

Reckoning with a Haunting: Creating Indigenous Future Imaginaries through Relationality and
Engagement within Human-Technology Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Reckoning with a Haunting: Creating Indigenous Future Imaginaries through Relationality and Engagement within Human-Technology Relationships

Vania Ryan

This thesis examines the research-creation network Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace or, AbTeC, co-founded and co-directed by artist Skawennati (Kanien'kehá:ka or Mohawk) and digital media theorist, poet, and software designer Jason Edward Lewis (Cherokee, Kānaka Maoli, Samoan). AbTeC creates images, narratives, and metaphors of Indigenous peoples in cyberspace to fill the Indigenous future imaginary. This thesis examines the project *Calico & Camouflage* (2021) – a digital and physical fashion collection created by Skawennati and co-produced by AbTeC. AbTeC's projects demonstrate the importance of Indigenous engagement and production of digital technologies to ensure their future livelihoods. AbTeC seeks to confront settler-colonial representations of Indigenous peoples that persist within the settler future imaginary. Drawing from personal interviews with Lewis and Skawennati, this thesis is grounded in a desire-based research framework as defined by scholars Eve Tuck (Unanga̓) and K. Wayne Yang. Indigenous and non-Indigenous theories of hauntology are utilized throughout this thesis in conjunction with Indigenous conceptions of relationality. Relationality as framed by theorists Jason Lewis, Noelani Arista (Kanaka Maoli), Archer Pechawis (Cree), and Suzanne Kite (Ogala Lakota) presents the possibility of treating digital technologies as non-human kin. This approach to relationality is further applied to the process of engagement within human-technology relationships as framed by white-settler cultural theorist Anne Cranny-Francis. Each theory is used to analyze *Calico & Camouflage* and how the project's various physical and digital formulations enact modes of Indigenous resistance, sovereignty, and cultural revitalization.

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Introduction

In his influential essay, “Drumbeats to Drumbytes: Globalizing Networked Aboriginal Art,” Cree/Métis theorist, artist, and curator, Âhasiw Maskêgon-Iskwêw demonstrates the global impact Indigenous artists and creatives have on digital media. He asserts that Indigenous cultural-determination is inextricably linked to engaging with digital media across disciplinary lines and community dialogues.¹ Further, Maskêgon-Iskwêw situates digital media as a tool capable of revealing the contemporary relevance of Indigenous methodologies, histories, stories, and the “profound connections to their widely varying lands.”² For Maskêgon-Iskwêw and many other Indigenous theorists and artists,³ the successful adaptation of new technologies and materials demonstrated by Indigenous peoples across time and geographical space affirms the “creative drive that is at the heart of Indigenous survival.”⁴ Indigenous artists, creatives, and theorists alike continue to demonstrate the importance of working within a variety of interdisciplinary visual, textual, and digital media to enact modes of Indigenous self-determination. Throughout time, Indigenous creatives across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat have adapted new technologies and materials utilizing Indigenous cultural knowledge to change and grow in accordance with desires for their past, present, and future livelihoods.⁵ Grounding their approach to Indigenous self-

¹ Âhasiw Maskêgon-Iskwêw, “Drumbeats to Drumbytes: Globalizing Networked Aboriginal Art,” in *Transference, Tradition, Technology: Native New Media Exploring Visual and Digital Culture*, ed. Melanie A. Townsend, Dana Claxton, and Steven Loft (Banff, Alberta: Walter Phillips Gallery; Art Gallery of Hamilton; Indigenous Media Arts Group, 2005), 3, <http://drumbytes.org/about/DrumbeatstoDrumbytes.pdf>.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ Noelani Arista, Marjorie Beaucage, Dana Claxton, Shawna Dempsey, Grace L. Dillon, Léuli Eshrāghi, Candice Hopkins, Suzanne Kite, Zacharias Kunuk, Jason Lewis, Steven Loft, Heather Igloliorte, Victor Masayesva, Julie Nagam, Archer Pechawis, Puhipau, Lisa Reihana, Michelle Raheja, Skawennati, Loretta Todd, Melanie Townsend, Greg Young-ing, Jackson 2Bears, and many, many more.

⁴ Maskêgon-Iskwêw, 3.

⁵ Throughout her essay, “Deciphering the Digital and Binary Codes of Sovereignty/Self-Determination and Recognition/Emancipation,” Julie Nagam (Métis/Syrian/German) uses the term “Indigenous cultural knowledge” as opposed to “traditional knowledge.” Given my understanding, this terminology has the capacity to expand what Indigenous practices are considered “traditional” to include a multitude of concepts, identities, and ways of knowing (Nagam. 80). Further, in my discussion with AbTeC’s Co-founder and Co-director, Jason Lewis, he explains that for him and other collaborators, terms like “Indigenous cultural knowledge” can be useful when engaging with cultural

determination within digital new media, is Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace or AbTeC – an Indigenous determined research-creation network based on Turtle Island in Tio'tia:ke/Mooniyang/Montréal, QC. AbTeC is co-founded and co-directed by artist Skawennati (Kanien'kehá:ka or Mohawk) and digital media theorist, poet, and software designer Jason Edward Lewis (Cherokee, Kānaka Maoli, Samoan). Drawing from theories of haunting, relationality and engagement within human-technology relationships, and desire-based research frameworks,⁶ I argue that AbTeC's projects reveal the crucial importance of Indigenous engagement and creation of digital technologies and their role in ensuring Indigenous future livelihoods.

The following thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which focusses on AbTeC's approach to creating images of Indigenous peoples in cyberspace to ensure their future livelihoods. Each chapter considers a single case study of the digital and physical fashion collection designed by Skawennati titled: *Calico & Camouflage* (2021). The first chapter utilizes the theory of hauntology and investigates how it can be used to reckon with the social and political effects wrought from colonization to write counternarratives that are grounded in Indigenous futurity. In the second chapter, I focus on the role imaginaries play within discourses of Indigenous sovereignty and how the images, metaphors, and narratives created by AbTeC contribute to the Indigenous future imaginary as framed by AbTeC's co-director, Jason Lewis. Chapter three is where I analyze the importance of relationality and engagement within human-technology relationships as they relate to AbTeC. Each chapter aims to demonstrate the profound

material. At the same time, he notes as well that using the singular term of "knowledge" is also powerful especially when considering concepts that do not necessarily have a specific cultural tie. In other words, some practices are considered to use knowledge that is not necessarily derived from one's cultural experience.

⁶ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "R-Words: Refusing Research," in *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*, ed. Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn (London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014), 231, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781544329611>.

power of digital media technologies to enact modes of Indigenous cultural revitalization, self-determination, future livelihoods, and resistance to settler-colonization.

AbTeC is home to a multitude of projects, many of which are situated in the online multimedia platform of Second Life. In Second Life, users can create personalized avatars and environments using objects, clothing, and avatar animations purchased from virtual marketplaces. The avatar animations consist of physical actions such as waving, dancing, or smiling. If a user desires, they can also create their own custom animations, objects, and clothing that can then be sold within a marketplace to other users. AbTeC's projects utilize materials and animations purchased from Second Life marketplaces as well as feature custom objects and animations that the AbTeC production team creates themselves. Many of AbTeC's projects utilize machinima – a form of cinema production created in real-time by filming avatars within environments on platforms like Second Life and other video games that allow users to record gameplay. Some of AbTeC's other projects include virtual art exhibitions, physical art works, and digital skills workshops offered internationally to Indigenous youth and adults. The project featured in this thesis is *Calico & Camouflage*, a digital and physical fashion collection of what co-director and co-director of AbTeC, Skawennati calls: "ResistanceWear" that infuses patterns and materials that are deeply rooted in past, present, and future acts of Indigenous resistance.

The goal of AbTeC is to ensure Indigenous presence by creating images and narratives of Indigenous peoples for the "webpages, online environments, video games, and virtual worlds that comprise cyberspace."⁷ To ensure the future livelihood of Indigenous peoples, Jason Lewis, co-founder, and co-director of AbTeC, asserts that it is vital for Indigenous peoples to not only use technology, but to develop it as well. This development can take a variety of forms such as the

⁷ "Projects," *AbTeC* online, accessed September 20, 2022, <https://abtec.org/#projects>.

creation of custom video games, websites, or computing technologies. To address AbTeC's goal to create Indigenous presence within cyberspace, Indigenous artists are invited to create images and narratives that represent what it means to them to be Indigenous in the past, present, and future. These images often confront damaging colonial stereotypes like the "imaginary Indian,"⁸ a concept that continues to persist within the present day. Lewis explains that colonial stereotypes about Indigenous peoples occupy the social imaginary and are perpetuated within the social, political, and economic structures of mainstream society and in turn, cyberspace.⁹ To combat the harmful images and narratives perpetuated by colonial stereotypes, Lewis proposes an alternative imaginary: the future imaginary. The future imaginary is "an informal and diffuse set of beliefs about how [Indigenous] culture will look one hundred, five hundred, or a thousand years from now."¹⁰ Nourishing this imaginary are images, metaphors, and narratives of Indigenous peoples created by members of AbTeC and other Indigenous creators using digital media to embed these images within cyberspace.

My methodology when engaging with images created by AbTeC is grounded within a desire-based research framework. Scholars Eve Tuck (Unangaŋ) and K. Wayne Yang describe desire-based research as "working inside a more complex and dynamic understanding of what one, or a community, comes to know in (a) lived life."¹¹ In other words, a desire-based research

⁸ "As described by art historian Marcia Crosby, the imaginary Indian developed out of the settler culture's need to erase the real Indian in order to depopulate North America in the minds of its immigrant population. Anthropologists, collectors, and artists believing they were "salvaging" the remnants of disappearing Indigenous cultures created a narrative that served to reify a particular profile of the Indigenous individual and his community. This profile was then homogenized to encompass all Native nations of the Americas, to the point that it became the accepted definition of the Native" (Lewis, *Preparations for a Haunting: Notes Toward an Indigenous Future Imaginary*, 232).

⁹ Charles Taylor's definition of the social imaginary: "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings . . . not expressed in theoretical terms, but . . . carried in images, stories, and legends" (Lewis, *Preparations for a Haunting: Notes Toward an Indigenous Future Imaginary*, 232).

¹⁰ Jason Edward Lewis, "A Better Dance and Better Prayers: Systems, Structures, and the Future Imaginary in Aboriginal New Media," in *Coded Territories: Tracing Indigenous Pathways in New Media Art*, ed. Steven Loft and Kerry Swanson (Calgary: University of Calgary Press., 2014), 231, CID: 20.500.12592/pknk3p.

¹¹ Eve Tuck and Yang, "R-Words: Refusing Research," 231."

framework is grounded in what an individual, community, or group wants for their past, present, and future livelihoods. Rather than centering around narratives of pain, trauma, or violence, desire-based research attends to these important narratives but from a desire forward perspective of what a group, community, or individual desire for themselves and their future. My methodological approach reflects a desire-based research framework through my decision to prioritize personal interviews with each co-director of AbTeC: Jason Lewis and Skawennati. My decision to conduct interviews with Lewis and Skawennati arises from the reality of my positionality as a white-settler born in Canada with an Irish-immigrant father, and second-generation Russian Jewish-Canadian mother. As I currently understand my positionality as a white-settler, I acknowledge that I have a responsibility to seek and demonstrate awareness when engaging with Indigenous theories, epistemologies, or conceptions of desire. I am aware that I will never fully understand Indigenous frameworks and that they are not meant for me to own or appropriate. In the words of Eve Tuck, what I am attempting to do is consider the ways in which “the colonized and the colonizer ‘leak’ into each other’s lives” after centuries of settlement.”¹² I imagine “leaking” to take many forms, some of which are demonstrated in this thesis which aims to grapple with settler-colonial history and engage with the efforts, strategies, and practices utilized by members of AbTeC. Lastly, because I am engaging with the subject of Indigenous futurity, it is especially important to indicate that I understand that it is not my place to determine what Indigenous futurity is or what Indigenous futures are. I believe conceiving Indigenous futurity is reserved for Indigenous peoples alone.

¹² Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," in *Handbook of Autoethnography*, ed. Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis (Abingdon: Routledge, Routledge Handbooks Online, 2013), 649, 10.4324/9781315427812.ch33 649.

Engaging in three distinct analyses of the physical and digital fashion collection, *Calico & Camouflage*, I begin in Chapter One by utilizing theories of hauntology to assert the power of reckoning with settler-colonial narratives to rewrite these narratives and recognize ghosts as social figures.¹³ Following this, Chapter Two considers how AbTeC generates images, metaphors, and narratives that create the Indigenous future imaginary and transcend stereotypes embedded with the settler-colonial and technological imaginary. Lastly, in Chapter Three, I contemplate the presentation of *Calico & Camouflage* in different digital and physical configurations to demonstrate the vitality of relationality within human relationships with non-human kin as framed by Indigenous theorists: Jason Lewis, Noelani Arista (Kanaka Maoli), Archer Pechawis (Cree), and Suzanne Kite (Ogala Lakota). Within Chapter Three, I expand on the role Indigenous relationality has within human-technology relationships in allyship with the theory of *engagement* as framed by white-settler cultural theorist Anne Cranny-Francis. Within each chapter, I aim to demonstrate how AbTeC ensures Indigenous presence within and beyond cyberspace through their engagement and development of digital technologies. My approach throughout is rooted within a desire-based framework that draws from Indigenous theories, and personal interviews with the co-founders and co-directors of AbTeC: Jason Lewis, and Skawennati. Utilizing theories of hauntology, relationality, and engagement within human-technology relationships, my analysis demonstrates how AbTeC's creation of images of Indigenous peoples within cyberspace ensures their future livelihoods.

