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Indigenous Practices and Performances of Mobility as Resistance and Resurgence

KEN WILSON

The same things that motivated my ancestors to walk . . . are motivating people now. . . . Indigenous people have long rallied against erasure: erasure from the land, erasure from American and Canadian consciousness. Putting our bodies back on the land can be very powerful.

— Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (qtd. in Rubinstein, *Born to Walk* 159)

Indigenous Mobility as Resistance and Reclamation

IN 2013, KWAKWAKA'WAKW HEREDITARY CHIEF and visual artist Beau Dick left his home in Quatsino, a community on Alert Bay on the northern tip of Vancouver Island, and began walking south, accompanied by family members, supporters, and community members. His destination was the Legislative Assembly in Victoria, five hundred kilometres away. There, in the presence of about three thousand people, he broke a copper — “a metal plaque traditionally used to measure the status, wealth and power of Kwakwaka'wakw chiefs” (Lavoie) — named *Nunmgala* on the steps of the Legislative Assembly (Hopkins, “Beau Dick”). Inspired by the activist movement Idle No More, Dick's breaking of the copper was a traditional Kwakwaka'wakw ceremony intended to shame the federal government for its attempt to weaken Canada's environmental laws (Rubinstein, *Born to Walk* 162). “The copper is a symbol of justice, truth and balance, and to break one is a threat, a challenge and can be an insult,” Chief Dick told Victoria *Times-Colonist* reporter Judith Lavoie. “If you break copper on someone and shame them, there should be an apology.”

Most discussions of Chief Dick's action in Victoria focus on the copper-breaking ceremony. Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, for instance, contends that “Chief Dick and his supporters performed the ceremony on the lawn of the legislature because they want to challenge the political relationship they have with

Canada — like their Ancestors, they are demanding a relationship based on justice, truth, balance, and protection of their homeland, the environment, and their way of life” (“Politics”). There is no doubt about the legal, political, and diplomatic significance of the copper-breaking ceremony. Yet the decision to spend ten days walking to Victoria suggests that walking must have been an important part of Chief Dick’s action as well. In a video posted online, Chief Dick states that the purpose of the walk was to create awareness of environmental and Indigenous issues and to build community (“Interview”). Clearly, he believed that walking would be a powerful way to achieve those goals; otherwise, he would have chosen a different way of travelling to Victoria.

In a conversation with settler writer Dan Rubinstein, Simpson notes that Indigenous history is filled with stories about people who walked great distances to bring about change and that walking traditionally was a way to socialize, strengthen family bonds, and engage in diplomacy. Putting Indigenous bodies back onto the land — particularly by walking — “can be very powerful,” she told Rubinstein (*Born to Walk* 159). One way to put Indigenous bodies onto the land is through mobile performances. My research suggests that in recent years the number of these practices has increased, and, since many receive no media attention, my unpublished 218-page annotated bibliography of published accounts of Indigenous mobility¹ probably underestimates the amount of Indigenous walking, running, paddling, or riding that is happening. In addition, Indigenous performances and practices of mobility often confound the typical categories used by settlers to understand the world: Chief Dick’s walk, and the subsequent ceremony, for instance, were simultaneously political, diplomatic, legal, sacred, and, since people were invited to participate in the walk and witness the copper-breaking ceremony, participatory or socially engaged.

Drawing from my 2018 bibliography, I examine in this essay three instances of Indigenous durational walking practices that deliberately resist settler colonialism, reclaim Indigenous culture, enact ceremony, build community, or function as forms of resurgence and sovereignty: Cree-Métis artist Cheryl L’Hirondelle’s 2001 performance *cistêmâw iyiniw ohci* (*For the Tobacco Being*), in which L’Hirondelle ran twenty-five kilometres across Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation in northern Saskatchewan in homage to a man named *cistêmâw iyiniw*, who, two generations before, would run or walk through that community calling on people to attend ceremonies (Hopkins, “Interventions”); Anishinaabe

