Laura Harjo. *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity*. The University of Arizona Press, 2019. 303 pp. ISBN: 0816541108.
https://uapress.arizona.edu/book/spiral-to-the-stars

Laura Harjo's *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity* (2019) is a loving and insightful book that innovates pathways toward bright futures for Indigenous communities without diminishing or downplaying the grim complexities of settler-colonial hegemony in the contemporary world. Harjo is an associate professor of community and regional planning at the University of New Mexico, and she was also appointed the Muscogee (Creek) Nation's Ambassador to the United Nations. In *Spiral to the Stars*, she proposes four concrete intersections of theory and practice that can guide Mvskoke futurity: "este-cate sovereignty, community knowledge, collective power, and emergence geographies" (24-25). Each of these tools draws upon traditional and contemporary Mvskoke knowledges and life practices, as well as Harjo's own training in geography and community planning, to offer vectors of transformative praxis that are both theoretically sophisticated and also accessible for non-academic readers. (This accessibility is vital given that *Spiral to the Stars* emerges from specific conversations with Mvskoke communities and aims to help people in these communities create realistic pathways toward better futures.)

One of Harjo's central arguments is that Mvskoke communities "already have what they need to live, shape, and imagine many modes of futurity" (46). Mvskoke people, in other words, do not need to wait for or depend upon the recognition of the settler-colonial state in order to take meaningful steps toward what Mvskoke poet laureate Joy Harjo calls the "lush promise" of a better world (50). *Spiral to the Stars* acknowledges the need, at times, for political action within existing settler-colonial legal systems, yet Harjo echoes Glen Coulthard's warning that the "politics of recognition" forced upon Indigenous peoples frequently enforce colonial modes of governance that do not ultimately benefit Indigenous groups (63). She therefore suggests that Mvskoke people act boldly—without waiting for anyone's permission—to create new social possibilities using tools that are already available.

The first tool of futurity that Harjo explores is "este-cate" or "radical" sovereignty, a transformative agency that emerges from the physical capabilities of both human and non-human entities. From one perspective, este-cate sovereignty might be thought of as the straightforward understanding that "everyone carries the power to act" (38). Sovereignty, in other words, does not descend from authorities on high; "action, power, and agency," Harjo argues, are instead available at the scale of "the body,

household, and community" (77). Such an embrace of embodied agency "resists the narrative of broken community, authored by outsiders, that becomes internalized and enacted by community members" (78). Este-cate sovereignty, then, renounces what Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor refers to as "victimry" and emphasizes instead the transformative agency that is always available to Mvskoke communities (Vizenor 15). Harjo captures this rejection of victimry (and a survivance-oriented celebration of agency) within the future-oriented optimism of her project: "futurity means that despite the nation-state's projects to eliminate us, here we are – living!" (198).

Although este-cate sovereignty might at first seem like a straightforward concept, Harjo's insistence that spiritual ancestors and non-human entities (such as plants and animals) embody powerful capacities for transformative action provocatively aligns her work with key critical currents in posthumanism, speculative realism, ecocriticism, and affect studies. At several points, for example, she argues that the work of creating better futures involves "the enactment of theories and practices that activate our ancestors' unrealized possibilities" (5). When reading this, I couldn't help but think of Deleuze's notion of the *virtual*, which Brian Massumi describes as a "mode of reality implicated in the emergence of new potentials" (16). Harjo argues, in essence, that a better world is possible—all the material conditions for its emergence *already* exist—but this world remains virtual, unactivated, and unrealized. Este-cate sovereignty involves taking action to awaken these immanent, already-available possibilities rather than allowing them to remain slumbering. Furthermore, Harjo theorizes each of her tools of futurity using what she refers to as "the Mvskoke lens of energy transfers," a paradigm that recognizes "the power and life in all things" and foregrounds ways in which "energy is transmitted from being to being, including plants and animals" (21; 53; 101). Humans, in other words, are not the only beings with the capacity to affect and to be affected: our lives are shaped in powerful ways by plants, animals, and the legacies of our ancestors—and we touch and transform all of these things, in turn, through our actions.

On a deeper level, then, este-cate sovereignty offers a transformative perspective regarding the emergence of the new: the best kinds of futurity blossom when we awaken to our already-existing power to act *in concert* with others (human and non-human, living and non-living). This central emphasis on relationality is my favorite aspect of *Spiral to the Stars:* in addition to the powerful community building tools she offers for Mvskoke praxis, Harjo also demonstrates what critical theory can look like when we reject the isolation and alienation endemic to late-capitalist settler-colonial epistemology and instead put *relationships* at the center of our critical concerns. In this

regard, *Spiral to the Stars* offers a vital paradigm that is desperately needed within the context of the Anthropocene, where the global drive to exploit people, animals, and natural resources too-often crowds out efforts to create ecological sustainability and social equity.

