Can I Get a Witness? Indigenous, Art, Criticism

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"Indigenous" is an emerging identity that extends and adapts First Peoples' ways of knowing and being to the contemporary moment and to spaces beyond our home territories. Natives from around the world – enabled by advancements in communication, transportation, government policies, and funding, and driven by a sense of urgency arising from degradations to our persons, our sovereignty, and our environments – are connecting with each other to produce inter-National networks and a collective consciousness. Art is part of this movement.

While Indigenous contemporary artists and curators make their home in various individual cultures and territories, we also participate in global art worlds and global conversations. We create objects, performances, exhibitions, texts, sounds, and meanings that blend, bend, and snap both colonial and customary cultures. If our labour is to be more than a tributary of art's mainstream, Indigenous artists and curators must engage in collective, critical reflection – on ourselves, works, and processes. If the movement is to thrive as a form of Indigenous creative sovereignty, our work must not only be recognized by mainstream witnesses, but it must be engaged, critically, by Native people. If we are not to gain Indigeneity at the expense of our "Anishinabeness," our "Métisness," or our "Musqueamness," our productions must be meaningful for all our relations.

On November 1, 2014, as part of Toronto's 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art, Kainai artist Terrance Houle presented *Iisistsikóówa (he is tired) – Friend or Foe #7* in a crowded former classroom at the Artscape Youngplace, a community cultural hub in Toronto's West Queen West neighbourhood. Terrance begins his performance by laying out chalk, tubes of red and black paint, and an X-ACTO knife. He introduces himself to the audience in Plains sign language. Suddenly, he is violently interrupted by four men wearing balaclavas and academic gowns. In a dramatic voice, one of the men reads from a scholarly paper about Indigenous art while his accomplices roll their copies of academic texts into clubs and beat the artist. Though staged, the brutality is real: Terrance is bruised and scraped, his glasses knocked from his face. The attackers force him up against a blackboard, where they outline his body in chalk. Only once the artist has been stripped naked by the attackers do several audience members step in to protect his battered, prone body. Terrance waves them off. Before they leave, the assailants throw down an open bag that contains regalia. Terrance sits up and lights a cigarette. He takes a loin cloth, necklace, and breastplate from the bag and puts them on. He smears his hands with red paint and presses them to his body and face. He sings while he takes bags of soil from just outside the performance space, opens them, and spills a mound into the center of the room. Terrance then washes himself in black earth, cuts off his braids, and buries them in the soil.

Iisistsikóówa – Blackfoot for "he is tired" – was, Terrance claims, his last work as a performance artist.

In her response to the event, festival blogger Alison Cooley writes that

> the performance reads as an allegory for being an Indigenous artist in Canada: being categorized, canonized, valorized, commodified on the market and in academic theory, even while being subject to the colonial aggressions of nationally sanctioned racist policy-making and individual everyday violences.[i]

Iisistsikóówa reminds Cooley of her passive complicity in the casual oppression of Natives. She explains that her failure to disrupt Native oppression, in Houle's performance and in her life, is due to "colonial power that make[s] us all vulnerable, reproduces our differences until we are all too female/too poor/too queer/too triggered/too weak/too scared to intervene."[ii] It is a powerful concession.

Cooley's account is sincere, thoughtful, and empathetic. Her description is evocative and the analysis perceptive. Aligning herself with Aboriginal struggle as a fellow subject of colonialism displays self-reflexive and affective solidarity. She shows how colonization distorts everyone. That she attended the performance at all, that she wrote about it, and did so with intelligence and sensitivity, is admirable and helpful. Witnessing – she describes herself as a witness – is crucial to reconciliation and the possibility of a non-colonial future. However, this is Settler business. The text centres a non-Indigenous subjectivity, hers, and the consciousness it aspires to raise is also non-Native. She casts colonial power as total, and Terrance Houle, its degraded subject, as living pedagogy for non-Natives.

