Dayna Danger, Thirza Cuthand and Bannock Babes: Desire in Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous Visual Culture in Relation to Land

By Adrienne Huard

A thesis presented to OCAD University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Fine Arts in the Criticism and Curatorial Practice program.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2020

Abstract

Engaging with the interdisciplinary artistic practices of Dayna Danger, Thirza Cuthand and Bannock Babes, this paper discusses the importance of desire within Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous visual culture with ancestral ties to the Canadian Prairies. These artworks strive to reclaim Two-Spirit representation as a means to engage with prospering queer Indigenous furturity. In conjunction with these artists, using the curatorial and critical practices of David Garneau, Cathy Mattes, Michelle McGeough, and BUSH Gallery guides this research to link Two-Spirit curatorial methodologies. Given the lack of critical and curatorial methodologies that tend specifically to Two-Spirit ontologies, this paper acknowledges the fluidity of Two-Spirit identities in relation to land and locality, and therefore, is a summary of these research findings within my scope. Using Eve Tuck's desire-based research frameworks, Gerald Vizenor's concept of native survivance and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's knowledge of Biskaabiiyaang, they provide insight on navigating ideas around Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous visual culture and curatorial methodologies. These artist and curatorial practices demonstrate certain commonalities: the importance of cultural and spiritual safety, kinship ties and relationships to the land.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my Primary Advisor, Ryan Rice, for his mentorship and guidance. His experience and knowledge within the field is invaluable, it was an honour to work alongside him throughout this process.

Secondly, I'd like to thank my Secondary Advisor, Susan Blight, for her insight that is grounded in Anishinaabeg knowledge systems. In many ways, she shared teachings while pushing me to engage with concepts I often looked past.

I am entirely grateful for my examining committee, including Andrea Fatona and Francisco-Fernando Granados, for showing me patience and ensuring that I focus on my ideas. There are times when I joke about working in a non-linear way and writing this thesis has confirmed that this is indeed true.

Thank you to OCAD University and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship for financially supporting my studies and making this research possible. Additionally, I'd like to thank my reserve, Couchiching First Nation, for helping me get this far. I simply could not have completed this program without them.

I'd like to thank my kin, Dayna Danger, Lindsay Nixon, asinnajaq, Suzanne Kite, rudi aker and Janelle Kasperski for their endless support and advice. I'm thankful for my family for encouraging me to trudge along at times when I didn't think I could. Thank you to the creatives mentioned in this paper, I am honoured to be in the presence of your practices. I'm grateful to have met my cohort in the CCP program, for our late-night study sessions in the office and countless laughs throughout the two years. And to Emma Steen, Laura Grier, Cierra Frances and Erin Szikora. Thank you for your kinship, love and citations.

Lastly, I want to thank the land, Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing, for hosting and nurturing me and my ancestors. Thank you for providing that good life. Miigwetch.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Foreword

Boozhoo indinawemaaganidog, Dibiki-giizis Wabigoon Ikwe indizhnikaaz, mikinaak indodem, Gojijiing (Couchiching First Nation) indoonjibaa, Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing (Winnipeg, Manitoba) indaa. My name is Adrienne Huard and I live in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing and I am registered at Couchiching First Nation, Fort Frances, Ontario. Like many Indigenous people, I was not raised with a direct connection to my Anishinaabeg ancestral knowledges, such as my language, cultural practices and ceremony. I am an urban NDN who has begun their path to understanding their Anishinaabe roots within the past decade. It wasn't until I reached the age of 26 until I received my spirit name, Dibiki-giizis Wabigoon Ikwe (Moonflower Woman). I am a Sundancer, a helper at ceremony and an oshkaabewiskwe (fire keeper). While my immediate family hails from the Great Lakes, my ceremonial family and practices are based in Manitoba (specifically Brokenhead, Sagkeeng and Little Black River First Nations). This leaves me with a variety of Anishinaabe teachings which differ between regions, however, I know these embodied knowledges reside within my identity—I will always be a prairie NDN. These are my truths, inviting a multitude of knowledges that encompass my spirit. I am also a cis queer woman, identifying as pansexual/Two-Spirit/Indigiqueer[1]. It is integral to state my positionality within Western academic institutions, because settler perspectives on Two-Spirit and Indigenous identities can lead to co-opted languages, misguided "research" and disingenuous information. By disclosing my relationship and lived experience to my research, it is my hopes that I am held accountable to my community, my family, and my kinship ties. It is within my best interest that

[1] Indigiqueer is a term introduced by Thirza Cuthand at the Vancouver Queer Film Festival in 2004.

we, as Anishinaabeg, are represented in a good way so we can continue to live that good life, inside and outside of the institution. Miigwetch.

Introduction

It is imperative to recognize that Indigenous people deserve the right to want, aspire, crave and attain pleasure through desire. We are human, as Anishinaabeg, with all our complexities, our contradictions and strengths. Desire is defined as a conscious impulse toward something that is longed or hoped for, one that promises enjoyment or satisfaction in its attainment.[2] This signals to modes of looking forward and therefore, desire implies that Indigenous lives aspire to thrive in the current moment and forthcoming future. This thesis will discuss notions of desire as it is mobilized through Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous visual culture and curatorial imaginings on the Canadian Prairies—specifically spanning as far west as Okanan Gaa-izhi-ategin (Regina, Saskatchewan) and as far east as Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing (Winnipeg, Manitoba) between 2015 and 2020. Emerging and mid-career Two-Spirit, trans, queer, women and gender-variant Indigenous curators and artists who consider the prairies their ancestral homelands are central to this thesis. My research focuses on and embodies specific cultural geography and the Indigenous cosmologies that accompany them. This places the discussion on artists and curators who identify as Nêhiyaw (Plains Cree), Michif/Métis and Anishinaabe. Because our cultural links, bloodlines and kinship ties intertwine between and across these prairie communities, they often inform each other through peripheral languages, dialects, ceremonies and stories.[3] This permits me to carry embodied knowledges—not to speak on their behalf—but to simply engage with their intelligence systems that relate, mix, braid and

[2] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Desire," last accessed June 22, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/desire

[3] Chantal Fiola, *Rekindling the Sacred Fire: Métis Ancestry and Anishinaabe Spirituality*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015): 76.

weave together with Anishinaabeg, just as my ancestors have demonstrated on our homelands since the birth of Turtle Island. Given the lack of critical and curatorial methodologies that tend specifically to Two-Spirit ontologies, I will be using curatorial practices and art criticism by Métis curator David Garneau, Métis curator Michelle McGeough, artist collective BUSH Gallery and Métis/Michif curator Cathy Mattes as guidelines. Their methodologies will help me develop a framework towards understanding Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous curation and critical thought. As a way of working through these curatorial concepts, I will be concentrating on the artistic practices of Saulteaux/Métis/Polish interdisciplinary artist Dayna Danger, Nêhiyaw/Irish/Scottish filmmaker, artist and writer, Thirza Cuthand, and Two-Spirit drag queen collective, Bannock Babes. Because Two-Spirit methodologies are perpetually in motion, rather than a fragment of an imagined past, these creatives will support a continuing dialogue as to what these ontologies entail through a visual art and curatorial lens. Engaging with their practices as examples, I will ask: how do Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous makers from the Canadian Prairies portray Indigenous joy, pleasure and desire in their artworks in order to redirect the global narrative to position our communities as thriving? In many ways, Two-Spirit methodologies aim to create spaces of self-determination through self-representation in ways that are specific to body, land and traditions each artist engages with. As a way of honouring Indigenous methodologies through my research, I insert my narratives and relationships to the aforementioned creatives as a way of connecting our relationality in order to hold myself accountable. In Opaskwayak Cree scholar, Shawn Wilson's book *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, he expresses that Indigenous relationality is central to Indigenous research paradigms. Wilson writes, "Rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationships with

other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of."[4] Stating Two-Spirit Anishinaabeg positionality in relation to queer Indigenous visual culture is imperative when participating in its discourse; therefore, I will frame my perspectives on these artists and curators solely through my Two-Spirit Anishinaabeg teachings while honouring Nêhiyaw, Michif/Métis philosophies as they relate to our ways of life.

The term "Two-Spirit" was gifted to Anishinaabe and Cree Two-Spirit Elder from Ojiigiziibiing (Fisher River Cree Nation, MB), Myra Laramee in a dream while she was attending the third annual international LGBT Native American gathering in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing (Winnipeg, MB) in 1990. It was a spirit-name that was given to her by our ancestors as a placeholder for lesbian, gay, trans, gender-variant, queer, pansexual, intersex and asexual Indigenous people—as the term for the queer Indigenous community has been lost through colonization and is waiting to be found again. Elder Myra Laramee remains the founding member of Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc., alongside Elder Albert McLeod from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and the Métis community of Norway House, MB. Elder Myra is someone that I hold very close in my heart, she has attended and participated in all of the Sundance ceremonies I danced at, she has prayed for me as I have for her. She remains amongst of group of Elders who hold my hand as I walk this red road. In addition to many of the teachings she has shared on my journey to help come into my understanding of Two-Spirit identity, she explained that the name "Two-Spirit" has begun to stray from its fundamental meaning. Many have inserted concepts around gender binaries within the term and that Two-Spirit is the amalgamation of both male and female spirits. This is false. Rather, the term Two-

[4] Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Black Point, NS: Fernwood Pub., 2008: 80.

Spirit or Niizh Manitowag, references the inherent ability for Two-Spirit people to act as peacekeepers within Indigenous communities. We have the ability to see both perspectives and resolve conflict; it is within our bloodlines. It is integral to note that some queer Indigenous people do not adopt the identity signifier as "Two-Spirit" due to the locality of its name. Nations outside Nêhiyaw and Anishinaabe are uncovering and being gifted teachings that are central to their specific understandings of Indigenous queer identities. Moving forward with the teachings that Elder Myra has shared with me and the community, it demonstrates a critical urgency for Indigenous people to hold their Elders close as these understandings can diverge from grounded fundamental Indigenous knowledges.

Engaging with possible concepts of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous methodologies within curation and Indigenous visual culture, I will discuss how that translates to Two-Spirit and queer Anishinaabeg, Métis/Michif and Nêhiyaw makers. Two-Spirit methodologies are shaped by the fluidity of gender expression and sexuality through art and storytelling. It is animated, spirited and perpetually in motion. And meanwhile, Two-Spirit methodologies have not been fully realized within academia due the complex and diverse identities within queer Indigenous culture. Two-Spirit Cherokee scholar and writer, Qwo-Li Driskill writes,

> Not only do Two-Spirit critiques remain accountable to both academic and nonacademic audiences, they are informed by Two-Spirit artist and activist movements… Two-Spirit critiques see theory practiced through poetry, memoir, fiction, story, song, dance, theatre, visual art, film, and other genres. Theory is not just about interpreting genres, these genres *are* theory.[5]

[5] Qwo-Li Driskill, "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 82.

To state that there is a singular protocol for Two-Spirit methodologies within art production or curatorial practices is restrictive and homogenizing due to the dynamic nature of Two-Spirit identities in relation to specific territories and nations. However, these practices maintain fundamental commonalities that are uniquely based in creating and preserving reciprocal and caring relationships. These constellations of kinship are steeped in ancestral knowledges while disseminating Western constructs of gender binaries and heteropatriarchy. Site-specificity remains integral to understanding the unique and varying ways in which Two-Spirit methodologies are formulated, dissolving the notion that Indigenous identities are static rather than fluid and perpetually in motion.

Drawing inspiration from a visual art and curatorial standpoint from Unangax scholar, Eve Tuck's theory on "desire-based research frameworks"[6] in her text titled *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,* she counteracts her initial concept on "damage-centered research"[7]. This text discusses the ways in which Indigenous pain is over-documented and over-researched, instilling an internalized narrative within us, as Anishinaabeg, that we are fundamentally broken peoples. Desire-based research frameworks move away from this rhetoric and instead, introduces the notion that we deserve to look to a brighter past, present and future. And while this text does not speak from a curatorial and visual culture standpoint, her theories resonate within Indigenous and Two-Spirit representation. Through Indigenous contemporary art discourse, one that celebrates our desires, needs and pleasure—it represents our nation as thriving which inherently supports our empowerment and success. By the definition of desire, I

[6] Eve Tuck, *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, *Harvard Educational Review* 79:3, (Fall 2009): 416.
[7] Ibid, 409.

will include notions that highlight Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous flourishment while expanding on our yearning for cultural and spiritual prosperity, which then positions our communities as those with aspiration, ambition and future imaginary. Using this as a model, I propose that Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous visual culture sits within the research frameworks that Tuck discusses in this text. While Dayna Danger's, Thirza Cuthand's and Bannock Babes' artistic practices reflect the damaging effects of Western settler colonialism, they also honour the significance of Indigenous reverence and resilience.

Throughout my research, I work through Eve Tuck's concept of "desire-based research frameworks"[8] by engaging with Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's notion of "native survivance"[9] as a parallel theory. In his book titled, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*, Vizenor establishes survivance as a form of self-determination for Indigenous peoples, one that departs from narratives that position our people as permanent victims under a Western and global colonial framework. Rather, it celebrates our cultures and the many ways we demonstrate the strength of our knowledges and cultural sustainability. The artists demonstrate this act of survivance, prioritizing our endless modes of care, reciprocal relationality, consent and kinship. They determine our expressions of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous love, desire, pleasure and resilience as a means of breaking from the confines of victimry.[10] These artists facilitate a restoration of our communities, advocating for spiritual, cultural, mental and physical agency that our peoples already embody in ourselves.

