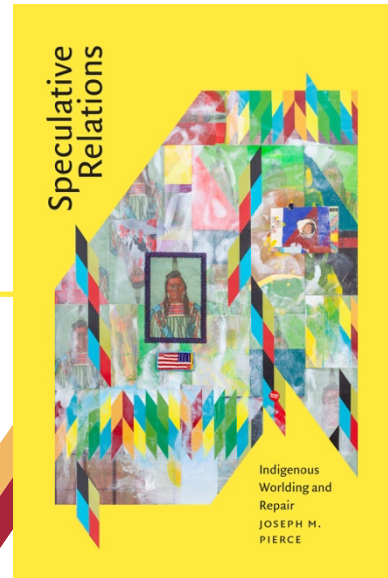


# Speculative Relations: Indigenous Worlding and Repair

by Joseph M. Pierce

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## Overview

*Speculative Relations: Indigenous Worlding and Repair* enlivens human and more-than-human relations through an engagement with Indigenous epistemologies, artwork, and methods.

“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. Relations, and by extension living in good relations, is a fundamental paradigm through which many Indigenous communities express cultural, political, and artistic sensibilities.” (p. 1)

This discussion guide, prepared by Geneviève François, foregrounds the methods developed in the book, and serves as a point of departure for future research, thinking, and community building. Geneviève François is a Black mixed-race queer disabled writer and researcher whose work is embedded in relationality, focusing on radical love and communal care as practices of liberation, speculating and embodying liberatory futures. The page numbers below refer to the print version of *Speculative Relations*.

## Introduction: Being in Good Relations with the Text

At the core of *Speculative Relations* is the ethic of being in good relations. This guide echoes Pierce’s invitation “to work toward grounding our own lives and experiences in the work of Indigenous methodologies, and in the work of finding pathways for ethical research and culturally informed critique.” (p. 213) So let us first ask what it means to be in good relations with the text. Being in good relations requires we take the time to think things through – context, space, history. We must contend with the ongoing realities of colonialism, and how they shape our lives. By acknowledging our own context, positionality, history, and the land that sustains us, we are grounding ourselves in place.

Being in good relations with this text also requires us to engage in the material practice of relationality. This is an ongoing process that does not begin or end on the page. Relationality demands that we contend with the question “How do we love ourselves and our relations?” (p. 190).

It is a practice of reciprocity. In discussing this work, in thinking about it, it is important not to get lost in the individualism that colonial systems continuously try to normalize, and rather take the time to relate, to expand our understanding and our *being* through relation. To be in good relations with this text, we must engage with it thoughtfully, and with the awareness that this text is a relation itself, part of a socio-cultural web that stretches across space and time. We must keep in mind that “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.” (p. 11)

This discussion guide is separated in four sections: Speculation, Worlding, Repair, and Relationality. It quotes directly from the book to provide working definitions for these core concepts. Though they have been separated for each exercise, these four concepts are mutually reinforcing – there is relationality in speculation and worlding in repair and repair in relationality and speculation in worlding. Speculative relations, as a methodology, asks that we understand the relation between these concepts, rather than isolating them. As Pierce claims, “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.” (p. 11)

The exercises below are an invitation to activate the concepts and knowledges shared in this book. When doing these exercises it is important not to “assume (...) 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.” (p. 15) It is important not to homogenize or romanticize Indigenous ways of knowing, and to be weary not to anachronize them. Rather, we must speculate and imagine. Consider doing the exercises below relationally, that is, while engaging with other humans and more-than-humans. Take these exercises as a project of ongoing speculative relations.

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## TOPIC: SPECULATION

“*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.” (p. 1)

“speculation is a term that folds within it both sight and insight, the truth of the gaze and what one can only discover through reflection.” (p. 99)



## EXERCISE: APPROACHING A WORK OF ART

Throughout this book, Pierce engages with artwork of many kinds through a speculative lens. This exercise invites you to practice similar engagement with an artwork of your choosing – be it visual art (photographs, paintings, sculptures, film etc.), poetry, writing, or storytelling. In looking for artwork, it is important to do thorough research. The artwork should be verified, with a named artist and a clear source. Speculation does not lend itself to AI art, which is predicated on the destruction of land and communities and the theft of human-made art. There is so much rich human-made artwork from which to choose.

Situating oneself (positionality, history, land, cultural context etc.) is an important part of engaging with this exercise. Here are some guiding statements and questions to speculate on your chosen piece of art, but feel free to draw from other methodologies Pierce utilises in this book:

- Consider whether the artist framed their work through a colonial lens or not, with purpose and intention or not, and how that shapes the artwork.
- Consider what is and what is not in the artwork. Do you see something specific, a symbol or theme, or is there something noticeably absent—a shadow or a haunting presence?
- How can engaging with artwork through speculation allow us to engage with history in counter-colonial ways, while also speculating towards decolonial futures?
- Does your artwork engage with gesture? (A facial expression, a movement of the body, a line of flight). What can you speculate from the subject's gesture? Think both with the artwork itself and intertextually. Speculate beyond the art while grounding yourself in Pierce's methodologies. Imagine possibilities without denying the realities that shape the artwork and that inform the artist.
- How does speculation allow us to think about opacity – the intentional shadows and erasures in a work? Is it possible to speculate while embracing opacity, embracing the fact that some things will never be known and that subjects do not need to be known to be relations? How can we navigate the necessary balance between speculation and opacity? How can artwork create that space?

