

## INTRODUCTION

# ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS THROUGH CHANGING LANDSCAPES: INDIGENOUS ACTIVISM AND LITERARY ARTS

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*9 million sockeye have disappeared. They didn't run upstream. We have a story about that. Sockeye were sent to Salish women to assist us during times of hunger. We were asked to honour sockeye and take care of the waters. We were told that if we take the sockeye or their habitat or the women for granted, they would not return. The story does not say that if we lose our fishing rights, we are not responsible for caretaking the fish or the women. It does not say that if we allow the newcomers to desecrate the waters, we are relieved of responsibility. It says that if we don't take care, they will not return.*

Lee Maracle, *Memory Serves*

In her story “Salmon Is the Hub of Salish Memory,” Sto:lo writer Lee Maracle reminds the reader of the relationship between the fish and the women, and she foregrounds the vital importance of honouring and nurturing these living entities and their inter-relatedness amongst one another and within the environment that sustains them. Attentive to the context in which she writes, Maracle reiterates the story’s warning that failure to do so will result in their disappearance. She further ponders what “the story does not say” (51), that is, with regards to responsibility when settlers are the cause of the devastation. Her text immediately calls to mind ongoing struggles for the protection of Indigenous lands and lives against the combined forces of global capitalism and settler colonialism. It brings out the necessity for a recovery that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have described as a fundamental decolonization imperative, one

that “must involve repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted” (Tuck and Yang 7). With her re-telling of the Salish story, Maracle puts forth the idea that caretaking—under all circumstances—remains a vital element in the struggles for Indigenous peoples and for the continuation of life in all its forms. Moreover, as Kyle Powys Whyte and Chris Cuomo observe, it is precisely “[a]s enactments of complex commitments to care [that] indigenous environmental movements have made great strides in protecting indigenous lifeways against the parties who are responsible for the environmental problems they face” (5). These parties include “international bodies, nation-states, subnational governments, corporations, and nongovernmental organizations” (Whyte and Cuomo 5-6). The question of responsibility therefore remains at the heart of an understanding of Indigenous environmental ethics and of their actualization in today’s neoliberal globalized colonial settler contexts.

8 Often, and in many ways, the contemporary productions of Indigenous scholars, activists, writers, and filmmakers relate to Maracle’s assertion that “violence to earth and violence between humans are connected” (53). In their respective works, for instance, Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine (2014), Blood and Sámi filmmaker Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers (2011), and Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2016) have exposed the intricate connections between the settler colonial project, the devastation of ecosystems, and the lives of Indigenous women and girls. Their poetic, filmic, and scholarly narratives contribute to ongoing conversations on environmental ethics and social justice at times of climate crisis by exposing the planetary and the community implications of the state of relationships between the land and the people. Tailfeathers makes this explicit when describing her short experimental film *Bloodland*, which is broadcast on YouTube, as “a social statement on the irreversible and detrimental impact of gas and oil exploration on our planet; and in particular on the impact that hydraulic fracturing has and will have on Kainaiwa, or Blood land” (Tailfeathers). Drawing on aesthetics of gore, *Bloodland* shows interspersed images of drilling into the earth and into the body of a young woman. The two sets of images rapidly mingle together to denounce the concomitant taking of Indigenous lands and lives while pointing at the gendered quality of this extractive violence. Similarly, Kanapé Fontaine has addressed in her slam poetry and her published work many of the ongoing concerns and reflections of Indigenous activism, including in relation to her engagement with the Idle No More movement and her participation in the 2012 Walk of Innu women from Uashat mak Mani-utenam to Montreal. The works of Tailfeathers and Kanapé Fontaine, among others, bear witness to the leadership role played by Indigenous women, through both arts and activism, in the combined struggles for the earth and for Indigenous women that have emerged forcefully since 2010 (“L’onderha” 6).

