but with a specific focus on water, even though (as with the Occupation of Alcatraz) they were presented in mainstream media as 'trespassers' instead of having legal rights to the land. As Powell and Draper observe:

> In North Dakota, #NoDAPL water protectors were not squatters; they did not make claims to foreign property. Rather, the movement to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline exemplified the social production of space, where a territory—unflinchingly Indigenous and unceded—became legible and reorganized through the work of a diverse collective that defined its aims through the core value and organizing principle *Mni Wiconi!* (Water Is Life!).[501]

The 'Water Protectors' at Standing Rock are part of a continuum of indigenous resistance in the US. Furthermore, their activism is used as a model for environmental protests in the US and is also strategically linked to global resistance movements, from the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico in January 1994 to the transnational alter-globalization movements of the early 2000s that Zapatismo ignited, as well as to indigenous rights globally.

The Standing Rock activists are part of "[a]n ontological rupture in the current political order and way of being in the world". This is effectively anticipated by *Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock*, which sees in the Water Protectors project an image of worldwide indigenous solidarity. Importantly, this involves projecting the *Oceti Sakowin* camp as a supplemental space outside the state. Moreover, in addressing the historical narratives of US colonialism, the *Oceti Sakowin* camp has influenced future formations. Standing Rock is now a reference for ethical indigenous-based, anticolonial, anticapitalistic arrangement in environmental activism, that has gone on to inspire others.[502]

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[498] Allison Herrera 'Standing Rock activists: Don't call us protestors. We're water protectors' https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-10-31/standing-rock-activists-dont-call-us-protesters-were-water-protectors accessed 06/01/2021.

[499] See: Jason Begay *Standing Rock and the Media*, Vimeo 2017 https://vimeo.com/205575141 accessed 08/08/2020.

[500] Nick Estes *Our History Is the Future*. London; New York: Verso; 2019: 2.

[501] Dana E Powell and Ricki Draper 'Making It Home: Solidarity and Belonging in the #Nodapl/Standing Rock Encampments.' *Collaborative Anthropologies* 13, no. 1 2020: 1-45.

[502] Rebecca Solnit 'Standing Rock Protests: This Is Only the Beginning', *The Guardian*, 12 September,

One of the three co-directors of *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock*, Myron Dewey with his drone and a 'Water Protectors' flag.

vi: Planet Protectors

The coda of *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock*, depicts a triumphant camp of the previous December, when Barack Obama agreed to a full environmental review of the site. The triumph was short-lived, as the immediate arrival of Donald Trump to the White House signalled an era of 'Orwellian authoritarianism', according to Chase Iron Eyes (Oglala Sioux). One of Trump's first acts as president was to overturn Obama's decision on his second day in office. It goes without saying that Trump made the Presidency his own platform, and it is no surprise that he holds business interests in Energy Transfer Partners, the company behind the DAPL. Whilst February 2017 saw the arrival of federal and state troops to Standing Rock, and the camp cleared, it was not a defeat. Floris White Bull reflected on the troop's arrival, calling them the "genealogical and ideological descendants of Custer." The troops began to slash tents with knives and the film depicts Water Protectors remaining non-violent in the face of police charges and unnecessary arrests made at gunpoint. Some of the most striking images in the film come from night-time police water cannons being sprayed on praying elders, and a young girl approaching officers in heavy tactical gear and offering them candy. On many occasions the violence of the police is met with words of solidarity from the Water Protectors: offering prayers for the police, calling them brothers, and reflecting that they are human beings "despite all the armour they have on." The sheer volume of police in tactical gear, with guns, dogs, truncheons, and high-power rifles present in *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock* is disturbing. There were many reports of injuries

2016 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/12/north-dakota-standing-rock-protests-civil-rights accessed 03/02/19.

and wounds to Water Protectors during their time at Standing Rock, but no indication that any police officers were injured by activists.

