Speculative Relations

Indigenous Worlding and Repair

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To Mom and Dad, with love.

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Preface: A Story of Relation

I am undone by the beating heart of a people. We stomp a ground that has known generations of our songs of hope and renewal, our memories and lamentations. Ancient cadences coax the gathered to life. Women mark time with rock-filled turtle shells and tin cans, bound to their ankles with care, giving shape to the insistence of our bodies in relation. I have lost myself in the warmth of belonging. We trace circles around a living fire. As our luscious bodies groove this earth, we are released from gravity's clutches, unencumbered by reality, spiraling.

I have lost myself, but in the losing I find relation. In the vibration of these bodies, I am not so much found as reassembled in another configuration. I find myself a possibility, a becoming.

This scene is from the first time I participated in a stomp dance, when I was visiting Tahlequah on a hot September night for the Cherokee National Holiday. I remember the disorientation, how the night seemed to lose its consistency; how the circling of bodies made each of us more than individual. I had read stories about this ceremony. I had learned about its parts by listening to others, but I had never been to one, much less been invited to join the circle. This experience is one of many in my life in which the form of Indigenous relationality, for me, served as a mode of repair. I think back on this moment, and though it is just one moment, one night, I can think back to how it marked a sense of belonging that I had not felt before. It was a moment in which my body made sense, relating, when the ruptures of kinship that had preceded that night no longer felt so overwhelming.

*

I am Cherokee. I am a citizen of Cherokee Nation. But I did not know this growing up. This is because my father, Randall, was adopted as a newborn by a white couple, Harold and Florence Pierce, and raised outside the

Cherokee community. He was born in 1952, and his adoptive parents raised him in Kilgore, Texas, a small town north of Houston. He was obviously not their biological child; the differences in skin tone and hair color and the suddenness of his arrival made this apparent. But they loved him and cared for him. And, when prompted, my father describes his childhood as joyful and full of time outdoors with his mischievous cousins.

My father knew nothing about his biological family. He didn't ask about something for which there were no real answers. He knew he was adopted. Having the family he grew up with was good enough for him.

My father met my mother, Catherine, in the early 1970s. After they married, my parents moved to a rural community east of Austin called Manor to start a family. That is where I was born. But my mother soon landed a job in her hometown of Corpus Christi, in South Texas, and we (by now I had a younger brother, Blake) all moved there in 1987. I was four and my brother was one. This part of the story is important because Corpus Christi was (and is) a city with a majority Latinx/Hispanic population, where someone with my father's phenotypical features is readily and easily identified by others as Mexican American, even if we did not identify as such ourselves. I say this, too, not to reify this obvious biological essentialism, but rather to state plainly the type of racialization that I, too, experienced, having grown up in this context and being of a very similar appearance to my father. The question "What are you?" was a constant. *Where are you from? No . . . where are your parents from? No . . . what are you?*

How do you answer such a question? The answer "I don't know" was exhausting and painful. For me, this was not just a source of pain, but a type of existential rupture. It was a gap in my life story that I did not have the tools to narrate. I did not know how to say what my body was doing, how it was being read in the eyes of other people. I did not have the language to describe my own self in relation. My interest in Latin America, and my ability to speak Spanish, is a product of this era of my life. Even though my mother's family is of non-Hispanic European ancestry, the fact that my father did not have anything to indicate who his biological parents were, other than the fact that he was born and adopted in San Antonio, Texas, led to a plausible explanation that he was likely of Mexican ancestry. But maybe and likely are not the same as knowing.[1]

In 2005 I was in my early twenties, just starting graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin, and Harold passed away. Only then did we go through the process of opening my father's sealed adoption records. The

process involved a judge's order, and my father had to undergo a psychological evaluation to ensure he was capable of receiving the information—the records of his adoption. After months of waiting, a large envelope came to my parents' house with my father's original birth certificate.

My mother called me to read what was there, plainly typed on a document that had haunted my father for decades—though he would never admit as much. She read the names of my father's biological parents, and noted that his birth mother, Ada Rock, was listed as Native American. It made sense. Or, perhaps, it didn't quite make sense yet. It was a start. Not long after, we learned that Ada was still alive, and we looked up her phone number. "I'm the wife of the son you gave up for adoption fifty years ago," was what my mother said to Ada the first time they spoke. *Can you imagine?* Ada was happy, tentative, but happy to hear from us. She knew this day might come and was glad it had.

We made plans to meet—in person.

It was a hotel lobby in Amarillo, Texas. A Days Inn. Ada walked in with one of her daughters, Lori, my new aunt, and we just talked. "We are Cherokee," Ada remarked with an unassuming, matter-of-fact tone. She had spoken Cherokee growing up but was forced to speak English when she went to school. She confessed that she could only remember a few Cherokee phrases at that point. The conversation was guarded in the way that absence hardens into hesitation. The face of my grandmother, my father's mother, my aunt, my father, my brother, me, under fluorescent light, searching for recognition, perhaps forgiveness.

After this initial meeting, we were invited to a family reunion in Oklahoma. That was when I became a citizen of Cherokee Nation. It was the summer of 2006. We completed the paperwork, now with the missing link to Ada Rock, my grandmother, as part of our genealogical connection to her ancestors, my ancestors, on the Dawes Rolls—the census taken after Cherokees were forcibly removed to Indian Territory. I was provided a Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood (CDIB) card which identified me as having one-quarter Indian blood (another racializing technology).[2] I was given a Cherokee citizenship number and a tribal enrollment card. What did this mean? What relationships, what responsibilities does this citizenship require? In a sense this book began in that moment, with the feeling of unknowing, but also expectation.

It has been nearly twenty years since that initial phone call, when my own definition of self-in-relation began to change. I have taken things

slowly, but not by choice. I wanted to know everything there was to know about "being" Cherokee. I wanted to inhabit this body, which had been so illegible, so pliable in the eyes of others, with a new sense of authority. Over time, I have realized that the bodying of self is a never-ending process, and that "being" Cherokee is something I can only express by telling this, my Cherokee story. But I am not alone. Adoption, erasure, assimilation, the forced removal of an entire nation from its homelands—all of this is part of the broader narrative of Indigenous life under (and in spite of) settler colonialism. This story of rupture and reconnection is not exceptional, though it is not often told. There is shame attached to the not-knowing, to both the stereotypical Indian and the inability to perform that stereotype. I too had internalized that image. It was against that perception that I had to develop a sense of kinship that honored the unknowability of so many parts of the Indian experience (for me). I had to learn that that singularity, "the" Indian experience, was an invention of the colonial imaginary. I had to learn to undo myself.

I am no longer the not-yet-Indian that I used to be. But when people ask—and they do ask—I do not know how to say all that I feel is necessary in order to be seen and understood. The story gets caught in my throat. That lump is something like: I am the mixed Indian child of a mixed Indian man who was adopted by a white family, but who knew nothing about his past and didn't care to interrogate such questions of identity. I could not bear the not knowing. So I hurled myself toward the unbearable. Toward myself. *How do you say this?* Even now, I do not want to claim this story as one of *reconnection*, but, rather, simply as a part of what it means to be an Indian within the context of settler colonialism.

The erasure and assimilation of Indigenous peoples is the fundamental mandate of colonization. But we are not erased. Of course, there is a gap in my knowing and my self (of my knowing *of* myself), and I feel the desperation that this lack causes in me, but at the same time stories such as mine can overwhelm the ongoingness of Indigenous life; they can generate a type of singularity in which the individual journey to reconnect takes on an affective charge of a sort of exceptionalism. There is no exception here. In other words, this is not a journey of self-discovery, but an emergent form of belonging and becoming. I write toward a self-in-community, toward the future me that my ancestors dreamed, toward the possibilities that emerge because of this complicated, ongoing story of making kin.

By now it should be clear that I have no interest in writing from a disembodied, "objective" place, as if such a thing were possible. Rather, this book

aims to braid cultural criticism, personal narrative, and theory in ways that are true to the experience of navigating these types of stories across time and space. Across desire. Across the possible. I would like this book to highlight the repair work of kinmaking, and to map how we live and love and care. I would like this book to stand as an exploration of what it means to live in good relations.

Introduction: Speculation, Relations, Worlding, and Repair

This book is about how contemporary Indigenous artists, knowledge keepers, and communities create and maintain relations. These relations are human and more-than-human, expanding across time and space, across struggles for Indigenous survivance and the ongoing enactments of reciprocity at the heart of Indigenous life.[1] Relations, and by extension *living in good relations*, is a fundamental paradigm through which many Indigenous communities express cultural, political, and artistic sensibilities.[2] As such, approaching creative works about (but especially *by*) Indigenous people requires a contextual framework that is not based in normative history, anthropology, or literary and cultural studies, but the relational paradigms of Indigenous ethics and metaphysics. In my view, this framework requires a methodology that expands toward the speculative.

