Reclaiming Turtle Island: Activating design sovereignty through deep time; an urban hide tanner's case study.

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ABSTRACT

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Urban centres are often sites of settler colonial violence and erasure for Indigenous peoples as territorial dispossession and displacement impact identity, belonging, and self-determining futures. This research-creation zine shares reflections on an Indigenous-led collaborative design (co-design) case study that follows the development of the first dedicated hide tanning cultural hub in the urban setting of Tiotiàh:ke/Montréal. This research is engaged through Indigenous autoethnography and land/place-based visual storywork, utilizing research-creation and zine-making through photography, illustration, graphic design, reflexive writing and personal archive. This thesis reflects on design sovereignty in relation to generating Indigenous land-based futures and considers the roles of architecture, design and the built environment in settler colonialism and Indigenous sovereignty. This research applies a critical necropolitical lens alongside Indigenous strategies of inquiry to re-imagine urban relations through placekeeping, land-based pedagogies and Indigenous sovereignty over deep time.

Keywords: Indigenous design pedagogy, co-design, design sovereignty, land-based futures, Indigenous futures, placekeeping, place-based approach, Indigenous autoethnography, visual storywork

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INTRODUCTION

Research Focus & Objectives

In developing the Parc Ionkwatia'tarò:ron co-design case study, my research seeks to contribute to the globally emergent dialogue around *design sovereignty* taking place between Indigenous architects, designers, and scholars. Pushing the discourse of decolonizing design towards "dismantling colonization by design" including the need to address the impacts of "dispossession and state violence" (De Santolo & Dixon, 2021). This research is necessary as it provides a place-based case study analysis in a region that is lacking both in literature and knowledge dissemination centring Indigenous designers. Where Indigenous architects represent less than 0.2% of practitioners across so-called Canada, according to the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada's Indigenous Task Force (Williams et al, 2024); with no data available on Indigenous design practitioners in the occupied territories known as Québec. This iterative framework of design sovereignty directly connects with identifying necropolitical assemblages[1] that seek to interrupt Indigenous land-based futures (Tuscello, 2023).

Research Questions

The main research question is: How can Indigenous-led co-design re-imagine urban relationships through placekeeping?

A Secondary research question has emerged as my research deepened:

How can design sovereignty facilitate Indigenous land-based futures?

My research generates knowledges through research-creation, Indigenous autoethnography (Whitinui, 2014) and Indigenous methodologies of storywork

[1] Building upon Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2019) political theory examining social mechanisms within society which determine who is allowed to live and who must die, the term *necropolitical assemblages* speaks to the complex, overlapping and intersecting systems which facilitate that loss of life within systemically marginalized communities. This can include legal structures, carceral systems, environmental racism, social determinants of health, access to or exploitation by technologies, research extraction, border imperialism, territorial displacement and all systems of dispossession and domination which generate, facilitate and exploit the death, suffering and precarity of marginalized peoples (Grenfell et al, 2023).

(Archibald et al, 2019) particularly focusing on land/place-based visual storytelling methods (Christian, 2017). I have created a zine which documents and reflects upon the development of a permanent outdoor cultural hub for the Buckskin Babes Urban Moose Hide Tanning Collective in Pointe Ste Charles, QC on unceded, unsurrendered Kanien'kehà:ka territory, formally named Parc Ionkwatia'tarò:ron (Deer T., 2025). Through this research I investigate how design sovereignty facilitates land-based futures by addressing systemic impacts through solutions which directly support Indigenous self-determination, demanding *land back* not only through material but also onto-epistemological [2](Gatt, 2023) means.

The Parc Ionkwatia'tarò:ron co-design was developed through a collaborative, Indigenous-led, co-design framework that informs the concept, functionality, landscape architecture, and toponymy. As the research-creation component of my Master of Arts in the Individualized Program, I have created a zine which documents and disseminates my experiences throughout the design cycle presenting a case study of the co-design process using Indigenous autoethnography and storywork. Collaborative design (co-design) extends beyond participatory design into an inclusive, collaborative process wherein diverse perspectives including architects, Indigenous community stakeholders, visitor experience designers, community partners and end users are brought together to shape, co-create, fabricate, and execute all aspects of a project from governance to implementation (Hayes et al, 2019). However, Indigenous co-design best practices are still emerging. Case studies are an important tool for sharing Indigenous co-design experiences and reflecting on diverse approaches which prioritise site specific contexts, histories, geographies, cultures, protocols, needs, and aspirations (Atkins, 2019).

Background

Since 2020, the collective has been hosting urban hide camps in an effort to "bring the bush to the City", (Deer, 2023). These immersive hide camps have been

[2] "The term indexes that questions of epistemology are inextricable from ontological ones. The notion that knowledge can be abstracted from the ways of life from which it emerges, is a characteristic of Western Science. Therefore, any discussion which separates epistemology from ontology perpetuates [Western] Science's dissociation of knowing from being. The key that links this to coloniality is that through this dissociation Western Science treats the world as furnished by objects of knowledge, as if they are ready to be extracted for collection, analysis and future application. In this way Western Science's understanding of "knowledge" parallels exactly with understandings of human and natural resources as extractible and exploitable." (Gatt, 2023) This phrasing aligns with Cree scholar Shawn Wilson's position that axiology - epistemology - methodology and ontology are an interconnected circle and not inseparable compartments which create an Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson, 2009).

taking place primarily at Bâtiment 7 (B7) in Montréal's borough of Pointe Ste Charles, QC located on unceded unsurrendered Kanien'kehà:ka territory also known as Tiohtià:ke. Bâtiment 7 (B7) is an old Canada National (CN) rail yard that was slated for condo development in 2005, which through local community mobilisation, was turned into a vibrant makers-space known colloquially as a "factory of collective autonomy" (Sanza, 2018; 7 à Nous, 2015). The Bâtiment 7 site has now undergone multi-lot remediation due to previous soil contamination (Deer, 2025).

As our hide tanning collective had already established a presence in the vacant gravel lot on the south-eastern wall of Bâtiment 7 since 2021, applying for permanent space was a natural evolution. The City of Montréal approved our pilot pitch to develop a permanent cultural hub space for hide tanning, amid the established 2015 soil remediation schedule (7 à Nous, 2015). We were able to earmark space for a permanent outdoor hide tanning and cultural hub in lot 4 of the Bâtiment 7 site. This initiative came about through Indigenous methods of relationality (Wilson, 2008) from a focus on Elder care, to collective care, and community access (Deer, 2023), resulting in a gesture towards urban land rematriation with an eye towards Indigenous futures. Engaging in land-based practices on the site is an embodied form of placekeeping which affirms Indigenous cultural practices in the urban landscape. Relationality brought our collective work into the ecosystem of Bâtiment 7, through the relationship-building that took place between Autumn Godwin of Buckskin Babes and Michelle Descheneau of Press Start BIPOC Youth Cooperative (Cassin & Vincelli, 2021). Buckskin Babes and Press Start retain a close relationship based on reciprocity, with Buckskin Babes collective members capacity building through education and mentorship, and Press Start supporting hide camps through childcare, banner making, and solidarity rooted in respecting Indigenous self-determination and autonomy on site. Establishing boundaries with local non-Indigenous neighbours has been key to cultural safeguarding and creating a learning environment for intergenerational knowledge transmission. This requires the ability to focus on the practice itself rather than educating settlers, embodying autonomy over the site we are activating (Champagne, 2023). At the time of this thesis publication, the cultural hub is currently under construction with a planned opening in the fall of 2026. This will be the first designated space of its kind, dedicating access for land-based practices for local Indigenous communities in the urban landscape of Tiohtià:ke, so-called Montréal (Deer, 2023).

My research employed Indigenous autoethnography which creates a culturally

distinct mode of inquiry enabling Indigenous researchers to use our embodied lived experiences (auto = self) to reflect on cultural groups of which we belong, with a particular focus on issues of social change as they relate to place, identity, self, and community (Whitinui, 2014). I selected a *zine* as my medium because this format produces visual narratives (Spiegel et al, 2020) as part of my storywork through a multimedia journaling practice that combines reflexive writing, third-party research, photography, illustration, graphic design, and curated objects through personal archive to both document and iterate my *storying* (Archibald et al, 2019). The zine includes my reflections on the case study's strengths, areas of improvement, and creates a container to generate critical discourse around the implementation of Indigenous design principles and the transformative power of placekeeping in the urban landscape. In combining visual arts with Indigenous autoethnography, my research develops visual narratives centered around land-based Indigenous futures rooted in a strengths-based approach (FNIGC, 2020).

PARC IONKWATIA'TARÒ:RON CO-DESIGN COLLABORATORS

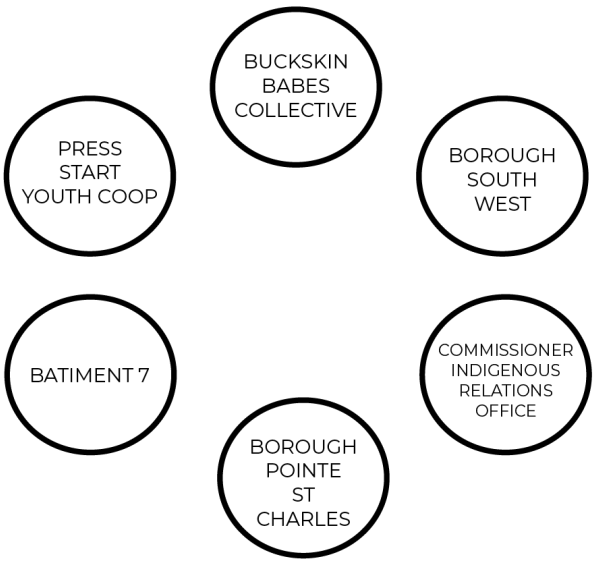

Fig. 1 Co-design partners

Self-Situating

My practice across disciplines is grounded in the interconnection of land-body sovereignty (Konsmo et al, 2016). I am a Seneca of Six Nations of the Grand River and I have been calling Tiohtià:ke home since 2013. I am a designer, educator, artist, and curator whose ways of doing are embodied through land-based learning and a lifelong

commitment to onkwehónwe'neha. Among other things, I have worked as an Indigenous co-design facilitator and consultant with experience in collaborative design frameworks, visitor experience, and public art, working closely with architects, archaeologists, curators, historians, and interdisciplinary designers to implement Indigenous design principles and decolonize contemporary approaches to the built environment on stolen lands. I recognize that architecture provides a unique opportunity to deepen relationships between land and body, and seek to explore the role of the built environment through design sovereignty in creating Indigenous land-based futures alongside the role of placekeeping in transforming urban relations.

My relationship to this research emerged through direct involvement as I am a part of an urban moose hide tanning collective called the Buckskin Babes (BSB) whose mandate "emerged at the hands of those who wanted to create an initiative that centres the reawakening of Indigenous cultural and land-based practices with an emphasis on access in the urban context" (Buckskin Babes, 2021). I am a core collective member and co-founder whose roles include program co-coordination, funding and administrative duties, partnership development, and co-facilitating land-based pedagogies centering hide tanning and adjacent land-based and arts practices.