Settler-authored critical reviews of Indigenous art are infrequent, and those that exist are addressed to non-Natives. Too often, Native art is contextualized within Western art history rather than considering First Nations, Inuit, or Métis aesthetic precedents, or, more importantly, Indigenous contemporary theory and practice. Many writers avoid criticism altogether, liking or disliking work on supposedly universal formal or subjective grounds. Even the better reviews generally turn on familiar tropes of injustice, the suffering Indian, and white guilt/solidarity. This is fine as far as it goes – much Aboriginal art, after all, complies with these tropes – and we can always use a witness (who will be believed). But when the subjectivity of these writings is non-Native consciousness, and the Indigenous is visible only when in proximity to white witnessing,[iii] it is important to recognize these texts as Settler texts – an important genre, but of limited use for Indigenous people.

Cooley reports of Houle's performance: "We recognize these motions newly as a manifestation of something that was always there (not beyond Houle's experience, but beyond our own)."[iv] In this fascinating construction, the author uses the plural "we" to encourage readers to join her as a collective, enlightened Canadian consciousness ("our own"). This collective entity is an unsettled Settler witness who tours the already always there, seeking not to homestead but to see what can be seen. Refreshingly, Cooley establishes an ethical horizon for her witnessing. She recognizes that there are Native worlds beyond her gaze and beneath her feet, and that she will not try to encroach upon them. Here, and in recent Settler accounts of Indigenous art generally, there is respectful, non-penetrative engagement – that is, there is an acute gaze outward and, especially, inward; there is an emphasis on insightful witnessing, on the ocular and reflective – but there is a reluctance to touch and be touched, to get physically involved, to engage the body and other senses.

There is a type of non-Indigenous witness – I am not referring to Alison Cooley here – who hungers for scenes of Native incident. These are mostly white people who stray with purpose among the urban disasters of capitalist colonialism, hoping to catch sight of spectacular degradation that they can redeem through art. They wander where they will, seeing and recording what they want – all the while knowing that, although they are at some physical risk, they are ultimately protected by the state, and their subjects know it. These individuals may be engaged in honourable activity: artist-reporter-social-critics who do not want to insulate themselves and their publics from the consequences of inherited privilege, who feel the moral urge to know and make known. Or they may be the somnambulistic wanderers of disenchanted privilege searching for sites of authentic being – which means discovering subjects who are unaware of the creative meta-text, meta-images, and meta-sounds these agents might yet provide to represent them. Whatever the individuals' apparent motives, from an Indigenous point of view – one sensitive to the subtler manifestations of the Settler collective unconscious – this form of Settler witnessing, of a specific looking-for, looks like colonization: not by settlement, but through survey.

The scopophilic colonial witnesses produce their Aboriginals through notice, record, and interpretation, rather than producing relations by being-with. These are panopticonic flâneurs[v] whose cool, glazed façades are unsoiled by tactile experience but whose insides roil with feeling, and with the frisson of their disturbing presence. To the Indigenous scout, they are the Settler avant-garde who occupy territory by pressing their right of free passage; they are the privileged bodies walking in dominion, strolling as a sovereignty exercise. Not only do they claim land through conspicuous surveillance; they affirm the integrity of the Settler body and self as mobile, clean, autonomous but protected agents – separate from and other than the grounded, messy, dependant, endangered, and unknowable Native.

Picture Terrance Houle cleansing his beaten body with earth, singing, cutting and burying his braids in a pile of soil in a Toronto classroom. His performance is an antidote to the ocular-centric and textualized self – the academic version of the Native who is translated from complex, messy life into black and white text. He is a contrary: getting dirty to get clean. The opposite of the prophylactic disaster tourist manifesting destiny, Houle lets experience penetrate him. In this way, what initially looks like the degradation of an Indigenous man becomes a redemptive ritual, echoing Blackfoot ceremonies that include self-authored mortifications of the flesh and the potential for transformation. The inverse of the panopticonic flâneur, Houle enters the heart of the witness and stays put, despite the beating, in a hyperbolic demonstration of the impossibility of his passing through Settler territory unchallenged. He does not beseech authorities or explain his actions but, rather, endures with his ceremony, language, and dignity intact.

Settler reviews tend to narrate Indigenous contemporary art as expression – creative illustrations of the pre-existing and already known – rather than as research, as a form of questioning, or the striving to generate new knowledge, new feelings, new sensations, thoughts, and intuitions, and new identities. *Iisistsikóówa* cannot be digested with the language, precedents, and theories of mainstream art alone. It is neither a spectacle of Blackfoot culture for Settler consumption, nor something Blackfoot people would entirely claim. Fresh art (art before art history), critical art (art worthy of criticism), is not reducible to culture. It is a new thing emerging from the multiple

sources that shape Houle, for example, but that he now has sufficient agency to interrogate and reshape.

