

Indigenous Futurity

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In a post human world where the networks and systems that circle the globe have the potential to eclipse any individual or nation, supplanting the horizontal orientation of empire with a vertical orientation of cyberspace, new autopoietic formations are emerging of individuals and communities in local expressions of the global. We can learn from the Lakota Sioux epistemology at a time when Cyberspace offers the potential to marry an ancient technology that allows for a total immersion of the body in an expanding time and space with the newest technology for mapping coordinates on the level of the body. The presentation takes an auto-ethnographic approach to Lakota Sioux practices as a complete technology that projects new possibilities for human interaction through anticipatory and tacit knowledge, which can be mapped onto puzzling situations to clear a path. Environmental activism has found a new center in the ceremonies of the Lakota Sioux, which locate knowledge in the ground through self sacrifice for the sake of the people for seven generations in the past and future. The ceremonies have begun to reverse the trauma of the imprisonment of reservation by locating new ways of being in the land and new ways of gathering both on and off the reservation through mediated circulation of knowledge that resulted in the encampment at Standing Rock in North Dakota. Although still struggling mightily under the gross accumulation of effects of poverty that is passed down generationally, the Lakota-speaking Indigenous of the North American Great Plains have emerged with a powerfully networked system of belief that can join in the reorientation of the globe from a horizontal to a vertical pathway through knowledge that is performative, embedded in the way that people live, and potentially radically disruptive.

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From the Indigenous perspective, the colonial project reoriented the earth from the vertical to the horizontal by introducing the Cartesian grid of the surveyor's transom, which mapped coordinates from the celestial sphere to demarcate and regulate the land. This orientation ultimately led to the establishment of the slave labor camp, the Mason Dixon Line, the transcontinental railroad, the reservation system as holding pens for the Indigenous, and even the modern city. All of these political systems were established on horizontal coordinates that regulated and controlled indigenous land and removed indigenous peoples. However, for the Indigenous the earth has always remained vertically oriented in a series of circles that orient the earth and sky to locate star knowledge that can be mirrored in ceremonies which take place on earth. Indigenous practices that were outlawed for one hundred years in the U.S. were revived in 1978, which has led to a steady increase in ceremonies on the reservations where the Lakota population was concentrated when they were forcibly removed from the Black Hills, and outward to other lands where they are calling for ceremonies in their dreams. A peripatetic culture that once moved in the middle of the continent in pursuit of buffalo has been transformed into a heterotopian culture led by Lakota speaking medicine carriers who arrive carrying knowledge of the ancient star structures of the Lakota Sioux ceremonies. A people who turned inward for one hundred years has turned outward as nomadic medicine carriers. I met Lakota teachers in the Potomac River Valley in the Middle Atlantic States where I was

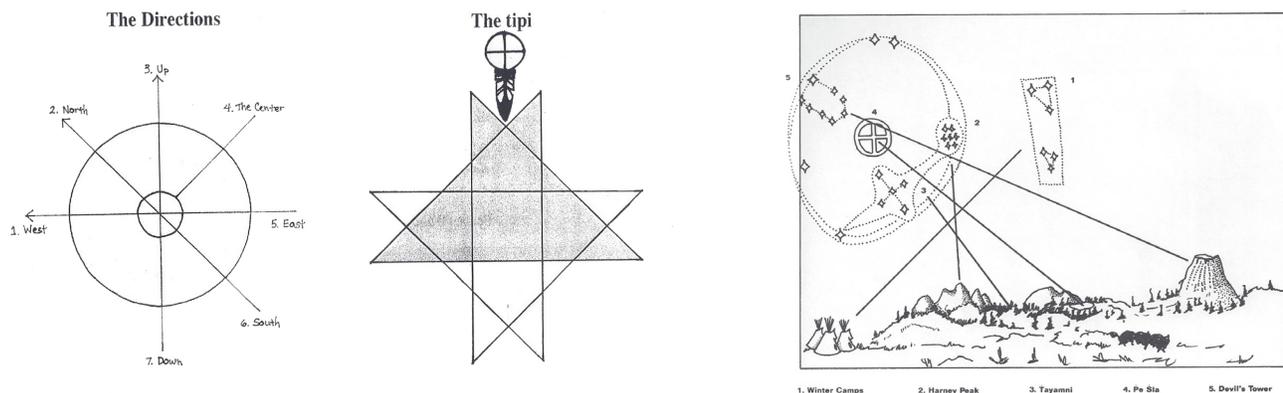


Figure 1 (Left): Tipi orientation diagram and tipi plan diagram
 Figure 2 (Right): Lakota constellations relating sacred stories to Black Hills