Indigenous Autoethnography through Research-Creation

The creative self-publishing format of a zine aligns with narrative sovereignty (Wente, 2022) and has long been used by marginalized communities as a liminal tool to address complex socio-political issues such as sexual assault, White supremacy and globalisation (Bryant, 2023) while creating a community-driven archive (Backer et all, 2022). Zines are an accessible community resource for disseminating critical theory as well as a method of knowledge production through sharing lived experiences. A subversive and democratized medium that was largely popularized in alternative, punk and DIY (do-it-yourself) subcultures (Wee, 2017) while promoting collective and collaborative social frameworks (Sou & Hall, 2023). This format enables narrative sovereignty as I develop my own visual language in conversation with the land-based practices and decolonial design principles that I reflect on, which Secwepemc and Sylix scholar Dorothy Cucw-la7 Christian denotes as *land/place-based visual storytelling methods* (2017). My hope is this tool will also be an affirming, capacity building, resource and advocacy tool for Indigenous and non-Indigenous designers, architects, and collaborators in developing emergent co-design processes.

This study investigates the transformative potential of placekeeping within the urban landscape through research-creation generating a zine-based co-design case study of Parc Ionkwatia'tarò:ron which establishes a permanent site for hide tanning and land-based pedagogies in a former industrial zone. This research-creation thesis examines the intersections between Indigenous sovereignty and the built environment through exploring how design sovereignty can facilitate Indigenous land-based futures in the urban context of Tiohtià:ke/Montréal. This paper begins with a literature review that helps to contextualize my research through reflecting on Indigenous and Black architects' and scholars' contributions to decolonizing design mapping Indigenous design principles. I begin the literature review by tracing an Indigenous etymology of *design sovereignty* by first revisiting the notion of Indigenous sovereignty in relation to land within my own Haudenosaunee worldview, exploring natural law and reflecting on Indigenous sovereignty across disciplines. Through my literature review I go on to reflect on established decolonizing design principles in practice through examining Indigenous design thinking, deep time and Indigenous futures.

Through my literature review I explore key contributions to the field by reflecting on Indigenous architectural paradigms of placekeeping, universal inclusivity and pluriversal amplification. I conclude my literature review by examining the essential role of cultural safeguarding in decolonial initiatives as they relate to the built environment. My theoretical framework is shaped through a synthesis of necropolitics and Indigenous sciences, as my research examines the transformative potential of placekeeping in the urban landscape and Indigenous land-based futures through design sovereignty - which raises the harsh realities of genocide, belonging and erasure. This theoretical framework reflects on knowledge transmission through multimodal meaning-making connecting Indigenous sciences and technologies as simultaneous cultural transmission, governance protocols, arts practices, and observable/material/natural sciences (Haas, 2007; Cajete, 2020). Through this theoretical framework I reflect on design as not only material but onto-epistemological and begin to critically examine the relationship between technologies and futures, where digital worlds correlate to what Mbembe refers to as “death-worlds” (2019).

For my methodologies, I implement what Cree scholar Shawn Wilson calls *strategies of inquiry*, which speaks to applying multiple qualitative methodologies at one time requiring adaptive research approaches in place of a singular methodology (2008). For my strategies of inquiry, I employ Indigenous methodologies of storywork

through land/place-based visual storytelling, Indigenous autoethnography and placekeeping practices as alternative mapping methods and applied use of territory. My thesis reflects on the research-creation process of implementing visual land/place-based visual storywork through zine-making by combining photography, visual arts and graphic design to reflect on the my embodied experiences as an Indigenous co-design facilitator, hide tanner and Buckskin Babes collective member to produce a zine-based case study documenting the co-design of Parc Ionkwatia'tarò:ron. This research considers Onkwehón:we[3] land-based futures through placekeeping in the urban landscape; weaving visual storywork, Indigenous sciences, necropolitics and design sovereignty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Sovereignty to Safeguarding: Indigenous Design Principles in Function, Form and Futures.

In exploring my research question of how Indigenous co-design can reimagine urban relations through placekeeping and reflecting on the role of design sovereignty in facilitating Indigenous land-based futures, I identify key decolonizing design principles which reflect the work of Indigenous architects and scholars who have shaped the field. These perspectives have impacted my design practice and helped to shape my understanding of decolonizing the built environment through Indigenous pedagogies of design. This section provides a foundation for situating the co-design case study of Parc Ionkwatia'tarò:ron within the broader context of Indigenous design practitioners who have come before me, and whose contributions have cleared the path for my work. This includes examining works across disciplines which reflect Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that inform Indigenous design paradigms and lay the foundation for my research. Māori co-design facilitator Karl Wixlon iterates that Indigenous design paradigms “position designer[s] as humble servant[s] within a cultural ecosystem” valuing land/place, relationality, interconnectivity, and natural law which come together to help vision and attain positive futures (2024). Underscoring the rising tide of design sovereignty amongst practitioners calling attention to the work

[3] Onkwehón:we is Kanien’kéha (Mohawk language) meaning people, referring to original peoples, Indigenous peoples and is imbued with meaning reflecting human beings responsibilities as part of Creation in relationship with the natural world (Hill, 2017).

that is still needed to be done to support self-determination over Indigenous land-based futures.

Indigenous Sovereignty

I find it pertinent to first situate the term *sovereignty* within my own understanding by sharing an Indigenous etymology of meaning which resonates not only through Haudenosaunee socio-cultural and political spaces, but Indigenous paradigms globally. Tuscarora scholar Jolene Rickard identifies Indigenous sovereignty to be "about self-defined renewal and resistance", asserting that it has "always been more than a manifestation of Western law; instead, it is a concept that embodies our philosophical, political, and renewal strategies." She goes on to name the subversion and appropriation of the term from Western legal traditions as a "critical source of self-determination for Indigenous peoples globally" (p. 467, 2011). This perspective holds the tension of what Indigenous sovereignty is speaking back to: Western notions of monarchies so-called right to kill, and political authority legitimized through external bodies as nation-states (Simpson, 2020). This key juxtaposition situates Indigenous sovereignty outside of Western political hegemonies, highlighting the innate and inherent nature of Indigenous sovereignty enacted through structures of self-determination shaped by Indigenous values and practices. This can be seen through Indigenous knowledge systems developed through interrelations between peoples and place, clan and kinship systems of governance, and multi-generational ecological and cosmological ethics frameworks. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson observes that the practice of critique helps to distinguish "sovereignty as Indigenous belonging, dignity, and justice" (p. 686, 2020). Indigenous sovereignty takes shape in diverse contexts globally as Indigenous peoples continue to renew, resist and refuse all modes of settler-colonial domination over lands and lifeways.

Rickard shares her experiences of Indigenous sovereignty through Haudenosaunee modes of socio-political and territorial-relational belonging; as "a "naturalized," unquestioned concept central to my Haudenosaunee contemporary Identity." (p. 467, 2011). Haudenosaunee scholars such as Rickard have traced evolving materializations of Indigenous sovereignty within the Haudenosaunee context back to political resistance movements such as at Moss Lake in Upstate New York in 1974; (2011) which notably may be the first time in recent history Indigenous peoples have both reclaimed and retained control of traditional territory from the contiguous United

States (Landsman, 1988). This mobilisation led to the establishment of the Kanien'kehá:ka community of Ganienkeh which is governed neither by the American Bureau of Indian Affairs nor Canadian Band Council system, but by Kayanerenkó:wa or The Great Law of Peace: our Haudenosaunee traditional governance system which predates any settler legal order on our homelands (Jacobs, 2025). Haudenosaunee scholars such as Rick Monture reflects on Indigenous sovereignty tracing further back in recent history, pointing to, amongst others, the early 1920s journey by Cayuga Hereditary leader Deskaheh to the League of Nations[4] (2014); and further back still, through the reflections of Seneca historian G. Peter Jemison, to the Treaty of Cananagaiga in 1794 (2000). The thread of Haudenosaunee sovereignty remains unbroken since settlers first encountered our governance protocols through the Kaswentha or Two Row Wampum of 1613, which exists alongside several other wampum agreements as part of a practice well established through wampum diplomacy across pre-contact Northeastern Turtle Island (Monture, 2014). Indigenous sovereignty is enacted through territorial belonging since *time immemorial* where emergence sites and oral histories tracing the formation of the landscape itself, animating intergenerational memory, meaning and ways of being.

Fig. 2 Pictured in Ganienkeh in 1974, original rendition of the infamous Unity Flag or Warrior Flag

[4] As a result of Deskaheh's mobilisations, in conjunction with simultaneous efforts by the Nisga'a Land Committee and Allied Tribes of British Columbia in bringing land claims against the unceded territories known as British Colombia, the Federal government amended the Indian Act to prohibit acquisition of legal representation by First Nations in Canada. Deskaheh's advocacy led the groundwork for what later became the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples (Swiffen, 2022).

designed by Karoniaktajeh Louis Hall of Kahnawá:ke, QC. Image from the Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center (KORLCC) archives. [1]https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/oka-crisis-the-legacy-of-the-warrior-flag/

Fig. 3 Modern version of Karoniaktajeh Louis Hall's Warrior / Unity Flag, which he redesigned during the 1990 Oka Crisis. The Warrior Flag has become a symbol of Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination and resistance across the globe since its widespread adoption in the 90s. [1]https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/oka-crisis-the-legacy-of-the-warrior-flag/

Indigenous sovereignty is inherent, place-based, and enacted in diverse contexts beyond Haudenosaunee territory by peoples who continue to assert their territorial relationality despite colonial occupation worldwide. Nisga'a architect Patrick Stewart reflects on one such key moment known as the Calder decision, where Nisga'a lawyer Frank Calder enfranchised[5] himself to pass the bar and argue for Aboriginal Title.

> In 1972 ... the Supreme Court of Canada reached a hung decision, in that there were three judges in support of the Nisga'a Nation and three against. The Nation took this as a victory, because never before had the Supreme Court supported anything from a First Nation.

This was a landmark moment in which Aboriginal Title was recognized as both unextinguished and predating the Royal Proclamation of 1763, affirming Indigenous jurisdiction for the first time within the Canadian judicial system. It was won by a Nation

[5] Enfranchisement refers to the loss of Indian Status, where First Nations individuals would be removed from their band list and effectively disenrolled through a number of means under the Indian Act prior to Bill C-15, including for First Nations women, marrying someone who is not First Nations ("marrying out"), attending post-secondary education institutions, voting in Federal elections and amongst others (Assembly of First Nations, 2020).

with strong traditional governance practices, including Potlatch and Hereditary Clan protocols (Wahpasiw, 2020). Another key moment of victory for Indigenous sovereignty in the impossible arena of the colonial court system is the highly referenced 1997 Supreme Court of Canada's ruling in the Delgamuukw case. However, colonial powers rarely respect Indigenous legal traditions, treaties, International law, or even their own constitution under Section 35. In the early 2000s the Wet'suwet'en established Unist'ot'en Camp, a cultural camp and healing lodge governed by Wet'suwet'en traditional laws that was erected in the coordinates of multiple oil and gas pipelines that had no jurisdiction or consent for construction by Hereditary leaders. Despite ongoing paramilitarized police repression, the Wet'suwet'en continue to maintain their presence on this site to present day (Smith, 2022).

