Beyond Survivance:
Embodying the Dance

Edwardo Madril

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Primary supervisor: Professor Sharon Mazer

Secondary supervisor: Professor Pare Keiha

Te Ara Poutama

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Abstract

The driving question of this thesis is: How might American Indian dance – whether 'traditional' or 'contemporary' – be seen to make significant contributions to the cultural and historical narrative of American Indian people? That is: How might the cultural values and systems that are carried through American Indian dance practices and performance expressions be seen to construct American Indian identity – past, present, and future? Further: How might American Indian dance, as an embodied performance practice, be seen to move American Indian people beyond the current stages of survival and survivance?

This thesis explores what it means to embody American Indian dance from my perspective as an American Indian academic, artist and dancer. Embodying the dance inscribes an action that is simultaneously dramatic and social, telling a story from the center of my soul in the company of my ancestors to the people alongside me, for the people watching, and beyond toward future generations. This thesis is grounded in dance and performance studies, using Diana Taylor's conceptualization of the 'repertoire' to explore the ways American Indian dance has served in the past to preserve, construct and sustain our communities against the prospect of annihilation during the long history of colonization. For this thesis, then, the 'data' as such will be the dances I choose to analyse using the lenses of theory, history and my own social and artistic experience. Accompanying the exegesis is a performance that will reflect the research and the outcomes as they have manifested. This approach will also reflect how the knowledge and experience of embodiment of the dance can best be produced and perform what the exegesis describes.

My background as a practitioner will frame and inform my analysis of selected examples as case studies. My first chapter will look at how American Indian dance has made a significant ongoing contribution to the survival of my people *as* a people. In my second chapter, I look at how, in the present day, these dances have come to be intertwined in contemporary dances that feature our traditions in non-traditional frames. In so doing, I will turn to Gerald Vizenor's concept of 'survivance' and the way Chadwick Allen takes the term up to analyse other forms of creative expression. For my final chapter, I will apply the critical framework I've thus developed to a close reading of my own creative practice to demonstrate how such performances might be seen to go beyond survivance to assert our agency as artists and as a people going forward.

At its core, this thesis is a quest for expanding knowledge and encourage understanding. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of what American Indian dance is through the bridging of knowledge systems in lived cultural experience and academic dance performance scholarship. Through this work, American Indian dance is highlighted as a path for cultural knowledge and identity to move beyond survivance towards cultural renewal within the complexities of our world.

Video Sharing Platform

The performance artefact can be accessed via the Vimeo channel here:

https://vimeo.com/1099469902/b083ac950d?share=copy

Password: Madril2025

Choreographer, performer, camera, and color editor: Eddie Madril

Film editor: Kathy Douglas

After the thesis has undergone examination, the creative researcher will make the performance artefact available free to the public on his YouTube channel.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Name: Edwardo F. Madril

Date: 9th June 2025.

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Introduction

> Yaquis regard deer songs as the most ancient of their verbal art forms. Highly conventionalized in their structure, their diction, their themes, and their mode of performance, deer songs describe a double world, both 'here' and 'over there', a world in which all the actions of the deer dancer have a parallel in that mythic, primeval place called by the Yaquis *sea ania*, flower world. (Evers & Molina, 1987, p. 7, italics in original)

On my tribal identification card, alongside my photo image, personal details and tribal enrolment number, is the drawn and doubled image of a Yaqui deer dancer. The illustration is actually quite complex in its composition. At the top, etched onto the image of a sepia-toned drum, the dancer appears beneath an enlarged image of a mask of the sort that would have been worn by a Pahkola dancer.[1] Superimposed at the bottom of the drum image is the Pascua Yaqui Tribal Seal: vertical blue, white and red stripes, with the image of the dancer centered and framed by the white stripe. The image of the drum, imprinted as it is with the dancer and the mask, seems to be drawn from the pre-colonial past, while the seal itself, with its more photographic effects set into the red, white, and blue of the American flag, seems very much of the post-colonial present. Positioned to the right, taking up almost half the available space on the card, this composite image parallels my photo to the left. It is larger than me – the square, DMV-like image of my face is actually smaller than the surface of the drum – and my own identity, it implies, would be incomplete without it. There are approximately 575 recognized tribal nations across the USA. My tribe is the only one I have seen to feature a dancer in its official representation of my identity. I find it strange that there is more than one image of a traditional Yaqui dancer on a tribal identification card. This fact suggests there is some level of importance to dance in my tribe and I am a dancer. It compels

[1] Pahkola dancers traditionally appear alongside deer dancers in all forms of ceremony and celebration.

me to assume I come from a rich heritage of dance as integral to my American Indian identity and tribal culture.

I am a dancer – lifelong. I am Hiaki.[2] I am an American Indian. I am a full blooded-card-carrying American Indian.[3] I am a traditional and contemporary artist, playwright, filmmaker, dancer, American Indian educator and a university graduate (the first in the history of my family), and now adjunct professor at San Francisco State University, Northeastern University, and College of Marin. I am committed to the revitalization of Native cultural customs and knowledges, for individuals and for communities, both urban and rural, city and reservation. I am committed to the development of a sustainable foundation for American Indians to navigate the distances between our cultural traditions and the contemporary world.

In this PhD thesis, I examine the significant contributions that American Indian dance – whether 'traditional' or 'contemporary' – makes to the cultural and historical narratives of American Indian people. When analyzed from the perspective offered by the disciplines of Dance, Theatre and Performance Studies, our dances can be seen to hold and transmit complex systems of knowledge by performing evolving ideas of American Indian identity – past, present, and future. Springing from my own decades-long experience as a cultural dance practitioner, as a Hiaki and as a scholar, my thesis is designed to work like a dance in the way described by Larry Evers, a non-Native scholar of English literature, and Felipe Molina, an Indigenous practitioner

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[2] The spelling of my tribal identity is variable depending on who is doing the identifying and in what year. My tribe is most commonly known as the Yaqui. Later scholarly work by members of the Yaqui people have established Hiaki as the name to be used formally.

[3] For this thesis, I will use the following terms interchangeably to describe the same people(s): Indigenous, American Indian, Native American, and Native. Tribe and Nation will also be used interchangeably. While each term has been used over the centuries to categorize and describe the original or first peoples of North America (primarily within the United States) for various purposes, it is recognized that each term was created in a language foreign to the Indigenous groups they are attempting to describe; in other words, they are not terms that these groups would necessarily choose to use to describe themselves.

of Yaqui cultural music, in their groundbreaking book: *Yaqui Deer Songs / Maso Bwikam: A Native American Poetry* (1987). While Evers and Molina, writing almost forty years ago, invite us to recognize dance as intrinsic to the survival of Yaqui language and culture, my research goes further to explore the ways American Indian dance, as an embodied performance practice, might be seen to move my people toward survivance and beyond.

Central to this thesis will be a filmed performance that explores and moves toward resolving the question of how dance can be seen to embody a state of being beyond survivance. In this, I am engaging a praxis that Baz Kershaw describes as, "action-based investigations oriented toward practical engagement in the world" (Kershaw, 2009, p. 107). The performance will be presented alongside the exegesis as an outcome of my research how dance – past, present and future – might be seen to embody the construction, maintenance and revision of American Indian identity. That is, the performance I create will be the result of my exploration of the question: if dance historically has served to hold Native American languages and cultures during the long period of colonization and oppression, and if we can see performances of survivance in the work of contemporary Native American dance companies that bring together traditional Indian and European dance practices, then how might dance come to embody something beyond survival and survivance for Native American communities and cultures?

In this thesis, I make use of the lenses of theory, history, my social context(s) and my artistic experiences as a performer to consider how American Indian dance practices and performance expressions might be seen to construct and carry American Indian identity – through the past and present, into future. In particular, as a practitioner-scholar, I make use of Diana Taylor's conceptualization of the 'repertoire' to explore the ways American Indian dance has served to contain and sustain our communities against the prospect of annihilation during the

long history of colonization in the United States. My background as a practitioner frames and informs my analysis of selected examples. My first chapter looks at how American Indian dance has made a significant ongoing contribution to the survival of my people *as* a people. In the second chapter I look at how, in the present day, these dances have come to be intertwined with contemporary dances that feature our traditions in non-traditional frames. In so doing, I will turn to Gerald Vizenor's concept of 'survivance' and the way Chadwick Allen takes up this concept in his analyses of other forms of creative expression. For my final chapter, I apply the critical framework I have thus developed to a close reading of my own creative practice to demonstrate how such performances can go beyond survivance to assert our agency as artists and as a people going forward. To embody the dance is to inscribe an action that is simultaneously dramatic and social, to tell a story from the center of my soul in the company of my ancestors to the people alongside me and for the people watching, and to move all of us together toward future generations of dance and culture. Beyond survivance, we can be free to immerse ourselves in the being of the dance, to be possessed by the invoked spirit, and to make the ancestors present onstage and off.

Literature Review

The body of academic work on American Indian dance is limited. For the most part, what does exist has been produced by scholars and artists who were not members of the communities represented in their research. It also should be noted that much of the scholarship on American Indian dance is by academics outside the fields of Dance, Theatre and Performance Studies – that is, by non-specialists in the art form, academics in such fields as Anthropology, History, Ethnography, Museum Studies, and Religious Studies. In this thesis, therefore, I have been

confronted with the challenge of coming to terms with what has been lost, misunderstood and/or misrepresented. Scholars from differing academic contexts have often translated what they saw, heard, and experienced through systems and tools not designed to see or account for the nuances of the dances they were researching. While building on and respecting what their work brings to my understanding, here I want to ensure that the knowledge I am presenting carries the truth of my own embodied thinking about American Indian dance history, contemporary practices and possibilities for the future.

As I step into the circle of research on American Indian dance, the aim is to bring together this body of research, to identify its gaps and fallacies, and to bring forward new understandings which have the potential both to correct and to build our knowledge of American Indian dance and performing arts. In a scholarly review of *Yaqui Deer Songs: A Native American Poetry*, for the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* (1987), William K. Powers of Rutgers University says:

> Of particular importance is the appearance of Native Americans not as objects of study, but as the students and interpreters of their own multitudinous and diverse cultures and histories. In the process, anthropology and history are partly swept into the shadows, but not totally since much of the new literature continues to interpolate and extrapolate, embellish and obfuscate, enrich and subordinate many of the ideas and the academic past, giving old concepts a newly-suited texture revitalized by an experiential present. (Powers, 1987, p. 128)

This thesis begins with a critical review of the research available in Performance Studies, Dance Studies, and American Indian Studies on the topic of American Indian dance and arts. In addition, I will be utilizing my own lived experience as a Hiaki artist, doing a deep analysis of my engagement in both traditional and contemporary American Indian dance arts and performance for over 40 years.

My analysis of the selected case studies relies, in the first instance, on the performance theories and methodological frameworks established by Diana Taylor in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), building as well on the concepts articulated by Victor Turner in *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982) and in *The Anthropology of Performance* (1987). Just as importantly, I weave into the research an exploration of the concept of survivance in theory and practice, building on Gerald Vizenor's influential books *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1999) and *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (2009). At the same time, I will be relying on the thinking of Chadwick Allen in *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (2002). My thesis also builds on the foundational work of non-Indigenous Dance scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy in *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (2007) as well as her more recent book, *Dancing Indigenous Worlds: Choreographies of Relation* (2022).

In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), Diana Taylor examines the ways that cultural knowledge is held and transmitted, especially in Indigenous and American Indian communities. Taylor argues that while what is recorded and stored in archives is essential, the knowledge that is performed in rituals, celebrations, and ceremonies – that is, the 'repertoire' – is vital to sustaining cultural and communal histories and identities over time. In Taylor's words:

> "Archival" memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change. Archive, from the Greek, etymologically refers to "a public building," "a place where records are kept." (p. 19)

She recognizes the value in archiving written and photographic records of performance. However, she tells us, we must consider the sources of those records, which were largely

assembled during periods of conquest and colonization. As such, we must also consider their implications and effects, especially insofar as they position the practices and cultures held therein as of the past, not the present. She says: "As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and trans-forms choreographies of meaning" (p. 20). That the hyphen in 'trans-forms' can be seen as intentional in the original further licenses my own thinking that our dances are not locked into historical, colonial frames, but rather essential to the work of embodying possibilities beyond the colonial. This is important, because, as Taylor tell us: "Even though the archive and the repertoire exist in a constant state of interaction, the tendency has been to banish the repertoire to the past" (p. 21). Taylor thus offers a pathway from the popular image of American Indian performance, which is most often stuck in the 19th century and held in archival materials, to the lived experiences of contemporary performers and communities, my own included.

Taylor's focus is on cultural practices and performances from traditional cultural groups of the Americas – primarily Latino cultures. She begins by inscribing her own journey in a way that will serve as a model for my own research here. Taylor argues:

> We learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices. Performance, for me, functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis. (p. xvi)

Following Taylor, I can assert that the traditional practices of culture reflect the belief systems and environment of a people who will include new ways of representing the natural changes of their worldview, as well as find new ways to perform that narrative. Her conceptualization of the repertoire allows me, as an artist and an academic whose practice is devoted both to preserving and to expanding my cultural knowledge via dance, to move beyond the archive, which has devalued the importance of what is created by artists whose performances have embodied

practice/knowledge while engaging with their communities in the present tense. My thesis seeks to restore and re-center the work of performing artists. Taylor reminds us:

> Those who had dedicated their lives to mastering cultural practices, such as carving masks or playing music, were not considered "experts," a designation reserved for book-learned scholars. While the Church substituted its own performatic practices, the neophytes could no longer lay claims to expertise or tradition to legitimate their authority. (p. 19)

I take inspiration from Diana Taylor, whose perspective on performance seeks to define the 'post' in the postcolonial: "Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it" (p. 20). As a practicing performer, whose dances have survived centuries of colonization and repression, I also recognize that my thesis will necessarily become part of the archive. At the same time, by exploring the repertoire of American Indian dance, in theory and practice, as it has also been woven into more contemporary, non-Native dance practices, I want to mark our survivance – that is, the livingness of our traditions – and to point us to something beyond that.

Gerald Vizenor developed the concept of survivance in relation to what is commonly referred to as the "Indian Renaissance" – a term referencing the emergence of several key artists working in fine arts and literature in the 1960s and 1970s. Vizenor is critical of the historical treatment of Native arts, literature and culture, in particular of the ways non-Native anthropologists relegated the traditional practices of Native communities to archives. Like Taylor, he is critical of the archive, which he views part of the colonial enterprise and, as such, as an ideological instrument for enforcing non-Native ideas of Native authenticity. In his book, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1999), Vizenor writes:

> Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry. (p. vii)

Vizenor is an enrolled member of the Anishinaabe people, a prolific writer, and a Professor in American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley (now retired). His scholarship has profoundly influenced how American Indian literature and art is understood in academic and social contexts. This thesis will be extending his views of the ways American Indian literature and art can be read as expressions of survivance to the analysis of American Indian dance as both a repository for cultural knowledge over time and a political act. Vizenor makes room for the exploration of his concept, telling us:

> Theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and by catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and cultural company. (*Native Liberty*, 2009, p.85)

For Vizenor

> Survivance is a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or a theory. The theory is earned by interpretations, the critical construal of survivance in creative literature, and by narratives of cause and natural reason. (*Native Liberty*, 2009, p. 89)

As Vizenor suggests, the way we define and practice survivance is a process and a way of understanding. In this thesis, I take up Vizenor's challenge to explore the performance of survivance in contemporary American Indian dance.

The work of Chadwick Allen is also key to my research. Of Chickasaw descent, Allen is a Professor in the Department of English, Adjunct Professor of American Indian Studies, and Co-Director of the Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies at the University of Washington. In *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Māori Literary and Activist Texts* (2002), he begins by explaining the way the title interweaves ideas of racial identity (blood) and narrative (memory), asking "How might we now distinguish between acts of complicity with dominant power and acts of contestation?" (p. 70). His work in *Blood Narrative* is well aligned with that of Vizenor and Taylor, as he shows how the embodiment of cultural

practice takes Indigenous peoples beyond the archived narrative into the active living memory. Allen says:

> In the broadest sense, this study investigates the construction of indigeneity within the context of deep and enduring settler colonization. More specifically, it analyzes a number of the Narrative tactics developed by writers and activists who self-identify as American Indian or New Zealand Māori to mark their identities as persistently distinctive from those of dominant European-descended settlers and as irrevocably rooted in the particular lands these writers, activists, and their communities continue to call home. (p. 13)

In *Blood Narrative*, Allen suggests that while Indigenous communities can retain their traditional practices, there are often tensions created between older and younger generations. Like Taylor, Allen considers the problem of the archive and its impact on the way people would historically have access to their own traditional cultural identities and practices. In his words:

> Given this context of political conservatism, it seems fair to ask, "To what degree were indigenous minority writers and activists able to resist pressures to promote assimilation? Which discursive forms were most productive for advocating indigenous distinctiveness and indigenous opposition?" (p. 70)

To explore possible answers to these questions, he looks at the radical movements of the 1940s and 1950s by Indigenous writers for the potential of their improvisational and transitive discursive practices – that is, for how Māori and Native American authors activated their texts through processes of experimentation independent of conventional structure.

I will be applying several concepts from Victor Turner's work, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982) in support of my investigation into how modern Native American dance traditions developed, and how they act as performances that can be seen to construct and represent ideas of Native American identity. I turn to Turner for his foundational work and perspective as a cultural anthropologist on ritual and cultural performance.[4] Turner

[4] See also other works by Turner, including: *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969)*, Performing Ethnography,* (with Edith Turner) (1982)*,* and *The Anthropology of Performance* (1988)*.*

identifies the connections between ritual, play, and theatre as they relate to the performative nature of human cultures. This thesis is reliant on Turner for ways of understanding how, for Indigenous peoples such as American Indians, rituals are not merely symbolic acts but are essential to maintaining "cultural dynamic systems, shedding and gathering meaning over time and altering in form" (p. 22). Of particular interest for the thesis are Turnerian concepts such as communitas, social drama, and liminality. Turner defines communitas, in part, as the sense of shared experience and collective unity of a group of people; in his words, the "modality of human interrelatedness" (p. 45). It is a state of being where individuals transcend their individual identities and become part of a larger, unified whole. How might Native American performance practices – from powwows to dance theatres – be seen to construct and provoke a sense of communitas for participants, both those performing and those watching? Turner defines communitas in this way:

> The liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as family, lineage, clan, tribe, nation, etc. (p. 44)

How, then, might the ways Native American dance practices, past and present, through their invocation of communitas also be seen to move participants through the stages of survival and survivance to something beyond?