searching for vestigial traces of my Shawnee ancestors in the upland trails of the Appalachian Mountains. My Shawnee ancestors were forcibly expelled from the land over a hundred years ago along with their language and ceremonies. The Lakota Sioux have revived their language and ceremonies in anticipation of the restoration of their land in the Black Hills. In keeping with their prophecies, they have opened their ceremonies to those who are called in their dreams to perform in the immersive practices. Through ceremony, dreams guide the action of the participants.

Indigenous Futurity comes at a time when Cyberspace offers the potential to marry an ancient technology that allows for a total immersion of the body in an expanding time and space with the newest technology for mapping coordinates on the level of the body. Architecture is increasingly engaged in immersive experiences that can alter the sensations of the occupant in complex circulatory patterns that are generated with affective materials. As a Sundancer in the Cangleska Luta Tiospaye on Pine Ridge Reservation, I present the immersive experiences of the Indigenous ceremonies as a media that can provoke architecture to reconsider a new relationship to essential practices of embodiment in environmental activism. Although indigenous building practices and styles have been appropriated by architecture in various phases of modernity, my studies are informed by the contemporary discourse that argues that indigenous practices are theorizing alongside of, or in anticipation of post structuralism and calling for a careful consideration of indigenous theory as a map for a new future. As a Lakota sundancer who is conversant in philosophy and theory, I write in the voice of an autoethnographer who experiences the phenomenology of the ceremony as a form of activism that can lead to a new future.

Writing fixes words to the page in an indelible way that is not as dynamic as speaking, which allows for performance to take place, and a community to be formed through exchanges that occur extemporaneously. I want to make it clear that I am presenting my experience within the constraints of writing, as a method of transferring an experience of knowledge that was conveyed to me via the oral tradition of the Lakota practitioners. When I first went to South Dakota to experience immersive ceremonies I was

unable to write or speak about them when I returned to my home in Brooklyn. Although disturbed at the time, I now understand that they remained on the land in a preverbal state. Whatever I saw and felt could not return with me to Brooklyn. After more than ten years in ceremony and learning how to sing in Lakota, the language of the ceremonies, I am now able to speak and write about the ceremonies. Still, I do so reluctantly since I am aware from my studies and practices that the gaze of the colonial has been distorting the ceremonies for hundreds of years by the faux Indian. I am wary of appropriation of Indigenous practices in the ventriloquizing voice of the Indian expert. When urged to write about my experiences in the ceremonies, I cautioned my Lakota teachers that as a Metis person who was educated logocentrically, the experiences are filtered through western philosophy and critical theory. Met with laughter that often accompanies ceremonies, I learned that the role of the ceremonies was not to turn me into a Stone Age person who exists before the alphabet was invented. Although the ceremonies have been revived, and there is always a distortion in revivals, I have come to see that they are not a reenactment of a past event, but rather an omnipresent event that is dynamic, flexible and open to changing conditions, including the Internet of ideas. Becoming rather than being Indian, I write as a Metis person who seeks to decolonize the ceremony so as to remove the nostalgia for an Indian past that is complicit with state sovereignty as it continues to hold the Indian in a non-state.