Indigenous peoples continue to implement Indigenous sovereignty globally, from coast to coast on Turtle Island and beyond. One notable example from the global context includes the Aboriginal Sovereign Embassy movement in so-called Australia, which started in 1972 with a beach umbrella opened on the lawn of the Australian Parliament in Canberra on occupied Ngunnawal Nation country. This action later spread to other city-centres such as Brisbane, occupied Turrbal and Yuggara country, and eventually became characterized by the sacred fire burning on unceded and unsurrendered territories. These Aboriginal Sovereign Embassies enable territorial protocols for coming onto Country, enacting traditional governance practices and creating a site for Traditional Owners (referring to Indigenous peoples to the specific territory) to gather, conduct protocols, assert sovereignty, and confront settler erasure. Over 50 years later, the sovereign embassies remain relevant and have generated key messages such as "Sovereignty Never Ceded", to "Always Was Always Will Be Aboriginal Land" and "Keep the Fire Burning". The Sovereign Embassies movement continues to have an immense impact as a site of resilience for political, cultural, and community mobilisation on Country, subverting the settler-colonial jurisdiction of urbanism and the colony. Operating at intersections of cultural activation, community building and apolitical rallying space which functions as an undefeated act of reclamation (Foley et al, 2014; Pengilley, 2022). This legacy highlights the fortitude of Indigenous sovereignty, embodied wherever Indigenous peoples are.

Fig. 4 Illustration by Wiradjuri and Ngiyampaa artist Charlotte Allingham (2020). [1]https://www.charlotteallingham.com/stolenlandss

These lineages of Indigenous sovereignty linked through Indigenous governance practices stir the words of scholar and litigator Paul Williams[6], who has studied Haudenosaunee legal orders closely and worked with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council in Ohsweken, Grand River Territory in present day Ontario. Williams reflects on the nature of political and legal frameworks as they relate to land tenure and governance,

> *The treaties between the Haudenosaunee and the Crown and the United States do not exist in a vacuum. They live in a universe of Haudenosaunee law, a long series of international councils, governed by rules of process and interpretation, assisted by precedents in the Kayanerenkó:wa itself. The images, words, and even the sequence of words used in treaty councils are linked not only to all*

[6] Paul Williams is of Canadian descent and through his proximity to community via his legal practice centred around Six Nations of the Grand River in Ohsweken, Ontario, he was politically adopted into the Onondaga Nation. However, this designation within community is referred to as "Hung About the Neck" according to the Great Law of Peace Wampum #66 in regards to Adoptions (Ganienkeh, 2021). This is an important distinction that many biographies from Williams fail to include.

other treaty councils, but to their sources in the law of the Confederacy. (p. 21, 2018)

Indigenous legal mechanisms are protocols of governance which embody Indigenous sovereignty, including multi-Nation Confederacy Councils which implement natural law through wampum diplomacy, and other modes of meaning-making across diverse Indigenous cultures throughout the continent and beyond.

Natural Law

"Haudenosaunee leaders often call the Great Law *Natural Law*. The inspiration from nature leads to an obligation: as a matter of responsibility, lawmakers must constantly consider the impact of their decisions on the natural world." (p. 5, 2018). Natural law goes beyond humanity and ripples outwards into territorial and even cosmological inter-relationships. A reflection of this practice can be seen in the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen or the Words that Come Before All Else, where greetings and thanks are sent to all aspects of Creation, from the insects to the fish, animals, birds, from humanity to Grandmother Moon, Mother Earth and Elder Brother Sun (Monture, 2014). This act of daily renewal *brings our minds together*[7], developing cultural and ethical perspectives while generating social cohesion through a shared starting point of connection. Additionally, Seventh Generation thinking (Yale Centre for Faith and Culture, 2024) demonstrates natural law by infusing an ethical awareness of relational impacts (inclusive of human and non-human beings) across deep time into Indigenous governance mechanisms. Six Nations historian and author Susan Hill shares that the Great Law identifies "that future generations come from the earth. People are instructed to walk carefully on the ground as the 'coming faces'—the children yet unborn—are just below the ground's surface" (p. 37, 2017). This thinking encourages us to consider the impacts of our footsteps along a seventh-generational timeline and applies a familial relation with our territories.

Natural law is not limited to Haudenosaunee worldviews, nor are assertions of Indigenous sovereignty. Another example is demonstrated through the Rights vs. Responsibilities paradigm. In an interview at Unist'ot'en Camp, Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en land defender Mel Bazil shares,

[7] This is a common English language interpretation of the Mohawk phrase *entitewawenon:ni ne onkwa'nikonhra*, which repeats throughout the Ohèn:ton Karihwatéhkwen (MBQ-TMT, 2026).

> *What [Western thinking] calls "resources" are not resources - this is a life force, a life force that we have relationships to. We don't own it. We don't own the rivers and we don't own the salmon. We have relationships with these worlds. Our laws are our responsibilities. In our language 'Anuc niwh'it'en means our responsibilities, our ways. So the way we harvest salmon is our living law; the action of properly harvesting salmon to respect their world is a living law.* (Bazil, 2019)

Indigenous governance becomes intertwined with personal and collective responsibility, including non-human beings and diverse natural phenomena exemplifying territorial kinship and relational systems.

Rickard points out that natural law "is a law that clearly precedes 'royal' law, or 'mercantile' law or 'bourgeois' property—interest law." She continues to illuminate that "the law of Indigenous peoples and specifically the Haudenosaunee is not anchored in Western legal systems but represents philosophical principles that transcend the colonial mythology of a hegemonic authoritarian state" (p. 469, 2011). These Indigenous worldviews directly challenge the imperial logics of Terra Nullius and the Doctrine of Discovery[8], undermining the expansionist nature of the extractive economies of globalization, and continuing to resist colonial domination over the natural world and Indigenous peoples, a relationship inextricably linked.

Extending Sovereignty

The axiologies of natural law, territorial kinship, and interdependence through deep time, self-determination, renewal and resistance help to comprise Indigenous sovereignty through diverse paradigms as they relate to generating Indigenous knowledges today. Rickard writes "[a] singular idea of sovereignty as a legal construct has evolved into multiple interpretations by Indigenous artists" and that "[a] narrow interpretation of sovereignty based on Western legal jurisprudence, therefore, does not represent Haudenosaunee foundational concepts of natural law, nor does it adequately address intellectual, cultural, artistic, and visual expansion of the concept. " (p. 470, 2011). Indigenous sovereignty through natural law is as multi-faceted as the land itself,

[8] Terra Nullius and the Doctrine of Discovery are political and legal justifications for colonization and seizure of lands not inhabited by Christians, as proclaimed by Pope Alexander the VI's decree *Inter cetera* in 1493 (Assembly of First Nations, 2018). These imperial justifications laid the foundation for (settler) colonialism, land theft via territorial dispossession and displacement and the genocide and enslavement of Indigenous peoples worldwide. Although formally repealed by the Catholic Church in 2023, the legacies within Canadian legal traditions remain to this day (Tomchuk, 2023).

emerging at intersections and expressions of Indigenous cultural and knowledge production across disciplinary borders. It is through expiscating sovereignty and engaging in critique (Simpson, 2020) Indigenous scholars, artists, political leaders and community members continue to build specific vernacular across sectors; from visual sovereignty (Rickard, 1995) to narrative sovereignty (Wente, 2022).

Visual sovereignty in the area of fine arts and curatorial practices coined by Jolene Rickard in *A Line in the Sand* identifies that "As part of an ongoing strategy for survival, the work of [I]ndigenous artists needs to be understood through the clarifying lens of sovereignty and self-determination, not just in terms of assimilation, colonization, and identity politics" and "sovereignty is taking shape in visual thought as [I]ndigenous artists negotiate cultural space" (p. 51, 1995). Rickard wrestles with the double-bind of orientalist perceptions of Indigenous peoples established by dominant cultures and White, Western sensibilities of art and culture. Visual sovereignty asserts cultural autonomy and self-determination over representation, aesthetic, visual language, function, and form across arts and cultural spaces. As many fields continue the work towards decolonization, Indigenous practitioners will continue to identify and apply Indigenous sovereignty across areas dominated by Western ways of doing and being.

Design Sovereignty: From Built Erasure to Indigenous Design Thinking

Building a shared understanding of Indigenous sovereignty is necessary to meaningfully reflect on *design sovereignty* which "aspires to renewal and growth in our communities and demands the dismantling of outdated Western thinking and practices of extraction. ...In looking towards Design Sovereignty, we take up an anticolonial stance to challenge the hegemonic trappings of the discipline" (De Santolo & Dixon, 2021). This concept in the world of design turns a critical eye towards systems of power, naming the functions of dispossession, domination and erasure established through ongoing colonial legacies. Urgently, design sovereignty asserts that "we must dismantle colonisation by design" and "address the impacts of dispossession and state violence". This reflects emergent critiques of Indigenous architects that some contemporary efforts to decolonize design tend to "hang a painting, place a sculpture or commission a mural to 'check the box'" (Porter, 2025) through more superficial approaches rather than deeply meaningful, restorative and collaborative design that addresses the needs, goals and aspirations of Indigenous communities. Importantly,

design sovereignty confronts settler moves to innocence[9] and invites us to value the relationship between culture and architecture; recognizing colonial systems which inform design are in fact intentional, ubiquitous and hardly benign.

"Colonization creates the "artifice" of the city on Indigenous lands. Gadigal sovereignty has been negated through the design and construction of the city of Sydney [Australia]. Radical challenges are required in order for genuine reclamation of land and space to take place" (De Santolo & Dixon, 2021). Aboriginal scholar Jason De Santolo of the Garrwa and Barunggam Nations of occupied Queensland, Australia touches on a key role architects play through settler-colonial social orders. He identifies the "artifice" as a material face of colonial dispossession serving as monuments to Terra Nullius and the Doctrine of Discovery, implemented through architectural design and urban development. Métis architect David Fortin shares that in regard to residential schools, "the politicians may have had the ideas of assimilation, but the people who drew the infrastructure for that to happen were the architects. Acting with no personal agency, they were agents of the system of assimilation" (2019). Fortin[10] describes a less metaphorical relationship to territorial dispossession as architecture is employed as a tool of settler colonialism. These legacies reify Terra Nullius on unceded lands through building the cityscape of the settler metropoli, fueled by Christian moralism; this is the direct implementation of structures of assimilation and genocide applied against us.

The goals of settler expansionism are reified through built environments, resulting in a transformation of unceded landscapes through various colonizing infrastructure. Examples are innumerable but at a cursory glance include flooding of traditional territories to implement lock and dam systems, resource extraction through strip mining, mountain-top removal mining, tar sands expansion, on to the construction of rail and motorways, and even urban sprawl (Spice, 2018). In fact, Frantz Fanon identified in *Wretched of the Earth* that the built environment of the colony is

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[9] This phrase refers to the seminal paper by Tuck & Yang titled Decolonization is not a metaphor, published in Vol. 1 No. 1 Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society (2012) University of Toronto, which outlines common pitfalls in attempts for solidarity that re-establish settler colonial powers while minimizing settler culpability in the ongoing territorial dispossession and occupation of Indigenous lands, and subsequent impacts on Indigenous lifeways and self-determination necessitated by the settler state.

