Translating Images of Survivance: A Trans-Indigenous Corporeal Analysis of *Spear* and *Maliglutit*

MATT KLIEWER

Beginning in 2016, I was part of a programming team that brought two features to the *Native Crossroads Film Festival and Symposium* in Norman, Oklahoma. Originally founded by Kristin Dowell, Karl Schmidt, and Victoria Sturtevant, *Native Crossroads* is run through the University of Oklahoma and currently headed by Cherokee film scholar Joshua B. Nelson. The 2017 *Native Crossroads* opened with the feature screening of Stephen Page's *Spear* and closed with Zacharias Kunuk's *Maliglutit.* While this schedule was largely coincidental, the way these two films bookended a Native film festival in Oklahoma containing documentaries and short films focusing on the water protectors protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline, Choctaw visual artist and filmmaker Steven Paul Judd, and Pawnee major league baseball pitcher Mose J. Yellowhorse, is suggestive. It highlights the unique interplay between the more locally produced films that appear each year at *Native Crossroads* and global Indigenous films often first appearing at *imagineNATIVE*, while also speaking to the power of trans-Indigenous film discourse at both the diegetic and productive level.

The productive transnational spaces of *imagineNATIVE* and *Native Crossroads* provide access to and resources for the maintenance of a global Indigenous visual sovereignty. In *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*, Michelle Raheja claims that "[v]isual sovereignty is a practice that takes a holistic approach to the process of creating moving images and that locates Indigenous cinema in a particular historical and social context while privileging tribal specificity" (194). While the creation of tribally specific images of survivance that Raheja describes is a fundamental part of the process of reinforcing visual sovereignty and enacting self-determination, extending such work across tribal boundaries also represents a powerful inter-tribal, globally Indigenous challenge to the colonial gaze. When analyzing Indigenous images from vastly different geographical and colonial contexts, we can find common colonial images that Indigenous image makers strategically deconstruct and remake in the image of survivance, revealing performative inter-tribal sovereignties One of the foundational aspects of visual sovereignty, according to

Raheja, is "a revision of older films featuring Native American plots in order to reframe a narrative that privileges Indigenous participation and perhaps points to sites of Indigenous knowledge production in films otherwise understood as purely Western products" (196). Stephen Page's *Spear* and Zacharias Kunuk's *Maliglutit* are useful films to consider in this context, as they demonstrate how an inter-tribal aesthetic directly engages Western colonial film conventions and colonial imagery, reframing narratives where Indigenous bodies encounter and resist their historically limited positionality in filmic mediums.

By viewing both *Maliglutit* and *Spear* as indicative of Barclay's Fourth Cinema[1] and by focusing particularly on their postindian subversions of genre and plot, we are able to consider the inherent meta-awareness of the filmic medium as one of the most politically viable methods of creating a global Indigenous media. In her examination of Kunuk's *Atanarjuat,* Shari Huhndorf points to film's "capacity to mediate across temporal and geographical distances . . . support[ing] an imagined Inuit community with deep historical roots" (76). Film, then, fundamentally contains not only the tools to contrapuntally form Indigenous coalitions around imagined and real Indigenous relations; in a specifically Indigenous context, as we see in both *Spear* and *Maliglutit*, film also maintains the power to write and gaze back against the colonial apparatuses of film *itself* through Indigenous bodies' movement through temporalities and spaces.

Trans-Indigenous film studies has not yet produced the sheer amount of material that exists within literary studies since the publication of Chadwick Allen's impactful *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*. Nevertheless, both Jessica Horton and Salma Monani have undertaken specifically trans-Indigenous projects within film and visual art, each adopting a focus on the corporeal body as a site of resistance. In Monani's chapter, "*Kissed by Lighting* and Fourth Cinema's Natureculture Continuum," she describes the "transcorporeal yet *embodied* response" that viewers experience in reflex to cinema in general, and with specific attention to a particular trans-Indigenous corporeal response to Shelley Niro's *Kissed by Lightning* (146). Likewise, in her analysis of *Atanarjuat,* Horton examines how "corporeal senses of place allow for a sympathetic alignment of bodies on film with bodies in real-time viewing space", explaining how "[t]his 'sense of place' is immediate, physical, and can be unconsciously experienced by the viewer" (7). Discussing this same scene from *Atanarjuat* in his keynote address at the 2018 Native American Literature Symposium, Joshua Nelson carefully

notes that the interaction between the corporeal and ecological in Indigenous film often decidedly speaks back against pernicious and stereotypical portrayals of the 'ecological Indian.' In much the same way as Horton argues that a naked Atanarjuat forces an immediate sense of place, I contend that both *Spear* and *Maliglutit* portray Indigenous bodies to locate that place within inherently colonial spaces.