Central to this thesis, also, is Turner's framing of the concept of liminality, the transitional phase in a rite of passage, for which he relies, in large part, on Arnold van Gennep in his work, *Les Rites de Passage* (1908). Following van Gennep, Turner elaborates on the definition of liminality as "the intervening phase of transition" in this way:

> The passage from one social status to another is often accompanied by a parallel passage in space, a geographical movement from one place to another. This may

> take the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject's pre-ritual or preliminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or postliminal status. (Turner, 1982, p. 25)

For this thesis, these understandings are useful in making sense of the ways dance – whether 'traditional' or 'contemporary' – can be seen, in the postcolonial frame, to offer a more open, mediatory, transitional or even transformational space for participants. In Turner's words:

> Just as when tribesmen make masks, disguise themselves as monsters, heap up disparate ritual symbols, invert or parody profane reality in myths and folktales, so do the genres of industrial leisure, the theatre, poetry, novel, ballet, film, sport, rock music, classical music, art, pop art, etc., play with factors of culture, sometimes assembling them in random, grotesque, improbable, surprising, shocking, usually experimental combinations. (p. 40)

What is of special interest for this thesis as I develop a way of performing that takes us past survival and beyond survivance, is Turner's proposal for a more radical state of being, the liminoid, which he identifies as an "independent domain of creative activity" that, instead of culminating in a return to the status quo ante, might be perpetuated in everyday life (p. 33). That is, if the liminal in performance can be seen as a way of affirming or even restoring the dominant culture, then the liminoid offers the possibility of ongoing change. For this thesis, then, the question becomes how might Native American dance step into this more radical space, a space of performative and perhaps socially transformative possibility?

Turner sets his discussion of communitas, the liminal and the liminoid, into the framework of what he terms Social Drama: a structured progression that sees communities moving through stages of breach, crisis, redress and reintegration or recognition of ongoing schism (p. 69). The driving force of Social Drama is generally toward restoration of the status quo ante, which communities enact through ritual or ritual-like mechanisms and experience as a kind of communitas – or surfeit of shared feeling – which is more often ideological than

spontaneous. My thesis considers how dance as performed first during the long period of colonial duress and into present times, might be seen as a way of embodying Social Drama and provoking the experience of communitas. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1977), Turner says: "Social structure is intimately connected with history, because it is the way a group maintains its form over time. Structureless communitas can bind and bond people together only momentarily" (Turner, 1977, p. 153). The question then arises, how might a Native American performance practice, such as powwow, be seen to create an experience of communitas that is both anti-colonial and sustainable over time – that is, more liminoid than liminal and as such carrying a more radical social effect? My thesis will be looking at how, in Turner's words: "The experience of communitas becomes the memory of communitas, with the result that communitas itself is striving to replicate itself historically develops a social structure" (Turner, 1982, p. 47). How might a performance practice like powwow, which has its roots in the 19th century and continues to be experienced by communities across North American in the 21st century, along with more contemporary dance productions that incorporate what might be seen as 'traditional' Native dance practices, be seen to carry forward the memory of communitas? In so doing, how might these dances be seen to embody survivance as well as survival? That is, how might our understanding of communitas be expanded in the context of Native American dance to include the enactment of survivance itself?

This thesis is necessarily reliant on two books by Jacqueline Shea Murphy, who is one of the few scholars writing in the area of Native American dance history and contemporary performance. Shea Murphy's perspective is that of an outsider – she is not herself Native – who has nonetheless deeply immersed herself for many years in embodied research, witnessing performances, participating in workshops and putting herself in conversation with the artists

whose voices she weaves into and increasingly foregrounds in her published work. *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing: Native American Modern Dance Histories* (2007) is a crucial text that not only exposes and interrogates the uses to which the archive has been put, but also critically challenges the ways with which American Indian dance has been engaged and portrayed by non-Native academics and others. Her more recent book, *Dancing Indigenous Worlds: Choreographies of Relation* (2022), presents her exploration of contemporary dance making by Māori, Aboriginal and Native American choreographers.

My analysis turns first to *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing* for the way Shea Murphy makes extensive, detailed use of archival records to uncover the history of Native American dance as it persisted through the long period of colonial suppression. Where her focus is primarily on how the dances survived, my thesis looks further to how the survival of the dances served to sustain our cultural knowledges and practices. Shea Murphy tells us:

> Indigenous dancers' bodies, despite the physical effects of colonization, are a location of ways of being and knowing, held in bodies and everyday movements. And movement practices – including contemporary movement practices – are a tool for locating and unearthing these ways of knowing. (pp. 9-10)

The People Have Never Stopped Dancing is a particularly useful resource for my first chapter in which I will examine how the dances we perform at powwow emerged at the margins of the Wild West Show and have come to embody the survival of Native American cultures. Shea Murphy asks: "How I wondered, did Native American dancers and choreographers themselves engage with the stage"? (Shea Murphy, 2007, p. 3). Her analyses of the way non-Native choreographers took up these practices to produce some of the most influential avant-garde dance works of the 20th century will give me a starting place also for understanding how more contemporary Native American choreographers might be seen to be working in much the same way.

As a dance historian, Shea Murphy situates her research within an ethnographic frame, emphasizing the importance of an emic perspective when discussing the cultural values embodied in Native American performance practices. Much of what she writes, from her position as an outsider, indeed resonates with my own perspective as an insider. For Shea Murphy:

> Some dancers and choreographers talked about the transformations they experience on stage when dancing as animals or other beings. Others talked about dance as a way of connecting with ancestral practices and ancestors and of their bodies as sites of blood memory accessed through danced exploration. I began to hear its meaning in a very particular, practical, and political way, related to a particular history of land loss, to the keeping hidden of documented practices, the taking underground of ceremonies and dances. (p. 9)

She examines the relationship between notable Native American dancers and non-Native artists who used their work as a basis for their own modern dance experiments. For example, her explorations of performances by Tom Two Arrows in the earlier part of the 20th century, the American Indian Dance Theatre of the 80s and 90s, and later Dancing Earth show us how the stage was set for the emergence of what we see now as American Indian modern dance.

Shea Murphy gives voice to the problematics of relying on archival knowledge, especially for the way research in this area has led to troubling assertions of 'authority' and 'authenticity' in the evaluation of American Indian dance practices. She observes:

> This policing of Native religious ceremonial dancing as fake and the simultaneous promotion of real Indians dancing in arenas…sought to do the work that more direct attempts at imposing Christian ideology had done in previous decades: control and contain its force and effect. (p. 54)

My thesis takes Shea Murphy's critique of what she finds in the archive, while also taking advantage of the understandings she brings to the surface in her analyses of the ritual and ceremonial dances recorded therein and her explorations of the ways

choreographers – both Native and not – have incorporated such practices into modern dance performances.

In her recent work, *Dancing Indigenous Worlds: Choreographies of Relation* (2022), Shea Murphy focuses on contemporary performances by Indigenous dancers. She juxtaposes her accounts of experiences of dance performances and workshops – as a participant-observer – in North America, Aotearoa and Australia against the voices of the artists themselves, so that the book appears to model the relationality that she is discussing throughout. Of particular interest for this thesis are her descriptions of performances and workshops with Dancing Earth and her dialogues with Rulan Tangen. No longer bound by the archive, here Shea Murphy makes her case for Indigenous dance as a critical practice of continuity and relationality. She focuses on ways Indigenous choreographers build their work in a liminal space between tradition and innovation, thus creating connections with their environments – political and geographical – through assertions of identity and acts of resistance.

My thesis necessarily must address the problematics of what we refer to commonly as "tradition" in relation to Native American cultural dance. In this, I am relying on Rustom Bharucha's "Notes on the Invention of Tradition" (1989).[5] Bharucha, who is Indian from India, describes performance practices by urban Indian artists and choreographers that changed in the 19th century after "mediations through the intervention and assimilation of 'foreign' structures of representation" (Bharucha, 1989, p. 1907). He explains changes in Indian performance as "invented" "in response to larger political, economic, and social factors" (p. 1907). "An atmosphere is constructed whereby 'the Indian tradition' is affirmed, not necessarily as people in India would understand it, but as our government would like to represent it to the world" (p.

[5] Bharucha is writing his essay in response to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's influential book, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983).

1907). He goes on to outline how the identification of traditional performance practices as "traditional" can be seen, in effect, to re-inscribe the effects of colonization:

> The point to be stressed here is that our 'tradition' had already been mediated by the colonial machinery of the nineteenth-century theatre, the conventions and stage tricks derived from the pantomimes and historical extravaganzas of the English Victorian stage. (p. 1907)

Bharucha's critique is directed toward the way certain performance practices were elevated and codified in response to the long period of English colonial rule. The application of Bharucha's "Notes" to my analysis of what has been termed "traditional" in the performance of powwow, in particular, will be complicated by my understanding that the history of colonization was different to a large degree in North America. At heart, though, both in Bharucha's argument and my analysis, is his observation that:

> In such spaces, the performers invariably fail to represent themselves. Rather, they are represented by the environments themselves, and by all the values – political, social, commercial – embodied in them. This does not mean that traditional performers should not perform in these 'alien' spaces, but new mechanisms and relationships need to be explored whereby performers have more time and power to control their representations. (pp. 1908-09)

As my thesis progresses, I will be keeping in mind Bharucha's critical view of the way "tradition" has been performed in India:

> In contrast, most experiments of "tradition" in the contemporary Indian theatre have merely borrowed a stock of techniques and conventions, which have been recycled in a rather facile and decorative manner. Though many of our "tradition-inspired" and "folk" productions have been entertaining and visually pleasing, they have totally failed, in my view, to contextualise their borrowings in a responsible manner. (p. 1912)

While it might be easy to reduce the performances of tradition at powwow to their most "entertaining and visually pleasing" aspects, I am hoping to lift into view the cultural and political work that these performances have done over time. How might the invention of tradition in the Native American frame have served as part of a strategy for survival – both in

acclimatizing colonial powers to diverse tribal practices and in providing a platform for the maintenance of these practices by their practitioners?

Dr. Te Rita Papesch a prominent Māori scholar, who is highly respected for her long history as a performer, composer, judge and commentator of Kapa Haka – the Māori performing arts practice that has come to be seen as 'traditional' – takes on Bharucha's critique of the concept of 'tradition' in her PhD thesis, "Creating a Modern Māori Identity through Kapa Haka" (2015). From Papesch's perspective, that Kapa Haka is an "invented tradition" is a positive and necessary development in the ongoing fight to value, restore and sustain Māori language and cultural practices in postcolonial Aotearoa New Zealand. For Papesch, the practice of Kapa Haka provides a case study in how an Indigenous people can make use of performance as a kind of "tūrangawaewae" – a place to stand, or a point of return, a home place – that provides a kind of continuity with the past and a platform for debating what the future might hold. She says:

> Not having an ongoing connection to home; without access to ongoing functions on their marae [gathering or meeting place] or tūrangawaewae where people can put into practice being and doing Māori; they turn instead to Kapa Haka to provide a basis whereby they can express themselves as Māori. (p. 25)

There are, of course, substantial differences between Aotearoa and the Americas in how colonization unfolded, and the postcolonial environment in which I am working in is unlike Papesch's. Nonetheless, like Papesch, who takes an insider position as a theorist/practitioner in Māori performing arts, I am also, in this thesis, working between my experiences as an Indigenous performing artist and a more formal, scholarly perspective to examine American Indian dance, especially in relation to larger political, economic, and social factors throughout history. In this way, Papesch's thesis and subsequent publications serve as a model for my research.

Papesch is making a case for the success of Kapa Haka, from the first festival in 1972 to the present day, in going beyond providing a platform for the survival of Māori language and culture. She argues that Kapa Haka has played a serious political role, ensuring:

> What we see on the stage is, in effect, now what underlies and empowers what we see when we see Māori people on the sidewalk (or really in Parliament and regional government), in schools and universities, in shops and in sports…and on television. (p. 29)

Following Papesch, while still respecting Bharucha's critique of the idea of "tradition" in the postcolonial context, I will be looking at how American Indian dance practices – beginning with powwow, and also when referring to ceremony and fancy dance – which are often referred to as "traditional" can be seen to contribute to the survival of our language(s) and culture(s). How, also, might the idea of "traditional" when attached to American Indian dance as it moves from powwow, ceremony and fancy dance onto other stages – for example, those of American Indian Dance Theatre and Dancing Earth – come both to represent ideas of survival and survivance while perhaps inhibiting further creative development?

Further research in literature includes Bethany Hughes' *Redface: Race, Performance and Indigeneity (2024),* where Hughes discusses the process in which artists and audiences make up the legible "Indian." Hughes examines how the use of redface as the "Stage Indian" in American theater racialized American Indian people and naturalized their place in history. Also included is Philip J. Deloria's *Playing Indian (2022),* where Deloria offers insight to the appropriation of the Native American identity in dress, language, and ritual by non-Natives. Laura Harjo's *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity (2019)* includes narratives of being and doing from the voices and experiences of the Mvskoke Creek people themselves. It goes on to describe and consider the future of traditional practices by the Mvskoke Creek community and considers indigenous futurities.

There are other articles that have been reviewed and have, in my opinion, been valuable in my understanding the research done by scholars to inform my knowledge.[6] However, my focus has been to see how a dancer who might be considered a master artist of the art form they practice or perform finds their way to continue that practice in modern times.

One example of artists participating in their customs in modern creative practices that stands out as a reference is Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal in *Te Whare Tapere: Towards a New Model for Māori Performance Art* (1998), and is also the focus of his dissertation.[7] Royal looks at the traditional pre-European Māori storytelling houses and asks, "can we construct a modern version of this historical form called a whare tapere? What would it look like and what are the implications and issues" (Royal, 2012, n.p.).[8] These questions form a similar basis to my approach an interest in how our American Indian dances can be shaped to fit modern performance spaces.

Design of the study/Methodology

This thesis is grounded in the field of dance and performance studies, using the approach modelled by Diana Taylor in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas (2003). Taylor's focus on the question of how "expressive behavior (performance) transmit[s] cultural memory and identity" (xvi) provides me with a basis for exploring how American Indian dance can be seen as a performance of embodied knowledge through which significant ideas of culture and identity are transmitted across generations. In this exegesis and*

[6] See also: Harjo, L. (2019). *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity*. Hughes, B. (2024). *Red Face: Race, Performance, and Indigeneity*. Deloria, P. (2022). *Playing Indian*. Mumford, M. (2016). Naadmaagewin… The Art of Working Together in Our Comunnities.
[7] See more: https://charles-royal.myshopify.com/products/te-whare-tapere-towards-a-new-model-for-maori-performance-art?variant=2926205187
[8] From Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga. https://maramatanga.ac.nz/node/1603?page=1

in the performance, I am adhering to Taylor's assertion that performance "functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply as an object of analysis" (xvi). Taylor's approach to performance research is intrinsically political, because, in her words: "If performance did not transmit knowledge, only the literate and powerful could claim social memory and identity" (xvii). My thesis will follow Taylor's central research questions:

> If, however, we were to reorient the ways social memory and cultural identity in the Americas have traditionally been studied, with the disciplinary emphasis on literary and historical documents, and look through the lens of performed, embodied behaviors, what would we know that we do not know now? Whose stories, memories, and struggles might become visible? What tensions might performance behaviors show that would not be recognized in texts and documents? (xviii)

How, that is, might American Indian dance across the generations be seen to have contained and transmitted vital understandings of tribal languages and cultures in pursuance of the survival of our peoples? How might the dance now be expressive of what Vizenor and others have termed 'survivance' and how might I conceive of, create and perform a dance that carries these understandings to something that might be seen as 'beyond survivance'?

My approach takes inspiration from the way Taylor includes her personal narrative and applies her explorations of the way her Mexican American identity has shaped her understanding of diverse North and South American ethnic and indigenous communities. I will build my analysis from the historical contexts of the dances within the dance academic canon and case studies of popular American Indian dances today. More specifically, I will be using Diana Taylor's conceptualization of the 'repertoire' to explore the ways American Indian dance has served in the past to preserve, construct and sustain our communities against the prospect of annihilation during the long history of colonization. Keeping Taylor's conceptualization of 'the archive' in mind, I also seek to find how American Indian dance has been described and codified

by scholars historically, and how that scholarship has come to inform both academic and artistic, Indigenous and not-so, thinking about what American Indian dance has become. Within the discipline of performance studies and the values of being a participant, I am applying my experience and reflections as a cultural artist and dancer to the work of performance analysis. From this analysis, I will then build the framework for the dance to be performed as an outcome of my research. It will form the basis of creating the dance as being beyond survivance. Importantly, it informs the way we as cultural dance practitioners can transform and shape evolving traditions.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter of this exegesis, "Survival," looks at how American Indian dance was practiced and those practices preserved during the long years that it was banned by the US government. Chapter One takes a largely historical view. I begin by examining the claim that what we do at powwow has origins on the grounds of the Wild West shows of the late 19th century, most famously coming to be practiced on the sidelines of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World* (1890-1900). How is it possible that what we call "traditional" in the dances we perform at powwow – dances that have been essential to the maintenance of tribal languages, cultures and identities – emerged as part of spectacles that so degraded the image of the American Indian for non-Indian audiences?

In my next chapter, "Survivance," I look at how, in the present day, the dances from the past have come to be intertwined with contemporary dances that feature Native traditions in non-traditional frameworks and spaces. I begin by examining the repertoire of the American Indian Dance Theatre for the way they appear to preserve and project "traditional" performance

practices onto the contemporary postcolonial stage. Central to this chapter is an analysis of the work of Dancing Earth led by founding artistic director Rulan Tangen. Based in California, Dancing Earth was established in 2004 as a primarily American Indian modern dance company, and over time has come to integrate other Indigenous dance practices in their choreographies. This thesis considers how Dancing Earth's performances make use of American Indian imagery, symbolism, and movement in a modern dance frame, and how, in so doing, such dances might attach ideas of survivance to their representations of American Indian-ness for primarily non-Native audiences.