[10] David Fortin is a Métis architect originally from Alberta, with family ties to Red River settlements in Manitoba. He was formerly registered with the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan and in 2013 he switched his membership to the Métis Nation of Ontario when he moved to the Province[1]. Although some Métis people choose to register with the MNO when they relocate, it is critical to note that the Métis Nation of Ontario has come under significant scrutiny in recent years over their registry practices, Indigenous identity claims and creation of "new" settlements on First Nations territory in Ontario. MNO has been widely critiqued by the Manitoba Métis Federation, Chiefs of Ontario, the Assembly of First Nations with an important conference taken place in December 2025 to voice concerns.[2][3]
[1]https://www.davidtfortinarchitect.com/
[2]https://chiefs-of-ontario.org/the-chiefs-of-ontario-reject-ongoing-efforts-of-the-metis-nation-of-ontario-to-rewrite-history/
[3 https://www.sootoday.com/local-news/forum-explored-metis-claims-in-ontario-through-indigenous-led-dialogue-11626868

designed to erase Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing while subduing Indigenous peoples to the violence of colonial rule. In this way, architecture operates as a function of transmitting colonial violence. Fanon goes on to identify how oppression is experienced through the body, which is the site Indigenous peoples experience the colonial structure (2001). These insights are integral to understanding the impacts of a built environment born from settler colonial expansionism, the scale of which ripples outwards into environmental and ecological impacts experienced through climate change (Simpson, 2025). These interlocking systems can be understood as necropolitical assemblages (Mbembe, 2019) and require the relational transformation of the natural world into resources, earth into object, and Indigenous peoples into subhuman. As dominant architectural forms contribute to capitalist values and practices such as over-harvesting and land dispossession, the impacts span out from structural genocide to biosphere and ecosystem degradation, to an attack on Indigenous lifeways through cultural transmission and ways of being (Wolfe, 2006). Part of this colonizing transformation of the built environment includes the decimation of structures Indigenous to these lands: from longhouses, pithouses, wigwams, lodges and tipis (Fortin, 2019) to carefully cultivated systems of life-affirmation such as food forests. This results in increased Indigenous architectural and archeological erasure, while infrastructural brutalism (Truscello, 2023) takes hold as part of a "legacy of built erasure". This built erasure takes shape from the landscape itself to the lack of representation/visibility of Indigenous architects and design practitioners, to direct systemic impacts witnessed by "abandoned residential school buildings, shuttered Indian hospitals that functioned as de facto prisons, or black mould that to this day climbs the walls of on-reserve schoolhouses" (Querenguesser, 2018).

Nisga'a architect Patrick Stewart goes on to highlight the realities of systemic barriers faced by Indigenous designers, shedding light on the role of settler colonialism and the Indian Act in delaying the advancement of Indigenous architects (Wahpasiw, 2020). Through colonial legacies such as Indian enfranchisement in the Indian Act, the field of architecture has only 20 licensed Indigenous architects in Canada today representing less than 0.2% of architects in the industry (Williams et al, 2024). This systemic analysis is critical when understanding the role that design sovereignty plays in generating Indigenous futures, requiring us to repair built erasure through grasping the impacts, gaps and injustices left by systems of colonial design. The ripple effects of which are not only through the building of settlements, cities, and colonial edifices on unceded territories, or the material structures within which genocidal policies operated.

These impacts expand outwards to environmental and ecological devastation and appear through systemic racism and/or gender-based discrimination enacted by legal frameworks such as the Indian Act, which has resulted in complex barriers regarding access and self-determination in design.

Where decolonizing design might seek an additive strategy by learning from Indigenous design thinking in a strength-based approach that celebrates Indigenous worldviews, sciences, and knowledge systems; design sovereignty seeks to not only name interconnected systems of power but to address the impacts and legacies of those structures. Design sovereignty restores agency through self-determining, defining, and generating design processes that resonate belonging, reflecting relevant goals and aspirations across lands and lifeways. It goes beyond ornamentation into a practice of self-determination through design that embodies Indigenous worldviews and natural laws. Creating infrastructure through culturally and environmentally relevant Indigenous knowledges applied in the present, to safeguard Indigenous futures.

Wanda Dalla Costa of Saddle Lake Cree Nation, AB and Principal Architect at TAWAW Architecture Collective shares in an interview in Canadian Architect[11],

> The values we imbue in architectural processes come from our traditional systems that are associated with our traditional architecture. Architecture is in the place, it is very specific to the place[.] When we are trying to reconstruct a future, we need to be really good listeners, and 'imagineers.' What we are doing is reimagining a future that is not the one we are living in. (Wahpasiw, 2020)

What Dalla Costa, who was the first Indigenous woman to become a licensed architect in Canada (Tawaw, 2026), is reflecting on is known as Indigenous design thinking (IDT). IDT is place-based and reflects diverse Indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems, values, and ways of being and doing. Dalla Costa emphasizes the relationship between designing in the present to create yet-unknown futures (2020). This relationship between Indigenous design thinking over deep time can be understood through Cree architectural Elder Douglas Cardinal's infamous quote, "The teachings of the Elders are not the teachings of the past. They are the teachings of the

[11] Canadian Architect is a magazine "and journal of record of two national professional associations: the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) and the AIA Canada Society and is the official magazine of each association – carrying both the *RAIC Journal* and the *AIA Canada Journal* within the pages of *Canadian Architect* magazine." [1] https://www.canadianarchitect.com/about/

future" (2021). Indigenous design thinking reflects what Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete refers to as the "Native Mind", where through intergenerational observation and territorial relationality Indigenous sciences, technologies, arts, philosophy and spirituality are deeply interconnected. Cajete goes so far as to identify that Indigenous worldviews are in fact ecological because they originate from Indigenous peoples relationships with our territories (Cajete, 2020). These insights iterate how Indigenous design thinking includes specific, place-based knowledges and ways of designing that reflect Indigenous values of relationality with territory through ecological, cosmological, and/or clan, kinship, and governance systems, cultural sensibilities, and modes of meaning-making, oral histories, and reflections on natural law. As Kamilaroi architect Jefa Greenaway (based on Gadigal country in occupied New South Wales, Australia) illuminates,

> Indigenous design thinking is embedding narrative within its DNA. It starts with facilitating agency and voice, and engaging with the specificity of place. But most importantly, it's a strength-based approach. It is understanding that there is great wisdom in 67, 000+ years of history and unbroken connection. (2019)

Indigenous design thinking embodies Indigenous worldviews, sciences, and governance protocols as dependently interrelated to place over deep time. These ways of thinking and doing directly confront dominant design practices which hinge on colonial fallacies of Terra Nullius and fail to recognize the phenomena of interrelationality or its role in safeguarding multi-generational futures. The remainder of this literature review will reflect on a few key Indigenous design principles that reflect diverse Indigenous design thinking. These concepts have influenced my own design practice and further situate my research.

Deep Time & Indigenous Futures

As Yuwaalaraay/Gamilaraay scholar, historian and filmmaker Frances Peters-Little shares, "All things will outlast us, the land will change, and survive … Yes, the land will be different. But new things will come of it" (McGrath, 2020). Through confronting settler constructs of time shaped by Eurocentric histories and settler colonial worldviews framing time as linear and fixed in one direction, deep time recognizes the interconnection of past-present-future reflecting relational configurations of peoples, lands, and lifeways. These conceptions of time are reflected

in Indigenous governance and ethics protocols that, for example, do not rely solely on biographical, individual lifespans but rather notions of time that span generations across ecosystems (McGrath, 2020). Deep time can reflect phenomena such as polychromatic time where “things happen in different ways at different times” as identified by Gregory Cajete (2020). Deep time rejects past-present-future as separate linear streams whereas Indigenous “knowledges of time are tens of thousands of years old, like eddies in a stream where the past, present and future flow together and continually cross over” (Mulka Project, 2023). Defining deep time as core to Indigenous worldviews and knowledge production. This is an important perspective that highlights the understanding of land-based futures as they interconnect with past, present and future through non-linear Indigenous worldviews (Greenaway, et al, 2018). Concisely, “deep time integrates Indigenous knowledge systems with geological, sociocultural, and relational perspectives, encompassing all relations—human and nonhuman, place and seasonality” (Lickers, 2025). The renowned Douglas Cardinal reflects on how deep time is embodied through intergenerational roles and responsibilities.

> You have to understand the responsibility you have. You are the grandchild of all the grandfathers that came before you, and you are the grandfather of all the grandchildren that come after you. Within you is the past, the present and the future. Everything you do affects the past, the present, the future. (Cardinal, 1998 p. 9)

Through ancestral memory transmitted by oral histories, culturally diverse mnemonic devices, and material cultures, Indigenous peoples retain connection to our emergence sites and trace our adaptation in response to melting glaciers, changing shorelines and other large-scale climate changes over tens of thousands of years (Martindale et al, 2019; McGrath, 2020). Some scholars identify this relationship as emplacement through oral history, recognizing the “permanent grounding of experiential knowledge in the land”, over generations and geographic formations (Zedeño et al, 2021, p. 307). Cajete names this relationship between place and people over deep time as ensoulment, speaking to the profound metaphysical and psychological connection embodied through Indigenous communities' sense of place (2000). This understanding of time cannot be measured from the starting points found in journals of early colonists such as Cortez, Cartier or Cook (McGrath, 2020).

In recognizing the non-linear relationship of past-present-future through

Indigenous epistemologies of deep time, the emphasis on Indigenous futures emerges as a key site for design sovereignty along a temporal-spatial axis. The term *Indigenous futures* was coined by Anishinaabe scholar Dr. Grace Dillon through her pivotal anthology *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2003). In recent years *Indigenous future imaginaries* has emerged as a speculative methodology which supports Indigenous peoples self-determination over temporal-relational spaces beyond the dystopian present (Lewis, 2023; Saganash, 2017). Hawai'ian and Samoan scholar Jason Edward Lewis has written extensively on this topic and has among others contributed substantially to this field. Lewis states that "[a] "future imaginary" is a vision of the future that is shared by a group of people and used to motivate change in the present. Future imaginaries provide groups with shared vocabularies for envisioning the future and strategies for getting to the future they desire". He goes on to identify that "[t]he imaginary imperative … insist[s] on understanding Indigenous histories, current lives, and visions of the future as a persistent unfolding of an unbroken line of epistemological and cosmological frameworks that continuously evolve and adapt to support the lived experiences of Indigenous people" (2023, p. 11 & p. 14). By refusing static, anachronistic characterizations which render Indigenous authenticity, belonging and identity into the past, Indigenous future imaginaries operate as critical sites of self-determination, renewal and resistance particularly in regard to decolonizing the built environment and re-imagining urban relations.