The film, its stark visuals accompanied by Floris White Bull's narration, informed by indigenous epistemology of the landscape, signals an indigenous interpretation of the event, and an emphasis on *différance*. As noted above, *Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock* already suggests an alternative form of storytelling from its title and bridges the epistemological and ontological gaps between the physical and spiritual world, as well as between the human and non-human. Considering how the DAPL protests were maintained on a physical and digital space forms a distinct departure of the landscape as well as continued representations of 'Indians'. It is reasonable to conclude that the enduring historical struggle between the US state and its indigenous inhabitants is the main driving force behind *Awake*: *A Dream from Standing Rock*'s narrative.

At the heart of the Standing Rock Sioux's protests was their legal entitlement to inhabit the land, as per the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, but the film also captures the profundity of the *Oceti Sakowin* camps. It was also inclusive of all people, water being universal to the survival of all human beings. It was not simply about reacting against corporate giants and their stakeholders, either. As this section has illustrated, Standing Rock is part of the wider historical and global movement for indigenous rights, with *Awake*: *A Dream for Standing Rock* forming a visual reminder of this. Whilst oil flows through the DAPL and the Standing Rock camps are now evacuated, the success of Standing Rock is not in the physical undoing of the pipeline, but in the ideological continuation of indigenous rights movements, particularly against extractivism. The physical manifestation of the camp may be gone, but the spirit remains, also as a cinematic entity. Standing Rock has become a model for environmental activism across North America and around the globe. Floris White Bull concludes the film with a statement and a question: "[w]e are planet protectors now. Will you join our dream?"

**Coda: *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (Zhao 2015) and *The Rider* (Zhao 2017) and the future of Native American representation in film.**

Moving beyond the mainstream in cinema, indigenous film offers greater potential for diverse representation and arguably a deeper understanding of the operations of power relations, as well as opportunities for collaboration, and the inclusion of oral traditions and alternative epistemologies. It is this aesthetic that offers a means to resist a colonial history of imposed meaning and offers an alternative narrative that joins indigenous epistemology with modern cinematic techniques. There is potential for more films by and about Native Americans which offer potential spaces of representation not found in Hollywood, that is perhaps, burgeoning because of structural changes to film rather than in spite of it – at least in terms of narrative fiction. The expansion of viewing platforms such as Amazon Prime, Apple, and Netflix increasing demand for content has only complicated this picture, whilst, ultimately playing into the hands of huge distributors.

Whilst a film like *Smoke Signals* has been observed for its timely introduction of Native American movies into the US – and wider – cinematic imagination; in terms of filmmaking it remains a bit of an enigma in the sense of how filmmaking has changed in the intervening years. Those companies that were the backbone of the 1990s' independent cinema boom, were subsequently bought out by major Hollywood conglomerates and subsequently transformed independent cinema into an industrial category, and, with that, the indie film has become an extension of Hollywood. Films in the early part of the new century were expressive of this change, such as *No Country for Old Men* (Coen brothers 2007) and *Inglourious Basterds* (Tarantino 2009) only suggested the trajectory of the 'indie' film which was also capable of pulling in huge Box Office receipts.[503]

Whereas the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed the explosion of Native American writers into the North American literary cannon, *Smoke Signals* and *Skins* can also seem to have contributed to the emergence of the Native American – as opposed to the 'Indian' – in the US cinematic imagination. Notwithstanding the weight of wider cultural tropes and stereotypes, as well as the historical and political co-optation of the 'Indian', via US mythmaking, the Western genre, white people playing 'Indian' and so forth, there is an emerging space in film-making that can usefully offer greater representation to Native

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[503] Yannis Tzioumakis 'American Independent Cinema in the Age of Convergence'. *Revue français d'etudes américaines*, Vol 136, No 2; 2013: 2.

Americans. This suggests that *Smoke Signals* was less a one-off or even a coda to those representations in film which have gone before but began the establishment of Native Americans in the cinematic imagination – as Momaday, Welch and Marmon Silko did for literature. Like literature, which has only seen the increase of books by and about Native Americans, such as Tommy Orange's *There There*, and Thomas King's 2012 *The Inconvenient Indian*, films by and about Native American people have only increased in recent years.

