Western Standard Time, Non-colonial Time, and Indigenous Futurisms

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Indigenization is the transformation of any totalizing ideology, culture, or power to better suit the wisdom, ways, and needs of a local community. The process assumes that a People and their territory have been invaded, and that their futures—even ones that feature colonial expulsion—includes negotiated adaptations to the contemporary rather than a complete return to the past. Indigenization is decolonial in that it both conceptually and physically resists colonization's totalizing drive. This refusal includes the decentering of Western standard time.[1]

Colonization is totalizing in that it imagines disparate locals as mere parts of a unified whole, rather than having their own character and even competing senses of reality. To the colonial mindset, deviations are corruptions, competitors, or both. To maintain the myth of unity and its supporting hierarchy, dissent must be cleansed and assimilated, or eliminated.

Decolonization is a practice of undoing. It endeavors to reverse the harms done to Indigenous Peoples and territories by centuries of physical and conceptual invasion, human and resource exploitation, and genocide. It is a justice movement. However, if authored within a colonial mind-set, the practice inevitably seeks to perpetuate its own existence. Those desiring to no longer be (seen as) colonial, divest themselves of some of their ill-gotten gains through the restoration of select lands and belongings to Indigenous people (Land Back and repatriation), grant limited sovereignty, cash settlements for past crimes, and engage other forms of reparation.

Settler decolonialism is a set of political, legal, and economic strategies that permit pockets of Indigenous sovereignty within a matrix of a slightly remodeled capitalism. Settler decolonialism surrenders slivers of real estate, political power, and cash while reifying colonial concepts of property, legislative and judicial authority, capitalism, and other totalizing ideologies and practices. It enables Settlers to settle more securely in appropriated lands while Indigenous peoples are encouraged (and contractually obligated) to further their entanglement in Western ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Colonial undoing is essential for the survival of not only Indigenous people but of our environment. However, it is exhausting, and questionable when it means Indigenous folks spend more time assisting Settlers in their (un)doings than on recovering and imagining Indigenous futures. While agents of Indigenization must engage decolonial labour, we must not allow ourselves to get mired in (de)colonial discourse at the expense of productive action. Indigenization, Indigenous-authored decolonialization, and non-colonial action, differ from Settler decolonialism in their concentration less on undoing the done than on making and remaking the Indigenous. Indigenization is the recentering of Indigenous people and ways of knowing, being, and doing in their specific territories. Indigenous futurisms conceive

[1] This paper expands and reworks the essay "Radical Currents: Indigenous Art in the Future Continuous," which I, presented Oct. 22, 2020, at *Constellations: Indigenous Contemporary Art from the Americas*, a digital forum organized by Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational and Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo of Universidad Autónoma de México.

colonization as an interruption rather than an evolution. Indigenous futures are free of colonists but not of neighbours who share territory and are guided by natural law. Colonial undoing is not an attempt to turn back time but to produced societies informed by knowledge, methods, and wisdom repressed by colonial capitalism—including Indigenous understandings of time.

Before invasion, the Niitsitapi, Nêhiyawak, Lakoda, Nakoda, and Dakota of the Great Plains of Northern Turtle Island, on whose territories I live,[2] for example, oriented themselves according to natural rather than machined time. They experienced duration as cyclical rather than linear and conducted themselves according to these rhythms. The tipi, medicine wheel, pow-wow arbour, round dance, sun dance—all circles. The rotating planet and solar orbit produce a succession of days and nights of wildly different lengths depending on the time of year and one's location. Seasonal cycles engender migration patterns and other natural and cultural cadences. The Niitsitapi, Nêhiyawak, Lakoda, Nakoda, and Dakota year consist of thirteen moons that are aligned with other events in the observable world and honoured by ceremonies and practical actions in the cultural world. Plains cultures sought to harmonize with the changing environment rather than distort it to conform to a mathematical, even division, of time.

The Enlightenment-colonial-capitalist-empirical imaginary pictures time as a straight line: a point extending from and unknowable somewhere to an incalculable elsewhere. A train rolls through the night from a diming past toward a future brightened by its headlamp. Western standard time is not neutral. It is constructed to enable specific concepts and actions and to discourage others. Time conceived as a line, for example, assumes progress. It imagines time as history, a unified entity moving in one direction and privileging certain people. Western standard time centers humans as time's protagonists and encourages newness over repetition. Mechanized time represses attention to time's varying pulse and the fact that it is not only duration but also a medium.

Western standard time is an image or object that not only measures but regulates. In one incarnation, it is a curved grid superimposed on the planet to organize space/time. In another, it is a machine attached to bodies and displayed throughout private and public spaces. We must watch our watches. Because Western standard time is out of agreement with the observable rhythms of the natural world, its regulation requires ubiquitous machinery to reinforce the 'reality' of its artificial reality.