artist Leo Baskatawang's 2012 *March 4 Justice* project, a walking performance from Vancouver to Ottawa, during which Baskatawang dragged a copy of the Indian Act chained to his body (Benjoe); and the Nishiyuu Walkers, a group of six Cree youth and a guide who, in the winter of 2012, snowshoed and walked from the Whapmagoostui First Nation in northern Quebec to Ottawa, a journey of nearly sixteen hundred kilometres, as a response to and in support of the Idle No More movement (Seesequasis 209-11). Walking and running — the forms of mobility that I consider here — are, as Simpson argues, powerful ways of putting Indigenous bodies back on the land. Each practice and performance of mobility enacts forms of resistance, resurgence, ceremony, and community building in unique and specific ways.

I am a settler, born and raised in the Haldimand Tract in southwestern Ontario and now living in Treaty 4 territory in southern Saskatchewan. My primary interests are in the political and aesthetic possibilities of walking performances. In particular, I wonder whether walking can bring settlers into a deeper, decolonized relationship with the land (see Wilson, "*Wood Mountain Walk*"). Indigenous Elders have told me that this might be a possibility, but some Indigenous artists have suggested to me that settlers walking on the land are simply colonizers inspecting their ill-gotten property. Despite that argument, my work asks several questions. If walking can bring settlers into a deeper, non-extractive relationship with the land, then might that relationship building be a way of beginning to understand our responsibilities to the Indigenous peoples in the territories where we live? Can settlers interested in this form of walking learn from Indigenous practices of mobility, or are settlers too deeply rooted in the ongoing history of settler colonialism for such learning to be possible? Those are the questions that my PhD research, which incorporates walks (alone and with other people) in Treaty 4 territory and learning *nêhiyawêwin*, the Cree language, asks. In this essay, part of that research, I argue that the practices of mobility of Indigenous peoples are worth our attention, not because they provide an easy model for settlers who wish to engage with the land through forms of mobile performance — the ongoing history of settler colonialism, and the differences between settler epistemologies and ontologies and Indigenous cosmologies (see Watts), make such simplistic conclusions impossible — but because they are powerful decolonizing acts of resistance and resurgence.

Cheryl L'Hirondelle and *cistêmâw iyiniw ohci*

In 2001, Cree-Métis artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle ran twenty-five kilometres across the Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation in northern Saskatchewan as part of a performance entitled *cistêmâw iyiniw ohci* (*For the Tobacco Being*). L'Hirondelle and her partner at the time, nêhiyaw artist and educator Joseph Naytowhow, lived in nearby Meadow Lake, working for the Meadow Lake Tribal Council as co-storytellers-in-residence for nine First Nations in the area (L'Hirondelle 3). “[T]he late Ahasiw Maskegon-Iskwew used to always tell me that I got my Master’s in the bush by doing that,” L'Hirondelle recalled in a conversation with nêhiyaw curator Elwood Jimmy and N'laka'pamux/Secwepemc artist and curator Chris Bose. “And I think that is so true. I was able to learn by washing dishes while there was an Elder sitting and talking at their kitchen table. I think about the stories and the information they shared — whether by just being in their company, by hearing them speak or by going on trips with them — really has influenced all my work since” (L'Hirondelle et al. 99-100). One of the stories that affected L'Hirondelle was about *cistêmâw iyiniw*, “a Cree man who had lived two generations prior to Cheryl and Joseph’s presence in Meadow Lake” and who “became famous in the area for delivering tobacco and messages from community to community” (Goto 155). Even when horses were available to him, *cistêmâw iyiniw* preferred to walk or run, and “People were amazed at the distances he could cover and how he traversed them so quickly” (Hopkins, “Interventions”). It was said that *cistêmâw iyiniw* could even cross rivers without getting wet (Hopkins, “Interventions”).