For my final chapter, "Beyond Survivance", I consider the performances of Supaman (Christian Parrish Takes the Gun), a Native dancer and rapper who, for over ten years as an artist has held true to his traditions in his dancing and knowledge base while intersecting those dances by performing them to modern hip hop music. How might performances by young artists such as Supaman allow us to envision ways of being and doing as Native Americans that can be seen to be beyond survivance? This is the question I ask also of my own experimental performances, for example as "Eclipse" at Coachella in 2016. Using modern regalia to conceal my true identity I become something more than a powwow dancer in costume.

In the dance, I am more than the survival of the people; I celebrate survival in our way. As Hilary N. Weaver suggests in the article "Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who Really Has It?" (2001), "Cultural identity is not static; rather, it progresses through developmental stages during which an individual has a changing sense of who he or she is, perhaps leading to a rediscovered sense of being Native" (p. 244). In this way, the performance insists on more than just carrying on; it is spiritual and tangible and can transmit beyond barriers. Evers and Molina,

in *Yaqui Deer Song/Maso Bwikam* (1998), describe the deer dancer in a similar space, being able to achieve transmission in otherwise unlikely ways:

> The dancers' ability to suggest the movements of a deer can be astonishing and mesmerizing. Nevertheless, the dancer can only move to the music of the deer singers. Their water drum is said to represent his heartbeat, their raspers his breathing, their words his voice. Through their song, he becomes the real deer person. (p.73)

I propose to demonstrate my repertoire and knowledge of ceremonial dances that stem from the historical practices of those that have come before me. The reflections from the work of the thesis will set the stage for the performance I am offering as the culmination of my research. I will be expressing what I embody as a Yaqui and an American Indian powwow dancer beyond survivance during my performance.

Chapter One - Survival

When I was in my teens in the late 1980s at a powwow in Manteca, California, one of my elders, Tom Phillips, told me that powwows originated from the Wild West shows. Wild West shows, he said, are where we got the Grand Entry and the modern style additions to the dances we do today. How could it be, I thought then and still wonder, that the performance stage of the Wild West shows could have made such a contribution to the survival of American Indian dance and culture? A powwow is a gathering of American Indian people who dance and sing for and with other American Indian people, and while tourists are invited to attend, they are generally kept to the sidelines as elements of Indianness are celebrated. The Wild West show, which dates from the late 19th century, was a spectacle for non-Natives to watch hired Indians shoot arrows and fall off horses when 'shot' by cowboys. At Wild West shows, American Indians were made to act, that is, in spectacles aimed toward showing the victory of cowboys and settlers over the savages who never stood a chance. As far as I could see, there was none of the dancing that celebrates the languages and cultures of Native Americans at the Wild West show. And yet, I was told, this is where it started. This chapter will look for the connections between Wild West shows and powwows, and consider how powwows past and present have served to support the survival of American Indian identity and culture throughout the past century plus of oppression.

The man who told me about powwows having originated in the Wild West shows, Tom Phillips, is Kiowa. Kiowas are from the Plains region of the United States, from which the styles of dance commonly seen in powwows originate. He was my elder. He was and is still highly regarded for his knowledge of the dance and culture. Respecting him, I believed that what he said must be true. But even so, I was troubled by this idea. How is it possible that such a well-

known anti-Indian performance practice could have provided the grounds for the emergence of powwow as a platform for maintaining the viability of American Indian languages and cultures? Powwow was, and continues to be a powerful resource – a reservoir and repertoire for the survival of my people. The Wild West show is not that. Being so troubled even more as I think about it now, I went looking for the history.

Dances Under Duress

This chapter begins with an examination of the banning of American Indian dances, and the written and visual records of the Wild West shows, placing the Cowboys-and-Indians spectacle in to its social context while seeking signs of the practices that became powwow. This chapter will also go on to say how other stages needed to be found on which these practices could continue to be performed without legal consequences. I will look at the formal histories as they have been written by non-Native academics and others, before turning to the memoirs of the dancers themselves. Following my analysis of the ways American Indians were seen to represent themselves in Wild West shows and their ways of performing for each other when not on show for non-Native audiences, I will look at contemporary powwow practices to see how what happens now can be said to have its roots in the Wild West show. Throughout this chapter I will hold close to my belief that the powwow's pan-tribal coming together and sharing of performance is central to the continuing survival of knowledge of who we are as Native Americans.

The effort to ban American Indian dances can be seen expressed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Hiram Price who writes in his Annual Report (10 October 1882): "If we expect to stop sun dances, snake worship, and other debasing forms of superstition and idolatry among

Indians, we must teach them some better way" (p. 158).[9] The intention was to remove their "primitive and pagan practices" in order to "civilize" the Indian. This meant Native people could not retain sacred or religious rituals and traditions in plain sight of authorities. Dances were integral to the sacred and religious practices, and in losing the dances they also risked losing their cultural identities. As Jacqueline Shea Murphy states in *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing* (2007):

> Indigenous dance practices embodied ideologies counter to those the governments were corporally enforcing. Dance practices and gatherings threatened assimilation policies based on classroom education and literacy, as they affirmed the importance of history told not in writing or even words, but rather bodily. Praying through bodily movement and ritual practice rather than through sitting, reading, and believing threatened colonizers' notions of how spirituality manifested. (p. 31)

The law banning Indian dances is formally called "Courts of Indian Offenses" (1883); this policy has also been known by American Indian people as the Indian Religious Crimes Code because it referred to illegal acts such as dances that were performed for the purpose of religious practices (Prucha, 1990, p. 160).[10] The courts on reservations had Indian judges, so discipline and punishment would be set by Indians themselves – albeit Christianized, or at least "civilized" Indians (p. 160). In a letter to the United States Government urging the formation of the law, the Secretary of the Interior Henry Moore Teller says:

> I desire to call your attention to what I regard as a great hinderance to the civilization of the Indians, viz, the continuance of the old heathenish dances, such as the sun-dance, scalp-dance, &c. These dances, or feasts as they are sometimes called, ought, in my judgement, to be discontinued, and if the Indians now supported by the Government are not willing to discontinue them, the agents should be instructed to compel such discontinuance. (p. 160)

[9] As cited in Prucha, F. P. (Ed.). (1990). *Documents of the United States Indian Policy*.
[10] See Barclay and Steele, "Rethinking Protections for Indigenous Sacred Sites" (2021) in Harvard Law Review, v. 134, n. 4 (p.1307)

The efforts to enforce the prohibition against Indian dances can be seen, for example, in the "Rules for Indian Courts" (1892). As issued by Teller, these "Rules" included the following statement: "Any Indian who shall engage in the sun dance, scalp dance, or war dance, or any other similar feast…shall be deemed guilty of an offense…and shall be punished" (Prucha, p. 187). The "Rules" included penalties for those who danced regardless, including the withholding of rations and imprisonment "for not less than ten nor more than thirty days" (Prucha, p. 187). If by law it was illegal for American Indian people to practice the dances mentioned above, then I assume it was imperative to find ways for the people of the tribes to retain their cultural practices. The American Indian had to be determined and creative to carry on dance and cultural practices. The opportunity was found in an unusual way – through performing in the Wild West show.

Wild West Shows

According to Eric Rossborough, the idea for the original Wild West shows first arose in 1872, when Ned Buntline, a popular fiction writer, discussed his idea for a theatre play with Bill Cody, a scout for the U.S. Army:

> At length, in the fall of 1872, Cody and a friend, Texas Jack, arrived in Chicago, where they met Buntline and a theatre promoter. Buntline was supposed to furnish scouts, along with twenty "real Indians," along with a play. Buntline had the scouts, but no Indians, and no play. It was Thursday, and the play was supposed to open on Monday. (Rossborough, 2023 n.p.)

Rossborough tells us the play written by Buntline was titled *The Scouts of the Prairie*. They didn't get real American Indians but paid twenty unemployed actors and an Italian female dancer to play the Indians. Rossborough says that Cody and Texas Jack were first-time actors who didn't remember their lines so Buntline, who also played a character, would continue to ask questions

of the actors to which they would respond according to what they saw fit in the moment (Rossborough, 2023 n.p.). According to Rossborough, the play was a flop from the perspective of the critics, but it proved a popular draw to audiences and toured the East Coast for two years, including a Broadway debut at Niblo's Garden. According to Matthew Kerns' *The Dime Library* website, a reviewer writing for the *New York Daily Herald* said:

> To describe the play and its reception is alike impossible. The applause savored of derision, and the derision of applause. Everything was so wonderfully bad that it was almost good. The whole performance was so far outside of human experience, so wonderful in its daring feebleness, that no ordinary intellect is capable of comprehending it—that no ordinary mortal can discuss it at any length with good taste and good temper. (Kerns, 2023 n.p.)

This attempt at a Wild West performance on stage neglected the American Indian presence, yet it was successful in that its popularity drew the attention of audiences. It can be argued that creators of the Wild West show took inspiration for their crowd-pleasing spectacles from the way audiences responded to the display of cowboys and Indians in this play.

The platform provided by the Wild West show was one of the only places the dances by the participating tribes could be practiced without consequences. According to Paul Fees of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, a museum in Cody, Wyoming, the first "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" show opened on May 19, 1883 at Omaha, Nebraska – just five weeks after the Courts of Indian Offenses had outlawed Indian dances.[11] These first shows would be performed at large outdoor areas such as rodeo arenas with the intent to bring live demonstrations of horsemanship and battle re-enactments to life for large non-Native audiences. Fees goes on to state that the Buffalo Bill's Wild West show had one hundred American Indian men, women, and children as performers. Because the dancers came from diverse tribal groups, there was probably an early

[11] See more on the website: https://centerofthewest.org/learn/western-essays/wild-west-shows/

pan-tribal mixing and matching that can be seen to have developed into something new over the subsequent century into something like the performances one sees at powwow.

Rita G. Napier writes on the various times American Indian people were visitors to Europe, how they shared their culture as spectacles for artists, or on other occasions share with journalists their treatment in the United States.[12] Napier looks at why Indians might have chosen to participate in the Wild West shows. She says:

> One of the more bizarre causes for joining the show grew out of the Ghost Dance and the conflict at Wounded Knee, 1890-91. The army placed one hundred Sioux prisoners in Buffalo Bill's custody to become actors in the show on the 1891-92 tour of Europe. (p. 385)

Napier shows that Indians chose to become performers for the Wild West show as an alternative to prison or isolation on a small patch of land without resources while being watched by U.S. military soldiers. The American Indian participants who danced were performing and practicing their traditions during the most oppressive of times – sustaining what may have otherwise been lost.

The Sioux prisoners, including those who had taken part in the Ghost Dance, Wounded Knee, and other assaults on American citizens, would have been considered hostiles. As such they were prevented from practicing their traditional rituals and ceremonies, but as Wild West show performers they could now participate in dances legally and avoid prison sentences. In choosing to perform in the show these prisoners were taking steps to ensure both their physical survival and the survival of their cultural, ritual and ceremonial practices. In *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003), Diana Taylor says:

> The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the

[12] As cited in Feest, C. F. (Ed.). (1999). *Indians & Europe.*

> repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and trans-forms choreographies of meaning. (p. 20)

In Taylor's terms, the prisoners who chose to perform in the Wild West shows did so in ways that allowed them to build a new repertoire from the old – that is, their performances allowed them to share and preserve their original cultural practices and became the basis for the practices we see now in powwow.

Stephanie Fox Knappe provides confirmation of where the American Indian participants were sourced:

> Approximately thirty Indians who had survived the massacre at Wounded Knee and were considered hostile were sent on tour with the Wild West in lieu of a prison sentence. Their participation in simulated assaults against emblems of civilization, such as the iconic emigrant wagon train or settler's cabin, was key to the safe yet stimulating thrills the exhibition offered, while their demonstrations of ceremonial dances and displays of aspects of daily life both in the arena and on the grounds were essential to its educational mission. (p. 79)[13]

What can be understood is that the performers embodied their cultural practices, like dance during this period of constraint and pressure. Performance served as an alternative to prison or execution or continued isolation on small patches of land without resources to support their own communities. American Indians were allowed to perform cultural practices in the most degraded of performance environments – the Wild West show – and the most oppressive of times. The Wild West show allowed American Indian people to perform, practice and sustain traditions – ways of being and doing – that might otherwise have been lost.

Melissa Sims says: "Native American customs, traditions, and native languages were encouraged in Wild West shows" (p. 102).[14] Sims appears to confirm the central issue of this

[13] As cited in Knappe, S. F. (2013). Art Perpetuating Fame: The Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West.
[14] As cited in Sims, M. (2021). Wild West Shows: An Unlikely Vehicle for the Survival of Native American Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century.

chapter: the Wild West show was a means of survival for the American Indian people and their cultural practices, including the dance. Sims says:

> Since the shows were to be realistic, the Sioux, Ogallala, Pawnee, Cheyenne, Cherokee, Arapaho, Sac and Fox, and Kiowa men and women employed in the shows were encouraged to keep their hair long and braided, to speak their native languages, to perform traditional dances and ceremonies, such as the Sun Dance and Ghost Dance, and to live in traditional tipis set up on the outskirts of the show. (p. 102)

Sims states what was expected from American Indian participants, which was to perform being a primitive Indian. Throughout the article Sims does not specifically indicate what dances were actually performed, nor when or where in the show. Since they were to perform authentic dances in performance that were not part of ritual or ceremony amongst their community it is probable that the dances were improvised using movements in their repertoire.

It may be argued that they brought with them their embodiment of the dance, as non-performers, and it was instrumental to the survival of the cultural practices. Melissa Sims adds:

> Although the Wild West shows, like Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, in the late nineteenth century were more educational exhibits than entertainment shows and used to justify national expansion in the West, the shows were the only way for the Native American culture to survive at a time when the United States government believed it was best to stop fighting them and assimilate them into mainstream white society through the eradication of their entire cultural system. (p. 104)

It appears that one of the ways for the cultural practices of American Indian people to survive was to participate in the Wild West shows as performing Indians, confirming what I had been told. They could utilize their freedom to dance in performance to retain their rituals and cultural practices. Sims explains the value of what Wild West shows provided for the survival of cultural practices, especially dance, by American Indian people.

In the "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World" [programme] (1893), there is a black and white photo of the outdoor performance grounds titled,

"Camp at Nottingham – As Wild West travelled in the Province of Europe" (Programme, 1893, p. 4). The image gives us an idea of the size of the performance grounds and how the space was designed – large enough to have a battle scene between the U.S. Cavalry and Indians. The image is taken from just outside the empty show arena and shows the outdoor arena from a downward angle view at daytime. There is stadium seating on three sides of the performance space, and on the third side of the arena large sheet backdrops are separating the backstage area, from where the photo is taken at an estimated height of a three-story building. The arena is approximately the size of a soccer field, used commonly as a spacious field or park surrounded by a walkway near houses and riverbanks, with an estimated capacity of 15,000 audience members. This confirms that the Wild West shows were very large spectacles with enormous audiences (especially for the time) on the order of the size we see at football games now, and perhaps in the same way.

Wild West Shows on Film

In a black-and-white silent film titled, "Authentic Footage of Buffalo Bill's Wild West and the Congress of Rough Riders of the World" (1910), there are a few scenes of American Indian dancing in New York City.[15] The eleven-minute video – with intertitles labeling each scene – goes through a series of scenes at the show arena, including such captions as backstage, Grand Review, cowboy shooting, cavalry exercises, battle scenes, and a final salute. A majority of the performers enter on horseback starting with the male Indians, then moving through the groups from the U.S. Cavalry to the various military groups, and ending with Buffalo Bill Cody himself. The Grand Review is particularly interesting because it shows all the performers entering the arena in a counterclockwise motion and in an order that showcases their specific

[15] William F. Cody Archive, McCracken Research Library at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. https://codyarchive.org/multimedia/wfc.vid00002.html

group, much like the order of events in the program. What is important to note is that the Grand Review entrance of the performers is much like the Grand Entry that begins the powwow – all the dancers in a powwow enter the arena in clockwise formation and begin with adult male dancers, continuing with adult female dancers and finally the youth dancers. Because all the American Indian dancers from the Wild West shows are from various tribes, much like powwows, and entered the arena in a follow-the-leader formation (unlike ceremonies and rituals), the Grand Entry for intertribal powwows was probably created from what was routinely performed in the Wild West shows to enter the performance space.

During the scene titled "Battle of Summit Springs," there appear to be nearly twenty American Indian men dancing while other Native people, including women, are setting up a camp of very unusual teepees. The men are wearing Plains Indian clothing identified by the following: eagle feather headdresses or porcupine hair roach head piece on the head, bone breastplates worn on the chest, beaded vests, beaded moccasins, leggings from waist to ankle with fringe down the side and paralleled with beadwork. They also wear a feather bustle worn on the lower back, and it appears each of the men dancing is holding a lance adorned with eagle feathers. Their dance movements are a side-to-side stepping with an initial single tap on each side, like a walking-in-place motion. Each foot takes two steps to the accompanying beats, then switches to the other foot to do the same. They are all upright with little bending of their bodies. Without the sound it is difficult to know what the purpose of the dance might be. By the motions and the dress of the dancers I am inclined to say it might be meant as a war dance preparation. I see all the dancers spaced out from each other taking up spaces within and outside a mock village, near the teepees, the horses and a couple of Indian women tugging the arms of a non-Native settler woman in a struggle. In this scene the dancers are moving in every direction rather

than in a circle as is done at a powwow in the arena. The scene as a whole, with all the dancers in relation to each other, shows little resemblance to any dance practice I've witnessed, participated in, heard in conversation with American Indian people, or have read about. The dancers observed independently have elements of movement that can be categorized as Men's Northern Traditional dance. The clothing being worn by the Native performers is quite similar to what is still worn by some American Indian Northern Traditional dancers at powwows.

Just after the eighteen-second scene described above, the video cuts to another dance for seven seconds, with American Indian men in a stationary position bouncing up and down on their toes – not in the form of ballet – and a hand up towards the sky, all wearing the same clothing as mentioned above. They are all facing the same direction but what they are looking towards cannot be seen. The upper body has little in common with what can be seen at powwows. The bouncing movement is similar to what can be seen in some dances today for warrior societies like Gourd Dance Societies performed by Southern Plains tribes, but not Northern Plains tribes, which are the primary performers in the Wild West show. These movements are not what I have seen at any powwow in person or in videos.