The juxtaposed narratives of these Indigenous artists and thinkers convey a sense of urgency that is now exacerbated by unprecedented depths of ecological and human devastation. In his 1970 assembly presentation on ecology, storytelling, and

the imagination, Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday brought to the attention of the American public: “We must live according to the principle of a land ethic. The alternative is that we shall not live at all” (13). Less than two decades into the twenty-first century, this eerie alternative seems to be moving nearer and nearer to our lives as “humanity faces radical global climate change, mass species extinctions, and unprecedented transformations to both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems across the globe” (Gardiner and Thompson 1). Indigenous peoples are particularly impacted by this state of affairs. This is demonstrated by, among other things, the water crisis “experienced primarily in small, usually Indigenous, communities” (McGregor 1), the flooding of vast areas of Cree and Innu lands by hydroelectric projects in Northern Manitoba and Northern Québec, and the effects of global warming on Inuit communities. One might wonder what becomes of “the principle of a land ethic” evoked by Momaday when the largely invisible “biopolitics of injustice” experienced by the Aamjiwnaang First Nation in the toxic and “seemingly post-apocalyptic environment” of “Canada’s Chemical Valley” in southwestern Ontario (Wiebe 11) are contrasted, on a more spectacular register, with “the huge, overwhelming scale of the destruction” experienced and observed by Indigenous peoples and individuals of other origins “in the middle of ground zero” of Northern Alberta’s tar sands (Wong 133). In a context where “[t]he cultural heritage, land, ecosystems and human health of First Nation communities [...] are being sacrificed for oil money in what has been termed a ‘slow industrial genocide’” (“Indigenous Earth”), what role can activism, film, and literature play?

This special issue of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue canadienne de littérature comparée* showcases comparative perspectives on the issues of environmental ethics and activism in Indigenous cultures, and also highlights the relationships among different media and genres of Indigenous creative expression. With its focus on concerns in Canadian culture and literature and beyond in a comparative context, this journal offers us a thought-provoking venue to explore the diverse and interrelated forms of Indigenous creativity, including literature, film, new media, and performance. Our comparative and bilingual approach seeks to explore themes of environmental ethics and activism in a contemporary context in which resource extraction and industrialization are increasingly being countered by indigenized forms of thought and action. In that perspective, we put forward contributions that examine the discourses, aesthetics, and knowledges that are emerging at the intersections of public protest, artistic expression, and environmental ethics.

Our examination of Indigenous literary and film narratives is based on the understanding that “stories are vessels of knowledge” and that, as such, they “carry dynamic answers to questions posed within Anishinaabeg [and, we wish to add, other Indigenous] communities, nations, and the world at large” (Doerfler et al.). The questions we address in this special issue are thus multiple and intersecting. In what ways can oral, written, and visual expressions by Indigenous artists and activists work to delineate, debunk, and denaturalize the ideologies that underlie settler capi-

talist industrialization and resource extraction? What teachings can be gained from the glimpses that different media and genres of Indigenous expression provide into the trespassing, upholding, or debating of the “border between bush culture and mall culture, between indigenous people’s mode of production and the totalizing push of state-led capitalism” (Kulchyski)? What specific understandings can be drawn from close readings of Indigenous narratives in terms of past, present, and future ways of envisioning the complex interactions between humans and all other living entities? More pertinently to this issue, how can comparative approaches to Indigenous literature and film enhance Indigenous literary studies, and, in turn, what opinions and perspectives can the latter bring to the field of comparative literature?

