An Indigenous Perspective in the Anthropocene: A Spiralic Essay on Time

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Naomi: *If extractivism is a mindset, a way of looking at the world, what is the alternative?*

Leanne: *Responsibility. Because I think when people extract things, they're taking and they're running and they're using it for just their own good. What's missing is the responsibility. If you're not developing relationships with the people, you're not giving back, you're not sticking around to see the impact of the extraction. You're moving to someplace else. The alternative is deep reciprocity. It's respect, it's relationship, it's responsibility...*

-Interview with Naomi Klein and Leanne Simpson

For those born within the last three hundred years to industrial and post-industrial societies, time is not measured by spiralling and dialogic relationships. Time is measured like money to create a global perspective. This allows those playing the game of commerce to cooperate under one system: managing global slave routes or tracking lazy employees' bathroom breaks. During the Anthropocene, measuring time linearly can demonstrate the devastating upward hockey-stick trajectory of pollution and allow for light-speed communications for families with loved ones in distant warzones. Linear time has a place in the Anthropocene, but when time, the foundation of measuring human experience, is commodified then

everything can be commodified. This perception is not natural. Since time immemorial, Indigenous communities around the world formed relationships with time that follow the transforming cyclical and regenerative nature of the land. Traditional ceremonies—like the round dancing during the 21st century Idle No More protests—spin together the past, present, and future with a flurry of footsteps. Teachers and storytellers of Indigenous knowledge—like essayist and scholar Kyle P. Whyte, or poet and screenwriter Tommy "Teebs" Pico—can communicate the ancient truths with spiralic and dialogic narratives. This essay will acknowledge this perception of time as *spiral time*. It must also be acknowleged that this essay is written by a settler-colonial and that any essay describing spiral time cannot do justice to the many perceptions of non-linear time. It is the hope of this essayist to address the works of Idle No More, Kyle P. Whyte, and Tommy Pico to continue their dialogue in spiral time, teaching alternate perceptions of time that deconstruct colonial ideologies through meaningful relationships.

The Idle No More movement began in 2012 by women who fought to connect their communities and call for "refounded nation-to-nation relations based on mutual respect" (Idle No More). Dr. Laura De Vos, a Belgian assistant professor of modern language and culture, explores the concept of spiral time by examining how the Idle No More movement uses dance as a resistance to colonial violence "by centering and practicing Indigenous resurgence and continuity" (De Vos 13). De Vos uses the term "spiralic time" to refer to the Indigenous "relationships to the seasonal cycles on their lands" and their relations to non-human beings of the land (2). This kind of temporality disturbs the colonial system by not perceiving "reconciliation as

an end in itself" but instead as "a continuing spiral" (2). Linear time can chart colonial violence in the past and mark the days when laws were made, or apologies were offered. Colonialism can use linear time to view itself as something of the distant and irrelevant past, until activists and dancers like those of Idle No More demand action. For any meaningful relationship between Indigenous and descendants of settler-colonials, "reconciliation [must] take on a temporal character as the individual and collective process of overcoming the subsequent legacy of past abuse, not the abusive colonial structure itself" (Coulthard 108-109). As Glen Coulthard states here, the idea of "subsequent legacy of past abuse" is difficult to understand linearly—but with spiral time the abuses are carried out over generations. Spiral time visualizes this violence as a continuous folding over rather than points along a line. A single moment or legal policy cannot deconstruct these intergenerational systems. Moving forward from this trauma requires an equally complex and dynamic perception of the problem.

Linear time is not sufficiently dynamic to fully visualise the layers of trauma that extend from the past and into the future during the present moment of our anthropogenic world. Visualizing time as a dance shared in relationship can be a good place for linear minds to start. Dance is experienced in relationship—to the other dancers, to the land under their feet, and those watching the dance. As the Idle No More protesters dance, they participate in the traditions passed down by their ancestors (Klein, "Dancing into being"). The memorization of dance movements shows the "irreducibility of the past" (Dearle) as the learned movements are performed in the present. The repetition allows the dance to be learned by future

dancers—showing the continuity of time. The ancestors of the dancers are present with the women of the twenty-first century in their shared movements. The descendants of the dancers are also present in the same way, all dancing the same movements across time. The dances are repeated and made new in each circle. These dances are not linear evolutions, but a spiraling pattern that is remembered and remade in each circle. In a more practical sense, these flash mob dances extend to inspire other dancers across space. After the flash mobs in the Regina's Cornwall Center, similar ceremonies followed in Edmonton, Ottawa, Winnipeg, and even Minnesota ("Round dance in Edmonton"). Spiral time does not measure these relationships by their dates, but perceives the dancers as dialogically connected through their movements. Visualizing spiral time as a dance can help Westerners see the folding nature of temporality; the repeated events and relationships allow resurgence of memory that is made new in the present to be passed on to the future gatherings. In these circles of dance, there are many spiraling relationships beyond the present at work. This experience of time, not measured units, allows relationships to continue despite any distance between generations.