Harjo expresses the importance of relationality with the Mvskoke term *vnokeckv*, which refers to a "love that cares for and tends to the needs of the people"—and, as noted above, her sense of who counts as "people" is radically more inclusive than settler society often allows (20). *Vnokeckv* is foundational to the second tool of futurity that *Spiral to the Stars* explores: community knowledge. If este-cate sovereignty rejects the feeling that Mvskoke people are powerless and encourages them to recognize their already-existing capacities, community knowledge overturns the idea that Indigenous ways of knowing are valueless and emboldens Mvskoke people to love and honor the truth of their individual and collective experiences. Community knowledge, Harjo suggests, is "embodied" and "felt," and it is "realized in daydreams and interstices" (116). It is a knowledge found in smells and dreams, and it is gained from observing the natural world, watching for signs, and gazing at the stars. Centrally, it is a knowledge that emerges within kinship networks; it rejects the epistemological poison of "settler knowledge production" and instead offers "a wayfinding tool back to the things we know and hold as valuable" (107; 117).

When individuals within a community recognize their power and honor their own knowledge and wisdom, they have an extraordinary capacity to come together and express collective power: Harjo's third tool of futurity. Collective power, she argues, is "community knowledge operationalized" (118). It is felt in the utopian space of stompdance, it is woven when Mvskoke people craft community quilts, it is expressed in the "generative refusal" of settler regimes of oppressive power (124), and it can be discovered within "alterNative" economies of sharing and exchange that reject practices of exploitation (such as predatory lending) (141). Ultimately, collective power pushes back against the fragmentation and alienation imposed on Indigenous communities by settler society, and it rekindles the idea "that the collective working together can accomplish more than one person" (145).

Finally, Harjo proposes that collective power can be expressed within emergence geographies, or the "spaces and places that Mvskoke people carve out, despite forced removal and land dispossession, to produce the social relations they need to thrive" (38). She offers the example of how one of her own communities—the Sapulpa Creek Indian Community—met at a "Jiffy laundromat in town and at a now-defunct mall"

before it was formally recognized as a chartered community (151). Although the formal recognition accorded to tribal towns and chartered communities offers access to important resources, Harjo notes that "not all communities have the time or ambition to operate a chartered community," and she also argues that the normative forms of governance required to gain recognition may prevent Mvskoke people from "fully creating the kind of community they desire" (154).

Emergence geographies, then, are the informal (rather than formally-recognized) spaces where Mvskoke people come together to form powerful and transformative kinship relations. In addition to laundromats and shopping malls, emergence geographies can also be "ephemeral" spaces that occur "seasonally or intermittently," such as stompdance ceremonies, festivals, softball games, and wild onion dinners (155). They might also be "virtual" spaces—where Mvskoke people connect using Skype, FaceTime, or Facebook—or they might include "metaphysical" spaces, such as the sacred burial sites of deceased ancestors, where people can "connect to a spiritual realm" (155). Emergence geographies, Harjo argues, "make space for Mvskoke ways of being in the world" without the need to wait upon formal recognition or approval from the settler state. There are spaces available right now, she suggests, where community relations can blossom and where the possibilities for better futures can be forged.

One odd organizational quirk of *Spiral to the Stars* is Harjo's inclusion of a detailed summary of the results of her Creek Community Survey (a study conducted to "reveal what tribal members find important" at various scales) entirely *within* the pages of her chapter on emergence geographies (165). The survey is smart, methodologically sensitive, and vital to the book as a whole, but it's not always entirely clear how the discussion of the survey results supports the chapter's focus on alternative spaces, and it feels at times (to me) like Harjo's analysis of the survey may deserve a separate chapter of its own.

The results of the survey, however, are thought-provoking: Harjo shows that many Mvskoke people feel that they have a sense of agency at the scale of their bodies, their households, and their local communities, but they often do *not* feel that they have agency within the tribal structure of the Muskogee (Creek) Nation or at larger scales beyond this. Harjo therefore concludes that "community-based methods" (182) offer the most powerful pathways toward futurity: Mvskoke people can exercise este-cate sovereignty and honor community knowledge within emergent spaces in order to achieve "the collective power of self-determination, respect, love, and consent" (181).

This is certainly true, and *Spiral to the Stars* offers an empowering vision and concrete tools that can help achieve meaningful change. One question that remains unexplored, however, is how such tools might scale up to enable change at larger levels. This is not a critique of Harjo's excellent study, but rather a concern that arises for me, personally, as I ponder the implications of her work. In essence, Harjo argues that, rather than waiting for the settler colonial state to enable new possibilities or struggling to force it to transform through grievance processes, Mvskoke people might instead step away from settler society—or work within it—in order to maximize the unactualized possibilities that are already available to create better futures at the local scale of the body, the household, and the community. While this may be one of the best options available (and it certainly beats a paralyzing sense of powerlessness and futility), the problem of settler hegemony remains.

Harjo provocatively mentions the possibility of "jumping scale," or bypassing deadlocks that have occurred at certain scales by connecting with allies who can act at larger levels (44). She gives the example of students, unable to influence decision makers at their school, who might use social media to connect with state legislators (or other decision makers) who can enact change. This makes me curious: is it possible that the tools of futurity outlined in *Spiral to the Stars* might catalyze larger transformations if conjoined with strategies for jumping scale? Harjo emphasizes starting from the body and scaling up to the level of the community; she touches upon the possibility of jumping scale in a larger sense only briefly. It would certainly be impossible for transformative efforts to jump scale without a strong foundation of individual and collective agency, and for this reason I think *Spiral to the Stars* offers a perfect wayfinding tool in its intended context. I also yearn for the day when Harjo's guiding *vnokeckv*, and her celebration of human and non-human relationality, can find a way to jump scale in the grandest possible way, guiding us all toward the loving possibilities for futurity she envisions.

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