CHAPTER ONE: Reckoning with a Haunting

¹³ Avery F. Gordon and Janice Radway, "her shape and his hand," in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. NED-New edition, Second. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttt4hp>.

It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future.

Avery Gordon, 1997¹⁴

In this chapter, I consider haunting as it relates to AbTeC, their general approach, and the projects they create. To begin, I situate the theory of hauntology as framed by settler-American sociologist Avery Gordon in her influential book: *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997). Following this, I apply Gordon's theory of haunting to AbTeC's approach to project creation and the formulation of the Indigenous future imaginary. Next, I consider how settler-colonialism is perceived as a haunting by Unangan scholar Eve Tuck and C. Ree in their lexicon titled *A Glossary of Haunting* (2013). Lastly, I examine haunting as it relates to *Calico & Camouflage* and how this project rewrites colonial narratives to represent Indigenous experience.

American sociologist Avery Gordon describes haunting as “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known.”¹⁵ For Gordon, haunting involves forms of reckoning and confronting dominant discourses and modes of knowledge produced within social and political settings. The dominant discourse produced within social and political settings forms vocabularies that Gordon explains ultimately failed her when she attempted to communicate “the depth, density, and intricacies...of domination and freedom, of critique and utopian longing.”¹⁶ The vocabularies generated by dominant powers, which we could apply to settler-colonial societies, according to Gordon have: “a constellation of effects, historical and

¹⁴ Gordon, 22.

¹⁵ Maggie Tate, “Re-Presenting Invisibility: Ghostly Aesthetics in Rebecca Belmore's Vigil and the Named and the Unnamed,” *Visual Studies* 30, no. 1 (2015): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2015.996388>.

¹⁶ Gordon, 8.

institutional, that make a vocabulary a social practice of producing knowledge.”¹⁷ Dominant vocabularies create certain effects, one which is the production of “ghosts.” According to Gordon, ghosts are “not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure,”¹⁸ which can remind us of their presences through affects and feelings generated from our lived experience. Expanding on this, ghosts as social figures produce affects and feelings as a mode of reckoning with our lived realities and in turn, form a haunting.

For Gordon, haunting can render visible the seemingly invisible. She explains that this ability contrasts with dominant culture and its seeming hypervisibility that presents everything as available for view and consumption through technologies like the internet. However, she explains that this hypervisibility also produces a sense “that neither repression nor the return of the repressed, in the form of either improperly buried bodies or countervailing systems of value or difference, occurs with any meaningful result.”¹⁹ In other words, when in dominant society where everything is seemingly visible it becomes difficult for non-dominant narratives to be seen and recognized. Despite the difficulty for repressed narratives to be recognized within dominant society, they can be made visible if society decides to recognize them. For Gordon, recognizing repressed narratives can take the form of acknowledging the repressed stories of social figures that have been produced within dominant societies, or the ghosts that have been rendered invisible. To this end, Gordon quotes prominent American novelist Toni Morrison, who states: “invisible things are not necessarily not-there,”²⁰ asserting that when the invisible is investigated, a “seething presence”²¹ can be revealed. Put differently, if these repressed narratives are

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁰ Ibid., 17.

²¹ Ibid., 17.

recognized, the intricacies of their presence can be made visible within a dominant society that has rendered them invisible.

Throughout the book, Gordon grapples with how repressed narratives or ghosts can be treated as social figures and made tangible despite their ongoing erasure by dominant powers. By applying Gordon's approach to the erasure of Indigenous narratives within settler-colonial societies like Canada, I argue that the theory of hauntology can be used to rewrite colonial narratives to center Indigenous stories and histories. Gordon describes hauntings as a form of "ghost stories" that consist of the stories of those who have been repressed and rendered invisible within dominant societies. This form of erasure is entrenched within settler-colonial societies and their repression of Indigenous narratives and histories, including the fact that new technologies have been utilized by many Indigenous societies since time immemorial.²² In response to the repression of Indigenous narratives by settler-colonial societies, AbTeC generates alternative stories that render visible those who have been invisible to create the Indigenous future imaginary. In other words, one could argue that AbTeC is writing ghost stories, stories that for Gordon reckon with the exclusions of those whose stories have been repressed. When repressed stories are attended to through the process of writing ghost stories, Gordon explains that this "implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects."²³ I assert that the writing of ghost stories is allied with AbTeC's creation of images, metaphors, and narratives of Indigenous peoples within cyberspace and beyond. Through AbTeC's attention to the invisibility of Indigenous peoples within the settler future imaginary,²⁴ they attend to these exclusions and

²² Candice Hopkins, "Making Things Our Own: The Indigenous Aesthetic in Digital Storytelling," *Leonardo* 39, no. 4 (2006): 342, <https://doi.org/10.1162/leon.2006.39.4.341>.

²³ Gordon, 17.

²⁴ Jason Edward Lewis, "A Brief (Media) History of the Indigenous Future," *Public* 54, vol. 27, Winter 2016. 37, [10.1386/public.27.54.36.1](https://doi.org/10.1386/public.27.54.36.1).

engage in a reckoning with the ghosts who have been produced by persistent processes and vocabularies of repression by generating their own narratives, by writing their own ghost stories.

Gordon explains that, if we search for articulations of absence when encountering dominant structures and organized forces in our daily lives, a haunting can be revealed.²⁵ Co-director of AbTeC, Jason Lewis identifies that the absence of Indigenous narratives within the settler future imaginary is undisputable. The settler future imaginary is concerned with settler futurity which comprises the cultural images, narratives, metaphors, and structures that establish and envision a future for settlers.²⁶ It is imperative to understand that settlers futurity cannot be enacted without recognizing the on-going reality that settlers imposed their future over Indigenous futurity through acts of colonial genocide and continuous oppression. For Eve Tuck and Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, Indigenous futurity “comprises of the structures and narratives that support and imagine a future for Indigenous peoples.”²⁷ The settler colonial imaginary and Indigenous future imaginary each consist of images, metaphors, and narratives that serve the respective futurity of either settlers or Indigenous peoples. In turn, the Canadian settler future imaginary exposes all inhabitants of so-called Canada to its images and narratives through their everyday lives when encountering settler dominated visual and textual media like film, literature, or news. I argue that the images, metaphors, and narratives that are represented within these media drastically impact the ways Canadian and Indigenous societies imagine our past, present, and future livelihoods. Lewis explains that the lack of representation of Indigenous peoples in the settler future imaginary through media is concerning for Indigenous futures.²⁸ Put

²⁵ Gordon, 19.

²⁶ Amber Hickey, “Rupturing Settler Time: Visual Culture and Geographies of Indigenous Futurity.” *World Art* 9, no. 2 (2019): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2019.1621926>.

²⁷ Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández quoted in Hickey, 166.

²⁸ Jason Edward Lewis, “A Brief (Media) History of the Indigenous Future,” *Public* 54, vol. 27, Winter 2016. 37, [10.1386/public.27.54.36.1](https://doi.org/10.1386/public.27.54.36.1).

differently, the lack of Indigenous representation in the settler future imaginary has rendered Indigenous narratives invisible, thus making the development of images for the Indigenous future imaginary imperative for Indigenous survival. However, it is important to note the forced invisibilities of Indigenous narratives are not without power. When the invisibility of Indigenous narratives is confronted, these narratives can find their power when they are recognized as a haunting.

The “seething presence” of repressed narratives can be exposed by those who reckon with the dominant settler colonial vocabularies by generating alternative ones. AbTeC generates alternative images, metaphors, and narratives by imagining and formulating their own conceptions of Indigenous past, present, and future livelihoods. They achieve this by creating projects that center Indigenous stories and lived experience. I argue that AbTeC’s projects act as a form of “reparations for past exclusions and silencings, making the previously unknown known, telling new stories, correcting the official records,” as Gordon describes.²⁹ These types of “official records” arguably take the form of written Canadian history, which has intentionally and irrevocably failed Indigenous peoples by burying their stories and lived experience to benefit the project of settler-colonialization. To reckon with atrocities wrought from dominant powers, Gordon cites the process of “making common cause,” explaining that our encounters with ghosts as social figures “must strive to go beyond the fundamental alienation of turning social relations into just the things we know and towards our own reckoning with how we are in these stories, with how they change us, with our own ghosts.”³⁰ I stress that Gordon’s concept of “making common cause” can be effective for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to grapple with settler-colonialization. Making common cause requires all of those who have been affected by

²⁹ Gordon, 20.

³⁰ Ibid, 22.

dominant forces to recognize and investigate the stories and narratives we consume and produce. Further, to make common cause, I believe we can begin to understand and reckon with the narratives that have been repressed by dominant powers and how they have changed us. What might reckoning with the haunting of settler-colonization look like?

I assert that AbTeC's projects reckon with settler-colonization as a haunting, through Gordon's process of "following the ghosts." For Gordon, "following the ghosts is about making contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located."³¹ AbTeC's articulations of Indigenous peoples in cyberspace can arguably be perceived as making contact with ghosts that have been produced by settler-colonization. The stereotypes and blatant erasure of Indigenous peoples and their past, present, and futures livelihoods have been produced by settlers and exist within the settler colonial imaginary. When considering the narratives contained within the settler future imaginary in the context of haunting, the dominant vocabularies wrought from colonialism in turn suggest repressed narratives. The presence of these repressed narratives can be revealed when they are recognized as a haunting and when the ghosts are identified as social figures. The power of engaging with haunting for both Indigenous and settler-colonial societies lies within the fact that, as Gordon notes, "haunting is a constitutive feature of social life."³² People have and will continue to be oppressed, and it is through engaging with these ghosts and being "less fearful of animation"³³ that we as societies can generate more accurate vocabularies that have the ability to change minds and alter future imaginaries through our lived experiences. Or in Gordon's words:

If we want to study social life well, and if in addition we to want to contribute, in however small a measure, to changing it, we must learn how to identify hauntings and reckon with

³¹ Ibid, 22.

³² Ibid, 22.

³³ Ibid, 22.

ghosts, must learn how to make contact with what is without doubt often painful, difficult, and unsettling.³⁴

To begin reckoning with the haunting of settler-colonization, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living on Turtle Island or so-called Canada have a role to play in “making common cause.” For processes of decolonization and unsettling to be enacted, perhaps reckoning with hauntings is a viable choice to enact change and generate anticolonial futures.

Hauntology and Textual Media

The theory of hauntology is applied to a variety of media, including textual media. *A Glossary of Haunting* is a useful lexicon written by authors Eve Tuck and C. Ree who preface the work by noting that the glossary is without an accompanying piece of writing. Referencing settler coloniality, Tuck and Ree muse that perhaps the main reference text or host has “gone missing, or it has been buried alive, or because it is still being written.”³⁵ Their decision to situate the glossary within an absence arguably frames the animation of a haunting as a response to something that is unresolved and makes itself known through its absence.

Throughout the glossary, Tuck and Ree position themselves as narrators, expertly shifting between first-person and second-person point of view to tell a story that purposely does not fit within settler-colonial knowledge frameworks. They write: “I care about your understanding, but I care more about concealing parts of myself from you.”³⁶ They continue: “Yes, I am telling you a story, but you may be reading another one.”³⁷ This approach suggests that Tuck and Ree seek to control their narrative by exposing that they are aware the stories told within the glossary can

³⁴ Ibid, 23.

³⁵ Tuck and Ree, “A Glossary of Haunting,” 640.

³⁶ Ibid., 640.

³⁷ Ibid., 640.

ultimately be misunderstood. The possible misreading of their stories seems to reference settler colonial master narratives and the repression of racialized and minority experiences within settler-colonial knowledge frameworks. Tuck and Ree's discussion of processes of haunting as they relate to settler colonialism reveal the strength of absences of unresolved violence. They explain that settler-colonial nations like the United States are "permanently haunted by the slavery, genocide, and violence entwined in its first, present and future days."³⁸ They frame settler colonialism as "the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts—those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation."³⁹ The authors establish settler colonialism as a haunting whose source of power cannot be silenced or appeased with actions of reconciliation but rather acts as "relentless remembering and reminding"⁴⁰ that settler colonial violence has and continues to occur. Further, the capability of haunting to act as a reminder of settler colonial violence also has the ability to move beyond settler-coloniality and ground itself within the generation of ghosts who refuse to stop haunting, reminding, remembering – who in their own way create alternative forms of resolve, of control over an alternative narrative.

Tuck and Ree utilize haunting to engage with their own desire-based narratives that refuse to engage in simplifying experiences based solely on trauma and damage. For Tuck and Ree "desire makes itself its own ghost, creates itself from its own remnants. Desire, in its making and remaking, bounds into the past as it stretches into the future. It is productive, it makes itself, and in making itself, it makes reality."⁴¹ Tuck and Ree's discussion of desire is framed using a hauntological perspective that repressed narratives or ghosts are created in every generation.

³⁸ Ibid, 642.

³⁹ Ibid, 642.

⁴⁰ Tuck and Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting," 642.

⁴¹ Ibid., 648.