Extending the scholarship of Channette Romero, Angelica Lawson, Danika Medak-Saltzman, and Joanna Hearne, my aim in this piece is to examine Indigenous survivance images in which colonial tropes appear intertextually as vehicles to rework and reappropriate Indigenous presence and space through corporeality. While Hollywood, and the colonial film apparatus in general, remains the spectre that haunts and limits Indigenous film production and distribution, colonial images of Indigeneity are summoned forth through the body in Kunuk and Page's works. As Raheja argues in *Visualities*:

> Scholarship on Native American filmic representations has historically presented a reading of indigenous peoples as victims of Hollywood interests, and a national rhetoric and relic of invisibility and disappearance . . . Yet this, of course, is not the whole picture. As a supplement and antidote to these images, important recent work on indigenous film demonstrates how contemporary indigenous filmmakers have resisted Hollywood by employing culturally specific representational practices of visual sovereignty, and sometimes by ignoring or eliding dominant representational conventions and other forms of colonization." (Raheja 12)

Within *Spear* and *Maliglutit*, each filmmaker notably refuses to ignore or elide colonial spaces and colonial filmic history. Instead, they confront each directly, both in conception and motion of the filmed bodies, allowing for meaningful decolonial disruptions. Through Indigenous filmic survivance, each film simultaneously alludes to and fractures colonial performativity—gazing back at colonial cinema. While Kunuk presents this through a repurposing of John Ford's classic 1956 Western *The Searchers,* Page subverts colonial filmic temporality through a contrapuntal historical retelling of Australia's colonial history as written on, and performed through, Indigenous bodies.

Strategically juxtaposing these two films reveals the ironic interactions between colonial film conventions and survivance in contemporary Indigenous films. Exposing filmic strategies that directly implicate and complicate colonial film narratives allows us to theorize imagic

survivance in ways that speak concurrently to specific Indigenous histories and trans-Indigenous filmic methodologies. Chadwick Allen argues that "staging purposeful Indigenous juxtapositions" becomes a means "to develop[ing] a version of Indigenous literary studies that locates itself firmly in the specificity of the Indigenous local while always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global" (xix). Where *Spear* utilizes metafilmic images to recalibrate colonial filmic portrayals of Aboriginality, Kunuk reinvents *The Searchers*, through (1) the utilization of Inuktitut language throughout the film; (2) a fully Indigenous cast; and (3) the reframing of the Hollywood Western projected in stark relief onto and against the landscape of Igloolik. This final element requires the characters to possess specific Indigenous knowledge of the land in order for the protagonist and his young sidekick to pursue *Maliglutit*'s kidnappers. In both of these films, colonial imagic portrayals of Indigenous peoples are rewritten and visualized through the bodies of the characters as they reenact and refute colonial film narratives. Ford's Westerns and the blackface Aboriginals of British propaganda films exist in perpetuity underneath each of the narrative arcs of these films, as both directors shift the colonial gaze ironically and vehemently back toward the colonizer via the framing of Indigenous bodies in colonial and decolonial spaces.

Gazing Through the Western in *Maliglutit*

Maliglutit, which translates from Inuktitut to English as *Searchers*, takes place and is filmed in and around the community of Igloolik, in Nunavut, northern Canada. The choice to reframe Ford's narrative (which was filmed on the Navajo reservation in Arizona, as a stand-in for West Texas) in the specific region of Igloolik points to Kunuk's desire to make visible the issues of colonialism that continue to impact the Inuit. Kunuk's Arctic setting intuitively challenges colonial mythology, as Shari Huhndorf underscores, stating that "[a]s signifiers, and instruments of power, images of the Arctic remain central to struggles for control of the region" (79). By transposing one of the most popular colonialist films of the twentieth century across national and tribal borders into Igloolik, Kunuk continues a filmmaking tradition of Western critique with a specifically Inuit method.

In *Maliglutit,* Kunuk challenges the images of Indigeneity found in the Western film genre. The reframing of Ford's film by Kunuk immediately contradicts the bas-relief of Ford's Indians. Additionally, by casting nearly all Igloolik actors the racialist dynamics of *The*

Searchers are subverted.[2] The application of Kunuk's stylistic filmmaking to Ford's *The Searchers* also amplifies the convention in Indigenous films of intertextually referencing films and images previously constructed *about* Indigenous peoples. In his book *Imagic Moments,* Lee Schweninger speaks to this allusion to colonial portrayals in Indigenous films, arguing that

> [t]he self-awareness exemplifies Fourth Cinema, in a sense, in that such instances demonstrate the filmmakers' insistence on the importance of telling one's own story by holding and focusing one's own camera. In this way, the filmmakers very literally and self-evidently control the gaze . . . This self-conscious use of film and photography, I argue, forces an awareness on the viewer and insists on a somewhat critical rather than a merely a passive response to the viewing experience. (Schweninger 15)

Kunuk's intertextual cooption of *The Searchers* reframes the narrative in a way that shifts the gaze both to the original conception and the ideologies that underlie Hollywood Westerns, while also indigenizing humanistic questions of violence and revenge. The drama of the murder and the kidnapping do not serve narratives of Manifest Destiny or inherent savagery, as is the case in Ford's film; they merely result from a lover's jealousy. The controversy takes place on a human and a tribal level, not one based in national racialist discourses. Instead, the titling of the film and the closeness of the narrative to Ford's western function as a postindian revision of Ford. By moving from the liminal positionality of the savage stereotype, *Maliglutit* underscores Anishinaabe theorist Gerald Vizenor's sense of "*transmotion,* that inspired sense of natural motion and singular, visionary sovereignty [that] abides in stories of survivance" (*Native Liberty* 108). The colonizer in *Maliglutit* is never present in a scene, but remains palimpsestically present in the narrative. Kunuk gazes back at Ford, pronouncing Indigenous presence and disrupting the manifest manners of conventional Westerns.