## TOPIC: WORLDING - KINSTILLATIONS



“*worlding* as the enactment of relational thinking in the context of Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies.” (pp. 1-2)

“*worlding* as an ongoing, iterative, and, thus, nonlinear form of signaling the creative potential of Indigenous artistic and cultural expression.” (p. 9)

“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.” (p. 4)

“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.” (p. 12)

## EXERCISE: KINSTILLATORY MAP

Kinstillation is a term coined by Cree scholar Kai Recollet that joins the words “kin” and “constellation”. This exercise invites you to map your relations as kinstillations. Create your own kinstillatory map, keeping in mind that speculative relations entails decentering the self through relational worlding. Take your time to sit with worlding and kinship before embarking on this mapping journey. Recall the story of the Pine Tree and the Pleiades (INTERLUDE 3. Star). Engaging with the kinstillatory map is not just about writing names of relations, it is also about inner

contemplation and the material practice of relationality. It is not an on-the-spot activity, it must be thought through and sustained in real life. Think of how long it took for Pierce to nurture his relations with the tobacco seedling in this book's Conclusion. Consider your human and more-than-human relations, and their part in your worlding. What would your map look like?

## TOPIC: RELATIONS

“*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).” (p. 1)

## EXERCISE: 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.” (p. 23)

An if/then statement is typically understood as a rhetorical device that begins with a hypothesis (if) and is followed by a conclusion (then). Today, such statements are common in mathematics and computing, but they have a long history as part of the grammar of many western languages. While we do not necessarily support those logics, we can use these structures to show how they can be pried open and used otherwise. Pierce calls this practice a grammar of speculation.

The book's epilogue demonstrates a series of if/then statements, which are a useful model. But the following exercise is drawn from an invitation Pierce extends in his “Manifesto for Speculative Relations,” published in the edited volume *Five Manifestos for the Beautiful World* (Knopf Canada, 2024; Duke UP, 2025). I quote from the manifesto in this exercise, as a grammar of speculation that allows us to trace relations, and to expose the false realities imposed by colonialism. Feel free to come up with your own, or to respond to the ones below.

- If speculative relations are processes of reciprocity and care, then what is required of us to sustain them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- If we refuse the dehumanizing ontologies that colonialism imposes upon us, while acknowledging the violences of colonialism, then we must:



“If History does not know us, or want to know us, on the terms we set out for ourselves, then History can go fuck itself.” (*Five Manifestos for the Beautiful World* p. 27)

“recall other things that can fuck right off.” (*Five Manifestos for the Beautiful World* p. 28)

“If these things can fuck off, then what do we do in the interim?” (*Five Manifestos for the Beautiful World* p. 28)

## TOPIC: REPAIR

“*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.” (p. 2)



## EXERCISE: STORYTELLING + GUIDING QUESTIONS

Repair is a deeply personal mode of engaging with speculative relations. To engage with this book is to engage with the author’s personal forms of repair. Consider INTERLUDE 1. Remember and the reparative work Pierce does in it. There is no one size fits all to repair. It is contextual and relational, and requires intention, introspection, and relation. As Pierce points out, “there is so little in the way of reparative praxis. We have very few tools at our disposal.” (p. 38) Yet, perhaps the key to repair is to pay attention to the ways in which speculative relations as a methodology touch the parts of us that are tender, the parts that seem to require attention, that are calling to us. In other words, repair is a form of storying ourselves through the world. Sometimes our stories are all we have. Sometimes we need to narrate alternative truths, worlds, realities.

This exercise uses storytelling as a method of repair that is part of the practice of speculation. Consider these prompts as departure points for storying.

- Where do you situate yourself with regards to repair? What internal work must you attend to in order to be in good relations? Contextualize yourself within this (settler, Indigenous, displaced)

Consider whether you must engage in research in order to attend to repair. Broaden what ‘research’ means to you. Archives, institutions, and the internet are useful, but thinking decolonially, engaging with relations (respectfully and in non-invasive ways) can inform repair.

- Consider what speculative forms repair could take for you: an artistic practice, an engagement with nature etc. Consider how engaging with the previous exercises may have touched upon repair for you, and what they attended to in your storying, worlding, speculating, and relating.

- Consider that repair may be sitting with questions that may not have clear cut answers

For example, “how do we re-member or re-embody the relationships that are required of us as queer(ish) Indigenous people. Or the question could be: How do we love ourselves and our relations?” (p. 90)

- How can speculating your relations allow you to repair them? Consider how widening the breadth of whom you consider ‘relations’ – as more-than-human and through space and time – can allow you to repair and strengthen relational bonds.
- What stories do you feel you, we, need in order to repair our relations? How can storying harness speculative relations?

## CONCLUSION

Here are some final quotes from the book’s epilogue to think through as we continue our journey of being in good relations through speculative relations:

“I hope that speculative relations has been a generous approach, that it has allowed you to think about your own communities and how these ideas might serve to enliven their forms of expression.” (p. 212)

“the speculative is the enactment of living in good relations. This requires humility. This requires faith. And it takes remembering and at times imagining the possibilities of our own participation in the world.” (p. 217)

“If it is a dream of speculative relations, then, perhaps this book provides pathways to kinship, relations lived and nurtured through time.” (p. 220)

“If it is a dream of speculative relations, then our relations, kinetic and kaleidoscopic, emergent and cosmic, are the hope for a future.” (p. 220)