When repressed narratives are addressed from a desire-based approach, Tuck and Ree propose desire can assert its own narrative. Desire-based haunting does not seem to forget past traumas, but rather utilizes the past to rewrite narratives that are representative of the lived experiences and desires of people who have and continue to be oppressed by settler-colonial forces. I assert that the ability for desire to engage ghosts produces alternative images, narratives, and metaphors about Indigenous peoples in the past, present, and the future – an ability that can be witnessed in AbTeC’s work and approach.

Reckoning with Ghosts: Inviting Animation within *Calico & Camouflage*

As indicated in the title of this thesis, *reckoning with ghosts* refers to the ways that members of AbTeC utilize digital media to transmit ghosts as social figures in and beyond cyberspace. Co-director of AbTeC, Jason Lewis, engages in discussions of ghosts whom he asserts can be generated within cyberspace. In his publication “Preparations for a Haunting: Notes Toward an Indigenous Future Imaginary,” Lewis indicates that cyberspace is not *terra nullius*, the colonial understanding of Indigenous lands and waters as blank slates simply waiting to be occupied. Lewis explains that cyberspace is not without presence because it is occupied with colonial ghosts manufactured by earlier colonial contributors to cyberspace. For Lewis, these colonial ghosts haunt the hardware stacks of computing technologies. To reckon with these colonial ghosts, Lewis, and members of AbTeC must infuse cyberspace with what he calls alternative imaginaries.⁴² These alternative imaginaries consist of images, narratives, and metaphors of Indigenous peoples that are self-determined and created in the interests of

⁴² Jason Edward Lewis, “Preparations for a Haunting: Notes Toward an Indigenous Future Imaginary,” in *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, ed. Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne, and Tamar Tembeck (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 241, muse.jhu.edu/book/48363.

Indigenous past, present, and future livelihoods. These images will not, however, be alone, but will exist among colonial ghosts, the latter of which comprise harmful settler colonial narratives about Indigenous peoples like that of the “imaginary Indian.”⁴³ AbTeC seeks to infuse alternative imaginaries or, perhaps, anticolonial ghosts, into cyberspace using binary computer coding language and 3D modelling programs to create projects like *Calico & Camouflage* to demonstrate knowledge that gestures towards the past, present, and future.

Calico & Camouflage is a digital and physical fashion collection of “ResistanceWear” that infuses patterns intertwined within the colonization narrative of Turtle Island and so-called Canada. The project is created by co-founder and co-director of AbTeC, Skawennati, who is one of the network’s main contributing artists. Skawennati’s AbTeC projects primarily use the medium of machinima and machinimagraphs – both of which are created by recording real time moving and still images within video game platforms like Second Life. *Calico & Camouflage* was designed by Skawennati and co-produced by members of AbTeC who specialize in 3D modelling within the Second Life gaming platform. The clothing was first created digitally for custom Second Life avatars and was later made real using physical fabrics and materials. The clothing consists of ribbon shirts inspired by Indigenous cultural knowledge as well as military-style cargo pants (see Figure 1). Skawennati decided to switch the two patterns that are often used on ribbon shirts and cargo pants. She created a custom floral calico pattern, a pattern that is often used for ribbon shirts which she used to create the cargo pants. Then she created a contemporary camouflage pattern that she used as the base garment for the ribbon shirt. Silk ribbons and floral calico materials were adopted by Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous peoples in the 1600s though trade with European settlers.⁴⁴ The silk ribbons were used to create ribbon shirts and

⁴³ See footnote #4.

⁴⁴ “Calico & Camouflage: Demonstrate,” *ELLEPHANT* online, October 28, 2020,

dresses that have become “widely-recognized signifiers of traditional Haudenosaunee (and others’) regalia.”⁴⁵ Skawennati explains that the decision to pair the calico pattern with the military style pant is grounded within resistance movements— such as Wounded Knee, the Oka Crisis, Standing Rock, Mauna Kea, and so many others—against colonial forces that have attempted to eliminate Indigenous peoples throughout history. The camouflage pattern and style of the pants indicates to Skawennati that “our land- and life-defenders have claimed camouflage clothing for their own to show that we are not afraid to fight.”⁴⁶ The significance of these patterns are used to make fashion statements by introducing silk ribbons to an original calico and a contemporary camouflage pattern infused with colours that for Skawennati reflect contemporary landscapes of activism within both rural/urban as well as digital/physical settings.⁴⁷ In an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Company, CBC Arts, Skawennati explains that the ribbons were made to reach the floor, representing the continual life and resistance of Indigenous peoples.⁴⁸ Because *Calico & Camouflage* was first created digitally as a virtual clothing line, I assert that the *Calico & Camouflage* project produces anticolonial ghosts and generates a haunting that is inextricably linked to its digital formulation.

Calico & Camouflage was first conceived of within a digital format for the custom avatars Skawennati and the AbTeC production team designed within the Second Life platform. In addition to the avatar’s clothing, they were each given a protest-sign listing specific calls to action in Kanien’keha, Anishnabemowin, English, and French, such as “NIBIING AYAAMAGAN BIMAADIZIWIN,” “THE FUTURE IS IND!GENOUS,” or “WATER IS

<http://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ellephant.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Calico-Camouflage-Demonstrate-description.pdf>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “When Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto moved online, Skawennati took her virtual world to the runway,” CBC Arts, August 2, 2021, video, 6:22. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgYRGUPOGPA>.

LIFE,” (see Figure 2). In a publication for the project’s display at ELLEPHANT Gallery in Tio’tia:ke or Montréal, QC, it is noted that once the fashion line was seen on the digital avatars it quickly became clear to Skawennati that the clothing needed to be realized in the physical world.⁴⁹ I argue that *Calico & Camouflage*’s digital origins demonstrate AbTeC’s utilization of digital media as a mode of transportation for anticolonial ghosts as a form of Indigenous resistance. AbTeC recognized ghosts as social figures through the creation of images, narratives, and metaphors of Indigenous peoples in cyberspace. The Indigenous imaginaries or anticolonial ghosts featured within *Calico & Camouflage* were first imagined by Skawennati, and then created digitally in collaboration with the AbTeC production team. By transmitting these self-determined images of digital avatars wearing *Calico & Camouflage* into cyberspace, it can be argued that Skawennati is attending to the absence of Indigenous peoples in the future through the process of reckoning with settler-colonization as a haunting. This haunting is generated by the attempted and purposeful erasure of Indigenous peoples in the past, present, and future by colonial forces. This erasure, however, is not omnipotent, but rather has generated a haunting filled with anticolonial ghosts who make their presence known through their absence. Skawennati’s *Calico & Camouflage* reckons with a haunting and the ghosts generated through colonial narratives by writing her own ghosts stories and creating images, metaphors, and narratives of Indigenous peoples in the past present and future. The initial digital formation of *Calico & Camouflage* reckons with the colonial ghosts that exist within the hardware stacks, porting the ghosts out of absence towards their eventual physical creation. With the help of friends and family, Skawennati hand-sewed the ResistanceWear, which was then featured in *Vogue Magazine* Online (see Figure 6.), Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto, 2021 online, the

⁴⁹ “Calico & Camouflage: Demonstrate,” 2020.

Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) Indigenous Fashion show at the 2022 Santa Fe Indian Market (see Figure 4.), and in variety of other forms.

The initial digital creation of *Calico & Camouflage* arguably sparked a mass animation of anticolonial ghosts, which Skawennati empowers to shapeshift by creating them in both digital and physical spaces. The importance of the animation of ghosts is reflected within processes of haunting as framed by Tuck and Ree. The harmful misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples that make up colonial ghosts or narratives are not erased, but they can be revealed by inviting them to be reformulated as anticolonial ghosts or Indigenous imaginaries to generate alternative vocabularies that reflect the lived experience of Indigenous peoples.

The transformative qualities of attending to ghosts as social figures offers possibilities for self-determined images of Indigenous peoples to proliferate within digital and physical realms. The *Calico & Camouflage* ResistanceWear infuses past, present, and future Indigenous knowledges and empowers members of AbTeC to utilize and adapt digital media to serve Indigenous futures and futurity through reckoning with colonial haunting. These ghosts do not sit idle within cyberspace; rather, they act as relentless reminders that colonial violence has and continues to occur against Indigenous peoples. In response to violent histories, these ghosts have and will continue to proliferate. However, with actions of reckoning, they can find their power to haunt in collusion with colonial ghosts to transform themselves beyond settler-colonial representations, as Indigenous imaginaries.

The shifting formations of *Calico & Camouflage* offer different opportunities to haunt cyber and physical space. The presentation of *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* in Toronto's Yonge-Dundas Square (YDS), for instance, is a site-responsive installation where the avatar activists are featured in the Square wearing the ResistanceWear and holding signs marked with words of Indigenous resistance (see Figure 2). According to their website, Yonge-Dundas Square

is a one-acre outdoor public event space located at the intersection of Yonge Street and Dundas Street in the Downtown Yonge neighbourhood of the city of Toronto, Canada. The Square contains multiple large permanent digital screens equipped for signage available to rent for respective events. When not in use for events, the digital signage is used to display visitor information, public art, video projects, and YDS sponsors. In addition, advertising on the screens is not available for purchase and all content must adhere to the official YDS Display Policy.⁵⁰

The *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* installation consists of multiple large digital screens that feature the avatars seen walking in and out of frame above life-sized printed versions of the avatars that are adhered to cement columns on an overpass located within YDS (see Figure 9). The virtual “gathering” of the avatars in YDS transforms the project’s digital formulation and presents the avatars in a physical space as though they are gathering for a protest (see Figure 3). These machinimas and machinimagraphs created using still and moving images in Second Life assert Indigenous presence, resistance, and futurity within Toronto’s YDS as both material and cyber terrains. I argue that the installation of the digital avatars in this physical space incites activism by asserting their presence through processes of virtual and digital haunting.

The ghosts generated from settler-colonialism cannot be relegated to cyberspace alone. They can be activated through the process of anticolonial ghost-making, through AbTeC’s authorship of their own ghost stories. These ghosts are animated by Skawennati to occupy space in digital, physical, and hybrid digital-material forms. The machinimagraphs adhered to the pillars stand tall, occupying space that was previously visually devoid of Indigenous presence. Yonge-Dundas Square is crowded with commercial advertisements and sites of urban development – and by animating visual manifestations of Indigenous peoples wearing *Calico &*

⁵⁰ “History,” *Yonge-Dundas Square* online, accessed January 23, 2022, <https://www.ydsquare.ca/about-us>.

Camouflage, a haunting is generated, making visible Indigenous sites of resistance. The ghosts serve as a relentless reminder that this has been Indigenous land then, now and will be in the future, and thus, find power in the process of reckoning with a haunting.

CHAPTER TWO: Sovereignty, Imaginaries, and the Indigenous Future Imaginary

Chapter two considers the importance of understanding the shifting definitions and understandings of Indigenous sovereignty and how it can be enacted by creating self-determined images for the Indigenous future imaginary. I begin by situating the Indigenous futurisms movement and how it inspired co-directors of AbTeC, Jason Lewis and Skawennati, to formulate images for the Indigenous future imaginary. Following this, I examine the shifting and paradoxical meaning of sovereignty by drawing from multiple Indigenous theorists including scholar Scott Richard Lyons (Ojibwe/Dakota), anthropologist and political theorist Audra Simpson (Mohawk or Kanien'kehá:ka), and cultural theorist Michelle Raheja (Seneca). Each theorist considers the impact of settler-colonization on Indigenous governance, sovereignty, and livelihoods throughout history into the present day. This discussion of sovereignty then leads into an analysis of Raheja's concept of "visual sovereignty" and how it is enacted by Indigenous creatives using digital media to appropriate Western film making practices. Next, I apply the theory of visual sovereignty to projects created by AbTeC and examine how forms of sovereignty are expressed within the Indigenous future imaginary. To conclude chapter two, I engage in an analysis of *Calico & Camouflage* and how the projects' digital and physical formulations lend themselves to modes of Indigenous mobilization and resistance.

One of AbTeC's main objectives is to create original artworks that address the future for Indigenous peoples on an international scale.⁵¹ AbTeC's centering of Indigenous futurisms draws heavily from concepts framed by Anishinaabe theorist and author Grace L. Dillon, who edited the first anthology on Indigenous Science Fiction: *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*. In this anthology, Dillon asserts the power of science fiction as "an equally valid way to renew, recover, and extend First Nations peoples' voices and traditions."⁵² Dillon asks the question: "does sf [science fiction] have the capacity to envision Native futures, Indigenous hopes, and dreams recovered by rethinking the past in new frameworks?"⁵³ Using science fiction to envision Indigenous futures is a mode of thinking that is deeply reflected within the work of AbTeC. The approach to Indigenous futurisms in *Walking the Clouds* rethinks science fiction by examining and revealing that futurism is not a new concept to Indigenous peoples, but rather, one that is often overlooked by settler-colonial society. Dillon's discussion of science fiction is allied with Afrofuturisms and centres on how the latter inspires Indigenous futurisms.⁵⁴ Co-director of AbTeC, Jason Lewis draws from Dillon's thinking when considering the future imaginary. Lewis describes the future imaginary as "an informal and diffuse set of beliefs about how [Indigenous] culture will look one hundred, five hundred, or a thousand years from now."⁵⁵ Lewis asserts that constructing the belief system of the Indigenous future imaginary requires Indigenous creatives themselves to "actively participate in building technology as well as using it."⁵⁶ In other words, the Indigenous future imaginary must be created by Indigenous peoples themselves. Because

⁵¹ Lewis, "Better Dance and Better Prayers," 60.