---

[8] Eve Tuck, *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, *Harvard Educational Review* 79:3, (Fall 2009): 409.
[9] Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 1.
[10] Ibid.

Furthering notions of restoration, Anishinaabekwe scholar, author, artist and poet, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson establishes a concept to recover through the term Biskaabiiyaang in her book *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence.* Biskaabiiyaang is an Anishinaabemowin verb translated to English as "to look back" or "returning to ourselves."[11] This concept emerges as a methodology within contemporary Anishinaabeg-centred academia. Simpson proposes that we apply this concept to our daily lives, let alone our artistic or research projects. Through the proposed Indigenous artists and curators in this thesis, I will demonstrate how these practices incorporate Biskabiiyaang methodologies alongside Tuck's desire-based research frameworks and Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance in their own unique ways. Additionally, it will be my intention to move forward with this project employing Biskabiiyaang through my research, writing and thoughts.

By returning to our cosmologies with the use of Indigenous visual culture as an epistemological framework, I will demonstrate a pro-active step in propelling Two-Spirit Anishinaabeg resurgence. Engaging with the art practices of Dayna Danger, Thirza Cuthand and Bannock Babes allows me to surmise and formulate Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous curatorial methodologies and visual art production. Because these practices are fundamentally grounded in Two-Spirit ancestral knowledges—steeped in connections to land, language, stories, sexuality, desire and pure queer Indigenous joy, this provides a genuine perspective on concepts relating to Two-Spirit methodologies. Eve Tuck's notions of desire-based research frameworks allows Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous makers to reclaim self-determination through visual

[11] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub., 2011): 49.

representation, altering our discourse to proactive and affirming narratives. Meanwhile, Gerald Vizenor's concept of native survivance re-establishes Indigenous strength and resilience by positioning these communities as thriving, rather than solely surviving. Lastly, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's reflections on Biskaabiiyaang brings guidance and comfort to these makers to return to their bodies, spirits and minds. This encourages Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people to fully restore autonomy and strength over their self-representation. I do not claim to convey an authoritative stance on Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous curatorial and visual culture methodologies. Rather, these insights are bound to evolve over the course of my lifetime and will continue to adapt in conjunction with the fluidity of my life stages, ceremonial practices and language revitalization. This mirrors the ever-changing and spirited knowledges and culture of my community.

Chapter 1: Nindawemaag

In order for Two-Spirit visual culture to truly commit to the genuine and considerate portrayal of the community, it is integral to demonstrate Indigenous queer love, joy and companionship in all its fruition. Engaging with kink and BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism) in their photographic and sculptural body of work, Saulteaux/Métis/Polish interdisciplinary artist Dayna Danger normalizes queer Indigenous intimacy in their *Mask* (2015-ongoing) series (fig. 1). Through their practice, they build a community of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous kinships as a step towards establishing safe and consensual relationships. But how does pleasure and desire form a grounded foundation within Two-Spirit representation in order to undo harmful narratives introduced by Western colonial ideologies around guilt and shame? How does Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous representation positively affect community members? And how does relation-building contribute to Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous art criticism and curation?

Raised in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Dayna Danger actualized their *Mask* series in 2015 and remains an ongoing project to this day. As a launching point into their career as an emerging artist, they originally presented this series as their final thesis project at Concordia University's Studio Arts MFA program in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal, Québec) in 2016. The artist's *Mask* series photographs Two-Spirit, Indigenous trans, queer, and gender-variant people wearing black leather BDSM bondage masks, adorned with matte and glossy black beaded designs. These designs are sometimes attributed to the model's personality traits or often according to tattoos that mark their bodies. Hiring Indigenous community members, such as Tricia Livingston and Nicole Redstar, to help with the arduous task of beading these masks

demonstrates Danger's commitment to continuing a collaborative approach. The largescale 60 x 75" portraits feature the models' bare shoulders, implying full-nudity as their gaze meets and challenges the viewers' voyeurism. This acts as a means to reclaim agency to Two-Spirit sexuality and gender expression; their leather masks act as a safety barrier while they sit powerfully in their sexual identity. The photos have potential to stand alone as each image conveys powerful narratives around bodily autonomy for queer Indigenous people. However, they are displayed as a cohesive quadriptych—*Sasha*'s (2016) hand gently touches *Lindsay*'s (2016) shoulder, with *Kandace* (2016) and *Adrienne* (2016) (myself) flanking the two on either side, demonstrating the importance of intimacy within kinship in Danger's series. These four participants are often tied to the artist's practice, reappearing in the form of collaborators and co-authors. To be clear, I am amongst the four models who can be found within or around the periphery of Danger's work. Inserting my narrative within this research is imperative within Indigenous cosmologies and methodologies; I am not separate from it. According to Nishnaabeg scholar, Madeline Whetung and Sarah Wakefield, the impetus to acquiring knowledge within the history of "research" is considered colonial due to its extractive nature.[12] The foundation of research relies on retrieving information outside of your periphery and molding it to reflect on your own ideas without necessarily deriving from those belief systems nor maintaining a reciprocal relationship with it.[13] I am deeply submersed and committed to Two-Spirit relation-building as a methodology. Because of this, transparency regarding the relationship I maintain between Danger and the artists within this community is imperative in order to move forward in this chapter by employing these research methodologies. Kandace Price performed alongside

[12] Madeline Whetung and Sarah Wakefield, "Colonial Conventions: Institutionalized Research Relationships and Decolonizing Research Ethics," *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education: Mapping the Long View*, edited by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, (New York: Routledge, 2019): 150.
[13] Ibid.

Danger in an episode of a digital video series piece titled *Queer (Self Portraits)*[14] (fig. 2) directed by Gabrielle Zilkha. In the video, they vivaciously express power dynamics between two Two-Spirit kin through intimacy and play fighting. Kilkha writes in an article for CBC Arts, stating, "Engaging the communities she represents in her work is a demonstration of Dayna's integrity as an artist – and I have a feeling that it's also what brings her most joy in her work."[15] In addition to participating in the *Mask* series, Danger photographed my naked body holding a caribou rack for their *Big'Uns* series which premiered on the cover of *Canadian Art* magazine for their Kinship issue in Summer 2017 (fig. 3). Since the conception of this issue, guest edited by Nêhiyaw/Métis/Anishinaabe Editor-At-Large, Lindsay Nixon; Danger, Nixon and myself have since formed a curatorial collective titled *gijiit*, prioritizing Indigenous sex, gender and sexuality within our curatorial narratives and trajectory. Without Dayna Danger's commitment to building Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous kinships through their art practice, I am convinced that many of us displaced queer Indigenous creatives and makers would be denied the position to feel empowered by the work we do today. In many ways, they demonstrate the strength in community-building through Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous visual culture.

American scholar and author, bell hooks specializes in theories around Black feminism, intersectionality, education and underrepresented communities. In her text, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, she focuses on the "life-enhancing vibrancy of diverse communities of resistance."[16] She discusses the ways in which these communities stand in

[14] *Queer (Self) Portraits* is part of an annual art exhibition titled *10X10 Photography Project*, curated and produced by James Fowler for Pride Month.
[15] Gabrielle Zilkha, "Dayna Danger has a powerful message for gender non-conforming folks: 'This work is for you'," *CBC Arts*, August 10, 2017, last accessed on August 19, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/arts/dayna-danger-has-a-powerful-message-for-gender-non-conforming-folks-this-work-is-for-you-1.4241754
[16] bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, New York: Routledge, 2003: xvi.

solidarity through underrepresentation and subjugation by the settler colonial state within educational and pedagogical realms. By physically occupying extensive amounts of space through their erotic large-scale portraits in the gallery setting, for example, Danger's artistic practice disrupts the colonial agenda by normalizing Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous bodies. Due to the ample size of the photographs, confrontation of Two-Spirit sexual and gender expression is nearly unavoidable. However, through their practice, Danger builds and celebrates a community with acts of genuine care, trust, respect, and consent. They write that their artwork "is a visual reminder that we are still reclaiming our vulnerability, intimacy and love—for ourselves and each other. Our sacred bonds are visible, still. I want to show the beautiful messiness, the truth, of our relationships. We are creating constellations of connection and care."[17] These artworks depart from narratives categorizing Indigenous populations as broken and encourage a trauma-informed responsibility to our community, that celebrates our pain and damage, and through that—our kinship and resilience.

Continually revisiting Indigenous suffering through visual culture can perpetuate trauma instead of relieving it. For Dayna Danger, prioritizing community-engagement remains their primary goal, resulting in the manifestation of respect, consent, honesty (truth-telling), and most importantly, love. bell hooks states in her chapter, *Spirituality in Education*,

> To be guided by love is to live in community with all life. However, a culture of domination, like ours, does not strive to teach us how to live in community. As a consequence, learning to live in community must be a core practice for all of us who desire spirituality.[18]

[17] Dayna Danger, "Bebeshwendaam: Transformative Non-Monogamy and Romantic Friendships," *Red Rising Magazine* 7 (2017): 35.
[18] bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, New York: Routledge, 2003: 163.

Dayna Danger centers kinship ties and relation-building through their spirituality, as this is intrinsically foundational to their artistic practice. Spiritual connections between their Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous kinship ties—a group of artists, academics, writers, beaders, musicians, thinkers, makers, and doers—inherently forms these bonds. These interwoven affinities may not maintain the same level of understanding between settler and Indigenous dynamics. Care and love can certainly be genuinely expressed between Indigenous and settler relations, however, there lacks a fundamental understanding of intergenerational trauma, power dynamics of skin colour, class and Two-Spirit ways of being (not to be confused with Western notions of queerness), for example. Unfortunately, deep-rooted traumas are perpetually shaped by colonial violence within the Indigenous community that remain incomprehensible by settler perspectives.[19] Perhaps Danger's *Mask* series refuses to portray these traumas for public consumption and instead, shifts the viewers perception to celebrate Two-Spirit resilience and relationality as a counterpoint. In conversation between Nêhiyaw scholar and poet, Billy-Ray Belcourt, and curator, writer, scholar and researcher Lindsay Nixon, they relate the importance of Indigenous queer art within the Indigenous contemporary art realm in their article, "What Do We Mean by Queer Ethics?" They discuss the importance of relationship building and kinship to the well-being and safety of our communities. They state,

> My formative years as a writer and creator were spent alongside queer youth in community-organizing, where I inherited queer relational philosophies through art and literature. I take up *queer* because of how I align my own experiences and identities, and as a way of repping the spaces that have loved me and nurtured my growth. My queer Indigenous kin raised me. In many instances, we didn't have queer and trans mentors, or the support of our cisgender and straight Elders. We had to teach one another what it meant to occupy gender-diverse and sexually diverse roles within community.[20]

---

[19] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017): 17.

[20] Lindsay Nixon, "What Do We Mean By Queer Ethics?" *Canadian Art Magazine*, May 23, 2018, https://canadianart.ca/features/what-do-we-mean-by-queerindigenousethics/

Many Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous youth historically have not and continue to be denied access to Two-Spirit Elders due to lack of visibility and safety within our own Indigenous communities. Therefore, Two-Spirit youth often look to their own for guidance and mentorship. However, through Danya Danger's art practice, we witness a yearning for the formation and maintenance of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous communities. This desire not only establishes a group of collaborators and co-authors to facilitate art-making and writing—it becomes a model for survival tactics through kinship ties and self-representation.

The masks themselves represent the obligation for consensual practices when engaging in the multiplicities of the kink community. Meanwhile, Danger uses the traditional medium of beadwork as a method of observing and moving through colonial violence and oppression. Lindsay Nixon, often writes about Danger's practice, highlighting their modes of sexual sovereignty, stating,

> Indigenous peoples' sexualities are frequently equated to histories of sexual violence, commodified and institutionalized by settlers seeking to dominate, discipline, and control Indigenous bodies. Danger's use of the leather BDSM mask references the kink community as a space to explore complicated dynamics of sexuality, gender, and power in a consensual and feminist manner. Danger engages with her own medicine, beading, in order to mark kink as a space for healing colonial trauma. There is no shame in this action. Here the models' gender expressions and sensual lives are integral to their resurgent identities as Indigenous peoples.[21]

The act of employing kink as a foundation to demonstrate the consensual and reciprocal relationships that are inherent in BDSM culture speaks to Danger's drive to use desire as a model to receive and provide opportunities for meaningful relations; this is significant for the Indigenous community. Consent comes to the forefront of Indigenous relationality after

[21] Lindsay Nixon, "Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism: sâkihito-maskihkiy acâhkosiwikamikohk," *GUTS Magazine*, May 20, 2016. http://gutsmagazine.ca/visual-cultures/

generations of mistrust presents itself in the form of colonial violence. As Anishinaabeg and Two-Spirit people are perpetually experiencing disconnection from their lands, minds, spirits, ancestors, language and culture, these artworks not only portray healthy connections to the people within our lives, but to our own bodies. Leanne Betasamoke Simpson writes extensively on the notion of body sovereignty for Indigenous peoples, stating,

> The sexuality of Indigenous women and 2SQ people had to be removed from the public sphere and from the control of Indigenous women and 2SQ people, as normalized within Indigenous societies and contained within the white heteropatriarchal home. This last point is critical to understanding the experience of Indigenous women today. Since we came from societies where sexual freedom and self-determination of our bodies was our birthright, the control of our bodies and sexuality became of critical importance to the colonizers. They reframed Indigenous sexuality within the confines of shame and modesty.[22]

Dayna Danger's *Mask* (2015-ongoing) series normalizes sexual liberation and the bodily agency Two-Spirit people demand. This inherently points to the desire for caring and respectful relationships within our communities. This is achieved while demonstrating the safety of intimacy between loved ones—romantic, platonic or otherwise—while subverting notions of shame and guilt. However, the complexity of these many modes of desire, wanting, lust, affection, intimacy and trust determines the varying manifestations of desire and how these ideas can connect with and guide our communities.

