Imagining Places: The Roles of the Place Trope in the Discursive Constructions of Indigenous Knowledge

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Introduction

When he confessed, "I feel certain that I could address the entire world, if only I had a place to stand," Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham accurately described the predicament of Native American peoples and cultures in general (quoted in Smith, 2009, 136).[1] Pivoting on the notion of place, Durham's remark refers to the traumatic event of Natives' losing their lands in the wake of European discovery and colonization of the Americas. And yet, the way it is used here the word "place" seems to also point to a type of location beyond sheer physicality, namely to a special place a person would need to secure so that a wider audience can see and hear him or her.

   In this article I explore this semantic flexibility of the *place* trope (including the related notion of *boundary*) and the kind of work that it does for contemporary Native American artists and heritage

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[1] In this paper I use several qualifiers interchangeably to refer to Indigenous peoples living in North America: "American Indians," "Native Americans," Natives," "Native (peoples)," "Indigenous (peoples)," "aboriginal (peoples)." I do so for convenience. However, whenever I need to be very specific about the tribal affiliation of the persons I write about, I do so by including the name of the tribe or Nation. This is common practice among Native American scholars and I follow their example.

professionals.[2] In particular, I claim that, and show how, this trope operates as a powerful discursive device enabling these artists and professionals to imagine possible futures for Indigenous peoples and the knowledge that belongs to them. My approach is inscribed in a specific tradition of research: Deirdre McCloskey, in one of the first studies in the rhetoric of science, emphasizes how figures of speech we employ in talking about phenomena "think for us," particularly when we are not fully aware of their status as figures (McCloskey, 1985, xvii). Writing in the same intellectual tradition, Alan Gross argues that scientific discourse cannot escape from the grip of metaphor creation (Gross, 1990, 81). Focusing on the topic of environment, George Myerson and Yvonne Rydin explore, among other things, ways in which figures of argument ("constitutive figures") "generate word pictures, atmospheres, linkages," thereby constituting "particular shapes of argument" (Myerson and Rydin, 1996, 149). John Nelson, too, shows how figures of speech "shape our thinking, speaking, and acting," an effect, he claims, that is both enabling and constraining, particularly since arguers might be driven "away from thoughts, words, and deeds that might well be pertinent" (Nelson, 1998, 113-4). Rom Harré, Jens Brockmeier, and Peter Mühlhäusler articulate the linguistic resources (e.g., metaphors) that various social actors who participate in environmental discourses deploy to persuade other actors of the cogency of their positions (Harré, Brockmeier, and Mühlhäusler, 1999). Finally, Ken Baake argues that such figures as metaphors have "some role in producing or fine-tuning knowledge" (Baake, 2003, 68). I find this approach particularly useful as it allows me to shed light on the rhetorical practices by means of which Native American artists and heritage professionals make sense of their experiences and respond to some of the threats to their identities and heritage.

I also position myself as a non-Native European scholar who approaches his topic interpretatively, that is, who accepts that the meanings of a cultural phenomenon emerge through a genuine dialogue between the meanings of the researcher and those of the participants. Thus, an imperative I follow in my research has been to do justice to the participants' points of view by rendering them as clearly as possible, while also trying to make sense of them from my

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[2] I examine statements that contemporary Native American artists and heritage professionals make through their artistic, professional, scholarly works, as well as through direct claims during interviews.

point of view. Accordingly, I analyze data consisting of transcripts of interviews with Native American artists and heritage professionals, scholarly works and opinion pieces, some of which have published in various journals and magazines and as a machinima series titled TimeTraveller™. The last is a digital project that has been designed, written, directed, and edited since 2007 by Skawennati Tricia Fragnito, a Mohawk new media artist living in Canada, with the help of Executive Producer Jason Edward Lewis, a Cherokee media artist and professor of computational arts at Concordia University in Canada.[3] The project runs seventy-five minutes in nine short machinima films about Hunter, a skillful, young Mohawk living in the future (in 2121, more precisely).[4] Disabused of the consumerist society in which he lives, Hunter uses immersive technology (in the form of a sophisticated pair of glasses) to travel through time and experience significant moments in the past history of North American Native peoples (e.g., the Minnesota Massacre in 1875, the occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969, and the Oka/Mohawk Crisis at Kanesatake in 1990.) His goal, in his own words, is to "learn more about [his] heritage" (Fragnito, 2013, Episode 9).

A Place to Stand: In Several Senses

Physical Place

Indeed, when Jimmie Durham invokes "a place to stand" it is impossible to miss the literal sense of his phrase, which brings to mind the land of Natives' ancestors.[5] In fact, as Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) and Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee) clarify, Indigeneity is conceptually linked to land ownership:

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[3] The episodes of this series are available at: http://www.timetravellertm.com/episodes.

[4] The word "machinima" refers to "films made by real-time three-dimensional computer graphics rendering engines" (Ng, 2013, xiv).

[5] Blackhawk, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2015; Furlan, 2017; LaDuke, 2017; Porter, 2012; Scholtz, 2013; Schweninger, 2008; or Spruce and Thrasher, 2008 are just a few studies published in the last decade that approach the issue of Indigenous peoples and their lands from various perspectives.

> The communities, clans, nations and tribes we call *Indigenous peoples* are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world" (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005, 597).