I develop this methodology over the course of the chapters that follow. But I would like to be clear from the outset and name the key terms I am referencing. *Speculation* indicates an open-ended method of scholarly inquiry that is attuned to the pluralistic nature of Indigenous worldviews. This approach harnesses, on the one hand, the creative power of speculation and, on the other, the ability to reflect on the lessons offered by Indigenous art and culture. *Relations* is the abiding structure through which Indigenous worlds make sense as an expression of dynamic processes of reciprocity and care. A relation is an expression of belonging and kinship and also a form of communication (i.e., storytelling). I understand *worlding* as the

enactment of relational thinking in the context of Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies. To uphold the relational principles of kinship is to ensure the proper ordering of the world. *Repair* is the result of upholding these relations, these worldings, despite ongoing colonial violence. To repair does not imply reconciliation or acquiescence to colonial norms. Rather, it takes the living of Indigenous life as a point of departure, a requirement for culturally grounded critique.

The core argument of this book is that by approaching Indigenous relations as speculative, and by understanding speculation as a core expression of relational practices, we can become attuned to reparative techniques and methods of care that sustain Indigenous worlds. Accordingly, the style and organization of this book reflect the underlying goal of furthering the relational paradigms and creativity of Indigenous worldings. I put speculation to work as both a methodology and a mode of expression. I also frame my engagements with objects of inquiry not simply as objects, but as relatives. This means that I try to imagine a work of art, a poem, or a photograph through a relational, rather than an objective, framework. I try to approach the works I analyze here not as data, but as kin. Finally, I imagine this book as a type of worlding, too, one in which I am not its sole creator, but part of the constellation of ideas and approaches that inform this work.

I begin from the premise that speculation is a core principle of Indigenous cosmological and cultural practice, philosophy, and metaphysics, a principle that implies extending beyond the self and toward other beings, other forms of life, other knowledges and expressive capacities. If extending beyond the self is an act of speculation, then relational paradigms are inherently speculative. This need not be overly complicated. It is simply to state that relating to beings outside one's self requires a reflexive and expansive mode of thinking that is neatly captured by the term *speculation*. And speculation, in its extension beyond the self, supports the relational paradigms of Indigenous worlds. Thus, speculative relations is a way of naming the process by which I relate to kin, but also how I come to understand kinship as worlding practice, one that requires not certitude but curiosity; not (just) filial connection, but mutual imbrication. To reach out allows us not just to position ourselves in proximity to others, but to find reparative ways of navigating the world in relation and solidarity.

Relations constitute the living embodiment of a People. This is also important to clarify because a book about Indigenous relations could easily slide into the anthropological domain of kinship charts and biological

essentialism. Likewise, it could dwell on colonial violence, the exposure of our wounds, in the hope that such exposure will elicit an empathetic response in others. Our relations were specifically targeted for annihilation by settler colonial technologies of elimination. Our relations are still the principal target of colonial violence. The loss is real, and it is devastating. Though it is important to understand the context and historical trajectory of this violence, a deficit-focused approach can limit the narratives of Indigenous peoplehood to the diminishing of our cultures, rather than the possibilities of our futures. In this book I try to balance an accounting for the realities of colonialism, while also gesturing toward alternatives to the colonial structures that limit Indigenous worldings. By seeking out these alternatives, I am speculating on relations, speculating on what possible lives, desires, and dreams emerge from the shadows of the documentary record and the colonial episteme.

Relations are typically understood as a set of responsibilities between humans and more-than-human beings. My suggestion is that the enactment of those relations—how we practice good relations—also requires speculation. When we relate, we imagine ourselves moving toward the future, as we may also recall our shared past. Thus, speculation—the ability to observe and project toward the past and future (which is to say, to remember and to predict)—and the lessons learned from those observations are essential for enacting the relational practices that are likewise essential to Indigenous epistemologies. So, when I say this is a book about relations, I do not mean that it explains what it means to be related. Rather, I want to show how a relational approach to both contemporary aesthetics and historical archives allows for generative perspectives on the potential of Indigenous artistic and cultural praxis in the past, present, and future. In concrete terms, this book aims to enliven relations, rather than explain them.

I also hope it provides pathways for connecting with embodied, ancestral, and futurist knowledge, and does so in a way that is true to both collective and individual experience. I write this as an embodied subject, one whose relations have been ruptured and who has sought out these pathways myself. I write from my own experience, an individual story that is unique, but in its contours is also shared by many. I cannot say that this book by a Cherokee person is reflective of *the* Cherokee (or Indigenous) experience. It is one of many such experiences that reflects how I have come to understand things like relationality and speculation, terms that I hope allow us all to deepen our understandings of belonging.

Relations are both an epistemology (a form of knowing) and an ontology (a form of being). They are not simply a set of cultural norms or kinship positions, but the substance of life itself, its enactment through methods of care and mutual engagement. To exist as Indigenous Peoples, we must relate to those beings who populate our worlds, giving it meaning, shape, order; but to relate, we must also engage in the imaginative act of speculation. To relate, we speculate. These are terms that reinforce each other. Kinship requires both an understanding of the self-in-relation and the ability to project, to position, oneself as part of an extended network of relatives. We know our relations by virtue of our lived experiences, as we understand those experiences in the context of cultural and historical paradigms that give them substance. In this, relations expand beyond the material and toward the unknown—they are not just of this world, but of the beyond as well. They exist in the present, and toward iterative becomings that are neither past nor future, but both simultaneously. Relations are a form of reckoning with time, space, and what vibrates between bodies—love, fear, joy, hope. Relations open pathways to thinking and being in reciprocity.

A relation is kin, but also story. This second valence conveys narrative structure, communication, and meaning. In this sense, a relation is also a world, to relate, to convey the possibility of one. As a mode of storytelling, speculative relations is thus an engagement with form—how we braid the strands of memory or invention into something tangible, something meaningful. As Cherokee Nation citizen scholar Christopher B. Teuton notes, the Cherokee word for storytelling is often rendered as *gagoga* (literally, he or she is lying), and though its meaning is contextual, to "lie" in this tradition is often understood to refer to "telling stories that stretch the imagination and belief."[3] In other words, there is a traditional understanding of storying, *gagoga*, that implies the suspension of disbelief—or what I would call a speculation. As I discuss below, one of the interventions I want to make with this book is to expand how we imagine and thus relate our histories, wounds, and futures. Sometimes we must "lie," stretch the truth, or remember in creative and unorthodox ways. The struggle to find ways of narrating (or theorizing, or investigating) the ruptures of our lives, those broken bonds of kinship, those untold stories, is the struggle to relate.

What I am describing here is at once a theory of what relations mean, a narration of the various meanings of relational engagements, and a procedural framework for apprehending the significance of relations, their practical enactments, and their implications for critical inquiry. I have been

interested in developing a methodological approach to Indigenous cultural and artistic production, archives, memories, land, and bodies that is itself relational, and which activates relational imperatives that are derived not from settler ontologies but from Indigenous paradigms. I am attempting to enact good relations through my approach to works of Indigenous knowledge production across diverse geopolitical locations and historical moments. I focus on moments of resistance to colonial violence, erasure, and the dispossession. These examples are not always historically prominent, but fleeting, especially in archives that were never meant to represent Indigenous presence. But by linking these moments across time and space a picture emerges, incomplete, partial, of the types of relations that make such resistance possible. The picture is not of Indigenous relationality per se, but of possible approaches to reclaiming a historical, emergent, or future life lived in good relations.

In summary, speculative relations is the overarching method I develop throughout this book. By combining these two terms, I am trying to describe embodied connections that are grounded in place, and yet which also reach toward the beyond. Speculative relations is an approach that combines the practice of reciprocity that is fundamental to Indigenous ethics, and the conjectural act of imagining otherwise possibilities for Indigenous people in the context of settler colonialism. This involves connecting to others through continual and reciprocal enactments of care and, in so doing, positioning the self as part of the network of relationships that sustain the cosmic, spiritual, and material world. I hope that by enlivening speculations with Indigenous forms of relation, and likewise by allowing the speculative to infuse approaches to culture, art, and literature, this book contributes to a deeper understanding of Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. I hope this book vibrates something within you, as an invitation to relate, to speculate.

Definitions

Speculation is a concept with a long and complex history. As Gayle Rogers notes, speculation comes to English from Ancient Greek through the late Latin *speculātiōn*, which was taken up in Old French as *speculacïon*, and rendered *speculacioun* by Geoffrey Chaucer in the late fourteenth century.[4] The Latin *speculātiōn* was a term that engendered much debate in its translation from Ancient Greek, and though I will not delve into the complexities here, the central concern for the Latin, according to Rogers,

was the distinction between *speculum* (a mirror or other reflective surface) and *specula* (a watchtower or lookout).[5] This semantic overlap leads to one of the central ambiguities of speculation: it is both to look inward as in spiritual contemplation, and to look out, toward a horizon. This is how sight and insight fold together as part of speculation's travels from the Greek to the Latin to various Romance languages to English.[6] This is how speculation carries with it both physical and metaphysical significance. It has always been a term about more than just sight; it is also about how one understands one's place in the world.

From the mid-fifteenth century, speculation would also come to include the observation of the stars—that is, the regarding of celestial movements across the heavens. Speculation is a form of stargazing. If we understand celestial speculation as a practice of spatial and temporal orientation, then we can affirm that it has been practiced by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. To put this differently: because speculation is a method of cosmic relation, it is also a form of making sense of the world and our place in it. Because Indigenous peoples conceive of space (land, oceans, stars) not as a collection of discrete objects but as interrelated and contingent forms of relation, speculating is not only about the practice of locating oneself in space, but also about relating to other bodies in accordance with specific cosmic and geographic precepts.