My thinking about indigenous practice and theory is informed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who begin *A Thousand Plateaus* with the analogy of the rhizome to explain extra territorial formations such as the "Indian without ancestry" of the U.S, adopting the hip patois of the reservation as I have in this article to refer to Native Americans as Indians. A rhizome for Deleuze and Guattari is a subterranean stem that submerges and reemerges as it is constructing or collapsing in a process that is "perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting again," which extends from plants to animals and groups of people who move nomadically. This emptying out of people could explain the impulses that led Lakota Sioux practitioners to drive for twenty-four hours across the U.S. to the Potomac River Valley to conduct ceremonies for Metis and European peoples like myself. It could also explain settler colonialism that led General George Custer to move from the battlefields of the Potomac River Valley to the Black Hills of South Dakota one hundred and fifty years

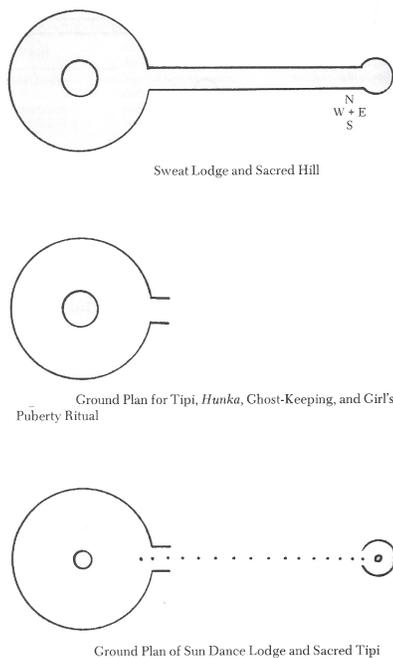


Figure 3: Plans for ceremonial structures

earlier to exterminate Indians. In this regard, my reading of Deleuze and Guattari is especially indebted to the astute reading of Jodi Byrd, who in *Transit of Empire* expands Deleuze and Guattari's 1980 proposal to argue that, "Deleuze and Guattari re/deterritorializ America as the world, coming full circle to find its west in its east and its east in its west, a worldly anew, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, that decenters all static, grounded belongings and locates them instead in becomings: becoming-Indian, becoming-woman, becoming-America." Byrd argues that Indians without ancestry exist *sui generis* alongside the tattooed savages evoked in other philosophical discussions as traces that still evoke colonial nostalgia for the empty land and exotic people who appear to empty the land as the Indigenous have been historically evoked in the myth of the New World: "...the Indians pass into the thickness of the rocks themselves, where aesthetic form is no longer identified with the commemoration of a departure or an arrival, but with the creation of paths without memory." The Indian is a model, like the nomad, "that assembles for Deleuze the site of movement, escape, difference—it is a stateless war machine, existing outside of and rupturing the state." As amply exhibited in the example of the Sacred Stone Camp's successful, albeit shortlived, bid to halt the construction of the Dakota Action Pipeline in 2016, Byrd theorizes that the Indian has the ability to "'stop the world"...as an appropriate rendition of a certain awareness in which the reality of everyday life is altered because the flow of interpretation, which ordinarily runs uninterruptedly, has been stopped by a set of circumstances alien to the flow."

However the Indian may stop the flow temporarily, to Byrd the Indian is still characterized by the colonial gaze as "polyvocality,

dance, proximity to nature and a plurilinear, multidimensional semiotic that wards off any kind of signifying circularity," and as a result they occupy a threshold of past, present and future that resists interpretation through this disruption that alters and redirects flow. "The Indian sign is the field through which post structuralism makes its intervention, and as a result, this paradigmatic and pathological Indianness cannot be circumvented as a colonialist trace. In fact, this colonialist trace is exactly why "the Indian" is so disruptive to flow and to experimentation. Every time flow or a line of flight approaches, touches or encounters Indianness, it also confronts the colonialist project that has made that flow possible. The choice is to either confront that colonialism or to deflect it. And not being prepared to disrupt the logics of settler colonialism necessary for the terra nullius through which to wander, the entire system either freezes or reboots." Byrd's point in tracing the Deleuzian wilderness and the Indian deferred is to detail the ways in which "the Indian" is put to flight within Western philosophical traditions. "Any assemblage that arises from such horizons becomes a colonialist one, and it is the work of indigenous critical theory both to rearticulate indigenous phenomenologies and to provide (alter)native interpretative strategies through which to apprehend the colonialist nostalgias that continue to shape affective liberal democracy's investment in state sovereignty as a source of violence, remedy, memory and grievability."