In 2001, L'Hirondelle decided to honour *cistêmâw iyiniw*'s memory by running one of his regular routes, the length of Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nation (Goto 155). She wore a racing jersey, “distinguishing her as a member of a formal event” rather than just someone out for a run (Hopkins, “Interventions”). A film crew recorded her performance and the performances of three other people, Naytowhow, nêhiyaw poet Louise Halfe, and Cree-Saulteaux-Caucasian multidisciplinary artist Cheli Nighttraveller, each of whom, Carcross-Tagish writer, curator, and researcher Candice Hopkins writes (“Interventions”), was given “a disposable camera, a list of Cree syllabics, and chalk”:

They were encouraged to write messages in syllabics wherever they saw fit. The performers were also encouraged to ask the people they

visited if they would still be willing to honor the age-old tradition of never turning a stranger from your door but, rather, inviting that person in and giving them food or drink. This is based on the Elders' belief that you never know how far someone has traveled. If the person still abided by this tradition, "water" was inscribed in syllabics on the outside of the house. During her run, Cheryl stopped at two houses where she saw syllabics denoting "water" and visited with the people inside.

The additional performers, Hopkins continues, "interacted with the community in a separate way":

Naytowhow recited the story in typical Cree tradition by becoming the spirit of Cistemaw iyiniw. He offered tobacco to the people he visited and alerted them to Cheryl's action. Louise Halfe chose to do a photo essay in addition to informing the community about the performance and recording their opinions of the action. Cheli Nighthtraveller visited the home of an elderly man in the nearby community of Loon Lake and documented her visit with photographs.

At the same time, the story of *cistêmâw iyiniw*, as told by his grandson, Harry Blackbird, was broadcast on three local radio stations, two of which mainly programmed Top 40 hits. "The idea of a Cree story interrupting the regular streams of Shania Twain and 50 Cent," Hopkins writes, "is subversive in itself."

Hopkins points out that "Each component of this performance — L'Hirondelle's running, the visits with the members of the community, and the radio broadcasts — extended public perception of the event"; moreover, all of the visits with community members let them know about the performance, broadening her audience; "the radio broadcasts ensured that the community had access to the original story"; and L'Hirondelle's action "physically inscribed" that story onto the landscape ("Interventions"). One might be tempted to use terms such as "relational aesthetics" (Bourriaud) and "social practice" (Bishop) to describe the community involvement central to *cistêmâw iyiniw ohci*, but Hopkins is careful not to make such claims:

The term "public art" doesn't resonate with most Native people. After all, they do not make up a large percentage of the museum audience. They certainly aren't viewed as constituting the public or even one of the more carefully defined "publics." Rather, they are

part of a community. Will the community of Makwa Sahgaiehc remember L'Hirondelle's performance as a great moment of contemporary Native public art? Probably not. However, it will resonate in the minds of those who witnessed it as an honorable act. ("Interventions")

Métis artist and critic David Garneau ("Migration") describes *cistêmâw iyiniw ohci* as "archaic, absurd, and powerful"; rather than a political gesture, he suggests, "it was a teaching disguised as an artwork." Following traditional *nêhiyaw* pedagogy, he continues,

her [L'Hirondelle's] action is a non-dialogic lesson — a memorable doing and showing rather than an invitation to debate or to be followed by an explanation. She did not give a speech; coaxing people back to their traditional ways. She ran. Community members could do with the gift what they would. While unfamiliar with running as art, they knew the story Cheryl told with her body. Many were awakened to protocol. Once the marathon began, people understood their obligations. They provided water, food, and places to rest, as is customary. They also told stories of past runners and how they linked communities. Perhaps L'Hirondelle wanted them to feel what was lost in the adoption of modern, disembodied forms of communication.

The comments from both Hopkins and Garneau suggest how *cistêmâw iyiniw ohci* could be considered a work of community involvement, an assertion of the necessity of the sacred, and an act of resurgence.