Apart from the production elements and ideological differences between the two films, several other aspects of *Maliglutit* stand out as subversions of the filmic manifest manners visible in *The Searchers*. In Ford's original, a band of raiding Comanche slaughter Ethan's brother Aaron, his sister-in-law Martha, and his young nephew Ben. They then proceed to kidnap his two nieces, Lucy and Debbie. The subsequent quest to recapture the nieces is undertaken by Ethan and Martin, Aaron's adopted half-blood Indian son. As a tracker with the ability to speak and understand the Comanche language, Ethan utilizes skills learned from the Comanche and his army experience to trail the raiding party to a convergence between two hills, where he takes

leave of his nephew in order to continue the search. The camera stays with Martin as Ethan exits off-screen, who returns later to inform the adopted nephew of his sister Lucy's death. A common interpretation of this scene holds that the lack of firsthand perspective during such a fundamental moment within the plot suggests that Ethan is not entirely honest with his nephew about the occurrences off-screen. Often vulgar and racist toward Martin, Ethan may have murdered his niece after finding her raped by the Comanche. This theme of the fear of miscegenation occurs frequently throughout the Western genre of film, and within *The Searchers* Ethan's interactions with Martin and the initial horror with which Ethan reacts to the discovery of Martha's body provide evidence for such a reading. In Sue Matheson's viewing of the film, she claims that "Ethan has no other choice but to leave because he cannot give up his incestuous love for his brother's wife and his extreme horror of miscegenation" (51). Discovering Lucy in a similar state would presumably trigger the same latent fear and murderous intent present in Ethan throughout the film.

The interactions between Ethan and Martin, and the murder of Lucy, are dramatically shifted in *Maliglutit* to challenge the racialist assumptions and fears of miscegenation that suffuse Ford's film. Instead of off-screen interactions between the two warring parties, Kunuk widens the camera in his beautiful panoramic landscape shots and refuses to look away from the abusive scenes merely implied by Ford and so feared by Ethan. Many of Ford's characters find doubles in Kunuk's film: Kuanana mirrors Ethan, and the role of Martin is occupied by Siku. While Siku mirrors Martin as the younger man in the search, it is suggested in the film's opening that he is likely the illegitimate son of Kupak, *Maliglutit's* analogue to the figure of Scar. The two women who escape death in the initial raid by Kupak's tribe somewhat mirror Lucy and Debbie, although neither is ever murdered, and instead of being Kuanana's niece, Ailla is his wife. And while the first significant plot point of *The Searchers* is mirrored inasmuch as Kuanana and his son leave their home unattended only for the remaining characters to be slaughtered in their igloo, the subsequent search for and fate of the wife figure vary greatly. Notably, the impetus for Kupak's raid finds root not in colonial relations between the two tribes but rather in a feud based on a prophetic vision had by one of the elders of Kuanana's tribe. The elder man who experiences this vision claims that "a murder is near," and an elder woman points to Kupak and exclaims that "[y]ou, Kupak, are the cause of all this. You asshole!" Ultimately, it is a combination of Kupak's refusal to share food from his hunts and his sexual encounters with

the women of the tribe that push Kuanana's tribe to banish Kupak and his followers. As a fundamental aspect of tribal sovereignty lies in the ability to set the parameters of membership, the banishment of Kupak displays and exercises that sovereignty.

The most important divergence in Kunuk's revision of *The Searchers*, however, lies in the fact that Tagaq and Ailla survive their kidnapping, although they are not unscathed. Where Ford hides these atrocities behind hills and walls, Kunuk relishes in the visual resistance and survival of Ailla. During her first night in captivity with Kupak, he asks Ailla to pour him a cup of tea. Wordlessly, Ailla pours a cup from a kettle that had been set by the fire. She hesitates as she brings the cup up from the kettle and looks toward a nearly sleeping Kupak with disgust. She then throws the cup of water into his face, which prompts him to attempt to assault her. This struggle unfolds over the course of a minute and twenty seconds, with Ailla pulling at Kupak's hair, punching him in the chest and face, and fighting tirelessly. As they continue to fight, the camera slowly fades from the firelit igloo, where the assault takes place, to the blowing snow of Igloolik, and then to Kuanana and Siku, sleeping upright. Kunuk forces the audience to witness the ferocity with which Ailla fights, and, unlike Debbie in *The Searchers*, Ailla never converts to Kupak's tribe—instead remaining resistant.

In the most memorable and strikingly unconventional scene of the film, Ailla and Tagaq attempt to escape Kupak's band. When they are alerted to the escape of their wives, Kupak and his ally Aulla dress quickly, gather the ropes that had previously bound Ailla and Tagaq, and give pursuit. Unlike the fast-paced, heavily scored and dramatized chases in *The Searchers* and *Stagecoach*, the camera pans wide, showing the two women running, slowly moving toward the camera, with a view of the two men some distance behind. Kupak catches up to Ailla as Tagaq and Aulla run off-screen. Rather than submit to being rebound with Kupak's rope, however, Ailla continues to fight, screaming "Get off" and "Get the fuck away from me." Kupak is able to retie Ailla, and commands her to "come with me" and "be nice," to which she replies, "I don't want to be with you" and "no," respectively. Refusing to go with Kupak, she forces him to drag her back to camp. This process is cut through by a scene where Kuanana and Siku have followed the tracks of the rival band close enough to see them through a telescope. The perspective changes again when Kuanana climbs a hill to gain a better vantage, then back to a close shot of Kupak continuing to drag Ailla back to camp. The closeness of the camera to the two bodies

displays the ferocity with which Ailla fights to keep from being bound to Kupak's sled. This sequence takes over three minutes, with Ailla finally tiring enough for Kupak to tie her.