The second dance seen in the footage, where Indian men are stationary, bouncing up and down, with one hand reaching towards the sky has some similarities to Sun Dance.[16] The ritual of Sun Dance is a dance practiced by several Plains Tribes for very specific purposes: healing for an individual, family, or the tribe. The Sun Dance is ceremonial, performed by men who stand in place facing the sun or center of a circle, with either one or both hands reaching towards the sky at an angle. The performance on film is in an arena for audiences who are almost certainly not members of the same tribe or even American Indian. The dance looks like this: each dancer

[16] See more in *Sundancing: The Great Sioux Piercing Ritual* (1998) Thomas E. Mails

standing in place bouncing up and down, with none of the items that would normally be present in the ceremony. What would be used in the ceremony includes a whistle in the mouth during the dance; sage or sweetgrass around the head, wrists, and ankles; and a tether between a treetop and tied to a sharp, carved bone pierced through the dancer's chest. What remains as part of the dance in this film is the bouncing movement for an audience and what transforms are the items used during ceremony. Given that the Sun Dance was outlawed at this time, what we are seeing is perhaps an adaptation. It cannot be ceremony, because that would have taken days to conduct. Even so it is possible to see this performance for an audience as a way of embodying the Sun Dance, preserving something essential or at least of its essence. The stationary position of the dancers, bouncing up and down, and with a hand up to the sky leads me to believe that this was a way to preserve the essence of the Sun Dance by adapting it for the Wild West show. They were far from their reservations and possibly didn't know if their people would have the ability to keep their dance traditions alive for posterity in a place and time where it was illegal.

The dancers in the two video clips described above are performing their dances for the show, that is, to fit the framing of what the production is intending for the audience. I imagine the dancers continuing to perform the image of the wild and feared Indians for the producers and the non-Native audience. This image and practice of dance as performance differs from when they are dancing to traditional music, with their Native community, and in relation to ritual or ceremony. If this is true, then I might see the dances done for the audience as theatrical performance – a diluted version of what would be performed in ceremonial spaces. However, having the ability to perform the outlawed dances meant the embodied repertoire of the traditions could possibly be retained by the American Indian people.

Another video, titled “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show” (Fifteesrebel, 2012) includes two scenes of American Indian dance.[17] While the video references a tour to Nottingham, England, in 1891, it includes footage filmed by Thomas Edison and dated 1894.[18] The first of the two dancing scenes begins at the 1:34 minute mark, and is being performed by six American Indian men in front of an audience. There are also two horses near them and one Native man on horseback. They are costumed in much the same way as in the previous clip, “Battle of Summit Springs.” The men are dancing in no certain direction, but are spread out from one another. Of the six dancers, one is carrying a feathered lance and the other is holding a pistol. Their movements include a side-to-side step with a double-tap on the ground. The knees are moving to high positions and their elbows are positioned towards their backs. Intermittently, and independent of each other, they hold their backs in a hunched position while looking downward, or in an arched position while looking towards each other. At least two women can be seen at a distance further back, who are dancing in a stationary position with up-and-down footsteps and slightly raised knees. These dance moves look very similar to the ones performed in the video “Battle of Summit Springs” where the dances have footsteps that match what may be a drumbeat. Yet, the spacing between them, and with no apparent direction they are travelling or recognizable upper-body movements may be what was performed for a non-Indian audience. Their costuming is what can still be seen at powwows today.

Following the last dance scene is what looks like dance being performed backstage, behind the scenes. From a distance there are four American Indian singers/drummers in the center of the space dressed in the Plains regalia, 3-5 non-Native gentlemen standing or sitting

[17] See more in the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjIH5AUglos&t=107s
[18] See more in the videos *Lakota Grass Dance* and *Buffalo Dance*: https://www.loc.gov/film-and-videos/?q=buffalo+dance+%281894%29+%7C+edison+silent+film+

near them, and five American Indian women and a child standing side-by-side. The dancing appears to be part of a rehearsal for performance, in that they are dancing together side-by-side then stopping abruptly and returning to a beginning spot. The sense of rehearsal is unlike what I have seen or experienced throughout my decades of being immersed in the culture. The women are wearing the same clothes in the other videos: hair in two braids (no feathers), a loose long-sleeve top, skirt (some with horizontal stripes), moccasins, leggings that start below the knee, and a blanket wrapped around the waist being held by hand. They're bouncing in an up-and-down movement while moving sideways to their left. This movement appears similar to both what I've found in researching descriptions of the Ghost Dance, and to what is practiced today as Round Dance. The movements in both of these are described and appear as an up-and-down motion while moving slowly sideways to the left. In this scene they stop after several beats then return to where they began like a rehearsal. The way they stop and repeat the same movement from their starting position is not something I have seen practiced. In the foreground are silhouettes of several American Indian men moving in and out of the video frame, and moving up and down during the same time the women are dancing. The dance motions made by the dancers' bodies in both videos are similar to what is practiced at powwows today except for the stopping and returning to the starting position. They are all moving in a circle, men and women are spaced away from each other, their steps are in unison and to a drumbeat and song performed by American Indian musicians. The sense of rehearsal aside, the dances preserved in this film look much like those seen in contemporary powwow.

In "Notes on the Invention of Tradition" (1989), Rustom Bharucha describes the changes in performances from altered environments: "In such spaces, the performers invariably fail to represent themselves. Rather, they are represented by the environments themselves, and by all

the values – political, social, commercial – embodied in them" (p. 1908). The environment in which the dancers performed almost certainly had an impact in the way the dances were choreographed (in that the dances would be choreographed in a theatre sense, rather than what would be performed in ceremony or ritual) and how the dances were seen by the non-Native performers, the producers, and the audiences.

Wild West Posters

In Michelle Delaney's *Art and Advertising in Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (2019) there is featured one poster printed in 1900. The poster depicts six illustrated scenes in color of American Indians and measures 42.5 x 29.25 inches. The poster is titled "American Indian Chief and Scenes of Indian Life, c. 1900." The title printed at the top of the poster reads, "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World" – these are the only words printed. Just below the words and above center is a red framed circle with a battle scene inside. The scene shows five Indians on horseback in forefront with pistols and lances, and six cowboys on horseback with pistols and rifles. To the left of the cowboys are two covered wagons, each with two people seated and two horses pulling the wagons. The circle is on top of what appears to be a background scene of twenty or more Indians on horseback traveling on a path oncoming forward, just to the right of the circle. To the left of the red circle and below the caption stands a single Indian at over half the height of the poster, wearing a feather headdress, a breastplate, a blue jacket and pants, moccasins, and holding a feathered war shield in his right hand and a lance in his left. At the bottom of the poster are two separate images each of an Indian attack. On the left is a black framed oval with what seems to be around six Indians attacking a family of maybe four living in a log cabin near a forest. The cabin is being set on fire by an Indian. On the right is

the other image, of five Indians on horseback with pistols, rifles, and lances attacking a six-horse stagecoach with two drivers holding rifles, a guard on the back with a pistol, and people inside the cabin area. Dividing the two bottom images is a floating image of an Indian painted and decorated war shield with what seems to be horse hair or scalps hanging from the bottom edge. In front of the shield is an Indian pipe and war or battle ax. The predominant images in this poster are of Indians being shown as threatening to the peace of the frontier and the lives of settlers. The framing of these warlike illustrations represents Indians in hostile and aggressive attacks.

Between the red circle image and the images at the bottom of the poster is a blue rectangle as a landscape scene with only Indians portrayed – this is where we see the Indians in a dance scene. The setting is flat ground with a forest in the background and two Indians seated in front of two teepees to the right of the image. The two seated Indians are watching five Indians dancing. They are each wearing various clothes: feather headdresses, moccasins, leather leggings, breechclouts. Each is also holding a weapon such as a warclub, a lance, a rifle, or a tomahawk. There appears to be crowd of standing Indians at a short distance behind the dancers. This glimpse of dance by American Indians shows that dance was being promoted, in at least one poster. While the poster does not explicitly define what dances would be performed, the positions of the dancers appear to be what is now common at powwows, Northern Traditional Dance. The dance is performed by men who have returned from a hunt or battle and tell of their experiences through the dance. They are wearing Northern Plains tribal clothing, with headdresses, often associated exclusively as Plains tribal regalia. Northern Plains regalia typically includes feathered headdresses and bone breastplates. The dancers are bent over slightly with a high knee position on one leg, while the other foot is on the ground. This position

is a highly energetic position for performance, and unidentifiable as any particular dance. This points to the theatricalization of the ceremonial dance for the excitement of the Wild West show audience, in contrast to the participatory shared experience of ceremony in the tribal environment, where ceremonial dances might be done for long hours, or several days. The dancers in the image have their arms bent slightly and each is holding a weapon: a rifle, a hatchet, a spear, and a knife. For the purpose of the Wild West show the holding of weapons theatricalizes the savage otherness of the Indian in contrast to the shared experience of storytelling and celebration with such weapons in powwow dances.

This representation of dance in a Wild West poster suggests how what has been performed at powwows today may be derivative of the dances practiced and kept during the time of survival in Wild West shows. The dances were made to appear threatening during the Wild West shows, but have been reconstructed over time from what they were then to what they are now. For the Wild West shows the Indian performers, namely the dancers, were wearing costumes and holding props that differ very little from what is used today in powwow. My first reaction and disbelief of powwows originating from Wild West shows by Tom Phillips has changed through this research. The distance between the appropriation and theatricalization of Indian culture and its more appropriate performance in powwow now is not so great as it first appeared. With the American Indians bringing their ritual and ceremonial practices into the degraded space of the Wild West show arena, the dancers were taking advantage of the platform to ensure the survival of those practices.

Indian Perspectives in the Wild West Show

American Indian dances performed as part of ceremony and ritual on tribal lands were held in closed communities. During the Wild West shows these dances were transitioned onto a performance stage as entertainment for paying audiences who were not, for the most part, American Indians. For example, Luther Standing Bear, who was raised on a reservation and was sent to the Carlisle Indian Boarding School before coming to perform in the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, tells us in his autobiography, *My People, the Sioux*, (2006):

> When it came time for the Indians to come in with their village in the center of the arena, we started the dance in which I was to appear before the King of England. I had a beautiful lance, and as the dance proceeded I worked over toward the King's box. There I shook the lance in his face and danced my very prettiest, you may be sure. The King had been very dignified thus far and had not even smiled. But when I got down to doing my fancy steps and gave a few Sioux yells, he had to smile in spite of himself. (p. 211)

According to his autobiography Luther Standing Bear joined the Wild West shows in order to avoid living on reservations, and performed dances to prove he could succeed at this endeavor.

One of the only other American Indians to give an account of their experiences dancing in a Wild West show is Black Elk of the Oglala Lakota people in the book *Black Elks Speaks* (1932). Black Elk's autobiography was actually written by John G. Neihardt, who composed the text from conversations they had in the 1930s. In many of the editions of the book is a sepia-tone photo of Black Elk along with another American Indian named, Elk. The photo is titled, "Portrait of Black Elk, and Elk in Dance Costume".[19] The book presents the image with the caption, "Black Elk and Elk as they appeared when touring Europe with Buffalo Bill's Wild West"

[19] The photo is by Elliot & Fry (1887) London, England. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.
https://www.si.edu/object/archives/components/sova-naa-photolot-24-ref6538

[1887-88] (Neihardt, 1932, p. 186). The photograph appears to have been taken in a studio, as would have been typical given the limitations of the medium at the time. Both men are bare-chested, wearing earrings, armbands, a breechcloth, decorated leather and beaded bands around each calf, bells on straps around each leg below the knees, beaded moccasins, and an otter fur hat and feather. Separate from Elk, Black Elk is wearing necklaces, and bells around his waist. Elk is wearing an otter fur hat with an added porcupine hair roach headpiece and a single eagle feather on top, along with a single otter pelt worn around the neck like a shawl that has been split in half with nearly twelve mirrors attached along it. Their clothing appears to be that of Northern Traditional dancers but without the feather bustle on their backs. There is no other specific indication they represent a specific dance style other than that they have bells on their costume.

Black Elk Speaks offers readers a glimpse of what it must have been like for him, and others, as they came to perform in the Wild West shows, in the process transforming their dances from tribal ceremonies and rituals into theatrical spectacles for non-Native audiences. As recounted in *Black Elk Speaks*, in 1886 when Black Elk was 23 years old, some white men came to his camp of Oglala. The visitors wanted Indian performers for their big show, traveling across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe:

> I thought I ought to go because I might learn some secret of the Wasichu that would help my people somehow.[20] In my great vision, when I stood at the center of the world, the two men from the east had brought me the daybreak-star herb and they had told me to drop it on the earth; and where it touched the ground it took root and bloomed four-rayed. It was the herb of understanding. (p. 150)

Black Elk had an initial intention of performing in the Wild West shows as a means to solving a problem his people were experiencing. Performing in the show was an opportunity to leave dire conditions and try to understand the lifestyle of the world outside of their own. This was

[20] The Lakota term *wasichu* has varying definitions, though the most accepted is the meaning of foreigner or, most commonly, white person.

survival. He is making an effort to find other ways of being, of surviving, of not losing his traditional lifestyle and traditions.

Throughout the book Black Elk mentions dance in reference to the ceremonial dances that were being performed on his tribal lands, more specifically the Sun Dance and the Ghost Dance. There is rarely any mention of dance in the Wild West show except for the dancing that would sometimes occur by the Indians in moments of leisure, but even then, the movement or attire was not described.

By 1887, Black Elk had been in London for six months performing in the Wild West show. That same year the Wild West show performed for Queen Victoria, where Black Elk had the opportunity to dance for her. Black Elk describes the experience:

> We danced and sang, and I was one of the dancers chosen to do this for the Grandmother, because I was young and limber then and could dance many ways. We stood right in front of Grandmother England. She was little but fat and we liked her, because she was good to us. After we had danced, she spoke to us. She said something like this: "I am sixty-seven years old. All over the world I have seen all kinds of people; but today I have seen the best-looking people I know. If you belonged to me, I would not let them take you around in a show like this." (Neihardt, 1932, p. 152)

This is one of the only mentions of dance in the Wild West shows by an American Indian who participated as a dancer. Dance continued in the show thereafter, possibly preserving customs and traditional practices. For the dances to survive they would have to endure participating as the Indians in battle scenes with cowboys. These acts were the price for the survival of cultural practices. I argue that Wild West shows provided a platform that might be seen as foundational to what subsequently became the dances at powwows.

The dances that were kept and performed in the Wild West shows must have adapted in order to satisfy the demands of the show. These dances drew from traditional dances in ceremony or during wartime, and were then constructed for the purpose of entertaining a paying audience. I

also argue that these newly invented dances continued to evolve to the point where they're considered traditional, which fits with the way Bharucha proposes that traditions are invented. This is not unlike what Papesch says when she applies Bharucha's theorizations of 'invented traditions' to Kapa Haka, which as it has evolved from both tourist and ritual practices has come to be seen as 'traditional Māori performance'. In Papesch's words:

> Those momentary experiences, fragments really, of Māori performance of my youth, as shared by those around me, came to be interwoven into Kapa Haka at the same time that our idea of who we were as Māori was evolving, becoming consolidated into something shared in performance and performed in the wider culture. Kapa Haka – for all its 'inventedness', it's not-traditional traditionalism – provided a platform on which we could begin to put the pieces of our cultural identity together into a coherent, consistent whole. (Papesch, 2015, p. 57)

In response to how traditions are invented, Bharucha asks in "Notes on the Invention of Tradition" (1989), "And to what extent has it been 'invented' (to use Eric Hobsbawm's valuable term) in response to larger political, economic, and social factors?" (p. 1907). Following Bharucha, it is possible to see that the dances performed in the Wild West show, which were the product of social pressures in their time, have now come to be seen as traditional. This is not without ambivalence – the dances have survived, but much has been lost.

After Wild West shows had lost their appeal to audiences, with the advent of motion picture films, and with the ability to perform dances still illegal on their homelands, how then would a people struggling to retain their traditional practices of ritual and ceremony move forward? The need to continue cultural practices in new environments required change and the people who managed to evolve with modern times would determine how this would happen.

Powwow Emergence

Many Indians were now American citizens, working and living in urban cities, and participating in a modern lifestyle. Some remained living with their tribe on reservations. The Plains Indian dances had been retained through Wild West shows – or were practiced in secret, since they were still illegal. One of the ways American Indian people could celebrate and practice being Native in intertribal communities was to come together and share what they might have in common, which would take the form of intertribal powwows.

Intertribal powwows today are public spaces held by and for American Indian people, dancers, singers, culture bearers, and community members of many tribes, to come together to dance and connect. Powwows can take place indoors, in facilities such as gymnasiums, or outdoors, like in public parks. Dance styles practiced at powwows are primarily those characteristics of tribes from the Plains region of the U.S. – the same tribes that participated in the Wild West shows. These tribes include but are not limited to Arapahoe, Cheyenne, Lakota, Osage, Ponca, and Kiowa. They are called intertribal powwows because today, tribes from across the United States participate as dancers and singers, not just those from the Plains region. The dances practiced at powwows are performed by many dancers, representing a great diversity of tribes, ages, and genders.

Powwows customarily begin with what is called the Grand Entry – a procession in which all the dancers come into the arena and perform a promenade. The entrance is accompanied by drums and songs appropriate for the procession and the dancers parade into the arena in a clockwise motion. The dancers will enter in either a single-file line or in pairs. They appear in appropriate dress, which allows Native and non-Native spectators to identify the dance style they represent and sometimes their tribal affiliations, depending on whether they wear tribal-specific

regalia or symbols. With the variety of tribes, dance styles, and modern influences, the description of what the dancers are wearing would be daunting. They wear what has come to be considered traditional clothing. The materials used to make the modern regalia today may, however, differ from what was available during the time of the Wild West shows. For example, the clothing at powwows today utilizes materials such as synthetic porcupine hair for the roach headpiece, double-feathered bustles for the men's Fancy Dancer, and clothing made with Native-designed printed material. These adaptations are forms of reproduction and evolution.