In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*, Simpson describes resurgence as "a lens, critical analysis, a set of theoretical understandings, and an organizing and mobilizing platform" that "has the potential to wonderfully transform Indigenous life on Turtle island" (49). "Engagement with Indigenous systems changes Indigenous peoples," she continues; "it is a highly emergent and generative process," one that "requires less engagement with the state and more presence within Indigenous realities" (49). L'Hirondelle's performance suggests how mobility can be a form of resurgence, a place-based practice that leads to a resurgence that is both cultural and political, since within an Indigenous context those ideas are inseparable (49-50). Such resurgence, as Simpson contends, is an assertion of sovereignty (53).

Leo Baskatawang and *March 4 Justice*

In the spring and summer of 2012, Anishinaabeg artist Leo Baskatawang, then a master's student at the University of Manitoba, and a friend, Ashley Bottle, walked from Vancouver to Ottawa along the Trans-Canada Highway, a 4,400-kilometre journey that lasted 135 days. Baskatawang walked with a copy of the Indian Act — multiple copies, in fact, since they kept wearing out during the journey — chained to his body, dragging on the ground behind him. The symbolism for him was clear. “The *Indian Act* is a ball and chain — it's oppression,” he told the Regina *Leader-Post*'s Kerry Benjoe. “I think we are symbolizing future change because as we drag it across the ground, pages are getting ripped out and it's being torn up.” The use of the Indian Act as a symbolic object suggests that his intentions were partly aesthetic and performance-oriented, as does the fact that the walk ended in Ottawa with a performance in which Baskatawang and dozens of supporters piled the copies of the Indian Act damaged during the walk on the steps below the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill (“Anishnaabe Iraq War Vet”). Those performance-oriented intentions were connected to his political intentions: Baskatawang wanted to emphasize the fact that the relationship between First Nations and the federal government is a collective issue and to rally support for changes in federal policy toward and legislation about First Nations peoples. “This means making substantial changes to the *Indian Act* and to get legitimate representation in the government,” Baskatawang told Benjoe, noting that whatever replaces the Indian Act needs to be developed in concert with First Nations peoples.

Baskatawang was also hoping to build community through the public nature of his walk. “I feel a strong tide swelling,” he told Benjoe. “Right now it's a ripple but I'm hoping by the time we get to Ottawa it will have the force of a tsunami.” However, his *March 4 Justice* had other goals as well. “This is about reclaiming our identity — having the self determination to define our own identity,” he stated to Benjoe. The fact that Baskatawang completed his walk with five companions suggests that the walk helped to build community as well as reclaim identity (“Anishnaabe Iraq War Vet”). That community did not consist only of the walkers who participated in the *March 4 Justice*; Baskatawang noted that he could not have completed the walk without the support of people whom he met along the way and who offered the walkers food and shelter (“Anishnaabe Iraq War Vet”). That community of supporters included settlers as well;

Baskatawang mentioned that such walks “are not exclusively Indigenous things” and noted that he was inspired by Terry Fox as well as by his ancestors (qtd. in Rubinstein, “Giant Steps”). There was also a sacred or spiritual aspect to the walk. The *Winnipeg Free Press*’s Aldo Santin describes Bottle as Baskatawang’s “spiritual and cultural mentor,” and the *Dryden Observer*’s Lindsey Enns suggests that the walk was a spiritual journey for Baskatawang. “Before this walk I wasn’t really in tune with our cultural protocols and beliefs, but since we’ve been walking it’s been really important to follow them and I’ve realized the effect they’ve had because things just seem to work out for us,” he told Enns, noting that their morning prayers for good weather were consistently answered.