⁵² Grace L. Dillon, "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms." in *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, ed. Grace L. Dillon (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press., 2012), 1-2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁵ Lewis, "Preparations for a Haunting: Notes Toward an Indigenous Future Imaginary," 231.

⁵⁶ Lewis. "Preparations for a Haunting: Notes Toward an Indigenous Future Imaginary," 230.

conceptions of Indigenous futures and futurity must be self-determined,⁵⁷ it is necessary to discuss the complex and inherently paradoxical concept of sovereignty.

Conceptions of Sovereignty

In her book *Reservation Reelism*, cultural theorist Michelle Raheja (Seneca) considers the shifting meanings of the term sovereignty as it is understood by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Through utilizing important discussions of sovereignty by Indigenous scholars: Jolene Rickard (Tuscarora), Beverly R. Singer (Tewa/Diné), Robert Allen Warrior (Osage), and Vine Deloria Jr. (Lakota), Raheja asserts that “sovereignty is an ontological and philosophical concept with very real practical, political, and cultural ramifications that unites the experiences of Native Americans, but it is a difficult idea to define because it is always in motion and is inherently contradictory.”⁵⁸ The contradictory features of sovereignty lie in the fact that the term has roots within Indigenous conceptions of self-representation that existed pre-contact.⁵⁹ According to Raheja, “prior to European contact, Native nations theorized about the concept of sovereignty in order to discursively distinguish themselves from the other human, spirit, animal, and inanimate communities surrounding them through performance, songs, stories, dreams, and visual texts such as wampum, pictographs, and tipi drawings.”⁶⁰ Raheja’s framing of early Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty are important when considering how understandings and definitions of sovereignty have been forced to shift as a consequence of settler-colonization.

⁵⁷ Jason Edward Lewis (co-director and co-founder of AbTeC) in discussion with the author, October 2022.

⁵⁸ Michelle H. Raheja, “Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)*,” in *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 197, muse.jhu.edu/book/1932. 197.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

According to Ojibwe/Dakota scholar Scott Richard Lyons, within the modern context of the early 18th century, the development of nations and states altered sovereignty into a systemic and relational process that shifted alongside the formation of political institutions. This formation of political institutions corresponded with the power for sovereign nations to “make and enforce laws, notions of political legitimacy and international recognition, and national self-determination.”⁶¹ The construction of sovereignty as it relates to the colonization of North America saw the term shift into a highly “contested and contradictory process.”⁶² The meaning of sovereignty became altered during the colonization of North America, which witnessed the making and signing of treaties between Indigenous peoples and European settlers regarding ownership of land that was, at the time, viewed to be under the ownership of sovereign Indigenous nations.⁶³ However, Indigenous sovereign land ownership was jeopardized by a complex array of issues wrought from settler-colonization including military strength and a forcefully imposed and growing reliance of Indigenous economic dependence on white-settler goods.⁶⁴

The early-mid 19th century witnessed the reclassification of Indigenous nations in legal documentation such as treaties, denoting them as: “domestic dependent nations,” “distinct societies,” or “political communities” instead of sovereign nations, thus creating a one-sided power dynamic that framed sovereignty as a process that required recognition from colonial authorities such as the Supreme Court of the United States.⁶⁵ This process eventually led to Indigenous Nations being viewed as a “ward or pupil” of the state rather than a fellow nation that

⁶¹ Scott Richard Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?” *College Composition and Communication* 51, no. 3 (2000): 450, <https://doi.org/10.2307/358744>.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 450.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 451.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 451.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 452.

exists within an international community of sovereigns.⁶⁶ A position of political paternalism over Indigenous Nations was imposed by countries like Canada and the United States. Within written legal treaties in the United States for instance, Indigenous Nations were increasingly referred to as “tribe” in place of “nation” and the treaties themselves were later titled “agreements” in response to the Abolition of Treaty-Making Act of 1871.⁶⁷ Lyons writes:

From ‘sovereign’ to ‘ward,’ from ‘nation’ to tribe,’ and from ‘treaty’ to ‘agreement,’ the erosion of Indian national sovereignty can be credited in part to a rhetorical imperialist use of writing by white powers, and from that point on, much of the discourse on tribal sovereignty has nit-picked, albeit powerfully, around terms and definitions.⁶⁸

The discourse surrounding Indigenous sovereignty is highly fraught and entrenched within settler-colonial legal definitions of what constitutes an Indigenous Nation, an issue that continues to be highly contested to the present day across settler-colonial contexts like that of the United States and Canada.

In their article: “Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity,” Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg theorist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Yellowknives Dene theorist Glen Coulthard frame settler colonialism in Canada:

As a settler colonial power, Canada has structured its relationship to Indigenous peoples primarily through the dispossession of Indigenous bodies from Indigenous lands and by impeding and systemically regulating the generative relationships and practices that create and maintain Indigenous nationhoods, political practices, sovereignties, and solidarities.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 452.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 453.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 453.

⁶⁹ Glen Sean Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity,” *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 254. doi:10.1353/aq.2016.0038.

As Leanne Simpson and Coulthard explain, much like in the United States, systemic and structural systems within Canada actively work to dispossess Indigenous peoples from their lands and waters. The authors reference political anthropologist Audra Simpson (Kanien'kehá:ka) and explain that the settler colonial state of Canada displaces Indigenous peoples from their lands through “state-sanctioned murdering, assimilating, and disappearing of Indigenous bodies (asymmetrically distributed across genders).”⁷⁰ According to Audra Simpson, Canada’s violent dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples works to disrupt political orders of Indigenous peoples because “these bodies generate knowledge, political systems, and ways of being that contest the hegemony of settler governmentality and thus make dispossession all the more difficult to achieve.”⁷¹ In response to the historical and ongoing disappearing of Indigenous bodies and knowledge, Leanne Simpson and Coulthard center acts of mobilization that aim to simultaneous “protect Indigenous territories and to reconnect Indigenous bodies to land through the practices and forms of knowledge that these practices continuously regenerate.”⁷² Leanne Simpson explains that instead of getting caught up in the politics of recognition,⁷³ Indigenous peoples can mobilize around the fear of disappearance rather than embed this fear into policies like state-imposed memberships that cause pain and rejection to those who are affected most by

⁷⁰ Ibid, 254.

⁷¹ Ibid, 254.

⁷² Ibid, 254.

⁷³ In his book *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014), Coulthard “problematizes the increasingly commonplace assumption that the colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state can be reconciled via a liberal “politics of recognition.” Coulthard compares this politics of recognition to Leanne Simpson’s writings on resurgence and explains that Simpson alongside other influential scholars calls on Indigenous people and communities to “turn away” from contemporary liberal recognition and to utilize the political practices and values of Indigenous peoples to revitalize Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing.

these forms of disappearance like Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, queer, and gender non-conforming people.⁷⁴

To address Indigenous disappearance, Coulthard and Leanne Simpson expand on Coulthard's initial writings on the concept of "grounded normativity" and refer to it as a reference for the ethical frameworks that are generated out of "place-based practices" and forms of Indigenous knowledge.⁷⁵ Grounded normativity, according to Coulthard and Simpson, fosters "respectful and diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests."⁷⁶ Leanne Simpson and Coulthard assert that land and place-based practices can be reproduced through frameworks offered by grounded normativity, frameworks that are based on "deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place."⁷⁷ The reconnection to land-based practices is imperative to address the erasure of Indigenous bodies and knowledge, because as noted previously, a key tenet of settler-colonization is the dispossession of Indigenous land and waters.

This discussion of land-based practices and their vital importance to Indigenous knowledge and ways of being guides me to the land on which this research is currently taking place. Tio'tia:ke or so-called Montréal is unceded Indigenous land meaning that it has at no point been legally ceded or given to the Constitutional Monarchy of the Crown of Canada. The land and waters belong to the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation. This research is based in Tio'tia:ke, Mooniyang, or Montréal, where I currently live and study; further, it is the physical location of

⁷⁴ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "'I See Your Light': Reciprocal Recognition and Generative Refusal," In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, 177. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/55843>.

⁷⁵ Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 254.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 254.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 254.

AbTeC's research laboratory, which is housed at Concordia University. Additionally, the co-founder and co-director of AbTeC, Skawennati is Mohawk or Kanien'kehá:ka, an identity that much of her work is centered around. To more accurately understand Skawennati's work, and the project featured within this thesis, *Calico & Camouflage*, it is necessary to situate sovereignty as it is framed by the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke and their continual acts of resistance against colonial forces to enact sovereignty. The subject of Mohawk sovereignty is examined extensively by the influential political anthropologist Audra Simpson (Kanien'kehá:ka or Mohawk) in her book, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014). It is important to note the reality that the scope of this thesis is insufficient to properly situate the shifting and often conflicting definitions of sovereignty within Indigenous Nations, let alone the complex and highly fraught issues associated with Mohawk sovereignty. It is crucial however to provide a baseline context of Kanien'kehá:ka or Mohawk sovereignty to offer a clearer sense of the paradoxical meanings of sovereignty to situate the lands, waters, and people of Kanien'kehá:ka Nation with which this research is inextricably bound.

Kahnawà:ke is a community located in what is now southwestern Quebec which comprises a largely Francophone population. The land where Kahnawà:ke is located is now considered a reservation or "reserve" spanning 29.85 kilometers.⁷⁸ The community of Kahnawà:ke consists of people who moved from the Mohawk Valley in New York State to the northern region of their hunting territory which is where they partially reside now.⁷⁹ The lands and waters of Kanien'kehá:ka Nation including the community of Kahnawà:ke and many other

⁷⁸ Audra Simpson, "Chapter One. Indigenous Interruptions: Mohawk Nationhood, Citizenship, and the State," in *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, ProQuest Ebook Central, 2014), 3, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1666608>.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

Indigenous communities are located at intersections of settler political land/water borders like those imposed by the United States and Canada. These imposed borders have forced extremely difficult situations onto all Indigenous peoples including those of Kanien'kehá:ka Nation within their political, economic, social, and personal lives.⁸⁰

Simpson explains that Kanien'kehá:ka people have never identified as citizens of Canada or the United States.⁸¹ Simpson asserts the political structure of Kanien'kehá:ka Nation “predates and survives ‘conquest;’ it is tangible (albeit strangled by colonial governmentality) and is tied to sovereign practices.”⁸² For Simpson and many others, Kanien'kehá:ka Nationhood is grounded within the decision making of the Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse) Confederacy which is comprised of an alliance between: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca peoples.⁸³ Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke have conducted themselves as a community that is part of the sovereign Kanien'kehá:ka Nation with the right to make alliances with other Indigenous Nations prior to the arrival of Europeans. However, for Kanien'kehá:ka people to identify with terms of nationhood such as being “Indigenous” and “Nation,” Simpson explains that, “although seemingly unable to be both things at once, the Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke strive to articulate these modalities as they live and move within a territorial space that is overlaid with settler regimes that regulate or circumscribe their way of life.”⁸⁴ In other words, the terms of nationhood for Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke are wrought with highly contentious issues caused by settler-colonization. Simpson explains: “as Indigenous peoples they have survived a great,

⁸⁰ In her book *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, Audra Simpson interviews an extensive number of Kanien'kehá:ka people about the complex issues they face navigating settler-colonial systems and the issues that have been forced upon them by settler-colonial governments regarding Mohawk citizenship structures.

⁸¹ Simpson, “Chapter One. Indigenous Interruptions: Mohawk Nationhood, Citizenship, and the State,” 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

transformative process of settler occupation, and they continue to live under the conditions of this occupation, its disavowal, and its ongoing life, which has required and still requires that they give up their lands and give up themselves.”⁸⁵ A highly fraught issue imposed by settler-colonizers onto Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat, is blood-quantum. Blood-quantum is a settler-colonial imposed measurement system that supposedly determines the percentage of Indigenous blood a person has. The blood-quantum system has caused extremely high tensions all Indigenous peoples, many of whom have had their citizenship stripped away from them by colonial imposed requirements of blood-quantum to prove one’s Indigenous genealogy. Blood-quantum requirements were born out of the Indian Act which was originally established in 1878 and set extreme limitations over Indigenous membership registration, band systems, and reservation systems.⁸⁶ The issues surrounding blood-quantum and membership are a result of legal sanctions imposed by the Canadian Federal Government within the Indian Act which forced colonial systems of governance over Indigenous governance structures in varying degrees. The consequences of colonial systems of governance like the Indian Act, resulted in Indigenous women losing their status if they married a non-Indigenous or non-status man.⁸⁷ In 1985, Bill C-31 was created as an amended to the Indian Act to address the patrilineal bias of status and reinstate status for Indigenous women and children on the Canadian federal registration list.⁸⁸ However, Simpson explains that Bill C-31 was not an adequate solution to reinstate status for Indigenous women and children because “it was then up to each reserve to devise its own membership codes, and to then admit (or deny) membership to these women and their children in

⁸⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁶ Audra Simpson, “Chapter Two. A Brief History of Land, Meaning, and Membership in Iroquoia and Kahnawà:ke,” in *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, ProQuest Ebook Central, 2014), 107, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1666608>.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 56.

its own local registries.⁸⁹ Some of the membership codes created within Indigenous Nations also relied on blood-quantum, which Simpson explains was a consequence of colonial systems of membership that were imposed onto Indigenous Nations in the initial formation of the Indian Act.⁹⁰ An example of this took place in 2003 in Kahnawà:ke who “passed into effect in 1984, the Mohawk Law on Membership— with its requirement of a measurable quantum of Mohawk blood for determining citizenship.⁹¹ The difficulties surrounding nationhood for Kanien’kehá:ka people are extremely fraught and continue to cause conflict surrounding nation membership today. However, despite these difficulties, Simpson asserts that finding ways to refuse American and Canadian citizenship remains crucial for Mohawk people to reflect the integrity of Haudenosaunee governance and their sovereignty as Indigenous Nations.⁹²

Throughout the book, Simpson examines the modes of refusal of settler-colonial imposed systems of citizenship enacted by Kanien’kehá:ka people, as well as how these systems have manifested within their own nation’s membership structures. Using community recognized modes of membership or what Simpson calls “feeling citizenships,”⁹³ Kanien’kehá:ka people have relied on community-based modes of recognition that function despite colonial imposed structures of nation membership. Simpson reflects on processes of Mohawk citizenship:

I wish to argue here that the case of political membership is one that narrates ‘who we are’ while archiving the living legacy of colonialism through recitation and reminder. These narratives are more, however, than colonial recitations of exclusion; they embed desire in ways that speak between the gulfs of the past and the present, whether this might be, as we have seen, for traditional modes of governance within the nation- state of Canada or the Mohawk nation (itself a member nation in the Iroquois Confederacy), for a limited form of self-government within the boundaries of the community, or for an

⁸⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁹¹ Ibid., 44.