Amelia Aranda Huete explains that "Reloj de caja alta," by Diego Evans, is a grandfather clock in the English Chippendale style "decorated with Chinese-inspired motifs. The hood has a pagoda-type top…. wood columns with Doric capitals…. the hour dial is silver, with black enameled Roman hour and Arabic minute digits," and there is additional lettering in Spanish and English.[3] It is not an impartial measurement device. This cosmopolitan clock both displays and

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[2] These teachings come primarily from listening to Nêhiyawak Elder Gerry Saddleback and Niitsitapi Elder Leroy Little Bear, and from Little Bear's text cited below. I am a member of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan. I was born and raised in Treaty Six territory, lived for two decades in Treaty Seven, and have lived in Treaty Four for a quarter century. The Canadian Constitution recognizes the Métis, along with First Nations and Inuit Peoples, as Indigenous.

[3] Amelia Aranda Huete. https://coleccion.bde.es/wca/en/secciones/coleccion/obras/reloj-de-caja-alta-r_27.html

assimilates its influences and announces its aspirations. It reveals its society's trading partners and rivals, colonial reach and ambitions. Chronometer made global navigation and colonization possible. Did this one's silver and gold come from Spain's South American colonies?

The Tyranny of Chronos exhibition contrasts this emblem of chronological time with an Indigenous sense of the complexity of existence. Antonio Pichilla's "Kukulkan (the Feathered Serpent)" (2017) is a wood and wool construction evoking Kukulkan, the Tz'utujil Maya snake that flies. This supernatural being unites the earth and sky, the material and the metaphysical. It figures the inseparability of elemental relations such as people and environment, time and space. This concept is embodied in Pichilla's combination of rigid wood and flowing fabric, and in the loom that organizes some threads but permits many more to remain loose, to resist containment.

Ibghy & Lemmens' "Each Number Equals One Inhalation and One Exhalation (Table 3)" (2016), consists of sculptural representations of graphic measurements of human activity. The work is said to question[4] the modernist obsession with the regulation of human bodies to increase productivity. However, because Ibghy & Lemmens employ modernist formalism (the grid; regular, simplified shapes; primary colours; hard edges; machined parts; etc.) to critique modernist formalism; the work is less critique than playful illustration. An artwork cannot mount a credible critique without some distance from the object, concept, or process being considered. Ibghy & Lemmens' sculptures, and the graphic measurements they proport to question, share a material and stylistic discourse and are, therefore, equally prone to its distortions. The work participates in formalist modernism rather than suggesting an alternative. Whether it echoes the world or evades it, formalism is a reductive pleasure. Like the clock, it proposes that the world can be simplified and made comprehensible. There is beauty in its regulations but also danger. Scientific formalism does not just measure people and things, reduce them to numbers, but, when applied as social engineering, it takes the resulting simplified and standardized models and applies them to the irregular world. Such measures attempt to regulate and re-form their subjects into objects.

Elder and legal scholar Leroy Little Bear explains that central to Niitsitapi thought is the awareness that everything is in flux. This knowledge "results in a concept of time that is dynamic but without motion. Time is part of the constant flux but goes nowhere. Time just is."[5] This is a paradox if time were singular and not relative. For Niitsitapi, time is both a current and a medium. As a medium, "time just is." It is not a being-toward or from. However, within the medium are currents, patterns and rhythms that are "in constant motion." Time is experienced as a current when we flow with it, and as a medium when we do not.

Many traditional Indigenous societies picture time as circular. This may at first seem a form of linear thinking—a circle is, after all, a line. However, the metaphor conjures images of curving

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[4] Yolanda Romero Gómez. https://coleccion.bde.es/wca/en/secciones/coleccion/obras/each-number-equals-one-inhalation-and-one-exhalation--table-3--e_152.html

[5] Little Bear, L. "Jagged Worldviews Colliding." *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Ed. M. Battiste. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000. 177-185. Also see: http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/aswt/worldviews/documents/jagged_worldviews_colliding.pdf

time, pictures water eddies, and concentric circles: rings within rings, days within seasons within years; lives within families within Nations. Circles have no beginning or end. Such a model centers the continuous present we experience. Unlike straightened timelines, it neither orients us as beings-toward the future or as beings fleeing the past. Looping time centers the current moment, the current that carries us in an ever-present, one that is in intimate relation with other overlapping iterations of that moment.

Imagining time's curves inspires spirals, springs, and coils. These overlapping seeming circles touch without quite being each other. The current season echoes the last and presages seasons yet to be experienced. They are alike, kin but are not copies. The same goes for all instances of life—your life is like other lives but not identical. Cyclical time recognizes reiteration, recurrence, and other timely rhythms. It embraces how your lived currency is entangled with all other currents. This model values complex relationality: visiting and revisiting, telling and retelling, making and remaking. Indigenous understanding of time is inseparable from bodies and place. Time as a medium just is, but as a current it is experienced by specific bodies in particular places. Little Bear explains:

> In Plains Indian philosophy, certain events, patterns, cycles, and happenings take place in certain places. From a human point of view, patterns, cycles, and happenings are readily observable on land: animal migrations, cycles of plant life, seasons, and so on…. Creation is continuity. If creation is to continue, then it must be renewed. Renewal ceremonies, the telling and retelling of creation stories, the singing and resinging of the songs, are all humans' part in the maintenance of creation.[6]

Indigenous philosophy and practice, then, is holistic and entangled, is generalist, process-oriented, about iteration, reiteration, continuity, and firmly grounded in a particular place and community. This should not be mistaken for a totalizing ideology. Plains people do not impose their understanding on others. What they know emerges from their experience of their place. If others in other places arrive at the same conclusion, that is wonderful, it may even be a truth. But its truth arises from the particular; it is not imposed by human power.