March 4 Justice brought resistance to colonialism, cultural and spiritual resurgence, and community building together in the form of a durational walk. It was self-consciously performance-oriented, yet it was more than a performance. Through its incorporation of ceremony, the march also had a sacred or spiritual aspect. As Algonquin playwright and theatre artist Yvette Nolan suggests, this complexity is typical of Indigenous theatrical performance (3); it seems to be typical of Indigenous mobile performances as well. Like *cistēmāw iyiniw ohci*, *March 4 Justice* therefore could be considered a form of Indigenous resurgence, although its focus on the Indian Act suggests that it was simultaneously an act of resistance against the processes and structures of settler colonialism. “Indigenous resistance and resurgence in response to the dispossessive forces of settler colonization, in both historical and current manifestations, employ measures and tactics designed to protect Indigenous territories and to reconnect Indigenous bodies to land through the practices and forms of knowledge that these practices continuously regenerate,” write Yellowknives Dene political scientist Glen Coulthard and Simpson (254). Walking and other forms of mobile performance and practice could be considered one of those “measures and tactics.” Although resistance to settler colonialism is not the same as “grounded normativity,” their term for “the ethical frameworks provided by these Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge” (254), the two separate fields of activity seem to be brought together in Baskatawang’s walking performance.

The Nishiyuu Walkers

The journey of sixteen hundred kilometres by the Nishiyuu Walkers,

from Whapmagoostui, Quebec, to Ottawa in the winter of 2013, was organized by seven Cree youth, including eighteen-year-old David Kawapit, who initially began thinking about the walk after he had a vision of a group of wolves united to defeat a bear: the wolves represented First Nations, the bear the federal government (Loewen). *Nishiyuu*, Japanese Canadian writer and artist Ayumi Goto notes, means “the people” in Cree (161), and the young people who made the walk were guided by Kawapit’s uncle, Isaac Kawapit (Galloway, “White Wizard”). For David Kawapit, the walk would help to restore the traditional trade routes among the Nêhiyawak (Cree), Omâmiwininî (Algonquin), and Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) peoples; it would also be a journey of personal healing for the young people involved, grieving the loss of friends and family members to suicide and substance abuse (Loewen). “The message we wanted to bring was unity with Cree Nations,” he told *The Globe and Mail*’s Karen Howlett. “I wanted to ensure that the next generation of youth have good lives, ones where they don’t have to fight for their native rights.”

Like Chief Beau Dick, the Nishiyuu Walkers were inspired by the Idle No More activities taking place during the winter of 2013 (Galloway, “Trek”). Idle No More, according to settler historian Ken Coates, “is a highly significant movement whose full social impact and influence on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Canada will unfold over decades” (xiv); for the members of the Kino-nda-niimi Collective, Idle No More is the “most recent link” in a long chain of Indigenous acts of resistance and resurgence (21). That link, the collective notes, “was forged in late November 2012, when four women in Saskatchewan held a meeting called to educate Indigenous (and Canadian) communities on the impacts of the Canadian federal government’s proposed Bill C-45,” an omnibus bill that “introduced drastic changes to the Indian Act, the *Fisheries Act*, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, and the *Navigable Water Act* (amongst many others)” (21). “With the help of social media and grassroots Indigenous activists,” this “teach-in” inspired “a continent-wide movement with hundreds of thousands of people from Indigenous communities and urban centres participating in sharing sessions, protests, blockades and round dances in public spaces and on the land, in our homelands, and in sacred spaces” (21-22). Both Chief Dick’s walk and the subsequent copper-breaking ceremony and the journey of the Nishiyuu Walkers were responses to Idle No More and inspired by that movement.

When the Nishiyuu Walkers arrived in Ottawa on 25 March 2013, they were welcomed onto Victoria Island in the Ottawa River by representatives of the Algonquin People, who invited them to gather around a fire to give thanks to the Creator and to Mother Earth (Pearson, “Nishiyuu Walkers”), suggesting the walk’s sacred quality. Later, on Parliament Hill, they were met by a singing and drumming crowd of three thousand people celebrating their accomplishment (Rubinstein, “Giant Steps”). They were also greeted by Cree former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Matthew Coon Come; Nuuchahnulth National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Shawn Atleo; NDP leader Thomas Mulcair; and Green Party leader Elizabeth May (Pearson, “Nishiyuu Walkers”). The walkers were overcome with emotion. David Kawapit stated that he had no words to describe how he felt: “This is not the end, this will continue. But it started with a walk” (Pearson, “Nishiyuu Walkers”). The group wanted to meet with Prime Minister Stephen Harper, but that request was denied because he was busy welcoming two pandas at the Toronto Zoo (Loewen); instead, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs Bernard Valcourt spoke to a small group of the original walkers, although no cameras or media were allowed in that meeting (“Young Cree Walkers”).