Many Native heritage professionals and artists use the word "place" in this standard sense of concrete, physical location.[6] For instance, architect Johnpaul Jones (Cherokee/Choctaw), lead design consultant for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, reminds us that, "Native peoples have an extraordinary relationship with the land and the world around them that stems from the broadest sense of kinship with all life" (Jones, 2008, 2). Moreover, many Natives claim that place is closely and complexly associated with Native identities and knowledge: "close ties" (L'Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012), "deep roots," and "ongoing link" (Prince, personal interview, August 18, 2010) are just three of the metaphors these people use to depict such a connection. The *root* metaphor in particular is pertinent, since it captures a sense in which the land supports knowledge just as it nourishes plants. Scholarship of Native heritage reflects this place-related dimension of knowledge by defining Indigenous knowledge as "a body of knowledge associated with long-term occupancy of a certain place" (Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg, 2000, 7). This is a type of association one can interpret in at least two ways. First, as many Native artists and heritage professionals point out, Indigenous knowledge reflects the self-understanding Native peoples develop by having lived in a certain place for a long time. Specifically, place shapes how one understands one's own embodied and situated being, even if

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[6] Thomas F. Gieryn usefully summarizes the features of place understood as a physical location: It is a "unique spot in the universe", displays "physicality," and is "interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined" (Gieryn, 2000, 465). This kind of place is what Robert Bellah, quoting German phenomenologist Alfred Schutz, calls "the standard place" (Bellah, 2001, 2).

awareness of such influence only occurs after a disruptive event such as dis-placement; changing "one's physical place" by being forced to move from one place to another often results in a corresponding mutation in "one's psychic place" (Beaucage, 2005, 140). What might explain this psychological effect is that "[a] sense of place is an emotional investment. It is part of Belonging, being part of a community that determines self and identity" (Beaucage, 2005, 140). In other words, one does not just occupy a place in a space understood as a physical container; rather, one inhabits a place and is thoroughly shaped by it.[7] As Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) puts it, "Indigenous peoples understand themselves to have emerged as coherent groups and cultures in intimate relationship with particular places, especially living and sacred landscapes" (TallBear, 2013, 510).

Second, Indigenous knowledge consists of the kinds of knowledge Native peoples acquire by engaging in everyday practices involving the land, e.g., exploring flora and fauna, hunting or fishing, cultivating the land, and in general "living off the land" (Prince, personal interview, August 18, 2010), as well as offering sacrifices to a Supreme Being, among other things.[8] What is more, this kind of knowledge is often embedded in narratives. As Jones aptly puts it:

> There is no place without a story. Every plant, every animal, every rock and flowing spring carries a message. Native peoples of the Americas learned over thousands of years to listen to the messages, and we know every

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[7] Phenomenologists interested in place and the experiences it affords have expressed the same thought. For instance, Jeff Malpas claims (and elaborates on the notion) that "our thinking is essentially determined by *where* we are, by the contingencies of our own *location* (…) and what it addresses is essentially given to us in and through the places *in which we find ourselves*," (Malpas, 2015, 1-2).

[8] Knowledge in this sense would also include expertise in regard to the protocols Native communities put in place to "act as safety belts or ways of protecting [the heritage], but also [as] ways of insuring the well-being of the people" (L'Hirondelle, personal interview, February 22, 2012). An example of such a protocol is the injunction "[to] not abuse [one's] part of the relationship to the animals and the land," which, according to Winona LaDuke (Ojibwe) is "the essence of culture and the essence of the meaning of life" (LaDuke, 1991, 43).

habitat. We know the earth; we know the sky; we know the wind; we know the rain; we know the smells. We know the spirit of each living place. The spirit of place is embedded deeply within us; we are connected to something larger than ourselves (Jones, 2008, 1).

In sum, the knowledge that Native people derives from the long-term occupancy of their land. This fact crystalizes a wider range of experiences, including spiritual ones, and does so in the form of storytelling. Place-as-land is important for Native Americans because it nurtures the kinds of knowledges that shape personal and collective identities and help their communities survive and thrive. That may in part explain why practically all Natives struggling for self-determination position their ancestors' lands at the center of their claims: "If the land question is not central to our struggle and the reason for our continued survival, then I don't know what is" (Smith, 2009, 168). Yet this understanding is also burdened with an insoluble tension. While claiming that traditional knowledge is intimately connected to the long-term occupancy of lands, that is, the places their ancestors owned before the disruptive Colonization, Native peoples are also aware that more often than not they no longer inhabit those lands. Such a cognitive dissonance may constitute the engine behind the decision of many Native artists and heritage professionals to explore and take up other forms of emplacement.