In an effort to rearticulate indigenous phenomenologies, I will present the ceremonies that I have participated in as a Sundancer who was invited in response to the dreams of my ancestors who provided me with the willingness to endure prolonged periods of sensory deprivation so I could receive visions that summon the past and the future to rescue the present. The ceremonies take place through the intercession of matter. Brought to the Lakota people by the White Buffalo Calf Woman, a humanimal knowledge-keeper whose story explains the relationship of the land and the sky, the people, animal, plant and mineral as they are synthesized in ceremony, the ceremonies provide a system of transformation that clears new paths through tacit and anticipatory knowledge that resides on the ground. As the healing animal matriarch, the White Buffalo Calf Woman teaches the people to build the structures for the ceremonies in circles and to utilize plants, minerals and animals in the ceremonies and prophesizes that the ceremonies will heal all of the red, yellow, white and black peoples in the coming millennia upon her return. Visited by two hunters on the barren plains in search of food, in the story, as it is told, the calf woman extends the bundle containing the sacred pipe and proffers an invitation to the ceremonies to the male supplicant who approaches her receptively. The greedy supplicant is turned into a skeleton eaten by snakes. Often interpreted as a Christian morality tale of lust, I prefer to see the story in Marxist terms as one of communal receptivity and capitalist greed in keeping with the post colonial focus of this article. In the receptive spirit of the White Buffalo Calf Woman, the celebrants work together to provide the temporary structures for the ceremonies. As a result of this communal activity the ceremonies provide a way to encourage new forms of gathering among the celebrants



Figure 4: Sacred Stone Camp Standing Rock Reservation North Dakota

so that the transitions of birth and death, health and sickness are commemorated together along with the sharing of resources in the building and maintaining of the ceremonies and the tiospaye that encircles and supports the ceremonies. Conducted in provisional, temporary structures, the Lakota Sioux ceremonies are primarily for the healing of the people in the past, present and future. In fact, the term medicine, as in medicine wheel and medicine man, is often applied to the ceremonies although the western conception of medicine is different than the indigenous conception of medicine. Medicine is what one does as a matter of course for the indigenous and is available through communal activity instead of a specialized expert, although there are intercessors and medicine carriers who conduct the ceremonies and transmit the practices; they cannot work alone.

The first and central ceremony is the Inipi ceremony. Commonly known as a sweat lodge, I prefer inipi to keep the focus on the spiritual values of the performance instead of potentially confusing its intentions with profane structures that involve sweating in confined areas. A dome shaped structure for heated rocks that are doused

with water, the inipi replicates the buffalo womb for the rebirthing ceremony that extends the teaching of the white buffalo calf woman to the people. The inipi is positioned in plan view as a round structure that is connected by a path ending at a round fire pit. During the ceremony the structure is activated by the presence of a ceremonial pipe that is loaded with willow bark for the celebrants who smoke the pipe in the third round to send the prayers to the star nation. Although the heat of the inipi can be intense for the initiate, the ceremonial combustion of plants such as sage, cedar and sweet grass together with sacred songs that were given to the people by the ancestors transmits the knowledge that comes to the people, who are crouched in the inipi in a circle around a circular pit for the rocks. Knowledge enters the lodge through fire, water, plant, animal and through prayers and songs in Lakota with drum accompaniment for rhythm. The Inipi ceremony introduced me to the immersive teachings of the Lakota people, which are shared with those who are in the inipi and those who will have been and are soon to be and may never be in the ceremony. Inipi ceremonies can be conducted on special occasions such as death or illness and for a vision that can bind the tiospaye in a common solution. The dome shaped structure connects the earth with sky through the concave dome of the interior of the structure, which is darkened even during the day. The