Dalla Costa shares that Indigenous design in the urban environment must "increase the visibility of previously invisible groups, and emphasize an engagement with the future, rather than relegating Indigenous perspectives to the past" (2020). Through this research, I have begun to reflect on the notion of sovereign futurity, as a temporal-spatial-relational axis where multi-generational and ecological wellbeing are safeguarded across deep time, and Indigenous self-determination over lands and lifeways are embodied in place. Sovereign futurity is the ability to self-determine our futures; futures our ancestors can recognize. Design sovereignty specifically asks us to imagine and create self-determining Indigenous futures where architecture, design and the built environment are no longer defined by Western hegemonies; reproducing Terra Nullius, colonial violence, and structural genocide through furthering the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. As Douglas Cardinal warns, "our future is in living in harmony with nature or else we will have no future" (1998, p. 9).

Placekeeping, Universal Inclusivity & Designing Relations with Land

Engaging key Indigenous design principles notably includes the notion of placekeeping which transcends Indigenous design contexts, a term popularized by Cree architect Wanda Dalla Costa (Soland, 2020). Placekeeping directly confronts the dominant paradigm of placemaking in urban design, which emphasizes urban development or city building, constructing not just infrastructure but identity through designing destinations which meet economic metrics such as via tourism or industry hubs. This delineation acts as an example of Indigenous storywork "speaking back as a way to counter the violence of colonial storytelling"(Archibald et al, 2019). Although placemaking can include social relationships to place, placekeeping "prioritizes ecological, historical and cultural relationships to place, while bringing the presence of Indigenous histories and futures into focus" and recognizes Indigenous peoples as the first city builders on these lands (Evergreen, 2020; Chung-Tiam-Fook, 2022). This means grounding architecture in culturally responsive design that puts human needs in alignment with ecological and environmental needs.

Kanien'kehà:ka architect Matthew Hickey asserts, "placekeeping for all species" (Hickey, 2022). This requires first understanding the histories, legacies, and ecologies that compile placehood on Indigenous lands. This approach directly challenges what some built-environment scholars have deemed *Terra Nullius blindness* as they work to develop pedagogical strategies for implementing Indigenous knowledges into design education in meaningful ways. Doing so to combat reproducing Indigenous territorial and epistemological dispossession, or reinforcing Western ontological views of the land as inanimate and empty (Tucker et al, 2016; Assembly of First Nations, 2018). As Hickey states, "We don't even use the term placemaking because the place is already there. The ground is already there," (2022) which combats colonial logics and reminds us that these territories were invaded, not discovered and stewarded intergenerationally by Indigenous peoples. Placekeeping reminds us these sites already carry names, cultural and social legacies over deep time, environmental and ecological cycles, and embody a role in truth and justice by "unsettling shared public spaces" to bring awareness to Indigenous presence and generate Indigenous futures (Evergreen, 2020).

However, placekeeping is rooted in practice and renewal through relationality; the scope goes beyond design into active care and maintenance of the site, and includes "supporting the ability of local people to maintain their way of life as they

choose" (Soland, 2022). Oneida architect Brian Porter, Principal and Founder of Two Row Architects, engages storywork in design in his approach to the Spirit Garden located in Tsi Tkaronto, demonstrating the principles of what Porter calls "designing relations with land" (Porter, 2024; Porter, 2021). The Spirit Garden Indian Residential School Survivors Restoration of Identity Project is located in the heart of Tsi Tkaronto's downtown core in Nathan Phillip's Square to create a "landmark designed to foster teaching, learning, sharing and healing for Indigenous communities and all who visit" (City of Toronto, 2024). The design features several elements imbued with symbolism from the Kaswenta[12] to the Tree of Peace[13], to more practical spaces such as the Healing Lodge situated within a showcase of diverse cultural representations through various sculptures coming together as a site of visibility and belonging (Toronto Council Fire, 2024).

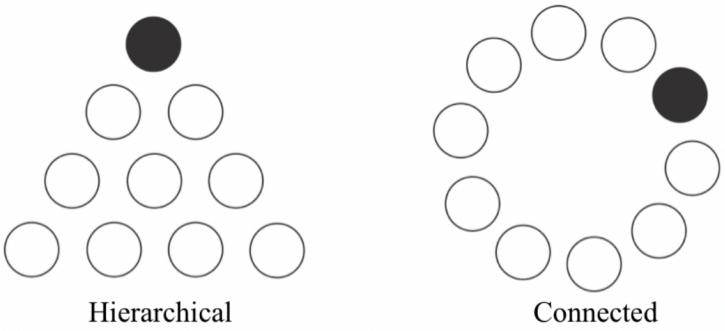

Fig. 5 Hierarchical vs. Connected worldviews positioning humanity in regards to the natural world [1]https://www.azuremagazine.com/article/decolonizing-design-the-case-for-universal-inclusivity/

This relational approach in design connects with the framework of universal inclusivity, another key Indigenous design principle. Universal inclusivity expands beyond accessibility and social location to environmental and ecological considerations (Hickey, 2022). Universally inclusive design reflects the needs of "various users of the place", including sensibilities informed by natural law such as habitat, migratory paths, environmental phenomena, and ecological cycles. The concept expands to incorporating well-being in a holistic manner, from physical to mental health, valuing the socio-cultural impacts of our environment and relationship to the natural world. Concisely, Hickey shares that "inclusive design is not just about reconciling our human

[12] Two Row Wampum or Kaswentha, is a wampum belt which "define[s] a formal, peaceful relationship with the Dutch in 1613. This first agreement was known as the Tekeni Teiohatatie Kahswentha, or Two Row Wampum belt, and is the philosophical foundation of how the Haudenosaunee have conducted themselves politically in relation to Europeans ever since" (Monture, p. 13, 2014).

[13] Tree of Peace is a cultural reference to the Great White Pine tree which stood as a symbol of Haudenosaunee Confederacy, through the Peacemakers journey as "a symbolic beacon among all nations as the place where others could seek refuge and an alternative to violence and war" (Monture, p.10, 2014).

relationships". This assertion decolonizes the dominant understanding of universal inclusivity within design, wherein accessibility is limited to human needs and rarely considers the wider implication for either ecology or ecosystem.

Pluriversal Amplification

> "Decolonisation is not just about championing 'plurality' in general, but recognising the specific and particular law of the land in any given territory, and the particular history of dispossession and the assertion of distinct sovereignties grounded in place." (De Santolo & Dixon, 2021)

This concept of pluriverse rejects a universalized world of Western modernity under neoliberal globalization but rather desires, as stated by the Zapastistas "a world where many worlds fit" (Escobar, 2018). Cajete addresses this concept through the language of the multiverse, recognizing Indigenous epistemologies value of kincentric ecologies (Salmón, 2000) wherein the natural world is not only animate but connected to Indigenous peoples through relational, familial ties (Cajete, 1994). A concrete example of this worldview through Indigenous epistemologies can be regarded through the Ohèn:ton Karihwatéhkwen, wherein ripples of gratitude and acknowledgement radiate outwards to all aspects of Creation. Māori scholar Dr. Miranda Smitheram demonstrates embodied knowledges of the pluriverse through what she calls "kinship assemblages" which reflect on the relationships, interactions, behaviours and "essence of being" of living materials that she works with through remediation practices, transforming that material (2025). These knowledges and ways of doing manifest in and shape Indigenous design thinking through expansive and interwoven principles, some of which have been explored in this literature review.

> When I first started my profession, I thought, why are we building boxes in a grid—like cancerous growths, polluting rivers and everything else? Why are we expressing all of our doodlings in European forms? Why not have buildings that reflect our own wonderful natural environment? (Cardinal, 1998 p. 4)

Cardinal highlights the ways that universalization regenerates cultural hierarchies through reproducing European and occidental forms within dominant modes of design. He goes on to analyze, in his seminal text *Architecture as a Living Process*, the homogeneity that has developed through dominant and universalizing

design by replicating aesthetics and sensibilities that have been imported from Europe or other regions. In this practice buildings are identifiable by their architect rather than their relationship to place (1998) once again reproducing systems of domination over Indigenous lands, embodying Terra Nullius and settler colonial social orders. Indigenous architects resist colonial domination and embrace pluriversal worldviews through examining the relationships between form and meaning, which can be communicated across materials, silhouettes and tectonic or spatial organization (Dalla Costa, 2020).

Fig. 6 O'Siyam Pavilion (external view). Example of Formline Architecture by Chipweyan architect Alfred Waugh, whose firm is located in the Pacific North West. Formline Architecture & Urbanism (2011) [1]https://www.formline.ca/

Pluriversal approaches challenge homogeneity and Western cultural dominance through form and aesthetic. They remain invaluable to processes of engaging place-based frameworks of co-design (Dalla Costa, 2021), or even other forms of knowledge production such as land/place-based visual storytelling. As stated in the foundational text, *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* Archibald et al writes that, "Through the interrelational dimensions of storywork, we transcend time and space, connecting on deeper levels of understanding with each other, all living beings, with the earth and the multiverse" (p. 12, 2019). Across ontologies or materialities, accepting multiplicity, abundance, and diversity are key to this Indigenous design principle and helps to generate paradigms through design sovereignty where Indigenous land-based futures can take place.

Cultural Safeguarding

Fig. 7 David Garneau, *Not to Confuse Politeness with Agreement*. (2013) oil on canvas. Montréal Museum of Fine Arts. Featured on the overleaf of Towards Braiding (2019) Jimmy et al.

> [T]he act of inclusion in itself becomes a means for the brick sensibility to reclaim universality: whereas it once excluded difference, now it embraces it and thereby becomes all the more totalizing. What remains unquestioned here is not only who decides the terms of inclusion, who benefits, and how, but also the assumption that exclusion from universalism is the primary basis of colonial relationships and, thus, that inclusion into the brick sensibility is the only viable and desirable means of addressing colonial harm. (Jimmy, p. 27, 2019)

In *Towards Braiding* Nêhiyaw curator and writer Elwood Jimmy identifies key differences between occidental and Onkwehón:we ways of being, using the following metaphor. Jimmy reflects that “brick sense and sensibilities stand for a set of ways of being that emphasize individuality, fixed form and linear time”, concerned with hierarchy, indexing the world, accumulating knowledge, external validation and “moving things forward”. Wherein “thread sense and sensibilities stand for a set of ways of being that emphasize inter-wovenness, shape-shifting flexibility and layered time”,

valuing relationality, embodied experiences, inherent worth, and a shared sense of responsibility for collective well-being (p. 13 -15, 2019). Through this social cartography Jimmy reflects on the assimilationist urge of dominant cultures to adopt and claim ownership of Indigenous knowledges and ways of being, while reproducing hierarchies through structures of inclusion that protect settler colonial power and agency.

In this section I examine some responses that are emerging in the face of ongoing challenges that arise for Indigenous designers, artists, and land-based practitioners in placekeeping initiatives. In particular, tensions develop as collaborative environments fall to atmospheres which often fail to rise to the standard of design sovereignty. Doing so by reproducing and re-entrenching relational dynamics that re-inforce settler colonial powers through assimilation, tokenisation, appropriation, erasure and other modes of protecting settler institutions and dominant cultures (Chung-Tiam-Fook, 2022). Throughout the rise of settler institutions' interest in reconciliation, forces such as erasure, tokenism, exclusion and appropriation have fraught the collaborative environments Indigenous designers, architects, artists, pedagogues and community members face across a variety of contexts. To build Indigenous land-based futures, design sovereignty calls on the essential mandate of cultural safeguarding to be implemented.

