reading with Simpson and Lindberg: re-membering kinship ties, layered bodies and visitation (w)rites

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abstract

This article reads with Michi Saagiig Nishnaabe writer and independent scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Nêhiyaw legal scholar and novelist Tracey Lindberg. The practice of reading with involves heeding textual instructions and prioritising narrative terms of engagement. Indigenous bodies layered with resurgent potential in Lindberg’s and Simpson’s fictions refuse to re-centre the legacy of white settler coloniality. Attending to the process of reading with, as a relational undertaking, involves re-apprising cross-generational legacies and re-membering collective responsibilities.

keywords

indigenous storytelling; resurgence; world-building; extended kinship relations; dreaming; reading with
As Potawatomi biologist and scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer explains in ‘Mishkos Kenomagwen, the lessons of grass’ (2018, p. 31): ‘From the First Salmon ceremonies in the Northwest to the great Thanksgiving Address of the Haudenosaunee, ceremony represents a ritual gift of spiritual energy, power, and beauty that is offered in reciprocity for the gifts, and contributes to a balance between humans and the more-than-human world’. This article refers to ceremony in both the everyday community-informed sense and as specially designated spiritual practices through which relational responsibilities are renewed and honoured.

A short story entitled ‘caged’ (Simpson, 2015a) from Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s Islands of Decolonial Love (2015b) retraces the pacings of a spotted lynx, gidigaa bizhiw, held captive in a zoo: ‘during the night, she paced. when dawn presented an opportunity she slipped out, her body sleeping through the day, her soul travelling. when dusk called the two back together, she began her methodical laps around her cage. back and forth, back and forth’ (Simpson, 2015a, p. 98). Less a coping mechanism than an effort to release her soul through cross-worldly travels, bizhiw paces so as to ‘bask more fully in the vision of her ancestors’ (ibid.). The dynamic of this effort changes as she begins to interact with a ‘tired, drained, [and] injured’ bear, naabak, who is moved to a cage across from her own (ibid., p. 99). Though naabak’s ‘normally warm red light was barely visible from his cage’ (ibid.), it gains in intensity, enough to one day draw her in ‘until she was able to slip out of her cage and collapse into his arms’ (ibid.). If others meet bizhiw with ‘fear and suspicion’, naabak is distinctly able to ‘cleanse’, ‘take the negative away’, ‘calm the pain [and] invigorate the heart’ (ibid., p. 100). The repetition of this soothing encounter enables bizhiw to yield eventually into another phase of her healing transformation:

it was fading. in time, the structure would become weakened, so that at the right time she could slip through it to the other world, this time taking her body with her. this time was near when her research would be complete. where the cage would fade completely into the landscape and she’d have to live in a different world in a different way. (ibid., p. 102)

In a story where bodies are material accretions of intimate spiritual encounters and live intergenerational crossings, Simpson renders imaginable the dissolution of a colonialist structure through ceremony. 1 ‘Storytelling’, as Simpson fittingly explains in Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back (2011, p. 34), ‘becomes a space where we can escape the gaze and the cage of the Empire, even if it is just for a few minutes’.

situating readers and storytellers

This article attempts to read with Tracey Lindberg’s first novel, Birdie (2015), and two collections of short stories, poems and songs by Simpson, Islands of Decolonial Love (2015b) and This Accident of Being Lost (2017c). First, I contextualise both storytellers’ relations to their respective communities and land-bases, and provide some historical context concerning settler colonialism in Canada. I then write about this idea of reading with and elaborate on what it means. Where the section ‘Re-membering kinship ties’ begins, and throughout the subsequent two sections, ‘Layered bodies’ and ‘Visitation (w)

