Running out of Indian Time

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Abstract

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For Native women poets, writing into a poetic tradition and in a language, English, that has been part and parcel of their oppression, poetic techniques act as new time-keeping devices. Poets such as Joan Kane, Esther Belin, Natalie Diaz, and Joy Harjo utilize creative agency to reinscribe temporality, making present the power of both traditional and contemporary Indigenous knowledge. By reimagining time, these writers create multiple temporalities, each one with a different poetic possibility of a future. The restitching of time that occurs through Native poetry brings together the reservation and the city, stillness and motion, the cycles of the seasons and the cycles of the female body.

Running out of Indian Time

11:23 am: I'm digging a trench in the front yard of Labateyah, the Native youth group home in the middle of Seattle. The gardener, Fred, and I are trying to lay a pipe for water runoff to feed the garden. To create the trench, I must chop through a vast, tangled underground network of fir roots. I hack each into splinters and shovel the fragments along with the dirt until my knuckles are chapped and bleeding. Still, I chop the roots into pieces as if I am splintering hours into minutes, each minute a unit of temporal labor that could make me worthy of being a part of this community.

If we define time as an objective measure of experience, and temporality as the passage of time as experienced by the subject, this, then, is my experience of temporality at Labateyah: I show up nearly every Saturday to work in the garden. I'm supposed to come at 10 am, but it ends up being 10:20 or 10:30 am, every Saturday. After a week of grad classes and teaching, I can't wake up on time in the morning. Each week, I feel immense guilt for not "clocking my hours" as I ought to, for not staying as long as I feel that I should.

In this space, however, my timeliness seems to be neither valued nor expected. Once, when I was struggling with a bent nail, trying unsuccessfully to hammer together the skeleton of cloche that would keep the lettuces from freezing in winter, I commented that Fred would have gotten it done faster without me. "You're right," he said. "But if you weren't here, I'd be a lot lonelier." Covered with the bones of the cloche, rickety as they were, the lettuces made it through the frost.

Colonial time continues to define the existence of Indigenous women, even in the spaces that give them food and shelter. As a woman who is both Native and white, I seek to enter these

spaces in an ethical way. The works of the poets that I have considered here offers me models for how to actively determine my own relationship to my nation and people in an unburdened way.

Here are some of the things that white people have said to me throughout my life, in no chronological order: "Did you grow up on the rez?" "How much are you?" "You don't look Indian." "I think the correct term is Native American." When I was a baby, to my mom at the grocery store: "Is her father Mexican?" Leaning forward, on the bus: "Are you Persian?" Or, worst: "Everyone's a little bit Indian."

As a poet, I often find myself overcome by anxiety over finding answers to these questions, and quickly. What do you call someone who's only Native when it's convenient? That's me. What would make you more comfortable? I can be that. What circle do I bubble in on the census? Can I be more than one circle? What would happen if I didn't mark any circle at all? Do I even have the time to discover the answers to these questions?

Contemporary Native women's poets demand that the reader take the time to step into their ways of knowing and to exist in its gaps. They utilize creative agency to reinscribe temporality, making present the power of both traditional and contemporary Indigenous knowledge. By cutting up and restitching time, these writers create multiple temporalities, each one with a different poetic possibility of a future.

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This discussion is not about aesthetics. For American Indians, time is the root of annihilation. Consider Chief Joseph's famous speech, from October 1877:

> "I want to have time to look for my children, and see how many I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

To have to choose between caring for one children's and fighting for one's life, to have only time for one task: this is the condition of Native existence. Time is the oppressor that forces the choice. For a Native poetics, the struggle is not to "make time new" but to evade it completely. For poets writing into a poetic tradition and in a language, English, that has been part and parcel of their oppression, poetic techniques act as new time-keeping devices. Contra the imposition of a Western temporality of linearity, progress, and development, Native women poets replace the clock with something different.

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Someone who didn't know my background told me this joke once:

> Two cowboys come upon an Indian lying on his stomach with his ear to the ground. One of the cowboys stops and says to the other, "You see that Indian?"
>
> "Yeah," says the other cowboy.
>
> "Look," says the first one, "he's listening to the ground. He can hear things for miles in any direction."
>
> Just then the Indian looks up. "Covered wagon," he says, "Hmm. About two miles away. Have two horses, one brown, one white. Man, woman, child, many chests and trunks in wagon."
>
> "Incredible!" says the cowboy to his friend. "This Indian knows how far away they are, how many horses, what color they are, who is in the wagon, and what is in the wagon. Amazing! Indian, how do you know that?"
>
> The Indian looks up and says, "Ran over me half hour ago."