> As our knowledges are assimilated and increasingly commodified, there is a growing pressure to fit within institutional parameters or to assimilate to dangerously out-of-touch research agendas. In the School of Design, there is a need for a dedicated strategy for protecting Indigenous knowledges and practices while attuning ourselves to the self-determined aspirations of future ancestors. (De Santolo & Dixon, 2019)

De Santolo and Jimmy speak to the challenges of ontological assimilation when participating in collaborative environments fraught with settler colonial power relations. Indigenous architects and designers have begun to develop protocols to protect Indigenous knowledge systems that sometimes challenge colonial and capitalist frameworks of intellectual property. One such tool that has been created by Indigenous architects, designers, artists, and scholars is the International Indigenous Design Charter (Greenaway et al, 2018) which seeks to safeguard cultural knowledges and to create respectful collaborative design frameworks. This includes defining best practices

for “accurate and respectful representation of Indigenous knowledge in all disciplines of design and associated media” (p. 29, 2018).

The International Indigenous Design Charter first establishes Indigenous peoples agency and self-determination over our knowledges by refusing paternalistic practices that position settler institutions and methodologies as authoritative or superior. By placing leadership and expertise into the rightful hands of Indigenous communities, the Charter defines parameters for engagement including that “Indigenous participants are not simply to be referenced” and in the context of built environment and collaborative design, “projects must be Indigenous led, with Indigenous stakeholders as active [design] participants”. The Charter establishes that “sensibilities and sensitivities associated with sharing Indigenous knowledge requires community engagement with cultural custodians and knowledge keepers”. Identifying the following key approaches of “[r]espectful exchange, open thinking, deep listening and a genuine commitment to learning must be based on the premise of relationality.” Emphasizing that “[b]uilding relationality ensures respectful and ethical practices are established and maintained through trust and inter-connectedness”. (p. 29, 2018).

The Charter defines 10 key principles from Indigenous-led, self determined design, to community-specific approaches and deep listening, respect for Indigenous knowledge systems through cultural competency, and shared knowledge via collaboration, co-creation and procurement. The Charter distinguishes the necessity of shared benefits - economic, cultural and otherwise - and that design impact must meet the terms of community needs, values and aspirations through deep time. Going on to identify legal and moral responsibilities reflecting that not all knowledges are appropriately shared in public domain, and finally a call to implement the Charter alongside other mechanisms such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These advocacy tools serve to support anti-racist, culturally-informed, collaborative design practices and challenge extractive structures present in the industry. Cultural safeguarding requires understanding positionality and engaging in appropriate and respectful engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems, requiring place-based approaches unique to each Indigenous Nation and community, understanding protocols and the need for ongoing relationship building.

Although there may be an altruistic thread that could inform collaborative design engaging Indigenous design thinking, good intentions are not enough. There

are a multitude of harms caused by, at best, well-meaning collaborators and, at worst, extractive systems that continue the maintenance of settler colonial agency perpetuating the erasure, displacement and further marginalization of Indigenous peoples self-determination over lands and lifeways. Brian Porter shares in an interview in *Disrupting Design*, “our stories have been around for centuries and it takes decades to understand them” he reflects “that doesn't stop mainstream architects from working on Indigenous projects. There are a lot of firms out there that don’t hesitate if they can secure a client on an Indigenous project”. Porter states, “If they don’t need to include us, they won’t” (Jennair, 2025). Cultural safeguarding means ensuring Indigenous peoples are not excluded on our own territories, decontextualizing our cultures, worldviews, sciences, and technologies through appropriation, exploitation and commodification.

In Dr. Dori Tunstall’s erudite text, *Decolonizing Design: A Cultural Justice Guidebook* (2023) she states cohesively and concisely that “DEI is not decolonization”. She reflects on limitations of diversity, equity and inclusion sharing how hegemonic power structures remain unchallenged within these frameworks. Tunstall states that “Decolonization means ceding the power of decision making to the original peoples of the land” and identifies that eliminating barriers to hiring and retaining Indigenous peoples is critical to furthering that goal” (p 27). Tunstall goes on to identify what she calls a “supertoken” who “exists because they have already excelled in systems that were meant to crush them. Their presence in a firm or institution does not automatically change the system” (p. 77). She urges institutions to “stop seeking the supertoken and focus instead on addressing systemic exclusion” (p. 94) because decolonization requires eliminating barriers of entry for Indigenous peoples. Tunstall shares solutions such as changing criteria to reflect equity markers and engage in practices such as cluster-hiring, where a cohort is brought on rather than one supertoken. These ways of restructuring support design sovereignty through addressing power relations maintained by systemic racism that perpetuates barriers and gaps created by legacies of colonial exclusion and dispossession through systems such as the Indian Act. Cultural safeguarding tears down colonial structures and implements models based on relationality, recognizing Indigenous lived experiences and embodied knowledges as both valuable and necessary.

The above literature review provides a foundation upon which to situate this case study within the context of Black and Indigenous practitioners who have come before me and whose storying has paved the way for this work. Through their practices of Indigenous storywork, these architects and scholars animate design as a living part of

Indigenous scientific and cultural heritage. Calling attention to the diverse Indigenous perspectives on sovereignty and self-determination in design, reflecting the impact of storywork methodologies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Land-based Futures through Indigenous sciences: Disrupting Necropolitical Assemblages

Decolonizing design principles and Indigenous design thinking are born from Indigenous sciences, knowledge systems, worldviews, and land-based practices, which are socio-material components towards building Indigenous futurity. Cajete identifies Indigenous sciences as culturally informed and dependently interconnected with ethical, cultural, social, and political structures (2020). This perspective resonates with what Cherokee scholar Angela Haas' observes in *Wampum as Hypertext*, which recognizes the "multimodal web of meaning" wherein wampum-belt encoding transmits multiple modes of meaning at one time through activating the intersections of art, culture, governance, technologies, and sciences (p. 91). She recognizes that our arts practices evoke at once socio-cultural protocols, governance practices, and land-based sciences and technologies (2007). In framing relational sciences and technologies through Indigenous onto-epistemologies, Cajete establishes what he calls *Indigenous thought* through place-based and culturally driven relational paradigms. He states "that all things are dependently interrelated in the harmony and balance of the multiverse" (p.9). Cajete goes on to share key principles that inform Indigenous sciences including spirituality, ethical relationality, reciprocity, mutualism, respect, restraint, harmony, interdependence, sustainable knowledge systems, and integration to place (2022). These frameworks around relational ontologies support better speculation as to what Indigenous land-based futures could mean.

In investigating Indigenous land-based futures through design sovereignty, I reflect on Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe's urge, "to reopen access to the deposit of the future, beginning with the future of those in whom, not so long ago, it was hard to say which part pertained to the human, to the animal, object, thing or commodity" speaking to colonial systems of dispossession of personhood and thus futurity (p. 8, 2019). Mbembe detects barriers to futurity through his necopolitical analysis recognizing the impact of colonial design on Indigenous peoples globally

through structures of dispossession, exploitation, dominance, slavery and genocide. Similar to the prism developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality in 1989 (Cooper, 2016), Mbembe's necropolitics generates a critical socio-political lens. Through his identification of "death-worlds" (2019) impacts of colonial design are measured by the dystopian colonial past-present-future which situates the violent parameters of systemic loss of life through colonizing Western technologies, geo-politics, infrastructures including the built environment and legal structures of Terra Nullius. He states that necropolitics accounts for ways in which "weapons are deployed in the interest of maximally destroying persons and creating death-worlds". He reflects on systems such as chattel slavery within settler colonial social orders as "topographies of cruelty" and helps to critically frame impacts of ongoing colonial design (p. 92). This lens generates compelling space for critical discourse around constructing Indigenous future imaginaries and the realities of necropower through militarized responses to and criminalization of Indigenous peoples who enact self-determination over our lands and futures. This necropower is enacted at the intersection of land-body sovereignty and self-determination over futurity.

> "Indian children in the residential schools die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is geared towards a final solution of our Indian Problem." Duncan Campbell Scott in 1910, Civil "Architect" of Indian Residential Schools (FNCSCSC, 2016)

Necropolitical assemblages include Western technologies of "progress" developed through policing Indigenous movements (Crosby & Monaghan, 2018) and materialities of suffering through resource extraction (Mbembe, 2019). I remain critical of Indigenous land-based future imaginaries which deeply integrate Artificial Intelligence and robotics, drawing caution from the maintenance of death-worlds; through weaponized unmanned aerial vehicles or UAVs (Brewster, 2023), expanding surveillance technologies of policing settler states (Crosby & Monaghan, 2018), to environmental impacts and land dispossession via resource extraction. These systems of colonial dispossession by design and corresponding death-worlds are expanding at rapid rates in new dimensions today as dominant governing bodies continue to act with impunity.

Dr. Tunstall highlights that we must understand the function of modernist design as part of colonialism and white supremacy (2023). This is an important schema

to recognize design as not only material or environmental but ontological. This positions the necessity of design sovereignty in achieving Indigenous land-based futures through addressing “colonization by design” (De Santolo & Dixon, 2021) and the necropolitical death-worlds generated. Dr. Tunstall goes on to suggest that to decolonize design we must be “putting Indigenous first” (2023). I argue this must include Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, sciences, technologies and methods; reflecting key principles identified by Cajete comprising the *Native Mind* (2020) including life-affirmation, interdependence, and right relationship. Additionally, Tunstall argues that the “tech bias in the European modernist project” must be dismantled. Citing that this technology bias was "devastating to Indigenous, Black and other People of Color communities because of its role in colonization” (p. 12, 2023). Indigenous knowledge systems continue to face marginalization from design thinking, to Indigenous sciences, and technologies. Through addressing the formation of death-worlds and necropolitical assemblages which undermine design sovereignty, my analysis cautions against the role of emergent Western technologies being highly integrated into Indigenous future imaginaries. This critique reflects the innately political paradigm of implementing design sovereignty through the call to generate systemic solutions within which Indigenous self-determination, autonomy, and sovereignty are embodied. This is the work that is necessary to facilitate Indigenous land-based futures, or what I am exploring through the term sovereign futurity.