## STORIES, KNOWLEDGES, AND CHANGING LANDSCAPES

- 10 The persistent proximity of Indigenous activism and environmental ethics runs all the way to the founding ideology of settler colonialism—the doctrine of discovery and its related concept of *terra nullius*—and its multiple embodiments across Turtle Island. For more than five centuries, conceptions of the land as an empty space to be appropriated, commodified, and exploited have been called upon to legally legitimize and morally justify settlement and economic development. Aimed at eliminating Indigenous peoples and appropriating their lands, the logics of capitalism and settler colonialism driving this process (Wolfe) have in turn made Indigenous resistance necessary. This was made clear once again with the struggle led by the water protectors at Standing Rock to halt the construction of Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), a crude oil pipeline stretching from North Dakota to Illinois and endangering sacred sites and crucial water sources. Under the new US administration, this battle is likely to face setbacks that will render resistance even more pressing. Nonetheless, the Sioux and the thousands of supporters who gathered at the Oceti Sakowin Camp have strongly foregrounded Indigenous presence and sovereignty, while slogans such as “MNI WICONI | WATER IS LIFE” and “UNITED IN WATER | PROTECTING AGAINST THE DAKOTA ACCESS PIPELINE” (“Oceti Sakowin Camp”) carried on through the web continue to emphasize the spiritual and collective meaning of the struggle. Significantly, the numerous Indigenous-led occupations, protests, road-blocks, marches, and other forms of public expressions have exposed the ways in which Indigenous environmental ethics are conceived of, imagined, called upon, embodied, and expressed. Whereas Indigenous peoples have strategically engaged with the nation-state’s jurisdiction and territorial delimitations through court cases and other institutional channels, activism has repeatedly and explicitly enacted and reasserted a storied relationship between the people and the land, fostering political and cultural resurgences in the same stride (Chamberlin, Corntassel).

In her close readings of Indigenous women’s poetry and literature, Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca) argues that “remembering important con-

nections to land and community is instrumental in mapping a decolonized Native presence” (29). Goeman observes, for instance, how “[i]n *Almanac [of the Dead]*, as well as in many of [Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon] Silko’s other works, the land is essential in examinations of power structures and Native peoples’ obligations to it, each other, and all living things on the earth” (171). Her reflection closely ties to the “philosophy of interdependence” that forms the basis of the Pueblo and other Indigenous environmental ethics (Ortiz, “Introduction” xiii). As Simon J. Ortiz, a poet and writer of Acoma Pueblo heritage, has expounded, this philosophy rests on the belief that “these lands and waters and all elements of Creation are part of you, and you are part of them; you have a reciprocal relationship with them” (“Introduction” xiv). Its persistence, adaptation, and elaboration have been ensured by its expression in traditional stories, contemporary writing, and other spheres of life (“Introduction” xix). “Personally, I don’t know if I ever ‘decided’ to be a writer and a poet,” Ortiz recalls, “but I know I have felt it was important to participate in the act of helping to carry on the expression of a way of life that I believed in” (“Introduction” xiv). As he further elaborates in his foreword to the anthology *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies: Conversations from Earth to Cosmos*, it is in terms of a necessity and a responsibility that he understood his impetus to focus as a writer on the changes to the natural and human landscapes he experienced and witnessed over the course of his life, notably with regards to the tragic degradation of the *chunah*, the little river along which he grew up on the Acoma Indian Reservation (Ortiz, “Introduction” xv-xvi; *Ecocriticism* xiii-xiv).

This concern for transporting oral knowledges through changing expressive forms and environmental contexts has been articulated repeatedly in Indigenous critical and creative discourses. In *Message Sticks/Tshissinuashitakana* (2013 [2009]), Innu poet Joséphine Bacon responded to this imperative by addressing the impacts of hydroelectricity, forestry, and mining projects while transposing the stories of elders and the language of the *nutshimit* into her poetic writing. Her work exemplifies the creative epistemological act of “thinking poetically” conceptualized by Cree scholar Neil McLeod. It further intersects with the way Cree writer “[Louise] Halfe’s poetic discourse embodies and is part of what [McLeod] call[s] ‘body poetic’, which connects our living bodies to the living Earth around us” (McLeod 89). In the realm of film, the short experimental documentary *Buffalo Calling*, directed by Tasha Hubbard (Nehiyaw/Nakawe/Metis), proceeds from a similar approach, with an emphasis on the animal realm. The film presents the story of the last buffalo and their eventual return home via an alternation of animation and live images of the buffalo, whose presence is made sentient by the buffalo sound interweaved in the soundtrack. Hubbard’s documentary is reminiscent of the “reelism of film” conceptualized by Michelle H. Raheja, whereas as “a representational practice it does not mirror reality but can enact important cultural work as an art form with ties to the world of everyday practices and the imaginative sphere of the possible” (xiii).