Virtual Place(s)

When Durham speaks of his need for and the importance of finding "a place to stand," we can be certain that we are invited to understand place as referring to more than just the land the Natives inherited from their ancestors. Specifically, this artist points to the possibility of uncovering or simply inventing other kinds of sites or positions that would allow one to be seen and heard by the others. I interpret Durham's search for such sites in two ways. First, "a place to stand" can refer to possible media-enabled sites that can function as conversational grounds, as well as platforms for developing possibly new forms of Indigenous knowledges. I claim that the emergent virtual environments, which recent new media technologies have made possible, constitute a key source of such grounding places. I single out the *virtual places* that Native artists and curators, together with designers, have managed to build as an exercise in futuristic imagination. Second, I interpret Durham's notion of searching for "a place to stand" in terms of an effort to articulate and inhabit a specific "subject position" which would

make Natives more visible in the prevalent technological discourse impacting the arts, heritage work, and education, among other things.[9]

Natives' encounters with the digital realm are a relatively recent event: Indigenous artists like K.C. Adams (Métis), Dana Claxton (Hunkpapa Lakota), Stephen Foster (Inupiaq), Skawennati Tricia Fragnito (Mohawk), Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew (Cree/French Métis), and Archer Pechawis (Plains Cree/Kwakwaka'wakw) are among the first to have adapted new media technologies as "potential sites of cultural expression" (Lewis, 2014, 66; also Guglietti, 2009; Hopkins, 2006, 2008; Lewis, 2004, 2012; Lewis and Fragnito, 2005, 2012; Loft, 2005, 2009; Todd, 2006). Jason E. Lewis and Skawennati Tricia Fragnito capture the affordances of the "networked digital media" by claiming that they offer "a unique opportunity for Aboriginal people to present a self-determined image to the world" (Lewis and Fragnito, 2012, 206).

I claim that the trope of place enables Native artists and heritage professionals to imagine and shape strategies for rooting Indigenous knowledge in newer grounds, as well as to position themselves as credible voices in the digital heritage arena. They translate and transfer modes of approaching physical place into digital environments, an operation that is possible because, according to curator, writer, and media artist Steven Loft (Mohawk/Jewish), the Indigenous media "cosmology" encompasses both kinds of environments (Loft, 2014, xvi).[10]

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[9] On subject positions, see Foucault, 1968; Keller, 2013. Keller defines "subject positions" as those "'places' that are contoured in the discourse and more or less strongly stabilized institutionally. These are places, or expectations and offers for possible speakers, e.g., through preconditions for specific qualifications, or addressees, e.g., offered collective identity; models of the 'environmentally aware citizen')" (Keller, 2013, 74).

[10] An Indigenous media "cosmology" refers to a model of media ecology that "embraces an Indigenous view of media and its attendant processes that incorporates language, culture, technology, land, spirituality, and histories" (Loft, 2014, xvi).

Cyberspace is an environment for the exploration of which the *place* trope is highly appropriate.[11] Indeed, if cyberspace is an ecology of virtual places, then the major stances one can take towards physical place may apply to virtual places as well. One can discern at least four strategies in this respect: (1) re-claiming existing (and previously owned) places; (2) claiming existing (but not previously owned) places as Indigenous places; (3) discovering places; and (4) inventing new places.[12] I explore these strategies below; I touch only briefly on the first two to suggest that they are not feasible and argue that the last two describe appropriate strategies for exploring some of the possibilities that cyberspace presents for enabling Native cultural expressions.

It is obvious that the first strategy cannot apply to the virtual ecology, simply because the emergent environment it describes has no previous Native ownership. It might seem that claiming existing virtual places could work as a possible stance one can translate into a viable strategy for approaching the virtual environment. As Loft stated in regard to museums, Native artists must "claim the space [of museums] as Indigenous space; we proclaim who and what we are firmly" (Loft, interviewed by J. Henry, 2013). It may make sense to "indigenize" museums, which, after all, are heritage institutions whose modern history is tightly intertwined with the European project of colonizing the Americas. However, one cannot re-claim cyberspace in a similar fashion. It is true that video game designers have portrayed Native peoples and their cultures in their specific media. However, such representations, stereotypical as they are, have been rather infrequent: "Representations of Indigenous characters in video games are rare and, in the few instances where such characters appear, they are based on stereotypical caricatures

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[11] Skawennati defines cyberspace as "virtual environments such as Second Life, online games like 'Worlds of Warcraft,' console video games, the web, chat spaces" (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010).

[12] Curator Candice Hopkins (Carcross/Tagish First Nation) hints at such strategies when she claims that, "Cyberspace has been occupied, transformed, appropriated and reinvented by native people in ways similar to how we have always approached real space. Like video, digital technologies have become a medium for speaking and telling our stories" (Hopkins, 2006, 343).

flowing from deep ignorance about both the history and present reality of Indigenous people" (Lewis, 2014, 64).

Discovering New Places

A much more appropriate way in which Natives might approach cyberspace is to strive to discover its constitutive places and the possibilities they offer for supporting cultural expression. Many Native artists and heritage professionals view cyberspace as a new territory that Native peoples can help shape (see, for instance, Hopkins, 2006; Lewis, 2014; Pechawis, 2000; Todd, 1996). Lewis, for example, claims that as a new media artist he aims to "tell a story [that reflects] on how [Indians] might sail the sea of cyberspace as a means of dreaming forth a future" (Lewis, 2014, 58). The spatial metaphor of navigable waters is highly appropriate, as it conjures up the imagery of an open medium rich in opportunities for exploration and discovery. One can certainly not miss the link between the activity of "sailing the seas" and the European colonist discovery of the Americas. However, Lewis seems to imply that, possibly for the first time, American Indians themselves are ready to engage in a kind of activity that is both similar to and different from the European endeavour of colonizing the world: we are indeed dealing with a form of exploration, yet its aim is no longer exploitative colonization (Vamanu, 2016, 237-8).