Western time, fractioning the day into hours and minutes, literally flattens the Native character. What a laugh. According to such jokes, Natives are unprepared to deal with the more

progressive Western concepts of time. Rather, Natives are supposed to operate according to their own lackadaisical temporality. The stereotype of "Indian Time" has been described by Scott Richard Lyons as "a Native version of the ubiquitous c.p. time ('colored people's time'), a racist stereotype that emerged in the colonies to characterize the colonized's ostensible lack of punctuality" (Lyons 9).

***

In this discussion of Native poetics, I have chosen to focus on contemporary women authors for reasons that transcend my personal agenda. Native women poets, far from monolithic, assume a variety of temporal positionalities: the concepts of time that their work enacts does not fit a simple heuristic or binary, just as their lives do not adhere to a single narrative regarding reservation life, urban existence, sexual violence, language loss, etc. As Molly McGlennen puts it in *The Transnational Designs of Indigenous Women's Poetry,* the "continued cultural production" of native women writers resists temporal binaries (22). Indeed, just as the "circles that inscribe their lives" are overlapping and complex, so, too, the concepts of time that exist in their work are both numinous and numerous (24). First, as McGlennen puts it, Native women writers have distinct ways of deconstructing "binaries that have historically defined academic study of Indigenous writing...the temporal binary of "traditional versus modern" is complicated by...[their] contemporary artistic production" (22). Despite these crucial interventions, however, Indigenous women and the feminist issues particular to them are largely underexamined in contemporary feminist circles, with Indigenous feminism still considered an emerging field (Suzack 2).

The intersection of genre and gender embodied by Indigenous women poets has implications for more than just Native women. In *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*—an

anthology of contemporary Native women's writings of North America, Joy Harjo writes, "The literature of the aboriginal people of North America defines America. It is not exotic. The concerns are particular, yet often universal. Anyone of these lands shares in the making of this literature, this history, these connections, these songs. It is a connection […] constructed of the very earth on which we stand" (Harjo 22). Thus, Indigenous feminist notions of time construct a bridge between poetic analysis with feminist theory, finding a new space between them. So doing, they actively reinterpret the world.

***

In *The Sacred Hoop,* Paula Gunn Allen gives us one distinct notion of an Indigenous temporality: a "traditional tribal concept of time, [which] is timelessness" (147). Allen's notion of time is a deeply dynamic sense of its absence. It is "achronological," rooted in motion and circularity, rather than linearity; time does not move forward or backward, but revolves around an axis. This achronological time sense stems from an understanding of reality that is rooted in ceremony rather than industry or capital. In Native ceremonies, there is always "plenty of time"; the individual is viewed as a moving event within a universe which is also a moving event (147). Indeed, as the authors of *New Perspectives on Native North America* describe, for Native peoples, days, hours, months, and years are mixed together with rites and ceremonies, as if they were part of the same system (Kan 341).

Ceremonial time exists at odds with Western chronological time, which for Allen is rooted in industrialism and colonialism. Linear, chronological time, exemplified by the clock, reflects "the process by which industry produces goods," profits are enhanced (149). Industrialization, directly linked with colonial imperialism, depends on this linear concept of time. It also supports the Western notion of the individual, an entity able through time to separate

himself (women are hardly mentioned within such heuristics) from God, other people, and his environment.

Ceremonial time resists the mechanical notion of temporality represented by the gears and motors of the clock. Allen uses the Indigenous ceremony of the hoop dance to highlight this fundamental difference:

> Dancing amid turning, whirling hoops is a means of transcending the limits of chronological time and its traumatizing, disease-causing effects. Chronological time denies that an individual is one with the surroundings. The hoop dancer dances within what encircles him, demonstrating how the people live in motion within the circling spirals of time and space. (150)

Within ceremonial time, the individual is living within spirals of time and space--the past, present, and future are not distinct. This spiraling conception of temporality in poetry is not singular to Allen--it is present in European poetics, as well. One recalls, of course, Yeats' conception of the "whirling gyres," the cycles of history within which temporality progresses. However, the dissolution of the individual into the surroundings sets Allen's theory apart. By choosing the shape of a spiral rather than a line, the Native subject is freed from the linear conceptualizations of Western history.

***

Poetically, a sense of ceremonial time can work itself out in many ways. In the work of Joan Naviyuk Kane, an Inupiaq poet, the individual dissolves in and out of the surrounding environment. Kane's poetry, which is spare and lyric, exemplifies movement: thawing, transforming, bridging, and preserving. She is concerned with preserving specific ways of knowing and being. As she stated in an interview with the New York Times, regarding her second collection *Hyperboreal* (2013): "I don’t want my children or their children to encounter our culture only through anthropology. A lot of my work is written against loss.” One way in

which her poems inscribe cultural memory is through using images and syntax to create a sense of ceremonial time: that circular timelessness in which individuality melts into collectivity.