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Historical treaties were negotiated in so-called Canada between First Nations and Crown (initially British and later Canadian) representatives from 1764 until 1930, when the final adhesion to Treaty 9 was made (Coyle, 2017, p. 40). Two thousand representatives of Indigenous nations as diverse as the Potawatomis, the Dene, the Plains Cree, the Senecas, the Mississaugas and the Odawa gathered in 1764 with Crown representatives to initiate 'a new enduring normative order' through the Treaty of Niagara 'on lands once occupied exclusively by Indigenous peoples, but henceforth to be shared with settlers and their descendants' (ibid., p. 43). In a co-edited anthology with Michael Coyle entitled The Right Relationship, Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows (2017, p. 23) explains that Canadian provinces eventually became 'a major force in the country's colonization'. The Royal Proclamation of 1763, which Peggy Blair (2008, p. 14) notes would be considered 'equal at law to an entrenched provision in the Constitution of the colonies of North America', was meant to protect Indigenous peoples' rights to their lands and prevent local settler governments from interfering in Indigenous affairs (Borrows, 2017, p. 22). However, as Borrows remarks in the chapter 'Canada's colonial constitution' (ibid., pp. 23–24), the British Judicial Committee of the Privy Council eventually 'vested the beneficial interest of any land surrenders in the provincial government'. This decision, which was reached by Canada's highest court, would continue to weaken the Crown's responsibilities towards Indigenous communities.
1923 addendum to the Williams Treaties\(^3\) infringed on Nishnaabeg peoples’ rights to hunt, fish and gather traditional means of subsistence, it also gave settlers permission to ‘clear-cut, [subdivide]’ and sell Indigenous land, initially to European settlers and more recently to cottagers in Toronto. As Simpson (ibid., p. 4) elaborates in As We Have Always Done, ‘We no longer have old-growth white pine forests in our territory. Our rice beds were nearly destroyed. All but one tiny piece of prairie in Alderville has been destroyed. Most of our sugar bushes are under private, non-Native ownership’. The chosen excerpts from Islands of Decolonial Love and This Accident of Being Lost reflect to what extent Nishnaabeg ‘are still enmeshed’, as Simpson (2011, p. 50) herself writes in Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back, ‘in the insidious nature of colonialism and neo-colonialism’. As a member of the bobcat clan (gdigaa bzhiiw doodem), Simpson (2017b, pp. 59–60, 45) elsewhere insists that she is ‘interested in freedom, not survival, and as kwe’, she writes, ‘I understand my freedom is dependent upon the destruction of settler colonialism’. Her storytelling builds vibrant Indigenous worlds in which Nishnaabe-encoded laws and intellectual practices are re-assembled with vulnerability, humour, tenacity and love.

The filtered effects of Canada’s genocidal mission assume a slightly different priority in Lindberg’s fiction. Lindberg is a Nêhiyaw legal scholar, novelist and citizen of As’in’i’wa’chi Ni’yaw (Kelly Lake Cree) Nation from Northern Alberta. In colonial provincial terms, her nation’s territory extends from northeastern British Columbia across west-central Alberta. Following the Peace River in the east, the territory is buffered in the west by the Rocky Mountains and limned in the south by Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 boundary lines. I mention this because the main character in her fiction, Bernice Meetoos, a big half-Cree woman lovingly known as Birdie, is also from Kelly Lake First Nation.\(^4\) In the afterword intended for book club readers, Lindberg (2015, p. 263) distinguishes herself from Bernice, who is ‘more willing [than she is] to love and trust at the end of her story’. Through shifting times, forms and places, Bernice works to heal her body which was violently taken ‘under siege’ by her uncle in her youth (ibid., p. 154). While this haunting cannot be dissociated from the intergenerational effects of state-sanctioned colonial violence, the novel works to remember these embodied layers and institutional traces, to secure the possibility of an Indigenous future that heals without forgetting. Lindberg’s novel interweaves the storylines of four of Kohkom Rose’s descendants: Birdie, her mother Maggie, her Aunt Valene and her cousin-sister Skinny Freda. Rose and her people were inhabitants of Kelly Lake hidden by other family members ‘when the Treaty Commissioner came through looking for a few more Indians to sign their rights away’ (ibid., p. 125). For Kohkom Rose’s descendants, this meant that they would not be recognised by the Crown as ‘status Indians’. Aunt Valene takes this to mean that the family was not ‘colonised or

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\(^3\) A ‘basket clause’ added to the 1923 Williams Treaties claimed that Indigenous peoples had allegedly surrendered ‘certain lands’ within the province of Ontario (Blair, 2008, p. xii). Yet, as Blair notes in Lament for a First Nation (ibid., pp. 19–20), ‘regardless of whether they had surrendered lands or waters, the Aboriginal peoples who engaged in treaty discussions with the Crown were intent on continuing their hunting and fishing activities without interference’.

\(^4\) According to their official website, the Kelly Lake and Peace River region was never included in the treaty process: ‘unlike neighbouring Aboriginal communities who joined Treaty 8—and subsequently found their lives and lands administered by the federal government through the Indian Act of 1876—KLCN people remained outside the Treaty and retained their self-sufficiency’ (The As’in’i’wachi Ni’yaw Nation, Rocky Mountain Cree, ‘About us’, https://www.kellylakecreenanation.com/aboutus.htm [last accessed 4 May 2020]).
“Indian Acted” to death’ in quite the same way as others were (ibid.). And while having 'no reserve, no treaty rights, no health care. No money' (ibid.) might entail living on the periphery of a self-proclaimed ‘benevolent’ and ‘pluralist’ Canadian society (Mackey, 1999 [1998], pp. 16, 75), Aunt Valene hints that this exclusion also rendered possible for some the capacity to exercise more ‘political autonomy and autonomous decision-making’ (Kuokkanen, 2019, p. 14). In spite of varying degrees of ongoing settler state interference, Indigenous resurgence nonetheless requires conscientious ‘flight paths’ to be repeatedly taken 'out of settler colonialism and into Indigeneity' (Simpson, 2017b, p. 197). Simpson and Lindberg establish their own methods of engaging, through narrative world-building, in this shared process of ‘returning to [them]selves, a reengagement with the things [communities] have left behind, a reemergence, an unfolding from the inside out’ (ibid., p. 17).