STRATEGIES OF INQUIRY

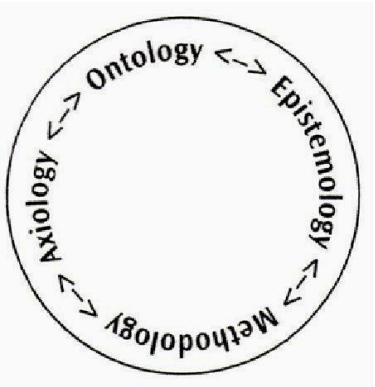

Fig. 8 Indigenous Research Paradigm. (Wilson, p. 70, 2008)

Indigenous Autoethnography and Research-Creation through Visual Storywork

My strategies of inquiry[14] combine Indigenous autoethnography with research-creation through land/place-based visual storytelling or storywork (Wilson, 2008; Whitinui, 2014; Archibald et al, 2017) to create a zine which shares the title of this paper, *Reclaiming Turtle Island: Activating design sovereignty through deep time; An urban hide tanner's case study*. Dorothy Christian shares that "[a]n Indigenous Inquiry process is set in an Indigenous research paradigm that privileges Indigenous systems of knowledge" (Archibald et al, p. ii, 2017). This philosophy is at the heart of my research as I seek to deepen and uplift Indigenous ways of knowing and being through my research, collaborative design, arts and land-based pedagogy practices. Indigenous autoethnography values a "resistance-based discourse" and seeks to "address issues of social justice and to develop social change by engaging [I]ndigenous researchers in rediscovering their own voices as "culturally liberating human-beings."" (Whitinui, p. 1, 2014). This mode of inquiry resonates with the values of the Buckskin Babes cultural hub co-design as this work emerged as a grassroots initiative through ad hoc mobilization to meet our needs as Indigenous land-based learners in Tiohtià:ke. Additionally, Indigenous autoethnography aligns with the critical design theory research I have been engaged around themes of sovereignty and self-determination. Exploring the self as culturally liberated within a context of engaging land-based pedagogies on sites of urban hide camps against a backdrop of ongoing settler colonial

[14] This phrasing, strategies of inquiry, is adopted in alignment with Shawn Wilson's reflections in Research as Ceremony (2009) where he shares this language to speak to a relational research practice wherein multiple qualitative methodologies are engaged at one time, requiring adaptive research approaches in place of a singular methodology.

erasure has resonated greatly with my process and provided a rich environment to reflect while refusing Western ontological traditions.

Christian connects Indigenous visual storywork with land/place-based visual storytelling asserting the "cultural congruence of [artists] selected aesthetics" (2017). Christian unpacks Indigenous visual storywork as weaving "relational qualities of land, story, and cultural protocols and how this shapes our Indigenous place-based identities, which … inform how visual storytellers construct the aesthetics" (Archibald et al, 2019). This mode of inquiry aligns deeply with my research-creation methods combining photography, illustration, graphic design and personal archive. Land/place-based visual storywork speaks aptly to Indigenous visual cultures, valuing encoded meaning developed through Indigenous artists' aesthetics that is passed down generationally as part of our cultural worldviews. Christian's background as a filmmaker engaging a lens-based practice helps me to better understand my own creative agency and voice.

As Haas asserts, Indigenous visual cultures employ a practice of multimodal meaning-making, and explores mnemonic technologies of wampum diplomacy as sites of technology, politics/governance, land-based relationality, cultural transmission and storywork. This observation recognizes the Indigenous ontologies of multi-modal meaning generated through interconnection across arts and sciences, supporting Cajete's iterations of the *Native Mind* (2020). He characterizes this framework as deeply interconnected, stating that Indigenous sciences are interwoven with cultural practices, spirituality and philosophy. These Indigenous scholars help to illuminate the exchange between Indigenous territorial relationality and Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, values, and ways of being and doing. The above strategies of inquiry helped to guide my research and reflections, ultimately highlighting the call for design sovereignty to engage both material and onto-epistemological *land back* to embody Indigenous futures.

Placekeeping practices: Visual Storywork as Alternate Mapping Methods

At Two Row Architects "placekeeping is really about how we respect our relations — the wind, the water, the land, the animals — and thinking about how we can build in a way that respects and enhances those. Through that enhancement, we're also, ultimately, enhancing life for humanity" (Hickey, 2022). This view reflects Indigenous values in design such as interconnection and relationality, where

understanding ecological cycles and environmental features contributes to “good design” and ultimately reaps positive impacts for humanity through balance with the natural world rather than domination over it. Brian Porter reflects on the site of the Spirit Garden Indian Residential School Survivors Restoration of Identity Project in Tsi Tkaronto as a seed, sharing that,

> If you want something to grow or a relationship to flourish, you first have to plant that seed. If you want that seed to grow and the relationship to flourish, it's something that you have to care for every year, year after year, through all of the seasons. Through all of the 13 moons, you need to work together, you need to nourish that place. (2024)

Porter states that creating the space is only the first step. Animating the site through culturally relevant programming and tending the garden both metaphorically and literally is necessary for the project to “take root” and begin to “foster other projects and improve those relationships” (2024). These reflections help us to understand placekeeping, in its best iterations, as a method of governance and Nation-to-Nation relationship building. When designing relations with land, there are mechanisms put in place to attend to the cycles of the seasons, both socially and environmentally. In this way, placekeeping goes beyond designing our built environment to understanding how our built environment can impact our relationships with each other and the natural world (Cardinal, 2019).

I engage Indigenous autoethnography through visual storywork. I will generate a personal archive through digital and polaroid photography in combination with graphic design and illustration, to create a zine which reflects on the case study of the Buckskin Babes cultural hub co-design process. My zine will detail my findings from the perspective of a hide-tanning practitioner, Buckskin Babes collective member, and collaborative design specialist. Building a praxis towards design sovereignty, the zine documents land/place-based visual narratives that are unique to the development of the cultural hub, in addition to informing the case study itself. The zine will reflect relevant co-design approaches that support the implementation of design sovereignty from relationships, place-based approaches, community activation and engagement, Indigenous-led design iterations for outcomes such as culturally relevant programming to support land-based pedagogies and community building necessary to heal colonial legacies through “bringing the bush to the City” (Deer, 2023). It is not always accessible

to go back to the bush in our home communities, or host a cultural fire in the City. Urban centres especially in the Northeast propagate invisibilization and subvert Indigenous territorial belonging through urban development expanding the settler colony. Through generating urban access as embodied resistance, renewal and refusal through Indigenous land-based practices against the dystopian colonial backdrop, we reframe urban relations through a lens of community power and placekeeping. Through these sites of activation design sovereignty supports Indigenous land-based futures through material and territorial belonging interwoven through Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Additionally, documenting this case study enacts placekeeping through Indigenous visual cartographies, as author Lola Remy names in relation to Kanien'kehá:ka artist and scholar Hannah Claus' 2013 cinematic work *memory maps (cartes mémoires)*. Remy argues that visual cartographies of territory act as an alternative mapping methodology and through visual and cinematic media demonstrate an applied use of lands by Indigenous communities (2018). Claus achieves this through a collaborative cinematic making, where participants trace territories through memory and meaning with the aid of a projector. In this exercise, participants subvert colonial cartographies through territorial relationality and land-body connection. Another example of this applied use of lands includes Wendat filmmaker Nicolas Renaud's short work *Onyionhwentsïio'* (2022), which features hand-drawn animations of a *portager* walking through the landscape based on specific locations within Wendat homelands. Renaud's work maps territorial relations through transgenerational memory, referencing the act of carrying by Indigenous peoples. This imagery evokes complex legacies Renaud identifies as both acts of hospitality, and colonial entanglement as land-based guides (2025). Ultimately these works transmit multi-modal meaning through visual storywork as alternative mapping methods. This practice functions as a form of placekeeping, which posits that land-bases already hold placehood within both ecological and Indigenous relations to territory, and is being activated through applied use of lands by generating and documenting Indigenous visual cultures.

METHOD & MAKING

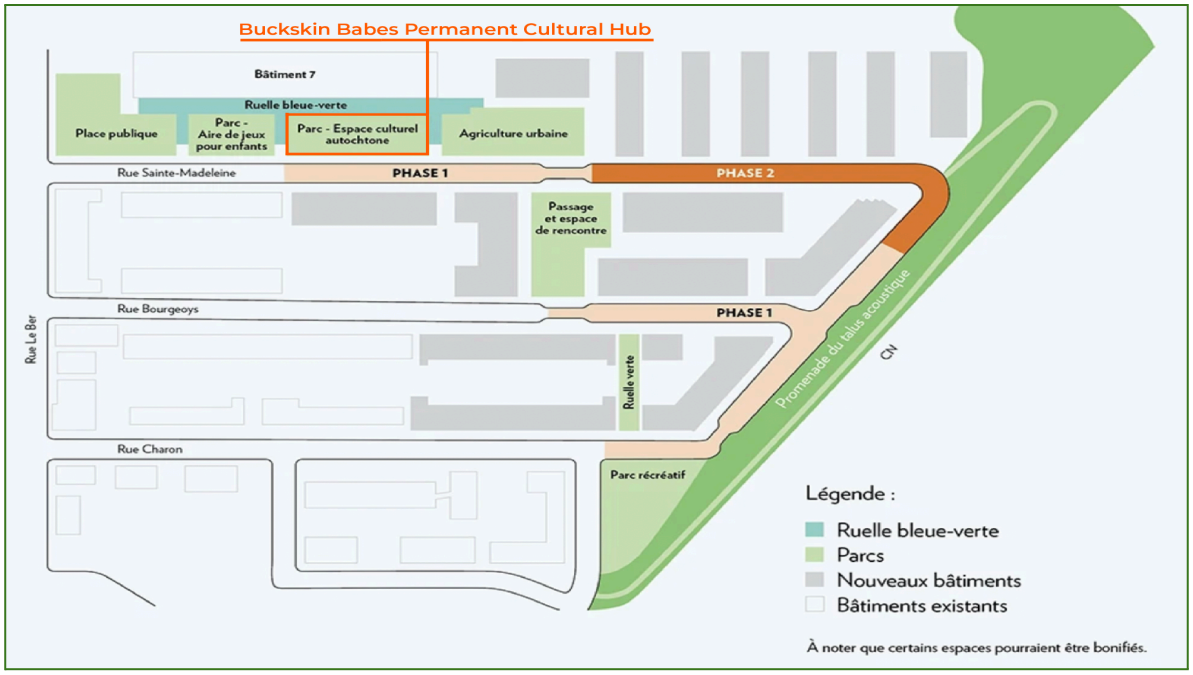

Fig. 9 Site map

[1]https://montreal.ca/articles/secteur-des-anciens-ateliers-du-cn-18628

My research-creation zine employs Indigenous autoethnography through visual arts documentation and multimedia journaling, including illustration, lens-based and curatorial practices. My research seeks to develop a praxis of design sovereignty through both the zines content and creation, from formulating the Buckskin Babes co-design case study to creating a zine for dissemination and reflection. In it I establish necessary context on Indigenous-led co-design best practices and contemporary Indigenous design pedagogy. I then move on to documention of the specific circumstances and background that inform the co-design process with the Buckskin Babes at Bâtiment 7, including its outcomes and my reflections. I employed both polaroid and digital photography to compile my personal archives, capturing references in relation to the land/place and moment/time, generating a culturally relevant visual narrative. I went on to digitize milestone materials such as event posters and objects such as deer antlers, which are symbols of abundance and community collaboration, and bone tools I created to build my archive and create a dynamic presentation of material data. I had to process all of my images in preparation to print the final zine, digitally photographing polaroid stills and creating a visual library through photo-documentation of various texts I referenced. In conversation with the graphic design approach, the lay-out favours bold images which saturate the pages, overtaking

margins, and layering images with text to reflect the content and concepts present. The colour scheme reflects colour ways found in the hide tanning practice and urban settings. I chose to layer urban textures including twisted metal, bubbling rain bleached paint and rough rusted surfaces throughout the zine to capture the environment our hide camps take place. I included several digital illustrations based on Haudenosaunee-specific petroglyph research, utilizing resources from my home community of Six Nations of the Grand River (Ohsweken, in so-called Ontario) enriching the layers of meaning through deep time. Through visual storywork I hope to activate both memory and visual cultures by integrating my personal archive in the graphic design of the zine. For example, I explore the visual metaphor of decay and transformation that is exemplified in aspects of the hide tanning process and through placekeeping itself; generating a larger narrative container to explore design sovereignty through decomposing and transforming colonial legacies. The visual storywork references various animals who contribute corporeally to the hide tanning process at various stages of harvesting and processing, incorporating images of the animal skins' flesh side on the recto and a photograph of the fur side on the verso of the back cover design. Culturally relevant plants are also referenced, such as sumac which hold soil bioremediating properties and are commonly found flourishing in liminal urban and bush spaces - particularly ditches and disturbed soil, operating as a place/land-based metaphor for resilience and resistance. I include other natural materials including heirloom seeds which to me have come to embody the notion of deep time and the interconnection of past-present-future and speak back to the transformative power of placekeeping in a context of urban erasure through design sovereignty.