If Indigenous artists completely understood what they were doing, they would be making customary art; they would be expressing their culture through its distinct, received forms. The confidence of customary artists comes from knowing what they are doing and knowing that it has a place within the culture their work embodies. Indigenous contemporary art is informed by, but not limited to, these traditions. Their destinations and receptions are uncertain – until, that is, an Indigenous critical community arises to consider them. They are experiments and, therefore, need not just appreciation but criticism to complete them. Only with their entry into critical discourses is their power beyond the aesthetic activated. Only then can they stimulate change in tribal and dominant cultures. It is the Indigenous work of art, text, exhibition, and sound that inspires, breathes life into, the Indigenous.

At the centre of *Iisistsikóówa* is an affective disturbance that cannot be explained away or displaced with words. Terrance Houle's act of cutting off his braids is not a rhetorical device but a profoundly moving, embodied performance of a complex, subjective experience, using and adapting inherited tools. While the ritual cutting of hair is a conventional sign for Blackfoot people, the meaning of the act is personal. It can be a mourning gesture honouring the loss of someone close, or it can mark a personal transition – the hoped-for loss of oneself and the birth of another self. What are we to make of this act as it occurs in a public, non-Indigenous space of performance art? Why this environment? Why these witnesses?

Australian art historian Ian McLean distinguishes "Indigenous contemporary art" from "contemporary Indigenous art." The former acknowledges that while all living Indigenous people are contemporary, not all the art they make is Contemporary. The word "Contemporary" designates a type of art, not simply the fact that it is art produced in the contemporary age. For example, saying that Modern art was practised in New York in the 1950s does not imply that all art made there at that time was Modern art. Customary art made by contemporary Native people, then, is unlikely to be Contemporary art. To avoid confusion, I capitalize the word "Contemporary" when I use it to refer to the art period that follows Modernism and Post-Modernism.

The word "Indigenous" operates similarly. According to conventional usage, the lower-case "indigenous" refers to something original to a particular place; "Indigenous" with an upper-case "I" refers only to a people original to a particular place. However, as I will soon explain and advocate, in its Contemporary usage, "Indigenous" is not synonymous with Aboriginal or Native or First Nations but, rather, indicates an additional way of being Native. Indigenous people are Native people when they are Contemporary. I discuss this idea in more detail below.

Ian McLean begins a recent essay with the claim that "a theory of Indigenous contemporary art remains elusive. This is reflected in its failure, outside of a few countries that are peripheral to the main game, to make a sustained impression on the main body of the artworld discourse."[vi] McLean's argument assumes that Indigenous artists measure their success by their status in the dominant art world. I would argue, however, that to identify as an *Indigenous* artist is to declare that you belong to the *Indigenous* art world and its discourse. A "theory of Indigenous

contemporary art" may be elusive, or it may just elude a false measure. A theory of Indigenous Contemporary art could only be successful, as Indigenous – that is, sovereign – if it were sensible and useful to Indigenous Contemporary artists and communities. Recognition by the global elite, "the main game," is of secondary importance. Like most non-Indigenous-authored texts, McLean's text assumes that Indigenous Contemporary art is addressed to the dominant art world, rather than being also a Native-to-Native communication – an Indigenous exchange that may be in conversation with the mainstream but is not subsumed by or fully comprehensible to it.

To engage Houle's performance as Indigenous, we must recognise it as addressed to Indigenous us. *Iisistsikóówa* takes place in a university. To the student, the Indigenous-in-training, Houle offers a dramatic version of what lies ahead, what it feels like to be an academic subject and the subject of academic inquiry – rendered in chalk outline. He warns that while the role of the "Indigenous artist" resembles that of his or her mainstream, un-prefixed version, it is always accompanied by the burden of not just difference, but the pressure placed on the Indigenous artist by the colonial drive to know, contain, absorb, and mortify. And it is exhausting – for Terrance (*Iisistsikóówa/*he is tired), and for any Indigenous person who finds him- or herself translating the Indigenous experience into forms mainstream people can comprehend. He also warns us about the consequences of losing touch with your body, earth, and home culture as sources of knowledge – the potential dangers of being in this abstract site, of following too closely the protocols of witness and whiteness, the danger of aesthetic distance.

