

We Interrupt This Program

Indigenous Media Tactics in Canadian Culture

Miranda J. Brady and John M.H. Kelly



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Introduction

Indigenous Media Tactics

This is the seventh generation.
There is a real change that is happening.
– Alanis Obomsawin, “Trick or Treaty?”

In a January 2015 talk following a screening of her film *Trick or Treaty*, eighty-two-year-old filmmaking legend Alanis Obomsawin declared that Indigenous youth were living a resurgence prophesized by their ancestors.¹ She joked that although she had believed her own cohort of 1960s activists would shake things up, this generation would be the real agents of change to disrupt the oppressive conditions of settler-colonial society.

We begin this book by highlighting Obomsawin because, over the past fifty years, she has cleverly harnessed the resources available to her through established media institutions to encourage a new public understanding of Indigenous people and issues. In focusing on the agency of Indigenous youth, as she does in her role as an Indigenous leader, Obomsawin humbly avoids mentioning her own profound influence in the reshaping of the Canadian media landscape. Her remarks also identify an important contemporary moment, where Indigenous people across Canada are working towards resurgence in their communities and inspiring the next generation to lead. Like Obomsawin, they are attempting to intervene in

sites of power using media tactics as a means of changing settler-colonial thinking. As they repurpose established institutions, Indigenous agents manoeuvre in ways that are both subtle and overt, and they offer graceful negotiations.

This book traces how Indigenous people are using media tactics or interventions in art, film, television, and journalism to disrupt Canada's national narratives and rewrite them from Indigenous perspectives. As a result, these individuals are redefining how Indigenous peoples are viewed and represented in Western media and society. Looking to sites where Indigenous media tactics are used, we examine how Indigenous ontologies, or Indigenous relationships with and orientation to the world, are expressed in creative and sometimes unexpected ways for the larger culture and for Indigenous audiences. We focus on a recent period of roughly ten years, approximately 2006 to 2016, a time described by Indigenous leaders and prominent thinkers as a "rebirth" of Indigenous cultures: "Indigenous peoples are rising, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of hardship" following cultural resurgence in many communities.² Exploring how Indigenous peoples have employed media tactics in the wake of this resurgence offers us a unique window onto this rebirth.

While we explore the ways that Indigenous agents act tactically within established institutions, as well as their attempts to disrupt them, we also discuss the limitations and critiques of existing settler-colonial frameworks. For example, while the National Film Board (NFB) has enabled Alanis Obomsawin to reach large audiences with more than forty films since the 1960s, some Indigenous thinkers express ambivalence about working within institutions that ultimately privilege the goals of the nation. In the book *Sovereign Screens: Aboriginal Media on the Canadian West Coast*, anthropologist Kristin Dowell lists, among other concerns, the NFB's ownership of rights to Indigenous films and the creative influence of non-Indigenous executive

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producers.³ Dowell recounts a comment from an Indigenous film festival coordinator about the NFB: “They own the distribution rights – they own them! And isn’t that just another form of colonialism?”⁴ We explore how and with what success Indigenous actors navigate and challenge such institutional structures.

We are certainly not the first to explore Indigenous media in Canada.⁵ However, our focus on how media tactics are used within established institutional frameworks across a broad range of Indigenous contexts is unique. We suggest that, despite their limitations, media are used to promote Indigenous goals across the different domains we investigate. As with Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor’s idea of survivance, or “survival plus resistance,”⁶ Indigenous media tacticians assert Indigenous presence and agency in the face of omission, erasure, and victimhood.⁷

We therefore focus on sites of public discourse where multiple audiences constitute ideas of Indigenous identity. These include sites of public memory (including on- and offline archives of historical and narrative material); popular media, art, and film institutions; and the news media. The cases we investigate illustrate the diversity of Indigenous media tactics as interventions into sites of power and a careful negotiation between mixed and pan-Indigenous audiences. They also illustrate the broader concerns important to contemporary Indigenous communities and the ways in which these concerns are placed firmly at the forefront of public consciousness.

Indigenous identity has had a unique relationship with the media because the formation of the most pervasive Indigenous identity constructs coincided with colonization in Canada and the United States and the development and proliferation of a number of popular media technologies. From the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, Indigenous people were the popular subjects of photography, novels,

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and motion pictures. These media portrayals followed the patterns established by their predecessors, the Western frontier paintings characteristic of George Catlin and Paul Kane. Contemporary media institutions have continued to further the goals of settler-colonial society by reproducing several centuries' worth of damaging stereotypes about Indigenous people.⁸ The reductive stereotypes reflect a salvaging impulse and an imperialist nostalgia⁹ that lament the apparently inevitable extinction of Indigenous people in the face of what settlers called "progress" and "civilization." It is not hard to see how the vanishing-Indian archetype furthered the goals of Western expansion: it implied that the so-called Indian problem had been resolved. However, as Michelle Raheja points out in *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*, and as Philip Deloria notes in *Indians in Unexpected Places*, Indigenous actors employed varying degrees of agency and subversion in this process, even when they did not maintain media ownership or control.¹⁰ For example, they took advantage of the chance to leave impoverished circumstances through acting opportunities, or they "pulled one over" on their ignorant audiences by playing to stereotypes.