practicing reading with

In the first chapter of As We Have Always Done, Simpson (2017b, p. 37, original emphasis) writes: ‘The idea of thinking in formation or thinking with, for me, comes from Indigenous intellectual practices and is also parallel to the intellectual work and brilliance of Black feminist theorists’. Simpson (ibid., emphasis mine) then poses a question first articulated by Black feminist theorist and poet Alexis Pauline Gumbs: what does it mean to ‘prioritize being with each other, being with the work, being with the possibilities, more than [...] trying to get it right in a structure built on wrongness?’. For Gumbs, this involves ‘not citing white people or men in her book’ (ibid.), whereas for Simpson it means:

thinking critically about the emerging canon in Indigenous Studies, noticing whose voices are centered and whose are marginalized, prioritizing Indigenous intellectual practices and theories, [...] citing the works necessary to bring about interventions of the highest caliber [and ...] striv[ing] for excellence within these Indigenous spaces on Indigenous terms. (ibid., emphasis mine)

In prioritising thinking and ‘being with’ more than 'trying to get it right', Simpson’s and Lindberg’s stories incite readers to respect their terms of engagement. Lindberg offers translations of relevant Nêhiyaw words for non-fluent speakers in an addendum for 'Book lovers', which appears at the end of her novel. While English translations of Nishnaabemowin terms are made available in footnotes throughout Simpson’s Islands of Decolonial Love, they are deliberately withheld in the later publication of This Accident of Being Lost. Simpson clarifies in an online interview with Jessica Johns (2017) that her aim in

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5 The Indian Act of 1876 and its subsequent amendments forcibly sought to diminish the viability of Indigenous cultures, knowledges and nationhoods. The racist, paternalistic and sexist system of classification legislated into existence through several Indian Act(s) regulated Indigeneity in ways that precluded other Indigenous folk (including Métis and Inuit peoples) from receiving 'status'; conflated race with identity; imposed heteropatriarchal provisions that targeted women and non-binary community members; sustained gendered and lateral violence; sutured connections to family, community and place; and imposed an electoral chief and band council system designed to erode precolonial governance structures and assimilate if not disappear self-determining Indigenous political orders. For more detailed analysis on the Indian Act, see Pam Palmater’s Beyond Blood (2011), Mary-Ellen Kelm and Keith D. Smith’s Talking Back to the Indian Act (2018) and Martin Cannon’s Men, Masculinity and the Indian Act (2019).
writing *This Accident* was ‘to welcome Indigenous and Anishinaabe people into this space’, thus leaving non-Indigenous readers to consult dictionaries and language-speakers should they wish to try and understand. I mention these divergent linguistic strategies to signal how Simpson and Lindberg each channel what Alutiiq artist and choreographer Tanya Lukin Linklater (2017, p. 149) elsewhere calls ‘the perpetual, active, refusal of complete engagement’. In a piece called ‘Desirous kinds of Indigenous futurity’, Linklater (2017) engages with Talhtan artist Peter Morin’s performance construed in response to the 200th celebration in 2015 of John A. MacDonald’s 1815 birthday.⁶ In this performance, Morin quietly relays his truth into a copper sculpture with a radio antenna ‘so that only the ancestors [could] hear his words’ (*ibid.*, p. 159). Morin’s work powerfully revokes any settlers’ entitled claims to extract and consume what was never intended for them. The ancient and the contemporary merge in this aesthetic conduit through which intimate and sacred communications are conveyed, in ways which reflect intimate understanding of Indigenous ‘intergenerational rhythms extending beyond the horizons of […] individual lifespans’ (Goodyear-Ka’apua, 2019, p. 87). Similarly, while some aspects of Lindberg’s and Simpson’s stories may be intended for all audience members, some more private or sacred elements may refuse complete engagement. Reading involves honouring and respecting the integrity of what is offered. To this end, lines from Simpson’s *Islands of Decolonial Love* and *This Accident of Being Lost* and Lindberg’s *Birdie* are cited often throughout to ensure that their distinctive terms resonate beyond any interpretive remarks I may have to offer.