The motion of Kupak and Ailla's bodies show their conflict played out in small muscle movements, wrestling without grand spectacle. It is a very human altercation, where we see the wife grow tired but continue to struggle with every sinew to escape the assault. The pacing of this scene directly contradicts the grand Hollywood spectacle of violence in *The Searchers*. While there is constant movement, it is muted by the close proximity of the camera to the bodies of the subjects. The intensity with which Ailla fights in the face of what seems to be an unwinnable battle illustrates an agency not offered any of the women or Indigenous characters in *The Searchers.* The contrast between the sweeping, sublime shots of small bodies moving in the vast landscape of the Arctic and the painful intensity of the close-ups of Ailla and Kupak relates the seeming harshness of the climate with Ailla's drive for survivance.

Temporal, Spatial, and Corporeal Movement in Stephen Page's *Spear*

In terms of Kunuk's films, *Maliglutit* presents the most straightforward, genre-focused film in the Isuma catalogue, but the film's allusive re-creation draws interesting and productive juxtapositions when considered in conjunction with Stephen Page's much more experimental film *Spear*. Both films confront colonial histories through interplays of narrative action and corporeality, yet a deconstruction of temporalities between the colonial past and present inform the movements of *Spear.* In her discussion of several films focusing on Aboriginal Australian histories and their relation to the larger hegemonic colonial narratives of Australia, Faye Ginsburg claims that a fundamental element of many prominent Aboriginal films is that they

> 'backtrack' through the nation's history not in triumphalist terms, but in ways that address the legacies of grief and violence wrought by settler colonialism, a significant transformation in the country's sense of its own legacies, and a recognition that it matters whose stories are told and by whom. (82)

Page's *Spear* continues this legacy, relating the innumerable traumas of the Aboriginal Australian population at the hands of their colonial British occupiers. History haunts *Spear.* The film takes its protagonist, Djali, through a series of historical and contemporary atrocities faced by Aboriginal Australians, all performed through dances that mix modern, classic ballet, and Aboriginal dance styles.[3]

Painting, costuming, sound, and movement coalesce within *Spear* to provide an Aboriginal historical revision. This revision offers a healing path for its young protagonist through the exposure of his body to the movements of his ancestors and, eventually, through his own enacting of ritual dance. Images of Indigeneity —both in the spatial choices made by Page and in the movements of the dancing bodies throughout the film—challenge colonial narratives and foreground an element of performativity. One scene in particular in *Spear* demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between portrayals and performances of Indigeneity, and assimilative colonial apparatuses—in this instance the forcibly assimilative Australian education that created the Stolen Generations. Several scenes in *Spear* are scored to recordings of colonial propaganda or horrifying accounts of abuse. Subsequently, the utilization of the song "My Boomerang Won't Come Back" draws the audience into a further simulation of colonial Australia by calling attention to the tension of decolonizing imperial representations while simultaneously performing in-step with colonial conventions. This dance, above all others, traps its performers in stunted, copied choreography. Whereas the vast majority of dances in *Spear* are flowing, balletic, painful, and beautiful, the dance to "My Boomerang Won't Come Back" features the only song accompanied by lyrics. The dancers begrudgingly perform, set to the racist recurring chorus "My boomerang won't come back/I've waved the thing all over the place/Practiced till I was black in the face/I'm a big disgrace t' the Aborigine race/My boomerang won't come back."[4] The farce of this performance notably clashes with the stylistic elements of the other dances.

Filmically, we might view this staged dance as an instance of postindian survivance. Vizenor views sites of colonialist portrayal as points of potential colonial disruption. To deconstruct the colonial "Indian" is to ironically inhabit that figure in a strategic manner. According to Vizenor, "[t]he *postindian* must waver over the aesthetic ruins of *indian* simulations (*Fugitive Poses* 15). The postindian is bound in a relationship with the public's perception of Natives and then uses this relationship to displace beliefs and perceptions circulating in public discourse (Miles 47). The application of the postindian—a concept specifically rooted in a North American colonial context—to Indigenous Australia, although perhaps imperfect, resonates in the gymnasium space and stage of the residential school. While all of the dances in *Spear* function as a form of transmotion, "that sense of native motion and an active presence" (*Fugitive Poses* 15), this scene calls attention to physical and sonic colonialism through repetition, performance, and ironic sound.

Appearing after a quick cut from a racist, previously filmed propagandist clip of a primitive and savage Aboriginal man, the performers stand in front of a school stage in a gymnasium, where a banner reading "Welcome to Country" hangs near the curtain. In Fiona Magowan's study of Yolngu dance in film, she argues that the very act of Yolngu dance constructs country, stating that "experiences of country are active and ongoing where perceiving and knowing place is always in the flux and flow of becoming through painting, singing and dancing" ("Dancing Into Film" 65). While the dancers must perform under a banner of a colonial nation, their dances actively construct an Indigenous country through active presence and movement. The banner, while on the surface welcoming the dancers to a residential school where they will be forcibly assimilated, also welcomes the viewer to the country constructed by the dancers through corporeal movement.