Inventing New Places

Invention or creation is a second strategy for approaching cyberspace. It is massively illustrated by non-Native creators and producers of digital media content, although only some of them have included representations of Native Americans. With the advent of new media technologies and the virtual worlds they open up, however, Indigenous artists and heritage professionals have sensed immediately the affordances these technologies could offer and have started exploring possible ways they may populate the virtual environments with Native characters and even embed Indigenous knowledge in that media content. For instance, Mohawk artist and curator Skawennati, who has expressed a keen interest in seeing increased Native participation in and contribution to the cyberspace and its related digital cultures, understands cyberspace "as a new territory, as a new frontier … as one of the first media that aboriginal peoples have a chance to be in on a ground floor" (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010). She elaborates on this situation by reminding us that:

We were always in front of the camera, not so much behind it. And so, what aboriginal people looked like was very much influenced by that fact. The same with cameras. Now, here is a new medium that, you know, it seems that we'll be able to be behind the camera ... We can represent ourselves. What we would like to see is more representations of ourselves across cyberspace; we'd like to see more people at a deeper level (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010).

In this case, the virtuality of place and emplacement may support prospective forms of knowledge, for instance of knowledge oriented not so much toward comprehending the past, as towards imagining possible futures for Indigenous peoples and their cultures.[13] For instance, virtual place can become the context for imaginative, prospective inquiry into the nature of Indigenous knowledge (does it require emplacement in a land base?), its production and circulation patterns (is Indigenous knowledge communicable in virtual environments, can virtual worlds enable storytelling, the fundamental genre through which Indigenous knowledge has traditionally been produced?), and so on.

What drives Lewis and Skawennati's creative efforts is their concern that collective futuristic imaginaries show almost no trace of Native American presence. As the two authors claim, "We do not tend to spend much time imagining what our communities will be like in one hundred, five hundred, or a thousand years ... Our absence from the future imaginaries of the settler culture should worry us. Absence implies non-existence, or, at the very least, non-importance" (Lewis and Skawennati, 2014, 56-8). At stake here seems to be a most concrete and worrisome effect this type of invisibility can have on the present: "A people that are absent in the future need not be consulted in the present about how that future comes about" (Lewis, 2014, 58). On the other hand, Lewis and Skawennati point to the availability of new media technologies – included under the label of "cyberspace" – which present Native artists and curators, first, with opportunities for making the imaginaries of the future more inclusive and, second, with means for controlling the media representations of Indigeneity (i.e., what

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[13] Lewis and Fragnito (2005) and, more recently, Medak-Saltzman (2017) have emphasized the importance of actively imagining possible futures.

defines Indigenous peoples and their ways of being in the world). In particular, Lewis claims that:

> Cyberspace has no native population that might contest the notion that it is *terra nullius* and thus subject to control by the first immigrants who might claim it. The resources in cyberspace are not timber, game and gold; they are processing power, bandwidth, networks and data, which, in dutiful accordance with Moore's Law, increase at a dizzying rate. The stakes are not those of survival, but of prosperity. And we're not just colonizing the place, we're making it up as we go (Lewis, 2004, n.p.).

In other words, Lewis views cyberspace as a territory offering practically unlimited resources; anybody can use these resources to expand and shape this digital realm. In this respect, competition may mean not so much the fight among various social actors for limited resources, as the creative tension that arises when media creators are engaged in an activity that almost paradoxically increases the amount of resources (Vamanu, 2014).

The Natives' optimism is hard to reconcile, however, with the notion that cyberspace colonization may reiterate "long established practices of colonialism" (Hall, 1999, 510) and thus foster (often hidden) inequalities. As Chris Cheshire had warned, long before Native digital projects took off,

> The advance of the western frontier involved the annihilation and disenfranchisement of native American communities. Colonialism and its heroic connotations have been challenged recently, particularly by the ancestors of ignored people who were the unacknowledged victims of colonialism. Of course, virtual reality will not mean trampling on pre-existing territories. However, there is a danger that this virtual space will alienate minority perspectives in a similar way: not from direct policy, but by the economics and practice of access to the technology. From under a head-mounted display it is easy to ignore the people outside the cyberspace: excluded by economics, language and subculture. The level of diversity of opinion and perspectives within cyberspace is a product of who has access (Cheshire, 1994, 26).

While discussing the pioneering work of filmmaker Loretta Todd (Cree), author of a land-marking text on "Aboriginal Narratives in Cyberspace," Hopkins notes that Indigenous peoples have always been able to adapt to the ever-changing environments, and the

emergence of information and communication technologies, in particular of the cyberspace, has represented a new and most exciting opportunity for Natives to make their stories and, thus, their traditional knowledge, more visible:

> [C]hange has come due largely to time and the advent of new technologies, but … what has remained consistent is the ability of Aboriginal artists to continually change these technologies to meet their needs. … This is true when Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun challenged his programmers in creating the virtual reality piece "Inherent Rights, Vision Rights" and is true today in works by artists like Archer Pechawis, Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Skawennati Tricia Fragnito and others. (…) I think with the shifts in technology there is greater accessibility and greater opportunity for networks, which means that works have more visibility than ever before (Hopkins, 2006, 343).

Hopkins emphasizes the importance of new media technologies in current Native projects of expressing their cultural heritage and themselves. Specifically, Native artists and curators have employed these new technologies with success – just like their ancestors had appropriated Western technologies for their purposes – to generate virtual places where Indigenous voices have found venues for expressing themselves and for creating and circulating knowledge.