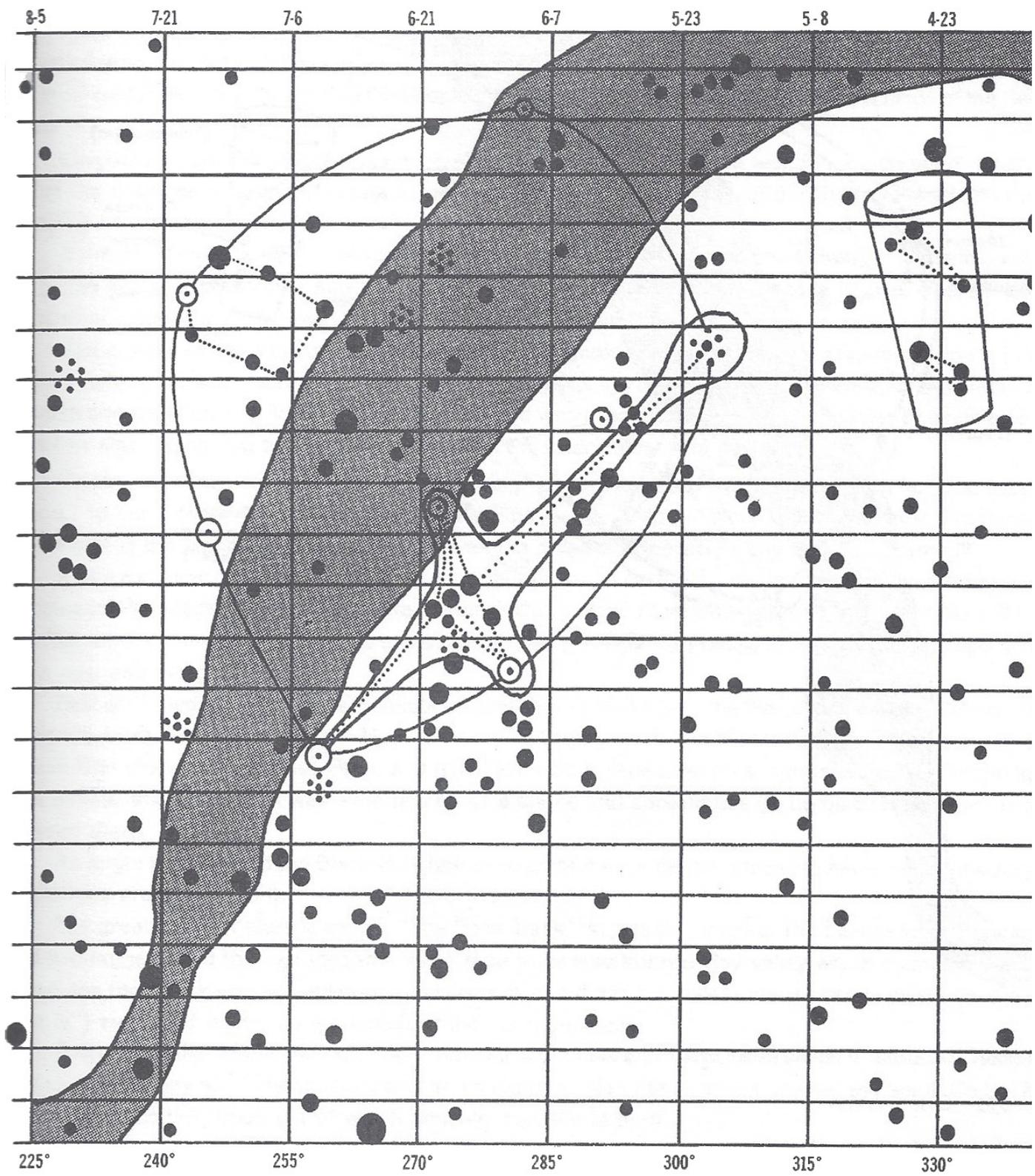


Figure 5: Lakota constellations in spring

inipi ceremony led to insights that prepared me for the hanbleceya ceremony. A ceremony of solitary immersion in the firmament, I remained in isolation for two days and a night on an eight by eight-foot pad surrounded by four hundred and five prayer ties that I made with my own hands by folding small fabric squares with bits of ceremonial tobacco, an altar and a mound of mole dirt for the spirits that live in the ground and a food offering for air spirits; tobacco is used sparingly in the ceremonies for prayer ties to activate the healing powers of the plant. The ceremonial pipe that we smoke in the third round of the inipi contains red willow bark, the origin of aspirin. Open to the sky and ground in all directions, in the hanbleceya I experienced the revolution of the earth as the sun set and rose and the cycles of wind as visible in the swaying trees around the pad and the healing power of song and dance and the animal spirits that visit me in the pad to bring knowledge that can only be gained in immersive experiences. The hanbleceya is supported by intercessors who remain at the bottom of the hill by a fire all night to watch for signs of my journey and by the spirits who leave signs in the mole dirt, which the intercessor interprets during the inipi ceremony that takes place after the hanbleceya so I can receive the people who support the ceremony. Hanbleceya sometimes referred to as vision quest, I prefer "crying for a vision," the literal translations of the Lakota for the ways in which the ceremony forces the celebrant inward to a painful place that is resistant to growth and can only be coaxed open through sacrifice for the people by the guidance of the animal and plant spirits.

During the second hanbleceya I see myself in a sacrificial position that I associate with sundancing and honored the visions by beginning to sundance. Sundance is a four-year commitment. I have just begun the third four-year commitment.

As a sundancer I participate with the other sundancers and supporters in the construction of the sundance arbor and the ceremonial regalia for four days and dance for four days and four nights around a tree that has been sacrificed for the dancers. Male dancers wear a long skirt and sage crown and ankle and wrist bracelets. Female dancers wear a loose dress and the same type of sage crown and ankle and wrist bracelets. The sundance is on the new moon in August to designate the new year with the ripening of the choke cherries that grow in the woods around the arbor. Like the number of prayer ties for the hanbleceya, the dimensions of the sundance arbor and the number of prayer ties that are used for the ceremony and the number of songs that are sung in each round and the movement in and out of the arbor and around the tree, bisecting the arbor to move across the tree, are all carefully prescribed. Like the other ceremonial structures, the sundance arbor is mirrored in constellations of stars. The crux of the tree is aligned with the Milky Way to bring star knowledge to the celebrants. The sacred tree is oriented vertically in the Sundance arbor. During the sacrificial piercing rounds, the arbor is closed to the horizontal coordinates of north, south, east and west and open vertically below the ground, on the ground, in the sky and the sky above the sky where the Milky Way