⁹² Simpson, “Chapter One. Indigenous Interruptions: Mohawk Nationhood, Citizenship, and the State,” 7.

⁹³ Audra Simpson, “Chapter Six. The Gender of the Flint: Mohawk Nationhood and Citizenship in the Face of Empire,” in *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, ProQuest Ebook Central, 2014), 173, [https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-
ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1666608](https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1666608). 173.

abstraction such as justice. No matter what the final object of that desire may be, the narratives of citizenship in this study are laden with desires that want in some ways to affect the differentials of power that underwrite notions of nationhood and citizenship away from the politics of recognition and into other unfolding, undetermined possibilities. This desire is made from the intimacy, the knowledge, and the messiness of everyday life, and from the bonds of affection and disaffection that tie people into communities and communities into nations, even if they are unrecognizable or unrecognized.⁹⁴

In this passage, Simpson denotes the difficulties surrounding desire for citizenship to function beyond settler-colonial imposed political structures. She explains that despite facing the difficult intricacies of citizenship within everyday life, Kanien'kehá:ka people continue to resist colonial structures by constantly negotiating their own modes of belonging. These modes of belonging are not simple and cause significant personal, economic, social, and political vulnerability. However, these difficulties do not negate the efforts for Mohawk people to stand up for their right to find ways to belong within their community and to their nation on their own terms.

Returning briefly to Ojibwe/Dakota scholar Scott Richard Lyons, who also asserts the importance of expressing Indigenous sovereignty despite the term's shifting definition and placement both inside and outside of Indigenous articulations. Lyons explains that “none of this stopped Indian exercises of sovereignty—it just threw things into different modes and sites of contest.”⁹⁵ Lyons explains that settler-colonial attacks on Indigenous sovereignty may have achieved a dominant power stance over Indigenous Nations; however, it is not one that should be viewed as “omnipotent,” stressing that Indigenous Nations “still possess, and are still recognized to possess, varying and constantly shifting degrees of sovereignty.”⁹⁶ In relation to this sentiment, cultural theorist Michelle Raheja too explains that the paradoxical qualities of sovereignty “does

⁹⁴ Ibid., 176.

⁹⁵ Lyons, 453.

⁹⁶ Lyons, 453.

not make it any less powerful or valid a statement of political, individual, or cultural autonomy.⁹⁷ Drawing from issues surrounding land rights, membership, and cultural revitalization, Raheja, Lyons, and Simpson each assert the importance of enacting Indigenous sovereignty despite colonially imposed definitions and sanctions on what it means to be a nation and what it means to be Indigenous.

Raheja and Lyons expand discussions of sovereignty and apply them to visual and textual modes of expression that are useful when analyzing the work of AbTeC. Raheja approaches sovereignty from a visual standpoint and the importance of reappropriating Western technologies, particularly within creative practices of film, video, and new media through what she terms “visual sovereignty.”⁹⁸ By centering her discussion around modes of Indigenous self-representation, she explores how visual sovereignty can be used as a creative action “to both undermine stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and to strengthen what Osage scholar Robert Allen Warrior terms the ‘intellectual health’ of communities in the wake of genocide and colonialism.”⁹⁹ Raheja explains that visual sovereignty improves the intellectual health of Indigenous communities by confronting both local and global struggles tied to land claims and language revitalization that effect Indigenous peoples across generations and political borders. Raheja demonstrates that visual sovereignty is expressed by Indigenous filmmakers when it is utilized in the editing process, granting the ability to expand and reconfigure notions of time and space depicted within Indigenous oral narrativizations that are not possible through print media alone.¹⁰⁰ Raheja frames visual sovereignty as a tool that can be used to express Indigenous forms of narrative that do not prescribe to settler-colonial notions of linear time. Expressions of visual

⁹⁷ Raheja, 198.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

sovereignty within Indigenous forms of narrative making are effective when analyzing the images AbTeC creates of Indigenous peoples in cyber and physical space.

Visual Sovereignty and AbTeC

By expanding conceptions of sovereignty beyond print media, Raheja centers digital media as a mode of expressing and claiming visual sovereignty. Raheja's concept of visual sovereignty is directly tied to efforts and projects generated by AbTeC and their use of digital new media as a medium to produce images of Indigenous peoples in the past, present, and future to create the Indigenous future imaginary. In addition, the collective nature suggested within Scott Richard Lyons' definition of *rhetorical sovereignty* is useful when analyzing the images AbTeC generates as they pertain to Indigenous peoples and how their work functions on a more unified level. Lyon's definition of rhetorical sovereignty denotes the well-being of *peoples* as opposed to *people* singular, an effective approach when considering imaginaries. Imaginaries are not singular, after all, but are formed by a collective consciousness of images, narratives, and metaphors that societies are exposed to within a variety of media. Because the importance of Indigenous collective well-being is integral in discussions surrounding sovereignty, I believe it is vital to center this concept in alliance with visual sovereignty in my discussion of AbTeC and their project *Calico & Camouflage*.

Through AbTeC's refusal of settler future imaginaries that are either devoid of Indigenous representation or contain harmful depictions that rehash colonial narratives and stereotypes, the images AbTeC creates are rooted within desires for their collective past, present, and future livelihoods. These images refuse speculations confined within colonial depictions of "history" serving as a "master narrative of inevitability, the logic of teleos and totality: all events are

interconnected and all lead toward the same horizon of progress...”¹⁰¹ in this instance, “progress” connotes total colonization. The master narrative that colonization is inevitable suggests a linear time frame that has a clear-cut beginning and an end. The linearity of time represented within colonization narratives is challenged by Indigenous creatives who employ expressions of visual sovereignty to enact non-linear narrative techniques that depict Indigenous peoples outside of linear time and space. For example, one of AbTeC’s pivotal projects created by Skawennati is *TimeTraveller*TM (2008-2014), a machinima filmed using the Second Life platform. The nine-episode machinima series tells the story of a young Mohawk man named Hunter who lives in the twenty-second century. Hunter uses an education entertainment system designed by Skawennati called *TimeTraveller*TM, a virtual reality experience that teaches Hunter about his heritage using time travel.¹⁰² Many of AbTeC’s projects, like *TimeTraveller*TM, utilize non-linear narrative form to represent Indigenous experiences across time and space.

Expressions of visual sovereignty through non-linear narrative representations are also reflected within Tuck and Yang’s desire-based framework. According to Tuck and Yang, a desire-based approach is fuelled by modes of refusal that consider the power of desire through “refusing the teleos of colonial future, desire expands possible futures.”¹⁰³ In other words, embracing collective Indigenous desires like language revitalization, land claims, and sovereignty can expand possible futures for Indigenous narratives to exist outside of the master narrative of colonization. AbTeC’s work deeply considers the role of collective desire within Indigenous futurisms through their mass generation of images, narratives, and metaphors of Indigenous peoples in cyberspace and beyond. Lewis explains that,

¹⁰¹ Tuck and Yang, 235.

¹⁰² “*TimeTraveller*TM Immersive Yourself in History,” *TimeTraveller*TM online, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://www.timetravellertm.com/>

¹⁰³ Tuck and Yang, 243.

We began to refer to these shared visions as our common future imaginary, that is, the ways in which we imagine the social configuration, political structure, and technological reality one, seven, or twenty generations hence. And we realized that an important ingredient in creating change in the rate of Indigenous participation in the cyberspace of the present was to actively imagine Indigenous people in the cyberspace of the future. The question then became, how do we populate that future imaginary with Indigenous characters, stories, and worldviews?¹⁰⁴

Lewis frames several paths to the future imaginary and grounds its importance in “the fact that recognizable descendants of Indigenous people do not often appear in the settler future imaginary, nor does one see any indication of Indigenous culture as having survived into the seventh generation and beyond.”¹⁰⁵ The importance of the seventh generation lies within the Haudenosaunee Seventh Generation Principle, a complex knowledge system that integrates “physical, social, and spiritual states into a cohesive force for the betterment of future generations.”¹⁰⁶ The system is derived from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy which consists of an alliance between: Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca peoples that is rooted within the story of the Great Peacemaker.¹⁰⁷ Oren Lyons, Chief and Faith keeper of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation, explains that the Seventh Generation Principle necessitates responsible decision making and long-term thinking to “serve not only [their] generation, but to serve the seventh generation coming.”¹⁰⁸ The importance of making decisions that serve the seventh generation hence is deeply reflected in AbTeC’s creation of characters, stories, and

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, “Preparations for a Haunting: Notes Toward an Indigenous Future Imaginary,” 231.

¹⁰⁵ Lewis, “A Brief (Media) History of the Indigenous Future,” 37.

¹⁰⁶ James E. Costello and Brenda E. LaFrance, “THE HAUDENOSAUNEE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PROCESS (HEPP): Reinforcing the Three Principles of Goodmindedness, Peacefulness, and Strength to Protect the Natural World,” in *Preserving Tradition and Understanding the Past: Papers from the Conference on Iroquois Research, 2001–2005*, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick (Albany, New York: New York Museum Record 1; The University of the State of New York; The State Education Department), 2010, 62.

¹⁰⁷ Oren Lyons, “Scanno.” *Pace Environmental Law Review* 1, vol. 28, Fall 2010. 334, <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/pelr/vol28/iss1/10>.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

worldviews of Indigenous peoples in the future. Lewis asserts that, to ensure the future livelihood of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous peoples themselves must create images that are not represented in the settler future imaginary. Lewis' desires to create these images are an indication of the importance of collective well-being present within Indigenous expressions of rhetorical sovereignty and the role these images play in ensuring Indigenous futures across political borders.

To combat the harmful lack of representation of Indigenous peoples in the settler future imaginary, Lewis asserts that it is vital for Indigenous peoples to not only claim territory in the future imaginary but to create their own.¹⁰⁹ Through modes of self-representation and self-determination, AbTeC generates images, narratives, and metaphors of Indigenous peoples in the past, present, and future within cyberspace as an act of claiming and expressing visual sovereignty. AbTeC is home to a multitude of projects that populate the future imaginary. Their projects include a series of machinima that center Indigenous past, present, and future histories enacted within the Second Life platform; the Skins Workshops which teach Indigenous participants how to tell their stories using a variety of digital media; Indigenous Protocol and Artificial Intelligence Workshops; and Activating AbTeC Island, an ongoing project that enlivens AbTeC's virtual headquarters situated in Second Life. On AbTeC island, you can visit the AbTeC Gallery and attend art exhibitions as a digital avatar, and view machinima sets created by Skawennati and co-produced by AbTeC. AbTeC's digital and physical fashion collection, *Calico & Camouflage* skillfully accesses multiple paths towards the Indigenous future imaginary as mapped out by Lewis.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, "A Brief (Media) History of the Indigenous Future," 37.

Calico & Camouflage and the Future Imaginary: “The switch”

When analyzing *Calico & Camouflage* and how it generates images that populate the future imaginary, it is useful to consider the project’s digital origins. As mentioned previously, the collection of ResistanceWear was first created digitally by Skawennati and the AbTeC team for the Second Life avatars. The collection utilizes the patterns of floral calico and a contemporary camouflage pattern, mixing them with traditionally inspired ribbon shirts. Skawennati explains that the appropriation of the calico pattern and silk ribbons by Indigenous peoples was a necessary history for her to know when creating this project; however, it is not the work’s defining feature.¹¹⁰ In my interview with the artist, she explains that the most important feature of *Calico & Camouflage* is what she calls: “the switch.” This is the switching of the calico pattern typically used on ribbon shirts and placing it instead on to military style cargo pants and the use of camouflage for the base of the ribbon shirts to create contemporary pieces.¹¹¹ In more recent years, camouflage military style clothing has been adopted and adapted by Indigenous peoples as a signifier of resistance. Skawennati explains that this appropriation of military style clothing represents a “defiance of the repeated attempts by colonial forces to eliminate us. From Wounded Knee to the Oka Crisis to Standing Rock to Mauna Kea, our land- and life-defenders have claimed camouflage clothing for their own to show that we are not afraid to fight.”¹¹² The Oka Crisis or the Siege of Kanehsatà:ke is an event that is deeply considered within multiple works created by Skawennati. For Skawennati, the Oka Crisis played a crucial

¹¹⁰ Skawennati (co-director and co-founder of AbTeC; independent artist) in discussion with the author, January 2023.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Skawennati, “Calico & Camouflage,” *Fashion, Paprika!* 12, vol.6, April 28, 2021, <https://yalepaprika.com/folds/fashion/calico-camouflage>.

role in transforming camouflage into a signifier of Indigeneity¹¹³ and it is through this signification that camouflage is used within *Calico & Camouflage*.