Conversely, some thinkers have suggested that the Western ontologies that underpin mainstream institutions are not only devoid of Indigenous perspectives – they are entirely counter to them. According to this view, it is impossible for Indigenous ways of knowing and being to transcend the boundaries of the colonizers' institutions, as these institutions devalue the relationship that Indigenous people have with their cultures, communities, and lands.¹¹ Many conclude that even when Western institutions feign inclusivity, they are too flawed to act as mechanisms for Indigenous resurgence; they are ultimately rooted in and designed to serve the goals of capitalism, patriarchy, and settler colonialism.¹² While this book focuses to some extent on Indigenous

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participation within, or Indigenous negotiation of, established boundaries, many Indigenous thinkers in recent years have addressed variations on the theme of refusal of these boundaries. As Taiaiake Alfred suggests in his essay “Opening Words” in *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*:

Many of my own generation of scholars and activists hold on to ways of thinking and acting that are wrapped up in old theories of revolution. Those theories centre on convincing the settler society to change their ways and restructure their society, through the use of persuasion or of force. But in the 20 years of my involvement in politics and academics, grounded in such revolutionary notions, I have often asked myself, “What if the settlers choose not to change their ways?” It is becoming more and more apparent each day, as capitalism and materialism grow into ever more powerful and arrogant forces and continue to roll over landscapes and cultures with impunity, that restoring a regime of peaceful co-existence with settler society and believing in the settlers’ potential for friendship and enlightenment is impossible.¹³

Similarly, in her article “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformations,” Leanne Betaamosake Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist, discusses an ontological incommensurability in Western educational systems that does not allow for the Nishnaabeg pedagogy she is committed to furthering:

A resurgence of Indigenous political cultures, governances and nation-building requires generations of Indigenous peoples to grow up intimately and strongly connected to our homelands, immersed in our languages and spiritualities, and embodying our traditions of agency, leadership,

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decision-making and diplomacy. This requires a *radical break* from state education systems that are primarily designed to produce communities of individuals willing to uphold settler colonialism.¹⁴

In the same vein, in his book *Red Skins, White Masks*, Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard challenges the politics of recognition, arguing that officially condoned forms of inclusion maintain oppressive colonial regimes. He writes, "Since 1969 we have witnessed the modus operandi of colonial power relations in Canada shift from a more or less unconcealed structure of domination to a form of colonial governance that works through the medium of state recognition and accommodation." He continues, "Regardless of this shift Canadian settler-colonialism remains structurally oriented around achieving the same power effect it sought in the pre-1969 period: the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority."¹⁵

Like Alfred, Simpson, and Coulthard, we acknowledge that Western institutions are circumscribed in their capacities to promote or encourage decolonizing epistemologies and Indigenous ontologies. Even while cultural policies encourage inclusivity (as in the case of the NFB, for example), they also make difference manageable while at the same time concealing and downplaying the oppressive conditions that persist. Contemporary cultural policies allow Canada to position itself as a benevolent and tolerant nation-state¹⁶ even as the state continues to disadvantage Indigenous people. A particularly insidious kind of violence is occurring, one that claims that Indigenous peoples themselves are responsible for their adverse social situations, including high rates of violence, suicide, incarceration, and the removal of children from communities and their placement into state care.¹⁷ According to the logics of neoliberalism and governmentality, Indigenous people now have the opportunities to improve their social

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and economic circumstances and are therefore to blame if they do not overcome their oppressive conditions, or if they choose to opt out of established structures for doing so. This perspective is ahistorical and fails to understand the ways in which current disparities are a direct result of the violent colonial legacies of dispossession and the attempted state-sanctioned eradication of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, Indigenous people are now encouraged to compete with each other for grants and status in order to achieve state-sanctioned forms of recognition and funding; ultimately, this process distracts from issues that are defined by Indigenous communities as essential.

A radical break, or a revolution in psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon's terms, could be the only way to unshackle the colonized subject from the settler-colonial psyche that pervades the larger culture and Indigenous people alike.¹⁸ At the same time, however, the boundaries of cultural, social institutions are at times subverted – and they can be productive in rather unpredictable ways. As one ironic example, efforts to assimilate Indigenous people through residential schools in Canada and the United States facilitated the pan-Indigenous connections among students who came together from widely dispersed regions. The common ground they discovered eventually inspired the American Indian Movement and its challenges to the US government in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁹ Similarly, Inuit leaders who experienced the trauma of assimilation in residential schools used their formal education to help establish greater political sovereignty in Canada through the formation of the government of Nunavut. Agents working within Western colonial institutions are playing creatively with conventions and apparatuses, and their efforts do effect change. We trace some of those agents in this book rather than focusing on a radical break.