While speculation was derived from Ancient Greek and codified in Latin, the act of imagining, speculating, neither is exclusive to the West nor is it limited to the Cartesian geographies that have come to dominate colonial modernity. My thinking here, I want to add, has also been influenced by Black studies scholarship that has sought ways to imagine relations across space and time.[7] A core aspect of work by scholars like Saidiya Hartman, Tavia Nyong'o, and Christina Sharpe is finding creative methodologies for filling in the gaps in the documentary record while remaining grounded in relations of care. To speculate is to render care to those seemingly lost to history. When I say speculation, I mean that the stars, rivers, humans, and more-than-humans are all part of an ongoing cosmic story that is material and conceptual, spiritual and embodied. To speculate is to dream knowledge itself as a practice of relations.

Let me give a concrete example: the Tsalagi (Cherokee language) word for nation, ᎠᏰᎵ (ayetli), is also the term used for the center, *where you are now*.[8] It is both a spatial and a temporal orientation, as well as a positioning in relation to community members. In the Cherokee cosmology, seven is a sacred number. There are seven clans and seven points on the Cherokee

star. There are also seven directions. In addition to the four cardinal directions, this system includes the above and below, representing the upper and lower worlds, and then, ayetli, the center, where you are now. It is from this place/time that an individual is able to situate themselves in relation, not only to people, but also to the forces beyond the individual body—stars, rivers, caves, mountains, spirits, ancestors. And crucially, ayetli is not just an individual place/time, but can also be a collective one. When applied to the Cherokee Nation itself, ᏣᎳᎩ ᎠᏰᎵ (tsalagi[hi] ayetli), it signifies that this is where we, Cherokees, are now: this is our nation.[9] It is thus a worlding concept that indicates a relational tether to place, time, and other beings.

In this, speculation is about imagining and traversing worlds. To speculate is to connect across space and time. It is to find a glimmer of hope, to offer a prayer to the unknown, to wonder. And yet speculation is also about the haunting of the past, what lies hidden in the recesses of history, those voices and images that the speculator conjures in memory. *I wonder where my ancestors are now*. To speculate is to imagine the possible when what has come before is uncertain. To speculate relations is to conjure them, even when—especially when—they are not evident. This is a method of engaging with others, the divine, and thought itself, by foregrounding the relational commitments of Indigenous epistemologies. There is a futurity in speculation, a way of imagining the possible while existing in the present. This is speculation, but also spectrality, a haunting insinuation of the past in the present. Speculation, spectrality, spectacle, the gazing out on the past and realizing that the present matters through its negotiation with ongoing incitements to name the ancestors, name the future, name, in our ways, where we are now.

The point of speculation is not to indulge in random flights of fancy (though there is nothing wrong with that), but to frame our engagements with the world, our relations with both physical and spiritual beings, as essentially tied to a process of both inner contemplation and the external, that is, material practice of relationality. But these demarcations of interior/exterior are somewhat misleading. Just as I cannot argue that the interior self exists in isolation, I cannot claim that what exists outside the self is independent of my experience of it. That does not mean that these boundaries (interior/exterior, self/other) are meaningless, but that they are only constituted by virtue of the epistemic arrangements of a colonial power structure that implements their discreteness, their self-evident inviolability, as the basis of existence. Speculative relations invites us to

navigate the liminal spaces, those porous encounters where the body is only a body when it is essentially part of another. We must focus on moments of mutual imbrication, in which there is no distinguishing the part from the whole, but instead an ongoing negotiation of contingencies and coalescings.

This book seeks to understand relations as situated enactments of reciprocity, forms of being-with that honor the constitutive mutuality of Indigenous cosmologies, epistemologies, and ontologies. Relations constitute ways of understanding and enacting bodily, spiritual, and affective dispositions through which both individuals and communities mobilize the rights and responsibilities of care. This care extends beyond the material, beyond the body, and toward memories, stories, songs, and prayers; beyond the self and toward imbrication with others. These practices of relating draw on the cumulative knowledge of custodianship and resistance, as they lean into future possibilities of kinmaking. Again, I am thinking of relations not as figured by normative constructions of disciplinary critique or anthropological taxonomy, but as a set of obligations and responsibilities that require engagement with others over time. Cherokee citizen scholar Daniel Heath Justice puts this succinctly: "Kinship isn't just a thing, it's an active network of connections, a process of continual acknowledgment and enactment."[10] This process, as Justice continues, is about defining who we are as people by demonstrating our humanness through acts of reciprocity. The humanity of humans is not a given. It is enacted through relations; as Justice concludes, "to be human is to be a good relative."[11] To be human is to relate. To be human means enacting the obligations and responsibilities that we learn from others, obligations we uphold through seeing and being seen by others. Humanness is an act of speculative relations.

By foregrounding relations, I am centering the worlding mechanisms that emerge from our own stories, rather than from the epistemologies of Western cultural systems. By placing speculation and relations in close proximity, I want to harness the sensitivity of speculation to signal the ongoing negotiations, both material and evanescent, that are required for relations to make sense within a particular Indigenous epistemology. This is how worlds are sustained. Accordingly, *worlding* is a term that I use in lieu of *world-making*, which has garnered some popularity in recent years. It seems to me, however, that "making" a world is not what the cultural and artistic works that I study here actually do or aim to accomplish. There is something about the English term *to make* that gives me pause, as if the world could be (re)forged without always carrying with it traces of previous

or future worlds. Rather, I think that by dwelling in the active potential of the noun-verb form (to world, and thus worlding), we come closer to the ongoing temporalities of Indigenous cultures.[12] In other words, rather than world-making, which can imply a leaving behind of a previous place, I prefer worlding as an ongoing, iterative, and, thus, nonlinear form of signaling the creative potential of Indigenous artistic and cultural expression.

To posit the worlding of worlds as a specific effect of Indigenous relational forms runs counter to the understanding of "worlding" offered by Gayatri Spivak in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.[13] According to Spivak, the history of colonialism, which is to say, the creation of a colonial history—its archival practices and the epistemological imposition of its narrative forms—produces the conditions by which "the world" of a particular colony is naturalized as the only possible one.[14] My understanding of Spivak's caution is that it is not just the obviously violent or the spectacular exercise of dominance that creates the colonial world, but also (more insidiously, more effectively) the administrative and bureaucratic accounting of geography and social and economic policy. One example provided by Spivak is a minor British bureaucrat whose early nineteenth-century travels along with a native escort "oblig[e] the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground."[15] In other words, the territory of the Native is resignified (reinscribed) by the psychic and emotional effort that is required to make the dichotomy of Self/Other make sense in this colonial context. The home ground, which Spivak calls (after Heidegger) "uninscribed earth," "is the condition of possibility of the worlding of a world [that] generates the force to make the 'native' see himself as 'other.'"[16] My hesitation about this formulation is that the earth is never uninscribed, never not absent Indigenous relations. And while Spivak is arguing that the colonial production of space is at once a production of the "Native" as subaltern and the "settler" as subject, the temporalities of Indigenous worlds make possible alternative understandings of territory as an ongoing, iterative, and yet asynchronous mode of relational praxis.

In contrast with Spivak's theorization of worlding, I am partial to the poetics of Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation), who offers a range of interpretive possibilities of the worlding of Indigenous worlds across his oeuvre. I will expand on Belcourt's work in chapter 5, but let me offer, as an example, his poem "Hermeneutics of the Sometimes/Somewhere," published in *This Wound Is a World*. Among these interpretative possibilities, we read: "1. the present is a non-world. don't let the flowers lead you to a different conclusion," and then, "6. the otherworldly is a category of

the experience of indigeneity," and finally, "11. remember: loneliness is an emotional performance of a world-to-come."[17] Opening with a refusal of the present, Belcourt implicitly denies the worlding mechanisms of colonial powers to define the world as such. That the present is not a world is not controverted by the presence of beauty (flowers) but confirmed by the definition of Indigeneity as sutured to the experience of multiple worlds (and wordings). Thus, "the otherworldly" is not necessarily a negation of the present, but an alternative to the singular developmentalist paradigm of Western ontologies (the "non-world") whereby the Indigenous is always positioned at a prior state, in history, as history. The affective register of the poem leads to the conclusion that in memory ("remember") loneliness depends on the possibility (even the creation of) a world that is not yet here.[18] In this case, the world-to-come references both an Indigenous temporality that imagines relations as an assemblage of connective tissue reaching across time and space, and also, crucially, that the antidote to loneliness is embedded within its very existence. I world, and I am never alone. Thus, to world is not to create an environ out of nothing. Worlding is relating. It understands the ongoingness of the world (of the proliferating worlds) as part of a temporality that does not require inscription or reinscription, but relation. To world, in this sense, is to be worlded by virtue of the entanglements and communicative inclinations that uphold a cosmology. Part of my intervention—through speculative relations—is to call forth, or perhaps conjure, the worlding possibilities of Indigenous collectivities and artistic expressions.