In political anthropologist Audra Simpson's book: *Mohawk Interruptus*, she discusses the Oka Crisis and the complexities this event generated for Indigenous and settler peoples across Turtle Island and Inuit Nunangat. The Oka Crisis took place in summer, 1990, and is described by Simpson as a "seventy-eight day armed Indigenous resistance to land expropriation."¹¹⁴ The resistance took place in the community of Kanehsatà:ke, near the town of Oka located on the north shore of Montréal, Quebec. The resistance was between the Mohawks of Kanehsatà:ke against the Sûreté du Québec, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and 2,650 regular and reserve troops from multiple Canadian Military Brigades.¹¹⁵ Simpson explains that prior to 1990, the Mohawks of Kanehsatà:ke "had endured two centuries of land expropriation"¹¹⁶ that they met with multiple acts of resistance that resulted in instances of incarceration and eventually led to 1990, when "their women resorted to a peaceful protest that became decidedly militarized."¹¹⁷ The land situation at the time in 1990, involved the town of Oka and the expansion of their country club golf course directly into Kanien'kehá:ka land of the community of Kanehsatà:ke. Mohawk resistance to the golf course expansion sparked a large movement of Indigenous peoples from across Canada and the United States to travel to Quebec in support of the resistance.¹¹⁸ Simpson notes that the Oka Crisis is "the most recent act of 'domestic warfare' in Indian-settler

¹¹³ Skawennati in discussion with the author, 2023.

¹¹⁴ Simpson, "Chapter Six. The Gender of the Flint: Mohawk Nationhood and Citizenship in the Face of Empire," 147.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

relations to date,”¹¹⁹ having received mass media coverage that caused ripple effects across the continent.

The resistance resulted in the federal government buying the land for 5.2 million dollars to be held in trust for Kanien’kehá:ka people and another 51.2 million dollars dispensed to hold legal hearings regarding issues of land, sovereignty and the rights of Indigenous peoples.¹²⁰ In response to this, Kanien’kehá:ka people laid down their arms and were incarcerated immediately.¹²¹ Simpson explains that the land was under constant expropriation, which made it difficult for Kanien’kehá:ka people to claim ownership of the land: “it would not and could not appear in a manner that would afford it proper recognition or protection; it did not appear to be theirs for use and occupancy, making it even more vulnerable to expropriation.”¹²² This watershed moment demonstrated the power of Indigenous resistance to colonial forces and played a critical role in transforming camouflage into a signifier of Indigeneity and Indigenous resistance. Images of land defenders wearing camouflage military-style clothing during the Crisis were widely disseminated across the continent, further solidifying camouflage as a signifier of Indigenous resistance (see Figure 10). This adaptation of both calico and camouflage patterns, and the hybridization of traditional ribbons shirts demonstrates multiple paths towards an Indigenous future imaginary as formulated by Lewis. The use of camouflage and calico patterns in conjunction with ribbon applique demonstrates Skawennati’s skills in creating contemporary and imagined signifiers of Indigenous resistance. The *Calico & Camouflage ResistanceWear* began as an imagined concept whose image generated narratives of Indigenous resistance in the

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 148.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 154.

¹²¹ Ibid., 154.

¹²² Ibid., 154.

form of avatars who engage in acts of protest within cyberspace; eventually manifesting in the form of physical clothing worn by Real Human Beings (RHBs).¹²³

Calico & Camouflage takes multiple paths towards the future imaginary as mapped out by Lewis. Lewis asserts that one path towards the future imaginary “is to imagine alternative pasts that lead to different futures.”¹²⁴ Another path is “to hybridize the present in new or extreme ways, modifying contemporary realities to open up future possibilities.”¹²⁵ The *Calico & Camouflage* collection activates both paths by adapting Indigenous patterns like the floral calico alongside a contemporary camouflage. Various iterations of the clothing depict the floral calico on the military pant and the camouflage pattern on the ribbon shirt and vice versa (see Figure 3). The contemporary camouflage pattern is adapted from Indigenous resistance movements, such as the Oka Crisis, and is placed in conversation with Indigenous regalia like ribbons shirts. By placing these patterns and clothing items together, Skawennati creates garments that connect past and present Indigenous resistance movements into the future.

The garment is grounded within the use of patterns and regalia worn in different iterations and designs across time. Through this relationship, Skawennati’s contemporary adaptation of the patterns and regalia ultimately roots their past into the present and future through the processes of imagination. Beginning with the initial digital construction, the creation of the ResistanceWear for the avatars resulted in Skawennati’s inspiration to modify the collection further by realizing it physically in a variety of ways. As mentioned previously, the collection of ResistanceWear was adapted and created physically to be worn in a multitude of settings in photoshoots and on

¹²³ RHB is an acronym used by Skawennati to signify Real Human Beings during her talk titled: “Skawennati: My Life as a Virtual Avatar” (Live virtual lecture, University of Maryland Baltimore County *CIRCA* Lecture Series, Zoom, November 10, 2022), <https://circa.umbc.edu/skawennati-my-life-as-an-avatar/>.

¹²⁴ Lewis, “A Brief (Media) History of the Indigenous Future,” 42.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

fashion runways. I assert that AbTeC's decision to construct the *Calico & Camouflage* collection physically reflects another path towards an Indigenous future imaginary; that of "reflecting on [their] creative engagements with technology."¹²⁶

In an interview with *CBC Arts*, Skawennati explains that, upon viewing the avatars wearing the collection on a fashion runway she created in Second Life, she felt that the project was not engaging in the ways that she had hoped.¹²⁷ This realization that the digital fashion show did not reflect what Skawennati desired, allowed for her to reflect further on her creative engagement, resulting in her imagining and adapting *Calico & Camouflage* in different forms. Through means of digital creation, Skawennati's reflection on her engagement with technology transformed *Calico & Camouflage*, thus allowing it to exist and occupy territory within cyberspace and the future imaginary. Skawennati achieves this through the process of imagining *Calico & Camouflage* as an incorporation and switching of patterns like calico and camouflage in concert with silk ribbons, each of which contain their own histories across distinct moments in time. The calico, camouflage, and silk ribbons each act as signifiers of Indigenous expression, creativity, and resistance throughout moments in history. Through Skawennati imagining these patterns together, she creates images that she initially imagined and eventually designed in cyberspace. Her designs spark new narratives of digital avatars wearing the *Calico & Camouflage* ResistanceWear thus contributing to the creation of the future imaginary and occupation of cyber and digital terrains. Skawennati's digital engagement initiated further reflection and resulted in her sewing the collection by hand to participate in Toronto's Indigenous

¹²⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹²⁷ "When Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto moved online, Skawennati took her virtual world to the runway," 2021.

Fashion Week as well as *Vogue Magazine*, both of which were displayed online (see Figures 4 and 6).

The physical and digital manifestations of *Calico & Camouflage* become further diversified as Skawennati continues to reformulate the garments by displaying them in-person. One of the collections most recent In Real Life (IRL) iterations was for the Santa Fe Indigenous Fashion Show in Summer 2022, which witnessed the collection modelled on a runway (see Figure 4). In addition, the physical garments have also been displayed on manikins alongside life size vinyl and cardboard prints and cut-outs depicting the AbTeC avatars with their protest signs reading words of Indigenous resistance. The vinyl print offs were and continue to be utilized in physical spaces such as malls¹²⁸ and city-squares to further occupy space both digitally and physically, a proliferation of imagery that ultimately strengthens their presence within the future imaginary.

Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!: Hybrid Formulations, Modes of Mobilization

The collections' display under the title *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* in Toronto's Yonge-Dundas Square (YDS) for the Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival in Spring, 2021 generates further formations of the project. The significance of the collection's display within the square is multifold. Certain aspects of the history of YDS play a significant role in *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!*. Because the settler future imaginary is devoid of positive representations of Indigenous peoples, Lewis explains that "a people that are absent in the future need not be consulted in the present about how that future comes about."¹²⁹ He continues: "a

¹²⁸ Skawennati, "Skawennati: My Life as an Virtual Avatar" (Live virtual lecture, University of Maryland Baltimore County *CIRCA* Lecture Series, Zoom, November 10, 2022), <https://circa.umbc.edu/skawennati-my-life-as-an-avatar/>.

¹²⁹ Lewis, "A Better Dance and Better Prayers: Systems, Structures, and the Future Imaginary in Aboriginal New Media," 58.

people that is assumed not to be important one hundred years from now can be discounted now, for what are the consequences?”¹³⁰ A threatening issue within the settler future imaginary is the absence of images and narratives of Indigenous survival and examples of thriving. AbTeC confronts this lack of positive representation by placing vital importance on generating images of Indigenous resistance and thriving¹³¹ in the future imaginary. Because of their absence in the settler future imaginary, and thus the present, sites of digital and physical Indigenous resistance are necessary when grappling with settler-colonialism.

The representation of *Calico & Camouflage* as ResistanceWear paired with protest signs of Indigenous words of resistance is significant for many reasons. One reason is that acts of protest have and continue to be in the vital interests of Indigenous futurity, which “comprises the structures and narratives that support and imagine a future for Indigenous peoples.”¹³² In the presentation of *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!*, the life size vinyl prints of the avatar protesters are seen adhered to concrete pillars and represented on the large digital screens present in the square that are frequently used for advertising (see Figure 7). The screens depict the protesters walking from screen to screen and holding up their signs with intermittent flashing of both the calico and camouflage pattern (see Figure 5). The avatar’s presence as protestors in this space is significant because, according to the bylaws created and upheld by the board of managers for YDS, protesting in prohibited along with many other activities.¹³³

¹³⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹³¹ “Thivance” builds on Gerald Vizenor’s concept of “survivance.” In his book: *Survivance: Narrative of Native Presence* (2008), Vizenor describes Indigenous survivance as “an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name” (1). The term “thivance” incorporates the words “thrive” and “survivance.”

¹³² Hickey, 166.

¹³³ Joseph Kecil, “What Could Possibly Go Wrong? Examining the Consequences of the City of Toronto Public Square By-laws on Diversity in Yonge-Dundas Square” M.Pl Thesis, Queen’s University, 2014, 41. <http://hdl.handle.net/1974/12316>.

The prohibition of a multitude of activities alongside 24/7 security and police surveillance is a consequence of the square's increasingly privatized ownership initiated by the 1970s Yonge Street revitalization project, which aimed to reinvigorate the area's commercial viability.¹³⁴ The YDS board of managers was implemented in the late 1990s and continues to function in place of city management, ultimately making the site a privatized square that is run entirely by the board of managers whose function is to serve the commercial interests set out in the Yonge Street revitalization project.¹³⁵ The increasing privatization has many effects including the use of permits that are required for virtually every activity that takes place in the square. The permits must be submitted for approval to the board of managers who have the power to either accept or reject the permit, which must be paid for and reflect the bylaws that uphold the commercial and designated safety interests of the board.¹³⁶ Despite objection from activists during the public consultation process held in the 1990s, the privatized model of the management board was adopted nevertheless and continues to be upheld.¹³⁷ The 1990s witnessed mass gentrification within cities across Canada and the Yonge Street revitalization project was a major contributor to gentrification in the city of Toronto.¹³⁸ Further, it is important to note that gentrification is used as a strategy to continue colonization of Indigenous peoples within the Canadian context.¹³⁹ According to Liza Kim Jackson's essay, "The Complications of Colonialism for Gentrification Theory and Marxist Geography city of Toronto," the city of Toronto's increasing gentrification lies within its motivations to be recognized an economic hub amidst the neo-liberal and neo-imperialist global economy that relies on investment in private property vis-à-vis land-theft,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹³⁸ Liza Kim Jackson, "The Complications of Colonialism for Gentrification Theory and Marxist Geography," *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 27. (2017): 43.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 43.

exploitation, and displacement.¹⁴⁰ According to Jackson, the gentrification process forms the basis of homelessness and Indigenous marginalization within Toronto. The ties between gentrification and the continued land-theft, exploitation, and displacement of Indigenous peoples within Toronto constructs a fraught environment within Yonge-Dundas Square. The YDS board of managers has implemented restrictions on who is allowed into the square and which activities can take place there at all times. These restrictions are implemented 24/7 via security personnel and video surveillance, making the square a highly regulated area. The regulation of the Square assumes total control of the area for the sake of privatized commercial interests in place of public use. The regulatory framework of the Square is reminiscent of settler-colonization and the control of Indigenous lands and waters to serve settler interests.