While many transformations of the environment occur on a daily, gradual, nearly

imperceptible basis, others happen through noticeable and sometimes dramatic shifts. From that perspective, Cherokee scholar Sean Kicummah Teuton explains how Indigenous peoples' "vital relationship to land is maintained in oral tradition through language, the medium by which tribal peoples recall and interpret significant events on the land to serve an ethical theory" (49). In relation to the Red Power Movement and the literary production of that era, Teuton contends that an era's discussions of environmental ethics are addressed and further elaborated in literary works inspired by key moments of Indigenous activism. Whereas Teuton addressed more specifically the Red Power Movement and works such as Scott M. Momaday's 1968 novel *House Made of Dawn*, his reflection can be extended to filmic and literary works inspired by other important moments such as the so-called Oka crisis, or Kanehsatà:ke resistance, of 1990, the Idle No More movement, and other events related to current issues derived from exploration, exploitation, and transportation of natural resources on and across Indigenous lands—with dams, clear cuts, fracking, tar sands, and pipelines at the forefront.

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Some of the narrative works that account for these historical and political moments include Lee Maracle's novel *Sundogs* (1992), Alanis Obomsawin's influential documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), Wapikoni mobile-produced short documentaries by Kevin Papatie (2009) and Réal Junior Leblanc (2012), as well as Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's 2014 poetry anthology *Manifeste Assi*. In 2014, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, who is an Anishinaabe (St. Peter's/Little Peguis) scholar, writer, and activist, co-edited as part of The Kino-nda-niimi Collective *The Winter We Danced: The Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*, an anthology spanning all of the seminal writings produced during the Idle No More movement in which Sinclair took part as an activist and co-organizer. For his part, Warren Cariou, who was born in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, into a family of mixed Métis and European heritage, has sustained a critical and creative exploration of the cultural politics of petroleum development in Indigenous communities. Elements of his reflection are interwoven through his documentary film, co-directed with Neil McArthur, *Land of Oil and Water* (2010), his literary narrative "An Athabasca Story" (2012), and the visual critique of the tar sands he called "petrography," a technique he developed and discussed as a means of "seeing through soil" ("Petrography;" see also Cariou and Gordon). The cover of this special issue showcases Cariou's "petroleum-photography" titled "Orb Weaver Web." This particular image, created through the interaction of sunlight and the heavy petroleum product known as bitumen, gestures toward the "web of life" metaphor that is discussed through this publication. Finally, Louise Erdrich's "Holy Rage: Lessons From Standing Rock" (2016) and Toni Jensen's "Women in the Fracklands: On Water, Land, Bodies, and Standing Rock" (2017), two texts respectively published in *The New Yorker* and in the *Catapult*, examine the spiritual, moral, and ethical aspects of Indigenous activism against neoliberal extractivism across Turtle Island. Like the events that foreground what normally goes unnoticed, Indigenous film and literary works such as these counter the nor-

malization and the acceptance of destruction and desecration in their multiple and changing guises.

Inuit filmmakers have questioned in powerful ways some of the core western scientific and cultural assumptions regarding the natural environment. In their 2010 documentary film *Qapirangajuk: Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change*, Zacharias Kunuk and Ian Mauro foregrounded the experiences and observations of Inuit elders and hunters through a documentary argument that strongly challenged the very suitability of certain scientific studies conducted in the Arctic, especially in terms of wildlife management. In her 2016 documentary *Angry Inuk*, Alethea Arnaquq-Baril formulated in a similar perspective a severe criticism of international anti-seal activism. Arnaquq-Baril is especially incisive in her debunking of the ways in which western-led environmental movements end up working against Indigenous peoples as they re-inscribe and re-enact in their discourses and their actions the separation between nature and culture that remains at the core of Western philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In Arnaquq-Baril's documentary, the blatant disregard for Inuit voices demonstrated by anti-seal activists on world tribunals is compounded by the ways in which the concern expressed for the seals systematically fails to be extended to the Inuit. Arnaquq-Baril's cinematic argument acts as a reminder of the ideological affinities between the "Great Divide" theorized by Bruno Latour (Cruikshank 11) and the dehumanizing colonial "civ-sav dichotomy" that was delineated and dismantled by Métis scholar Emma LaRocque in *When the Other Is Me: Native Resistance Discourse 1850-1990* (2010). In an act of decolonization and resurgence, *Angry Inuk* exposes the viewer to the "*Inuit Qaujimagajatuqangit*—'what Inuit have known for a very long time'" (Martin 3) while interrogating the distribution of responsibility with regards to the protection of the environment on a global scale. By bringing the viewers "on the land," Kunuk, Mauro, and Arnaquq-Baril insist on an environmental ethics that is formed and understood through an experiential, embodied, and storied knowledge of the environment, one that is conceptualized by its intricate relationships with human and other-than-human entities. They also expose the acute skills developed by the Inuit in terms of reading the local landscape.