From my experience the participants are grouped in the order the Arena Director places them. Often it begins with veterans first, carrying American flags, Canadian flags, eagle feather staffs, and can also include tribal flags representing the tribes and nations present. The appearance of American and Canadian flags show respect to American Indian veterans who served in the military, as they are considered to carry the tradition of being in Warrior Societies. Following the color guard are the head man and head woman dancers who lead the other dancers during the powwow. Then all other dancers join the procession, grouped by dance styles and categories, such as men's traditional, men's southern straight, grass dancers, men's fancy, women's traditional, jingle dress, women's fancy shawl, and on to youth dancers in the same styles as the adults.

The manner in which dancers enter the powwow and the origins of the grand entry had not been explicitly shared in my upbringing as a dancer at powwows. Severt Young Bear (Lakota) explains:

> A long time ago when there was any large gathering of dancers, they didn't do a grand entry like they do today at powwows where they come in to special song after lining up outside the dance arena. They dance in lines and all dance in a circle till everybody has entered and forms a big circle out in the center. I think

> this grand entry is based partly on some of the old warrior society parades but is really a result of Wild West shows and rodeos. (p. 54)[21]

Before the start of the Wild West show program for the audience there would be entering of all the show performers called the Grand Review. The purpose of the Grand Review for the Wild West show was to gather an audience and to parade the entertainers – especially cowboys and Indians – for the scheduled program, much like a circus. Much of what we see in the powwow Grand Entry reflects patterns of performance that were adapted from the Wild West show. What is noteworthy about the Grand Entry is its transformation from a display of subjugation into a celebration of collective identity and cultural survival. How does the Grand Entry do this, repudiating the worst part of that past and transforming it into a revitalization of American Indian identity?

After the Grand Entry, but before the general powwow dancing begins, a prayer or invocation is often offered by a respected elder or spiritual leader, not necessarily from a Plains tribe. It is most often not a Christian prayer, but I have witnessed some Christian elements being introduced – either in addressing God or Jesus, saying Amen, or quoting the Bible – although it has been extremely rare. The prayer is generally seeking blessings for the event, safety for the participants, and a respectful remembrance of those who have passed on. Sometimes the invocation is given in the Native language of the person presenting the prayer. I imagine this display of prayer could reflect the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects from a traditional life lived during the late 19th century and carried on by American Indian people during the Wild West show into the 20th century.

The general activities of a powwow take place after the grand entry and introductions of head dancers have taken place. Some of the dances have a resemblance to the dances practiced in

[21] As cited in Severt, Y.B. (1994). *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing*.

the Wild West. Of those dances the most notable in their similarities are the Men's Northern Traditional dance, the Men's Southern Straight dance, and the Men's Grass dance. The Men's Northern Traditional dance bears many of the same features as those of the dances discussed earlier, as seen in posters and in film footage. The dancer today typically will wear a porcupine hair roach head piece on his head with two eagle feathers attached on top in an upright position, bone breastplate worn on the chest, beaded vest, beaded moccasins, and leggings from waist to ankle with fringe down the side and paralleled with beadwork. They also will wear an eagle feather bustle positioned on the lower back, although they are much larger than those seen in the footage from "Battle of Summit Springs". They will often hold a dance stick adorned with eagle feathers in one hand and an eagle feather fan in the other – either made of loose feathers or from the wing itself. Their dance movements involve side-to-side stepping with an initial single tap on each side, while moving forward. Each foot takes two steps to the accompanying beats, then switches to the other foot to do the same. Their posture can either be upright with little bending of their torso or can shift to a lowering of the head and the torso bent forward. They will dance from the beginning of the song until the last beat is heard. Their movements may depict the act of a hunt or search for tracks on the ground. They may include head movements like that of an eagle looking from side-to-side. From time to time a dancer may give a warrior-like yell to show his ferocity.

The Men's Southern Straight dance is very similar to the Men's Northern Traditional dance with a few differences in dress and dance movement. The dancer will not have a feather bustle worn on the lower back for instance. He may wear a porcupine hair roach on his head or will often be seen wearing an otter pelt hat like a fez, with an otter pelt attached to the back of the hat and hanging down the back. His dance motions will be less dramatic than the Northern

Traditional dancer but with the same passion and concentration. He will also hold in one hand a similar eagle feather fan and a dance stick similar to the Northern Traditional dancer.

The Grass dancer is somewhat unique in dress and dance style. The Grass dancer does wear a porcupine hair roach on his head with either eagle feather plumes or eagle feathers in an upright position. He does not wear a feather bustle on his back. The clothing includes similarities to the Northern Traditional dancer: leggings, apron, and yoke. This will be adorned with yarn or satin ribbon for the fringe along the sides of each garment. The footsteps for the Grass dance involve a motion that resembles the laying down of grass with sliding feet in various shapes on the ground. Often, the dancer will move one foot in a shape then make a symmetrical or mirror image of the same shape with the other foot. The dancer will hold his elbows up throughout most of the song and dance until the last beat of the song.

Many of the male dancers will choose to participate in powwow representing one of the above-mentioned dance styles. They are respected as carrying the traditional dance knowledge from over one hundred years ago, at a time when American Indian dances were illegal but practiced in Wild West shows. The knowledge is transferred through the movements in the dance, the words in the songs, and the practice of being and doing as it has been taught from old rituals and ceremonies. It is difficult to ascertain what specifically has been retained from ceremonies and rituals, but the active participation in powwow as a dancer embodies great value to the continuing culture of the people. In *American Indian Dance Steps* (1931) Bessie Evans says: “There are qualities in the ceremonial dances of the Red Man that must be personally seen and heard and felt; for of them is born the elusive charm that defies analysis or description” (p. 5). Through Wild West shows and the formation of powwow the dances that have been retained do not come with written or archived instructions. The experience of being part of the dance as a

dancer includes being a container of a traditional practice that is felt and not merely defined or categorized by what exists in the archive or by what has been interpreted by scholars.

As a powwow dancer for over forty-years I still have a deep respect for the practices and traditions shared with me over the years. Dances at powwows are believed to be those parts of American Indian history that have been retained through attempts of assimilation and annihilation. They are composed of conventions within which there can be variations and improvisations, but they are a part of a continuous line of dancing that connects the present to the past and sets the stage for the future. My cultural expression as a powwow dancer has given me a way to practice my American Indian identity – more than just being Native, but being Native in what I do. Through powwow dancing I am preserving our American Indian cultural belief systems, learning cultural knowledge, and enacting cultural continuity – all of which contribute to the survival of American Indian dance in cultures between the reservations and across the North America.

My daughter, who is currently twelve years old, participates as a powwow dancer and presents herself proudly and with a great amount of respect. She does her best to practice the teachings of the traditions she has received from various people during her upbringing. She has taken her place in powwows as a head dancer, performs dances and teaches her knowledge at public performances, makes her own dance regalia, is a princess who through her attendance at powwows practices public speaking on behalf of the powwow she represents, and has started learning her tribal language. Her practice is a display of what takes place during survival – carrying what was in the past into the present as a dancer. Her dance is made from what was retained through Wild West shows, and from her freedom to shape from those foundations a movement that reflects the knowledge carried from the past.

Chapter Two - Survivance

This chapter looks at how the dances performed by American Indian Dance Theatre (AIDT) and Dancing Earth (DE) can be seen to embody survivance. The term *survivance* for this chapter is used in the way coined by Gerald Vizenor in *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (1994) in relation to American Indian arts. In his second book on the same topic *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1999), Vizenor defines "survivance" as a concept that goes beyond survival. In other words, survivance rejects passive victimhood and emphasizes active presence, resistance, and the continuation of Indigenous stories, identities, and practices. It is about Indigenous peoples asserting their agency and creativity in the face of colonial narratives that often cast them as tragic, vanished, or powerless. Vizenor revisits this discussion also in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2008), where he says:

> The theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and company. The nature of survivance is unmistakable in native stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs and is clearly observable in narrative resistance and personal attributes, such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry. (Vizenor, p. 1)

Rather than framing American Indian people as passive victims of colonialism, survivance asserts agency, vitality, and narrative power. It challenges stereotypical portrayals and emphasizes Native ways of being that persist and adapt. Vizenor critiques the way Native identity is often simulated, turned into a stereotype or museum piece. He sees survivance as an antidote to these simulations. He writes about how museums, Hollywood, and history books have created a frozen image of the "Indian" that erases lived Native presence. Vizenor uses the concept of the postindian warrior, someone who challenges the fabricated images and narratives

imposed by dominant colonial discourse he calls simulations. In *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (1999), Vizenor says, "The postindian, an urgent new word in this book, absolves by irony the nominal simulations of the *indian*, waives centuries of translation and dominance, and resumes the ontic significance of native modernity" (p. viii). Survivance is not about terms. Instead, as I understand it from the preceding passage, it provides a way of seeing beyond what has been sustained in the archives and, as such, beyond the survival of cultural practices toward a vibrantly evolving way of being and performing Indian-ness.

In this chapter I ask: How might the dances under examination in this chapter be seen to embody something beyond survival? That is, having seen how dance first in the Wild West Shows and even now in powwow has been essential to the survival of tribal practices and customs during the long period of oppression and suppression, how might contemporary, theatricalized interpretation of tribal dances be seen as performances of survivance?

This chapter examines the written and visual records of theatricalized American Indian dance performances, their meaning, and what they have contributed to preserving culture and identity for our people. Two American Indian dance companies will be investigated to find the ways in which their performances represent survivance: American Indian Dance Theatre and Dancing Earth. American Indian Dance Theatre was established in 1987 by Hanay Geiogamah and Barbara Schwei in New York City.[22] The company has had tours throughout the U.S. and internationally since its inception. When I corresponded with artistic director Geiogamah via email, he told me that there is a new full-length show in production for fall 2025 called "Ceremony for Mother Earth: A Healing" (H. Geiogamah, personal communication, March 9, 2025). What's remarkable is that after almost forty years, they are still creating new work.

[22] See more about AIDT: https://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/american-indian-dance-theatre/traditional-dances/

Dancing Earth was founded in 2004 by Rulan Tangen in San Francisco and is currently based in San Francisco, California, and Santa Fe, New Mexico. The company has continued producing work and workshops in the U.S. and internationally since its founding.[23] Both American Indian Dance Theatre and Dancing Earth have toured dance performances that include American Indian cultural themes and dance styles, including some from intertribal powwows. Both dance companies have theatricalized the dances often seen and performed on tribal lands and in powwows.

American Indian Dance Theatre

American Indian Dance Theatre has been a performing and touring company since 1987, primarily focusing on American Indian powwow dances. The director of AIDT, Hanay Geiogamah, set out to bridge traditional American Indian dances with Western contemporary arts in theatre.[24]

Together, Geiogamah and Schwei took the dance company onto stages throughout the U.S. and internationally for decades. Geiogamah, the artistic director, is an enrolled member of the Kiowa and Delaware Tribes of Oklahoma; he is a playwright, TV and movie producer, artistic director, and a professor of theatre in the School of Theatre, Film and Television at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).[25] He also served as the director of the UCLA American Indian Studies Center. Schwei, who passed away in 2004, was a non-Native concert and theatre

[23] See more about DE: https://www.dancingearth.org/
[24] See more: https://www.musiccenter.org/experience-learn/experience-learn/for-educators/artsource-curriculum/dance-units/american-indian-dance-theater/
[25] For Hanay Geiogamah faculty page: https://www.tft.ucla.edu/faculty/hanay-l-geiogamah/

producer in New York City for Broadway theatres such as the Booth Theatre and the Helen Hayes Theatre in the 1970s and 1980s.[26]

AIDT features American Indian powwow dances, music, regalia, and traditions in theatrically staged presentations. AIDT began as a dance company that recruited dancers from community powwows, a cultural practice that has been around for generations and is understood as traditional and ceremonial. American Indian dancers and musicians generally have a direct relationship with the audience – their own community. The key differences between what could be seen in powwow and what was performed by the American Indian Dance Theatre have to do with the shifting of the site of performance from a dancing ground onto a theatrical stage. The proscenium stage theatre is designed and meant to create a separation between the audience and what takes place on stage by actors, dancers, and musicians. AIDT performances are choreographed and performed for audiences that buy tickets, receive programs, and expect a clear start and finish. In *American Indian Performing Arts: Critical Directions* (2010), Geiogamah says:

> Moving forward, to the other side of this deeply embedded and intuitive control line, or at the other end of it, is the possibility of self-realization as well as a manifestation of dignity that is attached to the core, the essence, of tribal identity, and this dignity is charged with a force that, among many other helpful aspects, can heal, renew, educate, and inspire. (p. 109)

By taking the stage under their theatrical direction, AIDT is enacting presence over absence and initiating an alternative way to present American Indian dance and culture to audiences, many of whom are not Native themselves. This act counters the representation of Native people created by an outsider's imagination.

[26] See more about Barbara Schwei: https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/barbara-schwei-21246

In *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing* (2007), Jacqueline Shea Murphy says about AIDT: “The pieces are theatrical in their dramatic lighting, evocative stage sets, short length, and blocking, yet remain renditions of powwow or other community dances” (p. 203). Shea Murphy provides insight into how mainstream dance scholarship views American Indian dance on concert stages and how those dances and dance companies have been active in retaining intergenerational continuity. According to Shea Murphy, dance critics like Anna Kisselgoff of the *New York Times* and dance historian and critic Lynn Garafola for the *Ballet Review* wrote that AIDT performances were “distilled” and “ultimately disappointing” (pp. 200-201). In Shea Murphy’s view, however, performances by AIDT return agency to the dancers, whose control of what they perform allows them to bring forth a multi-dimensional sense of what is most socially and politically relevant to American Indians. Shea Murphy says, “In light of this rhetoric, a promotion of traditional dance with connections to community practice seems an astute rhetorical and politically resistant move” (p. 205).

While she writes extensively on the history of American Indian dance culturally and politically, Shea Murphy also offers the history of American Indian dance on the theatre stage. She spends time understanding the intention behind the design of AIDT by exploring the sources of American Indian powwow-style dance on stage. She researches groups like Thunderbird American Indian Dancers, a New York City intertribal dance troupe since 1963, and Lakota Sioux Indian Dance Theatre, from the Rosebud Sioux Reservation, South Dakota, since 1978. Through her research and interviews with Geiogamah, she finds that what non-Native viewers expect to see or how they interpret what they see can neglect what is authentic and not simply performed. Shea Murphy says, “Geiogamah noted that the boundary between what is sacred and what is public is often a lot more fluid than many non-Indian viewers realize” (p. 202). Shea

Murphy sees the dances choreographed by Geiogamah as performances of redress that supersede the otherwise "troublesome understanding of Indian identity as always in the past, rather than contemporary and, like all vibrant contemporary cultures, ever changing" (p. 204). She goes on to say:

> Yet in some ways, AIDT's early insistence on the close connections between the dances it presents and vibrant, continuing, traditional Indian communities could be seen as a corrective response to federally funded endeavors of the day that attempted, paradoxically, to promote American Indian arts, artists, and artistic practices, but primarily only insofar as these endeavors could be enfolded into a mainstream modernist art world. (p. 204)

Shea Murphy points out that AIDT was promoting what they chose to include on stage and not simply adhering to the mainstream expectations of American Indian arts. She illustrates the importance of furthering the value of American Indian dance as it transitions from survival to performing cultural dances on the theatrical stage at the artists' discretion.

What takes place in the transition from dancing at powwows to dancing on stage is a tension between what is being shared with the community at powwows and what is being performed in a staged performance. The community at powwows is made up of the families of the dancers and the other members of the Native community in a non-restrictive space, where there is no time limit or expectation of when activities start or end. Staged performances in theatrical spaces, in contrast, are made up of audiences who intend to watch artists perform their craft. The performance has a start time and an expected duration that aligns with what can be reasonably expected for a theatre show. A disconnect exists between what the dancer carries as a responsibility to the Native community at powwows through their dance and what the dancer brings as their best representation to a mostly non-Native audience. I have the experience of dancing in powwows surrounded by family, friends, and the Native community who share the relationship to the music, the songs, and their meanings, as well as the historical importance and

relevance of the dance, music, and song that resonates for us as a people. When I see the AIDT dancers performing on stage, I see Native artists dancing for the audience – while simultaneously dancing with the spirit and soul of the Native people who are not present at the performance: their families, the American Indian community, and their ancestors.

Through decades of performing American Indian dances on theatre stages, my experience tells me that presenting our cultural dances under our own terms is liberating. During the time of survival, when American Indian people could practice their dances for Wild West shows, they were performing being American Indians. What AIDT dancers have done on stage is to become American Indians being performers. Without having to act like an Indian for a Wild West show, they are demonstrating and exercising their freedom through creativity, modernity, and other cultural expressions, embodying survivance. I have come to understand the enormous and radical shift AIDT made in bringing the American Indian dancers onto the stage and what that has meant for my own journey.

I attended a live performance of AIDT that was presented in Sacramento, California, in 1989. I do not remember the name of the theatre, but it was in the center of the city. I remember being there with my mother, younger brother and adopted grandmother. The experience of watching the live show changed the way I saw American Indian dance. I witnessed a professional performance of powwow dance styles presented on the proscenium stage in a large theatre. The dances performed included many commonly seen at powwow but with theatrical lighting on the stage and cyclorama. Sitting in seats toward the back rows, I saw that each time the dancers came onto the stage, they appeared to be magnificent heroes of our people. The stage was lit with colors enhancing the vibrance of the regalia being worn by the dancers and with spotlights directing our focus with no distractions of an audience as might typically be

experienced at a powwow. There were no children running around, no families talking or laughing next to you, no announcements by an M.C. The darkness of the theatre made the experience seem to be between only me and the dancers onstage. At the same time, the distance between me and them was greater than what I would expect at a powwow where I could be on the edge of the dance arena near the dancers. This distance made them appear small. Yet their presence on stage with the lighting and clear amplified music made them larger than life. The precise choreography highlighted their movements and dances, showing just the more exciting bits of the dance in a way that was compressed into a vivid theatricality rather than being spread over time.