The Indigenous media interventions discussed in this book combine acts of acceptance and acts of refusal. They

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are akin to the tactics discussed by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, or what he describes as “victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong.’”²⁰ In de Certeau’s estimation, tacticians act within proper places in fleeting moments of resistance, relying on small moments in time when they do not have their own permanent places in which to act. While Indigenous actors may be marginalized within dominant paradigms, we can consider the ways in which they manage to manoeuvre nonetheless. As de Certeau suggests, a tactician “is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’”²¹ While these sorts of tactics may not lead to a radical transformation – or, for example, the repatriation of land necessary for Indigenous self-determination²² – they can elicit results. Tactics rely on moments in time until Indigenous places are recovered. In other terms, the overarching systems of settler colonialism may remain, but there are opportunities to act on and create fissures in their standard operations. A number of tactical battles continue – where Indigenous agents are engaging at the level of the institution or within established frameworks as a means of disrupting settler-colonial understandings – even when the disruptions are fleeting.²³

It is not our intention to set up a false binary between the perspectives of radical change and fleeting opportunities, to suggest they are mutually exclusive, or to determine which approach is more prudent. Nor do we wish to present contemporary Indigeneity as nothing but a constant dialectic enmeshed in the colonizing culture. On the contrary, Indigeneity is vibrant and alive. At the same time, culture and cultural institutions are fluid and dynamic rather than inflexible and static. We certainly do not espouse the view that attempts to influence perception are a substitute for justice based on the repatriation of land, but we hope they do influence how people understand the fundamental link between Indigenous people’s identities and their territories.

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An Indigenous intervention in media and other socio-cultural institutions can be a counterpoint to what Indigenous people perceive as an omission, a misconception, or a stereotype, or a way of being in and understanding the world. Like Edward Said's notion of the contrapuntal in *Culture and Imperialism*, we suggest that Indigenous media interventions provide avenues that denaturalize the "processes" of colonization as well as point out resistance to them. Said suggests that a contrapuntal reading "can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded."²⁴ The media tactics we explore in this book not only identify an omission, they also actively engage a popularly held notion with Indigenous-influenced ways of seeing and the tools for asserting these Indigenous perspectives further.

In *Reservation Reelism*, Michelle Raheja suggests that visual sovereignty can be subtle or overtly tactical; it can be a highly visible assertion of identity, or it can be a subversive, fleeting moment of resistance, sometimes as small as a nod and a wink by Indigenous actors to Indigenous audiences, even as majority audiences remain unchallenged. Raheja describes visual sovereignty as instances of creative self-representation by Indigenous media artists, both prior to and within the Hollywood system.²⁵ Like Raheja, we understand some forms of Indigenous intervention to be subtle modes of self-representation, graspable only by an audience thoroughly acculturated to Indigenous ways. We also look to more overt instances for wider audiences.

Like Audra Simpson and Glen Sean Coulthard, we reflect in this book on refusal and participation in the communities we study, and the ambivalence of promoting decolonizing approaches through established academic institutions.²⁶ Yet we also argue that theoretical and methodological tools offered through established scholarly institutions can be accessed to articulate and situate Indigenous concerns. At a time when the field of Native American and Indigenous

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studies is debating the efficacy and potentially repressive nature of theory, scholars such as Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith encourage us, in the introduction to their edited collection *Theorizing Native Studies*, to use conventional theory as a toolbox, challenging it where appropriate, bending it, and meshing it with Indigenous thinking – which scholars did not previously consider to be adequately theoretical.²⁷ By employing Indigenous thinking along with other theoretical frameworks, we acknowledge its much needed and deserved place in intellectual work. As Simpson and Smith suggest, there is no need to separate theory from its practical implications. Regardless of what we label it (worldview, knowledge system, or other), at its best, theory assists us in approaching the world in a more thoughtful way, especially when theory acknowledges and reflects Indigenous ontologies. As Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson suggests in a guest editorial for the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, “There is an expression: ‘If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn’t have believed it.’ The opposite holds just as true: ‘If I hadn’t believed it, I wouldn’t have seen it.’”²⁸ Taking our cue from Wilson, we think critically about the ways in which theoretical approaches shape our lenses of observation.

While traditional critical/cultural theoretical approaches can be helpful, they are at times inadequate for situating contemporary Indigeneity and its relationship with power. For example, Coulthard suggests a critical approach that goes beyond Marxist concepts of class and redistributive justice to encompass the histories and cultures of Indigenous people in a settler-colonial society founded on the seizure of Indigenous lands. He disagrees that politics focused on inequitable wealth distribution should take priority over identity politics and concerns over the loss of culture that is fundamentally tied to place: “Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism are best understood as struggles oriented around the question and meaning of *land*.”²⁹

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At the same time, Coulthard suggests, brute-force assimilation and removal policies may not be the primary means of maintaining power over Indigenous people in our contemporary age (though such strategies are still employed); rather, a similar outcome is achieved through the rationale of policies and practices that shift responsibility onto Indigenous people. This places Indigenous people in a kind of double bind vis-à-vis the modality of power described by Foucauldians as governmentality in which people self-govern through normalized tools, institutions, and discourses.³⁰ Yet while this explanation may account for broad power shifts, it does not shed light on the ways in which Indigenous actors navigate, understand, or take advantage of the inherent inconsistencies in the larger culture's power structure. It also fails to consider the specific differences in how discourse and power operate variously for different subjects. This book examines how Indigenous perspectives and media tactics challenge and complement post-structuralist ideas of discourse and power.