The (Boundary) Work That Virtual Places Do

Constitutive elements of places, boundaries represent the other important topological notion that organizes the statements of Indigenous curators on knowledge. According to cognitive sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel, the notion of boundary refers to the "mental fence" with which we "surround" an object to "separate it from everything else" (Zerubavel, 1991, 12). If we perceive things at all (whether they are material or social), it is because boundaries are already at work, "help[ing] us separate one entity from another" (Zerubavel, 1991, 12). We learn to perceive these distinctions as "natural" and, thus, they become as if invisible (Zerubavel, 1996, 426-7). This occurs even when the entities at stake are "meaningful social entities (families, social classes, nations)" (Zerubavel, 1991, 12). Specifically, Zerubavel suggests that people create such entities and make sense of experience by mentally clustering reality in terms of similarities and differences among things: "lumping" is the

mental process of "grouping 'similar' things together in a single mental cluster," while "splitting" refers to the mental process of "perceiving 'different' clusters as separate from one another" (Zerubavel, 1996, 421).

In the rest of this section I argue that and show in what respects the use that Native artists and heritage professionals make of the *place* trope and the related idea of *boundary* helps them to problematize and even transcend existing powerful binaries that foster stereotyped representations of Native peoples and their cultures: Nature vs. Culture, Us/Civilized vs. Them/The Others/Primitive, and Local vs. Global.

Nature vs. Culture

According to a strong distinction that Western scientific knowledge systems encourage, nature and culture are two separate realms of existence (Berkes, 2008, 10-11). French anthropologist Philippe Descola – in his discussions of Amazonian "native ecology" (e.g., Descola, 1994) – and French sociologist Bruno Latour – in his discussion of modernity (e.g., Latour, 1993) – have cogently problematized this stark distinction. Curator Richard Hill Jr. (Cree) invokes Latour as a source of inspiration when he addresses the powerful nature/culture dichotomy inherent in the very use of English language, a dichotomy that, according to him, has negative consequences on how Indigenous peoples understand themselves and their heritage:

> It's almost impossible to speak English without invoking those dichotomies of nature and culture. ... if we, Indigenous peoples, are trying to talk about our relation to the land, and we're using English to do it, and that's all I have to use, then we're stuck constantly creating these dichotomies functioning, and we're in that dichotomy: we're the nature to European culture and the history of our representation (Hill, personal interview, March 20, 2012).

More concretely, Hill points to the fact that maintaining this strong opposition and tying Native peoples to a pure category of nature has harmful effects on how these people are represented in various media and thus on how they come to understand themselves: "No one has created a model for talking about what it means to be an Indigenous person in an urban space. The romantic myths don't

give you the space to do that, because we're supposed to be the children of nature, in touch with all that" (Hill, personal interview, March 20, 2012). To interpret this curator's statement within Zerubavel's cognitive sociological framework, one can claim that nature and culture represent two "split" domains of reality, separated from one another by allegedly real boundaries. Indeed, according to Hill, many Westerners live within a Modern myth that encourages them to view American Indians as belonging to Nature's domain of things, and so split from Culture or from Science and Modernity.

Within the same cognitive sociological framework, one may problematize and even overcome this strong distinction if, through a process of "lumping," one could conceive of Indigeneity in terms of a conceptual blending of attributes imported from both domains. I claim that "lumping" is precisely what the creator and the producer of the TimeTraveller™ machinima (an interactive media combining film and game features) achieve through their digital work. They state that futuristic representations of Native peoples in the cyberspace will need to portray them no longer as "just survivors," but rather as "fully participating, empowered members of society, of contemporary, thoroughly modern, futuristic society" (Fragnito, n.d.). The main character of the series, called Hunter, actually illustrates well the shift from the survival to the empowerment model, for instance when he presents himself as follows:

> Like my father and my father's father, I can use a bow and arrow like nobody's business. I can also paddle a canoe faster than most speedboats... And like the legends say, I can walk the high steel without a worry. Hell, I can do gymnastics up there. All these traditional skills would've made me one serious breadwinner once... But today, in an over-mediated, hyper-consumerist North America, where there isn't enough room for everybody, I have to be content with being a ruthless, efficient, cold-blooded killer. And that pisses me off (Fragnito, 2013, Episode 1).

As these facts, which conveying a notion of the continuity of warrior traditions and practices, are disclosed to us viewers, we can actually contemplate Hunter skillfully handling various types of weapons, from more traditional and nature-related (e.g., bow and arrows) to more futuristic and arguably culture-related ones (e.g., a Stars Wars type of force light saber). In what recalls a piece of Social

Darwinism, he portrays himself as an exemplary citizen for the highly competitive place in which he lives, practising the traditional skills of his Nation with the new and sophisticated weapons of the future. It is precisely in response to the same kind of separation between nature and culture that we can interpret the proposal of curator Nancy Marie Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache) to view Native identity as "simultaneously mobile, contemporary, and tribal" (Mithlo, 2008, 27), a type of identity which overcomes a strong partition of nature and culture.