Kane's work explicitly pits a sense of ceremonial time against Western time. In the ekphrastic poem "Rete Mirabile," we are immediately given a spatial representation of industry: "A large many-storied institution looming always,/gabled trinity of windows jut from its thin skull." (Kane 58) Here, industrial time takes on spatial form in the "institution," with the "gabled trinity of windows" marking out its Christian origins, and its temporal state of "always." In contrast, the next section of the poem presents a less definite sense of space and time in the natural world: "The distinction between the ocean's blue & the whale's blue a matter of shades." Here, color becomes the porous boundaries between the elements of the natural world that do not separate from each other.

The poem's title, "Rete Mirabile," refers to the dense network of blood vessels within aquatic mammals that branch out and then reunite into a single trunk. These vessels are essential for storing the animal's oxygen. Similarly, the individual parts of the visual scene that Kane describes together create the dense net of the poem's natural and human world.

Later in the poem, even the Native human figures that enter the scene do not adhere to the easy boundaries of the industrial world. A man and a woman stand together in the foreground--the man is "Perhaps a priest. Perhaps an elder. Perhaps a printmaker. Perhaps one without allies." The woman "Could be old or young." According to a Western understanding of time, the woman must be either old or young; the man must adhere to one profession, which he would clock in and out of with regularity. By resisting identification, these figures resist the enclosures of linear time.

In Kane's work, like the hoop dance, the movements of the natural and human world spiral around each other. Her Indigenous temporality mirrors a "natural or seasonal temporality" (Lyons 9). "In Long Light," from the book's third section, reveals a blending of natural description with personal anecdote:

> ...Beneath the ice
> in its interminable thaw
> streams improbable
> but assuredly there—
> these things contained,
> not trapped by the world.
> What I mean to say is,
> I am not sure I will ever
> become the person
> I had hoped... (36)

Here, the description of the thawing snow becomes the impetus for personal confession. In Kane's poetry, the natural world is anthropomorphized to have human qualities, and vice versa. Kane's rivers are "glossal;" the wind "revise[s]" a scene; and "night's lopped moon / Couldn't put into words / The ink around it." Conversely, Kane's human characters sometimes resemble their environments; in one poem, a girl's heart is "a small stone," while in another, it "put[s] forth blossoms." This confounding of natural and human spaces enacts the concentric spirals of ceremonial time, in which "person and environment are knitted together" (Allen 150).

In this circular temporality, then, the individual is not a rooted, separate entity. Rather, as Allen puts it, a chronological time "Assumes the individual as a moving event" (149). This idea, too, is clearly drawn through Kane's poems. In "On Either Side," the speaker says of herself, "There is no final story,/no assertion, no deception./I may never know who I am." Here, the Western idea of the discrete individual is represented through the image of one kind of utterance, the "final story" or "assertion." In contrast, Kane's speaker admits "I may never know who I

am." Elsewhere in the poem, this sense of lack of self is expressed through the speaker's connection to the natural world. "She predicts sense yet I find none:/nothing, in fact, but the edges of things,/in wind and the movement of animals" (30). Kane's speaker, in evading sense, can nevertheless grasp at the "edges of things," found in movement.

An additional cycle of ceremonial time that Kane's work explores is the cycle of matrilineal relationships. Many of the poems deal with the loss of her mother, as well as her own daughterlessness. In these explorations, the identity of the figures as mother or daughter are often confounded. As she writes in "Innate": "I am a human being. // Daughter *mother* / Asunder" (61). As many of the poems are addresses to her mother, it can be difficult to track whether the women depicted in the poems are the speaker, her mother, or the daughter she doesn't have. This blurring of identity along the lines of matrilineal lineage expresses a different kind of emotional genealogy, different than the bloodlines of quantum that are used to mark Native identity.

My own mother likes to tell me a story about either her great-grandmother or her great-great-grandmother. It goes like this: Her grandmother, who was Lakota, was travelling with her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren. On their way home, the women and the children were caught in a blizzard. Although the older woman could have made her way home by herself, she stayed with her white daughter-in-law in the white blizzard, and they all died there in the snow, frozen to death. In the telling and retelling of this story, there has been a great deal of generational confusion. In the version my mother tells me, Elisabeth is the mother-in-law; looking at the family tree, this doesn't seem logically feasible: there are gaps in time. We no longer know which of my ancestors was buried in the snow, which woman bore the children, who was the elder and who was the younger: what is important is the sacrifice of the Native woman for her white family, of no blood-relation to her. The emotional dictions of the story have

taken precedent over the historical facts. This past is mysterious to me. As Kane closes "Ivory, Stomach, Bone": "Oh woman, / lapidated woman, / What would it have taken / To see your heart?"