As a mode of highlighting the importance of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous pleasure, Danger's *Mask* (2015-ongoing) series relates to the desire for spiritual and physical connection. This unearths a need for trust and safety in order for Two-Spirit people to fully realize the embodied yearning for spirited and grounded intimacy. Eve Tuck writes,

[22] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017): 110.

> Desire-based research frameworks, by contrast, can yield analyses that upend commonly held assumptions of responsibility, cohesiveness, ignorance, and paralysis within dispossessed and disenfranchised communities. Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the *not yet* and, at times, the *not anymore*… Exponentially generative, engaged, engorged, desire is not more wanting but our informed seeking. Desire is both the part of us that *hankers* for the desired and at the same time the part that learns to desire. It is closely tied to, or may even be, our wisdom. [23]

Tuck points our attention to the 'not yet' and 'not anymore." The 'not yet' speaks to Indigenous desire as a cognizant pursuit as opposed to an unattainable or unrealistic goal, whereas the 'not anymore' refers to a rejection of future trauma. For example, within Danger's photographs, the 'not yet' demands a prospering future for Two-Spirit, trans, and queer Indigenous people to be immersed with consensual, reciprocal and safe relationships that support their success and safety. This is not an unobtainable objective. In contrast, the 'not anymore' imagines an elimination of colonial trauma imposed on Indigenous spirituality, bodies and land. Because Danger expresses Two-Spirit relationality and pleasure, they are able to subvert representations of Indigenous pain which could ultimately further harm the queer Indigenous community. As a case study, Tuck discusses damage and desire-based research frameworks as demonstrated in an exhibition titled "Stereotypes vs. Humantypes: Images of Blacks in the 19th and 20th Centuries" at the Schomberg Center for Research on Black Culture at the New York Public Library in Harlem. Divided into two rooms, the exhibition displayed historical stereotypes in advertising, science, entertainment and educational images of Black Americans—images that perpetuate racial discrimination within the U.S.[24] The second room displayed "humantypes," or self-crafted images by Black Americans

[23] Eve Tuck, *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, *Harvard Educational Review* 79:3, (Fall 2009): 417-18.
[24] Ibid, 417.

who engaged with photography (often in the form of daguerreotypes) to subvert stereotypical imagery and reclaim their visual self-determination. Tuck writes,

> These humantypes are layered in composition and meaning. They are determined to show complexity and often reveal contradiction. Though posed, they feature real bodies and faces—real skin in place of the cartoonish illustrations of the stereotypes. The photographs and daguerreotypes are images of desire, while the stereotypes are flat damage.[25]

Through Dayna Danger's practice, we witness a restoration of Two-Spirit visual self-representation through their photographic and sculptural works. This points to the authentic nature of desire Tuck discusses: they display real skin and real bodies. Danger photographs the multiplicities of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous identities, permitting a dissolution of historical stereotypical imagery and rebuilding new and genuine representation. By depicting Two-Spirit identities through modes of care and trust, Danger ultimately moves to repair these communities as an act of resistance while also pushing for modes of desire. Tuck explains,

> Desire is a thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance. It is neither/both/and reproduction and resistance. This is important because it more closely matches the experiences of people who, at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures—that is, everybody. Desire fleshes out that which has been hidden or what happens behind our backs. Desire, because it is an assemblage of experiences, ideas, and ideologies, both subversive and dominant, necessarily complicates our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance.[26]

Because we feel the implications of disconnect within our own spiritual and physical selves as our experiences as Indigenous people vary entirely—depending on our nations, gender expressions and sexualities—actions of communicating and portraying desire are complex and diverse. Danger uses kink as a facet to normalize the safety in expressing our desires as

[25] Ibid, 417-418.
[26] Ibid, 418-419.

Anishinaabeg and Métis people, as desire allows our people to express hope and desire for safe and meaningful acts of consent, love, pleasure and care.

In order to work through Eve Tuck's desire-based research frameworks, we turn to Gerald Vizenor's concept of native survivance to understand the significance of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous visual art production. These creatives convey their own narratives steeped in queer joy while submersed in the safety of kinship ties. Survivance promotes Indigenous ways of being by separating us from the enacted colonial violence that harms the foundation of our population, languages, worldviews, songs, teachings and visual knowledge. Therefore, survivance affords Indigenous people the right to come back to our authentic selves. Vizenor states,

> The nature of survivance is unmistakable in native songs, stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, customs, and clearly observable in narrative sentiments of resistance, and in personal attributes such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mine, and moral courage… Native survivance in an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent… Survivance is the heritable right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in the course of international declarations of human rights, a narrative estate of native survivance.[27]

The absence and deracination that Vizenor speaks of is his concept of "victimry," which mirrors Tuck's concept of damage-based research frameworks. Victimry places Indigenous peoples within the confines of perpetual victimhood and therefore, stagnant and incapable of healing from colonial trauma. Vizenor writes, "The nature of survivance creates a sense of narrative resistance to absence, literary tragedy, nihility, and victimry."[28] And while we must acknowledge

[27] Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 85-86.
[28] Ibid, 1.

that the impacts of colonization have left our communities damaged in many ways, victimry confronts Indigenous sovereign position by stalling our mobility to move forward. Survivance then becomes a remedy for victimry; by taking matters into our own hands, we are able to reclaim Indigenous spiritual, mental and bodily agency.

While Danger's photographs suggest notions of pleasure, trust and care within BDSM and kink by Indigenous people, they also initiate a rejection of certain stigmas revolving around shame, guilt and fear. These are tactics used and adopted by Western religious ideologies that run counterintuitively to Indigenous ways of being.[29] Gerald Vizenor believes that with these ploys instilled by monotheistic and Christian doctrine supress native survivance and explains,

> The sectarian scrutiny of essential individual responsibilities provokes a discourse of monotheist conscience, remorse, mercy, and a literature of tragedy. The ironic fullness of original sin, shame, and stigmata want salvation, a singular solution of absence and certain victimry. There is a crucial cultural distinction between monotheism, apocalypticism, natural reason, and native survivance.[30]

Danger's desire to subvert notions of shame of Two-Spirit intimacy acts as an example of the "crucial cultural distinction" that Vizenor discusses that differentiate monotheism and native survivance. Their work celebrates the eroticism that remains stigmatized within Indigenous mentalities. Through the normalization of queer Indigenous pleasure and consent through visual culture, Danger provides a safe and consensual platform for Two-Spirited people to tell their own narratives around sexuality, gender and sex. The masks themselves represent a refusal of the settler colonial gaze, concealing their faces while maintaining eye contact. And in some ways,

[29] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017): 96.
[30] Ibid, 98.

the leather becomes a physical barrier that protects Two-Spirit identity while subverting heteropatriarchal standards. This permits an acceptance to change the rhetoric around Indigenous sex, sexuality and gender that has historically been misrepresented or invisible, re-building a pervasive outlook on Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous pleasure that simply was not our own.[31] Survivance encourages Indigenous makers to challenge historical inaccuracies which can be laced with Christian and Victorian creed, as a mechanism to re-build self-determination through a visual lens in order to strengthen our communities through expressions of wanting, gratification and protection. Self-representation leads to the healing process of colonial traumas by restoring our beings, bodies, genders, sexualities and reproductive lives.[32]

It is integral to note that Two-Spirit identity is always in flux and perpetually in motion.[33] When discussing and formulating protocols for Two-Spirit curatorial methodologies, we must avoid homogenizing queer Indigenous experiences. With the addition of pan-Indigenizing visual culture, this can ultimately remove our agency from our visual sovereignty and narratives. Historically, curators were positioned within superior power dynamics between artists and their artworks. Collections and exhibitions that were often based on Western colonial systems were deemed necessary for the development of curatorial projects. However, a reciprocal relationship to the artist and their truth could remain an important aspect in cultivating Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous curatorial methodologies. These standards of reciprocity demonstrate modes of respect and responsibility towards Two-Spirit communities in order to ensure spiritual and

---

[31] Qwo-Li Driskill, "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 71.
[32] Lindsay Nixon, "Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism: sâkihito-maskihkiy acâhkosiwikamikohk," *GUTS Magazine*, May 20, 2016. http://gutsmagazine.ca/visual-cultures/
[33] Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017): 37.

cultural safety. In Shawn Wilson's chapter on "Relational Accountability," he highlights the significance of maintaining accountability within Indigenous communities while demonstrating how this can be perpetuated within research, projects, relationships and in everyday life in general.

> The research ceremony is grounded in the community, and with the relationships that are being built comes the recognition that I am an integral part of the community too… The knowledge transfer is again all about continuing healthy relationships. Having a relationship with an idea also means that you must honour and respect that idea.[34]

When cultivating collaborative concepts, Wilson insists that these ideas will only flourish when steeped in a reciprocal manner—building and maintaining the well-being of the relationships within the community. Dayna Danger's artworks reflect the spirit of this knowledge, and can be used as a model throughout their art practice, initiating Two-Spirit methodology through the ongoing care and consent with their photographic subjects and co-authors. This remains fundamental in terms of community-engagement, maintaining reciprocal relationships between curator, artist, technicians, gallery staff and even art critic in order to facilitate the safety of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous kinship within the Indigenous and Western art realm as a whole. Métis artist, curator and writer, David Garneau, shares his perspectives on art criticism within the Indigenous visual culture realm in his text, "Can I get a Witness? Indigenous Art Criticism," stating,

> Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art begins with the knowledge that you are part of a community. Whatever you say or otherwise publish is delivered with care because you know that you will be held accountable by virtual neighbours. In Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art there is no critical distance of the Modernist sort. Unlike adversarial and

[34] Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Black Point, NS: Fernwood Pub., 2008: 123-125.

> ocular-centric Western criticism, Indigenous criticism is creative engagement in a dialogue with art; it is co-responsive not meta-discursive.[35]

Similar to Indigenous criticism, curation and visual art production surpasses Western methodologies surrounding visual culture. This is because relational accountability is intrinsically fundamental within Indigenous visual knowledge whereas Western modes of art production has the ability to separate themselves from the content.[36] The Indigenous art realm—including curators and critics— relies on specific Indigenous epistemologies within their visual art production, curation and writing. However, it also acknowledges the absolute urgency for community-claiming and relation-building. Community is foundational to Anishinaabeg ways of being.[37] To detach these methodologies from Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous curation would inherently affect the facilitation of cultural safety, kinship ties, bodily and spiritual agency, as well as visual sovereignty. When engaging with Two-Spirited and queer Indigenous community-building, it is integral to acknowledge the concept of "chosen family" as some people do not carry support from their home communites. This due to homophobia, transphobia, Western perspectives on gender binaries and other heteropatriarchal and heteronormative systems imposed by Western settler colonialism. Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar, Kim Tallbear, focuses on the importance of Indigenous kinship ties that have been severed due to assimilation and genocide. She writes, "Despite colonial violence against our kin systems, we are in everyday practice still quite adept at extended family. Beyond biological family, we also have ceremonies

---

[35] David Garneau, "Can I Get a Witness? Indigenous Art Criticism," *Sovereign Words: Indigenous Art, Curation and Criticism*, edited by Katya García-Antón, Daniel Browning, (Norway, Amsterdam: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2018): 29.

[36] Eugenia Kisin, "Archival Predecessors and Indigenous Modernisms: Archives in Contemporary Curatorial Practice on the Northwest Coast," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2017): 75.

[37] John Borrows, "Maajitaadaa: Nanaboozhoo and the Flood, Part 2," *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories* edited by Jill Doerflier, et al. (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013): xii.

to adopt kin."[38] Queer Indigenous and Two-Spirit peoples are all-too familiar with these practices as kinship-building remain on the forefront of survival tactics under a violence heteropatriarchal colonial apparatus. Therefore, the basis of community-engagement maintains the utmost importance to Anishinaabeg and Two-Spirited curation, criticism and visual art production.