While you don't have to be Indigenous to understand Indigenous art, it helps. Yes, *Isistsikóówa* engages non-Natives along the lines that Cooley draws: Houle embodies the racism visited upon him by a society that appreciates his art but reviles his brown body, and Settlers should recognize their complicity and construction within colonialism and decolonize themselves, and so forth. However, for Indigenous people, *isistsikóówa* is also about dissolving the divide between art and life, the ceremonial and the secular. It is about the Native reproduction of colonialism, about self-harm and lateral violence. Most pointedly, Houle's performance questions the desirability of Indigenous academic critique of Indigenous art.

I am a painter who wrote reviews (1989-2011) because my friends and fellow artists clamoured for criticism – well, publicity. While not always pleased with my efforts, my colleagues were happy that I undertook them. Critical art writing means not just press but discourse; it records and generates thinking, nudging readers, art production and display; it deepens the arts community, sharing the community's work beyond its borders. Until the turn of the twenty-first century, I wrote almost exclusively about non-Indigenous artists for non-Native publications. My reviews appeared in local weeklies in Calgary, national mainstream magazines such as *BorderCrossings* and *Canadian Art*, and a few international publications. I was the regional editor for *C* and *Vie des Arts,* and I co-founded and co-edited *Artichoke.* I also wrote for avowedly anti-colonial, non-commercial publications like *Fuse* and *Parallelogram*. But even there, I wrote with white readers in mind. Like Cooley, I cast myself as an implicated go-between, educating Settlers. It wasn't until the late 2000s that, like Terrance, I admitted exhaustion and retired (albeit temporarily) from this service. I wanted to discover, produce, and critique the performance of Indigeneity from within rather than in the guise of a Settler observer or from an assumed Settler perspective. I wanted to be, talk, and think with Indigenous people

about and through our art and lives rather than be a Native informant, teaching and entreating the dominant culture's embroidered fringe.

Indigenous Contemporary artists of the 90s and 2000s were also eager for critical art writing – sort of. In the path-making collection *Making a Noise!* (2005),[vii] Joane Cardinal-Schubert's essay "Flying with Louis" argued that we need Aboriginal art histories and criticism, "our own language of art: 'Aboriginal Art Speak.'"[viii] Cardinal-Schubert (1942-2009) was an important artist, curator, and writer. Like Terrance, she was Blackfoot; the two worked together in Calgary for several years. "Flying with Louis" marks a shift from the goals of the generation that preceded hers.

Cardinal-Schubert writes that in the 1970s, there was a profound change in how Native artists perceived and presented their work. The members of Professional Native Indian Artists Incorporation, better known as the Indian Group of Seven (1973-75), were interested in eating, in finding room in the commercial art market. They lobbied to have their work classified as capital "A" art and command appropriate prices: "they had the vision; saw the need for an intervention of passion to achieve the benefit of equality."[ix] For the most part, their desire was to join, not reform, the art world.

Joane Cardinal-Schubert's crew – the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry (1983-1995?) – wanted entry into the commercial art world, too, but they also demanded an equality that included access to what non-minoritized artists received: exhibitions in publicly funded art galleries, dedicated arts funding, residencies, teaching, curatorial opportunities, and a seat at decision-making tables. In the decades that followed, much of this was achieved. As early as 2004, however, Cardinal-Schubert took stock of the emerging Indigenous Contemporary art world – including her participation in it – and determined that the "equality" that had been achieved looked more like containment and exploitation: "I maintain that our efforts have been misunderstood; we have been co-opted."[x] She continues, "We have kicked down doors … lobbying with governments, educational institutions, funding agencies, galleries, and even our relatives, friends and peers."[xi] We have secured special funding for Indigenous arts, won curatorial internships at museums, learned Western critical theory and museum conservation: we have, she explains, been "a bunch of really 'good' Indians."[xii] But the price of individual achievement was the loss of Aboriginal collective solidarity. Aboriginal art, Cardinal-Schubert argues, is curated, celebrated, and consumed by non-Aboriginal audiences in Canada and overseas, all of which are "too far away" from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. If we continue this way, we will face "a further identity crisis" … and "we will not be able to advance an Aboriginal art theory." It is time, she argues, for a leap into "self-determination."[xiii] This "identity crisis" is what it feels like to be at the end of the "Aboriginal" and at the beginning of the "Indigenous."