contains all of the knowledge that the ceremonies transmit to the people.

Each sundance centers around an arbor and a tipi. The tipi is another example of vertical orientation. The tipi is star knowledge derived from the mapping of celestial coordinates. Open to the sky and aerodynamically sound, the tipi brings knowledge to the people from the spirits and provides a perfect temporary shelter for the windy plains. I've seen tipis remain standing in eighty-mile per hour winds. Through the long view of the patient observer, the movement of the stars is the source of all knowledge for the indigenous. The stars orient the ceremonies on the ground. This is the Lakota concept of mirroring. What goes on in the stars goes on on the ground. To the Indigenous the stars are never a means for dividing property; in fact, the capitalist concept of property does not exist in the Indigenous economies that I have known. If what goes on in the ground is a mirror of what goes on in the stars then it is the property of the star nation. The spatial organization of the reservation system of rectilinear grids and square houses is anathema to the indigenous belief systems. In his critique of the reservation Black Elk points out that everything in nature happens in circles not squares.

The Lakota Sioux defeated the American cavalry in the signature 1876 Battle of the Little Big Horn, known to Lakotas as the Battle of the Greasy Grass and Custer's Last Stand, which was led by the Lakota warrior Crazy Horse, to protect the Black Hills from colonization. Although Crazy Horse was assassinated by U.S. agents the following year and the reservation system was founded with the removal of the Lakota people from the Black Hills and with the banning of the ceremonies in 1883, Crazy Horse transmitted a prophecy to the people that the nations would be reunited in the seventh generation with the coming together under the sacred tree of life of black, red, yellow and white people to usher in a period of prolonged peace at the end of European American colonization. This is the seventh generation. The revival of the ceremonies comes at a time of the realization the Hopi prophesy that the earth will be covered with a spiderweb connecting everyone and that the extraction of minerals from the ground that came with colonization will be discontinued. In a post human world, the networks and systems that circle the globe have the potential to eclipse any individual or nation, supplanting the horizontal orientation of empire with a vertical orientation of cyberspace.