Dayna Danger's visual arts practice reflects Anishinaabe/Métis and Two-Spirit cosmologies which are central to our visual, physical, spiritual and cultural sovereignty. While Indigenous sexual and bodily agency is demonstrated through their *Mask* series (2015-ongoing), they also adopt Anishinaabe/Métis traditional ways of making to navigate their relationship with their experiences with colonial trauma. Modes of displaying and enacting desire becomes normalized for not only Two-Spirit, Indigenous trans, queer and gender-variant people, but for all Indigenous people in general. Rather than constrict Two-Spirit people within the confines of victimhood and brokenness, Danger reclaims self-determination through a visual lens. Not only do they facilitate this through sexual liberation, but also through authentic Two-Spirit self-representation that celebrates diverse queer Indigenous identities within a modern context. Healthy and reciprocal relationships become central to our existence as Anishinaabeg people in order to express our genuine modes of wanting, needing and achieving pleasure. While these relationships are not always attainable, community remains essential for Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous creatives. It was curator and art critic, Maya Wilson-Sanchez who reviewed the opening of international Indigenous exhibition titled "Àbadakone/Continuous Fire/Feu continuel" at the National Gallery of Canada in 2019. She not only summed up the relevance of

[38] Kim Tallbear, "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family," *Making Kin Not Population*, ed. Adele E. Clarke and Donne Haraway, (Cambridge: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018): 150.

community-engagement within Indigenous visual culture, but also how Danger enacted relationality through their Indigenous cosmologies. She writes,

> Artist Dayna Danger handed me a bone from the leg of the moose, which had been cut at an angle in order to remove the moose's hair from its skin. The process was satisfying, and Danger showed me a spot where the hair comes off easily. After some time, Danger left and others approached. I handed someone the bone I was using and taught them how to skin the hide like I was taught just some moments ago.[39]

Danger continues to establish and uplift kinships and chosen family members as a way of facilitating modes of relation-building through Indigenous visual culture, this model can be mirrored through other facets of the Indigenous art realm, such as curation and art criticism.

Chapter 2: Aki

[39] Maya Wilson-Sanchez, "'Àbadakone' Creates Community," *Canadian Art Magazine,* November 21, 2019, last accessed August 22, 2020, https://canadianart.ca/features/abadakone-creates-community/

Storytelling perseveres at the forefront of Indigenous culture. It reveals our oral histories, guides us though our life stages in the form of ancestral teachings, and ensures that we, as Anishinaabeg, understand our relationships with land and placehood.[40] As an example, I will engage with Nêhiyaw/Irish/Scottish interdisciplinary artist, Thirza Cuthand's film *Woman Dress* (2019) (fig. 4), to discuss the importance of queer Indigenous storytelling in relation to territory. She uses digital film as a way to portray and normalize Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous identity while promoting modes of desire through Indigenous futurisms. Dismantling binary notions of past and present, Cuthand conveys a yearning for future prosperity. Through this, she demonstrates a genuine story of Two-Spirit intimacy and care. With the guidance of Eve Tuck's desire-based research frameworks, Gerald Vizenor's concept of Survivance and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's notion of Biskaabiiyang, I ask: how does placehood contribute to Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous storytelling and visual culture? And how does desire achieve safety and solidarity in relation to land—not only within the art industry, but to our communities as a whole?

Born in Okanan Gaa-izhi-ategin (Regina, Saskatchewan) and raised in Misâaskwatôminiskâhk (Saskatoon, SK), Thirza Cuthand is a visual artist and writer who primarily focuses on experimental filmmaking and performance art. After twenty-five years of generating short experimental films, she has been conveying narratives around queerness, sexuality, gender, sex, mental health, love and Indigeneity since 1995. Her works vary from

[40] Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, "Bagijige: Making an Offering," *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories*, edited by Jill Doerflier, et al., (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013): xvii.

scripted storytelling to strands of insight into her consciousness, detailing her experiences on coming-of-age and her queer identity. For example, *2 Spirit Dreamcatcher Dot Com* (2017) (fig. 5) playfully engages with Two-Spirit identity in the form of a queer Indigenous dating website, set in the style of a Lovelife advertisement one would watch on cable television after midnight in the early 2000s. Meanwhile, performance art occasionally makes its way into her artistic practice as another aspect that allows her to explore and engage with themes around the intersections of queer and Indigenous identities. In 2019, Cuthand's films, *2 Spirit Introductory Special $19.*99 (2015) *and Just* Dandy (2013) were screened at the Whitney Biennial, the longest running exhibition of contemporary art in the United States, becoming a pivotal moment for her career as it recognized her long-running artistic practice at an international scale, pushing her to mid-career status.

Amongst her impressive filmography, her most recent film, titled *Woman Dress* (2019) signalled a particular sense of elation for me and other members of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous community. It provides insight into a teaching that many Two-Spirit people do not have access to due to colonial shame around queer Indigenous identities. Many of these stories are waiting to resurface again. The film runs at 6:28 minutes in length and was produced by the National Film Board of Canada, which streams for free on their website. It portrays a teaching told and narrated by Thirza's Auntie Beth. It is a story originally passed down from their late grandfather, Stan Cuthand when Beth was approximately seven or eight years old. Conveying a narrative of a Two-Spirit child named Woman Dress, they travel the Plains, trading stories with different nations and communities while being welcomed on their journey. They were unsure of where the child came from or where they were going however, they would provide pertinent

news from abroad which demonstrates the importance of maintaining communication lines for Indigenous communities across Turtle Island. Indigenous knowledge exchange allows the transference of technologies and stories, warns areas of looming threat, points to migration and hunting patterns, helps neighbouring communities understand where Manitouwag sleep and which plants to harvest.[41] The film mixes contemporary and historical footage, dissolving notions of present and past dichotomies while implying non-linear concepts of time, rejecting the idea that Indigenous people and stories are trapped in a static and unchanging past. Meanwhile, the story lacks a concrete conclusion—Auntie Beth states that traditional stories do not have endings because they continue to this day.[42] As Thirza narrates the film, she asks her aunt what Woman Dress would be doing in today's contemporary world to which she replies, "Today, they'd be travelling the world, telling stories… As long as we tell the stories, they live."[43] In the film, communities gather in Cypress Hills, a major trading camp, to honour the storytellers who bring news from afar and agree to protect them. According to my Elder Myra Laramee, Two-Spirits were sometimes gifted the ability to maintain peacekeeping roles through the form of storytellers, implying that our communities have always acknowledged the significance of Two-Spirit capacities. Additionally, the main character featured in *Woman Dress* is Hotinonshón:ni actor, writer, public speaker and educator, Kiley May, who identifies as Two-Spirit, trans, queer and genderqueer. In terms of significant Two-Spirit representation, this story is grounded within Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous voices, facilitating the genuine portrayal of these complex

[41] Alan Corbiere, "Expansive Approaches to Indigenous Art Histories," (lecture at OCAD University, Toronto, ON, September 6, 2018).
[42] Thirza Cuthand, "Woman Dress," *National Film Board of Canada*, 6:28, 2019, https://www.nfb.ca/film/woman-dress/
[43] Ibid.

identities that honour cultural safety as trans and gender-variant Indigenous people due to its commitment to uplift and normalize these roles.

Their gendered pronouns are used interchangeably in *Woman Dress* (2019), mirroring the ways her grandpa would tell the story while acknowledging the lack of gendered pronouns within Nêhiyaw languages. Similar to Anishinaabemowin, Nêhiyaw and other Cree languages do not compromise of gendered pronouns (unlike Western colonial languages such as English or French). Alternatively, our pronouns are used to differentiate animate and inanimate nouns using suffixes as indicators. For example, in Anishinaabemowin, "bear" (animate) pluralized is makwa-**g**, whereas a "stick" (inanimate) pluralized is mitig-**an**. Naturally, dialects differ depending on location—whether you're from the Great Lakes area or the prairies, for instance—and the determination of animate/inanimate nouns vary as well. In an interview with The Globe and Mail, Anishinaabe visual artist, Fallon Simard—a recent graduate in OCAD U's Interdisciplinary Master's in Art, Media and Design (IAMD) program and also a member at Gojijiing (Couchiching First Nation)—they state,

> Andy says that, in many Indigenous cultures, gender neutrality was commonplace and only interrupted at contact with Europeans. "It started happening to Indigenous bodies during those institutional times where people were regulated," they say, referring to colonial schools that enforced gender roles. Andy says that, traditionally, their Anishinaabemowin language was more inclusive of both genders. Instead of saying sister, brother, son, daughter, mom or granddaughter, people were simply "child," "sibling" or "parent," according to Andy… "Today my grandma just calls me 'noozhis,' which means 'grandkid,' or by my nation name, which is 'Waasegiizhigook,' meaning 'the light that shines through the clouds.' She really takes out all the gendered stuff for me, which I really like." This gesture represents a slight shift in human consciousness, Andy says, as well as signalling a returning to the Anishinaabemowin way of seeing people for who they are as spiritual beings.[44]

[44] Angela Sterritt, "Indigenous languages recognize gender states not even named in English," *The Globe and Mail*, March 10, 2016, last accessed on April 27, 2020, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/indigenous-languages-recognize-gender-states-not-even-named-in-english/article29130778/

Similar to the teachings Simard received from their grandmother, Anishinaabe Elder, Laureen Blu Waters, gifted me with comparable guidance, stating that our spirit names were ungendered before colonization. For instance, my name is Moonflower Woman, however, she explained that my name originally would simply have been Moonflower and by adding gender pronouns to my name, it signifies an imbalance of power. Heteropatriarchal notions of gendered and sexual hierarchy continue to seep into our communities through colonial assimilation, not only through the introduction of residential schools, but also perpetuated through the ongoing national crisis of Missing and Murdered Women, Girls, Trans and Two-Spirits (MMIWGT2S).[45] This demonstrates a disproportionate amount of violence towards non-cisheterosexual men in our Indigenous communities, on and off reservations. Meanwhile, this film encourages a normalization of Two-Spirit identity as Woman Dress' gender expression remains an underlying factor within the story. While it is certainly monumental to feature Two-Spirit representation within Indigenous visual culture, the story highlights the character's journey and storytelling attributes rather than solely highlighting their gender. Thirza normalizes Woman Dress' existence as a storyteller and peacekeeper first and foremost without prioritizing her gender and sexual identity. And while Two-Spirit representation is integral to Indigenous communities, it is important to remember that our sexual and gender expressions remain a fraction of our intricate and plentiful lives. Therefore, she disseminates the glorification of Two-Spirit identities and rather, simply contributes to a regular standard of the multiplicities and complexities of gender expressions within Anishinaabeg and Nêhiyaw community's, pre-colonization.

[45] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017): 100.

The locality of *Woman Dress* (2019) plays a significant role in Cuthand's storytelling: it is a story that describes a Two-Spirit person travelling the Canadian Prairies specifically. This connection to these territories rejects a homogenization of Two-Spirit identity and teachings on Turtle Island. Merging queer Indigenous roles, culture and people perpetuates an erasure of varied and unique selfhood within our communities. Because queer Indigenous identity is diverse, gender expression within Indigenous communities look very different amongst nations across Turtle Island. Thirza tells a story that honours Two-Spirit teachings that adhere distinctly to territories of the Canadian Prairies, subverting notions of uniform queer Indigeneity. Indigenous storytelling is intrinsically tied to placehood, relating to the cosmologies of the land and the communities that gather there. But what happens with Indigenous people—and even more specifically, Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people—are displaced, relocated and therefore, disconnected to ancestral lands? While Thirza Cuthand considers Tkaronto her home base, she continues to honour and sustain stories from her territory while holding herself accountable to her community. She adheres to an Indigenous social research paradigm, a concept Goenpul scholar, Aileen Moreton-Robinson discusses often in her work. Moreton-Robinson states,

> The social is constituted by our histories, our culturally embodied knowledges and life force that connect us to our respective lands, our creators, all living entities and our ancestors. By privileging and following the logic of our cultural knowledges, we come to know who we are and who we claim to be, as well as who claims us and how we are connected to our lands. This is a matter of ontology, our being—not a matter of identity—and how relationality informs an Indigenous social research paradigm.[46]

[46] Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. "Relationality: A Key Presupposition of an Indigenous Social Research Paradigm." In Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies edited by Chris Andersen and Jean M. O'Brien. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017: 69-77.