We/Civilized vs. They/Others/Primitive

Historian Jill Lepore has shown how New England puritans (e.g., Reverends William Hubbard and Increase Mather) adopted the "language of cruelty and savagery" in their letters, diaries, and (war) chronicles to define their "sense of themselves" ("what it meant to be 'English'") against the Indian Others, whom they described as "Brutish, Savage, Barbarous" (Lepore, 1998, xiii-xiv, xviii; see also Canup, 1990). For instance, writing his account of what has become known as "King Philip's War" of 1675, Reverend Hubbard deplored the "barbarous Cruelty" of the Indians, to whom he referred as "these Heathen" (as quoted by Lepore, 1998, 4). Known under the label of "othering," this central theme in postcolonial theory refers to the various types of boundaries drawn, through "splitting" and a certain use of language, between "Us" (a group of people defined as "civilized") and "Them" (another group defined as "primitive" or "uncivilized") (on postcolonial theory, Said, 1979; on splitting Zerubavel, 1996). This dichotomy, in which Indigenous peoples are regarded as occupying the (presumably inferior) position of "the other" (often bound by a certain territory, usually beyond the frontier and/or in a Reservation), maps perfectly onto the related split between Nature and Culture: It contrasts groups of people based on how they are allegedly placed on a scale of historical progress ranging from a stage of so-called primitivism (arguably linked to the state of nature) to a stage of civilization (arguably closer to culture). In fact, the assumption of stages in the progress of civilization pervades 19th-century European and American thinking (TallBear, 2013, 513). Having its origins in Puritan religious discourse, this conceptual binary is currently produced and reinforced with particular strength (1) within the scientific discourse circulated in academia (especially anthropology, until recently); (2) within the consumerist discourse of tourism; and (3) within media discourse.

(1) As far as *science* discourse is concerned, one can point to the book anthropologist Johannes Fabian devotes to the specific ways in which the anthropological discipline is built around a construction of "its own object [as] the savage, the primitive, the Other" (Fabian, 1983, 1). This kind of discourse centers on the scenario of a researcher subjecting an Indigenous population (most of the time located in a distant and often exoticized territory) to the theoretical and methodological gaze afforded and encouraged by his/her scientific discipline. Artist and writer Alfred Young Man (Chippewa-Cree) captures well this situation in which the scientist is constructing a voiceless Native "Other:" "The only people that had anything to do with Indians were studying them, the anthropologists, and giving the world their general idea of who Indian people were. We never had a chance to talk, to tell them who we were" (Young Man, interview by Abbott, n.d.). Piscataway curator Gabrielle Tayac also views the origins of this split in science, specifically in the works of the "fathers" of Sociology – Marx, Weber, and Durkheim – who, according to her, by "assuming that pre-Christian Europeans [were] like American Indians," would just "use American Indians as primitive men for everybody" (Tayac, personal interview, February 24, 2012). Finally, curator Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) offers the example of such an operation by examining the field notes of Scudder Mekeel, an anthropologist who, in Pine Ridge in 1930, was drawing a distinction among three "classes" of Native Americans: "1. Christian and trying to be acculturated. 2. Pagan and living as near as possible in old way, and perhaps succeeding spiritually to some extent. 3. The in-betweens—loafers, criminals, delinquents. The first two are fine individuals—the third (by far the majority) are all bums" (Mekeel, as quoted in Smith, 2010, n.p.). Interestingly, Smith renders this strong distinction obsolete by suggesting ironically that the first two types are "doomed," because they submitted to a "boring and impossible" acculturation program, whereas Indians of the third type form the more interesting category of people, because they display "[r]eluctance to get with the program, or any program for that matter. Yes, we're talking about the artists of the Red Nation" (Smith, 2010, n.p.).

(2) As far as the *consumerist* discourse of *tourism* is concerned, the same author eloquently captures how the process of othering is at work in the type of "gaze" that defines the typical tourist:[14]

> There are tourists who flood out here by the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions every year from back east and from all over the world. One of the things they want to see is the savage Indian. That's one of their favorite stereotypes. They come to the reservations and crowd around with their cameras and their camcorders and generally make nuisances of themselves because they want to take back to where they're from pictures of savage Indians or primitive Indians that reflect their understanding of Native people (Young Man, interview by L. Abbott, n.d.).

In fact, one of the reasons many Native heritage professionals are actually uncomfortable with the notion of "heritage" is that the tourist discourse has appropriated it to an extent that it can no longer capture adequately the practice of handing over of knowledge within Native communities (Mithlo, personal conversation).

(3) Finally, as far as *media* discourse is concerned, Smith targets the Western movie genre and claims that the textual and non-textual language it proposes reinforces problematic binaries. Specifically, it "extends the metaphor of the frontier into paired opposites of, for example the wilderness versus civilization, the individual versus community, savagery versus humanity" (Smith, 2009, 49).

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[14] John Urry and Jonas Larsen capture cogently the relevance of the place dimension of the "tourist gaze," for instance when they claim, right at the beginning of their book, that "at least a part of [tourist] experience is to gaze upon or view a set of different scenes, of landscapes or townscapes which are out of the ordinary. When we 'go away' we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in ways we appreciate, or at least we anticipate that it will do so. In other words, we gaze at what we encounter. This gaze is as socially organized and systematized as the gaze of the medic. Of course, it is of a different order in that it is not a gaze confined to professionals 'supported and justified by an institution'. And yet even in the production of 'unnecessary' pleasure many professional experts help to construct and develop one's gaze as a tourist" (Urry and Larsen, 2011, 1).