As with every academic pursuit, our work is limited in scope. Rather than focusing on how media tactics are received by the audience, in this book we focus on the media tactics themselves. We explore the ways in which Indigenous actors attempt to appeal to audiences as opposed to the ways in which audiences read interventions by Indigenous actors. Yet it is important to describe how we understood audience(s) and their relationship with media as we began our study, and throughout the book we elaborate further on anticipated audiences for the sites and texts we examine.

We understand audience(s) as active producers of meaning, as diverse and non-monolithic, and as possessing varying understandings of Indigeneity based on their previous experiences.³¹ A few researchers have discussed audience reception and Indigenous identity in the media. The work that has been done in the Canadian and American context has suggested

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that, not surprisingly, Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences frequently have very different readings of texts and other media that feature Indigenous people and issues.

Anthropology scholar S. Elizabeth Bird found that the negative stereotype of the ignoble savage common for the past two hundred years³² had begun to disappear in 1990s American television shows. The archetype of the noble savage had become more popular and was more widely identified with Indigenous identity by mainstream American audiences.³³ In *The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World*, Bird compares the responses of Native Americans with those of the larger culture to the television show *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, which included Indigenous characters and themes. She found that “the largely stereotypical presentation of Indians (stoic, non-emotional, spiritual, and so on) was accepted as authentic and essentially unremarkable by White audiences, while Indian viewers found it inauthentic, irritating, and one-dimensional.”³⁴

Media studies scholar Debra Merskin, who also conducted audience research in the United States, argues that the larger culture’s texts have been created mostly from non-Indigenous perspectives and prioritize non-Indigenous people as the target audience. This leads to stereotypical representations that do not relate to the actual experiences of most Indigenous audiences.³⁵ She views the essentialized media representations as a form of symbolic annihilation, “either condemnation, trivialization, or absence,” with real implications for Indigenous self-image.³⁶ According to Merskin, it is profitable to reproduce stereotypes of Indigenous people from “a shared cultural reservoir of thought-to-be-truths” as media texts frequently “serve the interests of those who aim to retain their status and resources.”³⁷ She suggests that the larger culture’s texts rarely challenge the accepted symbolic order. As author Daniel Francis argues in *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, they reflect the

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imperatives of Canadian culture more than acting as accurate representations of Indigeneity.³⁸

As our studies in this book illustrate, the proliferation of reductive stereotypes has provided a great deal of material for Indigenous agents who wish to turn cultural assumptions on their heads. Our investigation suggests that Indigenous media producers recognize the power of media as storytelling tools. In other words, the medium is *not* the message, as Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism would suggest.³⁹ Whoever controls or subverts the content matters in the meaning-making process, as do varied audiences and modes of production access, and circulation.

Indigenous texts frequently appeal to multiple audiences simultaneously, with particular nods to Indigenous audiences who will understand them. As indicated above, Michelle Raheja points to the ways in which Indigenous actors played along in films created by non-Indigenous people for general audiences, with a nod and a wink to other Indigenous people.⁴⁰ Similarly, scholars Sophie McCall and Shari Huhndorf both discuss Inuktitut language cinema production by Igloolik Isuma Productions, the Inuk company started by Zacharias Kunuk, Paul Apak Angilirq, Pauloosie Qulitalik, and Norm Cohn.⁴¹ The production company considered multiple audiences in its award-winning English-subtitled film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. McCall argues, however, that "the Isuma filmmakers were deliberately prioritizing Inuktitut speakers as their main audience."⁴² She suggests that Isuma's subsequent film, *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, caters "even less to non-Inuktitut speakers."⁴³ Further, Kunuk's later film *Angirattut (Coming Home)* was intentionally released in Inuktitut without English subtitles in order to embed viewers in Inuit language and landscapes.⁴⁴

Inuktitut is a highly sophisticated agglutinative language that does not translate precisely into English; moreover, its use by Isuma created dialogue that diverged in meaning

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from the English translations in subtitles of earlier films. As Huhndorf and McCall suggest, potential interpretations of the films therefore vary for different audiences. The films include cultural cues that hold different meanings for Inuit audiences in comparison with non-Inuit audiences, or outsiders, whom Inuit refer to as Qallunaat. Among the cultural cues, Isuma films are nonlinear and feature dreams and characters from the spirit world as central to storylines, without explaining their appearance or suggesting they are separate from the conscious and material world. This reflects a uniquely Inuk worldview not easily accessible to Qallunaat audiences. We explore this feature in greater depth in our discussion of IsumaTV's Inuit residential school survivor testimonials.