At the same time as the above-mentioned change in film production culture (or the culture of film production) has meant finding distributors has gotten more difficult for filmmakers, it seems that in the case of Chinese filmmaker Chloé Zhao, there is still a place for exciting filmmakers and off-beat 'alternative' Americas in the mainstream, as evidenced by her Oscar winning *Nomadland* (2020). Written, produced, and directed by Zhao, the film returned eight times its $5 million budget at the Box Office.

Although Zhao is not Native American herself, her perspective as a female Asian filmmaker perhaps offers her insight and respect of Native Americans in terms of cinematic representation. The narrative strategies she implies in her films locate their genealogy with works such as *Smoke Signals* and *Skins*, as alternative narratives in independent filmmaking. But also, her propensity for using non-trained actors in combination to a verité approach to her filmmaking, perhaps also aligns her work with more social realist or experimental filmmaking seen with regards *Dislocation Blues* and *Awake, A Dream from Standing Rock*.
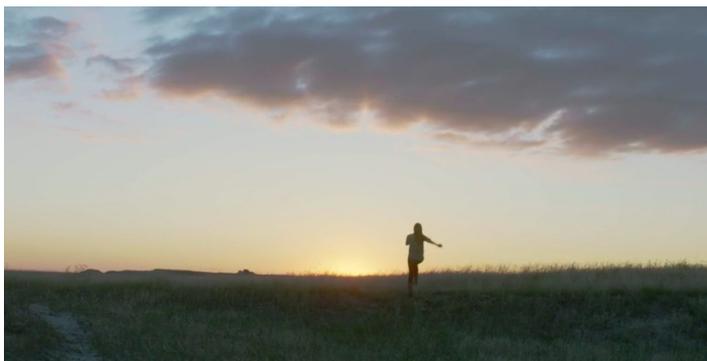


The cinematography of *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* is both highly aesthetic but never overwhelming or alienating, perhaps lending an alternative focus on the US West.

*Songs My Brothers Taught Me* and *The Rider* perhaps anticipate the direction that film may move as a result of her work, particularly in terms of Native American representation. The difficulty being the change within the industry in that studios are no longer picking up films as they were in the time of *Smoke Signals*. As Zhao comments:

> We have got to be creative about where the money comes from in indie film. I don't blame independent production companies for not giving me money because they can barely keep their heads above water. They barely can sell their films. It's so hard to make money in indie film. So I thought, let me knock on some different doors. There are commercial companies who want to branch out and do interesting films.[504]

With regards Native American representation, Zhao's *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* and *The Rider* suggest more than just a critical response to Hollywood's cowboy/ 'Indian' binary. Zhao's films visually assert indigenous sovereignty and mobility because they actively engage with local communities, but the subject matter is clearly something that is stimulating.[505] *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* displays the hallmarks of the character driven narrative of her later work, and by using a cast that includes non-trained actors only lends to the verité feel of the film, to obvious effect given Zhao's continued success.[506]



As with *Smoke Signals* and *Skins*, *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* reveals the hardships of the reservation but also illustrates the importance of community and familial relations amongst the Lakota.

*Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, as *Smoke Signals* and *Skins* did, deals with the stereotypes of the reservation, and illustrate Zhao's personal investment in the subject matter. As Zhao continues: "[t]he Lakota people were responsive to the story because they wanted to see something real on screen. There are just so many things that they cannot relate to in Hollywood."[507] Indeed, as Zhao would do later with *The Rider*, *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* makes use of local Lakota residents from the Pine Ridge Reservation, along with

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[504] Emily Buder 'How Werner Herzog-Approved 'the Rider' Director 'Got Creative' Financing Her Exquisite Cannes Premiere'. 2017, https://nofilmschool.com/2017/05/rider-chloe-zhao accessed 13/05/2020.
[505] Hearne *Native Recognition*: 239-240.
[506] Brady DeSanti 'Songs My Brothers Taught Me' *Journal of Religion & Film*, Vol 20, Iss 3, Article 19: 1-2.
[507] Buder 'How Werner Herzog…'

appearances by Inuit/ Cree actor Irene Bedard, who also starred in *Smoke Signals*, amongst others, which stresses the importance of collaboration as well as continuity between films of this nature.