Julie Cruikshank, in her 2005 book *Do Glaciers Listen?*, and Jeannette Armstrong, in her 1998 text "Land Speaking," have both explored the idea of an ongoing conversation between human beings and entities of the landscape. Where Cruikshank looked at glaciers "portrayed [...] as conscious and responsive to humans" (7) in terms of their "imaginative possibilities" (7), Armstrong reflected on land as a reservoir of knowledge and teachings, as well as a speaking entity: "It is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks. It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die. We survived and thrived by listening intently to its teachings—to its language—and then inventing human words to retell its stories to our succeeding generations" (176). Armstrong's reflection incites us to pay attention to the influence that ecological devastation and severely disrupted landscapes might exert on the language of the land and on the stories it summons.

These questions have been taken up in unique and insightful ways by what Grace L. Dillon discussed as “the praxis of Indigenous Futurisms” (1). Imaginings involving zombie apocalypses and tar sands, Navajo corn and the colonization of Mars, profit-driven oil corporations and ecological disasters, un/liability, complicity, and community, as well as the fate of environmental ethics in post-apocalyptic landscapes, have been put forward in literary and film works such as Richard Van Camp’s “On the Wings of This Prayer” (2013), Nanobah Becker’s *The 6th World: An Original Story* (2012), Thomas King’s *The Back of the Turtle* (2014), and Stephen Graham Jones’s prolific speculative fiction (2013, 2014; Jones and Van Alst 2015), to name but a few. Indigenous creation stories and other oral stories, as well as Indigenous land ethics and “vital cosmo-ethics” (Monani 45) have been drawn upon to create, envision, and dream Indigenous futures. Some of these futurescapes are envisioned with intricate connections to pasts characterized by major upheavals and to presents shaped by “a sense of ongoing crisis” (Scott 77). In many ways, grim, disturbing, and

**14** seemingly hopeless realities have inspired Indigenous narrative artists to investigate, make sense of, and create hope out of disruption and destruction, just as “changing landscape features, such as fluctuating glaciers, have provided imaginative grist for comprehending and interpreting shifting social circumstances” (Cruikshank 12).

Lastly, it might also prove productive to look at how Indigenous environmental ethics and their underlying philosophy of interdependency and interbeing have been developed subjectively in narrative works revolving around urban dwelling. In a move to suggest “points of possibility for personal decolonization,” Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson observed that “literary expression of personal decolonization may generate an urban poetics of decolonization that regenerates or re-envisions what a relationship with land or social relationships may look like and what such praxis or practice may produce” (195). From that perspective, we might inquire about what could emerge from the urban poetics of decolonization discerned in the creative works and social engagements of Winnipeg-based poets Duncan Mercredi (Cree), Katherena Vermette (Métis), and the late Marvin Francis (Cree). Furthermore, if we are “thinking about urban landscapes as native hubs,”<sup>2</sup> as Métis scholar Chris Anderson (162) has suggested after Renya Ramirez, what could we grasp in terms of how Indigenous narrative arts can account for, represent, and imagine the ways in which Indigenous environmental ethics can be produced, reproduced, and recreated in urban contexts? These are some of the questions that inspired this special issue.