**re-membering kinship ties**

Readers meet Lola on page 9 of Lindberg’s (2015, p. 9) novel *Birdie*: ‘Lola was not, well actually she was, as bad as you might think’. Lola is initially the ambivalent settler who employs Birdie to bake for her at ‘Lola’s Little Slice of Heaven’ shortly after she moves to Gibsons, British Columbia (BC). ‘[A]lmost always fascinated because [she’d] never met an Indian before’ (*ibid.*), Lola’s settler ignorance eventually gives way to some measure of self-awareness. At a later point in the fiction, Lola contemplates how she is seen in the reflection of Bernice’s gaze: a ‘look in [Bernice’s] eyes that reminded Lola of something familiar and too painful to call up. But she recognised and knows it, and sees it in that mirror’ (*ibid.*, pp. 112, 113). Lindberg renders possible a moment where two unrelated experiences of physical and sexual violence can be held in tenuous proximity. Lindberg sits closely here with the risk of merging experiences on the basis of idealised assumptions about ‘shared’ forms of oppression while at the same time reminding readers that settlers tend to want to convert difference into sameness—as evinced when Lindberg (*ibid.*, p. 115) writes, ‘something in [Lola] has warmed to the Indian version of herself, if only because she is so close to the Kid’.

Lindberg posits a shaky mirror between Lola and Birdie in a way that solemnly remembers the shortcomings of earlier white feminists who mobilised their campaign in the name of ‘global sisterhood’, on the basis of privileged erasures and deeply flawed assumptions about race, sexuality, nationality, gender and class (Brah, 2000; Amos and Parmar, 2005). In positing this tenuous mirror, Lindberg disturbs the top-soil layer of repressed truths to recall white women as long-standing beneficiaries of imperial and

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⁶ As the first prime minister of Canada, MacDonald both sought to implement and authorised ‘the creation of the Indian Residential Schools’ as part of an extensive colonialist mission to weaken Indigenous nations in order to minimise the perceived threat that their existences posed to Canadian nation-building efforts (Linklater, 2017, p. 159).
colonial settler institutions. In a chapter from *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson (2017b, p. 96) recalls how 'much of the policing of [...] Nishnaabeg bodies, intimate relationships, and parenting was done by and through white women' who were the main educators at Methodist missions established near Mississauga Nishnaabeg communities in the early 1800s. In an article entitled 'Not my sister: what feminists can learn about sisterhood from Indigenous women', Lindberg (2004, p. 347) asks, 'how can I call you sister when you were oppressor first?'. 'Our secrets are [not yet] the same', Lindberg (ibid., pp. 351–352) writes a bit later; until white feminists collectively 'own the history of oppression[,] tak[e] responsibility for the shared telling of that story' and revisit ‘mistakes’ made to the satisfaction of Indigenous communities, any concerted efforts at ‘reconciliation’ can only continue to fail.7

In an interview with Jason Kerr (2018), published in the *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, Lindberg concedes that she is 'having quite a difficult time with the word reconciliation and the concept of reconciliation', which has gained a significant amount of traction in Canadian mainstream discourse since the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008. Lindberg’s (ibid.) remarks continue to reverberate 'on the day after the Gerald Stanley decision came down' in 2018 when the Saskatchewan farmer was acquitted by an all-white jury of the murder two years prior of Colten Boushie, a 22-year-old Red Pheasant First Nation man:

> We have to reconcile ourselves to the idea that if you’re an Indigenous person, there is no justice for you [...] There is a segment of the population, and it’s not just in Saskatchewan or North Battleford, where I’m not certain that you could reconcile with because you’d never consider them a relative. Until you can say Colten Boushie is part of my family, I’m not sure that reconciliation can occur.

While *Birdie* may not explicitly concern itself with the tenability of a process like ‘reconciliation’, the fiction normalises the practice of extending relations to non-biological kin. After her mother leaves, and after being abandoned for three consecutive days by Auntie Val, Birdie is found by Social Services and placed with the Ingelsons. ‘Family’ is the word Birdie spells out with discarded particles of flour left on the counter after she decides to leave the Ingelsons’ foster home (Lindberg, 2015, p. 146). Eventually, we learn that the meaning of ‘home’ for Birdie ‘was not [simply] a mélange of stuff, kindness and chance’ (ibid., p. 228). In a text that bears live traces of colonial dispossession, family is a unit fraught by betrayals, held together and fragmented by biological ties and consistently re-aligned by choice. Lindberg softly intimates that settler-Indigenous relations can be strengthened through continued and renewed engagements, and in some cases through kin-making, as Lola’s assenting and yielding presence eventually secures her place as part of Birdie’s chosen family.