From Aboriginal to Indigenous

Prior to European contact, the people of Turtle Island did not conceive themselves as Aboriginal. What we called ourselves, as in the case of the Inuit, usually meant something akin to "the people." Every group also had other names, appellations – not always positive – by Native and Settler others to indicate significant differences between groups of people. The Gayogohono, for

example were called “Cayuga” (“real snakes”) by the Algonquian.[xiv] The French called the Nehiyawak “Kristenaux” or “Christians,” which was corrupted into “Cree.”[xv] We Métis were called “Otimpemsuak” by the Cree, meaning “the people who own themselves,” a name that recognizes our independence from both Settlers and First Nations people – and sometimes each other!

First Nations on Turtle Island were as different from each other as nineteenth-century Russians were from the Portuguese. Colonization forced adjacent communities to forge alliances as a means of protecting themselves from decimation. To identify yourself as Aboriginal is to recognize that you have more in common with other Turtle Island Natives – despite language and culture differences – than you do with Settlers. The present European Union, for example, is a similar political construct – a collective of Nations with different languages and cultures who nevertheless organize themselves according to a common conceptual identity in response to external forces. The term “Aboriginal” encompasses the various tribal identities that compose it, but it is not synonymous with them. To be Aboriginal is to be Tahltan, for example, but also to have an inter-tribal consciousness that differs and may even conflict with your primary identity. Indian Brotherhoods, the Assembly of First Nations, the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry, and so on, are all expressions of Aboriginal consciousness. But they are also more than a sum of their parts.

“Indigenous” is not synonymous with “Aboriginal” but instead marks the emergence of a new way of being. If Siksikaness is your primary (tribal) identity, for example, and you treaty with adjacent First Nations to compose the Blackfoot confederacy, then “Blackfoot” is your secondary, Aboriginal, identity. “Indigenous” is a tertiary identity consisting of Aboriginal people who ally with First Peoples from other parts of the world. The first alliances are with those who share a common historical imperialist history – First Peoples from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are, therefore, “natural” Indigenous allies.

When asked if he was a black man, Cornel West once explained, “When I say I am a black man, I’m saying first that I am a modern person, because black itself is a modern construct … a hundred years ago I would have said I was a ‘coloured man.’”[xvi] West goes on to argue that “we’ve come up with various categories, including black, as a way of affirming ourselves as agents, as subjects in history who create, initiate and so forth.”[xvii] I would argue that the term “Indigenous” is a similar manifestation of agency: with it, we acknowledge our identity as history makers.

The Indigenous has been emerging from the Aboriginal for generations, but it is only recently, especially with the *UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, that the mode of Indigenous has become conscious of itself. People can perform an identity for ages before it is legible, even to themselves. While I participated in the Indigenous for some time, it was not until I went to Australia with a delegation of Aboriginal curators from Canada in 2008, and met with Aboriginal artists and curators there, that I knew myself as Indigenous. In those conversations, we discovered shared identities formed within, against, and despite colonization. Our ability to articulate this – to acknowledge and actively share self and collective consciousness – constitutes a visible, present, and conscious Indigenous mode of being.

The Indigenous emerged because of new technologies that enabled us to learn of, meet, and communicate with each other. Indigenous is a discursive and contingent space characterized by mobile relations enabled and maintained virtually, through the internet, by telephone, in the shared processes of reading and writing, and physically, thanks to rapid travel.

These three modes of being Native – the First Nation, the Aboriginal, and the Indigenous – are nested in each other. An Indigenous-identified person is Aboriginal and also a member of a First Nation, tribe, Métis local, iwi, or another group. Yet while all Indigenous people have a tribal affiliation, not all tribal peoples are Indigenous. Yankunytjatjara elder Lowitja O'Donoghue explains: "We are very happy with our involvement with indigenous people around the world … because they are our brothers and sisters. But we do object to it being used here in Australia … Call us Aboriginal."[xviii] While our primary social identities are due to birth or adoption, being Aboriginal or Indigenous is a choice.