In this scene, the performers are costumed in the baggy tan clothes of the residential school, painted with poster paints and colorful, childlike drawings of nature scenes. The men are bare-chested, and several are adorned with childlike handprints instead of the traditional paint more commonly seen in the other dances. During the dance, each performer's movements match the music count rather than supplementing the music, as is the case in other dances throughout the film. The sonic manifests more strictly in the body movements in this dance, with the metaperformative conventions being underscored by the stage, the simplistic dance movements, and the two outsider gazes of Djali and the elder Aboriginal man. This performance of Indigeneity becomes increasingly complicated when the elder of the two observers joins in the dance. The elder viewer moves from observer to performer in a strategic repositioning in order to express both the inescapability of these performances and their ironic hyperbole. The performance comes to an abrupt end, with a visibly jarring iris out transition to close the frame. Within this scene, the metaperformative aspect of Indigeneity, as filmed through a First Cinema gaze, disrupts master narratives of assimilative education and emphasizes discrepancies and ironies within Indigenous portrayals by deploying a Vizenorian simulation.

As the bodies of the dancers in the school are locked into their choreography and colonialist portrayals by "My Boomerang Won't Come Back," the temporal and spatial shift immediately succeeding the iris out moves the viewer and the metaviewers of Djali and the elder into the repressive colonial space of a prison. The scene opens with establishing shots of a cloud crossing the sun and the corner of a barbed wire prison-yard fence. Djali walks with a new guide,

an Aboriginal woman carrying a bag. The shot is filtered through a cage-like fence, offering a Fourth Cinema perspective from inside a prison that contains a majority Aboriginal population. The inversion of the camera orients the scene as firmly juxtaposed against the previous colonial gaze of the school gymnasium scene. Cutting away from Djali, we see the backs of twelve prisoners facing forward in a massive warehouse. The combination of prison imagery and warehouse setting display an inhumanity whereby the prisoners are stored, not confined. Djali and the woman are transported to the waiting room, where she is searched. A guard finds herbs and a Tupperware of white paint, which he wordlessly allows the woman to take with her. She leaves Djali and enters a bathroom, where she paints her face and sets fire to the herbs so that they smoke.

As the woman prepares her ceremonial medicines, one of the prisoners receives a tray of prison food and goes to sit down to his meal in a small cafeteria. The shots alternate between the ceremonial preparation and the growing angst of this prisoner, as shown through his facial expression and hesitance to step through the same monotonous routines as the other prisoners. When the prisoner sits, the camera moves to a close-up on his face as he looks around anxiously, removes the shirt from his prison uniform, and starts to dance. The dance begins by evoking the pain and fear of the dancer through his facial expression and his proximity to the floor. He almost cowers. The tone changes significantly, however, as other prisoners come to notice the dancer. He disrupts the space, the routine of the prison. He stands and jumps, and the movements turn from pain and fear to a defiant, albeit brief, resistance. The dancer returns to the floor and the camera cuts to the woman approaching from the bathroom. She carries two pots of smoking herbs, her face fully painted. She nears the dancer cautiously, who reacts as if in fear when he sees her. They circle each other until, seemingly defeated, the dancer reaches toward her and the smoking pots, embracing the woman as though too exhausted to continue this battle. The camera cuts back to Djali, who, although not present for the dance, stares contemplatively at the floor as if he had witnessed it. The camera slowly zooms closer as Djali stares at his open hands and smoke from the same herbs pours in from off-screen. At this moment Djali perhaps recognizes the scared, yet ferocious dancer within himself. He breathes deeply of the smoke and the experience, obtaining and interpolating another aspect of the confinement of the Aboriginal body.

The vacillation within this scene between fear and fervor in the dancer's movements, and the potential healing of the dancer at the hands of the woman, speaks to the survivance narrative performed within such colonial spaces. The dancer disrupts the procedure of the warehouse prison. Where Djali previously experienced the ideological confinement of his body in the space of the gym, the physical confinement of the aboriginal body becomes subverted through this dance. Through it, space is transformed; from a repressive space of inhumanity into a place that evokes powerful affective responses as the retelling of dominant histories becomes the recreation and revitalization of Aboriginal histories through movement and ceremonial healing.

The sonic backdrop of *Spear*, with symphonic music underscored by colonialist propaganda tunes, displays a desire to achieve decoloniality through survivance, which must occur in colonial spaces that otherwise seem to foreclose the possibility of a decolonial project. "My Boomerang Won't Come Back" directs the dances in the school, and a colonial propaganda speech regarding Aboriginal assimilation plays throughout the scene in the prison. These spaces are clearly the ideological spaces of the colonizer, but one of the most sonically affective scenes of *Spear* comes in the form of a tortured dance performed by one Aboriginal man in an underground chamber. As the camera takes us through the halls of this dark place, it focuses on a large man who speaks directly to the audience in an untranslated Aboriginal language. The camera cuts away to a close-up of Djali, who bends down to uncover a man beneath a blue tarp. The uncovered man ("Abused Man" as he appears in the credits) appears suddenly, without the presence of the large man or Djali, and begins to dance, without music, to the recorded voice of a male narrating the sexual abuse of an Aboriginal boy. The recording and the dance are interrupted by cuts to the large man, still staring into the camera and speaking—disrupting the violence of the abusive man. It is precisely the lack of movement in juxtaposition to the tragic dance that resists the puppeteering of the abuser. The camera cuts to Djali, who then looks down to find Abused Man's head covered with a plastic bag. Djali removes the bag and the camera continues to cut between the three temporal positions of Abused Man dancing, the large man speaking to the audience, and Djali gazing at the immobile Abused Man.