**layered bodies**

The third chapter of Simpson’s (1999) PhD dissertation attests to her commitment to ‘Anishinaabeg methods of inquiry, including learning-by-doing, dreaming, ceremonies, storytelling and

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7 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015, p.184), established to ‘redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation’, notes in their report that ‘Reconciliation not only requires apologies, reparations, the relearning of Canada’s national history, and public commemoration, but also needs real social, political, and economic change’. 
self-knowledge'. In a work published nearly eighteen years later, Simpson (2017b, p. 23) outlines how Nishnaabe intelligence systems are composed of ‘interconnected and overlapping’ elements, which include ‘stories, ceremonies, and the land itself’, all of which hold ‘procedures for solving the problems of life’. Her fictional characters often engage in traditional Nishnaabeg practices (which include wild-rice harvesting, canoeing, sap collecting and hunting). Some characters mock their weakness for settler commodities while others crave knowledge-keepers and communal experiences. In a short story titled 'Akiden Boreal' (Simpson, 2017a), Migizi—the Nishnaabemowin referent for ‘bald eagle’ and clan name associated with Mississauga territory (Simpson, 2015b, p. 115)—is a ‘more-than-human’ character, a kind of ‘extended relative’ (Nelson, 2014, p. 216) who blends characteristics of teacher, lover, guide, protector, friend. As Simpson (2017b, p. 193) elsewhere explains, ‘My ancestors are not in the past. The spiritual world does not exist in some mystical realm. These forces and beings are right here beside me—inspiring, loving, and caring for me in each moment and compelling me to do the same’.

‘Akiden Boreal’ centres around a gender nonconforming character’s long-awaited and costly visit to the last cedar ‘earth place’ of its kind: ‘The bank says it will take me the rest of my life to pay off the loan’ (Simpson, 2017a, p. 51). A brochure weathered by folded displays of attention promises an other-worldly experience and warns that some visitors may never recover. The narrator carefully re-reads the brochure as if it could somehow unlock the door inside to ceremony. Various things ‘can be thought of as ceremony’, the narrator explains, like ‘having a fire, sharing food, making love, even just sitting with things for a few hours’ (ibid., p. 50). Softening and euphoric tones are used to describe what happens to them, once they are finally admitted inside: ‘I’m losing track of my body; the edges are dissolving and I’m a fugitive in a fragile vessel of feelings and smells and senses’ (ibid., p. 53). In a time and place where there is no elder left to corroborate what the ‘den’ of ‘akiden’ means, the narrator has no interest in sweetening the desperate measures they are willing to take to feel this place (ibid., p. 52): ‘We are from people that have been forced to give up everything and we have this one opportunity to give something to ourselves and we’re going to take it. We are fucking taking it. Even though occupation anxiety has worn our self-worth down to frayed wires. Even though there is a risk’ (ibid., p. 50). The risk is nonetheless loosened by a subtending belief in tradition as ancient as it is ever-changing: ‘Convinced that being an Akiden addict for the rest of our lives is important, convinced that living as an addict, dying as an addict, is unconditionally worth it [...] Because this is how our Ancestors would have wanted it’ (ibid., p. 53). Even if sacred Indigenous healing spaces and medicines are increasingly co-opted by settlers for neoliberal capitalist gain, Simpson (2017b, pp. 192–195) insists here that a ceremony which restores a sovereign body to itself and its obligations to other kin constitutes an ‘everyday act of resurgence’.

Lindberg and Simpson appear motivated by parallel incentives: their stories are generated from the perspectives of Indigenous characters who render reality indiscernible from fiction while they write about the future, as ‘it is happening’ (Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Collective, 2016, p. 18). The structure of Lindberg’s novel works to maintain the integrity of various dream-tellings, as distinct from both the longer narrated chapters and metaphorical lessons conveyed in the form of short stories. Because time moves throughout ‘as an arch and not a line’, Lindberg (2015, p. 154) refuses Euro-Western preoccupations with sequential ordering. Fifteen dreams (the Nêhiyaw language term used throughout is pawatamowin) and twelve short stories (classified under the term acimowin) are recounted throughout Lindberg’s novel. In the chapter ‘How to find authentic Indigenous stories’, Métis legal scholar and writer Chelsea Vowel introduces readers of Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations,
Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada (2016) to two main Plains Cree literary genres. The first, âtayâkêwina, refers to ancient legends or sacred stories carefully rehearsed, at times over the course of several days, which reflect Nêhiyaw worldviews, laws, philosophies and ways of being (ibid., p. 96). The Nêhiyaw language term that corresponds most closely with the word Lindberg uses is âcimowina. Since stories classified as part of this second genre tend to be passed down between family and community members, they are not as well-known as those in the first genre. Vowel (ibid., p. 97) specifies that insofar as they are often more factual than mythological, these in general are not 'meant to be taken literally'. Lindberg (2015, p. 266) explains that the acimowin were imparted separately for readers 'who needed to learn the lessons from a narrative and not a novel'. Throughout these short stories, relations extend towards numerous inseparable others as the shape or periphery of Birdie's body often becomes indiscernible from that of an owl or a curling tree, while other characters assume their corresponding other-than-human forms, with her uncle appearing as wolf and the members of her chosen bird-family as raven, eagle and crow.