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At this point, I've learned not to read the comment sections of online articles about Native issues. One of the common refrains from incensed internet commenters is that the past has no bearing on the present issues that concern Native Americans. Here's a representative quote, from the comment section of a Native scholar's blog:

> "i would first like to start of by saying their are two types of American Indians, ones that work and ones that create trouble and free load. Which one are you? One waiting for the paycheck every month for you doing nothing? Or the one that uses that money that you get for free? Yes the whites took over your land and all of the other stuff. But here is the thing. that was over 500 years ago. so yes GET OVER IT. where I'm from I see more native on native violence then what i see on The Walking Dead. I mean come on lets blame everyone else then what the learn at home!!!" (cutcharislingbaldy.com)

Which one am I? Only twelve tribes determine membership by lineal descent rather than quantum, or percentage of Indian blood. According to some tribes, which have a lower quantum requirement, I am an American Indian. According to my own (Standing Rock Sioux), I am Indian enough to qualify for health care but not enough to be a tribal Indian. By the law of quantum, I am Indian enough to free load, but not enough to be a member of the tribe.

How do I exist as a person whose existence is governed by the imbalanced concentric circles of whiteness and Nativeness? One privilege of being a (usually) white-presenting woman of mixed descent is the ability to let the past impact my present only as much as I want it to. ‘‘Her choice

to give up whiteness was a privilege,'' Michael Jeffries wrote of Rachel Dolezal in The Boston Globe. Am I Indian enough to cause trouble, or am I over it?

I think, again of Joan Kane's *Rete Mirabile,* which is Latin for *Wonderful Net*. Each tribal descendant is part of the dense network of blood vessels within the body of the nation. But when the blood weakens and mixes with water, how will the animal breathe?

***

As children, my Sioux grandfather and his brothers would sometimes play in the reservation graveyard where the ancestors were buried. Once, as a joke, they dug up the circle of stones that surrounded Sitting Bull's grave and rebuilt the circle somewhere else. Years later, white men came to dig up Sitting Bull's remains and move them to a nearby town, to attract tourists. They did so, or they thought they did. "I don't know who they dug up," my grandfather says, "but it wasn't Sitting Bull."

Were Sitting Bull's bones lost, or had they finally escaped? This kind of complicated fugitivity is part and parcel of Native life, in which the line between erasure and elusion is often blurred. Fugitivity is part and parcel of contemporary Native life, in which, often, one's very existence is questioned. As Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes explore, decolonial Native art exists in the ruptures in the fabric of temporality: fugitive spaces that break "colonialism's enforced silence" (III). By rejecting a structured Western aesthetic, Native poetics performs instead a poetics of flight, a fugitivity that allows them to exist separately from colonial time. This is another way of framing the sense of constant movement that Allen explored in *The*

Sacred Hoop: fugitive[1] temporality rejects the "finality of enclosure (capture/captivity) by remaining in motion: moving, seeking, and escaping into and toward the 'tangible unknown' of decolonization" (IV).

In poetry, building a sense of fugitive time involved both linking the poetic speaker to the rootedness of place while simultaneously disallowing a single temporal-spatial narrative to be imposed on her. One of the easy binaries of the contemporary Native experience of place is the reservation/city binary. Dominant narratives surrounding the "urban experience" read it solely as the outcome of colonial displacement during the 1800's and 1900's (McGlennen 41). However, the poetry of contemporary Native poets allows us to see this narrative as more complicated. Esther Belin, the author of *From My Belly*, has come to stand as one model "urban Indian." As urbanness has increasingly become a part of the Native experience, many Native poets assert the importance of tying their poetry to the natural landscape and the physical environment that their people have historically been connected to. This refusal to see land as property is clearly anti-colonial.

Yet Belin's work explores the way that not just ancestral homes can be homelands. Rather, she keeps time on the move by creating both city and reservation as hubs for a complex social system that maps Indigenous knowledge across states. Just as the bones of Sitting Bull were moved, forgotten, and translocated between the reservation and the city, Belin's poems move between Los Angeles, Oakland, the Navajo reservation, and the highways of California, in and out of worlds seen as traditionally Indian.

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[1] In this section, I purposefully intend to reference Fred Moten's notion of "fugitive blackness." Indeed, in the great swamps covering Virginia and North Carolina, Native Americans fleeing the colonial frontier took refuge alongside fugitive slaves (Smithsonian)

In the poem "Blue-sing on the Brown Vibe," Belin introduces us to the character Coyote, a literal fugitive, constantly in motion, traveling from Oakland to the reservation and back again. Each of the four sections of the poem begins with a description of Coyote in motion: he "struts down 14th," "travels by Greyhound," "wanders," and "wanders in and out of existence." In his travels, he encounters other Native figures, each of them on their own journey. Belin insists on naming these characters according to their tribal affiliation. Thus, we meet a Dine, a Navajo, a Ponca, and a Seminole. These figures weave in and out of each other's lives on the various modes of transportation that they use: the greyhound, the bus, etc. Interestingly, they can undercut the colonial system by using modes of transport, such as the train, that are deeply embedded in a capitalist system. They evade enforced time by literally disappearing into the machinery used to keep it in rigid motion.