Regardless of Cuthand's current locality, she employs her ontology as a Two-Spirit Nêhiyaw visual artist by affirming her relationality to her ancestral homelands. Physically, she may be situated away from the Prairies however, by providing a platform for her Auntie Beth to recount the teaching of Woman Dress, she remains in relation with her cosmologies and placehood. In a way, she is re-telling a story while applying references of the land through modes of citation. In August 2018, BUSH Gallery partnered with Plug-In Institute of Contemporary Art, hosting a three-week long post-graduate research program in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing and Baaskaandibewiziibing (Brokenhead First Nation). The theme was "Site/ation", which led to "pushing a radical approach to curating and art making, born from active engagements and lived experiences on the land, land marking, contemporary art, the reserve, and the gallery."[47] In conjunction with the research program, they guest edited an issue of *C Magazine: Contemporary Art and Criticism* 136 on "Site/ation" where they speak to their relationships to territory from an Indigenous visual culture lens while steering away from conventional Western modes of art display. Willard clarifies in an interview for *C Magazine,*

> 'Land-based needs to be understood as 'Indigenous land-based,' which firstly and fundamentally values the Indigenous territories you are on whether you are from that Nation or not. That principle is very important to BUSH Gallery. We also recognize that BUSH can't be assimilated into broad, public ideas of 'Land' because what we are trying to get at are specific ideas, histories and aesthetics about land that, as always in this country and worldwide, are about specific Indigenous lands. Thus the concept and title of the issue as Site/ation which makes room to consider ways the land affects us and how we gain knowledge from it, as a broader inclusive method of land-practice.[48]

[47] "Summer Institute Session II: Site/ation with BUSH gallery," Plug In ICA, accessed June 30, 2020, https://plugin.org/exhibitions/bush-gallery/

[48] Tania Willard, "Q+A On the transformational power of centring art on Indigenous lands," interview by Elora Crawford, *C: International Contemporary Art*, February 22, 2018. https://mailchi.mp/2750266837d0/january2018-1172141?fbclid=IwAR1eWFcDkRHLTGCBO-Kkm6yTzmHQRM4eb1XPA-9oZxhvV616MEC2LbxyvUM

The concept of land-based artistic practices are not new to Indigenous visual culture. However, BUSH Gallery shifts the framework in regards to relationships to land within contemporary Indigenous art. Cuthand visualizes a story told within her family in relation to the Canadian Prairies while maintaining its cultural and spiritual integrity as a way of enacting Site/ation specific to her ancestral ties. Perhaps it is a way of honouring her ancestors and the land while reaffirming Two-Spirit identities before colonization. Perhaps it is a way of returning to herself. Anishinaabe scholar and author, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson continues to elaborate on Biskaabiiyang, stating,

> For Nishnaabeg people, our political and social cultures were profoundly non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian and non-coercive. Our culture placed a profound importance on individuals figuring out their own path, or their own theoretical understandings of their life and their life's work based on individual interpretation of our philosophies, teachings, stories and values. In combination with their own interpretation of the name or names they held within their society, clan responsibilities, and personal gifts or attributes, individuals were afforded a high level of autonomy within the community for exploring and expressing their responsibilities.[49]

The relevance of storytelling was gifted to Woman Dress, reflecting the importance of Cuthand's artistic practice as a filmmaker and storyteller herself. She embraces this role and gains her own agency in order to articulate her gifts and responsibilities, not only to her home community, but also the Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous community. Therefore, Biskaabiiyang can be applied in order to understand Cuthand's practice as a means to embody her initiative to communicate and share Indigenous stories and teachings through film. And through this, she encourages them to live on.

[49] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub., 2011): 53.

While many Indigenous stories do not elude to conclusions as they continue to live on and weave through generations and nations, it becomes apparent that our ancestors have always grasped notions of non-linear concepts of time. Indigenous Futurism and the Future Imaginary plays a significant role in Cuthand's film through the dissolution of past and present, integrating historical and contemporary imagery. *Woman Dress* (2019) challenges the dichotomies of antiquity versus future, pre-colonization versus post-colonization and therefore: civilized versus savage. Métis/German/Syrian scholar and curator, Julie Nagam writes extensively on these binaries in her text, "Deciphering the Refusal of the Digital and Binary Codes of Sovereignty/Self-Determination and Civilized/Savage," to analyze the contemporary art world's drive to separate traditional art mediums with modern technologies. She states,

> Media and technology are not new to Indigenous people; there is a long tradition of innovation and cultural significance. Much of the theoretical debate on sovereignty is tied to proving cultural ties to the past and a relationship to the land, which is vexed by an unequal colonial dependency. These claims have material consequences in that they depend on the notion that Indigenous peoples' cultural practices and historical knowledge are locked in a framework that is static and unchanging.[50]

Fundamentally, innovation and technology have always existed within our traditions, from map-making, beading, vernacular architecture, tanning hide etc. We are not static, nor stagnant people. These practices demonstrate Indigenous technological advancements through maintaining our dependency to the land that hosts us. This becomes especially apparent through Cuthand's filmmaking, a relatively new technology, as her storytelling reflects her ancestral cosmologies and territories. Within a Two-Spirit context, the story of Woman Dress encourages a legacy of Two-Spirit identity to be honoured within that conversation of innovation and

[50] Julie Nagam, "Deciphering the Refusal of the Digital and Binary Codes of Sovereignty/Self-Determination and Civilized/Savage," *PUBLIC: Art, Culture + Ideas 54: Indigenous Art, New Media and the Digital*, (Winter 2016): 79.

technology, which has otherwise been omitted. Nagam goes on to speak to perspectives of Indigenous makers and their desire to exist in a world without stipulation or restrictive ideologies, stating,

> Indigenous artists have a desire to merge both their cultural and traditional knowledge with new and existing technologies and devices. This desire creates a space for flexibility in the production of knowledge and creative practices. Indigenous artists who work within digital and new technologies are not bound by the same tired argument of traditional-versus-contemporary art practices.[51]

This desire leads to wanting. It is an urge to reject these fabricated complexities of past and future within Indigenous perspectives which demonstrates a colonial stronghold on our perceptions of ourselves. These inner narratives assert that our Indigeneity remains valued when it is solely placed in a historical context. However, how do we engage with a yearning for the future when Two-Spirit Anishinaabeg and Nêhiyaw identities have historically been erased, leading to a complex desire for the future imaginary?

Upon Eve Tuck's researching for desire, she draws upon American Professor of Sociology, Avery Gordon's concept of complex personhood, describing it as "conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning."[52] She then proceeds to place this within a desire-based research frameworks by removing the Western individualistic tendencies and rather, emphasizes the interdependence of the collective.[53] Complex personhood then defines the contradiction that many Indigenous people have of living in a Western society. These societal

[51] Ibid, 82.

[52] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 5.

[53] Eve Tuck, *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, *Harvard Educational Review* 79:3, (Fall 2009): 420.

contradictions fundamentally exist within problematic systems of oppression such as heteropatriarchy, capitalism and materialism, complicating our relationships to our own Indigenous identities. It is imperative to acknowledge that desire can encompass many things, including contradiction. These conflicts confront realities between tradition, land-based practices pedagogies, land sovereignty, technology, consumerism and resources extraction. Tuck states,

> Within collectivity, recognizing complex personhood involves making room for the contradictions, for the mis/re/cognitions, usually in an effort to sustain a sense of collective balance. For tribal peoples, this can mean resisting characterizing one another in ways that tacitly reduce us to being either trapped in the irrelevant past or fouled up by modernity and by acknowledging that as twenty-first-century peoples, it is our collective duty to ensure that any and every member who chooses can engage in traditional sustenance practices use science and Indigenous ecologies to understand the world around us, and attend relevant, respectful, and responsive schools.[54]

What Tuck describes here is a rejection of those Western settler constrictions placed on Indigenous identities, dictating technological advancement and accessibility for these communities while denying the reality that we are indeed modern peoples as well. These complex personhoods can also be witnessed in Cuthand's film, *2 Spirit Dreamcatcher Dot Com* (2017). The queer Indigenous dating site advertisement not only presents a desire for queer Indigenous intimacy, but also to look to modes of technology to seek these connections. As Cuthand narrates in the film, "2 Spirit Dreamcatcher Dot Com isn't like all the other dating websites, we match you up based on our Elder's algorithm. We take into account tribal affiliation, shared interests, compatible kinks, and offer an option to hide all your cousins from your list of potential dates."[55] Steeped in modern Indigenous vernacular and knowledges, this film demonstrates the blurred lines between Western colonial society and Two-Spirit ways of

[54] Ibid, 421.

[55] Thirza Cuthand, "2 Spirit Dreamcatcher Dot Com," *Vimeo*, 2017, https://vimeo.com/215438778: 00:58

being. Additionally, it encapsulates attainable futurities of desire while looking forward as a mode of informed yearning. Thirza Cuthand also demonstrates this in *Woman Dress* (2019) when the artist enters the frame at the end of her film, holding hands with Kiley May and eventually embrace. This eludes to Cuthand's desire to break barriers between concepts of past and future within Indigenous and Two-Spirit visual representation, embodying desire while accepting it with all its contradictions.

Ending the film in an embrace, Cuthand and May set the tone for a caring and compassionate relationship. They dismiss the notion that intimacy is solely reserved for romantic partnerships—similar to Dayna Danger's *Mask* (2015-ongoing) series—while normalizing the display of affection between Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people. Additionally, the artist demonstrates prospering relationships between Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people, pushing to celebrate the representation of our identities as grounded, flourishing and diverse—with all of our complexities. Genuine and grounded Two-Spirit visual representation extends to the normalization of queer Indigenous relationships within our communities, rejecting harmful colonial narratives introduced through heteropatriarchal systems of oppression by settler society. This film establishes the truth that our identities have been widely accepted and respected within our community's pre-colonization. Meanwhile, misconceptions of Two-Spirit roles within Anishinaabeg communities often depict us as highly regarded, such as a medicine people, leaders and name givers. My Elder, Myra Laramee, has informed me that Two-Spirit people are simply equal members of society. Rather, we all carry our designated gifts and responsibilities according to our names but we operate unilaterally as a group. No one is superior nor inferior. Neyonawak Inniniwak scholar, Dr. Alex Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree Nation) has been writing extensively on

Two-Spirit identities for over three decades, providing grounded discussions regarding our understanding of our roles within our communities. She states in her article, "How We Find Ourselves: Identity Development and Two-Spirit People,"

> Today, academics argue whether or not two-spirit people had a "special" role or were special people in Native societies. In my community, the act of declaring some people special threatens to separate them from their community and creates and imbalance. Traditionally, two-spirit people were simply part of the entire community; as we reclaim our identity with this name, we are returning to our communities.[56]

Moving away from divisional narratives permits Two-Spirit identity to integrate and prosper within Western society rather than acknowledging difference where heternormatively remains central and standard practice. *Woman Dress* (2019) certainly celebrates the character's gifts and responsibilities however, they are humbly honouring their journey. They are widely accepted into each community along their travels, demonstrating that Two-Spirit identity has been normalized without hesitation. Because of their acceptance, Woman Dress is able to honour their gifts and thrive as a storyteller. Gerald Vizenor expands on the importance of storytelling, stating, "Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of natural reason, tragic wisdom, and the provenance of new literary studies."[57] Stories fundamentally mirror our relationships to land, family, language and culture. Similar to Biskaabiiyaang, survivance surpasses ideological rhetoric, placing the term as a theory and alternatively, insists that it is a cosmology within our very being. And while we apply Eve Tuck's concept of desire-based research frameworks through the lens of Cuthand's storytelling, Vizenor's notions of survivance acts as a parallel theory. The film recognizes colonial trauma

[56] Alex Wilson, "How We Find Ourselves: Identity Development and Two-Spirit People," *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 66, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1996): 305.
[57] Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009): 88.

which imposed erasure of lost Two-Spirit teachings and pushes through this victimry to encourage a sovereign mobilization of Two-Spirit relationality through storytelling. Stories establish the preservation of our epistemologies as Anishinaabeg, especially in relation to our ancestral territories; these teachings ensure that we are connecting with our ancestors and will continue to do so.

Indigenous curation and visual art production acts as a mode of storytelling, conveying messages about our relationship to land, bodies and kin. Métis curator and art historian Michelle McGeough reflects on methodologies of Indigenous curation when she was hired to curate a retrospective exhibition on easel painting by the Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico, titled *Through Their Eyes: Paintings from the Santa Fe Indian School, 1918-1945*. In her text, "Indigenous Curatorial Practices and Methodologies," she disseminates Western curatorial practices, which are often individualistic while imposing authoritative narratives over artists' voices. Instead, she calls for community consultation as a means of returning Indigenous agency over our culture and stories.[58] Understanding the importance of Indigenous narratives to be reclaimed, she interviewed community members, living artists and their descendants in order to represent the narratives in a responsible manner. McGeough writes,

> Native American stakeholders have consistently advocated for specific changes in the ways that Native American people and their stories are to be presented in institutions such as museums… Native people wished to be consulted and involved in telling their stories. The desire for such collaborations has resulted in substantial changes of museum practices.[59]

[58] Michelle McGeough, "Indigenous Curatorial Practices and Methodologies," *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 13.
[59] Ibid, 15.

In many ways, Thirza Cuthand takes control of Indigenous and Two-Spirit narratives, providing a platform for Two-Spirit stories to continue their legacy. She too, consulted with community in order to provide grounded knowledge on Two-Spirit identity. Instead of pursuing an authoritative stance on this identity, she incorporated various voices with participation from the community in order to reclaim and uplift Two-Spirit representation.

What does storytelling mean for Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous agency within our own representation? Our stories—told from our perspectives, about our people—plays a significant role in the self-determination of Two-Spirit communities. We feel seen, empowered and revered. In an online interview with international cinema hub and organization, *Dirty Movies* (DMovies.org), Cuthand speaks to her relationship to storytelling and filmmaking, saying,

> My videos are often told in a similar manner to the way my grandfather would tell stories his parents and grandparents would tell him, like a monologue with a sort of larger meaning attached. Cree stories can be very funny, and some can be very sexually explicit too… I also recently made a film, [Woman Dress]… and it was really wonderful to not only be able to make that story more widely known as a film, but also to sort of have proof that 2 Spirit people were accepted and welcomed before colonization.[60]

Storytelling, whether it is conveyed through curation, visual arts, music, performance or literature, asks that we honour our ancestors and the ones who have come before us. This is an especially integral part of honouring Anishinaabeg epistemologies and ways of being. Portraying these stories demonstrate our relationships to the land, while normalizing Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous existence and gifts within the community. Anishinaabe curator Jamie Isaac from Sagkeeng First Nation explored the intersections of Indigenous art, activism in her MA Thesis at

[60] Thirza Cuthand, "Our dirty questions to Thirza Cuthand," interview by Victor Fraga, *Dirty Movies*, September 24, 2019, last accessed on May 12, 2020, https://www.dmovies.org/2019/09/24/our-dirty-questions-to-thirza-cuthand/

University of British Columbia. She writes, "The contributions of the Indigenous arts movement laid the ground for Indigenous artists today who are researchers and activists who are telling a story, seeing the world, interpreting the world through an Indigenized, growing decolonized lens."[61] For Two-Spirit creatives such as Cuthand, maintaining our agency by telling our own stories becomes a mode of activism while taking strides in undoing harmful gender and sexuality discrimination introduced by Western settler systems of oppression.