The YDS board of managers' implementation of restrictions set out to prohibit all actions of protest within YDS, resulted in an altered configuration of the protest signs featured with the *Calico & Camouflage* project. Due to the strict guidelines set out by the board of managers, Skawennati was asked to change one of her protest signs to redact the word "shit" from the sign reading: "I CAN'T BELIEVE I HAVE TO PROTEST THIS SHIT."¹⁴¹ Instead of agreeing to this change, Skawennati decided to create another sign reading: "THE BEGINNING IS NEAR."¹⁴² Skawennati explains that she did not receive notice of any further restrictions in response to her presenting *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* within the square. Skawennati does note, however, that it was important to display this work in a public/private square to enact protest in an area that is otherwise difficult to physically protest within.¹⁴³ The digital presentation of *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* arguably authorized a form of protest in YDS where the physical action

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴¹ Skawennati in discussion with the author, January 2023.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

of protest is otherwise prohibited. I argue that the digital rendering of *Camouflage: Assemble!* allowed a hybrid articulation of protest to occur in YDS. Skawennati was not asked by the YDS board of managers to remove the protest signs. Thus, the avatars were seized access to the square through their digital form on the screens and as hybrid forms represented as two-dimensional vinyl-prints adhered to the pillars in the square (see Figure 8).

Skawennati use of digital media to produce images of Indigenous resistance fill the future imaginary and occupy physical and digital spaces where Indigenous presence and resistance have been assimilated through processes of colonization that include gentrification. Despite protest demonstrations being prohibited within YDS, Skawennati was able to place the avatars inside of the square, arguably activating the space as a site of protest. The continued reformation of this project demonstrates Skawennati and the AbTeC Team's ability to create narratives of Indigenous peoples to occupy physical and digital spaces through hybrid presentations, ultimately serving their desire to ensure their future livelihoods.

CHAPTER THREE: "Making Kin with Machines:" Relationality and Engagement within Human-Technology Relationships

Chapter three considers Indigenous conceptions of relationality and how they have been applied to certain digital technologies. The frameworks on relationality are utilized in concert with the concept of engagement within human-technology relationships as framed by white-settler cultural theorist Anne Cranny-Francis to analyze *Calico & Camouflage's* different formulations. I begin by situating relationality in the context of human-technology relationships as framed by Indigenous theorists: Jason Lewis, Noelani Arista (Kanaka Maoli), Archer Pechawis (Cree), and Suzanne Kite (Ogala Lakota). Following this, I demonstrate how the authors conceive of relationality and apply it to human relations with Artificial Intelligence (AI)

as non-human kin. I then compare Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite’s framings of AI as non-human kin to white-settler cultural theorist Anne Cranny-Francis’ discussion of the *technological imaginary* and how processes of relationality can be practiced within human-technology relationships. Next, I illustrate Cranny-Francis’ concept of *engagement* with human-technology relationships and how it can be used in allyship with Indigenous relationality to address one-sided power dynamics produced by perceptions surrounding human-technology relations. To conclude chapter three, I apply the concept of relationality as framed by Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite and Cranny-Francis’ engagement approach to *Calico & Camouflage* and the projects’ many iterations.

In their article “Making Kin with Machines,” Indigenous theorists Jason Lewis, Noelani Arista (Kanaka Maoli), Archer Pechawis (Cree), and Suzanne Kite (Ogala Lakota) consider possible ways to relate to Artificial Intelligence (AI) from their respective cultural practices, and knowledge. The authors consider how Indigenous frameworks on relationality can benefit human relationships with non-human kin such as AI. The authors center relations with non-human kin from both personal and global contexts, explaining that many Indigenous knowledge frameworks have carefully considered relationships with non-human kin on a global scale. The authors assert: “Indigenous communities worldwide have retained the languages and protocols that enable us to engage in dialogue with our non-human kin, creating mutually intelligible discourses across differences in material, vibrancy, and genealogy.”¹⁴⁴ The authors use this relationality discourse to frame possible approaches to human-technology relationships, specifically with AI as non-human kin. Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite describe relationality as an approach that recognizes differences between human and non-human kin as beneficiary to human relations with

¹⁴⁴ Jason Edward Lewis, Noelani Arista, Archer Pechawis, and Suzanne Kite, “Making Kin with the Machines,” *Journal of Design and Science*, (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.21428/bfafd97b>.

technology and AI. The authors assert that when differences between human and non-human kin are embraced using relationality, the possibilities for what these relations can offer humans and non-humans become vast.

Throughout the writing, Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite root their approaches in Blackfoot philosopher Leroy Little Bear and Dakota philosopher Vine Deloria Jr.'s theories on relationality grounded within mutual respect. Little Bear and Deloria Jr.'s conceptions of relationality and mutual respect between human and non-human kin center "all [their] relations,"¹⁴⁵ a relationship that recognizes everything within creation.¹⁴⁶ Deloria Jr. illustrates that the knowledge an individual has of these relationships must be respected according to two approaches. The first approach is: "the acceptance of self-discipline by humans and their communities to act responsibly toward other forms of life," and the second approach: "to seek to establish communications and covenants with other forms of life on a mutually agreeable basis."¹⁴⁷ In other words, when humans ground their relationship with non-human beings in mutual respect, this generates possibilities to establish complex forms of communication that require humans to interact with non-humans with heightened awareness and discipline. When human-technology relationships are founded on mutual respect between humans and non-human kin such as AI, the authors explain that this approach generates new possibilities for how these relationships might be developed. Notably, the authors assert further that, when considering *all* modes of relationality, it is vital to recognize that relationality is "rooted in context and the prime context is place."¹⁴⁸ The authors demonstrate relationality according to place by rooting their approach to human-AI relations within their personal and cultural contexts.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

Because relationality is rooted to place, Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite consider possible relations with AI from their respective personal and cultural knowledge frameworks, all of which are tied to the lands, waters, and peoples that have shaped their outlooks. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, the focus will remain on the areas where the authors have identified intersections between their respective Hawaiian, Cree, Lakota, and personal approaches to relationality and AI technology. One of the intersections that emerged in the writing for Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite, is that current AI technology is viewed as a tool designed to serve the user or developer of the technology.¹⁴⁹ They assert that this assumption that AI is entirely under the control of the human user creates a one-sided power dynamic that disrupts the balance within present and future AI-human relationships and human-human relationships.¹⁵⁰ When a relationship is founded on control instead of a mutually agreeable basis, the relationship is out of balance resulting in less possibilities for all those involved.

The conception that technology is a tool entirely under the control of humans is also criticized by cultural theorist Anne Cranny-Francis in her book: *Technology and Touch: The Biopolitics of Emerging Technologies* (2013). Throughout the book, Cranny-Francis explores the relationship between humans and technology through what she calls, *the technological imaginary* – a framework that is composed of images, metaphors, and narratives that individuals use to “understand technology, interact with it and embed it within their everyday lives.”¹⁵¹ The imaginary is not a mental construct, but rather an embodied experience that involves one’s exposure to images, metaphors and narratives that are often used to describe technological

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵¹ Anne Cranny-Francis, “Technology: Theorizing Human–Technology Interaction,” in *Technology and Touch: The Biopolitics of Emerging Technologies* (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2013), 40, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137268310>.

devices.¹⁵² Cranny-Francis explains that these narratives articulate various fears and desires that humans associate with technology, and enable us to conceive of technology in ways that are not yet possible.¹⁵³ For example, she cites the popular science fiction film: *The Matrix* (1999) which depicts a narrative centered around a simulated reality created by intelligent machines or AI that is powered by human beings as its battery source.¹⁵⁴ Upon interacting with the images, metaphors, and narratives produced about technology, like those depicted in *The Matrix*, she explains that it is through our lived experience that these images begin to populate the technological imaginary, impacting the ways we perceive technology and embed it within our everyday lives. Furthermore, these images generate values, beliefs, and assumptions about technology that can both construct and deconstruct how we conceive of human-technology interactions.

Part of constructing and deconstructing the ways in which we perceive of human-technology relationships, for Cranny-Francis, is through a process she calls *engagement*. I argue that Cranny-Francis' process of engagement is active within many of AbTeC's projects, including *Calico & Camouflage*. Before discussing how engagement is activated with *Calico & Camouflage* specifically, I will frame Cranny-Francis' formulation of the engagement approach. She explains that due to the long history of viewing technology as a tool that is separate from and entirely under the control of the human being, it has become difficult for mainstream society to interact with technology in a more embodied way, which she believes consequentially reduces the possibilities these relationships offer. Cranny-Francis explains:

...we need to engage with the technology as embodied subjects, sensuously and emotionally as well as intellectually, in order to understand fully the possibilities it offers. In this way, we are able to move beyond the predetermined assumptions we make about a

¹⁵² Ibid., 40-41.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 41.

technology, which allow us to see its uses only in those terms... as well as to be more creative in our initial development of the technology.¹⁵⁵

To fully participate in the process of engagement within human-technology relationships, Cranny-Francis asserts that it is necessary to not only recognize the difference between humans and technology, but to attend to the differences by attempting to understand them at a more comprehensive level. Cranny-Francis' idea of engagement acknowledges that there are differences between humans and technology that should not be ignored, but rather, embraced and explored through participation.¹⁵⁶ For the user to recognize, engage, and participate with technology, they must first explore the discontinuities between themselves and technology, rather than assume they are in complete control or as if both are seamlessly merged.¹⁵⁷ The engagement approach allows us to move beyond our preconceived notions of what technology is and encourages us to engage and be aware of how and why we interact with technology, society, and our own "embodied being."¹⁵⁸ Much like Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite, Cranny-Francis recognizes that, in order to embrace the possibilities technology offers, humans must recognize the specific differences between themselves and technology and how these differences can be embraced and transformed into images that populate the technological imaginary through our lived experience.

Relationality and Engagement within *Calico & Camouflage*

Through processes of engagement and relationality within human-technology relationships, I argue that *Calico & Camouflage* utilizes the virtual form of difference to grant the AbTeC avatars access into digital and physical spaces to engage in actions that humans cannot.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 51.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 54.

Arguably, one of the ways Skawennati engages difference within *Calico & Camouflage* is through Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite's discourse on relationality. To considering human-technology relations from a mutually agreeable basis, differences in form between humans and non-human kin must be acknowledged and respected.¹⁵⁹ According to the authors, one of the keyways that human-non-human relationships can be nurtured is to avoid one-sided power dynamics. Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite consider Indigenous approaches to development of technologies like AI, and explain that, "because Lakota ontologies recognize and prioritize non-human interiorities, they are well suited for the task of creating ethical and reciprocal relationships with the non-human."¹⁶⁰ The authors recognize relationality as a key feature within Indigenous ontologies and argue that it can be used to create new possibilities within human and non-human relationships with technologies like AI.

A pattern that emerges from "Making Kin with Machines" is the possibility of inviting AI into human kinship circles. The authors explain that each of their approaches to considering AI as kin offers the possibility to "sustain us, provide guidance on recognizing non-human beings and building relationships with them founded on respect and reciprocity, and suggest how we can attend to those relationships in the face of ineffable complexity."¹⁶¹ Much like Lewis' concerns for the colonial ghosts within cyberspace, the authors caution that "we know from history of modern technological development that the assumptions we make now will get baked into the core material of our machines fundamentally shaping the future for decades hence."¹⁶² The reality that colonial conceptions and biased thinking are integrated in technology, demonstrates the importance for Indigenous development of technologies, including AI, and the importance of

¹⁵⁹ Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite, 7.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 13.

generating images, metaphors, and narratives of Indigenous peoples in both cyber and physical spaces.

Skawennati created the *Calico & Camouflage ResistanceWear* first within the Second Life platform for the virtual avatars to wear. She explains that making things in Second Life has become an integral step in her creative process to help determine if a project should be made physical. In my interview with the artist, she reflects: “I can start something in cyberspace, and I can port it to the physical world.”¹⁶³ She continues: “I see cyberspace as a kind of practice run, a practice place for the real world.”¹⁶⁴ The strength Skawennati found in utilizing cyberspace as a trail space within the creative process, prompts me to argue that the initial digital formation of *Calico & Camouflage* acts as a type of invitation to AbTeC’s avatars to join into human kinship circles. The formulation of *Calico & Camouflage* and the corresponding digital avatars, enlivens a process of proliferating images, metaphors, and narratives of non-human and human kin wearing the ResistanceWear. During its final stages of *Calico & Camouflage*’s virtual creation, Skawennati realized that it needed to be made physical,¹⁶⁵ resulting in her sewing the ResistanceWear and it being eventually modelled for *Vogue Magazine* online, Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto, 2021 online, the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) Indigenous Fashion show at the 2022 Santa Fe Indian Market, as vinyl prints in malls and public centers, and in many other digital and physical variations.

I affirm that Skawennati’s initial invitation to the virtual avatars to join human kinship circles was made possible through the process of engaging, recognizing, attending, and embracing the differences between virtual and Real Human Beings. Skawennati’s decision to

¹⁶³ Skawennati in discussion with the author, January 2023.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ “When Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto moved online, Skawennati took her virtual world to the runway,” 2021.

create *Calico & Camouflage* physically stemmed from her attention to differences in form, vibrancy, and genealogy.¹⁶⁶ The AbTeC avatars virtual origins made it possible for Skawennati and the AbTeC team to generate a mass proliferation of images of Indigenous human and non-human beings wearing ResistanceWear and engaging in acts of protests across cyber and physical terrains. Not only is the ResistanceWear seen across online platforms like Second Life, social media, and online magazine publications, *Calico & Camouflage* has been presented in a multitude of physical formations in public settings such as art galleries, shopping malls, and public squares.