In *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, the narrative centres around a brother/ sister dynamic that Zhao would later use in *The Rider*, with intimate interior shots juxtaposed against 'magic hour' shots of the Great Plains. The film is both tender and raw at times but, to a large extent, resists the tropes associated with film 'Indians' through an unhurried and nuanced piece of ethnographic filmmaking.[508] Zhao interrogates the continued centrality of the reservation as a place of community and resilience by building on positive tropes of Native American culture in cinema already established by Chris Eyre's films.



*The Rider* 'looks' like a Western, but the cowboy is played by Lakota Brady Jandreau, offering a different take on US masculinity, disrupting traditional associations of cowboy and 'Indian' in the process.

*The Rider* depicts the people of the Pine Ridge Reservation and the Dakota Badlands on the peripheries of society. In working closely with the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota for *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, Zhao established a relationship with Brady Jandreau, who would play the protagonist, Brady Blackbird in *The Rider*.[509] This relationship was the basis for *The Rider* and suggests the human connection and understanding the filmmaker achieves in her work.

Moreover, whilst *The Rider* takes place in the American West, it cinematically disrupts the iconography of the Western genre, and the mythology of the frontier, largely through the context of its subject matter:

> The filmmaker, Chloe [*sic*] Zhao, doesn't drown the myth of the American cowboy in Hollywood gloss. She strips it down to its raw, aching essence. She steeps

[508] Jordan Hoffman 'Songs My Brothers Taught Me review – tale of Lakota life finds wonder in ennui' 02/03/2016. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/mar/02/songs-my-brothers-taught-me-film-review-lakota-reservation, accessed 20/05/2022.
[509] Hervé Mayer 'Neo Frontier Cinema…': 19.

us in the rhythms of life on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, where young Lakota men wear chaps and Stetsons and harbor dreams of rodeo stardom.[510]

In this way, Zhao rejects Hollywood storytelling by adopting a hybrid dramatic/ social realist approach to filmmaking, as seen in, for example, *Frozen River* (Hunt 2008). The latter also follows the contemporary trend of independent cinema which also reaps high Box Office receipts, as illustrated above.[511] Moreover, these collaborative filmic productions within the indigenous community re-code the Western whilst undermining the currency and efficacy of the frontier narrative of violence as competence.[512]

In *The Rider*, protagonist Brady confronts the cinematic image of the cowboy as he confronts his own identity perhaps most revealingly through his relationship with fellow rodeo rider, and best friend, Lane Scott. Brady frequently visits former star rider Lane who has suffered a severe brain injury. Whilst their relationship focusses on their shared passion for rodeo, it also allows for a deeper investigation of what being a cowboy means. Helping Lane with his recovery, Brady and Lane dress up in their rodeo gear, and fashion a saddle and reigns from the hospital gym equipment. It is a scene which underscores their shared identity of the cowboy but also illustrates a more tender moment between the friends which comes across as both powerful and poignant.[513] As Zhao explains, *The Rider* is: "[m]y version of a feminine gaze on one of the most masculine images in American culture."[514] *The Rider* centres on the epitome of US masculinity – the cowboy – and reinscribes this image with an intimate treatment of the Lakota rodeo rider Brady Jandreau.[515]

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[510] Justin Chang 'The Rider Offers an Aching Portrait of Masculinity in Crisis', 2018, https://www.npr.org/2018/04/10/601116837/the-rider-offers-an-aching-portrait-of-      masculinity-in-crisis?t=1589021223156 accessed 09/05/2020.

[511] Hervé Mayer 'Neo Frontier Cinema: Rewriting the Frontier Narrative from the Margins in Meek's Cutoff (Kelly Reichardt, 2010), Songs My Brother Taught Me (Chloé Zhao, 2015) and The Rider (Chloé Zhao, 2017).' *Miranda* [Online] 18, 2019: 15. http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/16672  accessed 09/05/2020.