I mean for this book to speculate on relations and to relate in speculative ways. It dwells in the narrative and epistemological frameworks of Indigenous relations, while also shedding light on how those relations are bolstered through a sense of yearning, a future possibility that emerges across various forms of cultural production. To relate is to world, and this worlding impulse is at the heart of Indigenous forms of reciprocity and mutuality. Thus, this book is centered in the relational ethics of decolonial praxis, and thus imagines pathways for healing, surviving, and repairing knowledge systems that have been erased or hidden through colonial violence. This means that I arrange eclectic and intentionally unorthodox assemblages as "objects of study." The expressive potential of Indigenous relations is not limited to any single form or genre of cultural production. Nor is it bound by the temporal partitions of canonical literature or history. I make no attempt to construct a linear narrative. The purpose of this book is to disrupt such a progressive teleology and instead foreground

the resonances between periods, histories, and geographies. Indigenous methodologies are not just questions, but actions. They require "doing" a relationship in an ethical way. They require being a good relative. In other words, the doing, enacting, mattering (the verbing) of Indigenous relations embeds within them the method for asking questions that allow us to better comprehend our own literary, cultural, and artistic traditions.

Kinstillatory Possibilities

While speculative relations is the overarching method through which I am engaging the material in this book, my understanding of this approach has been deeply influenced by recent Indigenous feminist scholarship that links cultural production across earth and sky. Specifically, my approach dialogues with what Cree scholar Kai Recollet terms kinstillations, what Mvskoke scholar Laura Harjo calls a kin-space-time constellation, and what Maya Ch'orti' scholar Gloria Elizabeth Chacón describes as Indigenous cosmolectics. I explain each of these concepts below, but I want to first recognize that, while emerging from a distinct cultural context, all three of these ideas attend to land-based epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies, in a way that is responsive to the multidimensional and trans-temporal understandings of Indigenous life. While much Indigenous studies scholarship has been attuned to territory as a method of engagement with the cultural production of Indigenous peoples, the aforementioned scholars remind us that territory is also an expansive concept, ranging across different worlds.

There are other important interventions that also remind us of this need to connect across time and space (or across the filaments of our multiple worlds). We could think of the Zapatista call for "a world where many worlds fit," and the subsequent development of terms like "pluriversal" by anthropologists like Arturo Escobar, Marisol de la Cadena, and Mario Blaser.[19] Or we could recall Osage scholar Robert Warrior's proposal that Native American nonfiction writing be understood as part of a trans-temporal continuum. This is what Warrior calls "synchronicity," which, "as an imaginative tool, helps in a consideration of the gaps of what documentary history doesn't reveal."[20] Warrior continues: "To engage in speculation . . . [is] a way of trying to grasp from the shreds and shards of evidence significant aspects of a Native intellectual patrimony."[21] Though he uses the term *speculation*, Warrior does not develop it as a distinct methodology. Nevertheless, his

approach, and that of Escobar, De la Cadena, and Blaser, gestures toward a growing consensus that a singular epistemological (or ontological) paradigm, divorced from spiritual concerns or obeying a linear temporality, is inadequate for approaching Indigenous forms of thought, praxis, and art. All these scholars are pointing to the need to shed Western narratives of progress and universality in favor of more dynamic, less doctrinaire understandings of the lives and histories of Indigenous peoples.

Returning to Recollet's helpful framing, the word *kinstillation* joins constellation and kin.[22] But this neologism is not an attempt to describe a new or previously misunderstood phenomenon. Instead, it is an effort to foreground ancestral knowledge in the present. Kinstillations enact our ancestral knowledge, of the stars, of our own stories of creation and of survival, in an ongoing, reflexive relationality that is nonhierarchical and ephemeral (as in everyday, quotidian). It is an ongoing act, a praxis of Indigenous refusal to acquiesce to colonial normativities (specifically, the ontological and the epistemological) in favor of land-based understandings of reciprocity. Land holds memory, even when humans forget. Land holds bodies and medicine and spirits, even when humans no longer see them.

Recollet coined this term in a poem entitled "Kinstillatory Gathering," which begins with the following lines: "Kinstillatory gathering spaces, wishful thinking through dimmed light, making meaning out of the shadows because sometimes shadow-glyphs are all that we have left as our means for time travel."[23] This is a placing, a landing of knowledge that at the same time points to a mode of ancestral fugitivity (to time-travel is an act of speculation). Here, relationality is not bound by the limits of reason or proportion—and especially not by the anthropological marking of kin on charts, genealogies, or family trees—but expands the scale of possibilities through which Indigenous communities make meaning of and through the body. This meaning-making shifts from normative filiation to the constellational (the web, the network), and from the rational to the embodied. Gathering in kinstillation makes possible the resonating of bodies in relation, the reverberating, kinetic sharing of space, through which we begin to recall how to travel through time, how to speak to the shadows, how to negotiate our beings-with and beings-in-relation as a form of ongoing enactment of Indigenous sovereignty, mutuality, and care.

I hasten to add: this is not a metaphor.[24] The land is not "fictive" or "chosen" kin.[25] Our bodies are not symbolically made of stars. We are those cosmic elements, and in recognizing ourselves as cosmologically interre-

lated, as connecting cross-temporally as part of an emergent and ongoing epistemological project, we maintain the bonds of reciprocity and collaboration that are at the heart of our stories.

Recollet situates this grounded/celestial knowledge as a method of time travel. This is also not a metaphor. When we look at the stars, we witness the past. Kinstillatory praxis is thus a form of transtemporality that links stories of emergence with ancestral histories and future-oriented possibilities.[26] These ways of knowing do not track onto normative timescapes, but rather are always situated in iterative becoming. In other words, kinstillations invoke an ancestral futurity that is grounded in our ways of relating to the human and the more-than-human across time, space, and feeling.[27] Kinstillations are a means of living in the balance of rupture and creation. They mark us as poised across normative thresholds of intelligibility.

In a collaborative text written with Yup'ik dancemaker Emily Johnson, Recollet and Johnson reflect on the choreographies and technologies of kinmaking that orient us toward land-body-sky:

> Kinstillatory describes a relational practice of being grounded when you are not of this place, and considers the possibilities of rooting/routing toward the sky. This concept also refers to falling in love with rupture to mimic the practices of supernovas exploding to expel mass/consciousness, thus providing the framework to jump scale through extending the potentials for multi-variant grounding practices.[28]

Kinstillatory praxis is thus a method of negotiating the ruptures of time and space as they are felt in the body. These ruptures exceed the central tools of settler colonialism: displacement, erasure, and removal. The concept is about movement, choreography, and multiple bodies in cosmic motion. In this way, kinstillations are not simply stories we tell, but rather enactments of decolonial love and repair that are deeply rooted in our own bodies, epistemologies, and cosmologies.

Kinstillatory praxis enacts ancestral knowledge and movement across the breach of land and sky. In doing so, it conveys a sense of interconnectedness that draws on stories in which the earth and the celestial are intimately related, and in which humans, more-than-human beings, and spirits transit across these realms. In short, kinstillations are forms of becoming-more-than-oneself. They draw on and are themselves enactments of relations. In this sense, they are an ethical commitment to reaching toward the beyond while being grounded in place, where you are now.

For many Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island, the stars represent a pathway to the land of the dead. The Milky Way is often known as the path of souls across which our ancestors travel to reach their final resting place.[29] While the details may vary from community to community, that the Milky Way is itself a method of transportation, a celestial path, is one of the most common stories explaining how the dead transition from the corporeal to the spirit world. While this story may be widespread, I do not mean to universalize it. Of course, there are many different forms by which communities explain how they care for the dead, and the obstacles that those ancestors must face en route to their final resting place. This is not a Christian heaven, but another place, in the celestial realm where our ancestors find kin and continue to make kinship with us, here, in this place. We are related to the stars. And we remember our communities through the paths that stars create. This speculation is an act of care, repair, and humility.

Laura Harjo's work provides another beautiful rendering of how Indigenous people relate across land and sky. But it is important to note that her own theorization is felt, experiential knowledge that emerges from a place of loss, in her case, the loss of her father. When he passed on, her understanding of space-time shifted, and that shift inspired her to posit a decolonial method of relating across territory. As Harjo puts it: "The act of drawing from our relatives who have transitioned to a spiritual realm transcends a settler ordering of space."[30] Harjo's work on spatializing futurity has, in turn, allowed me to imagine the quotidian enactments of Indigenous relations, or, in her specific treatment, Mvskoke practices of este-cate sovereignty, which precede and exceed settler notions of political economy, territorialization, and history.[31] In her terms, "Mvskoke spaces are social spaces that are not placed within measurement geographies of Cartesian mapping but instead connected to multidimensional spatialities: terrestrial, virtual, spiritual/metaphysical, and celestial realms."[32] This spatial understanding, in particular as a defined but reflexive and dynamic interaction, is what Harjo calls a "kin-space-time envelope."[33] The first example that Harjo provides of a kin-space-time envelope is in fact stargazing: "We are observing the same stars as our ancestors."[34] Thus, the speculative and the relational are intimately connected across the scale of the cosmos, and centered on the land and in the body of the person who connects across that expanse to an ancestor, a relative, a dream, a future self. These envelopes can join and associate with each other, thus constituting a "kin-space-time constellation," which Harjo describes as "a cluster of

kin-space-time envelopes that offer new spatial configurations, which we need as Mvskoke people to live and be in the world."[35] We need, in other words, the ability to think beyond ourselves in order to inhabit ourselves, our bodies, as part of the contingent, relational epistemology that provides meaning to our enactments of sovereignty. In a very real way, these speculative envelopes stage opportunities for enacting good relations, for being good relatives.