Within the cognitive sociological framework proposed by Zerubavel, one may problematize and even transcend the strong distinction between the categories of civilized and primitive again through a process of "lumping:" one could identify entities that pass as "civilized," yet in fact share (at least some) attributes of what usually counts as examples or features of "primitivism," and vice-versa, therefore blurring the boundary between "pure primitive" and "pure civilized."

The TimeTraveller™ machinima illustrates well this strategy. For instance, we encounter the young Mohawk who embarks, in Episode 1 of the series, on a first travel through time (to 1862) to visit the scene of the only massacre perpetrated, according to existing data, by Indians themselves. Hunter arrives at a location (looking very much like a fort) where a British officer briefs White officers on an alleged massacre of Minnesotan White farmers. Hunter narrates for us what he sees in the stealthy mode that the miraculous glasses make available to him:

> This one Sioux hunter dares his friend to kill this white farmer, so the friend kills the farmer's whole family. Then all the Sioux go on a rampage and kill hundreds of settlers: they cut off people's heads, rape women, torture children, and loot a few towns. It really gets the audience riled up. This ridiculous, unsophisticated agitprop has done the trick. And if I was one of these guys [i.e., the soldiers on the benches], I'd be ready to kill the savages too. But I'm not buying it. If there's one thing every Indian knows, it's this: When it comes to history, always get a second opinion (Fragnito, 2013, Episode 1).

This is precisely what Hunter is willing to find out and, equipped with his time travel-supporting device, he pays a visit to four Sioux tribesmen who took part in the bloody events at the farm (in Acton Township, Minnesota, year 1862). He can interact with them (speaking and understanding their language, feeling what they feel), so he decides to switch from the stealthy to the interactive mode his glasses afford. He learns that the Indian Federal Bureau agents did not pay them their due rent (as required by the two treaties from 1851), so they are not able to sustain themselves. The group decides to visit a local farmer to ask for food, under the assumption that this neighbour will act as the good Christian they know he claims to be. However, they soon face an angry farmer with a rifle in his hands, shouting in a raspy voice: "Get off my land!" – after which he withdraws behind the front door. The rather

bemused and amused Sioux depart, but are stopped in their way by the farmer and three other persons (two men and one woman). They loom menacingly from the house's open doors and windows, pointing their rifles at the Indians. The farmer thunders again, "Nobody threatens me on my own land! Go back to where you came from!" After a moment of heavy silence, one "grumpier" Sioux opens fire, kills the farmer, after which the situation deteriorates into what Hunter calls "a classic case of 'kill or be killed.'" The farmer's acolytes are murdered in the ensuing brawl. A girl is later found dead in the house, clearly a collateral victim, much to the distress of the Sioux warriors. Hunter reports that a full-fledge massacre against the Sioux develops, in which he decides not to take part, not even as a witness. He concludes:

> This little skirmish kicked off an all-out war: the Dakota Sioux vs. the United States. My crew plus hundreds of their fellow tribesmen were accused of treason. Of them, thirty-seven Indians were hung in the largest mass execution in America ever. In other words, we're the worst bunch of criminals this country has ever seen. Maybe our problem is bad press (Fragnito, 2013, Episode 2).

This kind of story, presented in the form of a machinima film, challenges received (and, as a rule, distorted [Lewis, 2012, 23]) narratives about Native peoples and their heritage in a very innovative fashion. It "paints a picture that consciously seeks to perturb accepted history" for instance the "accepted story" that the Natives are primitive, while the non-Natives are civilized. The machinima series captures how things may have looked like from the point of view of the Native themselves: We actually receive the events through the eyes, ears, and mind of the Mohawk protagonist and can, thus, identify better with his point of view.

In another, more recent example, we witness the Oka/Mohawk Crisis at Kanesatake, in Canada, in 1990. A group of Mohawk people, organized in what was known as the "Mohawk Warrior Society," decided to take up arms to resist municipality plans for the building of a golf course on their territory. Hunter arrives at the place of conflict during the standoff and impersonates the famous Anishinaabe warrior Brad Larocque, who certainly bears resemblances to the "savage" warriors of the past. However, once we have access to their camp and to the very cozy scenes of conversations among the Natives, we understand that they are utterly sophisticated people who just want to defend their lands and

elaborate on why they should do so. After we learn that the Mohawk surrender while also managing to keep their land, the last comment Hunter makes, awhile captures this precise stance: "The biggest lesson? If letter writing, law suits, land claims, and a democratic process in general don't work, try messing with people's morning commute" (Fragnito, 2013, Episode 3).

Local vs. Global

A third strong distinction that circulates through various discourses (media, academy, and so on) positions Native Americans in the category of the *local* (or *parochial*) as opposed to the *global*, with the implication that the latter is the positive and more promising term of this binary.