Joane Cardinal-Schubert's call to withdraw our creative energies from national and international exhibitions and focus instead on our local communities arguably looks very much like a retreat from the Indigenous and Aboriginal back to the tribal. She was concerned that artists' outward-seeking behaviours were working well for the Canadian nation, and were rewarding individual artists, but that overall, they were not benefiting the artists' Nations. I think she was responding to what I see as a weakness in the Indigenous position. Of the three modes – First Nation, Aboriginal, and Indigenous – the tribal or Nation-al is most tied to land and language. Aboriginal relates to country,[xix] but when in the Aboriginal mode, people spend more of their time in motion and in urban environments. The Indigenous mode is the least grounded in place. It exists in placeless spaces online, in transit spaces, urban studios, international residencies, temporary exhibitions, and conferences – and it exists in English.

In the Indigenous mode, a person untethered to his or her community, land, and language is easily assimilated by the mainstream. If a person identifies as a Haida artist, for example, the person is saying that he or she is not only an artist, but an artist claimed by a specific community. That claim and that relationship imply responsibilities to that community. If an individual identifies primarily as an artist and tribal affiliations are incidental, and yet the individual still makes art with reference to that culture (like artist Jimmy Durham, for example), the individual may be operating in the Indigenous mode, but more likely he or she is simply an artist. But even then, while the tribe may no longer claim that individual, the Indigenous community may still claim the artist as one of its own.

The Indigenous art world is an international network of artists and curators. It includes the Aboriginal curatorial collective, which, while based in Canada, has an international roster; Native American Art Studies Association; international residencies and other gatherings; and loose collectives of artists and curators who connect with each other in person and through email, social media, Skype meetings, and publications. This self-conscious, extra-tribal, global network works to legitimize its own members and keep them from slipping into assimilation on the one hand and traditionalism on the other. I think of this looking out, for, and into each other as Indigenous critical care.

Alison Cooley notes that one of the rolled papers used to club Terrance Houle had the name "Joan Cardinal" on it. Cooley records but does not recognize the significance of this inclusion. Along with Clement Greenberg's name – which is written on one of the other rolled papers – it is folded into the critical colonial superstructure that oppresses Joane Cardinal Schubert and Terrance Houle alike. From an Indigenous point of view, however, Terrance Houle's vigilante Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art – and in this case, Blackfoot criticism of Indigenous critical writers! – is a shattering statement, one delivered specifically to us, the Indigenous.

Terrance is a ceremonial person. No matter how engaged he is in the mainstream art world, much of who is and what he means remains undigested by it. He centres himself in ceremony and country. *Iisistsikóówa,* I feel, expresses Houle's incredulity of criticism, of academic considerations of art that imagine they hover above the Native subject, whether they are authored by Indigenous people or not. Cardinal-Schubert's name on one of the rolled texts used to beat Houle may suggest that she is complicit in such abuse, but more likely Houle is suggesting that her texts could be used by non-Natives to abuse the Native artist.

There is often concern among traditional, local people that Indigenous people might be giving away too much – in other words, playing the Native informant in order to reap rewards offered by the mainstream. There is always the possibility that the Indigenous can be co-opted and used by the mainstream to abuse the Aboriginal, the tribal, and the land.

Yet I see Houle's performance as a warning rather than a prohibition. All of Houle's work, including *Isistsikóówa,* seeks conciliation, a space between the Indigenous and the Native. The fact that Houle introduces himself in Plains sign language, the trade language used to link Plains tribes with each other and, later, with European traders, illustrates this. As the first Aboriginal inter-Nation-al language, Plains sign language is, at its heart, a tool of conciliation.

Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art begins with the knowledge that we are part of a community. Whatever we say, or otherwise publish, must be delivered with care because we know that we will be held accountable by our virtual, Indigenous neighbours. In Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art, there is no critical distance of the Modernist sort. Unlike adversarial and ocular-centric Western criticism, Indigenous criticism is creative engagement in a dialogue with art: it is co-responsive, not meta-discursive.