In Harjo's approach, as with that of Recollet, we understand that there is a specific type of relationship between humans and more-than-human beings that must be recognized if we are to fully comprehend our ethical responsibilities in the world. That specificity is important, but it is not exclusionary. It does not mean that a Mvskoke understanding of the world is only ever applicable to Mvskoke stars, plants, and animals. Rather, the constellation of knowledge, and of bodies in relation, offers alternative pathways to understanding (and grounding) one's place in the cosmos. It means that this alternative (to the colonial demand for Indigenous erasure and elimination) can be ethically approached from a wide range of perspectives if the core principles of reciprocity and mutuality are upheld. For example, as a Cherokee person I note similarities between the Mvskoke cosmology and my own, but I do not assume that they are the same, or that I can simply apply one understanding to another context without attending to the implications, challenges, and discrepancies that such a move would entail. None of this means that we cannot learn from and adapt our own methodologies by drawing on the work of others, but rather that context and deliberation matter a great deal.

For her part, Gloria Chacón's understanding of cosmolectics "[ties] together the fundamental role that the cosmos and history, sacred writing and poetry, nature and spirituality as well as glyphs and memory play in articulating Maya and Zapotec ontologies."[36] The proposal rejects a dialectical approach in favor of Mesoamerican philosophical practice known as *kab'awil* in Quiché Maya, "a vision that duplicates."[37] Kab'awil is a double visioning, a form of recognizing the disconnect between settler and Indigenous epistemological frameworks—the way settlers "see" is not the same as the way Maya or Zapotec people "see" (themselves). It is a concept that emerged in precolonial times (Chacón traces it to at least the fifth century BCE pre-Classic Maya civilization) and has undergone transformations and reformulations up to the present, but it has retained the sense of a multiplicity of vision across time and space. In my understanding, Chacón's

proposal allows for a type of speculative approach to Indigenous writing practices such as glyphs and textiles that does not situate them as exclusively material texts, but enlivened creations that engage historical traditions that predate the arrival of European "writing." This, in turn, offers an innovative way of tracing the temporality of Indigenous cultural production, one that is not circumscribed to the developmentalist narrative of colonial nation-building. A cosmolectical approach does not limit the observer to a singular standpoint but implies a historical flow that doubles back on itself. The double gaze points both inside and outside, toward the earth and toward the sky. When I observe the stars, I position myself in relation to those ancestors who became stars, too. Stargazing is a relational act that ensures my connection to the world as it is, but also as it could be, in a future when someone else stares at the same sky, the same stars, and imagines me as I am doing now, as I was doing then.

Many Indigenous communities tell origin stories in which they are themselves descended from the stars. As Chacón reminds, the Zapotec name for themselves, *Binnigula'sa'* or *Binnizá*, means Cloud People.[38] Learning from this and other origin stories requires that we recognize how we are related to the movements of the stars, the arching, celestial pathways that present themselves as lines of flight, constellations, and future possibilities. This is not to say that the stellar paradigm should be more or less prominent than land-based praxis. The role of stars in an Indigenous cosmology is contextual and particular. Not all communities place the same amount of importance on star knowledge or star becomings. But the theoretical concepts developed by Recollet (and Johnson), Harjo, and Chacón, respectively, remind us to ground ourselves at once in the land and in the stars. Which is to say, not to isolate the telluric in our understandings of relational ethics. Yes, the land is the primary paradigm through which I understand relationality, but this understanding of "land" must also include the stars (and other celestial, telluric, and subterranean formations). The celestial is an essential, though not exclusive, component in the relational context within which human and more-than-human life makes sense.

A final clarification: I am proposing stargazing as method. But not just stargazing. Star-relating. Star-becoming. It is not simply the gazing that interests me, but the becoming star, as our ancestors have done, as I will at some time in the future. This is a method that harnesses both the spectacular and the spectral, and through such a lens, I hope, we can begin to relate more carefully to the works, archives, and stories that follow.

Dayunisian Dreams

I have endeavored to lay out the methodological concerns that have inspired this work, drawing on recent work in Indigenous feminism and decolonial studies. But my understanding of speculation comes primarily from the Cherokee tradition, from my own reading and rereading, listening, and contemplating the way the Earth was made, our story of creation. Let me tell a story about beginnings.[39]

A long time ago, before people, before land, the earth was covered with water. The animals lived on Turtle's back in Galunlati, the upper world. They were grateful, but they were starting to feel crowded. They worried that they were running out of room. So, they held a council to decide if someone would volunteer to see what was below the water. Maybe there was room there. Or maybe there was another place to live that they did not yet know about. The prospect of leaving Turtle's back was daunting. They looked into each other's eyes—they were afraid. After a long silence, Dayunisi, Beaver's Grandchild, the Water Beetle, said that they would see if they could learn what was out there, beyond.[40] *Dayunisi was small but brave. They leapt off Turtle's back and landed on the water, held by its tension. They darted this way and that, dancing on the water, gliding across the waves. But they could not find a place to rest on the water's surface. They were tired. But they knew they had to keep searching. So, they dived. Down, down, down. Through the waves, through the purple-blue water as the light began to fade. It grew dark. It grew cold. But they kept swimming. They had almost given up when, stretching out their hand, they touched something soft at the bottom of the great ocean. They grabbed a piece of mud, a speck of land, and turned. Up, up up. They swam. But they were so tired. They were running out of air. Just when it seemed hopeless, they began to see the light from above. They thought of their kin, and they kept on swimming. Finally, they reached the surface and pushed through the waves, holding up the piece of mud for all to see. The other animals gasped with relief when they saw tiny Dayunisi emerge from the water. And when that speck of mud touched the air, it began to grow. It expanded in all directions, growing and spreading. It spread so much that it became the island that we now call Elohi, the Earth (the Middle World), Turtle Island. The animals thanked Dayunisi. Wado, they said. And when the land had hardened, when Suli, the great Vulture had created the mountains and the valleys with his giant wings, when the rivers and streams began to flow, when the trees unfurled their green leaves to soak up the sun, the animals knew they would survive. Turtle let them off his back and they started to live on Elohi.*

In the Cherokee tradition Dayunisi, Water Spider, dives into the primordial sea and returns with a small piece of mud that expands to create the world we now inhabit, Elohi, which is suspended between the Above World, Galunlati, and the Below World, Elati.[41] Like most cosmogonies, this one demonstrates a fundamental truth: life itself is the product of a reaching out, a search for something beyond the known, an extension toward the possible. Life is a gesture toward what could be.

When I picture this story, I imagine that when Dayunisi dives into the water they generate ripples that break the cosmic silence, murmurings of a future yet to come. I can see how the waves we experience today are the result of that vibrational opening, a kinetic disruption of time and space. I try to imagine what it felt like to dive beneath the surface of a limitless ocean. Sometimes I wonder if Dayunisi hesitated when, as the light from above faded into a withering darkness, their task must have seemed impossible. What would it be like to endure, to reach out, touching land when there was not yet such a thing as land? What propels us to reach out not knowing if there is anything there to grab onto? Dayunisi's search for a solution to a community problem is predicated on a willingness to explore, but also to expose themselves to the possibility of failure. They are not just a character in this story, but a guide for acting in service of the greater good. What is more, we are the result of what Dayunisi touched in that exact moment, when their hand grasped the basic matter of the world before it was possible to imagine it as such. A world in the process of creation, worlding. This story—indeed, our existence—depends on one crucial moment: Dayunisi's reach toward the unknown. That gesture is a reminder of the promise of ancestral time opening into the future, a luminous glissando between worlds.

Reaching, this gesture toward the possible, is a core lesson I take from the Cherokee origin story. There are other lessons to learn. But this one is an ethical imperative and an enactment of relating. The world is itself the product of a futurity that is not yet here, on the horizon, and yet this world bears an impulse that carries with it unknown possibilities as well as past-future dreams. These Dayunisian dreams, these speculative relations, are about what could be, what emergent futures our actions make possible.

The Cherokee creation story accords a sense of balance to the cosmos through a series of relations. The upper and lower worlds are bisected by the surface of the ocean, where the Turtle floats, and upon which the other animals live. Dayunisi can live on the surface of the water, and is thus

of both the above world and the below. Dayunisi's dive to the bottom of the ocean posits another relation, between the surface of the water of the middle world and the surface of the mud in the depths of the world below. The Great Vulture flaps his wings, and creates the peaks and valleys, another spatialized set of relationships that involves a balance of form. But perhaps more importantly, the middle world, Elohi, is tied to the sky by four cords, attached so that it stands firm. The imaginary of this cosmos is thus tripartite, including a fundamental connection between the above, middle, and below worlds. There are dualisms, but not polar binaries in this cosmology. And there are creatures, such as Dayunisi, who transit across these realms, and whose abilities are essential for the world to exist as it does. Without Dayunisi this world would never have been formed. And the world is fundamentally connected across different levels of the cosmos.