Thirza Cuthand dissolves binary notions of past and present in her film *Woman Dress* (2019) by conveying a yearning for future continuation of Two-Spirit storytelling and representation. She demonstrates that desire becomes deeply entrenched in our informed imaginings of future prosperity, with all its complexities and contradictions. Storytelling remains at the forefront of her practice, providing a continuation of Two-Spirit teachings while normalizing Two-Spirit existence, intimacy and care. This is all accomplished through her grounded relationship to her land and ancestral knowledges. Meanwhile, queer Indigenous and Two-Spirit curatorial methodologies and visual knowledges vary depending on the locality of their teachings, however, they are all steeping in community consultation and relation-building. This allows for the diverse lived experiences of Two-Spirit identity to be conveyed in a reciprocal and grounded way while honouring unique relationships to varied territories. She demonstrates the significance of contemporary Two-Spirit representation through non-linear, Indigenous concepts of time. And by embodying her own ontologies, Cuthand's storytelling encourages a legacy of Two-Spirit teachings to carry on.

[61] Jaimie Lyn Isaac, "Decolonizing Curatorial Practice: Acknowledging Indigenous Curatorial Praxis, Mapping its Agency, Recognizing its Aesthetic Within Contemporary Canadian Art," (MA diss., University of British Columbia, 2016): 31.

Chapter 3: Ganawenjigaazo

Two-Spirit visual representation can often expand further than the contemporary art lens, grounding itself in pockets of familiarity and safety that are often situated on the fringe of cultural institutions. Historically, major cultural institutions promoted violent colonial practices through the lens of anthropology and ethnology, building generations of mistrust for Indigenous nations who have been robbed of their stories and belongings in the process.[62] Two-Spirit collective Bannock Babes (fig. 6), based in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing (Winnipeg, Manitoba), showcases its Indigenous queer drag queens, kings and performers that challenge gender binaries through an Indigenous lens. As a launching point, we can mirror the ways in which Bannock Babes emulate their Two-Spirit knowledges in their performances through Cathy Mattes' curatorial methodology of Métis Kitchen Table Talks, which emphasizes Indigenous cosmologies while highlighting the importance of community engagement.[63] Their events sit on the outskirts of these galleries and rather, build their own safe, Indigenous-led spaces. These sites can be mirrored through David Garneau's concept of "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality," which push for Indigenous-only gatherings as a mode of refusal to settler surveillance.[64] However, does the legitimacy of their artistry and performances wane when placed outside of major cultural institutions? What happens to the context of the work once disassociated from the gallery setting where community-engagement comes to the forefront? Can security be achieved

---

[62] Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012): 19.

[63] Cathy Mattes, "Curating as Kitchen Table Talk," filmed July 21, 2016 at *Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art*, Winnipeg, MB, video, 1:05:31, last accessed June 3, 2020, https://plugin.org/curating-as-kitchen-table-talk-curator-talk-with-cathy-mattes-july-21-2016/

[64] David Garneau, "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing," *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016): 8.

inside the gallery walls or do artists find comfort in building their own spaces for Two-Spirit expression? And by pushing for safe spaces to gather as Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people, how do Bannock Babes attain self-empowerment through modes of desire and gender expression? Their performances playfully intersect gender roles, introducing fluid representations of gender expression. Their acts often acknowledge the impacts that colonization has on gender and sexuality within our communities while insisting on cultural specificity to Indigenous communities on the Canadian Prairies. This includes but is not limited to drag performances in regalia, glitter beards and cut-off shorts while dancing to A Tribe Called Red's "Land Back" or even lipsyncing to Disney's Pocahontas theme song. As Two-Spirit Mi'kmaq scholar Margaret Robinson states, "The emergence of two-spirit identity coincides with a cultural shift within Settler-dominated communities toward challenging binary categories of sex and gender."[65] Through humour, camp, dance, makeup and ancestral Indigenous knowledges, Two-Spirit drag guides queer Indigenous representation while pushing against colonial tropes that either ignore or erase these identities.

With alternating members, Bannock Babes consists of an array of emerging and established drag artists. They have been deemed as Winnipeg's finest "Indigi-drag" royalty[66], performing at varying events such as drag brunches, library readings and art fundraisers. The collective includes Feather Talia, Local Honey, Bambii Gunz, Tru North, and Luna while alongside presenting experienced legends like Anita Stallion, Vida Lamour Decosmo and Sandi Bay. Their youngest member is Olivia Limehart Sky at the young age of 12. The group is

[65] Margaret Robinson, "Two-Spirit Identity in a Time of Gender Fluidity," *Journal of Homosexuality* (2019): 1.
[66] Drag in the Peg, "Posts: Bannock Babes," *Facebook*, September 21, 2019, last accessed on May 13, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/pg/draginthepeg/posts/

spearheaded by organizer, Prairie Sky, who often hosts and MC's the Bannock Babes events while managing the groups financials at the end of the night. The majority of these celebrations are situated at local queer bar, Club 200, located in central downtown Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing. Many of drag artists are committee members of the annual Two-Spirit Pow Wow which takes place at Nestayawa (The Forks, Winnipeg) every June in conjunction with Winnipeg's Pride festival. Bannock Babes hosts multiple fundraisers for the ceremony throughout the year with all proceeds going to the organization. Differing in purpose, these performances and events maintain a single vision: to build a safe space for Indigenous drag artists to convey their drag personas. They demonstrate multiple expressions of gender bending through comedy and drama while asserting their cultural safety by establishing Two-Spirit-led events. For many, this means situating itself outside of the white washed gallery space. In terms of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous visual culture, Bannock Babes subvert the contemporary art world while ensuring their sexual and cultural identity remains uncompromised.

Firstly, and most importantly, we need to recognize that the rise of drag performance within mainstream culture stems from an art form birthed by members of the Black and Latino LGBTQIA+ community in Harlem, New York between the 1960's and 80's.[67] Ballroom culture maintained an underground safe space for drag and vogue performances, introducing an elaborate competition of "Houses" for artists to belong to while designing glamourous and grandiose makeup and costumes to accompany their acts.[68] Meanwhile, some members of the community were struggling with homelessness and poverty while existing during the height of

[67] Tsione Wolde-Michael, "A Brief History of Voguing," *National Museum of African American History and Culture*, last accessed May 14, 2020, https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/brief-history-voguing
[68] Ibid.

the HIV/AIDS crisis in New York. It is because of perseverance of chosen family and queer solidarity within the Black and Latino community that this art form exists and continues to be celebrated today.

Secondly, it is integral to acknowledge that I am not a drag performer. Rather, I have been invited to participate at a Bannock Babes event in the form of a floorwork and lap dance alongside Honey Local on March 14th, 2020 at Club 200. I am a pole dancer and burlesque performer. Since my return to Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing in December 2020, it had been a dream that was realized; performing with Bannock Babes was an absolute honour as I was amongst exceptional artists. The event acted as a fundraiser for the Two-Spirit Pow Wow in June (since postponed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic), for which I am an acting committee member. Including my personal relationship and narrative to Bannock Babes and the Two-Spirit community in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing is integral. Inserting my narrative and relationship to the collective employs an insider research concept through an Indigenous methodology lens as outlined by Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. She writes,

> At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality and richness of their data and analysis. So too do outsiders, but the major difference is that insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities. For this reason insider researchers need to build particular sorts of research-based support systems and relationships with their communities.[69]

As an inside researcher, my goal is to avoid speaking on their behalf and alternatively, articulate my responsibility to my community by providing a platform for their modes of visual culture that

[69] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (London; New York; Dunedin, N.Z: Zed Books, 1999): 137.

often and purposefully sits outside major galleries and institutions. It is my hopes that this research remains productive as a means to amplify Indigenous drag artist's voices while rejecting extractive colonial methodologies that underlie within academia.

For many drag artists such as Bannock Babes, alter egos and drag personas emulate a form of empowerment through self-expression. As American drag queen, model, singer, songwriter and television personality, RuPaul famously says, "You're born naked and the rest is drag."[70] He implies that drag opens up the possibility of uncovering your underlying identity, one that is masked through imposed heteropatriarchal and Westernized worldviews within our society. Safe spaces for drag events, such as 2SLGBTQA+ venues, encourage performers to truly articulate their authentic selves within a queer setting. These sites dismantle notions of gender identity while leaning into over-exaggerated expressions of gender performativity. Regarding Bannock Babes events, they counteract Westernized versions of gender identity through Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous cultural specificity while embodying Indigenous cosmologies. Two-Spirit M'ikmaq scholar, Margaret Robinson states, "… many Indigenous nations traditionally had suprabinary genders and did not view same-sex relationships as taboo."[71] In an text written by Wodi Wodi drag queen and scholar, Andrew Farrell titled "Lipstick Clapsticks: A Yarn and a Kiki with an Aboriginal Drag Queen," they use drag as a method of engage with conversations around the intersections of Indigenous and queer identities. They state,

> I am well aware that by participating in drag, as an Indigenous person, I am in some ways representing Aboriginal sex and gender minorities across various spaces… I embrace drag in all facets of my life; I do not think it should be isolated to the stage. I believe that gender and sexual diversity should not contribute to the isolation of Indigenous peoples

[70] RuPaul, *Working' It!: RuPaul's Guide to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Style*, (New York: Harper Collins Publisher LLC, 2010): ii.
[71] Margaret Robinson, "Two-Spirit Identity in a Time of Gender Fluidity," *Journal of Homosexuality* (2019): 6.

> in any way. The overwhelming representation of Aboriginal LGBTIQ people in the media… is largely negative and focuses on our hardships and the challenges we face. I aim to diversify that representation by being visible and proud, and celebrating and demonstrating that we are more than our oppression.[72]

While Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous representation can be met with many challenges, visual art through online platforms allow for more liberated and expressive forms of exhibiting one's identity.[73] These modes of display demonstrate Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous perspectives as flourishing as their true selves, it promotes their existence, their perspective and their own voice. This is integral for the community to witness the normalization of Two-Spirit presence and all the fluid ways in which gender expression and sexuality exists within Indigenous ways of understanding.

Subverting binaries of past and future, male and female, urban and reservation, civilized and savage, Two-Spirit drag artists find ways to demonstrate Indigenous complex and diverse identities. They recognize the rejection of colonial ideologies of stagnant personhood directly connects to a longing for autonomy and self-expression. Eve Tuck acknowledges that desire stems from the urge to look forward but also to the past in relation to body through spirituality within desire-based research frameworks. She states,

> In many desire-based texts (Anzaldúa, 1987, Cheng; 2001; Didion, 2005; Williams, 1992) there is a ghostly, remnant quality to desire, its existence not contained to the body but still derived of the body. Desire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future. It is integral to our humanness.[74]

---

[72] Andrew Farrell, "Lipstick Clapsticks: A Yarn and a Kiki with an Aboriginal Drag Queen," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 12, no. 5 (2016): 580.
[73] Ibid, 578.
[74] Eve Tuck, *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, *Harvard Educational Review* 79:3, (Fall 2009): 417.