At first, these encounters seem to serve to reveal the ironies of existence as Native person in an urban environment:

> a bilagaana snaps a photo
> the Navajo woman stands
> holding out her hand
> requesting some of her soul back
> instead
> she replaces her soul with a worn picture of George
>   Washington on a
> dollar bill. (3-4)

In the act of standing still for the photograph, the Navajo woman loses her soul, becomes a stereotype and unwittingly participates in the capitalist system. The act of photography, of preserving a moment for the benefit of the photographer, is a clearly Colonial act. It is only in moving that the Native figures become fugitives from this system.

Toward the end of the poem, however, it becomes clear that the ceaseless movement and travel that the figures engage in has a deeper, connective purpose. Sections III and IV, together, make up a single scene in which Coyote, the Seminole, and the Ponca "travel on the Richmond train / headed for Wednesday night dinner at the Intertribal Friendship / House" (6). Here, the Native people build transnational relationships through a shared fugitivity. Markedly, it is not at the institutionalized dinner itself that these relational bonds are forged, but on the journey there. Traveling to a space and time that is designated as intertribal, they can exist and survive on their own terms.

As the final section of the poem states, Coyote wanders "in and out of existence," undercutting the sponsored extinction of the colonial Nation-State. The colonizer would prefer to designate the Indian as either existing or not. Again, these are terms dependent on a sense of linear time: existence implies being, while extinction implies having existed at one time. In contrast, Belin's urban native is able to move in and out of these states of time. From extinction into existence, and back out again.

This sense of temporality in motion appears again in Belin's poem "Night Travel." The poem's title seems to set us clearly in night time, a fixed way of seeing time. However, throughout the poem, as the speaker travels back and forth between the reservation and Los Angeles, she unsettles the reader's clear sense of temporality. The speaker, having ties both to the Rez and to LA, is nonetheless a fugitive from both named spaces, in constant motion between them. As the destinations remain fixed, time is set in motion. In the first section, the speaker states that she "travels to L.A. in the darkness of the day," immediately disrupting the idea of night that we had held at the opening of the poem (56). Even the natural cycles of time, as determined by the movements of the earth and sun, cannot be held in place.

In the poem's fourth stanza, the night becomes spatial, too, as the speaker describes a darkness that makes her "one with the dark / driving my black truck / invisible" In the act of travel, she loses herself in darkness. The night time that surrounds her temporally extends out like a road that moves her back and forth between different strands of time. In this stanza, then, the speaker disappears into a memory of traveling this same journey as a child with her family. In this memory of childhood travel, the younger version of the speaker also "stares into the darkness of the / road / the long darkness empty of cars." A darkness in motion allows the speaker to travel invisibly not just between spaces but between the past and the present.

Darkness, here, of course takes on a physical dimension as well. The darkness that surrounds her also defines her; it is the skin that she lives in. Thus, the external marker of difference that is used to delineate her by the outside culture becomes a way for her to escape delineation. The final stanza of the poem:

> I know the darkness of the roads
> It swims through my veins
> dark like my skin
> and silenced like a battered wife
> I know the darkness of the roads
> It floods my liver
> pollutes my breath
> yet I still witness the white dawning (57)

At the beginning of this stanza, darkness, again, is described in images of movement; it "swims" through the speaker's veins, under her dark skin. However, the tone here becomes bleak through the end of the poem. Although in constant movement, the darkness is "silenced like a battered wife." Belin, in this image, directly alludes to the seemingly inescapable cycle of violence that targets Native women. And, in the poem's final turn, the darkness itself becomes both inescapable and truncated. Moving through the speaker's body, the darkness "floods" and "pollutes" her, overwhelming and poisoning where previously it offered freedom. And, finally,

the night that was an escape is symbolically ended by dawn, figured here as a confluence of light and whiteness. In one sense, the protective darkness of night lasts forever; in another sense, it was always inevitable that it should be ended.

Belin’s work highlights both the freedom and the intense anxieties offered to the contemporary, urban Native who chooses to live in a fugitive temporality. Fugitivity is a way to be invisible, true, but it also carries with it the fear of being caught. And invisibility itself is both a relief and a terror. Like the bones of Sitting Bull, lying in anonymous darkness, Belin’s speakers move through a world that thinks it knows them but doesn’t. Through movement, they create their own sense of time. This allows for relational connections to be built between fugitives, but also means living in the anxiety of the “White dawning.”