My thinking here is influenced by Justice's reading of the Mississippian category of anomaly, which refers to entities (both human and more-than-human) within Southeastern (i.e., Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Mvskoke/Creek, and Seminole) cultural systems that transit more than one world or more than one social or bodily category. As Justice proposes, "Neither good nor evil, potentially helpful or harmful to established social categories and hierarchies, the anomalous body in pre- (and sometimes post-) Christian Southeastern traditions represents profound powers and transformative possibility."[42] Specifically, Justice is referring to animals such as the bat and the flying fox (mammals that can fly), the bear (who can walk on two legs like humans), or hybrid beings such as the flying snake (Uktena in Tsalagi). The anomaly of these beings lies in their capacity to link worlds, bodies, and knowledge through their liminality or multiplicity.

Although Justice does not mention Dayunisi, they are clearly an anomalous being. Their nature is, precisely, being able to transit between two worlds, water and earth. In fact, I would suggest that Dayunisi is the first anomalous being, the first example of transversality that is necessary for the foundation of the world. Elohi, it is worth repeating, emerges from cosmic sea because Dayunisi was able to do what the other beings could not: exist between worlds. The emergence of land depends on a being that has the capacity to transit between worlds, and in their transit, in their gliding between above and below, between nothingness and everything, resides the power of our bodies, also anomalous, inexorable in their quotidian mutability, in their becoming.

If this is how the world was born, then let us imagine that Dayunisi is a model for us who traverse spheres of gender, desire, or culture. A model

at the center of everything, at the crucial moment when all that exists begins to be what it was meant to be—what it will become. We could even say that living between worlds is Dayunisi's norm. This leads to a simple conclusion: if this is how the world was born, then anomaly is required for the world to exist. It is the spark that ignites life. Dayunisi's turn underwater instantiates a process that does not obey normative temporality (neither cis nor hetero nor capitalist nor patriarchal) but is itself a becoming world that characterizes this sacred story. And thus, Dayunisi is an ancestral guide for those of us who refuse colonial norms, who, in our bodies, desires, dreams, and in-betweens, also generate worlds. If there is something that this story of Cherokee origins teaches us, it is that creation itself is the inescapable product of a continuity, a gesture, a becoming. We bear witness to constant transformation. Thus, finally, we see that Dayunisi is a nonbinary ancestor, liminal, humble, and at the same time essential for the creation of the world we inhabit.

Organization

I would like to offer a way of connecting across the work that follows. There are two distinct though mutually reinforcing modes of writing that I engage with throughout this book: chapters and interludes. The chapters are more analytical in form, while the interludes offer a speculative or experimental style of writing. I do not put more or less weight on either mode. The form of this book engages in speculation and offers diverse ways of thinking and writing. I realized early on that traditional academic prose could not contain the feelings of rage, longing, or love that I felt while writing. My solution was not to try to fit those speculations into a normative academic framework, but to allow them to breathe. By alternating between chapters and interludes, I invite the reader to find resonance across these interventions. Thus, the five chapters ("Relate," "Gesture," "Become," "Body," and "Love") and four interludes ("Remember," "Speculate," "Star," and "Rock") all take their titles from verbs (or noun-verbs) that hold multiple meanings. I have opted for these dynamic verbs because they gesture toward the speculative relations I hope to develop in each section, and I invite the reader to imagine these titles as activating rather than describing the content therein. While the interludes are varied in form and content, they all provide a glimpse, gesture, or a meditation on aspects of speculative relations that complement or contrast with the chapters that

surround them. And yet the chapters do not adhere to a strictly academic register, but gather strength from speculative moments, creating frequencies of relation rather than discrete boundaries.

In addition to the preface, chapter 1, "Relate," and interlude 1, "Remember," operate in an autobiographical mode that situates my own story as part of a continuum of Indigenous relational praxis. These sections orient the reader toward the methodology I develop throughout the book, while also identifying myself as a writer within the various communities and histories that constitute my relations. All three sections deal with ruptures of colonial dispossession including allotment, adoption, and the memory of ancestors. They modulate across legal, familial, and photographic archives, linking structural issues to personal experience. Though the theme of adoption predominates, the theoretical impulse that runs throughout is a desire to repair the violence of colonialism. Thus, "Relate" and "Remember" function as a pair of texts that engage autobiographical and historical narratives of Indigenous dispossession to underscore the possibilities of repair through a method of speculative relations. "Relate" begins with a history of adoption and allotment, describing them as twin techniques of colonial dispossession. "Remember" is an experimental text written as a palimpsest of archival and familial narration, in fact written with my father, whose voice I transcribe from an interview he recorded about the story of his life. Thus, moving from the historical and political question of the allotment period in the United States to the history of my own family, I suggest possible avenues for the recuperation of Indigenous relationality.

Chapter 2, "Gesture," focuses on ethnographic photography and theorizes what I call gestural resistance as a method of enlivening the past. "Gesture" turns to the presence of photographs, but the paradoxical absence of Indigenous subjectivity within the frame of colonial ethnographic photography. This chapter moves from Turtle Island to Abiayala, specifically to the photographic holdings of Argentina's Archivo General de la Nación, and from contemporary imaginaries back to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century practices. Here I ask how subtle gestures that are present in the ethnographic mode can become indices for resisting the historical framing of Indigenous people as static remnants of a bygone era. Interlude 2, "Speculate," provides a counterpoint to the previous chapter, starting from the fact that there are no photographs of my own family on our original allotment land. I speculate on what those photographs would have looked

like, an effort to create an archive out of traces of memory, or rather, the desire for a memory where none exists.

Chapter 3, "Become," turns to contemporary visual media including painting, sculpture, and photography. I start with the work of the early twentieth-century painter E. A. Burbank and his portraits of the Chiricahua Apache leader Geronimo, whose body becomes a simulation of Indigeneity by virtue of Burbank's use of the color red as a racial synecdoche. I then turn to the contemporary art of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Jeffrey Gibson, and Raven Halfmoon, whose diverse strategies of representation call into question the earlier proposition of Indigeneity as a stable category, and redness as its expression. Interlude 3, "Star," tells the traditional Cherokee story of the origin of the Pleiades and the Pine Tree, a narrative that provides evidence of how speculation and relations interact across land and sky. This story deals with the movement of Indigenous bodies in relation, recalling the stomp dance in the preface, and offers a preview of the potential of embodiment as a method of speculation. Chapter 4, "Body," for its part, also deals with visual culture, specifically the representation of Indigenous bodies as naked from the colonial period to the early twentieth century. It opens with the notion of the ethnopornographic, asking how to shift from that colonial visual register to what I call the Indigipornographic. This is the longest chapter in the book, and it develops a series of examples, each of a different expressive genre (photography, sculpture, and film), and each deriving from a different geographical context. I analyze colonial lithographs, the nineteenth-century photography of Frederick Monsen, nineteenth-century bronze sculpture, and the contemporary photographic and sculptural work of Métis artist Dayna Danger, and conclude with a reading of the 1970 pornographic film *Dust unto Dust*.

Chapter 2, "Gesture"; chapter 3, "Become"; and chapter 4, "Body," represent a trio of chapters focusing on visual culture but spanning diverse geographical regions and time periods. Across these three chapters, I focus on visual media to highlight the spectacular and spectral presence of Indigenous bodies—the question of embodiment comes to the fore as a vector of analysis. How do we relate to photographs of Indigenous people that were not intended to evidence Indigenous life but our static positioning as historical remnants? How do we look at images of violence, genocide, and destruction? How do we relate as a method of repair when faced with the historical weight of Indigenous absence—an absence that is only so from the perspective of settler ontologies that nevertheless threaten to overwhelm the frame of reference? "Gesture" and "Become" are two chapters

that engage with such questions, while "Body" looks at the possibilities of repair despite colonial violence.

If "Body" asks what types of desires are expected of Indigenous peoples, interlude 4, "Rock," and chapter 5, "Love," invite a partial response. "Rock" describes a ceremony of protection carried out by a dear relative and follows a meditation on the erotics of vesicles—in this case, the tiny bubbles that remain when a volcanic rock forms. In this autobiographical reflection, I imagine forms of love between human and more-than-human beings, positing a decolonial vesicular erotics as one possible path. In both sections, I ask how bodies relate, how eroticism and desire form part of our ongoing methods of relationality. These two sections are about queerness, desire, and love. Love is particularly visible in the poetic work by contemporary queer and two-spirit writers from Turtle Island, and I dedicate chapter 5 to analyzing some aspects of a new generation of Indigenous poets whose work nevertheless harnesses ancestral practices and knowledges to inform what types of affective resonance love can have for bodies ever on the verge of undoing themselves, unbecoming, unraveling.

I conclude the book by telling the Cherokee story of Tobacco and Hummingbird, which serves as a final—and somewhat more practical—example of how speculative relations has emerged in my own life. The conclusion aims to provide a synthesis of the relational approach that this book develops, rather than a summary of its principal arguments. Finally, in the epilogue I share a series of "if/then" statements, a rhetorical mode that most often refers to logical or mathematical formulae, but in my mind becomes a form of speculative relations. I end with this to remind the reader of the possibilities of enacting good relations, while also gesturing toward a chain of thought that in its simplicity also provides alternative ways of inhabiting Western analytical logics.