Bannock Babes and other Two-Spirit drag artists sit within a liminal space between "traditional" Indigeneity while performing in Louboutin high heels, beaded earrings and Chanel lipstick. This opens up possibilities to acknowledge our ancestors by celebrating the ever-changing fluidity that Two-Spirited identities emulate, creating a space to express desire for queer Indigenous prosperity. Tuscarora curator and scholar, Jolene Rickard, discusses the importance of returning to tradition and ancestral knowledge for Indigenous artists and how that acts as a mode of Indigenous resurgence. She states, "Tradition as resistance has served Indigenous people well as a response to contact and as a reworking of colonial narratives of the Americas."[75] And while Tuck considers desire in relation to past and future, she articulates that these "ghostly remnant qualities"[76] are attributed to presence and absence. It is impossible to acknowledge the presence of Two-Spirit representation without the absence of it, historically and today. Western settler society then becomes a site of haunting, according to Tuck. She writes,

> The United States is permanently haunted by slavery, genocide, and violence entwined in its first, present and future days. Haunting doesn't hope to change people's perceptions, nor does it hope for reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop.[77]

The continuation of Two-Spirit drag demonstrates empowerment and resilience through generations of ongoing colonial trauma within systems of oppression, such as heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. Its refusal to stop is driven by haunting. Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous self-determination does not signal to an end of settler colonial haunting but acknowledges the presence of Two-Spirit representation through the absence. Notions of desire invoke a longing for self-representation—a space within society where queer Indigenous peoples can exist,

---

[75] Jolene Rickard, "Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 110:2 (Spring 2011): 472.
[76] Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, (Portland: Ringgold Inc., 2013): 642.
[77] Ibid.

convene and thrive without limitation. Meanwhile, desire ties into modes of brazen self-expression, such as dance, music, makeup and clothing. Some Two-Spirited drag queens take responsibility in conveying messages that push back against colonial tropes that paint our communities as broken. Since 2006, Two-Spirit Blackfoot interdisciplinary artist, Adrian Stimson's alter ego, Buffalo Boy (a parody character of Buffalo Bill) playfully engages with narratives around gender-bending, sexuality, colonial histories, and stereotypical Indigenous portrayal within mainstream representation. However, Stimson's alter ego does not signal the first display of queer Indigenous presence. We must acknowledge the film work of Sayisi Dene video artist Zachery Longboy whose work focuses on the depth of being a carrier of HIV as an Indigenous person such as is film *Water Into Fire* (1994). Additionally, the performance of Cree/Métis actor Billy Merasty who plays drag queen Pow Wow dancer, Zachary John, in multidisciplinary Haudenosaunee artist, Shelley Niro's film, *Honey Moccasin* (1998), for example. However, the manifestation of queer Indigenous presence of Buffalo Boy encapsulates the normalization of playful Indigenous drag performance within contemporary art and mainstream representation. Stimson introduces an initiative to establish acceptance of Two-Spirit desire and longing through storytelling, humour and of course, Indigenous drag. This lineage of Two-Spirit representation has paved the way for Two-Spirit drag, such as Bannock Babes, in order to carve out a space for them within a contemporary visual arts context. In an article co-authored by Kanien'kehá:ka scholar and curator, Ryan Rice and settler scholar, Carla Taunton, they highlight Stimson's integral role within the contemporary art lens as a queer Indigenous performer, stating,

> Buffalo Boy's 'queerness' is a manoeuvre to reclaim, reframe and liberate within the colonized spaces of reserves and broader society. As a contemporary performance artist, Stimson rekindles a distinct queer identity that is alive in our society, urban, rural and anywhere in between… An intervention of sorts, the multi-media installation *The Two-*

> *Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Buffalo Boy's First Peep Holes* uses play and humour to expose Buffalo Boy's queer identity and provoke questions relating to the complexities of sexuality, gender and society through performative strategies of resistance, camp and drag.[78]

In many ways, Bannock Babes and Two-Spirit drag enables a possibility to venture outside of the limitations of gender performativity within our societal norms by breaking outside of the colonial restrictive lens of imposed gender roles. Instead, it opens up possibilities to uncover notions of desire by rejecting Western definitions of gender and returning to Anishinaabe and other Indigenous knowledges of Two-Spirited identities. However, when drag enters the gallery space, where does visual art begin and community-engagement end? Audience members become a staple of the event, tipping drag performers while occasionally participating in drag acts. Without the audience, performativity becomes obsolete. And what happens to the authenticity of one's performance when removed from the security of Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous-led community spaces?

Convening in spaces that maintain cultural, spiritual and physical safety in order to promote Indigenous self-determination may also mean that these spaces are not attributed to major cultural institutions. While contemporary Indigenous visual representation is certainly challenging harmful and archaic stereotypical depictions of our cultures, it has not always been this way. Gallery, museum and academic spaces carry a history of colonial trauma enacted on our ancestors which continues to linger today, cultivating an everlasting rumination of disregard for Indigenous life. Anthropological and ethnographic conduct enforced by colonization invaded "ethnically-defined territorial spaces that now needed to be made sense of, to the ordered,

[78] Ryan Rice and Carla Taunton, "Buffalo Boy: THEN AND NOW," *Fuse Magazine* 32 (March 2009): 21.

ranked, to be governed, to be possessed,"[79] according to Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson. Our objects and narratives no longer belong to Indigenous communities—we have faced the forced removal of ceremonial objects, bodily remains, our clothing and land. This colonial mode of display solely exists for the purpose of displaying a culture that is distinct from Western settler society.[80] Jamie Isaac discusses this further in her MA thesis at UBC, stating,

> Indigenous peoples maintain contentious relationships with knowledge producers within educational institutes and museums, such as Harvard University and The Smithsonian because these places still possess collections from looted Indigenous cultures, including sacred objects and human remains. In these institutions of coloniality, Indigenous curators are faced with not only having to reframe and rewrite false representations but also work within those systems that illegitimately possessed Indigenous materials and bodies for their collections of study and display. The relations between these institutions and Indigenous curators working within them are fraught with justified tension.[81]

A common rhetoric by Indigenous people is that we experience discomfort in a setting that houses our stolen belongings and ancestors while imposing inaccurate narratives on our communities for Western settler consumption. Ho-Chunk scholar Amy Lonetree's often discusses this in her research, stating, "Museums can be very painful sites for Native peoples, as they are intimately tied to the colonization process."[82] Therefore, introducing queer Indigenous artists and curators into colonized institutional spaces could face a multitude of challenges.

Bannock Babes events establish Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous-only gatherings as a means to engage with their ancestral cosmologies in a safe and grounded manner. The notion of

---

[79] Audra Simpson, "On ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures* no. 9 (2007): 68.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Jaime Isaac, "Decolonizing Curatorial Practice: Acknowledging Indigenous Curatorial Praxis, Mapping its Agency, Recognizing its Aesthetic Within Contemporary Canadian Art," (MA diss., University of British Columbia, 2016): 17.
[82] Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012): 19.

building Indigenous-only spaces within the art realm is not a new concept. However, it has increasingly begun garnering attention by artists and curators as a move to acknowledge discomfort to some within major cultural institutions. Métis scholar David Garneau writes about "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality"[83] in his text, "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing." Critiquing the performativity of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Garneau pushes for safe spaces where residential school survivors provide their testimonies without re-traumatization by settler and institutional surveillance. He discusses his oil on canvas series, *Aboriginal Curatorial Collective Meeting* as a way to encourage the importance of Indigenous-only intellectual spaces, stating,

> Irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality are gatherings, ceremony, nêhiyawak (Cree)-only discussions, kitchen-table conversations, email exchanges, et cetera in which Blackfootness, Métisness, and so on, are performed without settler attendance. It is not a show for others but a site where people simply are, where they express and celebrate their continuity and figure themselves to, for, and with one another without the sense that they are being witnesses by people who are not equal participants.[84]

An example of an irreconcilable space of Aboriginality would be Urban Shaman: Contemporary Aboriginal Art Gallery in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing (Winnipeg, Manitoba). Urban Shaman opened its doors in 1996, establishing itself as a site for exhibition and discussion of contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit art.[85] It is one of three longest running Indigenous artist-run centres in Canada, providing consistent community-based programming and remains central to the regional, national and international Indigenous contemporary art discourse.[86] Urban

---

[83] David Garneau, "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing," *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016): 8.
[84] Ibid, 8.
[85] "History," Urban Shaman: Contemporary Aboriginal Art, last accessed August 25, 2020, http://urbanshaman.org/site/history
[86] Ibid.

Shaman initiated a culturally sovereign space at a critical moment, with a rising urban Indigenous population in Winnipeg in conjunction with limited Indigenous-led cultural institutions. Mohawk/Jewish curator Steven Loft, writes in a retrospective about his experience as former director of the gallery space, stating,

> Within the context of a large and growing Aboriginal population, the projects and outreach by Urban Shaman offer a contemporary "meeting ground" in the city. It is in this way that we create self-defining narratives of art and culture that promote inclusion and complementary discourse respecting unique cultural imperatives and dynamic communities. This is not an oppositional stance, a victim stance, or an identity stance. This is the process of nation-building.[87]

Establishing Indigenous-only spaces, or irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality, moves us away from narratives around victimry and instead, leads to a grounded site for self-representation and self-determination. The reclamation of Indigenous spaces are imperative for the nation-building that Loft addresses. Pushing this further, Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous-only sites then reject Western perceptions of gender and sexual identity that have seeped into the Indigenous subconscious. Similar to Urban Shaman, Bannock Babes events then become an irreconcilable space for Two-Spiritedness. Introducing Two-Spirit-only spaces somehow seems revolutionary when our embodied experiences crave familiarity, kinship and relation-building. This is especially pertinent in the art world when visual culture is a driving force within Anishinaabek ways of being.[88] Perhaps Bannock Babes events refuse Two-Spirit performativity imposed by settler surveillance and rather, they encourage a site to express their authentic and genuine selves.

---

[87] Steven Loft, "It's Not Open Heart Surgery…so…Here we Go…," *Retrospective*, (Winnipeg: Urban Shaman, 2006): 27.

[88] Molly McGlennen, "Horizon Lines, Medicine Painting, and Moose Calling: The Visual/Performative Storytelling of Three Anishinaabeg Artists," *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories*, edited by Jill Doerflier, et al., (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013): 342.

When relating Garneau's concept of "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality" to specific Indigenous curatorial methodologies on Treaty 1 territory, this brings me to Michif curator and scholar, Cathy Mattes, and her concept of the Métis Kitchen Table Talk. Mattes emphasizes the importance of Indigenous curatorial methodologies that are specific to her ways of knowing: she is a Michif woman whose family hails from Baawitigong area (Spruce Woods, Manitoba). In a curator talk at Plug-In Gallery in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing, co-presented with the Wood Land School in 2016, she outlines the historical significance of the kitchen table as the epicentre of gathering and domesticity for Michif people though it is not defined as a strictly gendered site.[89] It is a place to carry out creative tasks such as beading and embroidery, but also a place to convene to discuss cultural and political topics over shared meals.[90] Mattes intertwines her Michif cosmologies into her curatorial methodologies, stating,

> For Métis, kitchen tables are sites of survivance and transmotion. The potential of Métis and other Indigenous experience around the kitchen table allows for flow-through of experience that is dialogical and relevant in curating. The kitchen table is a meeting space and therefore, the kitchen table talk needs to be the central methodology in discussions about engaging communities through curatorial initiatives.[91]

Through this methodology, one that runs in Mattes' bloodline, she is able to fully embody and implement a curatorial approach that is steeped in community consultation, kinship engagement and relation-building. Western notions of individualism (often seen in academia and curation) dissipate as Michif ways of being prosper and flourish, demonstrating Indigenous safety and joy within creative spaces. Additionally, she actively withdraws from institutional sites and

---

[89] Cathy Mattes, "Curating as Kitchen Table Talk," filmed July 21, 2016 at *Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art*, Winnipeg, MB, video, 1:05:31, last accessed June 3, 2020, https://plugin.org/curating-as-kitchen-table-talk-curator-talk-with-cathy-mattes-july-21-2016/

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

knowledges while promoting Indigenous-led gatherings inside and outside the white walls and the ivory towers. Mattes successfully applies ancestral knowledges, grounded in her physical and spiritual ties to her homeland within her curatorial trajectory. She demonstrates that it is entirely possible to promote Two-Spirited and queer Indigenous pedagogies specific to the teachings of our territories while retaining Two-Spirit-only safe spaces. Two-Spirit drag collective, Bannock Babes, withdraw themselves from institutional and settler gazes, creating a community of performances that validate the rejection gender conforming identities while establishing culturally specific safe spaces for Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people. Places like gay bars in Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing lend their platforms to the Two-Spirit drag community, ensuring that their visual culture, performance and queer resilience is made possible which therefore, uplift a multitude of queer Indigenous voices in order to achieved self-determination.

By avoiding essentialist language revolving around Indigenous queerness, Two-Spiritedness and Indigenous drag, it is important to acknowledge the complexities of gender and the spectrum of sexuality as a whole. Though our ancestors may or may not have been leaning on ideas of camp, lipsyncing and glitter to demonstrate the intricacies of gender within our communities before colonization. Drag performance permits a pathway to returning to ourselves by erasing the restrictive ideologies around fixed gender roles. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson touches on the importance of Biiskabiyang leading our communities to modes of freedom through return and self-autonomy, stating,

> Biiskabiyang—the process of returning to ourselves, a reengagement with the things we have left behind, a re-emergence, an unfolding from the inside out—is a concept, an individual and collective process of decolonization and resurgence. To me, it is the embodied processes as freedom. It is a flight out of the structure of settler colonialism

> and into the processes and relationships of freedom and self-determination encoded and practiced within Nishnaabewin or grounded normativity.[92]

For some, drag leads to an acceptance of self and in some ways—a returning to one's identity. Winnipeg Two-Spirit drag performer, Levi Foy, speaks openly about his drag persona, Prairie Sky in an interview for CBC regarding their episode of Canada's a Drag, a docuseries produced by CBC Arts. He says, "Prairie Sky is my direct connection to worlds I do not know, memories that are not exclusively mine and moments I do not own… Without her, I don't think I would love and accept Levi in an honest way."[93] By gathering and celebrating drag artistry through an Indigenous lens, it permits Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous people to subvert colonial standards of gender. Additionally, drag rejects Western representation of Indigeneity as a whole, inviting our communities to embrace our bodies and self-expression with the utmost importance through music, dance, heels, wigs, lipstick and queer kin.

Two-Spirit representation gains momentum in today's contemporary world, reaching further than gallery walls and museums. Historically, our belongings and ancestors have been looted from these institutions, enabling a loss of agency of our stories as Two-Spirit Anishinaabeg. Two-Spirit collective, Bannock Babes, cultivates a community that acknowledges multiple concepts of gender within Indigenous knowledges while expressing performed gender through the art of drag. They emulate the possibilities for performance and visual art display that encourages Two-Spirit curatorial methodologies that are specific to Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing and

---

[92] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017): 17.