Like Baskatawang, the Nishiyuu Walkers had multiple motivations. David Kawapit told Rubinstein that, though initially the walk was conceived as a political event, the health benefits made it a success. “The other goal, unity, is going to take a long time,” he continued. “But we have to keep pushing. Don’t depend on somebody to do something for you. If you want something to happen, you have to start it” (“Giant Steps”). The journey of the Nishiyuu Walkers was an opportunity to build community as well — not only a community of walkers but also one of supporters. As Simpson told Rubinstein, walks like the one undertaken by the Nishiyuu Walkers are “an opportunity for all Canadians to join in and walk alongside. This type of relationship isn’t mediated by the mainstream press or politics. And that’s one of the ultimate goals: connection” (“Giant Steps”). Indeed, as Whapmagoostui Chief Stanley George told Howlett, the most remarkable aspect of the journey was the welcome that the walkers received in communities along the way. In Wakefield, Quebec, for instance, five hundred residents prepared a hot dinner for the walkers in the town’s community centre, where the walkers spent the night.

Unlike the actions of Baskatawang or L'Hirondelle, the journey of the Nishiyuu Walkers was not self-consciously performance-oriented. Rather, it was an act of both political resistance and cultural and spiritual resurgence. In their journey, resistance and resurgence were bound together. According to the *Ottawa Citizen's* Matthew Pearson, the walkers wanted "the world to know [that] the Cree people are the true keepers of their language, culture, traditions, and that the Cree Nation continues to respect the sacred laws of its ancestors" ("Making Every Step Count"). The Nishiyuu Walkers, *néhiyaw* writer Paul Seesequasis tells us, "were called by a simple message of hope and unity and by the example of walking with a goal in mind," and the journey gave the participants purpose and "a sense of their collective power" (210). That collective power was both a resistance to the pathologies of colonialism and a cultural and spiritual reclamation:

There was likely not a single one of those nearly 300 youth who had not witnessed, or felt first-hand, the debilitating effects of reserve life: boredom, dysfunction, isolation, addiction, abuse, or suicide. These are all too prevalent in the sedentary enclosures that we call the "reserve" and that affect so many northern communities. Add to this the loss of knowledge of how to live off the land, the boom and bust cycles of mining and its despoliation, and the fact that there is simply "nowhere to go." Take all this under consideration and perhaps one can begin to grasp the essential relevance of the Nishiyuu Walk. (210)

By walking, Seesequasis continues, the young people were "moving away from colonial confines, from their own fears, from their own insecurities. It [wa]s a move away from the reserve, both metaphorically and physically" (211). Indeed, for Seesequasis, the Nishiyuu Walkers "were fulfilling a time-honoured Cree tradition of walking": "The act of motion was, in its essence, a balance of tradition and necessity combined in a way of existence that was sustainable and life-affirming" (209). Their journey "was an affirmation from Indigenous youth, at first young men, then later young women, that they could no longer be 'idle'" (210).

Seesequasis shows how resistance to colonialism and political, cultural, and spiritual resurgence joined together with emotional and physical recovery in this walk. It was political, yes, but it was also about healing, imagining a different kind of future, and even forging spiritual connections with ancestors. Indeed, the fact that David Kawapit was

motivated to begin the journey by a vision suggests its sacred or spiritual orientation (Loewen). The bringing together of these different categories of experience would be unlikely in a long walk organized by settler youth, yet the combination makes perfect sense in the context of the Nishiyuu Walkers. Indeed, to describe the political, communal, cultural, and sacred as “different categories of experience” might make little sense to an Indigenous observer. That description is doubtless a product of my own settler epistemology; Indigenous cultures do not seem to organize experience into the same categories as settler cultures. Those differences need to be attended to when settlers think about Indigenous mobile practices.