Indigenous people wear watches. We have cell phones, live in houses and drive cars. We are bi-cultural. That is, we blend traditional Indigenous ways of knowing and being with the ways and things of other peoples to become contemporary human beings. As Maria Jacinta Xon Riquiac explains when decoding Antonio Pichilla's textile sculpture: "Kukulkan is an encounter with memory staged to weave space-time through shapes and colours, a time and a people whose resistance and dynamism are constant as they strive to continue to be contemporary Maya Tz'utujil in today's globalized world."[7] While we are contemporary, not all innovations and imports suit us, here. Not every invention, concept, and mode rhymes with our territories. One of Indigenization's greatest challenges is finding a balance between Western standard time and non-colonial time.

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[6] ibid, Little Bear.

[7] Maria Jacinta Xón Riquiac. https://coleccion.bde.es/wca/en/secciones/coleccion/obras/kukulkan--serpiente-emplumada--e_159.html

The first step is to avoid the conceptual trap of constructing false dichotomies of 'Western' and Indigenous as essentialist categories that resist agreement. Both ways of being are polyphonous and full of dissent. It is reactive, reductive, and inelegant to articulate the Indigenous as the opposite of 'Western', as some decolonialist do. Similarly, to describe 'the West' as if it was internally consistent only serves to reify its power. Rendering the 'West' as a singular narrative is a requirement of the totalizing myth. Showing, for instance, how Euro-American cultures repress their own contents when they mirror Indigenous philosophy, suggests that the Enlightenment-colonial-capitalist-empirical imaginary might be a momentary preference of the powerful rather than a natural fact. Such stubborn habits can eventually be displaced by a more holistic and generous project that is already latent in the hearts of its citizens.

While the colonial-capitalist aspect of 'the West' centers a singular sense of time, not every westerner agrees. Ancient Greeks, for example, had competing concepts of time. Chronos embodied linear time while Aeon personified circular time. Chronos and chronology only came into ascendance during the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, global trade and capitalism. Chronological time, with its sense of the inevitable march of history, of progress, the regulation of bodies and goods, the central position of timekeepers, and their feelings of superiority over the untimely, became the essential conceptual fuel for colonialism. Scientific concepts like light years, for example, are neutral, but when welded into the chronological imaginary of Western standard time, the image engenders a propulsion toward alternative planets and away from the one we are currently ruining. Aeonic time, Indigenous time, encourages being in an intimate relationship with the current we occupy.

A caution: just as 'the West' often lacks coherence and consistency, few First Peoples are paragons of their traditional teachings. Natives live under occupation and within programs of aggressive assimilation and racism. Reserves are not utopias. Indigenous is not a settled position. It is an aspirational identity, a recovery and creative mission that attempts to continue the best, non-colonial, ways of knowing and being into the future.

The irony of Indigenous philosophies is they do not center Indigenous people. Plains Elders I listen to all focus on what it means to be what they call "real human beings" or "the real People." There are, of course, local ways of being, for example, a better Nêhiyawak. Nêhiyawakness requires certain bodies, relations, knowledges, and customs, and is tethered to specific territories. Human beingness includes and informs the local but also exceeds it. Real human beings can be found in every culture, though some cultures aspire to this condition more than others. In addition, Indigenous ontologies are relational rather than hierarchical. People are part of ecosystems, not at the top of a pyramid or chain. In fact, many traditional stories emphasize human weakness, how we are dependent on our animal kin who are better adapted for survival. We prize our traditional Indigenous people because we can see that they are closer to human beingness; they inhabit Indigenous time/space as much as possible. They know and live ways of being other than the dominant mode—ways that are more suitable to humans, our relations, and territories.

Non-colonial action engages restorative justice, but only as a means toward a deeper end. It strives for the restoration of a humanity embedded in territory but also exceeding it. Therefore, the Indigenous is not only about Indigenous Peoples, but also about restoring other-than-Western standard time, non-capitalist humanity in every land. Axiomatic to non-colonial action is the understanding that the forces and systems called colonial, imperial, capitalist, etc., are Wendigo. That is, a mindless, unquenchable hunger that possesses people and institutions, a rampant force that ends only with the destruction of everything that does not resist it. Non-colonial action is the practice of doing Other-wise. It includes looking for homologies in settler and Indigenous societies; ways of being and knowing repressed by the colonial imagination. Finding such common truths and reviving it is essential to our collective survival. As in Antonio Pichilla's "Kukulkan (the Feathered Serpent)" (2017) our societies must be ones in which the woven and free co-exist.

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