The zine documents celebratory moments showcasing the many hands behind the hide work and co-design process. Highlighting moments of hide camp abundance through images of overflowing harvests such as piles of mallard duck wings processed on site. Deer and moose hides are featured at various stages of processing, creating an in-group signifier and beacon of belonging for fellow hide tanners and land-based learners. Additionally, the zine documents various stages within the co-design process sharing schematic designs, detailed design documents and processes of community engagement. Through visual storywork I reference relevant forms, including hide-scraping frames that cradle the practice. Hide tanning is often a collective practice and I hope to represent natural laws of abundance and reciprocity through land/place-based visual narratives, documenting activations of the site. I contrast "raw

materials” in the form of freshly harvested antlers with the silhouettes of pine trees bursting with sap, highlighting the interconnection of lands and lifeforms. Photographs privileged tight shots often on 18-35mm lens to emphasize an intimate relationality and create a visual narrative device to communicate the work is shown through my perspective/worldview/lens. Subjects range from insects to celestial bodies to reflect and resonate with Onkwehón:we values, showcasing the confluence of my research in a visually dynamic format referencing cycles of renewal and seasonality. I showcase the evolution of the materiality of hide processing, juxtaposing boney, moss covered antler with refined bone tools that I made by hand. I incorporate halftones into several images to reference serigraphy and its aesthetic form, featured predominantly within punk, alternative and DIY subcultures. The zine shares an overview of findings from co-design process reflections, outcomes, challenges, accomplishments, limitations and successes and includes theoretical frameworks through Indigenous design pedagogy.

My findings focus on the documentation of the Parc Ionkwatia'tarò:ron co-design process and creating collaborative frameworks to implement design sovereignty through the creation of a permanent, outdoor hide-tanning cultural hub at Bâtiment 7 transforming urban relations through placekeeping. Interwoven through the research-creation practice includes land/place-based visual storywork, documenting my experiences at various stages of my own hide tanning journey. This includes Buckskin Babes collective hide camps and learning from Knowledge Keepers such as Grace Ratt, Eleanor Hegland and Brian Bird (Deer, 2023). Building my hide tanning knowledge as a continuous learner has resulted in attending hide camps in other territories, such as Moose River Basin Hide Camp near Cochrane, ON and a Hide Tanning and Parfleche Residency at Banff Centre for Arts, AB. During my time at Banff, we were supported by faculty including Buffalo Peoples Arts Institute (BPAI) and Dene Knowledge Keepers Lucy-Anne Yukalya and Suzan Marie. One of the faculty with BPAI, Lorne Kequatooway shared an important teaching with us, stating that “Buffalo builds kinship” (2024). He was speaking to the impact of the practice on social and environmental relations, which I have experienced within every hide camp space. The photography that is featured in the zine hones into site-specific iconography and relationships, reflecting the visual storywork of hide camps at Bâtiment 7 and documenting our journey throughout the co-design process.

One of the ways that the kinship building of hide tanning developed through the co-design was in the acquisition of over 70 deer hides donated to the collective.

There was a plan by the City of Montréal to cull a number of deer in south shore Longueuil where the deer population was exploding in their municipal green spaces. Through the cultural hub co-design project our urban hide tanning initiative got onto the municipal radar. We were approached as an ideal recipient of the deer hides and we were able to negotiate support to build our storage capacity, connecting with daphne Indigenous artist-run centre to host our freezers until our space at B7 is complete. This spirit of community mobilisation and the willingness to redistribute existing resources to Indigenous directives has been present throughout the co-design process and highlights the capacity for relational transformation through placekeeping in urban environments. The landscape architects from the South-West Borough whom we worked closely with were adept at creating solutions to meet our vision and minimize barriers. We engaged our community throughout the process, including key milestones such as a celebratory feast to establish the toponymy or naming of the site. The name was activated through feasting, developed through community dialogue and interpreted/translated by fellow Buckskin Babe collective member and Tká:nios co-founder, Brooke Rice. We pushed for agency over toponymy within the context of an increasingly unfavourable political climate as double minorities as Anglophone Indigenous community members, in regards to French language policy.

As we visioned the space, we embodied the values of our collective practice reflecting on Elder care, accessibility, intergenerational learning, cultural safety and care taking that must be done at every stage of the tanning process - creating ways to receive those needs in our infrastructure. We secured multiple sites for implementing visual arts treatments, creating opportunities for Indigenous artists as part of economic reconciliation. Through our co-design we thought of our tools, our workspace, our necessities and created spaces for gathering, scraping, soaking, and smoking. We will be able to utilize a firepit creating urban access to natural fire; an immense barrier for City natives. We are fighting the necropolitics of colonial design through embodying Indigenous land-based futures in the urban environment “bringing the bush to the City” (Deer, 2023). However, there remains limitations and challenges to navigate from the call for *Land Back*, not only materially but in terms of onto-epistemology. We remain in a position of advocacy, continually pushing boundaries within colonial systems, coming up against settler sensibilities, priorities, processes and policies. This includes the formal designation of the site as a municipal park which remains ultimately in the hands of the City of Montréal. As we continue to push decolonizing design initiatives into a praxis of design sovereignty, it is important to celebrate our wins

but also tally the barriers that push us to reflect and continue to deepen this work. However the project demonstrated unwavering success by moving beyond theoretical “decolonization” into a tangible, urban reality. Demonstrating how design sovereignty through placekeeping is not simply aesthetic but embodied through living practices of cultural renewal and self-determination across deep time.

IMPACTS

Coming into this work with a strong anti-colonial and anti-racist approach, I value the impact of my research to be meaningful not only in the context of my lived experiences and professional development, but useful also to broader communities with consequences beyond my own accreditations. The praxis behind developing a zine is to promote capacity building across disciplines as an accessible, easy to disseminate tool that also celebrates the impact of the shared responsibility of advocacy and cultural heritage work is deeply important to me. Through uplifting Indigenous modes of knowledge production, this tool can support advocacy, evaluation, implementation, and develop capacity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous design professionals alike while existing as a case study which documents an act of placekeeping that disrupts settler colonial “death worlds” and urban erasure. This research contributes to Indigenous design pedagogy and the growing global conversation around decolonizing design practices which uplifts Indigenous ways of knowing and being, advocating for practitioners to push the boundaries of hegemonic and often colonizing design practices towards design sovereignty reimaging urban relations through placekeeping.

The zine is a resource for implementing Indigenous design principles and providing critical firsthand reflections on place-based co-design practices while sharing honest reflections on building praxis for design sovereignty to facilitate Indigenous land-based futures, sharing a foundation for re-imaging urban relations. This accessible resource was created to share my research and lived experiences in hopes of being applied in the field to build capacity for designers from all backgrounds in decolonizing practices in the built environment. This will simultaneously normalize and celebrate the implementation of Indigenous methodologies, ontologies and epistemologies into diverse design practices, validating the call by Indigenous architects to restructure what the dominant paradigm considers *good design*.

CONCLUSION

In answer to my research questions, “How can Indigenous-led co-design re-imagine urban relationships through placekeeping?” and “How can design sovereignty facilitate Indigenous land-based futures?”, my research-creation resulted in the development of a zine-based Indigenous co-design case study zine as a tool for knowledge dissemination, building praxis towards design sovereignty. In combining Indigenous autoethnography and visual storywork, my zine reflects on the successes and limitations demonstrated in the case study of Buckskin Babes cultural hub co-design at Bâtiment 7 in Pointe Ste Charles, which took place from 2024-2025. My research reflects critical contributions from Indigenous and Black architects, designers, and scholars which situates the co-design case study within a matrix of building Indigenous futures through design sovereignty and transformative power of placekeeping in restructuring urban relations. Indigenous land-based futures require design sovereignty to combat re-forming necropolitical assemblages that systemically render Indigenous life under settler colonial occupation a state of continuous resistance against the death-worlds enacted by socio-material infrastructures of Terra Nullius on unceded lands. By reclaiming space through intergenerational land-based pedagogies in the urban environment we are securing Indigenous land-based futures through design sovereignty and reorienting new(old) ways of relating within the spatialization of urbanity through placekeeping.

I have found that the notion of reclaiming Turtle Island will require systemic solutions that reflect both material (land/place-based) and onto-epistemological, embodied through Indigenous ways of knowing and being. As Cree scholar Shawn Wilson notes, the interconnection between axiology, ontology, methodology and epistemology teaches us that values, such as Indigenous sovereignty and natural law, inform ways of knowing, being and doing (2008). Through placekeeping practices urban relations can be transformed by facilitating sovereign futurity by supporting Onkwehón:we self-determination in the built environment, subverting architecture's dominant function of colonial violence to a site of generating Indigenous belonging and renewal through territorial relationality. Placekeeping embodied by Indigenous land-based practices restructures urban landscapes, re-framing sites of erasure, displacement and dispossession to sites of life-affirmation, abundance and renewal. I integrate a critical necropolitical lens, helping to identify structures which challenge and subvert Indigenous futures, ways of doing and being. The zine transmits the

material labour of reclamation, showcasing the relationships, frameworks, and practices that came together to create Park Ionkwatia'tarò:ron. In addition to serving as an accessible and easy-to-distribute tool that documents our co-design in a format that incorporates multi-media approaches for dissemination through self-publication and online distribution. The grassroots nature of zine-creation aligns with the values of this research and also leans on a tradition of self-publishing that breaks mainstream graphic design and literary conventions.

The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada states that Indigenous-led collaborative design frameworks are still emergent as an iterative process that must continually adapt, overcoming challenges through colonial design conventions. Co-design requires willingness for settler structures to engage meaningful restitution and justice through placekeeping, however practical implimentation faces limitations within those structures (Atkins, 2019). This co-design case study cites the impact of humanity within those systems, as individuals choose to challenge, subvert and reimagine the limiting structures of dominant design together. This case study builds on Indigenous design pedagogies and affirms the importance of self-determination outside of dominant systems, valuing multiplicity, Indigenous sovereignty through place-based approaches and creating solutions outside of the dominant paradigm. Placekeeping through Indigenous-led co-design enacts design sovereignty through supporting Indigenous peoples' agency in shaping land-based futures (sovereign futurity) - seeking justice and redefining urban relationships through life-affirmation, abundance, and land-body sovereignty.

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