The resonance of the abuser's voice fades as the large man begins to chant. The camera focuses our attention on the dancing Abused Man, marked with a black "X" painted across his bare chest. A mist, reminiscent of the smoke from the prison scene, pours from the ceiling and an Aboriginal chant song replaces the horrific narration of the abusive man. Abused Man wipes

away the "X" on his chest, using the mist to smear the black paint. The two temporal zones of the dancing Abused Man and the stationary Abused Man, accompanied by Djali, converge as we see Abused Man sitting dejected and traumatized beside Djali. Djali brings a cup to Abused Man's lips, and he drinks with little to no movement. The healing in this scene remains incomplete, perhaps never to be realized. The history seems irreconcilable, but Abused Man survives, and, through his very presence, he forces the colonial gaze to confront itself and Abused Man's trauma at its hands.

One character in *Spear* fails to find reassurance, healing, or a distancing of postindian irony through dance. Suicide Man is a character who appears several times in the film as a drunken, homeless, and seemingly ignored alongside the progression of the greater narrative of Djali's growth. His body lacks the grace of the other dancers, and as such he fails to filter the colonial trauma wrought on him. Page portrays Suicide Man as a staggering summation of the results of the previously danced traumas, stumbling from colonial space to colonial space. The audience eventually finds him in a dark room. The chair he occupies is spotlit, forcing the viewer to encounter a character so often and so intentionally ignored. Slightly off-center in an immobile shot, Suicide Man speaks to an off-screen interrogator in a drunken slur, reliving much of the trauma displayed in earlier dances. Ultimately, the camera zooms to the chair as Suicide Man stands in a position such that his thighs mark the top of the frame, the rest of his body off-screen. His feet move slightly at first, then kick the chair out from beneath him, with the sounds of convulsions and a swinging rope underscoring the disembodied legs. Djali appears immediately afterward, too late to save the man. As he looks on in horror, a young woman approaches from behind and covers his eyes. This image, more than any other in the film, affects Djali to the point where he can no longer witness, no longer accept the trauma of his history. Disjunctive with the entire plot movement of Djali, the covering of his eyes becomes a necessary mercy.

This final scene of tragedy marks the movement of the film back to Djali's journey. He and another young Aboriginal boy, Romeo, are painted by the other dancers and the Old Man from the school before a montage cut to the beautiful open space of a cliff overlooking the ocean. Unlike the claustrophobic, darkly lit urban spaces, the natural light and openness of this space provide a sense of healing that emanates directly from atmosphere and land, affectively inviting the viewers to participate. The dance performed here is led by Djali, who has functioned almost entirely as a stand-in for the audience gaze until this juncture. Reading this scene as a liberating,

completive dance, we might envision Djali's movements as indicative of Magowan's analyses of Yolngu dance, in which "[t]he body provides an emotive and sensory domain of awareness through which to explore its transformative potential via singing and dancing. In ritual, meanings are not verbalized, but they are danced and enacted since they are most poignantly felt though the body" (*Melodies of Mourning* 14). Without vocalizing the meanings Djali has interpolated through his exposure to these various dances, his body starts to move with the other dances in ways he has resisted up to this stage. Eventually, he stands apart from many of the dances, hearing and seeing the history and the trauma of his fellow Aboriginal dancers, and ultimately transforms into a dancer himself after the painting ceremony.

Djali's journey to this point and place mirrors the capacity of film to relate the marginalized histories of Aboriginal peoples. In particular, the dances that relate trauma express the story that is written on and performed by the bodies of the actors. Performance, in this case, is not a facsimile of reality, but an attempt to instill Indigenous stories via non-Western methods. Sonically and kinetically, the dances are coded with Indigenous knowledges that escape and critique traditional Western filmic conventions. In speaking of the power of film to address these issues, Tewa and Diné scholar Beverly R. Singer claims that "film and video visualize the healing from the ruptures of our history related to colonialism, disease, and cultural loss. Our identity as filmmakers also helps to reverse the devastating effects of assimilationist educational policies that coerced a sense of inferiority in us" (9). Many of the performances in *Spear* are visualizations from an Indigenous perspective of these ruptures as told through the bodies of Indigenous Australians. The final dance and the dramatic shift in filming technique from the more stable shots that we see in the school, prison, and dark underground room to the quick montage cuts of Djali's initiation dance display just such a reversal. Sonically, the dance is scored not with a traumatic voice but instead with a modern beat, supplemented with Aboriginal language accompaniment and the chants of the dancers themselves. In this dance, we truly see Djali emerge as an image of survivance, a person who has survived the trauma of colonialism in ways that Suicide Man was unable to do, and one who continues to resist and heal through dance. In *Spear,* Djali's initiation dance, portrayed as a result of his spectatorship of historical trauma, directly engages survivance through kinesthetic movements. The camera moves just as agilely throughout the shot, refusing to stand still and witness colonial atrocities as it did in the

school and for Suicide Man's death. The transmotion of the bodies as they perform, disrupt, and subvert their colonial histories arrest the viewers and enact survivance through dance.