[512] Hearne *Native Recognition*: 13; 230.

[513] Aren Bergstrom 'Review: The Rider (2017' 18/05/2018 https://3brothersfilm.com/blog/2018/5/18/review-the-rider-2017, accessed 20/05/2022.

[514] Nancy Tartaglione  'The Rider' Helmer Chloé Zhao On Her Portrait Of The Demonized American Heartland 2017 https://deadline.com/2017/05/the-rider-chloe-zhao-cannes-      directors-fortnight-protagonist-pictures-ones-to-watch-clip-video-1202090289/ accessed 3/3/2020.

[515] Anne Cohen 'How Chloe Zhao Applied The Female Gaze To America's Most Masculine Symbol 11/04/2018 https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2018/04/196185/the-rider-movie-true-story-brady-jandreau-chloe-zhao accessed 18/05/2022

Zhao inserts femininity and intimacy into the image of the cowboy in *The Rider*.

By illustrating an alternative West in *The Rider*, Zhao suggests the transformative potential of the frontier. The imagery of the West, so closely associated with the films of John Ford, is redefined by the gaze of the indigenous characters. Both *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* and *The Rider* are stunning examples of film-making that also offers a narrative that redefines colonial boundaries as well as disrupting the confines of a film genre and suggesting the potential for future indigenous representation in film.

**Afterword**

This thesis has considered the representation of Native Americans across film contexts. Its aim has been to contemplate film as an expression of Native American identity and aesthetic presence within North America. The thesis has differed from other studies of Native Americans in film in that it considers both the colonial context and how Native American epistemology – stories, history, and culture – can offer a means with which to reconsider and review – as well as add a depth of implication to – these films. The thesis' starting point of the Western – or at least the Western's iconography – was essential, as opposed to simply pointing out an obvious correlation between film 'Indians' and representation of Native Americans in film. This was crucial in setting up the discussion which sees film as a cultural medium – amongst others – which contributes to discourse. Importantly, the Western is greatly influenced by the US' own sense of itself, and an expression where cultural myth and US history collide. This has, obviously, had an impact on the representation of Native Americans, not because of any feature pervasive to genre, but rather, because it is unique to the United States as a colonial society.

The myths that the US has created with regard its own history are reflected in film. This has meant the creation of the 'Indian' and the subsequent appropriation of these aspects of an imagined Indian-ness that fits with the US' own projection of itself, its identity, and its history is, perhaps, inevitable – but no less curious. This is also why imagery associated with the Western and the 'Indian' is not restricted to genre. *White of the Eye* (Cammell 1987) illustrates this curious blend, whilst *Hidalgo* (Johnston 2003) offers an intimate Indian-ness to the white hero. However, it is also possible to think differently about genre, associated imagery, and appropriation. The film landscape will not change unless the methods employed for analysis change. Thinking about 'America' as a space of indigenous expression and not one inscribed with settler-colonial values offers film new meaning, as well as potential spaces of expression.

Whilst *White of the Eye* suggests the toxic effects of masculinity, violence, and appropriation, it is possible to consider the relationship between the film's imagery in the context of Native American geographical understandings, to disrupt cultural hegemony. Engaging in a careful consideration of the text's detail in *Hidalgo* offers new meaning to both the 'Indian' and US history built on the myths of the West which placed the 'Indian' as the opponent of white European civilization. There is some evidence this is beginning to happen in mainstream Westerns, with *The Revenant* (Iñárritu 2015) exploring indigenous language

for example. Although also as *Hidalgo* does, *The Revenant* presents film tropes that are also expressive of 'Revisionist' cliches, such as the white saviour narrative and the elision of women and other troublesome representations. However, there is further potential to view non-Westerns such as *Into the Wild* (Penn 2007) that continue to project a certain image of the US as a predominantly white, male space with an empty landscape, free from indigenous peoples, for the taking.