The description of the production printed in the program provided at theatre performances shows that their intended audience is non-Native people.[27] The printed program states: "The dances and music are authentic and traditional. They have been given a new focus, possibly a new energy by placing them in a theatrical setting" (AIDT Souvenir program, n.d.). According to Shea Murphy in *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, one critic responded to an AIDT performance at Jacob's Pillow in 1995 by saying, "However closely the theatrical version of a dance may approximate its ceremonial or social original, the very act of representing it onstage militates against its authenticity…Inevitably, something is lost in the transfer to the stage" (p. 201). Shea Murphy adds a counter-narrative involving what appears to be a similar idea to that of survivance. She says, "The company's approach, like that of various other contemporary American Indian dance companies, instead plays with these presumptions, consciously maintaining a separate sphere between what is read as traditional and modern even as it complicates these definitions" (p. 201).

[27] I purchased an original AIDT theatre program online. There is no date associated with the program printing. I assume the print year is 1987, which is when the company was founded and started touring.

The dance that stood out the most in my memory of the performance I saw when I was so much younger was the Fancy Dancer. He spun out from the wings across the full length of the stage with his arms spread to each side of him holding dance sticks with feathers flying from a string far from his body. It was an image that struck me as something beyond powwow, beyond survival, something experimental. His arc of action was deliberate and used the stage to perform what could be seen as careful and methodical. His lines were crisp and showcased his moves in the direction of the audience, unlike at a powwow where one dances in all directions. I wanted that freedom and experience to express myself as an artistic dancer.

I was excited about the prospect of performing onstage myself from this performance. I was nineteen years old, so I may not have understood its value or importance then. I felt that it might propel me into another sphere of experiences and place me onstage with hundreds of people there to watch my best dancing. I had ambition, but I had no direction. Having done small performances at schools and libraries, I knew then that it could be a teaching tool, perhaps a way to dispel stereotypes of American Indian people and educate the general public on cultural truths. However, I had no invitation to be part of such a large and professional production, so I went looking at other types of performances, like non-Native concerts and plays. I found in an online video interview with Geiogamah that he did the same when he went looking for ideas to create American Indian theatre: he explored Black theatre through the Black Arts Movement, initiated by LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), which was happening in the 1960s and early 1970s.[28] Geiogamah wanted to dramatize what was happening with American Indian people at the time. In the video interview, Geiogamah reflected on the conversations of what was in the minds and

[28] See more on the interview with Geiogamah: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTKl8vx_5W8

hearts of American Indian communities during the late 1960s and early 7190s. Geiogamah recalls his thoughts at the time:

> I think I want to write plays about what's happening with us and start examining our situation, our reality, our truths. Because…we didn't have the answers to a lot of things but we wanted to know. Why this was, and how this was, and how we got this way, and what we could do to fix this, and how to change this. But there was just so many questions, so many legitimate goals to aim for. So, I modeled my awareness for developing ideas for an American Indian theater along the lines of the African American, Black theater at that time, which was really, really happening. (WorWic, 2024)

In his exploration for ideas, he found similarities to the struggles and responses to those struggles in the artistic performances in non-Native cultural theatre. He drew inspiration from looking at another cultural group producing plays that were doing what he envisioned. Geiogamah's determination decades ago inspired my work in searching for creative ways to express modern Native life through dance – the challenges and the celebrations.

Since attending the AIDT performance in 1987, I now have the opportunity to revisit an AIDT performance through the 60-minute film *American Indian Dance Theatre: Finding the Circle* (1990).[29] I have watched the video many times since it was released, but without really looking at or analyzing it as I do now. The film is part of the Great Performances series, which started in 1976 on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and was produced by the television station WNET in New York City. The film's producer, director, art director, and other roles are Native and non-Native. Hanay Geiogamah (Kiowa/Delaware), artistic director of AIDT, is the film's writer. The film itself is part of the Phil Lucas collection at the Smithsonian.[30]

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[29] See more on *American Indian Dance Theatre: Finding the Circle* (1990): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otfGpwnayG0&t=448s

[30] See more on the Phil Lucas archive: https://americanindian.si.edu/collections-search/search/archives?edan_fq%5Bset_name%3A%22Phil%20Lucas%20videotape%20collection%22%5D=set_name%3A%22Phil%20Lucas%20videotape%20collection%22&edan_q=phil%20lucas

Lucas (Choctaw) collaborated with Geiogamah and was a groundbreaking documentary filmmaker. It is unclear whether Lucas directly collaborated with Geiogamah or contributed in some capacity to this specific film. The fact that the information one finds has gaps and is limited is indicative perhaps of the status of Indian dance and film at the time.[31]

The film alternates between dances performed in powwow and on Indian lands and those performed on the theatrical stage, much as I experienced when attending American Indian Dance Theatre in 1989. Written by Geiogamah, the film's voiceover narration presents the perspectives of American Indian people. The dancers of AIDT can be seen in the film performing their dances on stage, which appear to be presented as they would perform live during their AIDT tours. The film starts with a scene from an outdoor powwow, where dancers are side-by-side in a Round Dance. There is an audio voiceover during the dance scene: "Indian America celebrates a rich dance heritage. From the Dakotas, the American Southwest, the Great Plains, the drums, and the songs call the generations together at powwow. A time for joy and for renewal." The scene then changes to a theatre stage with thirteen dancers performing what is known in powwow as a Snake and Buffalo dance – a follow-the-leader dance that I have danced at powwows for many years. The voiceover continues, "The American Indian Dance Theatre honors this heritage, next on Dance in America." Once the opening credits end, an opening scene for the theatrical performance by AIDT appears. It opens almost as a ceremony with a solemn (Hopi Sunrise) song and a nighttime scene recognizable by the dark cyclorama and painted stars in the sky.[32] The stage floor is lit with a leaf breakup gobo, and trees are planted, standing straight up with some branches, a few of them with leaves. A young, topless Native man in traditional buckskin

[31] Provenance is unclear.

[32] The Hopi Sunrise song is fairly well known by American Indian people over the past few generations and has been used by many Native performance groups including my own, Sewam American Indian Dance. For more on the song by Chester Mahooty: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-YIDdtwOjY

leggings and breechcloth enters with the voiceover narration, recounting an origin story of his people and their relation to music and dance.

The narrator describes the stage environment as new to the man walking on a path from his dream. It is suggested that the man has been walking for months. From the music and slow movement, he creates a sense that he is searching for something sacred, and yet he is also on a theatre stage, in front of an audience, disassociated with what might be sacred. This narrated piece might be an attempt not merely to perform something sacred for an audience's pleasure but to insert a sense of ceremony. Perhaps it is a way to create a ceremonial space for the dancers and singers who will be on stage throughout the performance. The ceremony is made up of gestures, with hand and arm movements connecting the earth with his body, recognizing and receiving the earth as medicine or as a relative. He then lies down momentarily as the narrator says the man is dreaming of the future. He then rises as the narrator says: "He felt prepared, and then he saw the gift." The drum is the gift mentioned by the narrator. Geiogamah may be sharing the teaching many dancers are told about the drum, that it is a gift representing the heartbeat of all living things above us, below us, and around us. So, with this teaching, the gift is life, and we are dancing to continue the heartbeat or life of the people. The performance of people dancing to the beat of the drum shows the audience how the heartbeat of life moves through the people. In this demonstration of the vitality embodied in the dancer with his drum, the performance onstage shifts our perspective from survival to survivance – making visible and visceral a celebration of the spirit that animates the people.

The scene of the young man with the drum fades out, and four Grass Dancers enter the stage in a follow-the-leader fashion that is not traditionally done at powwows. The stage floor is brightly lit and decorated with a row of one to two-foot blades of tall grass. On the cyclorama is

a sky scene with light clouds. They begin by performing a choreographed version of the dance. Each wears a porcupine hair roach headpiece with eagle feathers attached to the top, a beaded headband with a beaded disc on the front, beaded wrist cuffs, beaded moccasins, bells, and various beadwork pieces on their body such as belts and harnesses. They all wear what can be distinctly identified as traditional Grass Dance regalia at powwows today – a yoke, breechcloth, and pants that all have yarn attached along the sides, at nearly twelve inches in length (this length varies at the dancer's discretion). Their movements are also in the style of Grass Dance, which American Indian people at powwows expect from the dancers. The background of the Grass Dance is elaborated in the AIDT Souvenir program:

> In the northern plains, the elders would ask the young men to stomp down the tall grass to prepare a clearing for their ceremony. Many early dancers wore tufts of sweetgrass, which evolved into the first feather bustles. Most grass dancers today use strips of cloth, leather, or yarn to give the effect of rippling grass. (AIDT Souvenir program, n.d.)

The motions appear as though they are swaying their arms in rhythm with their feet and legs, symbolizing the act of laying down grass. The grass represents the tall prairie grasses found in the Northern Plains region of the U.S. Once they have been dancing for a few minutes in synchronization, they break into their individualized Grass Dance styles.

The Grass Dance is the first specific genre presented by AIDT in its performance. The choice of the Grass Dance as a starting place makes sense, as its original purpose in ritual has been to lay down the grass before a ceremony. In transferring the Grass Dance to the theatrical stage, it may be that some of the values of ceremony are invoked. As a result, it is possible to say that the performance of the Grass Dance in this theatrical context both enacts the survival of ritual practices beyond the period of oppression and repression and embodies a kind of survivance – a celebration of the vitality of the people thus represented.

Men's Northern Traditional Dance is the next men's dance performed in the film.[33] One dancer enters from the left of the screen to a ruffling drum beat. Four bare teepee frames stand on both sides upstage, flanking two Women's Northern Traditional dancers standing next to each other and dancing in place. The male dancer takes a knee center stage as the music and beat continue. He wears clothing similar to that of the traditional dancers in the Wild West show. However, his regalia has added elements, or adornments, that make it full and robust, including a large eagle feather fan held in his hand. His shoulders are dressed with large eagle feathers in a fan shape, and his roach headpiece has a few large eagle feathers attached to its side, pointing downwards. He wears a large eagle feather bustle attached to his lower back. The drumbeat stops its ruffling tempo, and the man dances to the slightly slower beat.

The next dancer enters from the left of the screen and performs the same movements to the drum as the first dancer. He kneels next to the first dancer, as it has apparently been choreographed – an unusual and uncommon practice in powwow. He wears the same style of regalia and has the same description as above. The third and final dancer for this scene enters from the right of the screen and wears the same style of regalia, but instead of a porcupine hair headpiece, he is wearing a coyote pelt on his head. He kneels next to others in a line and continues the dance in sync with the other two dancers for the first song. They dance to a medley of three songs: Sneak-up, Crow Hop, and Straight. At a powwow, the dancers would not dance next to each other, move in sync, or dance to a music medley. I argue that this sort of choreography transforms a communal performance practice into a display of that practice for a paying audience, from something shared by insiders to something shown to outsiders, consistent with how Melissa Sims demonstrates this same act in Chapter One. This might be seen as a bad

[33] The point of reference is the film and the sequence of events in the film might differ from how they appear on the stage.

thing, a degradation of ritual and customary practices. However, as illuminated on the theatrical stage such performances also might be a way of claiming space for something new, especially if the choreography is set by American Indian people.

How can the dance be called a traditional dance as it is performed on stage for an audience, with theatrical lighting and choreography? The dancers are presenting an act of dancing that no longer has the same purpose as it would if performed within a community gathering, like a powwow. However, what may be taking place, and what I argue, is that the dance is, in part, an act of survivance as it performs presence, creativity, and continuity as described by Vizenor. It appears that the dance presents an evolution in American Indian dance, which was created by the dancers exercising their independence in shaping their own identity. The new style and artistic liberties taken by the dancers demonstrate how what has been considered traditional dances can develop and evolve.

What interests me most in the film is the entrance two-thirds of the way through, of the Hoop Dancer, Eddie Swimmer (Eastern Band Cherokee), who enters from the up-stage center.[34] The stage is designed with tall, thin tree poles (trunks) in upright positions set in a semi-circle upstage. Some upright poles are grouped with several poles between the middle of them, similar to the shape of the letter 'H.' There is a centerstage drop spotlight with nine smaller circles of light bordering the center circle. He is holding a single hoop and is dressed in a small yoke, breechcloth, beaded moccasins, beaded belt, armbands, bells just below the knees, and sheepskin leggings the full length of the shins. Swimmer dances, adding hoops as he progresses, and makes various geometric shapes. He is dancing fast and possibly using 22 hoops (it is difficult to count

[34] Swimmer learned Hoop Dance from Tony White Cloud, the hoop dancer in the film *Valley of the Sun*, mentioned in chapter one. Also mentioned on the website is that Tony White Cloud is considered the founder of the modern Native American Hoop Dance.
For more on Swimmer: https://www.blueridgeheritage.com/artist/eddie-swimmer/

during his dance and from the aged footage). He assembles the hoops into spheres and what looks to be the representation of animals, such as birds and butterflies. He ends his dance on one knee, with both hands reaching to the sky, one holding a spherical shape made with approximately eight hoops. His head is held down, almost in a bow to an audience, and his performance ends. In his dance I see him expressing the Hoop Dance in a way that is more theatrical in how he maintains focus on the audience. However, he also keeps the same designs that have been taught to many Hoop Dancers as standard moves. He tells the story of creation as many Hoop Dancers do, creating shapes that resemble various living things like flowers and birds. He continues using the hoops in a way that shows that even in adding more hoops he can still embody the purpose of telling a story of creation.

When I look at this dance piece in the video, I am reminded that my practice of hoop dance since 1983 has taken on many definitions and purposes while still being grounded in the teachings I have received from many elders throughout my life.[35] In my experience, many stories allude to hoop dance as only using a few hoops, and I was told that five hoops was the old way. There are hoop dancers who dance with over 20 hoops at powwows and performances. They are fantastic to witness and have evolved to be part of competitions to show skill and complexity. Swimmer takes what was once considered traditional and gives it new meaning and perhaps a new purpose for the stage and, therefore, the audience. By expanding the dance into using more than five hoops Swimmer theatricalized Hoop Dance. As Kevin Locke and Benjamin D. Koen argue:

> Broadly, the Hoop Dance can be viewed as a multifaceted archetype of unity that has the potential to transform individual consciousness with respect to understanding one's vital role in the collective of humanity and by illuminating

[35] For an equivalent perspective, see Te Rita Papesch on the power of Kapa Haka to 'put the pieces of our cultural identity together into a coherent, consistent whole' (Papesch, 2015, p. 57).

> for the collective the value of each member's diversity, contributions, and gifts. (Locke and Koen, 2008, p. 483)[36]

The hoop dance, as it has evolved by dancers like Swimmer and as seen on the American Indian Dance Theatre stage, embodies survivance. The hoops show us how individual elements can be woven into a whole or many different wholes in beautiful, inspiring, and transformative ways. The hoops are the same individually, and when they are maneuvered during the dance, they are combined one at a time to create images of living things in the environment.

Dancing Earth

I now focus on Dancing Earth (DE), an Indigenous contemporary dance company founded in 2004 by Rulan Tangen.[37] The company features Native and non-Native dancers, Indigenous themes, Native traditional powwow dances, modern dance, and fusion choreographies.[38] DE includes American Indian dance through an artistic and modern performance lens that explores traditional Native and Indigenous identities.[39] I will focus on two works by DE that incorporate American Indian dance: *Walking at the Edge of Water* (2011-13) and *Indigenous Futurities* (2020).

Tangen has an extensive dance history and experience in various dance styles, including classical ballet, contemporary ballet, modern dance, and powwow. She has a mixed heritage: Kapampangan and Pangasinan from Luzon Island Philippines, as well as Norwegian and Irish lineage.[40] Her powwow training comes from her adopted Lakota family, who raised her in the

[36] As cited in Locke, K. Koen, B. D. Koen. (2008) The Lakota Hoop Dance as Medicine for Social Healing.
[37] See more on Dancing Earth: https://www.dancingearth.org/about-dancing-earth-1
[38] See more: https://dancemagazine.com/modern_vs_contemporary/#gsc.tab=0
[39] Dancing Earth includes American Indian dance as well as Indigenous dance from native cultures internationally.
[40] See more in the Dancing Earth website: https://www.dancingearth.org/artistic-directors-acknowledgement-and-action-steps-regarding-identity-statement?ss_email_id=5fd29aefe4a10962d54024e2&ss_source=sscampaigns

Northern Plains traditional powwow dancing. From the Dancing Earth website and various articles written about her and the dance company, she focuses on Indigenous people, their struggles, their relationship to the environment, and giving power to their authentic voice for social change and awareness.[41]

> *We gather as individual artists to create experimental yet elemental dances that reflect our rich cultural heritage as contemporary global peoples. We strive to embody the unique essences of cultural perspectives by creation and renewal of artistic and cultural movement rituals. Ancient and futuristic, our dances are an elemental language of bone and blood memory in motion. (Dancing Earth, 2025)*

Tangen works with Indigenous people to teach, learn, and collaborate with a vision to create dance performances that bridge those Indigenous experiences with audiences locally and internationally.

Since its inception, the group has incorporated various dance styles and levels of expertise. Some dancers have formal dance experience, some are still learning, and others are on a personal journey to build a relationship with their Native identity through dance. Some DE participants come from dance disciplines like modern and hip-hop, and others are Native people dancing their powwow style. The company, which includes American Indian dancers, aims to educate an audience and the dancers themselves on Indigenous issues and build awareness of those identities. At the same time, they search for best practices in engaging with the people they directly and indirectly represent while building their own knowledge base and identities. In *Dancing Indigenous Worlds* (2023), Shea Murphy says:

> DE enacts relationality: prioritizing the collective care of company members over that of audience numbers; engaging Indigenous food knowledge, languages, and practices of reciprocal exchange in the company's dance training; drawing on specific family and tribal stories, practices, entities, and words brought in by contributors; cultivating connection with Indigenous land and peoples where the

[41] For example: Wakpa, T. B. (2016) "Culture Creators and Interconnected Individualism: Rulan Tangen and Anne Pesata's Basket Weaving Dance." *Dance Research Journal* 48, no. 1. Also, Shea Murphy, Jacqueline. *Dancing Indigenous Worlds: Choreographies of Relation*. University of Minnesota Press, 2023.

> company tours, including connecting with local communities and offering workshops to Indigenous youths; seeking out and following the guidance of Indigenous elders. (pp. 64-65)

Dancing Earth brings onto the stage the relationship they build with the land and people where they perform as an aspect of engaging with the environment where they perform. They are a group "in which people could not just serve another's vision but bring in something of their own" (Shea Murphy, p. 129).