The relational patterns of Indigenous knowledge require speculative thinking. That speculative thinking, in turn, allows us to remember and perhaps renarrate the worlding mechanisms that uphold our communities and epistemologies. The worlding of Indigenous worlds is an effect of our relations, an imperative that only becomes possible through active, embodied relations with place. To uphold our worlds, or to repair the worlds that have been (and continue to be) attacked by colonialism, my suggestion is that we must relate, and in our relations (both our storying and our mutual imbrication), we find alternative forms that allow us not only to think differently, but to gather, love, and connect.

Epilogue: If/Then Statements

If the stars are our kin, then stardust is kindust, sprinkles of kinship glistening on our faces as we look up in awe.

If kinship glistens on our faces, then our faces are receptacles of cosmic becoming.

If our faces receive cosmic kinship, then our skin is a container for that which falls from the sky, enveloping our bodies in velvet stardust, holding inside our insides, holding outside the cosmic kinship, a threshold of blood and time.

If the stars are our kin, then kinship is also kin-space-time.

If kin-space-time is the fabric of the universe, then the matter between stars is a kinship becoming, a sliding fullness, an ever-expanding twinkle.

If the matter between stars is kinship, then most of the universe, is, in fact, kinship.

If most of the universe is kinship, then kinship is the overriding force of meaning, mattering, of what was and is and will be.

If what is is mostly kinship, then why the fuck is kinship not the most important thing always, everywhere, in human affairs?

*

If Indigenous people are human because we conceive of humanness as a commitment to reciprocity, then colonialism (the structure of whiteness and capitalism) is not only nonhuman but antihuman.

If colonialism is antihuman because it is a destructuring of humanness, a genocidal impulse, a deliberate and intentional undoing of reciprocal relations, then it is the most dangerous thing on the face of the earth. It will kill us all.

If the thing that will kill us all is colonialism, is the structure and thought and built environment that is structured and thought and built to sustain whiteness and capital, then colonialism should be the most heavily critiqued positionality (but more than just positionality . . . idea, language, firmament, desire, epistemology) because it is the thing that has always and will always lead to the mass extinction of every living thing on the planet.

If colonialism is planetary, then it is an apocalypse.

If colonialism is an apocalypse, then it is an ongoing manifestation of the denial of that forthcoming reality, a sleight of hand meant to dispute the origins and outcomes that are inevitable if we really follow through on the logic of whiteness and capital.

If we really follow through on the logic of whiteness, then we are condemned to death by its structuring of reality, a reality that is not really real, but an imposition, a machination.

If we can understand that this reality is not the only one, and that we are not condemned to death if we can begin to undo the realness that is not real, then perhaps we have a chance to survive.

If this is bleak, then it is bleak.

If this turns bleak, then it is only because we must understand the stakes for the gestures of repair that emerge in the wake of such circumstances.

But let me confess: if I think about this too much, I fall into despair. Oh, but despair is not what motivates this book, not what sustains Indigenous life. It is not. I promise.

*

If Indigenous worlding, relations, and repair are what sustain Indigenous life, then to speculate on what future possibilities exist for Indigenous life is a life-affirming, life-giving methodology.

If that methodology is life-affirming, then it is a future.

If it is a future, then dreaming that future to life is the goal, the truth of this book, and it could never be otherwise.

If it is a dream, then it is a speculation.

If it is a dream, then it is a relation.

*

If it is a dream of speculative relations, then perhaps the future is unwritten, and in its writing, in its becoming, we will find that our futures are

futuring with every breath, every glance, every gesture of resistance found and discovered, uncovered from colonial archives, unearthed from white clay painted on a freckled cheek, shaped through dripping paint, twisted and spun in webs of kinetic body-memory.

If it is a dream of speculative relations, then, perhaps this book provides pathways to kinship, relations lived and nurtured through time.

If it is a dream of speculative relations, then our relations, kinetic and kaleidoscopic, emergent and cosmic, are the hope for a future.

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Many people have contributed their time, energy, and support over the years as I have worked on this book. If there was a genesis to this project, it has come from two places: initial ideas emerged in dialogue with Kai Recollet and Emily Johnson, who have both been kindred spirits and steadfast supporters; and Daniel Heath Justice has read and reread many of these pages, always offering encouragement, and I am so appreciative for his deep wisdom, humor, and wit. My dear kin SJ Norman and devynn emory both offered generous support and grounding. The late Elizabeth Freeman believed in this work even before I did. Her brilliance endures. I am grateful to them and many others who have engaged with these ideas in different iterations: db Amorin, Claire Bishop, Susan Blight, Teagan Bradway, Jayna Brown, Lena Burgos-Lafuente, Jodi Byrd, Seba Calfuqueo, Luis Cárcamo-Huechante, Dayna Danger, Natalie Diaz, Leah Dickerman, Demian DinéYazhi,' Diego Falconí, Liisa-Ravna Finbog, Maura Finkelstein, Claudia Sofía Garriga-López, Leila Gómez, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Candace Hopkins, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, K'eguro Macharia, Stephanie Malak, Brenda Mallory, Tanya Marquardt, Carlos Martiel, Liz Montegary, Carlos Motta, Amber Jamilla Musser, Andrew Newman, Tavia Nyong'o, Jean O'Brien, Laura Phipps, Kai Pyle, Chandan Reddy, Shana L. Redmond, Mark Rifkin, J. Logan Smilges, Susan Stryker, Chloe Alexandra Thompson, Michael Tondré, Alejandra Uslenghi, Rinaldo Walcott, and Joshua Whitehead. This list is doubtless incomplete, and I apologize if I have inadvertently neglected to name those who have helped me along the way.

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spaces, including Kinstillatory Mappings in Light and Dark Matter, Abrons Art Center; Indigenous Digital Artistic Hub, University of Toronto; Hofstra University; Pratt Institute; Northwestern University; Arizona State University; Brown University; University of New Mexico; Native American and Indigenous Studies Speaker Series, Tufts University; Looking like a Person: Portraits After Coloniality Symposium, the Huntington Library; Queer Directions Symposium, Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, University of Toronto; Western Carolina University and University of North Carolina, Asheville; Berea College; Idea Lab, Museum of Modern Art; Sequels Symposium and Indigenous Lands, Resisting Sexualities in Abiayala, Lozano Long Conference, The University of Texas at Austin; RMS/Roth Symposium, Dartmouth College; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Oak Institute for Human Rights, Colby College; New York University; Syracuse University; and DocX, Center for Documentary Studies, Duke University. In addition, Christina Sharpe invited me to present a manifesto version of this work as part of the 2023 Alchemy Lecture Series at York University, and I am humbled for that opportunity, which has led to more speculating and kinmaking. My "A Manifesto for Speculative Relations" was first published in *Five Manifestos for the Beautiful World*, edited by Christina Sharpe (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2024), and parts of it are reproduced in the preface and interlude 3, "Star."

Earlier versions of other portions of this book were published in a few places: the section "Kinstillatory Possibilities" from the introduction appeared in my chapter "In Good Relations: Native Adoption, Kinstillations, and the Grounding of Memory," in *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form*, edited by Teagan Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, 95–118 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022). Also in the introduction, the Cherokee creation story and its relationship to Dayunisi appeared as "El giro de Dayunisi/Dayunisi's Turn," in *Terremoto* 22 (2022): 34–39. Chapter 1, "Relate," is slightly expanded from my chapter "Allotment Speculations: The Emergence of Land Memory," in *Allotment Stories: Indigenous Land Relations under Settler Siege*, edited by Daniel Heath Justice and Jean M. O'Brien, 63–73 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021). Interlude 2, "Speculate," is derived from an essay titled "Instant Ancestors," published in *Protean Magazine* 4 (2023): 12–19.

At Duke University Press, I would like to thank Gisela Fosado for her commitment to supporting my work, especially when my own doubts interfered. Thanks also to Alejandra Mejía, for helping bring this work to

fruition, and to the two anonymous reviewers of this manuscript, whose insights pushed me to improve it in many ways.

Kinship comes in many forms. I have made kin with people and landscapes and communities, with stones and stars. I have often wondered how to adequately express such a thing as gratitude for a place or a memory. Perhaps all I can do is say thank you, wado, to those people and places, to those ancestors whose perseverance imbues these pages with a sense of wonder. Wado, to my parents, Randall and Catherine Pierce, to whom this book is dedicated; my brother Blake; sister-in-law Sarah; and their three children, Luke, Landon, and Levi. I have learned a lot about relations by playing hide-and-seek over the years. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, James, for being a reader and listener, for your abiding love, and for allowing me to feel vulnerable. This book about speculations is as much about finding the language we need to feel and express love as it is about listening to the possibilities that come from a full and tender heart. I thank you for always being there for me. And I thank those ancestors whose dreams we inhabit, we whose lives and relations make up the fabric of this world. We whose speculations bring those ancestors to life.

Notes

PREFACE

The first three paragraphs of my preface were published as part of the manifesto version of this work in Pierce, "A Manifesto for Speculative Relations," which was first published in *Five Manifestos for the Beautiful World*, edited by Christina Sharpe (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2024).

1. I have written about this process before and will return to the broader issues of adoption and cultural assimilation in chapter 1. For an early version of these thoughts, see Pierce, "Adopted."