However, Belin's work also suggests ways of cultural continuance that resist the rez/city binary. As her characters reveal, contemporary sources of personal and cultural knowledge are lodged not in one location, but are internally. Allison Adelle Hedge Coke's *Blood Run*, explains how heavily Native peoples have relied on networking: "when a separate nation needed to take refuge...a host tribe might...provide protection for them while helping them to sustain themselves" (5). Likewise, by creating routes between the spaces that form refuges for the fugitives, Belin's speakers build intertribal networks and new means of resistance. Through constant motion, these fugitives become one nation of refuges for each other.

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Between 1879 and 1883, Sarah Winnemucca, a Paiute woman, left the reservation and traveled throughout the major cities of the United States, delivering hundreds and hundreds of lectures on the injustices directed toward Native Americans. Traveling from lecture hall to

lecture hall, she publicly expressed the gendered dimensions of colonialism, decrying the rape and exploited sexuality of Native Women as the basis of colonialism.

In 1883, Winnemucca became the first Native woman to publish a personal and tribal history (Wiget 147). Here is an excerpt from her book, a recounting of a Paiute story: "So the light boy and girl disappeared, and their parents saw them no more...And by and by, the dark children grew into a large nation, and we believe it is the one we belong to" (Winnemucca 6-7).

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Period can be defined as:

1. A rather large interval of time that's meaningful in the life of a

   person, in history, etc., because of its characteristics, a quantum of time:

   Native girls are nearly five times more likely than white girls to spend a period in a juvenile detention facility.

2. A statement used by a speaker or writer to indicate that a decision is irrevocable

   or that a point is no longer discussable:

   I forbid you to go. Period.

3. Repeated cycle of events, such as menstruation. A wonderful net of blood.

   During their periods, many Native American women gathered together in Moon lodges.

***

Another dual reality directly related to temporality is to be found in the work of queer and two-spirit Native women. The cultural production of contemporary Indigenous women serves to obfuscate and dislocate a heteronormative sense of time. As Scott Laurlia Morgensen argues, queer and Two-Spirit people recall ways of being that "exceed colonial epistemic authority"; so doing, they "disrupt the temporality of settler colonialism, which predicts indigeneity's erasure

by positing authenticity as a past split from a progressive present" (26). A queer temporality, in contrast, articulates a tradition that is not primordial but directly linked to memory and survival within colonial conditions.

Both Molly McGlennen and Grace Hong, among other scholars, link queer temporality to Audre Lorde's notion of the erotic, as mapped out in her seminal essay "Uses of the Erotic." Native queer poetry, through a celebration of the erotic, critiques the ways that colonialism has affected queer native women while also positing an alternative way of forming tradition and of viewing time. As quoted by Hong, Lorde locates the erotic as a form of sensuality, a “full inhabitation” that evades “neoliberal technologies of abandonment” (78). Although this way of being involves joy-sharing and, thus, bridge-building, Lorde evades a simple idealism. Rather, the erotic is deeply tied to abjection, to “terror and chaos...everything that modernity has had to reject in order to constitute itself” (69).

The erotic, then, which is termed “messy, sinister, smelly, erotic, confused, upsetting,” must be excluded in order for neoliberalism to flourish. It is connected to the bestial--”messy, sinister, smelly”--and thus is the exclusion upon which Western political spaces are built. Lorde, via Hong, places the erotic within the body of “the mother.” Opening oneself to precarity by aligning with the erotic is to enter the precarity of racially and sexually particular populations. According to Hong, risking precarity through “living and embodying the erotic” is the only way to evade the norms of neoliberalism (80). The erotic, then, and its affects, located within the body, become the site of resistant power, the only place where contestation is possible.

The work of Natalie Diaz, collected in her first book, *When My Brother Was an Aztec,* takes on this challenge to engage with "the messy and sinister." Writing from the perspective of a Mojave woman who grew up on the Fort Mojave reservation, Diaz's poems nevertheless engage

with connective tissue that she finds throughout the world. In her poem "The Red Blues," an extended meditation on menstruation serves to undercut colonial exclusions through elaborate, extended descriptions of a very literally messy part of her existence as a woman. The denial and sanitation of menstruation is a part of the Colonial mindset; menstruation is relegated to one week per month, and must not disrupt the woman's role as an active laborer or participant in society. Diaz, however, unleashes a litany of metaphors and images surrounding this part of her bodily existence, extending its boundaries beyond the spatial and temporal spaces allotted to it.

In the first line of the poem, she locates the reader in both time and space: "there is a dawn between my legs," she states, placing the start of day in the locus of her body (11). Each of the poem's six stanzas begin with the anaphora "between my legs," refusing to allow to forget where the images and actions of the poem are focused. The poem is relentless in its attention to the messiness happening in her body, escalating from a dawn full of types of birds, to "bulls between my legs," to "car wrecks between my legs," to "a war between my legs." These are images of violence and destruction, the "Terror and chaos" that modernity is built on but now seeks to ignore.