## CREATING AND THINKING ACROSS REGIONS AND LANGUAGES

This special issue brings together English and French contributions so as to build bridges between scholarly writing and creative works from these two spheres of

language and culture. Our goal is not to focus on comparisons of different settler-colonial contexts and influences. Rather, by creating a shared space for voices that often circulate within restricted areas, we wish to address concerns that are relevant to diverse Indigenous communities, writers, filmmakers, scholars, and activists across settler-colonial cultural and linguistic boundaries. In this process we walk in the footsteps of other scholars who strove to engage a dialogue across settler colonial borders in the field of Indigenous literary studies, whether through world franco-phone Indigenous literatures (Gatti), “borders, boundaries, and cultural crossings” from both sides of the US-Canada border (DePasquale et al. 13), Indigenous literary expression across colonial linguistic divides within the nation-state (Lacombe et al.), or a broad range of Indigenous artistic practices and embodied cultural and political expressions across the three Americas (Sioui Durand, *Indiens*). These diverse critical and creative endeavours across regions, languages, and artistic disciplines speak to a readiness of Indigenous literatures and literary studies to travel across settler-colonial borders that define other fields of study.

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In 2014, *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature* expanded the scope of this Indigenous comparative work by publishing forty-four scholarly texts on Indigenous literatures across genres, histories, methods, and geographies, including North America as well as the Pacific and Atlantic regions. According to co-editors James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, “the *Handbook* also recognizes the significant development of an inter- and trans-Indigenous orientation in Native American and Indigenous literary studies” (2). This scholarly orientation resonates with Indigenous artistic and political trajectories that are multiple, at once grounded and moving, specific and interconnected, community-based and international. On the political level, we can observe the result of these trajectories in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was adopted in 2007 “to enshrine [...] the rights that ‘constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world’” (quoted by “Indigenous Foundations”). On the artistic level, these trajectories can be discerned in the aforementioned literary anthologies as well as in numerous scholarly conferences, creative collaborations, international art exhibitions, literary and film circuits, including those channelled through book fairs such as Kwahiatonhk!, festivals such as *Présence autochtone*, *imagineNATIVE Film & Media Arts Festival*, and the *Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival*, and various other Indigenous cultural events across the United States, Latin America, and elsewhere at the international level (Salazar and Córdova; Sioui Durand; Cusi Wortham; Pearson and Knabe).

Resorting to the “*onderha*,” an Iroquoian word meaning “support” or “foundation,” Huron-Wendat performer, art curator, and sociologist Guy Sioui Durand conceptualized this Indigenous mobility through an embodied experience of living on the land in its connection with the spiritual manifestations of that life.<sup>3</sup> Sioui Durand further interprets the *onderha* as a “vision circulaire et globale indissoluble, ce qui nous [Indigenous peoples] incite à circuler dans tous les territoires, géographiques

comme artistiques” (“L’onderha” 4). In many regards, Sioui Durand’s reflections are in agreement with the conception of Indigenous approaches to comparative literature proposed by Chadwick Allen. In his chapter “Decolonizing Comparison: Toward a Trans-Indigenous Literary Studies,” Allen advocated for “taking up methodologies that are *trans-Indigenous*, a broad set of practices designed explicitly to privilege reading *across, through, and beyond* tribally and nationally specific Indigenous texts and contexts” (378). The academic work he fostered has systematized and refined ways of approaching cultural and artistic productions that tend to move away from colonial practices and theories. This is a concern that has also been central to the recently founded Indigenous Literary Studies Association (ILSA), notably in its use of the word “literature” to refer broadly to ‘arts in the medium of language’ and its emphasis on scholarly and artistic accountability to Indigenous communities (“Indigenous Literary Studies Association”).