Layers of ceremonial efforts accumulate over the course of Birdie to reflect an integrated and relational aspect of 'nêhiyaw piimatisiwin [Cree way of life]', which mixed-rooted Plains Cree lawyer and scholar Darcy Lindberg (2012, p. 5) identifies in his MA thesis as integrally upheld by the Cree law and principle wâhkôtowin. Sturgeon Lake First Nation Cree researcher and professor Willie Ermine translates wâhkôtowin to mean 'kinship' or 'the state of being related' in the most expanded sense of the word (O'Reilly-Scanlon, Crowe and Weenie, 2004, p. 29), which includes 'a broad network of relations, connecting us to all animate and inanimate beings, seen or unseen' (Lindberg, 2012, p. 5). A reference to pimatisewin appears almost immediately in the first dream recounted in Lindberg's Birdie. Readers learn over the course of the novel that this 'tree' is considered a living manifestation of the 'good life' (Lindberg, 2015, p. 265). Within the fictional landscape of the text, four 'trees of life' are considered sacred in North and South America, one of which is located in Loon Lake, a fictional reserve in present-day Alberta, and another in Gibsons, BC. Near the end of the novel, Maggie visits the tree in Gibsons, the one that is purportedly dying of pollution, before she herself journeys into the other world (ibid., p. 24). The tree, which already looks dead to Birdie's mother, smells of dirt: 'Not garden dirt. Not forest dirt. But white dirt, like in the old stories' (ibid., p. 255). This belated scene summons an earlier memory involving Birdie and a damp bouquet of wilting tiger lilies she retrieves from a Vancouver alleyway (ibid., pp. 204–205): 'When she opened them up and put them on the table she noticed an odour about them. She breathed in deeply [...] They smelted liked dirt' (ibid., p. 205). In these instances where the text gives way to allegory, Lindberg holds accountable those who license and conceal the circulation of settler pollutants in a way that significantly refuses to re-centre colonial whiteness.

Plains Cree and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2005, p. 31) reminds anti-oppressive feminist scholars and researchers that 'dreams have long been a source of knowledge for Indigenous cultures'. Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million (2011, p. 315) elsewhere refers to 'Dreaming [as] a communicative sacred activity'. Birdie looks 'into [a] sleepmirror', in one of the earliest recorded pawatamowin, and notices 'talon scratches on her face' (Lindberg, 2015, p. 15). On another occasion, she awakens from a deep sleep with a crow feather between her lips (ibid., p. 90). Later, while living on the streets of Edmonton, the grid of the city seems to impede her capacity to dream (ibid., p. 150). The novel retraces Birdie’s efforts to harness a specific kind of ritual undertaking: a cross between dreaming, fasting, changing, nourishing and healing (ibid., p. 135) is perhaps one way to
describe the practice only she and Kokhom Rose before her were called upon to cultivate. Birdie’s sophisticated capacity to shift and time travel is described throughout as a kind of ‘sinking’ (ibid., p. 17). The ability to ‘separate who she was from where she was’ (ibid., p. 47) demands an awareness that does not privilege a rational centre, one that trusts in a kind of medicine—work that is not contained by spatio-temporal limitations: ‘All she knew was that she usually ended up someplace where the past lives with the present, and they mingled like smoke’ (ibid., p. 148). The narrator tells us that Birdie’s capacity to sink-shift while in Edmonton ‘was still an imprecise, unmapped trip. Where she went depended on something she could not control’ (ibid.). She becomes especially able to temper her ‘sleepingwake state’ sometime after the police find her under a bridge in Edmonton, once she has been admitted by the Alberta Regional Psychiatric Services to the Sanitorium with feet, arms, legs and hands seared from a fire, which readers learn was part of an imprecise plan to kill her uncle (ibid., p. 98). Yet it is perhaps only later still, in Gibsons, when she lapses into an immersive dream-sinking, that Birdie truly begins to refine her ‘visitation rites’.

**visitation (w)rites**

I am drawing methodological and theoretical inspiration from a piece called ‘Before dispossession, or surviving it’ (2016, p. 2), written by Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective, an ‘art and research based collaboration’ composed of three avatars. In a passage from their work that I am accustomed to re-reading, ‘visitations’ are considered both ‘hauntings’ and ‘fugitive outsiders’:

I am sometimes outsider and always fugitive, I have family, I belong to people and to places, to traditions. Visitations reinforce connections, create new ones, disrupt expectations. Visitations are not settling, they are not colonial exploration. Visitation rites. Visitation rights. Visitation writes. (ibid., p. 17)