Each of these six stanzas escalates the temporal space allotted to the description as well. The dawn described in the first stanza takes a matter of an hour or an hour and half. However, the next stanza describes a bullfight, a spectacle that the crowd gazes at for quite a long time. Next, the car wrecks, not a single car wreck, but many--maroon Volkswagens, a rusted bus, a gas tanker, an IHS van--populate the poem's landscape.

Then, in a dramatic turn, the body takes on the temporal scale of history: "There is a war between my legs," the speaker says, going on to describe it:

> a battle on eroding banks
> of muddy creeks, the stench of metal,

purple-gray clotting the air,
in the grass the bodies
dim, cracked pomegranates, stone fruit,
this orchard stains
like a cemetery. (12)

In these lines, Diaz co-opts the Western notion of history as marked by battles and violence. The month's-long, year's-long process of a war is condensed to fit between the legs of the female Native speaker. In her body, then, the systemic destruction of entire civilizations, occurring over the course of several centuries, becomes a natural process, a part of the cycle of existence.

After describing her menstruating body as a war, the speaker turns to the colonial impulse of religion and claims that imagery for herself, as well. "There is a martyr between my legs / my personal San Sebastian," the speaker claims. The colonizing imagery of Christianity, too, is subsumed into the body; it becomes "personal," a way for the speaker to explore her most personal physical processes.

In the final stanza, Diaz unleashes a litany of metaphors, ranging from "broken baskets," "scarlet smallpox robe," "crimson garbage truck," "Mary's heart," from the sacred to the profane. In this long, multi-clausal list of images, she touches on many aspects of life as a contemporary Native woman, the lineage of disease and language and natural world that forms the fabric of her body. She closes with the image "period of exile," a phrase that evokes both the colloquial term for her subject and the harsh realities of existence as a dislocated Native person.

Thus, over the course of the poem, Diaz uses the period to open multiple strands of temporalities and force them to coexist. For her speaker, a period is not a designable era; it keeps no timeframe. Rather, the Native female body takes into herself all the messiness and particularities of its history. Her blood is deeply symbolic, yet also makes her who she is.

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In an interview with Bill Moyers, when he stated that she was "memory alive," native poet Joy Harjo retorted, "We *all* are" (quoted in Suzack 214). To be "memory alive" means, for Harjo, living in an improvisatory way, allowing oneself to dwell in temporal leaps. Let me explain. Improvisation, of course, is primarily associated as a musical term. And Harjo is both a poet and a musician; she has produced five CDs and regularly tours with a band. Her musical sensibility is apparent both technically and imagistically in her poems. In her most recent collection, *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* (2015), she makes several references to jazz and blues, both types of music which are rooted in the African American tradition, but where many Native musicians have found success.

Indeed, jazz as an art form is deliberately concerned with creating an alternate temporality. In the face of a music world that rewards music that fits into a set structure and begins and terminates according to regulations, jazz values improvisation, repetition, and free association, which work together to form an alternate temporal-spatial reality (Mantie and Smith 535). As a tradition, it has many parallels with the Indigenous tradition of music-dance, which is practiced by many of the tribes within North America. Indigenous music-dance also invites instinct, flow, and uncertainty as its main values; "music-dance affords a rich experience that addresses the entirety of the receptive auditor" (McDonald and Hamilton 2014).

In contrast to Western ideals of time, in which there is one temporal reality, both music-dance and jazz exist in a temporal space wherein there could be endless possibilities, depending on the improvisational decisions of the musician and the listener. Both are invited to be fully engaged, both mentally and physically, in an invitation reminiscent of Lorde's erotic. So, doing,

they disrupt the Western binary of music as a leisure activity, composed of discrete and permanent rhythms.

Into this context, then, it is natural that Harjo's collection would link jazz to her own experience as a Native poet and musician. Her sense of improvisational time appears, first, in the form of the book, which alternates traditional-appearing lyric poems with what are debatably prose poems, or small essays. These prose sections often take the form of riffs on some idea, unrestrained by length or form. In one of these small sections, "Talking with the Sun," Harjo's sense of an improvisational sensibility clicks into place: “After dancing all night in a circle we realize that we are a part of a larger sense of stars and planets dancing with us overhead. When the sun rises at the apex of the ceremony, we are renewed.” The poem continues, “There is no mistaking this connection, though Walmart might be just down the road.” And Harjo concludes the poem with “Humans are vulnerable and rely on the kindnesses of the earth and the sun; we exist together in a sacred field of meaning.” The temporal rhythms of the planetary bodies exist together with human senses; together, they struggle toward creating kindness and renewal.

In the traditionally-lineated epistolary poem "Letter to Lawson or We Were There When Jazz was Invented," jazz improvisation becomes both Harjo's metaphor and her method. The poem has seven stanzas of long, sprawling lines, unevenly punctuated. Sometimes, the poem has a short line that ends abruptly; sometimes, a sentence carries over from stanza to stanza. Formally, then, the poem ushers the reader into an experience of time that is unpredictable and dependent on the mental shifts of the speaker.