The purpose of Indigenous critical performance and writing is to push the whole Indigenous project forward. As a critical writer, you are part of that project. This work is grounded in Indigenous creative and territorial sovereignty. Axiomatic to Indigenous criticism of Indigenous art is the assumption that there is such a thing as art that is a part of (but also apart from) the mainstream, and that its marker is "Indigenous," and that its content is determined by its members. Central to "Indigenous" is Aboriginal and tribal title to specific spaces.

The philosopher Arthur Danto argues that the end of art occurred in 1964 with Andy Warhol's "Brillo Boxes."[xx] Previously, art objects had been made and organized by what Danto frames as a Hegelian force called art's history, which followed a linear progression. Signs of collapse appeared as early as Dada and Duchamp, whose work never quite fit the mold of art's forward march. But Warhol delivered the *coup de grâce,* writes Danto, because his sculptures contained

their own theory – they are conceptual objects. Unlike previous works that required art history and philosophy to explain, fuel, and guide them, "Brillo Boxes" embodied what previous works had only represented. This sort-of art is self-aware; it no longer needs explanations fostered by philosophy or art history. These things are at once mere objects, art works, and philosophical propositions. In fact, these art-objects-agents of philosophy challenged and influenced philosophers such as Danto. They were no longer philosophy's subjects but its colleagues. Pluralism, Danto predicted as far back as 1986, would forever reign. There would be no further art movements, only individual artists and curators doing their own thing. And that, in the dominant art world, is what has happened.

I would argue, however, that what ended in 1964 was not art, but Modernism. Contemporary art is the name given to art after Modernism. This period has also seen a rejection of art and criticism that imagine they are forms of revealed and universal truth rather than agreements among similarly trained observers. Today, artwork and critical writing that attempt to revive these old, limited, and limiting perspectives are really a form of capital zombieism – non-critical, art market twitches, artificial semblances of life.

Why would Indigenous artists wish to participate in such a world? Why would Indigenous theorists seek as a measure of success whether we make a "sustained impression" on that necropolis? That we might wish to make a "sustained impression" on the periphery of this world – or the centre of *our* world – makes better sense. While the dominant discourse might lose faith in its meta-narratives, the Indigenous continues to learn and embody its world-view – not as *the* view, but as our views, the ones that make sense of us in our territories.

Indigenous Contemporary art is the name of our art after the end of Aboriginal art. What Indigenous art hopes to end is the reproduction of the colonial. What it aims to reject is art, criticism, and identities that imagine they are forms of revealed and universal truth rather than agreements among similarly trained observers. Indigenous Contemporary art marks the end of First Peoples identities, ways of knowing and being that were invisible to or degraded by an ontological hierarchy designed to benefit its designers.

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[i] http://7a-11d.ca/festivalblog/. Posted on November 8, 2014.
[ii] Ibid.
[iii] I am thinking here of bell hooks' consideration of Basquait, whom, she argues, can only be seen – recognized – when in the company of some "highly visible white figure," in this case, Andy Warhol. See "Altars of Sacrifice: Re-membering Basquiat," in bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations,* 27-42 (New York: Routledge, 1994), 36.
[iv] Ibid.
[v] In suggesting this phrase, I am offering the reader a visual image of the mobile panopticon of one form of white witnessing, that of interested non-engagement.
[vi] Ian McLean, "Theories," in *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art,* edited by Ian McLean, 31-42 (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 31.

[vii] Joane Cardinal-Schubert, "Flying with Louis," in *Making a Noise! Aboriginal Perspectives on Art, Art History, Critical Writing, and Community,* edited by Lee-Ann Martin, 26-49 (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, 2003).
[viii] Ibid., 34.
[ix] Ibid., 28.
[x] Ibid., 42.
[xi] Ibid, 27.
[xii] Ibid., 28.
[xiii] Ibid., 27.
[xiv] http://www.native-languages.org/original.htm
[xv] http://www.native-languages.org/cree.htm
[xvi] Cornel West, "On Black-Brown Relations," in *The Cornel West Reader,* 499-513 (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 500.
[xvii] Ibid.
[xviii] Ian McLean, "Names," in *Double Desire: Transculturation and Indigenous Contemporary Art,* edited by Ian McLean, 15-30 (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 15.
[xix] By "country," I mean the Aboriginal Australian sense of space that includes land and territory, but also all the beings, names, spirits, and relations of a place.
[xx] Arthur Danto, "The End of Art," in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 81-115.