Conclusions

As I have suggested, my motivation in writing this essay was to compare my walking practice to the mobile performances and practices by the Indigenous people discussed here. That comparison leads to several questions. Can mobile performance practices carried out by settlers be considered decolonizing art practices? At the conclusion of “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation,” Garneau leaves that possibility open. “While the core of Aboriginality is incompletely available to non-Native people, settlers who come to spaces of conciliation not to repair Indians but to heal themselves, who come not as colonizers but with a conciliatory attitude to learn and share as equals, may be transformed,” he writes (38). That might not be decolonizing, however, because it represents a personal, interior transformation. For Unangã education scholar Eve Tuck and education scholar K. Wayne Yang, that transformation might simply constitute a form of conscientization — a move to settler innocence — because it is a substitute for what they see as the goal of decolonization: the restoration of Indigenous life and “*all of the land, and not just symbolically*” (7). Mobile performances by settlers are unlikely to make contributions to that goal.

Few settlers are likely to be able to engage with decolonizing aesthetic practices or with territory itself in a decolonizing way. Settlers must acknowledge that the structures of settler colonialism are so powerful that good intentions, empathy, or feelings of ethical responsibility cannot subvert or resist those structures. Even attempts at working in solidarity with Indigenous peoples might be undermined by those structures, which, as Australian researcher Clare Land notes, distort attempts at

dialogue or collaboration between Indigenous people and settlers: “[E]ven within a situation of collaboration and solidarity, rather than forced dialogue, the workings of power and contrasting relationships to colonialism eventually reveal themselves” (132). That continuing history can make relationships of trust and cooperation difficult. Settler privilege is another obstacle to such work. “I am somewhat skeptical about the willingness of settlers to support a movement in a sustained way on the basis of either moral responsibility or self-interest,” writes political and cultural anthropologist Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox. “I have found that even the most supportive settlers have a privilege line they refuse to cross” (224). Tunisian theorist of colonialism Albert Memmi goes further, suggesting that the colonizer who wants to refuse to be a colonizer is bound to fail: “[E]verything confirms his solitude, bewilderment and ineffectiveness. He will slowly realize that the only thing to do is to remain silent” (43). If the colonizer who desires this refusal “cannot stand this silence and make his life a perpetual compromise, he can end up by leaving the colony and its privileges,” Memmi concludes (43). In the Canadian context, the ability of settlers to withdraw from activities of solidarity or refuse to cross lines of privilege could be seen as similar forms of escape or evasion.

Given the realities of settler colonialism, how can a settler claim to be doing decolonizing work? How can such a person resist the extractive imperatives of settler colonialism and enter into a relationship with the land? How might mobile performances by settlers engage in building relationships with Indigenous peoples? Could the notion of “walking-with,” the methodology described by settler scholars Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman as enacting “situated and contingent ontologies between land, peoples, and nonhuman others,” be useful in coming to an understanding of what it might mean for settlers to engage in decolonizing practices (11)? For Springgay and Truman, “walking-with” is both “explicit about political positions and situated knowledges, which reveal our entanglements with settler colonialism and neoliberalism,” and “a form of solidarity, unlearning, and critical engagement with situated knowledges” (11). The term “walking-with” is promising. However, it is essential to register the differences between non-Indigenous practices of mobility, such as Goto’s 2013 running action, *In Sonorous Shadows of Nishiyuu*, a series of runs of sixteen hundred kilometres over several weeks inspired by L’Hirondelle’s music and the journey of the Nishiyuu Walkers (Goto 160-75; see also Garneau, “Migration”), and the practices of mobility by Indigenous people that I have discussed here. It is possible

that, compared to Indigenous political and aesthetic work, most non-Indigenous attempts at decolonized practices might be too compromised by their creators' locations within settler colonialism. Non-Indigenous people who walk or run on the land indeed might be nothing more than colonizers inspecting their stolen property.²