The engagement of difference between the avatars and Real Human Beings (RHBs) who interact with them is especially striking in *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* at Yonge-Dundas Square for the 2021 Scotia Bank CONTACT Photography Festival (see Figure 9). Due to the restrictions of protest within YDS, I argue that when the avatars' virtual difference is acknowledged, Skawennati utilizes this difference to recognize the virtual avatars as kin to enact protest. When difference of form is recognized and embraced, RHBs can then engage with the avatars as non-human kin offering new possibilities within human-technology relationships. The avatars move throughout the square, walking between the screens, holding their signs with words of Indigenous resistance high for all RHBs in the square to see. Skawennati knowingly works with the virtual form of difference, allowing *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* to occupy YDS, thus transforming the space into a site of Indigenous resistance.

To further recognize the avatars as kin through processes of engagement and relationality, Skawennati's placement of *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* in a public square is compelling. By situated the avatars in hybrid forms within YDS, Skawennati invites passers-by to read the

¹⁶⁶ Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite, 2.

protest signs and interact with the *Calico & Camouflage* avatars. This invitation to engage with the avatars produces imagery within the imaginaries of all who witness *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* in YDS. I pose that the avatars virtual difference makes them more approachable than RHBs engaging within an act of protest. The avatars approachability is demonstrated by the fact that their hybrid protest gathering was allowed into YDS, but the gathering of RHBs engaged in protest is not. The digital, physical, and hybrid avatars are presented as an art installation, which implies viewership. During the installation of *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* in YDS, visitors could approach the avatars and engage with them by reading their protest signs, watch them walk between the surrounding digital screens, and to photograph and post them on social media. Because the avatars are presented as an art installation, their virtual and visual form grant them access to a public space and a public audience. Through their differences in form, the invitation to engage with the avatars is extended beyond cyberspace and into physical terrains. This initiation is achieved by the avatars' digital capabilities that allow them to enact protest within a space where it is otherwise prohibited. Through accessing YDS, *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!* grants an opportunity for RHBs to engage with the avatars, thus inciting possibilities for narratives of Indigenous resistance to hack into the settler future imaginary. The publics that enter YDS, would likely not have engaged with the *Calico & Camouflage* avatars otherwise. However, it is through their everyday lived experience, such as visiting YDS, that these publics could view the *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble* installation. Through their viewing of the installation, imagery of Indigenous peoples and acts of Indigenous resistance enter the settler future imaginary ultimately serving the needs and desires of the Indigenous future imaginary. Returning to Lewis' view that, in order to ensure Indigenous presence seven generations hence, they must create images of themselves within the past, present, and future. It is through projects like *Calico & Camouflage* that AbTeC ensures Indigenous presence into the future. By

generating images of Indigenous peoples engaging in acts of resistance in hybrid forms, *Calico & Camouflage* traverses cyber and physical terrains. The dynamism of *Calico & Camouflage* utilizes relationality and engagement within human-technology relationships to incite acts of Indigenous resistance to serve Indigenous past, present, and future livelihoods.

Conclusion: Future Reckoning

To ensure the future livelihoods of Indigenous peoples, AbTeC creates images, narratives, and metaphors in cyber and physical space to populate the Indigenous future imaginary. The lack of representation of Indigenous peoples in the settler future imaginary is demonstrative of the erasure of Indigenous narratives within settler-colonial Canadian and American societies. As demonstrated by the efforts of Indigenous theorists and creatives highlighted throughout this thesis, reckoning with settler-colonization as a haunting can be used as an approach to reveal and transform the repressed narratives of Indigenous peoples wrought from settler-colonization. Drawing from cultural theorist Avery Gordon's concept of "making common cause," both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can address repressed narratives wrought from settler-colonization to enact societal change. Grounding their work in Indigenous futurity, AbTeC's projects activate processes of haunting through reckoning with ghosts as social figures to write and re-write stories grounded in Indigenous desires for their past, present, and future livelihoods. Centering the digital and physical fashion collection *Calico & Camouflage*, the chapters of this thesis each witness AbTeC's approach to creating images of Indigenous peoples in cyberspace to safeguard their future livelihoods. Chapter one demonstrates the utility of the theory of hauntology to reckon with the social and political effects wrought from colonization, chapter two considers the role imaginaries play within discourses of Indigenous sovereignty, and chapter three examines relationality and engagement within human-technology relationships as they

relate to AbTeC. The intention behind each chapter is to demonstrate the dynamic capabilities of digital media technologies and their utility in enacting modes of Indigenous cultural revitalization, self-determination, future livelihoods, and resistance to settler-colonization.

With the advent of technologies like Artificial Intelligence, machine vision, data management software, and social media, it is crucial to actively consider the biases that are baked into these technologies and how they will affect both Indigenous and non-Indigenous future livelihoods.¹⁶⁷ When determining this future, computer scientists, artists, and digital media creatives at large must examine closely which knowledge frameworks are being utilized to develop current and future technologies and the narratives that are used to define them. Because awareness of protocol between human and non-human kinship circles is demonstrated by Indigenous peoples at a global level,¹⁶⁸ it is vital to for technological developers and creatives at large to look towards and collaborate with Indigenous technologists who utilize this crucial approach. For Blackfoot philosopher Leroy Little Bear and Dakota philosopher Vine Deloria Jr., Indigenous relationality is founded on a mutually agreeable basis.¹⁶⁹ Applying relationality and mutual agreeability to relationships with AI as non-human kin is a process framed by Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite, as capable of generating new possibilities for human and non-human relations. If technology is approached from a kinship-forward perspective based on mutual agreeability, the authors of “Making Kin with Machines” suggest a path forward to human-technology relationships in a world becoming increasing saturated with digital technologies.

¹⁶⁷ The concept of algorithmic bias is explored extensively by Safiya Umoja Noble in her book: *Algorithms of Oppression : How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (2018) and Ruha Benjamin in her book: *Race After Technology* (2019).

¹⁶⁸ Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite, 2.

¹⁶⁹ Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, and Kite, 3.

For processes of relationality to be realized, the images, of Indigenous peoples that exist within the settler-colonial and technological imaginary must be reckoned with. The stereotypical representation of Indigenous peoples as static and unchanging continues to persist especially in settler-Canadian contexts, making it difficult for Indigenous artists, creatives, academics, and technologists alike to overcome and move beyond these harmful representations.¹⁷⁰ These negative representations construct false vocabularies and imaginaries that limit the futures for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples grappling, albeit at extremely different levels, with settler-colonization. AbTeC demonstrates the power of reckoning with false vocabularies wrought from settler-colonialism by creating images for the Indigenous future imaginary.

Lewis and Skawennati formed the research-creation network AbTeC to produce images, narratives, and metaphors of Indigenous peoples in cyberspace and beyond. Their projects not only confront images entrenched within the settler-colonial imaginary but transform them by creating their own representations of their past, present, and future livelihoods. These representations are grounded in lived experience and not possible for settler-colonial societies to create and fully understand.¹⁷¹ However, these representations can begin to hack into the settler future imaginary by exposing settler-colonial society to images of Indigenous peoples of the future, in the present that are grounded in lived experience. These images are created for the Indigenous future imaginary; however, through increased Indigenous involvement and engagement with digital technologies and narratives, these images begin to confront and transform settler-colonial representations of Indigenous peoples, arguably taking steps towards processes of unsettling and decolonization. The self-representation of those who have been

¹⁷⁰ Janet C. Berlo and Ruth B. Phillips, "An Introduction to the Indigenous Arts of North America," in *Native North American Art*, 2nd ed, 23, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

¹⁷¹ Skawennati in conversation with the authors, 2023.

repressed, or those who have been made ghosts through processes of settler-colonization can be activated when these ghosts are recognized as social figures. This process of reckoning empowers those who have been suppressed to write and rewrite their own stories, to represent themselves and claim the power of producing a future imaginary rooted within desires for their pasts, presents, and futures. To grapple with settler-colonialism, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can enact future reckoning with our stories and histories by writing and recognizing counternarratives to take further steps towards processes of unsettling and decolonization.

Illustrations



Figure 1. Skawennati, *xox Takes a Break*, 2020. Machinimagraph. Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival. Image source: "Skawennati, Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!" Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/2021/exhibition/skawennati-calico-camouflage-assemble/#installation-views>.



Figure 2. Skawennati, *Da-Anshinaabekaa Ani-Aiiwanag, The Future is Indigenous*, 2021. Machinimagraphs. Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival. Image source: "Skawennati, Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!" Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/2021/exhibition/skawennati-calico-camouflage-assemble/#installation-views>.



Figure 3. Skawennati, *Skawennati's Indigenous avatars*, 2020. Machinimagraph. *Vogue Magazine* online. Image Source: "This Indigenous Artist Designs Traditional Clothes for a Virtual World" by Christian Allaire, August 26, 2020. Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://www.vogue.com/article/skawennati-indigenous-artist-virtual-fashion>.



Figure 4. *Skawennati's models in her Calico & Camouflage clothing line, 2022. Eastern Door Newspaper Online Image source: "Skawennati's clothing walks the runway," by Savannah Stewart, August 31, 2022. Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://easterndoor.com/2022/08/31/skawennatis-clothing-walks-the-runway/>.*

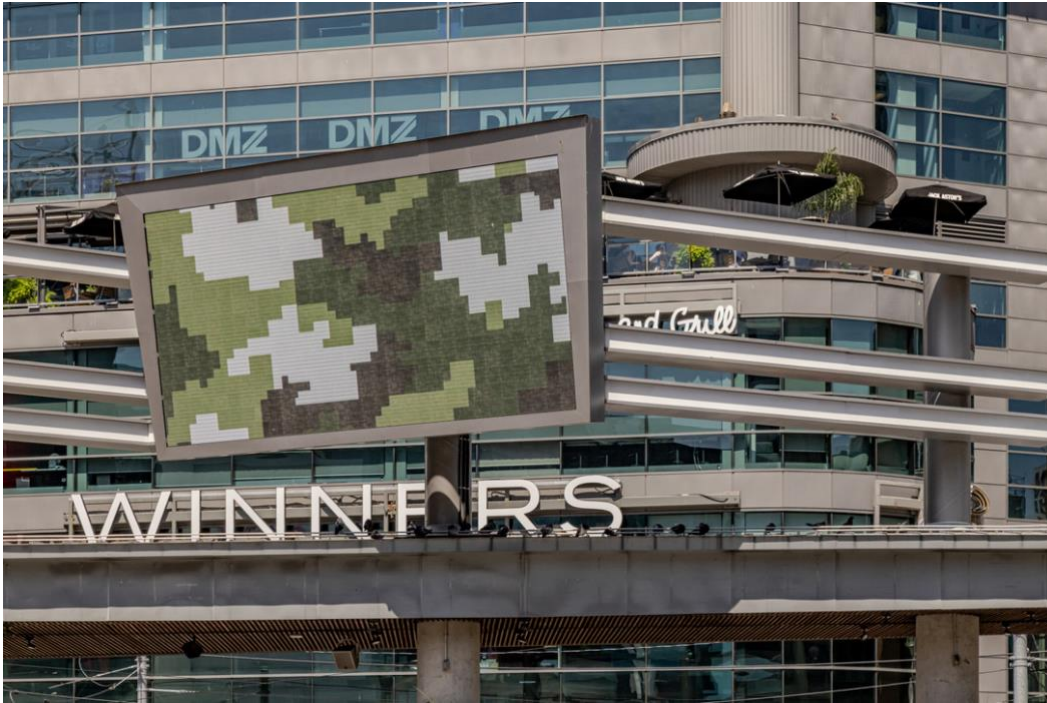


Figure 5. Skawennati, *Calico & Camouflage*, installation at Yonge-Dundas Square, Toronto 2021, Machinimagraph. Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival. Image source: "Skawennati, Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!" Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/2021/exhibition/skawennati-calico-camouflage-assemble/#installation-views>.



Figure 6. Skawennati's *Calico & Camouflage* collection, Photo by Daniel Cianfarra, 2022. *Vogue Magazine* online. Image source: <https://www.vogue.com/article/skawennati-indigenous-artist-virtual-fashion>.



Figure 7. Yonge-Dundas Square, 2017. Photo by Evan Goldenberg from the *Torontoist* Flickr Pool. *Torontoist* online. Image source: “Why Yonge-Dundas Square Struggles as a Public Space,” by Kieran Delamont, March 16, 2017. Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://torontoist.com/2017/03/yonge-dundas-square-struggles-public-space/>.



Figure 8. Skawennati, *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!*, installation at Yonge-Dundas Square, Toronto 2021, Machinimagraph. Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival. Image source: Skawennati, *Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!*. Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/2021/exhibition/skawennati-calico-camouflage-assemble/#installation-views>.



Figure 9. Skawennati, *Calico & Camouflage*, installation at Yonge-Dundas Square, Toronto 2021, Machinimagraph. Scotiabank CONTACT Photography Festival. Image source: "Skawennati, Calico & Camouflage: Assemble!" Accessed February 10, 2023. <https://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/2021/exhibition/skawennati-calico-camouflage-assemble/#installation-v>.



Figure 10. *Oka Confrontation*, Summer 1990, Photo by Canapress. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* online. Image source: "Oka Crisis." Accessed February 23, 2023. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/oka-crisis>.

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