The speaker herself moves fluidly and abruptly between past, present and future. She begins the poem with a marker of time:

> I have lived 19,404 midnights, some of them in the quaver of fish dreams
> And some without any memory at all, just the flash of the jump

From a night rainbow, to an island of fire and flowers—such a holy
Leap between forgetting and jazz. How long has it been since I called you back?

Even while stating the exact number of midnights that she has lived, she refuses to describe or name these midnights with any certainty. Rather, they either exist in the realm of dream or separate from memory, in image. The catalog of images that Harjo gives here are archetypal, mythic even: night rainbow, fire and flowers. Here, separation from the certitude of memory allows for the improvisation of forgetting, which she explicitly links to jazz in the last line of the stanza.

The poem goes on to leap in and out of the speaker's present consciousness into images of the past, echoing the leaps and jumps that she uses to describe the sounds of jazz. In the process, the speaker's imagination conjures up a variety of figures, including a "bear of a horn player" and a baby described as "the blues in buckskin and silk." Throughout her wildly associative meditation, allusions to jazz and music continually pop up. "I can only marry the music; the outlook’s bleak / Without it," the speaker says, and "Weh yo hey Weh yo hah, those water spirits will carry that girl all the way back / To the stomp grounds where jazz was born." In the latter quote, Harjo links the chants and movements of Native American music-dance explicitly with jazz: it is in the Native stomp grounds that "jazz was born."

In the briefer poem "Midnight is a Horn Player," the connection between time and musical improvisation is made explicit through Harjo's conceit. "Midnight is a horn player warmed up tight for the / last set," the poem begins. It goes on to describe the next hours of the night as the other members of the jazz band: One A.M. is a drummer, Two A.M. is a guitar player, etc. Each of these figures is carefully described in terms of their wants and needs. Then, the poem turns at Five A.M. to describe the aftermath of a late night watching music--the cleaning crew arrives and the speaker goes to have breakfast at a 24-hour diner. Throughout this

night, time is defined by the musicians and the audience, those figures involved in the alternate temporality of song. After "we shut it down," at 8 A.M., however, "the clock keeps / running, all through the town." This curious closure places time within the bodies of the humans, who are the inhabitants of the town. The movement of time, for Harjo, is inscribed on the bodies of the human figures, and defined by their actions, memories, and desires. Thus, it is subject to the improvisational rhythms of human life.

Harjo's use of improvisation as method and metaphor serves to conceptualize the way that the personal and the social overlap, which has implications for a feminist sense of how to bring these two pieces of Indigenous existence together. Jeanne Perreault has said of Harjo that "by bringing memory and history together in the process of retracing the past, the poet brings a personal process and a social one together" (Suzack 201). As Harjo knows, improvisation demands both a deep personal awareness and a careful integration with the other players. Likewise, Harjo's work builds radical connections between individual entities and a cosmic sense of community.

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In 2016, I read this excerpt from a news report, written during the Dakota Access Pipeline protests:

> According to the North Dakota Highway Patrol, several improvised weapons including small propane tanks rigged as explosives, as well as various slingshots and rocks, were found at the site.
>
> The NDHP says the improvised weapons were used during a riot at the Backwater Bridge on Nov. 20 in attempts to harm law enforcement. ("Authorities investigating explosion by DAPL protesters in North Dakota," KSFY ABC)

What could be a more improvisational music than the sound of a homemade explosive shattering the frigid skeleton of the air?

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In the equations of quantum mechanics, the entropic arrow of time gets less-defined at smaller scales. For example, in 2007, scientists in France shot photons into an apparatus and showed that their actions could retroactively change something which had already happened.

Do you comprehend what this means? I barely do, but here's how I understand it: how we choose to measure "now" affects what direction a photon took billions of years ago. Our choice in the present moment can affect what had already happened in the past. As Asher Peres, pioneer in quantum information theory, puts it: "If we attempt to attribute an objective meaning to the quantum state of a single system, curious paradoxes appear: quantum effects mimic not only instantaneous action-at-a-distance, but also, as seen here, influence of future actions on past events, even after these events have been irrevocably recorded."

The restitching of time that occurs through Native poetry brings together the reservation and the city, stillness and motion, the cycles of the seasons and the cycles of the female body. In this reconfiguration of time, reinventions of the enemy's language, the mundane and the sublime can coexist.

As Joy Harjo says, closing her poem "Rushing the Pali,"

> We can sing ourselves
> to the store or eternity as surely
> as we were born into
> this world naked and smeared
> with blood and fight.

Rete Mirabile. The quantum paradox of blood.

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