Productive Juxtapositions in *Spear* and *Maliglutit*

While *Spear* and *Maliglutit* share relatively few overlaps in their stylistic and narrative elements, reading the films together through a trans-Indigenous lens allows valuable conclusions to be drawn regarding transnational Indigenous film theorization. Whereas Kunuk's signature framing of his actors in the vastness of the space of Igloolik demonstrates how the characters are both highly connected to the land and subject to its sublimity, Page's characters are framed in an often-antagonistic relationship with their surroundings. Until the concluding scene, his dancers remain subject to the colonial spaces of the dark abusive underground cavern, the prison, and the interrogation room. Both narratives, through different filmic relations of colonialism, grapple with colonial imagery. As previously discussed, the metafilmic narratives provided by each film offer the medium of film itself as a potential sovereign representational space. While the techniques utilized by both directors remain largely responsive to specific colonial histories, they do share commonalities in their conception, goals, and specific visual styles that highlight transnational colonial agendas. According to Huhndorf,

> certain aspects of these visual practices are specific to the indigenous context. Popular images have conventionally relied on progressivist racial logic to define Native peoples as inferior to Europeans and to confine them safely to the historical past. (21)

In both of these films, the assertion of presence in hostile and historically violent imagic spaces refuses this confinement, and directly challenges progressivist narratives that erase Indigenous presence. This can be examined with particular clarity in the layering of colonial sonicism in *Spear* and plot divergences in the re-appropriation of *The Searchers.* In *Maliglutit* specifically, Kunuk endeavors to reframe Indigenous presence in a genre where Indigenous peoples are frequently killed or portrayed as violent savages. Those images

> generate a key paradox: the hypervisibility of Native peoples underlies an abiding social invisibility . . . Rendered timeless and placeless, Native people have been stripped of a contemporary political presence and, hence, of any legitimate claims to land. (Huhndorf 21)

The connection between visual imagery of Indigenous peoples and their pronounced absence or misrepresentation in *The Searchers* and the colonialist film being shown in the bowling alley in *Spear* both emphasize the constant reference point of Indigenous realities that Huhndorf theorizes. The images analyzed by each film, whether through a direct metafilmic sampling or through the transposed plot and character structure of *The Searchers*, refuse to participate in either a relegation of Indigeneity to prehistory or the justification of contemporary imperial practices. The deliberate sampling of racist clips or direct allusions to Westerns overtly points to the correlation between image and dispossession.

Perhaps the most illuminating and productive juxtaposition between these two films involves the way each director treats the bodies of his Indigenous actors. In each of Kunuk's films, the bodies of his subjects are heavily protected against the tundra climate of Igloolik. Maintaining body heat becomes a primary plot point in *Maliglutit*; the building of igloos and the burning of seal blubber for warmth form the essential daily labor for both tribes in the film. Apart from their exterior clothing and the hunt for warmth, the actors' faces clash with and resist traditional Hollywood standards of beauty. Far from the imposing figures of John Wayne and Henry Brandon, the primary protagonist and antagonist are not tall, nor are they stylized with the typical signifiers of Hollywood Westerns and masculinity. The men maintain patchy beards, their teeth are crooked, and the women are adorned with traditional Inuit facial tattoos. Initially jarring for outside viewers, the beauty of these bodies finds root in the practicality of survival in a harsh, freezing landscape. Kunuk often employs close-ups and extreme close-ups on the faces of his actors while they are eating, sleeping, or working. The focus on the beauty of his subjects through their mastery of the Arctic landscape produces an imagic sense of survivance tied specifically to Indigenous land. The Igloolik land becomes reflected physically in the characters, and the characters in turn utilize their specifically Inuit imagic presence as tools to change and survive in Igloolik.

Similarly, characters' bodies in *Spear* show an acute knowledge of their surrounding space, oftentimes changing their dances based on the specific colonial or Aboriginal space they inhabit. In the dimly lit urban setting where a car has crashed, the dance group creeps carefully and slowly toward subjects who will become the epicenter of a dance. In one scene, a female dancer moves swiftly through a deserted forest, alert, hunched, even scared, as if hunting. Unlike in *Maliglutit,* the dancers often are clothed sparsely, or in colonial costume. Many scenes feature

the dancers shirtless, painted to various degrees with white, red, blue, or black. One particular scene, which Page returns to throughout the film as a bridge of sorts, shows an extreme close-up on a dancer hanging upside down from an unknown point, painted white with feathers adorning his back. The paint has cracked on his body and his face; every time the dancer turns his torso in a slow contortion, paint falls to the unseen ground below. The dancer appears to be contorting in an attempt to free himself from his invisible bonds, never quite managing to escape in these scenes. The musculature of the dancer becomes pronounced in each of these turns, a sound of creaking accompanying the movements. While the meaning of the paints remains various throughout the film, the white paint that has caked and dried on this subject and the woman walking through the woods appears to be haunting, signaling an internal and external struggle that both characters seem unable to conquer. These struggles are wordless, offered through the body movements of the characters, and, unlike the swifter dance scenes where the camera captures multiple bodies in motion, these two scenes disturb and fascinate through movement and paint.