The particular context and location of media is also central to understanding its reception.⁴⁵ The location of place-based media in sites of public memory will inevitably lead to various readings in reception. In *Decolonizing Museums*, historian Amy Lonetree points to the differences between Indigenous exhibitions in centralized, majority museums and those in tribal or community museums, where the primary audience is Indigenous and local.⁴⁶ While many centralized museums design exhibits for the larger culture's audience, Lonetree looks at how colonial legacies are addressed when local Indigenous curators play a central role in designing exhibits. She suggests that the local sites she has examined tend to provide more critical commentary on colonization; many also serve as cultural centres where Indigenous people use the space to heal and work through the violent legacies of colonialism. We also find that the locations of the media tactics investigated here have and will likely continue to have various implications for audiences, uses, and meanings, depending on where and when these tactics are employed.

Our approach considers the multiple interpretations of texts and institutions in which Indigenous actors play a role,

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and the various ways in which diverse audiences actively engage in meaning making. Because we focus on established institutions that attract both Indigenous and majority audiences, we consider how those institutions appeal to both kinds of audiences and some of the sub-audiences within those groups. For example, to satisfy its mandate to inform “all Canadians” about what happened in residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hosted events of various sizes in different types of communities, and used many forms of media to reach both local and national audiences. Each variegated audience likely understood TRC events very differently. Similarly, while the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival in Toronto draws Indigenous filmmakers and participants from across Canada and beyond, the majority of festival participants come from the surrounding Greater Toronto Area and do not identify as Indigenous. The Indigenous films featured at the festival are polysemic, screened for audiences of various backgrounds and in differing contexts. In our personal communication with Terril Calder, a Métis filmmaker who premiered her first feature-length film at imagineNATIVE in 2014, she stated, “I had Indigenous and white people look at my film, and they got completely different things out of it ... I find that fascinating.”



We conducted research for this book over roughly a five-year period, from 2012 through 2016. Taking our cue from Indigenous thinkers who employ decolonizing models of research, such as Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith,⁴⁷ we offer a scholarly framework that combines ideas from Indigenous and non-Indigenous critical and cultural theorists. We employ qualitative methods adapted for each context, including loosely structured interviews and participant observation, as well as discourse and storytelling analysis,

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paying mind to the ways that Smith and other Indigenous scholars (such as Shawn Wilson, Margaret Kovach, Audra Simpson, and Joann Archibald) have troubled Western, empirical frameworks. This includes the ways in which methods and theories are inextricably linked due to the fact that ontological and epistemological assumptions underpin both.⁴⁸ Like Indigenous studies scholars Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, and Smith,⁴⁹ we find qualitative methods useful for challenging notions of objectivity and neutrality. We understand our work as part of a larger decolonizing project, or “a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices.”⁵⁰ Following the lead of Smith and others, we challenge and attempt to avoid practices that “perpetuate Western power by misrepresenting and essentializing Indigenous persons, often denying them a voice or identity.”⁵¹

While our work follows the decolonizing and Indigenist perspectives put forward by scholars such as Opaskwayak Cree academic Shawn Wilson,⁵² it is not strictly “Indigenous scholarship” in the way that thinkers such as Plains Cree/Salteaux scholar Margaret Kovach have defined it.⁵³ Kovach suggests such work “consists of scholarship that is based on a tribal epistemology” and is best conducted by Indigenous researchers who are members of that community.⁵⁴ She argues that Indigenous research frameworks should be relational; accordingly, she develops her own research methodology to reflect the knowledge system of her Plains Cree culture.⁵⁵

Notwithstanding the importance of Kovach’s relational approach and the idea of relational accountability,⁵⁶ we recognize that the communities we explore in this book are not centred on one location and are not always rooted in

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one ontological system. We therefore define Indigenous communities broadly. Because of the wide scope of our research and the nature of the questions we ask, we look to multiple sites where Indigenous participants identify particularly with one Indigenous community as well as with a broader Indigenous identity. Scholars such as Jeff Corntassel have discussed the link between resurgence, decolonization, and “everyday practices of renewal and responsibility within Native communities today,” in particular Indigenous sites.⁵⁷ Similarly, we understand decolonization as rooted in everyday practices of Indigenous resurgence that extend beyond one geographic site.

The locations we examine tend to draw wide Indigenous participation, but we do not assume that a universal ontological or epistemological orientation motivates the Indigenous actors we discuss. As Cree scholar Michael Hart suggests, the many divergences among Indigenous perspectives make drawing totalizing statements about Indigeneity problematic.⁵⁸ At the same time, we recognize that some of the patterns listed by Hart in his article “Indigenous Worldviews, Knowledge, and Research” are commonly articulated by the Indigenous actors and texts we engage. This includes a relational world view that encompasses “a close relationship with the environment.”⁵⁹ It also recognizes “a spiritual realm and that this realm is understood as being connected with the physical realm.” Integral in this context is “a strong focus on people and entities coming together to help and support one another in their relationship.”⁶⁰ Similarly, we recognize a “respectful individualism,” which Hart suggests exists in many Indigenous communities as being consistent with communalism and which considers the needs of community rather than merely self-interest.⁶¹

As Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith suggest, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are rooted in historical traditions that promote colonial and imperialist agendas.