16 Despite the liveliness of both the milieu and the field of Indigenous narrative arts, however, there remains a certain gap between Indigenous literatures and scholarly research in the fields of literary studies and cultural studies. Furthermore, the politics of interpretation of literary works and the definition of scholarly criteria for evaluating critical discourses continue to be negotiated. This maintains within the field of Indigenous studies an acute awareness of research as “a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other,” as brilliantly discussed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, after the work of Edward Said, in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2). For his part, Allen has more specifically discussed the lack of interest that comparative literature as a field of study has shown for “Indigenous texts, methodologies, and contexts” (380-81). In response to a remark on “the scandal of comparative literature” made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Allen severely criticized the renowned scholar’s expression of personal shame in relation to her lack of acquaintance with Indigenous orality. He quoted Spivak’s statement, “I will remain caught in the scandal of comparative literature, unable to access First Nation orality. I mention my shortcoming in hope” (Spivak 81, qtd. in Allen 380). By resorting to the genre of the confession to address what is in fact a disciplinary shortcoming, Allen contends in his analysis of that statement, Spivak plays a part in obscuring fundamental issues, namely the “institutional and colonial” (381) reasons behind this dearth. According to Allen, the scandal resides not in the personal but rather in “the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous intellectual production and self-representation in all areas of the academy” (381). It is against this backdrop that he urges his scholarly readership to “reject scandal, embrace reading” (381), namely that of Indigenous texts.

## GENESIS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

In resonance with Allen's project, our contributors closely study the works of writers, filmmakers, and activists from the Innu, Anishinaabe, Cherokee, Inuit, Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Onondoga, Tuscarora, Secwepemc, and Acoma nations. They explore the settlers' and Indigenous peoples' relationships to the environment that sustains them by looking at novels and poetry, slam and speculative fiction, storytelling and documentary filmmaking, as well as other forms of expression including the contrasting discourses of government and mining officials versus those of Indigenous activists and community members. Their juxtaposed contributions hint at the insights that a comparative examination of environmental ethics and activism can bring into cultures that feel on a daily basis the blunt of settler colonialism. As Patrick Wolfe clearly demonstrates, the settler colonial project of "the elimination of the native" (387) knows no boundaries, and the impacts of capital accumulation and resource exploitation are at once localized and all-encompassing.

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The idea for this special issue came about at the University of Manitoba through discussions with our late friend, colleague, and mentor Renate Eigenbrod, author of *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada* (2005) and one of the founding members of ILSA. After her death, we and Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair drew from our respective areas of expertise and set out to conduct this comparative examination on questions that each of us had interrogated from different angles over the last years (Cariou and McArthur; St-Amand, "Discours critiques"; Cariou and Sinclair; Doerfler et al.; The Kino-nda-niimi Collective; Cariou, "Indigenous Literatures"; St-Amand, *La crise d'Oka*; Cariou and Gordon; "Petrography"). For reasons that we fully endorse and support, Sinclair withdrew from the current special issue at the last stage of the process, but his contribution played a fundamental role in this issue. We included critical investigations from four scholars from across Turtle Island. Their proposed angles of analysis encompass literary water ecologies, poetics of decolonization, environmental discourses in response to disaster, and the role of women in Inuit filmmaking and the transmission of oral tradition. The themes explored include Indigenous lands and lives, colonial violence and resource extraction, alienation and annihilation, respect and reciprocity, excess and destruction, resistance and resurgence.

Norah Bowman's text engages directly with the discourses of community activists, whose input she acknowledges at the start of her contribution. Drawing from her observations of a post-event community meeting, Bowman compares the Indigenous and the corporate/governmental discursive responses to a large-scale mining catastrophe that devastated Secwepemc Territory in 2014. The author discerns two opposing ways of framing the spill: one in terms of capitalist accumulation, and the other in terms of inter-species life and interdependence. Referring to Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" (2013), Bowman points to the role of Indigenous narratives in countering the propensity of mining and government representatives

of downplaying the long-term, undramatic effects of environmental disasters. The author discusses the oral transmission of Indigenous knowledge in relation to the sovereignty of the watershed and to the rights and title to the land. Calling for a decolonization of the discourse of environment, Bowman highlights how creative narratives of urgency work to expose and remind the extent of ecological damage.