Images of survivance, while rooted in specific responses to colonial oppression, can be viewed transnationally and trans-Indigenously as productive and subversive ironies capable of speaking to multiple colonial histories simultaneously. In *Spear* and *Maliglutit*, two seemingly disjunctive films participate, through different filmic methods, in the same endeavor of transmotion. Through their subversive, contrapuntal styles, Page and Kunuk gaze back at their colonizers, privileging Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous presence through images that assert narratives of survivance. In each film, the body engages with colonial frameworks and spaces in vastly different manners, yet via filmic movement and corporeal survivance the filmmakers produce intercultural, trans-Indigenous exchanges through the body.

Notes

[1] In her utilization of Barclay's theorization of Fourth Cinema, Joanna Hearne notes that Fourth cinema, "trac[es] the Transnational heritage of dominant film storytelling to the originary scene of settler colonialism" (Hearne 3). The concept of Fourth Cinema, "a cinema that seeks to establish the pre-eminence of the voice of the indigenous" (Milligan 351), inherently transcends nationalistic film borders in ways which allow for meaningful interactions with specific Indigenous histories.

[2] N.B.: Henry Brandon, the actor who plays Scar in *The Searchers*, was neither Comanche nor Indigenous but rather German-American.

[3] Importantly, Rachael Swain notes the many trans-Indigenous exchanges that have codified into contemporary Indigenous dance in Australia as a result of the Intercultural Indigenous Choreographic Laboratories (Swain 504).
[4] In 2015 the song was banned as racist in by the Australian Broadcast Corporation. The song also reached number one on the charts in Australia in 1962 (Huffadine).

Works Cited

Allen, Chadwick. *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Evans, Robert Michael. *The Fast Runner: Filming the Legend of Atanarjuat*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

Ginsburg, Faye. "Blak Screens and Cultural Citizenship." *Visual Anthropology Review*. 21:1/2 (2005): 80-97.

Hearne, Joanna. "Native to the Device: Thoughts on Digital Indigenous Studies." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*. 29:1 (2017): 3-26.

Horton, Jessica L. "Alone on the Snow, Alone on the Beach: 'A Global Sense of Place' in *Atanarjuat* and *Fountain*." *Journal of Transnational American Studies*. 4:1 (2012).

Huffadine, Leith**.** "ABC Radio Bans Joke Song My Boomerang Won't Come Back Because It's Racist... Even Though It's Been Around Since The 1960s." *The Daily Mail.* 24 Nov. 2015. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3331469/ABC-radio-bans-joke-song-Boomerang-Won-t-Come-s-racist-s-1960s.html

Huhndorf, Shari M. *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009.

Krupat, Arnold. "*Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner* and Its Audiences." *Critical Inquiry*. 33:3 (2007): 606–631.

Kunuk, Zacharias, director. *Maliglutit.* Isuma Distribution International, 2016.

Magowan, Fiona. "Dancing Into Film: Exploring Yolngu Motion, Ritual and Cosmology in the Yirrkala Film Project." *Landscapes of Indigenous Performance: Music, Song and Dance of the Torres Strait and Arnhem Land*. Ed. Fiona Magowan and Karl Neuenfeldt. Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005.

---. *Melodies of Mourning: Music & Emotion in Northern Australia*. Santa Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research Press; University of Western Australia, 2007.

Matheson, Sue. "'Let's Go Home, Debbie': The Matter of Blood Pollution, Combat Culture, and Cold War Hysteria in the Searchers (1956)." *Journal of Popular Film & Television*. 39:2 (2011): 50-58.

Miles, John D. "The Postindian Rhetoric of Gerald Vizenor." *College Composition and Communication*. 63:1 (2011): 35–53.

Milligan, Christina. "Sites of Exuberance: Barry Barclay and Fourth Cinema, Ten Years on." *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*. 11:3 (2015): 347-359.

Monani, Salma. "*Kissed by Lightning* and Fourth Cinema's Natureculture Continuum." *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development: Toward a Politicized Ecocriticism*. Ed. Scott Slovic et al. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014 135-150.

Nelson, Joshua. "A Conversation with Joshua Nelson." Native American Literary Symposium, 23 March 2018, Mystic Lake Casino Hotel, Prior Lake, MN. Keynote Address.

Page, Stephen, director. *Spear*. CinemaPlus Pty Ltd, 2015.

Raheja, Michelle H. *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011.

---. "Visual Prophecies: *Imprint* and *It Starts with a Whisper.*" *Visualities: Perspectives on Contemporary American Indian Film and Art.* Ed. Denise K. Cummings. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2011. 3-40.

Schweninger, Lee. *Imagic Moments: Indigenous North American Film*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013.

Singer, Beverly R. *Wiping the War Paint off the Lens: Native American Film and Video*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Swain, Rachael. "A Meeting of Nations: Trans-Indigenous and Intercultural Interventions in Contemporary Indigenous Dance." *Theatre Journal*. 67:3 (2015): 503–52.

Vizenor, Gerald. "American Indian Art and Literature Today: Survivance and Tragic Wisdom." *Museum International*. 62:3 (2010): 41-51.

---. *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

---. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.