Such questions do not arise, however, when one considers mobile performances or practices by Indigenous people. Although mobile performances by settlers might offer symbolic resistance to settler colonialism, they cannot possibly enact other aspects of Indigenous walking practices — elements that make such practices important parts of the projects of decolonization, Indigenous resistance to colonialism, and resurgence. For that reason, such practices need to be better known. Much more research needs to be done on this topic. Many other examples of Indigenous mobility could have been included in this essay, including Kanien'kehà:ka scholar Brian Rice's private, spiritually focused walk through traditional Rotinonshonni lands in Ontario and New York (see Rice 424-518); the solo walks by Innu Elder Elizabeth Penashue as both an engagement with territory and a reclamation of "a good meshkanu," meaning a good "path" (Taillon 14); the Water Walks by the late Anishinaabe Elder Josephine Mandamin (McGregor 26-30) and by Anishinaabe grandmother and environmentalist Katherine Morriseau-Sinclair (Walker), among others; the Huron-Wendat women who made *La Marche Amun*, a walk of five hundred miles from Wendake, the Huron-Wendat reserve within the boundaries of Quebec City, to Ottawa to protest against and educate people about the Indian Act's gendered discrimination (Burelle 115-40); and the long, collective, health-focused walks organized by the Innu physician Stanley Vollant and carried out with young people from Innu reserves in Quebec (Rubinstein, *Born to Walk* 1-24, 39-42; Rubinstein, "Walking Cure"). All of these actions, along with the many others that have received little academic or media attention, are powerful because, as Simpson contends, they put Indigenous bodies back on the land, no matter whether that land is the shoulder of the Trans-Canada Highway, roads on a reserve in northern Saskatchewan, or frozen rivers in northern Quebec. All of these actions actively resist settler colonialism; engage in reclaiming culture, language, and the sacred; build community; and embody forms of resurgence and Indigenous sovereignty.

NOTES

¹ I would be happy to share this bibliography with anyone who asks for a copy.

² The question of whether a non-Indigenous person of colour, such as Goto, could be considered a settler is complex. “Who ‘occupies’ the position of ‘settler’ and to what degree is a shifting and mutable issue,” writes sociologist Avril Bell, a pākehā New Zealander. “While there are differential positions of power in the national field, there are no positions of innocence,” she continues. “At the most basic level, all whose families arrived after colonial settlement occupy a position in a set of social structures created by that settlement” and to some degree are complicit with it (6-7). Of course, those who arrived in a colonizing society unwillingly — as enslaved people, for instance — or who are racialized and therefore structurally disadvantaged by the dominant group might well disagree. For that reason, sociologist Emma Battell Lowman and geographer Adam J. Barker exclude “exogenous Others” from the category of settler, because the benefits of being a settler are distributed unevenly, depending on things such as nationality, class, gender, and migration status (29). So does Australian historian Lorenzo Veracini (17). Chickasaw literary scholar Jodi A. Byrd borrows the term “arrivants” from the Barbadian poet and critic Kamau Brathwaite “to signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism around the globe” (xix). Byrd calls upon “settler, native, and arrivant” to “acknowledge their own positions within empire and then reconceptualize space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant settler colonialisms and diasporas have sought to obscure” (xxx). Bell acknowledges the complexity and difficulty of her argument (6); however, if, as Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe argues, settler colonialism is about control of land (388), then perhaps anyone who occupies Indigenous land might well be considered part of settler colonialism despite the realities of racism and structural disadvantage in settler colonial states such as Canada. After all, Tuck and Yang state that the goal of decolonization is the return of “all of the land” (7) to Indigenous peoples, not just the land occupied by whites. Nevertheless, I realize that there will be objections to my use of Goto’s project as an example here. After all, I have never had to deal with the racist and sexist abuse that Goto experienced during her *In Sonorous Shadows of Nishiyuu* performance (see Goto 166-67), and that fact points to the stark differences between our experiences: I am insulated by white, male, cis-gendered, settler privilege, and she is not.

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