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Western epistemologies, including scientific inquiry and methods, have been mobilized over the past few centuries to legitimize Western institutions and their agents as experts, while delegitimizing Indigenous perspectives and people as objects of study.⁶² Research itself has often been considered “one of the dirtiest words” for understandably distrustful Indigenous communities.⁶³ While the ethics and sense of responsibility vary among those employing research, research can be used by Indigenous people as a tool for change. Research can be consistent with traditions of observation and information gathering long used to benefit Indigenous communities,⁶⁴ though the methods of sharing knowledge among Indigenous communities may differ dramatically from the Western traditions of expert discourse and academic publication.

Community-based research founded upon equal partnerships with Indigenous peoples can find common ground for certain methodologies. Both Margaret Kovach and Soowahlie First Nation scholar Jo-Ann Archibald point to storytelling as an important site of intergenerational knowledge transfer that can act as a method, a site of analysis, and a research tool.⁶⁵ As Kovach suggests, “The act of sharing through personal narrative, teaching story, and general conversation is a method by which each generation is accountable to the next in transmitting knowledge.”⁶⁶ In our approach, we understand storytelling very broadly, examining it through a number of different cultural sites and media, exploring the ways in which media augment and circumvent the storytelling process. We consider storytelling and performance as central functions of public statements, media texts, and loosely structured interviews.

Throughout our research, we were conscious of our subject positions, including who we are in relation to others,⁶⁷ which varied due to our own differing experiences. Our position as insider/outsider was confounded by the fact that

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only one of us is Indigenous, we both work for a research institution, and, in most cases, neither of us is a member of the specific communities of our participants.

While Miranda J. Brady has been embedded in research related to Indigenous identity for fifteen years, she was raised in a white, middle-class family. Her approach to research is partly influenced by her upbringing in a rural northern California town near an Indian rancheria; the area where she was raised has a violent colonial history that was not officially addressed in curricula when she was in school. Growing up, she was immersed in an environment that legitimized a deeply entrenched racism that continues to plague the Indigenous people there today. As an academic, Brady is situated in a privileged position, yet she views her roles as learner and researcher to hold equal importance. As part of this process, she uses decolonizing frameworks and an Indigenist paradigm throughout her research and university teaching. She takes very seriously her responsibility to teach her students about historical erasures and their ongoing legacies. This approach privileges a commitment to relational accountability.⁶⁸

John M.H. Kelly is a Skidegate Haida, Eagle Clan, of the Haida Nation of British Columbia, an elder who is racially coded as Indigenous. By this, it can be understood that his appearance reflects his Indigeneity – he wears his hair in a long braid and wears clothes with Indigenous signifiers such as Northwest Coast designs. He also comports himself as an Indigenous elder, respectfully assuming a leadership role and providing guidance when he is asked, guidance that is consistent with his own traditions. Since 1975, his career has been wide-ranging, from newspaper and television journalism to Indigenous language and culture revitalization to teaching in secondary schools and universities. He has worked and lived within Indigenous communities and is intimately familiar with and personally invested in many of

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the issues discussed in the book. At the same time, he is shaped by his professional training as a journalist.

Neither of us claims to be a detached, distanced observer – nor would we wish to be. We acknowledge our own performative positions as researchers and the transformative potential of seeing research as an “embodied struggle, as an intervention, as breaking and remaking, and as kinesis, that is, a sociopolitical act.”⁶⁹ How we conduct ourselves as researchers and the ethics that accompany and underpin our work continue to shape the landscape of Indigenous inquiry, potentially affecting our relationships with Indigenous people and their perceptions of a wider academic community. The capacity of research to promote fruitful models depends upon building truly equal partnerships with Indigenous communities. Given the already tenuous relationship between researchers and Indigenous communities, we tread an always complex and potentially problematic path that requires us to prioritize respect above all else. Wherever possible in our research, we included detailed descriptions that reveal our own assumptions about particular sites. Importantly, we had to recognize that our perspectives often diverged from each other and were far from universal.

We offered to share interview transcripts and our findings with participants and provided them with opportunities to revise. This reciprocity encouraged accuracy from their point of view. This honouring might not meet some researchers’ criteria for academic objectivity, but for Indigenous peoples, respect for the individual is crucial to the cultural ethic of achieving true consensus among researchers and participants. This also built trust and invited participants to be actively involved. We often found our research transforming in unexpected ways as we opened discussions with filmmakers, artists, commissioners, journalists, and others. Rather than data gathering in the positivist sense, our research assumed

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more of a dialogue as we found ourselves in extended conversations with participants beyond the interview process.