- Through the lenses of a few of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's twenty-five projects, Karine Bertrand demonstrates how Inuit filmmaking across the Arctic contributes to cultural revitalization and community healing. Bertrand studies the remediation of Inuit storytelling on-screen with a focus on the role of Inuit women in the transmission of oral tradition. The works of Inuit filmmakers Elisapie Isaac and Alethea Arnaquq-Baril are discussed alongside those of Igloodik Isuma Production and Arnait Video Productions, two production companies that have played an important role in the development of community-engaged Inuit filmmaking. In her examination of the indigenization of the medium, Bertrand pays attention to the voices of Inuit women in documentary films, and to the role Inuit women play in the organization of community gatherings for screening local productions. The author's close reading of the Arnait collective's documentary film *Sol* discusses the connections between the violence of the settler colonial state, the suspicious death of Solomon Tapatia Uyarasuk, and the loss of Inuit lives as one of the numerous impacts of territorial dislocation and cultural alienation. It points at the ways in which harm to others, self-destruction, and environmental devastation can be understood as interrelated.
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William Huggins looks at the oppositional efforts and Indigenous literary water ecologies articulated in the works of writers Louise Erdrich (Anishinaabe), Winona LaDuke (Anishinaabe), Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene), Thomas King (Cherokee), Eric Gansworth (Onondoga/Tuscarora), and Simon Ortiz (Acoma). He contextualizes his analysis by listing figures of environmental damage to convey the outrageousness, the excessiveness, and the dangerousness of resource extraction projects and infrastructures such as the dams along the Nelson River in Manitoba and the Keystone XL pipeline and open-pit mines. It is against this backdrop that he proceeds to examine how these writers have taken up the struggle for Indigenous lands and waters through their imaginative works. Huggins analyzes how they tackle themes of mining and dams in the realm of fiction in order to interrogate the impacts of ecological destruction on Indigenous peoples. After discussing the significant presence of water in Indigenous creation stories, Huggins investigates how the writers he studies in his contribution reclaim, repatriate, and restore ancient worldviews, and in so doing, counter and confront the colonialist environmental legacy.

In her contribution, Gabrielle Marcoux proposes a close reading of the slam "L'âme en tannage" written and performed by Innu poet and activist Natasha Kanapé Fontaine. In line with the dual lens of examination used by Huggins, Marcoux discerns in Kanapé Fontaine's work a poetic program of decolonization that is enacted through both resistance and resurgence. Focusing on the relationship between language, territory, and memory, Marcoux foregrounds the critical positioning and

analysis at work in Kanapé Fontaine's poetic expression. The poet's discursive and epistemological strategies of decolonization, argues Marcoux, include the use of language and irony in the rewriting of history and the invocation of voice and sounds from the land as tenets of a land base. Marcoux contends that Kanapé Fontaine's poetic voice simultaneously fulfills functions of denunciation, judgement, and meditation. Her textual analysis highlights how the slam addresses both antagonistic and collaborative relationships with settlers while also asserting Indigenous pride, survival, and sovereignty.

## CONCLUSION

These reflections anchored in the field of Indigenous literatures can lend themselves well to a conversation with ongoing investigations in the field of comparative literature, especially as the cosmopolitan, the multicultural, and the global have yielded the right of way to the "planetary," a turn that has emphasized the relational together with a consciousness of inhabiting a shared planet at a time of serious environmental crisis (Spivak; Heise; Moraru; Elias and Moraru). We hope that this special issue, with its focus on environmental ethics and activism in Indigenous film and literature, will bring out the potential for elucidation contained within comparative approaches and the crucial need for accurate readings and interpretations of the world we inhabit. This direction of thought seems particularly fitting as we strive to better comprehend Indigenous struggles for Indigenous lands and lives while pondering the larger question of responsibility in a time of ongoing settler colonialism and global climate crisis.

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## NOTES

1. In her discussion of the "struggles over cultural meanings replicated in contemporary debates" (11), Julie Cruikshank observes, "The consequences of what Bruno Latour calls this 'Great Divide' differentiating nature from culture continue to cascade internationally through debates about environmentalism, biodiversity, global climate change, and indigenous rights" (11).
2. In "Urban Landscapes of North America," Anderson explores the possibilities that could be generated by understanding urban Indigenous communities in urban spaces in terms of "the concept of hubs," which Renya Ramirez defined as "a mechanism to support Native notions of culture, community, identity, and belonging away from tribal land bases" (qtd. in Anderson 161).
3. "L'expression lie la vie concrète dans les territoires à ses manifestations spirituelles" (Siouri Durand, "L'onderha" 4).

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