The iterative transmission of the homophone ‘rites’ works to keep several political, sacred and textual inflections intact. At once, then, visitation (w)rites are those which ‘infuse ceremony with meaning’ (Simpson, 2017b, p. 141) while they invoke politicised claims to justice as these are determined by self-governing Indigenous nations. The word ‘visitation’ also recalls another practice through which Indigenous storytelling is consistently revitalised. Michif artist and scholar Dylan Miner (2014, p. 326) remarks how, in the conversations of a particular group of Anishinaabemowin-speaking elders who meet on a ‘semi-regular basis’, visiting emerges as ‘a quintessential component of maintaining community ties’. Visits, especially when these occurred unexpectedly, ‘allowed for relationships to develop between and among different generations’ (ibid., pp. 326–327). As Simpson (2017b, p. 199) reminds readers of As We Have Always Done, ‘One does not become educated within Indigenous intelligence systems by reading books or obtaining degrees’. ‘Visitation rites’ entreat from participants and readers a capacity for attuned presencing. ‘Visiting’, as an Indigenous-centred and centring tradition, is one in which Birdie’s ‘dream-travelling’ works to keep alive.8

The members of Birdie’s chosen family are summoned through various channels to gather around her while she lays motionless in the bedroom above Lola’s bakery, while ‘inside she is alive. Living through recall.

8 Dian Million (2011, p. 315) also writes of dreaming as a ‘sense-making’ effort and form of learning that takes place in unexpected and intimate settings.
Feeding herself memories' (Lindberg, 2015, pp. 168, 162). Recognising in her a 'needing to dream', Auntie Val understands that Birdie is nonetheless 'communicating with spirits' (ibid., p. 117). At the sight of Birdie seemingly wasting, the members of Birdie's makeshift family are coerced to revisit, in them, what could have precipitated her wilting state. Klamath tribes member Angie Morrill, Unangax scholar Eve Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective (2016, p. 13) argue that violence and precarity are tools of colonial dispossession used 'to continually sort those who are permitted to take place and those who must take their proper place of “non-being”'. The authors also clarify that precarity is 'politically-induced' inasmuch as it involves 'unnecessary and systemic exposure to injury, poverty, indebtedness, early death' (ibid., p. 7). While Birdie's deterioration seems to anticipate a 'being made' not to matter (ibid., p. 5), Lindberg (2015, p. 168) insists that her journey 'take[s] root in spirit first and body next'. Her survival depends on the performance of a feast-offering, initially devised in her wake-dreaming state, through which she re-members the tree of life as one of her own. In addition to various list-makings, 'pemmican, moose gut, deer brain, glosettes raisins' (ibid., p. 167), the ability to tend to the tree requires that she first 'make an avatar, a host that will be [her] shelter, while [she] [charts] a new geography' (Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective, 2016, p. 15). If Birdie is able to write her own prophetic future into existence, it is precisely because this journey requires and involves numerous others. 'This is a gathering' (Lindberg, 2015, p. 39), and one which, in keeping with ceremonial protocols, requires varied protective layerings and sheddings (Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective, 2016, p. 15). There are moments in Lindberg's narrative where the 'paradox of damage' is indirectly recalled, perhaps only insofar as to refute 'damage or deficit-centered views' (Tuck, 2009, p. 417); as Tuck (ibid.) elsewhere explains, 'we need [first] to say [them] aloud'. Tuck (ibid., p. 409) dedicates a letter to researchers and educators demanding that they 'reconsider the long-term impact of [their] damaged-centered research' as a way to hold accountable those who overdetermine and magnify Indigenous states of 'pain and brokenness' on which their research then capitalises. Lindberg's (2015, p. 256) novel swerves at the end with Maggie who takes leave for the Eastside of downtown Vancouver because 'she knows someone like her can disappear here'. When considering the painful reality that this fictive situation memorialises, a question posed by Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective (2016, p. 9) reverberates: 'I think I want to know about the larger question of how do you grapple with representing vanishing without reproducing the violence of vanishing?'.

The cautionary tone of Emilie Cameron’s piece entitled 'Indigenous spectrality and the politics of postcolonial ghost stories' (2008) suggests a shared and related concern. Questioning there 'the positionality of those who figure Indigenous peoples in ghostly terms', Cameron (ibid., p. 384) considers the influx of 'haunting metaphors in Canadian cultural production' to be dangerously 'deadly', particularly in cases where the presence of 'ghosts' works either to affirm nation-building mythologies or to render unavoidable the settler-state’s violent ascendency. We need only recall the prevalence of nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific discourses that fuelled Canadian nationalist sentiments concerning white supremacy (Mackey, 1999 [1998], p. 42), or how settler fantasies concerning the 'vanishing Indian' coincided with increased commodifying trends in a global market that was intent on 'freezing' Indigenous appearances in the form of plastic and wooden artefacts (Lindberg, 2004, p. 351). This is precisely why Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Qollective (2016, p. 5, emphasis mine) suggest that 'the endgame of opposing our dispossession is not possession, not haunting, though I’ll do it if I have to; it is mattering'.