How we mobilize and make available for future generations the Indigenous words, sentiments, stories, and performances discussed in this book has implications. As researchers who are invested in a decolonizing approach, we feel it is our responsibility to do justice to the intent, wisdom, and creativity shared with us by Indigenous actors wishing to advance the well-being of their people through media interventions in sites of power. By extension, voice was an important consideration in how we envisioned the book in two key ways. First, the fact that we come from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds as co-authors meant that at times it was appropriate to signal that the collective “we” used to discuss Indigeneity was voiced on behalf of John as he identifies as Indigenous. In these cases, we highlighted John’s singular intention, sometimes with quotation marks. Second, we attempted wherever possible to privilege the words offered to us by our Indigenous participants by incorporating long excerpts from interviews, public statements, and previous publications.

Even as we searched for the words to adequately discuss the struggle of Indigenous actors in order to address the institutional confines of the media landscapes in which they act, as researchers and writers we found ourselves facing another sort of structural limitation – the limitation of language as an impoverished and at times violent tool. Terminology was a major point of concern; historically, naming and claiming have gone hand in hand in Canadian and American settler societies. We have used umbrella identity categories such as “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” interchangeably, but by no means do we wish to conflate the very disparate groups who tend to be lumped together under them. Because we point to examples from both Canada and

the United States, we use the terms widely employed in those countries: for example, “American Indian” and “Native” are used to describe groups in the United States, while “Aboriginal,” “First Nations,” “First Peoples,” “Inuit,” and “Métis” are used to describe groups from Canada. We understand that such terms are problematic and reproduce static binaries; we fully acknowledge that opinions differ about which terms are appropriate, and we understand the objections people have to each of them. We rely on identity categories as severely flawed tools, and we intend them with the utmost respect. Wherever possible, we attempt to identify people according to their own modes of self-identification, including the names of particular Indigenous nations or the bands with which they identify, keeping in mind our limitations in entering into conversations about “Indigeneity.” When asked to state simply how he defines Indigenous identity, John suggests: “We are ‘The People.’ Perhaps we can settle on that, plus this: ‘We Are the People Who Have Been Here from the Beginning,’ or, as an alternative, ‘We Are the People Who Have Always Been Here.’” These descriptions work for many who identify as Indigenous.⁷⁰

We do not expound on Indigeneity beyond this. We saw our research task as not to define identity categories but to listen to our participants and their definitions of community, and to observe how they engage media tactics in a meaningful way, while recognizing the limitations of our tools. In John’s understanding, the newer culture uses labels and acronyms. Indigenous terms in their own languages are descriptors, however, not labels. For example, we are the Haida (the people), the Lakota (the friendly people), the Anishinaabe (the people), and the Dene (the people). Many others follow the same pattern. Until the Europeans came (to Turtle Island), we never needed quick-fix labels for stereotyping a continent that contains hundreds of communities linked by relationships, languages, heritages, and land. The

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First Peoples should not be named by the 500-year-old mistake of a lost Italian sailing under the flag of Spain. The misnomer “Indian” stuck – and did a disservice to Indigenous peoples from here and from India alike.

We found ourselves also having to rely on similarly problematic terms such as “settler-colonial society” and “majority culture.” As John suggests, we have no term to properly characterize the rich diversity of the larger culture that does not identify as Indigenous. Some people from the larger culture deeply understand and care about the concerns of Indigenous people, work with them in respectful ways, and at times identify themselves as “allies.” Is it fair to paint with the same brush both “allies” and “adversaries”? We therefore negotiate language with caution. John insists the human circle is incomplete if even one of the four colours is removed (the four colours representing both the directions so important in many Indigenous worldviews and the incredible global human diversity). Therefore, we hope to employ language that encourages bridge building rather than alienation.

Another challenge in writing the book was selecting from the bounty of Indigenous media interventions currently spanning the Canadian landscape. The cases we present only begin to convey the vibrant buzz in the air in many Indigenous communities across Canada today. As a means of delimitation, we have focused on issues and events that both cut to the heart of contemporary Indigenous concerns and convey broader themes for a wide audience.

There are a number of stories we could have shared that did not make it into the book. For example, while the works of filmmaking legend Alanis Obomsawin might provide more overt examples of manoeuvring within the confines of media institutions, we also wanted to illustrate some of the subtler tactics we understand as media interventions within established frameworks. By the same token, we made a conscious decision to not include a chapter on the Aboriginal

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Peoples Television Network (APTN). APTN is a non-profit independent broadcaster that provides a unique opportunity for Indigenous perspectives to be widely distributed to Canadian households through basic cable packages, as mandated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).⁷¹ APTN is important as a precedent and model that triggers Indigenous media production.⁷² However, like the works of Alanis Obomsawin, APTN has already been discussed extensively in academic literature⁷³ and has seen wide popular recognition due to its secured place via media regulation. We therefore choose to focus on less well-known but noteworthy examples.

Discussions in the first two chapters illustrate the contingencies of historical narratives and the apparatuses for reproducing them. We begin with a review of Indigenous interventions into history through media practices and public testimonials in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Some of the content of these chapters may be upsetting to some readers, especially residential school survivors or intergenerational survivors who have experienced the effects of residential schools firsthand.