One of the works I examine is *Walking at the Edge of Wa*ter (2011-13), which was "commissioned by Native mentors of Anishinaabeg, Métis, Lakota, and O'odham people for the protection of sacred waters of our bodies as people and of the planet" (R. Tangen, personal communication, August 8, 2021).[42] The piece was presented in theatres across the U.S., including in New York, California, and New Mexico, and internationally in Canada and New Zealand. In the videos I examine here, I am looking at excerpts from performances rather than complete shows. On the Dancing Earth website Walking at the Edge of Water is described as "Invoking powerfully relevant water themes of creation, destruction and renewal, Walking at the Edge of Water parallels ancestral healing rituals in a prophetic dance of inter-disciplinary expressions." (Tangen, 2025)

The video *Work Sample #1 Rulan* (2018) includes an excerpt from the production *Walking at the Edge of Water* (Dancing Earth, 2018, 9:32).[43] Floor-mounted blue lights shine on the cyclorama, and the stage is a black Marley floor lit with dim white drop-spots. The music features simple repetitive percussion and a viola. On the Dancing Earth website, the description of the commissioned piece says: "*Walking at the Edge of Water* is an inter-tribal contemporary

[42] For *Walking at the Edge of Water*, the years in production on the DE website are listed as 2012-13, yet in the same website, under Tangen's bio, it has the years in production as 2011-13.
[43] See more on this video *Work Sample #1 Rulan*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrQGQF_09bU

dance expression of global Indigenous water perspectives. Invoking powerfully relevant water themes of creation, destruction and renewal, *Walking at the Edge of Water* parallels ancestral healing rituals in a prophetic dance of inter-disciplinary expressions" (Dancing Earth, n.d.). The eight dancers on stage are wearing jackets, vests, pants, t-shirts, and dresses all grey, blue and black in color with distressed and torn fabric in most areas of the garments. The clothing appears to connote a post-apocalyptic feeling, as if they are meant to represent a disastrous future. This is not regalia and even the semblance of Native costume is missing. However, some dancers wear face makeup much the way a powwow dancer would, with dark paint across the eyes and white dots or a white line along the border of the dark paint. This face paint style represents warpaint worn by those who historically enter battle and war and has been carried over from powwow dancers. Many of the dancers have long hair that hangs down loose or in the form of braids. Based on the description from the DE website I believe the costumes set the scene as a message about a predicted future out of balance and without easily accessible water. I interpret this piece as contemporary dance that includes American Indian dance in the forms much like dances I've seen and described performed by AIDT. I also see how Dancing Earth subtly includes American Indian dance movements within its contemporary choreography to integrate the ritual aspects of Native culture in the performance narrative. If traditional American Indian dance has the function of storytelling and aspects of spirituality, then what Dancing Earth performs in *Walking at the Edge of Water* is contributing to a broader cultural and historical narrative of American Indian people.

There is a fluidity that takes place in what appears to be freeform movement with a floor mapping of choreography. Arms and legs move like waves extending from the body while the torso expands and contracts. There is less group choreography and more individuals dancing

with a common concept. I also see American Indian dance style when one of the male dancers at centerstage starts his dance with elbows pulled back and high knee movements with a step on each foot (Dancing Earth, 2018, 10:16). The movements the dancer is performing are the features of a Men's Northern Traditional Dancer. In so visibly mixing sequences that appear 'traditional' with other forms of contemporary dance, Dancing Earth makes a show of intermingling the past with the present and pointing toward a future in the process of being created through the bodies of the dancers. This effect might be seen as a way of embodying survivance through the dance as they weave traditional practices into a contemporary dance piece set for the stage. I suggest that what takes place in the merging of traditional and modern dance styles counters conventional American Indian dances found in the archives. These acts of hybridity in Native dance in modern times represents what has been in the works of Taylor, Turner, Vizenor, and Shea Murphy.

In the video *Short film Walking at the Edge of Water, by Dancing Earth and No Reservations Productions* (Dancing Earth, 2014), sidelights shine white light onto the stage, and a black and white video is projected onto the cyclorama.[44] The music is a synthesized guitar string note with strong reverb and tunnel wind effects. A voiceover begins, "If you were wrapped in plastic, how long would you last? Las Vegas is the most water-wasting city in the world" (Dancing Earth, 2014, :00). Standing centerstage is a dancer in the opening scene wearing distressed and torn clothing along with a porcupine hair roach headpiece. The porcupine hair headpiece is fascinating because it appears to be traditional, reflecting the customary headpiece of the Plains Indians, who are part of the powwow tradition. While one might assume it is a wardrobe item for theatre, I see it as more than that. Using a traditional American Indian

[44] See more on this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WabF0sF5QMA&t=14s

headpiece on a theatrical stage is the continuance of the cultural clothing. I argue that the clothes or regalia carry a piece of historical knowledge and understanding. The items being worn by the dancers represent what was not confiscated during the period of colonization and oppression but have been carried through American Indian dance practices. The dancer, who I presume is male, is wearing a gas mask with a filter canister on the left of his face and is surrounded by seven other dancers wearing similar clothing but no gas masks. The dancers are not wearing the same regalia typically worn in powwow. However, through their contemporary dance, they carry knowledge of what was and continues to be practiced by American Indian people.

Two dancers pass in front of the others using the Men's Northern Traditional Dance movements by their high-step marching-style pace, with their backs arched. Each of them is holding a stick rattle in their right hand that shakes as their hands move up and down towards their chests. What the two dancers enact is the expression of cultural memory and identity showing they are retaining the dances used in the past for ceremony and during powwow. The other dancers are spread out on the stage floor and perform movements that are fluid and improvisational, as they are on the ground arranged in shapes that suggest struggle. They appear distraught and defeated in expressing their relationship to the music and theme of the piece. They are communicating a challenge or a battle between good and evil in the world. This hybrid or syncretic dance offers a vision of something new that might, because of its creative engagement with past, present and future, be seen as an embodiment of survivance.

The next work I examine is *Indigenous Futurities* (2020), a live-streaming online performance during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.[45] This performance represented how dance artists claimed space in virtual space. The 32-minute performance was livestreamed

[45] See more on Indigenous Futurities: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4OMCnhc8BE

on June 18th, 2020, and included music, voiceover, and dance. I focus on the inclusion of an American Indian Hoop Dancer, Lumhe Micco Sampson from the Mvskoke Creek and Seneca Nations. He and his brother Samsoche are both Hoop Dance performers and have been dancing since they were young boys. They have been performing and conducting Hoop Dance workshops for 25 years internationally.[46]

In the video, starting at the 9:40 minute mark, Sampson is centered on his hands and knees with 15 white hoops intertwined on his body. He is wearing a decorated black vest, matching wrist cuffs and breechcloth. Around his legs below the knees are sheepskin leggings and he is wearing moccasins. He is dancing with a virtual background, featuring video of a satellite view of Earth in motion. The music is a slow trance like a hip-hop song with spoken word style rap. He moves his hands up along with his body as if emerging or growing from the ground. He moves like he is struggling to stand or break through a ceiling, and eventually, he is free to move side-to-side to the music with his arms up. As he dances, he spins with a hopping motion, lifting and slightly shaking his leg to release hoops onto the floor, leaving him with five hoops across his arms and one held upwards by his teeth. He releases the hoop from his teeth and grabs it to hold it with his foot. He uses a hoop in his hand to make it intertwined. He continues to spin until he slows down and drops all the hoops from his body onto the floor. Sampson kneels on one knee and executes some movements that are less American Indian and more in the form of contemporary dance. He then grabs a hoop and performs an action suggesting that the hoop has become a bow and arrow for him to shoot towards the sky. He displays his skill with a single hoop, followed by two and then three, for the next minute and a half. Eventually, he ends the dance with three hoops in the shape of a sphere, spinning between his hands positioned at the

[46] See more on the Sampson Brothers: https://sampsonbrosarts.com/home

top and bottom. He places the hoop sphere on the ground, kneels, and spreads his arms out to his sides.

From my decades of experience in hoop dance, I know that anyone who has been taught or trained in this dance form has been told the use of a single hoop, and adding to it is the most important part of the storytelling of the dance. A Hoop Dancer tells a creation story and expresses themselves with the hoops in their own style. AS Kevin Locke and Benjamin D. Koen argue, "The Lakota Hoop Dance is a choreographed prayer that aims to create health and healing at the individual and collective levels of human life through an expression and manifestation of the principle of unity" (Locke & Koen, 2008, p. 483). What Sampson performs in his Hoop Dance for Dancing Earth is more than a dance to be included in the production. I see his participation as continuing the purpose of the American Indian dance as a ceremony, much like the American Indian Dance Theatre begins its production with a young man creating a ceremonial space for the other dancers. He draws from those Hoop Dancers who have come before him and have performed Hoop Dance for generations, such as Tony White Cloud and Eddie Swimmer. The hybridity of his Hoop Dance performance, integrating both contemporary and Native dance movements throughout his performance, demonstrates something new and creative. Diana Taylor says, "Dances change over time, even though generations of dancers (and even individual dancers) swear they're always the same. But even though embodiment changes, the meaning might very well remain the same" (Taylor, 2003, p. 20). The Hoop Dance has been done for generations and has, in many accounts, remained the same. Sampson is exercising the act of survivance by performing his own style of hoop dance in a modern time.

Chapter Three – Beyond Survivance

In this chapter, I will explore what it might mean to perform dances that move us beyond survivance. I will look first at a performance titled *Prayer Loop Song* (2014), created by Christian Parrish Takes the Gun, performing under the name *Supaman*. Supaman's in-studio digital music performance incorporates American Indian songs and dances with hip-hop in ways that carry forward what is considered 'traditional' – from ritual, ceremony, and powwow – into contemporary popular culture. The second work examined in this chapter is my own performance as 'Eclipse' during the 2016 Coachella Music Festival. I will analyze the performances of Supaman and Eclipse to show how they might be seen to embody something as going beyond survivance in the evolution of American Indian culture and identity.

This chapter looks deeper at how Native dance beyond survivance might step into a more radical space of performative and perhaps socially transformative possibility. Beyond survivance, I contend that such dances might be seen to offer the possibility of ongoing change, which Turner identifies as an "independent domain of creative activity" (1982, p. 33). What is being explored is how individual American Indian dancers might practice and find creative ways to develop new American Indian dance.

Supaman

Christian Parrish Takes the Gun (Supaman) is a young Native music and dance artist of the Apsáalooke Nation of Montana (Crow), who has made noteworthy changes in the way American Indian powwow dance style and music navigates unorthodox and traditional spaces.[47]

[47] See more on Supaman: https://www.supamanhiphop.net/

In the online music video *Prayer Loop Song*, he includes traditional American Indian Fancy Dance and improvisational hip-hop dance.[48] The video begins with an establishing shot of a modern version of a 1980s-inspired "boombox" that fills the screen. It is a portable stereo system with a handle at the top, radio dial, speakers, and a station for an MP3 device. The camera is pulled back to show a studio environment (the credit says it is the Billings Gazette's Studio) that includes a standing microphone, a turntable with a record on it and a mixing desk. The backdrop is made up of walls with graffiti painted on them. Supaman enters the space with the fringe and feathers of a powwow-style Fancy Dancer. He is wearing a porcupine hair roach headpiece, two back bustles and arm bustles in white and turquoise made from rooster hackle feathers. He is also wearing a yoke and breechcloth with intricate designs, and using the same color sequence as the bustles. He has beadwork on his wrists and head with a necklace and medallion that reads, USDA SUPAMAN. He picks up a Native hand drum with rawhide on one side and rawhide thong ties on the back. The drum is octagon shaped with a Native design of a bird painted on the head. He begins a beat on the drum in front of a standing microphone, processing what we see him perform through a loop station. He then picks up a Native-style flute and plays a few notes in a simple melody. After playing the flute, he pauses to listen to the culmination of the looping sounds then he moves to the beat, first as a powwow dancer and then in the style of a 1970s Robot Dance. As the song progresses, he incorporates "beatbox" vocalizations. Supaman repeats earlier robot moves and other hip-hop-style moves. He adds more to his musical composition and includes a powwow song-style vocable – a melody with no lyrics. He does three different versions of the same melody: natural speaking voice, tenor, and bass. The loop station assembles all the sounds, and then he adds DJ scratching from the vinyl album on the turntable.

[48] See the video: Billings Gazette. (2014, February 20). Studio Enjoy: Supaman – 'Prayer Loop Song'. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0jq7jIa34Y

He then begins to rap in English. These lyrics hold themes that are a traditional cultural tenet of Native songs and dance performances. His opening lines are, “I pray for the ones listening right now – struggling, feel like giving in right now. I’m a pray for you, pray that you come back home, I pray that you understand that you’re never alone” (Parrish Takes Gun, 2014). He ends the song with the following lyrics:

> And I pray for wisdom and I pray for power, and I pray for being ready in the final hour. And I pray for those who keep judging men in the streets, and I pray for my friends and my enemies. (2014)

The relationship between the lyrics and his dancing reveals the importance of how spirituality is incorporated into his performance. He is a dancer, and what is noteworthy is that he alternates singing with dancing. In creating music that is often associated with young adults as urban or street music, he includes what is important for him to convey – there is value in continuing the practice of prayer for all people, the same as it was during tribal-specific ceremonies in the 19th century.

As the song ends, he steps away from the microphone to dance in his powwow-style Men’s Fancy Dance. He uses fast footwork with high-knee action while spinning and moving his arms and hands holding sticks with a string of feathers attached at the end. He is performing his powwow-style dance to hip-hop music he created. What this says is that there is room for mixing the older forms of dance with more modern music. He demonstrates breaking through a wall that prevents traditions from evolving. His song ends with his dance stopping on the last beat, from a spin into a hurdler stretch. He addresses the heavy realities he experiences and knows about in his Native community. He equally makes fun of himself at the end of the dance exclaiming, “Can somebody help me up?”, thereby keeping his work culturally grounded, lighthearted and in balance with his American Indian community. This is a common expectation for Native people

as they choose to move outside of tradition and incorporate Western or modern ideas in their artistry. His worldwide audience is drawn from utilizing social media and he talks across generations making use of the old in more contemporary ways. On the Supaman website, after a long list of awards, accolades, and international recognition, the following statement reflects how he lives his life: "He is currently on tour around the country spreading the good medicine of resiliency, love, laughter, and inclusion" (Supaman, n.p.). His national touring brings together Native people from across North America to view and consider new ways of thinking about American Indian identities in the contemporary frame.

Supaman's artistry is rooted in particular historical foundations of traditional teachings, traditional instruments, reflections of his tribal Nation and Native people within the powwow arena, and what is accepted as traditional powwow-style Fancy Dance regalia. However, Supaman neither relies exclusively on the archive nor on making an effort to have a preset song or dance prepared for viewing by an audience. He can reach into his repertoire of dance (both traditional and modern), his knowledge of Native narratives (historical and current), and thereby build a performance with elements and qualities of a distinct and authentic American Indian dance. He mixes this with elements of contemporary popular culture – in particular youth culture – in ways that are experimental and open to new ways of thinking about his American Indian heritage and identity. In his dances, and in his promotional materials, we can see that Supaman is doing what he can to influence a generation of American Indian dance artists in the way of meaning-making and identity construction for American Indian people, especially youth. In an interview Supaman says**:**

> And don't stop gaining information and gaining a perspective, learning and unlearning in life, you know, because you are the author of your experience here on Earth. The world ain't pushing you around now, the world ain't happening to

> you. You're creating your reality. That is the power that you have. (Takes the Gun, as quoted in Masenthin, 2024, n.p.)

Supaman enacts his traditional cultural practice of dance for purpose and storytelling in his music while using his lyrics and words to interact with cultural knowledge systems and practices. In mixing elements of powwow – specifically Fancy Dance – with rap and hip-hop, Supaman creates a space for imagining other new ways of being and performing Native. His performance in *Prayer Loop Song* disrupts the Western theatricalization of American Indian dance set for the proscenium stage. By deconstructing the convention of prepared choreography, he performs what he embodies from personal experience.

Eclipse

I now analyze the dancing I performed at several music festivals in the U.S. during 2016 with DJ Mr. Carmack. Aaron Carmack, known by the artist's name, DJ Mr. Carmack, is from the Tohono O'odham Nation, located near Tucson, Arizona, and near my tribe, the Pascua Yaqui reservation. He is also of Filipino and Native Hawaiian ancestry. Mr. Carmack adds to the modern representation of bringing traditional culture forward within modern society. He is a world-touring DJ of several genres and a classically trained musician in many instruments.[49] His upbringing was in a home centered on traditional cultural songs and the importance of cultural identity.

In 2016, DJ Mr. Carmack invited me to join the Coachella Music Festival stage as part of his Immersion Tour that year. The tour included eight performances across three states, which additionally included such music festivals such as Lollapalooza, Life is Beautiful, and Snow

[49] For more on Mr. Carmack: https://www.mrcarmack.com/home

Globe.[50] The decision to perform on the Coachella stage as a Native dancer was deeply thought through, given its particular history involving cultural appropriation.[51] With innovative American Indian dance practices taking on new meaning on stage before an audience comes the responsibility of retaining its purpose and significance.

I spent considerable time in dialogue with family and elders to decide how I might perform meaningfully and appropriately. The stage was intended for music, yet I was to dance for historical significance. I had the opportunity to share how I saw American Indian dance fit with an audience that did not expect to see dance. How, I thought, could I provide a positive image of an American Indian while at the same time doing dances that both represented my Native culture and related to modern DJ music? My dance was to oppose a stereotype, elevate the culture, be artistic, and be myself.