Kyle P. Whyte's academic work uses spiral time to communicate generations of Indigenous knowledge despite using colonial media. He uses clear and elaborate skill to communicate his knowledge through essays, a medium first used by the colonizer English Lord Bacon to mean "a composition more or less elaborate in style, though limited in range" ("Essay, II.8."). Whyte builds his essay arguments through "dialogical unfolding of spiraling time" (Whyte, "Indigenous Sci-(fi)" 7) between his Potawatomi traditions and Western academic tradition. Whyte's skill over the essay

form allows him to intentionally disregard certain limits of this form to weave in his indigeneity and intelligence. A clear example of this is his essay "Indigenous Science (fiction) for the Anthropocene" published in *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space.* This article's thesis is to "honor Indigenous histories, perspectives and projects...and that support constructive and critical conversations of allyship" (225). One of his main points is to "engage in dialogic narratives through counterfactual space" with writing and storytelling (230). His introduction presents his argument, and the points presented in the body paragraphs "overlap with and refer to one another" (222), helping the reader to continuously unfold the layers of his thesis, reaching a deeper understanding with each repetition of his points. His main deviation from the essay form is his conclusion. His essay is "without a conclusion section" (222), which spirals his essay away from the ideal linear progression of an essay—hook, introduction, thesis, body paragraphs, conclusion. The intentional omission ensures there are still questions to "engage [with] another time" (230). His conclusion is used to support his thesis: engaging Indigenous perspective and building allyship through dialogue. If his essay followed the straight, terminating line, there would not be a great need for dialogue. Whyte's practical application of spiral time in his essay keeps his traditionally spiralic perspective, while folding it into a form that linear minds are capable of perceiving.

Whyte's essay on Indigenous science (fiction) is a less political introduction to his ideas. His more recent essays, like "Time as Kinship" and "Environmental Justice, Indigenous Peoples, and Consent", are politically vehement about demanding action. A full analysis of these essays is beyond the scope of this essay, but their

messages—of "engendering better situations through establishing and repairing shared responsibilities" and how consent is "connected systematically with human relationships to the environment" (Whyte, "Kinship" 54; "Consent" 47)—can be better understood with the perception of time as an unfolding spiral rather than a line. Whyte does not seek to exclude those who live in linear time but encourages his reader to critically question their perception. These essays ask how spending time thinking about temporality as currency has prevented Western and Indigenous people from having meaningful relationships. Story is an easier way for lessons to be passed on as it allows the mind to spiral with the spiraling nature of narrative. Reading his essay on Indigenous sci-(fi) provides a theoretical framework before the reader can truly join in Whyte's fierce political advocacy.

While many writers use literary and poetic devices that look like spiral time—foreshadowing, flashbacks, allusions, or compounding repetition—spiral time is clearer in Indigenous writing, such as the poetry of Tommy Pico. Tommy Pico's *Nature Poem* expresses a personal Indigenous experience and identity living under colonial scrutiny. Books have often been used as fixed objects to perpetuate capitalist and colonial systems. In reading *Nature Poem,* despite "interacting with a fixed object, the reader is directly engaging with another's philosophies and life experiences" (Murphy 1). The main devices in Pico's book, *Nature Poem*, that depicts spiralic temporality is repetition. Throughout the sporadic and colloquial language of the book, the idea of "the kind of nature [Teebs] would write a poem about" (Pico 2) is repeated. Like Whyte's use of repetition, each time the words "nature poem" are repeated they give new understanding to Pico's perception of nature (2; 6; 7; 15;

27; 73). This repetition is perforated by wit and absurdism to confound and disrupt any attempts at pinpointing Teebs and nature on a line. Linear readings of this poem create no effective conversations about the anthropogenic crisis an Indigenous person experiences in the city. His poetic technique continuously asks the reader to remember and renew their ideas of his nature. This non-linear progression of his poem inhibits any interpretation of his experience being linear. While the poem does contain scenes and characters, there are no dates. At the end of the book, there is the nature "poem you wanted all along" (73) about sunsets and gardens; this is the same nature which "puts hands on the ribs of [his] chair and asks...to go into the bathroom with him" (2). Teebs and his perception of nature are "adaptable to different settings and will never be the same twice" (De Vos 1). His poem has concepts like forgiveness, patience, and community folded up with resentment, anger, and dissent. These concepts are incompatible in most Western traditions, but Pico's poem depicts how relationships naturally encompass all of these contradictory ideas. In spiral time, these experiences overlap without erasing each other. Reading his poem in spiral time can cause confusion that leads to meaningful engagement and dialogue about the complicated relationship Teebs has with nature and the world of the Anthropocene.

Spiral time is not a new system, or a tool for capitalists to use to commodify and assimilate Indigenous ideologies. Spiraling perceptions of time allow for non-linear thinking that perceives reconciliation as a process enacted in continuity. Spiral time can connect humans with each other and the non-human world as an alternative to viewing time as forward and backward or accelerating along a straight

line. Reconnecting with spiral time will allow the major drivers of the Anthropocene, the capitalist-colonials, to dialogically remember and reconnect with nature. Spiral time, the dynamic and living experience of time as non-linear, can show how generations across time can share wisdom and inspire action in the present. In the Anthropocene, we gain critical insights when looking to our descendants and asking how "we become a good ancestors ourselves?" (Whyte, "Indigenous Sci-(fi)" 7). The term spiral time is inadequate to summarize the diverse implications of this dialogic, relational, and diverse understanding of time. This is like how the term Anthropocene cannot summarize the poly-crises of the industrial and post-industrial world. This perception may not unify the global economy but may begin a dialogue with the reader, inviting them to question why the status quo was put into place and how someone—be they writers or teachers—can begin dismantling this crisis.

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