[93] Levi Foy, "'A lady who loves gowns but talks like a trucker': Meet Winnipeg drag queen Prairie Sky," interview by Peter Knegt, *CBC Arts*, April 8, 2018, last accessed on June 1, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/arts/a-lady-who-loves-gowns-but-talks-like-a-trucker-meet-winnipeg-drag-queen-prairie-sky-1.4606920

its surrounding areas. By carving out these spaces that sit outside of cultural institutions, they build sites to dismantle Western notions of gender and sexuality. Meanwhile, they remain grounded to embody their ancestral teachings in a culturally, spiritually and physically safe manner. And while they sit within a liminal space between traditional Indigenous and Western expressions of drag, the legitimacy of their artistic practices only improves. Bannock Babes are embodying Indigenous resurgence, providing meaningful connections to their ontologies. By building their own culturally relevant spaces, they ensure audience participation feeds the desire and validity of their identities. Two-Spirit cosmologies remain central to community engagement and gathering as Indigenous relationality is foundational to our Anishinaabeg ways of being. Through Two-Spirit drag, Bannock Babes bring brazen self-representation to the forefront to ensure a safe and secure Indigenous existence for past, present and future Two-Spirit communities.

Conclusion

Found in the works of Dayna Danger, Thirza Cuthand and Bannock Babes, declarations of desire within Indigenous visual culture specific from and between Okanan Gaa-izhi-ategin (Regina, Saskatchewan) and Miiskwaagamiwiziibiing (Winnipeg, Manitoba) ultimately position Two-Spirit Anishinaabeg, Nêhiyaw and Michif/Métis communities as fluid, with our complex urges, aspirations and needs. Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous visual culture does not carry a singular praxis, methodology nor protocol as those limitations homogenize the multiplicities and diversity within the community. Two-Spirit identities are fluid and differ in relation to the locality of their teachings. In Dayna Danger's *Mask* series (2015-ongoing), they normalize pleasure, intimacy and consent within kinship ties through their photographic portraits and furthermore, we witness acts of care between Thirza Cuthand and Kiley May's embrace in *Woman Dress* (2019). Two-Spirit drag collective, Bannock Babes, demonstrate the significance of gender bending while forming safe spaces to build and uplift community-engagement specific to queer Indigenous peoples. This is similar to Danger's practice, in which they use visual culture as a safety guard to nurture desire between Two-Spirit relations. These artists dismantle ideas around "traditional" Indigenous visual culture and instead, demonstrate our people as ever-evolving and fluid while staying grounded in our embodied knowledges. These knowledges are translated through the tools of photography, filmmaking, and drag performance. Meanwhile, these artistic practices are intrinsically tied to their connections to their ancestral teachings and land. They reclaim their stories around Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous identities by making their presence and perspectives known while rejecting Western notions of individualism through community-based practices. Therefore, Anishinaabeg, Nêhiyaw and Métis/Michif and Two-Spirit visual art production, art criticism and curatorial practices maintain a fundamental

commonality: the desire for community and kinship ties. Without the cultural, spiritual and physical safety within our networks that enable us to fully realize our identities through self-expression and care, Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous representation would not be what it is today. However, there is a long journey ahead of us. While I humbly admit that this paper was only a reflection of my findings, I do not claim to define Two-Spirit and Anishinaabeg curatorial methodologies. It is my hopes that I am able to witness Indigenous visual art production and use it to propel my own understandings of my identity and teachings while being firmly grounded on my ancestral territory. Miigwetch.

Bibliography

2016 Canadian Census. "City of Winnipeg Indigenous Peoples Highlights." *Winnipeg Infrastructure Planning Office: Economic Research*. September 2018. Last accessed June 22, 2020. https://winnipeg.ca/cao/pdfs/IndigenousPeople-WinnipegStatistics.pdf

Borrows, John. "Maajitaadaa: Nanaboozhoo and the Flood, Part 2." *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories* edited by Jill Doerflier, et al. Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013: ix-xiv.

Corbiere, Alan. "Expansive Approaches to Indigenous Art Histories." Lecture at OCAD University, Toronto, ON, September 6, 2018.

Cuthand, Thirza. "2 Spirit Dreamcatcher Dot Com." *Vimeo*. 4:56. 2017. https://vimeo.com/215438778

Cuthand, Thirza. "Our dirty questions to Thirza Cuthand." Interview by Victor Fraga. *Dirty Movies*. September 24, 2019. Last accessed on May 12, 2020. https://www.dmovies.org/2019/09/24/our-dirty-questions-to-thirza-cuthand/

Cuthand, Thirza. "Woman Dress." *National Film Board of Canada*. 6:28. 2019. https://www.nfb.ca/film/woman-dress/

Danger, Dayna. "Bebeshwendaam: Transformative Non-Monogamy and Romantic Friendships." *Red Rising Magazine* 7 (2017): 32-35.

Doerfler, Jill; Sinclair, Niigaanwewidam James; Stark, Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik. "Bagijige: Making an Offering." *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories*, edited by Jill Doerflier, et al. Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013: xv-xxvii.

Drag in the Peg. "Posts: Bannock Babes." *Facebook*. September 21, 2019. Last accessed on May 13, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/pg/draginthepeg/posts/

Driskill, Qwo-Li. "Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 69-92.

Farrell, Andrew. "Lipstick Clapsticks: A Yarn and a Kiki with an Aboriginal Drag Queen." *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 12, no. 5 (2016): 574-585.

Finley, Chris. "Decolonizing the Queer Native Body (and Recovering the Native Bull-Dyke): Bringing 'Sexy Back' and Out of Native Studies' Closet." In *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press (2011): 31-42.

Fiola, Chantal. *Rekindling the Sacred Fire: Métis Ancestry and Anishinaabe Spirituality*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press. 2015.

Foy, Levi. "'A lady who loves gowns but talks like a trucker': Meet Winnipeg drag queen Prairie Sky." Interview by Peter Knegt. *CBC Arts*. April 8, 2018. Last accessed on June 1, 2020. https://www.cbc.ca/arts/a-lady-who-loves-gowns-but-talks-like-a-trucker-meet-winnipeg-drag-queen-prairie-sky-1.4606920

Garneau, David. "Can I Get a Witness? Indigenous Art Criticism." *Sovereign Words: Indigenous Art, Curation and Criticism*. Edited by Katya García-Antón, Daniel Browning. Norway, Amsterdam: Office for Contemporary Art Norway (2018): 15-31.

Garneau, David. "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing." *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016: 1-27.

Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

hooks, bell. *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope.* New York: Routledge, 2003.

Isaac, Jaimie Lynn. "Decolonizing Curatorial Practice: Acknowledging Indigenous Curatorial Praxis, Mapping its Agency, Recognizing its Aesthetic Within Contemporary Canadian Art." MA diss., University of British Columbia, 2016.

Kisin, Eugenia. "Archival Predecessors and Indigenous Modernisms: Archives in Contemporary Curatorial Practice on the Northwest Coast." *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review*. Vol. 42. No. 2 (2017): 72-86.

Loft, Steven. "It's Not Open Heart Surgery…so…Here we Go…" *Retrospective*. Winnipeg: Urban Shaman, 2006.

Lonetree, Amy. *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Mattes, Cathy. "Curating as Kitchen Table Talk." Filmed July 21, 2016 at *Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art*, Winnipeg, MB. Video. 1:05:31. Last accessed June 3, 2020. https://plugin.org/curating-as-kitchen-table-talk-curator-talk-with-cathy-mattes-july-21-2016/

McGeough, Michelle. "Indigenous Curatorial Practices and Methodologies." *Wicazo Sa Review* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 13-20.

McGlennen, Molly. "Horizon Lines, Medicine Painting, and Moose Calling: The Visual/Performative Storytelling of Three Anishinaabeg Artists." *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories* edited by Jill Doerflier, et al. Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013: 341-359.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. "Desire." Last accessed June 22, 2020. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/desire

Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. “Relationality: A Key Presupposition of an Indigenous Social Research Paradigm.” In Sources and Methods in Indigenous Studies edited by Chris Andersen and Jean M. O’Brien. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017: 69-77.

Nagam, Julie. “Deciphering the Refusal of the Digital and Binary Codes of Sovereignty/Self-Determination and Civilized/Savage.” *PUBLIC: Art, Culture + Ideas 54: Indigenous Art, New Media and the Digital* (Winter 2016): 78-89.

Nixon, Lindsay. “Making Space in Indigenous Art for Bull Dykes and Gender Weirdos.” *Canadian Art Magazine*, April 20, 2017. https://canadianart.ca/essays/making-space-in-indigenous-art-for-bull-dykes-and-gender-weirdos/

Nixon, Lindsay. “Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism.” *GUTS Magazine*, May 20, 2016. http://gutsmagazine.ca/visual-cultures/

Plug In ICA. “Summer Institute Session II: Site/ation with BUSH gallery.” Accessed June 30, 2020. https://plugin.org/exhibitions/bush-gallery/

Rice, Ryan; Taunton, Carla. “Buffalo Boy: THEN AND NOW.” *Fuse Magazine* 32 (March 2009): 18-25

Rickard, Jolene. “Visualizing Sovereignty in the Time of Biometric Sensors.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 110:2 (Spring 2011): 465-486.

Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017.

Robinson, Margaret. “Two-Spirit Identity in a Time of Gender Fluidity.” *Journal of Homosexuality* (2019): 1-16.

RuPaul. *Working’ It!: RuPaul’s Guide to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Style*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher LLC, 2010.

Wilson-Sanchez, Maya. “’Àbadakone’ Creates Community.” *Canadian Art Magazine,* November 21, 2019. Last Accessed August 22, 2020. https://canadianart.ca/features/abadakone-creates-community/

Simpson, Audra. “On ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, ‘Voice’ and Colonial Citizenship.” *Junctures* no. 9 (2007): 67-80.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *Dancing on our Turtle’s Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub., 2011.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London; New York; Dunedin, N.Z: Zed Books, 1999.

Sterritt, Angela. "Indigenous languages recognize gender states not even named in English." *The Globe and Mail*, March 10, 2016. Last accessed on April 27, 2020. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/health/indigenous-languages-recognize-gender-states-not-even-named-in-english/article29130778/

Tallbear, Kim. "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family." *Making Kin Not Population*, edited by Adele E. Clarke and Donne Haraway. Cambridge: Prickly Paradigm Press, (2018): 145-164.

Tuck, Eve; Ree, C.. "A Glossary of Haunting." *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis. Portland: Ringgold Inc., (2013): 639-658.

Tuck, Eve. "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." *Harvard Educational Review* 79:3 (2009): 409-428.

Urban Shaman: Contemporary Aboriginal Art. "History." Last Accessed August 25, 2020. http://urbanshaman.org/site/history

Vizenor, Gerald. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Whetung, Madeline; Wakefield, Sarah. "Colonial Conventions: Institutionalized Research Relationships and Decolonizing Research Ethics." *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education: Mapping the Long View*, edited by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. New York: Routledge, (2019): 146-158.

Willard, Tania. "Q+A On the transformational power of centring art on Indigenous lands." Interview by Elora Crawford. *C: International Contemporary Art*. February 22, 2018. https://mailchi.mp/2750266837d0/january2018-1172141?fbclid=IwAR1eWFcDkRHLTGCBO-Kkm6yTzmHQRM4eb1XPA-9oZxhvV616MEC2LbxyvUM

Wilson, Alex. "How We Find Ourselves: Identity Development and Two-Spirit People." *Harvard Educational Review*. Vol. 66. Cambridge: Harvard University, (1996): 303-317.

Wilson, Shawn. *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods.* Black Point, NS: Fernwood Pub., 2008.

Wolde-Michael, Tsione. "A Brief History of Voguing." *National Museum of African American History and Culture*. Last accessed May 14, 2020. https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/brief-history-voguing

Zilkha, Gabrielle. “Dayna Danger has a powerful message for gender non-conforming folks: ‘This work is for you’.” *CBC Arts*. August 10, 2017. Last accessed on August 19, 2020. https://www.cbc.ca/arts/dayna-danger-has-a-powerful-message-for-gender-non-conforming-folks-this-work-is-for-you-1.4241754

Appendix A: Figures

Figure 1: Dayna Danger, *Mask* series, 2015 – ongoing, beaded leather fetish masks, 4 digital inkjet prints, 60 x 75" each, last accessed July 3, 2020. https://www.kelownanow.com/watercooler/news/news/Kelowna/New_humorous_and_potentially_shocking_exhibit_to_open_at_the_Kelowna_Art_Gallery%C2%A0/

Figure 2: Dayna Danger, *Queer (Self) Portraits: Dayna Danger*, 2017, directed by Gabrielle Zilkha, digital video, 3:06, last accessed on August 24, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/arts/dayna-danger-has-a-powerful-message-for-gender-non-conforming-folks-this-work-is-for-you-1.4241754

Figure 3: Dayna Danger, *Big 'Uns – Adrienne*, 2017, digital print, 44 x 66", last accessed July 3, 2020. https://resilienceproject.ca/en/artists/dayna-danger

Figure 4: Thirza Cuthand, *Woman Dress* (still), 2019, digital film, 6:28. https://www.nfb.ca/film/woman-dress/

Figure 5: Thirza Cuthand, *2 Spirit Dreamcatcher Dot Com* (still), 2017, digital video, 4:56. https://vimeo.com/215438778

Figure 6: The Bannock Babes event at Club 200, Winnipeg, Manitoba, March 14, 2020. Image by author.