We first explore how Indigenous actors used media practices to amend historical omissions and intervene in the public archive through the testimonials about Canada's residential schools, while at the same time contesting the conditions under which these actors gave their statements to the commission. Although the TRC has been widely criticized for various reasons,⁷⁴ it allows for a revision of a national mythos, which has until this point omitted some of the most damning details of Canada's origins as a nation-state, namely, the legacy of the residential schools. As Paulette Regan suggests in *Unsettling the Settler Within*, Canada largely understands itself as a peacekeeping nation with a benevolent settler past in comparison with its neighbour to the south. We challenge this celebratory notion as we review

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statements about the forced removal of Indigenous children from their homes and communities and the systematic abuses they faced in the residential school system. We highlight the courage of residential school survivors as they made their statements and of TRC leaders who attempted to bring their stories to the fore through a highly mediated testimonial process. At the same time, we draw attention to the omission of some Indigenous experiences from the commission's process. Ultimately, we contend that the media practices of the TRC shaped and guided testimonials but left room for resistance to and alternative uses of the process. We also explore possibilities for the TRC's National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, which will house thousands of digitized survivor testimonials and related documents for a wide Canadian public.

We then describe the Inuit leaders of Nunavut's struggle to gain more control over the context and ways in which Inuit survivor testimonials were to be conducted by the commission. Through productions posted on the IsumaTV media portal, Inuit leaders such as Zacharias Kunuk and Peter Irniq illustrated the importance of including distinct Inuit experiences in the TRC in their own communities and languages. These and other efforts eventually resulted in the formation of the TRC's Inuit sub-commission. Thus, in the process of creating an archive of Inuit survivor testimonial videos, Inuit leaders intervened in the shaping of public memory. The archive is a political, ontological apparatus, a means of asserting Inuit inclusion in the TRC process and the national residential school archive, while at the same time reflecting the Inuit refusal to be conflated with other Indigenous people through the TRC process. The archive and its creation illustrate the distinct experiences of Inuit people, the conditions that shape Inuit historical narratives, and a drive for cultural sovereignty. While colonizers have used archives as mechanisms to mediate, surveil, and control

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Indigenous people, and to reproduce and maintain status quo power relations, the IsumaTV project illustrates how archives have also been mobilized to present culturally specific assertions of truth.

Next, we turn to the complex relationship between Indigenous peoples and the popular media, from early photography and painting to film and television, and how such media are natural tools and sites of contestation. There is a close, historical relationship between the proliferation of Indigenous identity constructs; expansionist and nation-building imperatives; and the development of photographs, motion picture, and film. Reductive Indigenous discourses and imagery have circulated widely over the past two centuries through the practices and forms of popular media. We review some of the most common stereotypes in popular media and Hollywood films and argue that such signifiers say more about the imagination of the larger cultures producing and viewing them than they do about Indigenous people themselves. At the same time, we propose a new cultural approach to media studies that considers the particular connotations of Indigenous media practices. Many Indigenous artists and thinkers use the existing media repertoire subversively. We discuss redfacing and remediation in art institutions as popular media tactics employed by Indigenous artists (such as Kent Monkman, Jackson 2bears, and Dana Claxton) in order to turn mainstream media texts and practices on their heads and to shed light on Indigenous erasures. Through their installations in art institutions, their live performances, and their online presence, these artists recontextualize popular visual cues (for example, the vanishing Indian and Indian head iconography) and challenge the assumptions that underpin them.

We then explore the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival as an intervention into the film industry, fostering

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Indigenous filmmakers in a harshly competitive environment. The original intention of the festival to support Indigenous filmmakers is reflected in its broad, artist-centred treatment of what constitutes Indigenous media. The festival encourages works and filmmakers who refuse filmmaking conventions and those who fully exploit them. By providing support and prioritizing the filmmaker's self-identification rather than abiding by a strict definition of Indigenous aesthetics, the festival provides unique opportunities for Indigenous filmmakers to grow and develop their works. This encourages the proliferation of Indigenous perspectives in film and creative experimentation with genres, forms, and themes, as illustrated through the work of Jeff Barnaby, Terril Calder, and Shane Belcourt, who have all been active in imagineNATIVE over the years.

Finally, we consider some of the most common shortcomings of mainstream news coverage of Indigenous affairs, and the ways in which Indigenous public figures – particularly Anishinaabe reporter Duncan McCue – actively work to intervene in them. McCue works within the confines of mainstream reporting in his position at the CBC, emphasizing the importance of stories and modes of storytelling that are relevant to and appropriate for Indigenous communities. As a journalist for CBC-TV British Columbia and a journalism educator at the University of British Columbia, McCue talks of the importance of training the next generation of news professionals to cover Indigenous affairs with awareness, respect, and relationality. Using our conversation with McCue as a starting point, we discuss the structural limitations of mainstream news media and its ethnocentric reporting with regards to Indigenous issues, as well as the historical distrust with which many Indigenous people view reporters. McCue leaves us on an optimistic note, however, and models another type of journalism, actively involving

himself in training Indigenous and non-Indigenous news professionals so that they are better equipped to approach Indigenous issues and communities in a thoughtful and respectful manner.

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