Many Native artists and heritage professionals attempt to problematize and overcome the framing of Indigeneity within this binary in two ways. First, they criticize questionable forms of locality that they claim many Native communities embody. For instance, some of heritage professionals criticize a drive many Natives experience to embrace tribalism; they understand it as "a perverted, embattled form of community" and suggest that Indigenous peoples should avoid the parochialism of the attitude that focuses exclusively on local ties and values (Lippard, 1990, 153). This is a form of criticism that embeds a specific interpretation of the "place of our own" which Jimmie Durham invoked in the quotation I placed at the beginning of this paper. According to Hill, such a "place of our own" may start looking more like a self-enclosed spot: "We have to be really careful that, as we're asserting that [legitimate] authority [over knowledge], we're not defining ourselves into a corner, that we're not reducing our intellectual circumstances down to this little thing: 'This is our bit of traditional knowledge'" (Hill, personal interview, March 20, 2012).

A possible solution to this problematic form of locality is embraced by many Natives: some form of pan-Indianism, understood as a version of strategic essentialism useful to Indians in the process of locating their selves, of communicating with one another and with non-Indians, and of engaging in political action. As curator Mithlo describes it eloquently:

> I actively embrace the idea of the "every Indian" as a
> pantribal construct, as well as the reference "non-

Indian." As problematic as a generic Indian construct has been in reference to negative stereotyping, I suggest that the essentialism inherent in pantribal causes is also inevitable, given centuries of active colonial practices via various legislative acts (the General Allotment Act of 1887, the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation Program, 1948-1979). Since contact with Native North American groups, the US government has enacted specific policies that have resulted in common legacies … Like other identity constructs, the category of pan-Indianism exists and is employed variously as a means of locating self, a communicative device, and a political tool (Mithlo, 2008, 24).

Many Native artists and heritage professionals also criticize questionable forms that the category of the global takes. For instance, they target the same pan-Indianism, which they regard as "an artificial foil invented to facilitate federal policy" (Straus and Valentino, 2001, 85-6).

Within the cognitive sociological framework proposed by Zerubavel, one may problematize and even transcend the strong distinction between local and global again through a process of "lumping." Specifically, one may explore and propose alternative middle-ground forms of identities that escape the alleged purity of the two categories, while also blending attributes drawn from each of them. Because cyberspace is by definition a delocalized (or fluid) medium, cultural expressions based on it enable Native communities and peoples to explore and project more fluid forms of identities (possibly "glocal," to use a term coined by sociologist Roland Robertson). This is, for instance, what curator Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree/Blackfoot) has in mind when he claims that a "contemporary community is no longer a fixed, unified, or stable place; it exists in a state of flux" (McMaster, 1998, 20). In a similar vein, Cree curator Hill states that every Native person exists "in a double world now. Even if you grew up in the Reserve, even if you speak your language, everyone's watching TV up there; no one is in a pure state. So, everybody negotiates these worlds in different ways" (Hill, personal interview, March 20, 2012).

Not only does a machinima series like TimeTraveller™ manage to show that identities and knowledges that display various blends of locality and globality (or "glocality") are at least conceivable, but it also discloses its creators, Native Americans themselves, as

individuals with identities and experiences that have transcended this split. For instance, in Episode 4, the young Native girl Karahkwenhawi manages to travel to the future, more precisely to the Olympic Stadium in Winnipeg in 2112, where she participates in a lavish Manito Ahbee intergalactic powwow. The general tone is celebratory, especially since the host reminds the Indigenous audience that powwows were once forbidden in the public space, but that their ancestors managed to survive and to find ways to continue convening secretly. The ceremony includes a fashion show where young Native girls display clothing with Indigenous themes. At the same time, traditional Native and cyber-punk motives fuse together in people' way of dressing and sporting their hair in the Winnipeg scene; as such, they offer a possible face of the cultures within which Indians of the future may live. Also, Skawennati and Lewis, her collaborator, are live examples of aboriginal people who manage to lead lives that bring together a sensitivity and respect for local values – "the way we talk to our children, the expectations we have of them and of ourselves" (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010) — and a cosmopolitan way of being in the world. "I have my European side and a Native side, and they're good, they're well integrated, I think. How can we bring that to the future? Yeah, so that's my big concern: the future and the past, thinking what the future looks like and how to use the past to help us think about that, to help other people know where we're coming from and understand what the relationship is between us now" (Skawennati, personal interview, August 20, 2010).

Conclusions

I began this paper with a statement by a Native artist, Jimmie Durham, who claimed, "I feel certain that I could address the entire world, if only I had a place to stand" (as quoted in Smith, 2009, 136). I explored the semantic flexibility of the *place* trope (including the related notion of *boundary*) and the kind of work that it does for contemporary Native American artists and heritage professionals. In particular, I claimed that (and showed how) this trope operates as a powerful discursive device enabling these artists and professionals to imagine possible futures for Indigenous peoples and their knowledge. I argued that one may interpret the searching for "a place to stand" in two senses: as a need Native peoples experience to regain ownership over their ancestors' land, and as a need to claim, discover, or even invent new places, for instance in the emerging virtual environments. In the second part of the paper I showed how Native artists and heritage professionals make use of the *place* trope and the related idea of *boundary* to

problematize and possibly transcend existing powerful binaries that foster stereotyped representations of Native peoples and their cultures: Nature vs. Culture, Us/Civilized vs. Them/The Others/Primitive, as well as Local vs. Global. The strategy for deconstructing each of these binaries involves Native artists and heritage professionals in acts of imagining future places that Indians can inhabit. This paper points to the importance of virtual environments not only for developing Native heritage projects, but also for problematizing and even transcending binaries within which Native peoples and their knowledges are still framed in various discourses.

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