2. A CDIB card is an official document issued by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs that affirms a quantum (or fraction) of specific Indigenous ancestry. Mine notes that I have one quarter Indian blood because my maternal grandmother, Ada Rock, was a full blood Cherokee. While the Cherokee Nation does not use blood quantum for enrollment (instead using lineal descent to a person listed on the Dawes Rolls), I was still issued a CDIB card as part of this legal process. For a summary of various viewpoints about the use of blood quantum in tribal enrollment policies, see Garroutte, *Real Indians*, 29–37. For a nuanced approach to the history of blood quantum in relation to more recent developments in genetics and DNA, see TallBear, *Native American DNA*, 55–66.

INTRODUCTION

Part of the section "Kinstillatory Possibilities" was published in "In Good Relations: Native Adoption, Kinstillations, and the Grounding of Memory," in *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form*, edited by Teagan Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, 95–118 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

Part of the section "Dayunisian Dreams," about the Cherokee creation story and its relationship to Dayunisi, was published as "El giro de Dayunisi/Dayunisi's Turn," in *Terremoto* 22 (2022): 34–39.

1. While the term *survivance* has become ubiquitous among North American Indigenous scholars and scholarship, it is less common in other contexts. Gerald Vizenor

coined the term in his book *Manifest Manners*, originally published in 1994, and expands on the concept in his introduction to the edited volume *Survivance* (2008), where he writes: "Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivable is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name" (Vizenor, "Aesthetics," 1).

2. Though I return to the issue of living in good relations below, here I am following Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 73–77.

3. Teuton, *Cherokee Stories*, 7.

4. Rogers, *Speculation*, 9.

5. Rogers provides a masterful account of the transformation of this term over the centuries. On the point of the Latin terms *speculum* and *specula*, Rogers refers to St. Augustine's commentary on a passage from 2 Corinthians 3:18 (King James Version), which translates speculation as "beholding as in a glass." The distinction had theological implications regarding *how* one was to see God, and thus how to approach Christian devotion. See Rogers, *Speculation*, 9–15.

6. Rogers, *Speculation*, 12.

7. Though, as I describe in this introduction, I have primarily drawn on Indigenous understandings of speculation, I would be remiss if I did not also note that the work of Black studies scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, Tavia Nyong'o, and Christina Sharpe has also been influential to my thinking. Hartman's article "Venus in Two Acts" first developed the notion of "critical fabulation," which she defines as a method not of recovering the lives of enslaved people, but "playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story," and "re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view" (11). Nyong'o, in turn, develops the term "afro-fabulation," drawing on Hartman, Donna J. Haraway, and Audre Lorde, as "the persistent reappearance of that which was never meant to appear, but was instead meant to be kept outside or below representation" (*Afro-Fabulations*, 4). Nyong'o's archive of Black art and performance is different from my own, but I deeply appreciate his insistence on the emergence of unexpected and fantastical modes of embodiment as techniques that undermine the presumed truth of Black racialization and its representations. Sharpe, finally, in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, charts multiple forms of lingering with archives of violence, erasure, and enslavement. There is much I could cite, but a simple question stands out when Sharpe analyzes the photograph of a young Haitian girl with the word "ship" taped to her forehead: "What happens when we look at and listen to these and other Black girls across time? What is made in our encounters with them? This looking makes ethical demands on the viewer; demands to imagine otherwise; to recon with the fact that the archive, too, is invention" (51). These are engagements with the archives of Black life, death, enslavement, but also joy and memory. The specificity of Black studies scholarship and its engagements with such archives is not something I engage with in the present study, but I do think these methodologies have played a part in inspiring my thinking on how to think about archives and the people they portray in a different way.

8. See also Teuton, *Cherokee Earth Dwellers*, 35–36.

9. This is not the same as the Cherokee word for "ourselves," which is not "Cherokee" but aniyuwiya, the real or principal people.

10. Justice, *Why Indigenous Literature Matters*, 41–42.

11. Justice, *Why Indigenous Literature Matters*, 43.

12. Yes, dear reader, Heidegger writes about worlding. No, dear reader, I will not be footnoting him. The reasons are explained in the following paragraph.

13. Spivak, who does engage with Heidegger—and to dazzling effect—first theorized the "worlding" of the "Third World" in the article "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives," originally published in 1985. Portions of the article were included in the chapter "History" in *A Critique*.

14. Spivak, *A Critique*, 211.

15. Spivak, *A Critique*, 211.

16. Spivak, *A Critique*, 212.

17. Belcourt, *This Wound Is a World*, 52.

18. The resonance with José Esteban Muñoz's queer utopia is evident here as in much of Belcourt's work. See Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

19. The much-cited phrase "a world in which many worlds fit" forms part of the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (ELZN), which was put forth in 1996. See https://radiozapatista.org/?p=20287. In addition to Escobar's *Pluriversal Politics*, see Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser's edited volume *A World of Many Worlds*.

20. Warrior, *The People and the Word*, 7.

21. Warrior, *The People and the Word*, 7.

22. This discussion of Recollet's use of kinstillation is derived from Pierce, "In Good Relations," 96–98.

23. Recollet, "Kinstillatory Gathering," 51.

24. Here I am following Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor."

25. See Weston, *Families We Choose*.

26. I mean "transtemporality" in the general sense of across or linked through time. However, it is important to note that Jacob Lau's use of "trans-temporality" to index how trans bodies (and in particular trans of color bodies) exist "within and beside" normative cis temporality is not entirely absent from my thinking here (Lau, "Between the Times," 3). Time is a gendering and racializing apparatus. As such, Indigenous forms of gendering often *appear* commensurable with normative time, only to be rendered incommensurable with colonial normativities that produce Indigeneity as ontologically deviant, as unproductive in capitalist modernity.

27. I first heard the term "ancestral futurity" from Wiradjuri artist SJ Norman in 2020. The concept has been central to our collaboration as curators of the performance series *Knowledge of Wounds*, which first took place at Performance Space New York in January 2020. For more information, see https://performancespacenewyork.org/shows/knowledge-of-wounds/. Norman and I discuss *Knowledge of Wounds*, ancestrality, futurity, and Indigenous bodies in "Liminal Tension/Liminal Gifts: SJ Norman in Conversation with Joseph M. Pierce," *Critical Correspondence*, March 20, 2020, https://movementresearch.org/publications/critical-correspondence/sj-norman-in-conversation-with-joseph-m-pierce.

28. Recollet and Johnson, "Kin-dling and Other Radical Relationalities," 18. The collaborative work between Recollet and Johnson has been crucial to my understanding of kinstillations. This understanding is both experiential and conceptual. I have participated in Emily Johnson's *Kinstillatory Gatherings in Light and Dark Matter*, monthly fireside gatherings at Abrons Arts Center in Lower Manhattan. In addition, Johnson was a participant and space keeper in *Knowledge of Wounds*, and both she and Recollet continue to elaborate on these concepts.

29. For a summary, see Lankford, "The 'Path of Souls,'" 205.

30. Harjo, *Spiral to the Stars*, 54.

31. Harjo glosses este-cate sovereignty as "Indigenous kinship sovereignty" (4), and notes that the Mvskoke term literally translates to "red man" or "Indian" (n3, 254). My focus in this paragraph is the enactment of kinstillatory relations, which are essentially sovereign practices. Harjo writes, "Este-cate sovereignty renovates conventionally received ideas of tribal sovereignty and draws upon the profundity of Mvskoke epistemologies to structure sovereignty. Este-cate sovereignty is a type of sovereignty that Mvskoke people have always practiced, one that predates settler colonialism, and Mvskoke people still practice it in new and renegotiated forms in their daily life. This other way of knowing sovereignty can be carried out by individual community members to perpetuate their community" (*Spiral to the Stars*, 51).

32. Harjo, *Spiral to the Stars*, 41.

33. Harjo, *Spiral to the Stars*, 31.

34. Harjo, *Spiral to the Stars*, 31.

35. Harjo, *Spiral to the Stars*, 41.

36. Chacón, *Indigenous Cosmolectics*, 12.

37. Chacón, *Indigenous Cosmolectics*, 13.

38. Chacón, *Indigenous Cosmolectics*, 12.

39. I have retold this story in my own way, though I have drawn on elements from two main published sources: Teuton, *Cherokee Stories*, 38–40, and Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 239. Teuton also begins his literary study *Deep Waters* with the Cherokee origin story, utilizing its symbolic meanings to propose a parallel between the act of literary and cultural criticism and Dayunisi's dive to the bottom of the ocean. In this comparison, the scholar immerses himself in the chaotic waters of the text, method, or assumed knowledge, and returns to the surface with material that can be shared by all, bringing new possibilities to the realm of critical inquiry. Though I am indebted to Teuton for this elegant and culturally grounded heuristic, I draw on a different aspect of the origin story for inspiration here, and I will return to this story in chapter 1 to expand on its diverse meanings. I published an earlier version of this section in *Terremoto* in both English and Spanish. See Pierce, "El giro de Dayunisi."

40. Dayunisi does not have a binary gender, so I use the pronoun *they*.

41. I am using these terms as they were taught to me. However, as Christopher B. Teuton relates in a recent book, *Cherokee Earth Dwellers*, which draws primarily on teachings by Cherokee elder Hastings Shade, the Under World is also called Elohi Hawinadidla. See Teuton, *Cherokee Earth Dwellers*, 34–35.

42. Justice, "Notes Toward a Theory of Anomaly," 220.