At the time of the tour, DJ Mr. Carmack was known for his trap music, a subgenre of hip hop known for its multi-layered and rhythmic synthesized productions. Joining Native dance with the modern music created by an American Indian DJ artist on the Coachella stage was the origin of the character I named Eclipse.[52] Eclipse, as a dance character, is meant to convey a spirit of improvisation and American Indian identity, as well as ambiguity. Donned in an all-white outfit resembling an American Indian Fancy Dancer, I expected that Eclipse was unidentifiable to a non-Native audience attending a music festival. This attire was not meant to represent American Indian people directly. Having done so might have put a burden on them

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[50] For more on the Immersion Tour and a video clip see: https://www.facebook.com/mrcarmackmusic/videos/1332604296781346

[51] Coachella made international headlines in 2014 when Victoria Secret model Alessandra Ambrosio posted a photo of herself on Instagram getting ready for the famous festival. Her photo sparked controversy: a fashion trend that saw Native-inspired feather headdresses rise as a fashion piece, and cultural appropriation of Native American feather bonnets. https://ictnews.org/archive/supermodel-uses-sacred-headdress-to-get-totally-stoked-for-coachella

[52] For an image of Eclipse at Coachella: https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/dancer-performs-onstage-with-mr-carmack-during-day-2-of-the-news-photo/523611488

having to answer for its existence at the festival. Nor was the attire meant to satisfy or appease any expectation of Indianness from the audience. There was no definition given to the audience of what Eclipse was supposed to be. This allowed the audience to construct their understanding of what a Native might be. One could argue that this character was American Indian but not specific to any tribal representation. Eclipse had no color, tribal-specific symbols, or markers beyond the feathered regalia from a powwow. White handkerchiefs covered my face except for the eyes. Every other body part was covered in regalia: white satin yoke and breechcloth with white satin ribbon fringe, white beadwork headband and wrist cuffs, white dance sticks in hand with white feathers hanging at the ends, and white feather back bustles and arm bustles. White leather gloves were on my hands, white angora fur leggings around my legs below the knees, and white beaded moccasins worn on my feet. I also wore a synthetic roach headpiece with imitation eagle feathers on top. The costume is foundationally the same as what would be seen at powwows but it is all white and my face is covered, which is not typical. The dancer may appear to be American Indian but not in a way that is familiar. The costume is not regalia for powwow, but for the purpose of transformation.

Mr. Carmack began the music set slowly, building towards hard beats. Performing as Eclipse, I emerged from behind Mr. Carmack, representing Carmack's soul and Native identity stepping out. Eclipse peeled away from DJ Carmack with ethereal motions until a resounding, loud, and definitive beat changed the mood, and Eclipse's movements responded. Once I appeared on the stage in front of the DJ tables the crowd erupted in a loud cheer. The feeling I had was powerful and overwhelming. I had a burst of energy I did not have before entering the stage. I could feel a buzz or tingly feeling throughout my body and it was so tremendous that for a quick moment I forgot to dance. The moves I performed most were those in the traditional style

of Fancy Dance. However, in alignment with the DJ music I included modern elements of hip-hop and capoeira-style movements fused with Native dance – I used the dance styles interchangeably.

The crowd danced along, bouncing to the beat. The crowd cheered at various moments during the dancing. Their communication to the stage energized me to the point of entering a kind of flow state, which transcended the particulars of movement and sound to create a sense of something beyond. I felt weightless and could perform moves without preparing what would come next. I was in a spiritual place almost as if I were in ceremony.

Mr. Carmack and I agreed that I would include a prayer or blessing during the performance. After initially stepping onto the stage and dancing for a minute, I chose a moment to offer a blessing. I faced the audience with my feet in a wide stance. With my right hand I touched the stage floor praying for the earth that has made me. I slowly moved to touch my heart to pray for love and beauty within me so I might also share it with all around me. I touched my forehead to pray for humility so that I can be thankful for those who came before me to give me all I have as a human being. And last, I touched the top of my head to pray for a continued relationship with what is above me including the air that spreads my thoughts and feelings, as well as with the Creator. The action was a way to recognize a reverence for the land and an invocation given in respect to the audience. It was not an explicit or performative prayer or ceremonial action, yet the movements were spiritual to me and held a significant meaning.

Throughout my dance, a pre-recorded video of my dancing was projected on a large video screen at the back of the stage. This meant that the audience saw the dancer in the present moment and the dancer as captured in the past, dancing together and separately, almost the same and yet somehow carrying the possibility of change. What the audience experiences and what is

being performed is simultaneously the archive and the repertoire. There is the recorded dance being projected while the live dance is being performed.

I left the stage after the Fancy Dance and returned later as Eclipse dressed in all-black as a Hoop Dancer. I wore a black sleeveless t-shirt and black compression shorts. I also wore the same white angora fur leggings, white beaded moccasins, and white bandana to cover my face below my eyes as I wore in the all-white costume. I chose to have Eclipse alternate between white and black to reflect how the moon takes on different shades from the sunlight. Eclipse represents how one identity can be covered by another while maintaining the original form.

Before starting the dance, I prayed as I have always done. It was not a performed prayer but one I had in my heart and mind as I entered onto the stage. The music I danced to was what Mr. Carmack was playing at the time and was not predetermined. For the powwow I perform Hoop Dance in the same way as I have for 30 years. I choose a drum group to sing the song for me to dance to, we determine the speed of the beat, and I let them know my signal to show I have completed my dance. I make the designs that have cultural meaning and that I learned from other Hoop Dancers. For my Hoop Dance at Coachella, I chose to modify how I would engage with the eight hoops I held in my hands. I picked them up one at a time from the floor. I altered most of the moves I usually do to be more mechanical, robotic, or by changing what a shape meant in its representation. Unlike my usual pacing, which is constant and to the beat, I intermittently moved the hoops around my body fast and sometimes very slow. I was considering how the dance might be performed and interpreted in the future. The dance I transformed for the Coachella audience performed something that was beyond what I perform at powwows and beyond the theatrical adaptations of Hoop Dance by dance companies on the proscenium stages.

From ceremony to powwow to the Coachella stage, Native dance, as I express it through Fancy Dance and Hoop Dance, becomes the storyscape of my repertoire as a performance artist. I have been performing Fancy Dance and Hoop Dance for over 40 years and in that time, I have experienced American Indian dance as ceremonial and as exhibition. This came into full scope for me through the experience with Mr. Carmack on a performance stage of that setting – with such a varied, mostly non-Native, culturally uninformed audience. My responsibility was to enact that traditional cultural meaning as a Native dancer while innovating the storyscape to a modern performance stage.

By embodying the dance, I insist on more than just carrying on. I give form and consciousness to the past, present, and future of my connection to the collective identity of Native people. This may be what is meant by Rustom Bharucha when he states, "Inventions uphold a different sense of the unknown. Instead of 'exposure', they are concerned with *making* new artefacts" (1989, p. 1907). In this way, Eclipse is the invention of what is beyond survivance. The American Indian dance by Eclipse is concerned with creating something new rather than mimicking or representing an old story. It is this alteration that modifies what an American Indian dancer can be rather than what they are supposed to be by historical standards.

I am American Indian, whether dressed like those who created the dances over a hundred years ago or in modern, Western-influenced clothing. As I experience it, the dancer within the dance carries meaning and purpose. I step into this history when I dance and make it present again. I look to the past and the future, and act as a conduit between them. Dance carries meaning and purpose; I enact that meaning in every dance performance. At Coachella I brought the knowledge and understanding of American Indian dance as it has been taught to me by past practitioners. I prepared for the dance with prayer and intentions to offer blessings to the space

and the audience. By not wearing what is typical regalia at powwows during my dances, I was demonstrating that what was most important was my relationship with the dance and how I was to embody the movements performed. I was practicing the cultural aspect of the dance in ways that resonated with how I see my place as Native in a modern time.

As a practicing cultural performer whose dances have survived centuries of colonization and repression, by exploring the repertoire of Native American dance in theory and practice I not only mark our survivance – that is, the livingness of our traditions – but point us to something beyond that. I am a powwow dancer and I am Yaqui. My Yaqui traditions, I believe, are embedded within me and in my dance practice. When I dance, I am bringing the past into a modern reconstruction. I take inspiration from Diana Taylor, whose perspective on performance seeks to define the 'post' in the postcolonial: "Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it" (2003, p. 20). For the Yaqui, our traditional dance practices or occupation of a dancer is more than performative – it is a generational transmission of knowledge and a lifelong commitment. In part, the deer dance is the embodiment of the *saila maso* (Little Brother Deer), who, for the dancer, comes from a dream state and into the spirit of the deer to share those knowledge systems.

In reflecting on my performance as Eclipse, I want to assert that it is less of a character and more of an identity. This allowed me to bring a performance to the stage while balancing innovation and tradition. Eclipse represents the inner me. I am participating in forming something new for the future without having to be tied to the traditional ways American Indian dance is performed. The Eclipse character has the function to represent all Native people in the eyes of a large audience. No definition is given to the audience. This abstract character allows

the audience to create their interpretation of what a modern American Indian might be, informed by their experience with this faceless Native persona.

As change takes place throughout history with every culture, we may ask whether these changes reflect a need, a want, some innovation, or by force? In this research, I have found that the narratives that rise in change occur in response to all of these influences. As Bharucha reminds us, "Tradition can be invented in any number of ways, even though we may not be aware of it. The most conspicuous of 'inventions' are 'fabrica-tions'" (1989, p. 1907). Complexity, confusion, and misinformation rise as part of that change in response to force and need; it creates additional pressure that becomes part of the alchemy of transformation. However, then the next new dance is added, and change becomes about innovation and want; it becomes about dance that evolves with the people, for the people.

Native Liminoid

The title of the performance piece is Native Liminoid. Native is both about me as a Native American and the dance "style" being performed, as well as the liminoid, where the performance that takes place challenges the dominant discourse of what has occurred throughout history. In his statement of this concept Turner says about the liminoid:

> The "liminoid" phase between leaving one post and taking up another would repay study in terms of comparative symbology, both in regard to the subject (his dreams, fantasies, favorite reading and entertainment) and to those whom he is leaving and joining (their myths about him, treatment of him, etc.) (p. 25)

I understand liminoid to share characteristics with liminality, but without the traditional social structure or ritual. For this performance I am detaching myself from my usual role of a Fancy Dancer and Hoop Dancer at powwow and/or other traditional structures. I am not resolving a personal crisis or trying to achieve a specific goal. I am balancing between both traditional and modern, and between fictional and actual realities in the dancing I will present.

The piece takes on two parts: a past and the creation of a future. The two parts also reflect a story of birth and life, or a story of creation in its overall connection to the traditional storyscape of American Indian dance. The final piece will be a recorded performance in a studio and access to the video will be provided for the examiners.

As I walk towards the stage, I pause, respect, and acknowledge the transition from what, who, and where I have been to where I am going physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I decide to go into the next space, as I am well prepared. I am hesitant but can succeed with what I have been taught. The archive has taught me, and the archive is to be trusted. This is me at the very start of powwow dancing.

I wear clothes I would not wear daily but to make an impression for certain social arenas – this is my costume. I am wearing what I feel would appease an audience, something less primitive, less savage, less stereotyped, or simulated for an American Indian dance performance. I am wearing a long-sleeved black button-down shirt, with small red stripes in the shape of arrows. Also worn are black slacks, and pinstriped breechcloth with an embroidered fleur-de-lys emblem on the bottom corner. On my feet are black socks. My hoops are on the floor. I then shift my thoughts to remind myself that I am not there to dance for an audience. They are not there to critique me. This is the moment of the trickster. This is the moment of shifting from the performer, the hired dancer, the Indian – to the authentic self, as I proclaim. I choose to dance, but I dance to what I feel with the music being played. The song can be a powwow song or not. I will dance what I feel in the music. I know my obligation on the stage is to dance in a Native style.

I reach for the hoops, close my eyes, and offer thanks and a prayer for the retaining of the dance by the ancestors. I acknowledge those who have been my teachers, not just in the Native dancing, but all teachers who have shaped me throughout my life and every aspect of my life. I thank all living things that have been gifts from the Creator. I step back and touch the floor, my heart, forehead, and head. I will keep these movements sacred to me. This is never performance and, therefore, will not be defined. While the dance is not a performance, there is the knowledge that an audience exists in some fashion.

I close my eyes and breathe once I am ready to pick up the first hoop. The music plays and is a modern song, Mr. Carmack – *Headache*.[53] I continue by entering the first hoop in the way I was taught about entering the world through a circle. I have been taught to understand the

[53] For the song and video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeZ52XJR9Sc&list=PL7mdhlejPJe-KBB_8wNGX2679KjqoHmo5&index=1

first hoop as being myself, as managing to control and master myself is the most important and challenging task. I move the second hoop through the first, showing the world of binaries and the exchange of opposites – the sun and moon representing day and night and mother and father. I place the two hoops before me and emerge as if being born or renewing. I move to three hoops, four hoops, and then five. Each time, I create shapes that might represent animals, insects, or other living things like plants or flowers. I continue the dance until I use all eight hoops and end by creating a sphere of hoops to represent the world or the whole and complete self. I pause and deconstruct the sphere. The dance has always ended with the sphere to show construction and creation. The narrative of creation is always in renewal and uses what has already been created, returning to its original self, allowing for creation to take place again for generations.

I begin my next dance to the song, Mr. Carmack x Arnold – *Muney (Gimme dat)*.[54] I do not begin with movement but instead with internalizing the sounds. I also know my place is on the Earth, not the stage. The dance will be for all things above me, below me, and around me. The dance will be prayer. The first move is in the style of a Yaqui deer dancer. I have never done the deer dance. I have never practiced the deer dance, never rehearsed. It is what moves inside of me. I then shift to improvisational movement, almost as if it were a practice of repertoire. The etymology of the word practice means 'action' - I am taking action. From the thesis research I have learned that the dances were often for ceremony within the cultural community, shifted to intertribal powwow, and have since been performed for audiences in proscenium theatres. Moving beyond survivance must mean a return of the dance being performed for ceremony – I am embodying ceremony.

[54] For the song and video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_K-TQR18ZfI&list=PL7mdhlejPJe-KBB_8wNGX2679KjqoHmo5&index=2

The movements come from tribal specific ceremonies, and powwow-style dances – very minimal movements as I do not intend to perform for praise. I am dancing to appeal – both to petition and charm. On the one hand, I am dancing the anti-structure without a recognizable form or conventional style. On the other hand, I aim to charm with the movement I convey as the sound seduces me. The footwork of many tribal dances is drawn from my lifelong experience of attending and often participating in ceremonies.

The music stops. I stop dancing. The purpose of the dance was not for the cheering crowd. The cheers from a crowd do make a difference in how I perform. With or without dance regalia, with or without powwow music, the dance will still occur from the heartbeat, breath, and prayer. The dance exists because of the efforts through the great adversity our ancestors endured. The cleverness of retaining what was theirs even if it was deemed illegal, given that a national plan was in action to suppress and discontinue the dances. I dance because they want me to; I dance because they survived; and the dances have been reshaped through survivance, and my daughter needs to know them. By enacting the historical archive and reshaping it as I choose to in reclaiming the narrative, the viewer has witnessed and taken part as the audience of the repertoire transitioning into future stories of strength for the people.

The whole performance presented in this artefact is assembled as snapshots in time of the dancer in the artistic process of shapeshifting for themselves, and in this case not necessarily for a visually present audience. Testing the transmission with its most modern application, the audience is unseen – watching on a video, physically separated from the performance as we challenge new paradigms. However, I am also in practice, and the transmission I offer as a dancer remains. I created a space that undermines the convention of performing on a stage with

an invited audience. I am occupying the space and decision-making of what I will perform, all the while knowing the performance to be viewed by those unseen:

> When we scan the rich data put forth by the social sciences and the humanities on performances, we can class them into "social" performances (including social dramas) and "cultural" performances (including aesthetic or stage dramas). As I said earlier, the basic stuff of social life is performance, "the presentation of self in everyday life. (Turner, 1987, p. 13)

Turner goes on to say, "Self is presented through the performance of roles, through performance that breaks roles, and through declaring to a given public that one has undergone a transformation of state and status, been saved or damned, elevated or released" (Turner, 1987, p. 13). Perhaps what might be seen as a disruption and distortion of traditional cultural practices can instead seen not as a loss of the original culture, nor as constituting new American culture, but simply creating a new culture.

The whole presentation represents the overarching dialogue of the ritual and the research. First, the ritual of what theatre performance requires – a performer, the piece, the audience – in conventional terms. Historically, American Indian people participated in their customs that reflected their daily life relationship with the world. It was less of a practice and more of a lifestyle. Next, the ritual of what American Indian powwow style dance requires – powwow style music (preferably live), the regalia appropriate for the dance style (in this case, Men's Fancy Dance), which would be full of bright colors, ribbons or fringe, beadwork, and a complete set of feather bustles on the back and arms. However, instead of donning a costume that highlights what a powwow dancer is supposed to wear, especially to be identified as a type, the dancer might be identified by the dance and not what is worn. Am I still Native without the regalia? Am I still able to perform the movements of dances with the spirit and nature of the culture? Earlier in this thesis when discussing the performance by Supaman I state, "Supaman enacts his

traditional cultural practice of dance for purpose and storytelling in his music while using his lyrics and words to interact with cultural knowledge systems and practices (p. 87). I also state in reference to my dance as Eclipse, "How, I thought, could I provide a positive image of an American Indian while at the same time doing dances that both represented my Native culture and related to modern DJ music? My dance was to oppose a stereotype, elevate the culture, be artistic, and be myself" (p. 88). This research has looked at and considered what the more radical social effects might be in beyond survivance and I assert that it may be from a transitive discursive practice. By that I mean, beyond survivance in dance might include an indigenous group shaping and defining their own identities over time without relying solely on a Western colonial discourse taken from peripheral perspectives. This research took more of a 'I perform and I interpret', than an 'I perform and they interpret' perspective. By this I mean and am referring to the dance practitioners themselves as cultural masters or as part of the community they represent doing the research and the creative process for the future.

In the article "The Tradition of Recycling Identity in Native Culture: The Re-Traditioning of Tradition" (Madril, 2019), I say:

> The formation of such new figures in the cultural narrative became necessary in telling our living history – one that is not static and is continuously evolving. What becomes essential in the practice of dances and songs then is how they reflect the identity of the people as they see themselves in context in an evolving world. The re-telling of origins as they necessarily engage with the ongoing transformations of life becomes, by definition, 'traditional'. (p. 4)

From my past it was important for me to practice traditional customs when I was growing up. I was participating in survival and sometimes in survivance. I wore what I learned to wear by observing what was in the archive – as seen in photos, written in text, or by what older practitioners told me. Now I see that when we move from reshaping Native dance in response to

survival to recentering and innovating dance as a form of empowered engagement in a modern future, we move into engagement beyond survivance.

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