In a diffused and fragmented world of heterotopias that have arisen through the discreet and fleeting and recombining spaces provided by Cyberspace, the indigenous practices that I present here encourage the production of subjectivity and activate relationship of the Earth and environment instead of a modernity based on universalizing concepts that minimize differences in massive and volumetric glass walled accumulations of capital, an Internet of Objects and edge conditions of increasingly degraded poverty. The interfaces provided by the digital age enable the original technology of the indigenous belief system as it is presented in this article to be transmitted. I was able to learn what I present in this paper because I was able to connect with people in cyberspace, although it is certainly

true that a virtual experience was essential to the knowledge that I have produced here. The ceremonies and ceremonial sites are never photographed or represented outside of the ceremonies and I have been careful to relay only the spatial coordinates of the ceremonies as architecture. It is also true that millions of Indigenous people are unable to connect in Cyberspace at the present time due to extreme levels of poverty.

Still, the Internet has enabled the Lakota people that I practice with to connect broadly both within and without the reservation via social media to expand their sphere of influence and mobilize political support in their struggles for survival. When I leave the Pine Ridge Reservation after the annual Sundance I still participate in the political life via Cangleska Luta Tiospaye social media site that brings local, particular knowledge of the reservation in all of its many facets into my screen in Brooklyn, NY. In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai posits that the universalizing forces of modernity have been broken apart and excited by the technology of cyberspace. For the purposes of his argument Appadurai organizes the scapes into five categories for the five largest units of data. These are ethnoscares, for rapidly moving groups of “persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live,” technoscares, “global configuration of technology [that] moves at high speeds across various kinds of impervious boundaries,” financescares, “the disposition of global capital...at high speeds,” mediascares, “image-centered, narrative based accounts of strips of reality,” and ideoscares, “concatenations of images..specifically oriented to capturing state power.”

A stone age practice that was not available to people living in the modernity of the twentieth century is now readily available as a result of the the circulation of media that was evident in the return of ceremonies in the Potomac River Valley and the Sacred Stone Camp as a fulfillment of the prophesy of the White Buffalo Calf Woman. Assembled by a group of women under the guidance of La Donna Brave Bull Allard who gathered on a sacred burial ground and sundance ground in Standing Rock Reservation to protect the land and the water from the threat of a pipeline moving fracked oil through the area, the Sacred Stone Camp is reproducing itself in many other examples of environmental activism. Although the water protector’s camp was eventually destroyed and the pipeline was installed, the efforts of the water protectors are still being pursued in the courts and, more important, the discourse of environmental activism has shifted from “protest,” to “protection,” which may be as significant as the shift in discourse to “make peace not war,” in 1968. As a sundancer who has experienced the communality of the tiospaye during the sacred ceremonies, I was not surprised to see the Sacred Stone Camp as the realization of hundreds of tiospayes moving in circles from as far away as New Zealand and Norway to bring the future of indigeniety and all seven of the bands of the Lakota Sioux nations for the first time since the Battle of Greasy Grass onto the screens of millions of people who followed the action via social media on a variety of platforms, and contributed in excess of one million dollars for the protectors. The Cangleska Luta tiospaye is located a hundred miles south of the Sacred Stone

Camp. Throughout the winter of 2016-2017 water protectors on their way to the encampment stopped on their way north to collect firewood and other supplies, which were freely given in the Lakota spirit of communalism. Like the interfaces of the digital sphere, the indigenous practices and theories that underlay the Lakota Sioux ceremonies are reorienting the verticality of the earth and the stars for potentially transformative new critical futures.

ENDNOTES

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3. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 8.
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16. Ibid 34.
17. Ibid, 35.
18. Ibid, 36.

IMAGE CREDITS

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Figure 2. Goodman, Ronald. *Lakota Star Knowledge*. Rosebud, SD: Sinte Gleska University: 1992, 29.

Figure 3. Powers, William K., *Oglala Religion*. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press: 1975, 186.

Figure 4. <http://www.openmicroc.com/photos-go-inside-nodapl-a-collective-effort-to-stop-the-dakota-access-pipeline/>

Figure 5. Goodman, Lakota Star Knowledge, 5.