However, as appropriate, this thesis has also considered how independent film has engaged with these dominant and historical tropes associated with the Western genre. Independent film has offered Native Americans a means with which to engage with dominant filmic appropriation of their identity. *Smoke Signals* (Eyre 1998) was perhaps an obvious film with which to consider these, but in terms of establishing Native American expression in film, it is key. Underlining its significance is how it presents a marginalized space (the reservation) and revises its meaning in film. But the film also gives way to the indigenous storyteller, forming a crucial link between the present space of the reservation and indigenous traditions that have been elided and eroded by US colonial imposition. *Smoke Signals* also ties those filmic tropes of the Western and explores them with irony and nuance, as does *Dead Man* (Jarmusch 1994), which calls into question the effects of civilization and the disastrous consequences this has had on indigenous peoples in North America, deliberately offering new meaning and expression via the use of un-subtitled indigenous languages.

Latterly, in this way, this film presents an alternative take on America. The presence of Native American language enables the viewer to contextualize the dominant tropes of the Western genre and to rethink them. Whilst *Winter in The Blood* (Andrew Smith, Alex Smith 2012) again, like *Smoke Signals*, presents a contemporary indigenous presence in film which destabilizes the historical narratives of a disappearing indigeneity – one that is often consigned to the country's historical past within the realism of cultural expression. Crucially, these mediations open up a unique exploration of the Native American Trickster in film, and perhaps augment contemporary literature where these characters are present.

The Trickster forms a crucial intervention in these cultural mediums, which questions dominant discourse. This forms what Vizenor calls 'Trickster discourse' to undermine established modes of being – particularly those in literature and film which have replaced Native American representation and identity with the 'Indian'. There is further potential to consider the Trickster in contemporary literature and film, and what it means – and what role this aspect of indigenous knowledge can play in contemporary US in bridging the gap

between past and present as well as forming indigenous expression in the contemporary sphere.

Historically and culturally, 'Indian' has too often been pitted against the 'norm' as both enemy of white civilisation and of capitalism. However, as this is a construction, it means that it can be played with in an ironic way, but also moved beyond this fixity as a legitimate expression of Native American identity. The potential for this moving beyond in film was articulated during the Standing Rock protests. These protests offered Native Americans a means of representation in film and diverse media, linking past with present, and forming a lasting legacy of the camp as a means with which to negotiate the imposition of colonial and capitalism with cultural expression. *Taking Alcatraz* (Ferry 2015) considers the historical context of indigenous activism in US history. *Taking Alcatraz* gives meaning and articulation to a marginal thread of history, and the potential for animating these is significant. *Taking Alcatraz* negotiates and disrupts the national narratives and myths surrounding the US.

Replaying and re-examining these events extends the indigenous voice and animates alternative Americas. Many of the actions at Alcatraz acted as ironic counter-commemoration to the nation's past and interrupted the dominant myths and colonial narratives which consolidate the US' image of itself. Film also acts as a permanent reminder of the historical record. The value and potential for film and media has only increased in the years between Alcatraz and the events at Standing Rock. The films about, and the filmmakers at Standing Rock illustrate this in their practice, shooting many hours of footage in some respects, such as for Cody Lucich's *Akicita: The Battle of Standing Rock* (2018). The wider coverage of this event was made possible by inexpensive film cameras as well as cameras on smart phones and the practical application of social media.

The potential of low-cost video cameras and social media is illustrated by filmmakers at Standing Rock. Combined, this has helped create a unique social record of Standing Rock. Films such as *Dislocation Blues* (Hopinka 2017) and *Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock* (Fox, Spione, Dewey 2017) remain as permanent expressions of environmental activism. These indigenous narratives counter colonial cultural expression but also combine to resist the effects of capitalist resource extraction. In addition, there is also potential to view these films as a historical document of indigenous activism in the US, but also as a set of films around the event itself, which would be a useful future study. As a whole, these films offer a contemporary expression to Native American peoples, ensuring an ongoing indigenous

presence within the cultural landscape, whilst projecting an alternative image of the US that is not dominated by capitalist and colonial exploitation.

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