Simpson (2015b, p. 69) tells us in a footnote to another poem published in *Islands of Decolonial Love* that ‘jiibay’ in English means ‘ghost [or] skeleton’. She writes there of settlers who uncover a skull while renovating a cottage that was built upon sacred burial grounds, among numerous others, ‘all along the north shore of pimaadashkodeyaang (you might call it rice lake)’ (*ibid.*, p. 67). The voice of an ancestral messenger resonates near the end of her poem: ‘my grave is desecrated / my skull is in that white lady’s basement / my bones are under that orange tarp from canadian tire / cracked / rattling plastic in the wind like a rake on the sidewalk’ (*ibid.*, p. 69). The poem concludes by addressing those who would never pause to consider themselves guests: ‘ahhhh my zhaganashi / welcome to kina gchi nishnaabe-ogaming [which Curve Lake First Nation elder Doug Williams elsewhere translates to “our homeland”] / enjoy your visit / but like my elder says / please don’t stay too long’ (*ibid.*). The use of the possessive first-person singular pronoun plays here with settler anxieties and expectations in a way which reconfigures who the sovereign is (Scudeler, 2015).

Both Lindberg and Simpson’s narratives project into the past, present and future self-determining capacities for complex decision-making. We read the following lines on the first page of *Birdie*: ‘She is at peace when she touches the spirit she knows is in Bernice. Her girl is rich, rich with possibility and lifeforce. It fills Maggie and the room and everyone is awed for a moment while it passes through and over them’ (Lindberg, 2015, p. 1). At the very end of Lindberg’s novel, readers are tasked with re-membering the first page of the novel and the work as a whole, to ‘resist that which makes [her] living dead’ (Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Collective, 2016, p. 15). Lindberg (2015, p. 1) summons readers to remember how the presiding sentiment in the initial passage was ‘one of satiation: full and fed’. While livelihoods strained by settler colonial violence may stifle capacities to envision different futures, a force in Lindberg’s novel extends beyond the point where Maggie chooses to let go and writes an ending which endures, on its own terms.

**embodying reading with**

Reading *with* does not concern itself with narrative closure. As a practice it can be differentiated from a ‘symptomatic’ method of reading (which assumes ‘meaning to be hidden, repressed, deep and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter’) and, to some extent, from a ‘surface reading’ approach (which sets out to ‘accurately depict’ and ‘bear’ witness to ‘the truth’ based on ‘what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts’) (Best and Marcus, 2009, pp. 8, 1). Instead, those reading *with* are moved to reject an imperialist understanding of themselves as privileged epistemic recipients or interpreters accountable only to Euro-Western audiences. In tandem with Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Collective (2016, p. 2), who forewarn, ‘When I told you that I will probably haunt you, you made it about you, but it is about me’, reading *with* refuses participation in any programme where the reader’s interpretations of ‘truth’ are valued above the gifts, teachings and instructions that the story/teller cautiously imparts. Reading *with* puts emphasis on the repeated activity of engaging, visiting or looking *with* as a relational practice rather than a ‘look[ing] at’ or ‘through’ (Best and Marcus, 2009, p. 9). As such, the practice engages the reader in formation *with* the story’s distinctive terms of engagement. Reading *with* is also *embodied* through continuous practice: through the practice of staying, thinking in formation and taking time *with*, measures of relational attunedness (Morrill, Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Collective, 2016, p. 2) are gradually cultivated in ways that inform the reader’s encounters with numerous live others.
In conclusion, I invite readers to stay with the enormous implications involved in recentring Indigenous world-building through conscientious reading efforts. Lines from Simpson’s and Lindberg’s stories are woven throughout this article, with the intention, each time, of showing how their words bring the reader awareness of other worlds without giving them the key to cross over into them. In other words, reading with suspends the fantasy of closure and instead models careful reading practices that constitute a basis for historical re-tellings, collective re-imaginings and actionable changes. Simpson elsewhere reflects on the transformational potential of Nishnaabeg, engaging deeply with Nishnaabeg governance systems, ceremonies, practices and ethical processes:

Engagement changes us because it constructs a different world within which we live. We live fused to the land in a vital way. If we want to create a different future, we need to live a different present, so that present can fully marinate, influence, and create different futurities. If we want to live in a different present, we have to center Indigeneity and allow it to change us. (Simpson, 2017b, pp. 19–20)

Reading with, as I have attempted to demonstrate, demands relational engagement with Indigenous thematics which in turn reflect Indigenous world/views and intergenerational histories indissociable from community, individual storyteller and land-base. In their respective efforts to write layered Indigenous bodies, responsible forms of kin-making and visitation rites, Lindberg and Simpson continuously recentre Nishnaabeg and Nêhiyaw worldings where collective obligations extend towards spirits, trees, four-legged, winged and other cross-generational relatives. Reading with Indigenous stories involves situating oneself as much in relation to local Indigenous places as to the real and complex Indigenous worlds that these narratives create. Lindberg and Simpson do not simply generate imaginary or fictional spaces; their narratives build these worlds, and in that process, summon readers to engage in (partial) formation with Indigenous-centred futurities, where seeds of different presents live.

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