Imagination and Rewriting in Joshua Whitehead's *Jonny Appleseed*
Layers of Material Practice

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Abstract *Writing carries special significance for Indigenous peoples. In North America and beyond, European colonizers have used writing to commit and justify acts of violence against Indigenous peoples from the first days of contact. Writing creates and relinquishes authority; it includes and excludes subjects. Where writing has gained such authority, the act of rewriting has become an essential tool of disruption for the political struggles of marginalized peoples worldwide, including women, members of LGBTQ+ groups, people from postcolonial settings, and Indigenous peoples living in Western settler countries and countries that experienced European colonialism. In this article, I analyze First Nations author Joshua Whitehead's 2018 debut novel, Jonny Appleseed, as a rewriting of settler-colonial coded concepts surrounding Indigenous sexualities, Indigeneity, and the link between Indigenous peoples and technology. Whitehead thereby materializes new knowledge which challenges dominant discourses. Through a Foucauldian perspective, I frame writing as a material practice because of its relationship to power and discourse. The novel's protagonist Jonny rewrites the established cultural scripts, what Diana Taylor calls "scenarios of discovery," for his own financial gains. Jonny might reproduce a conventional notion of cyberspace and the 'discovery script,' but he is the one in control of his materiality; his own body, image, and story.*

Keywords *Two-Spirited; Cyberspace; Indigenous; Rewriting; Scenarios of Discovery*

Introduction: Writing, Rewriting, and Materiality

To put it mildly, there is a complicated relationship between the act of writing and Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Since first contact, writing has been

used by European colonists to commit and legitimize acts of violence against Indigenous peoples. Postcolonial and Indigenous scholars like Diana Taylor and Craig S. Womack, maintain that writing has emerged as the dominant means of knowledge production and exchange in the hegemonic, white-coded settler discourse across the USA and Canada. This phenomenon dates to the early years of colonization and settlement of the "New World," or more accurately, Turtle Island.[1] Historically, writing has mostly been the domain of linguists, philologists, historians, and literary scholars who have focused on linguistic and translation-related textual meaning. Kathryn E. Piquette and Ruth D. Whitehouse claim that although such work is necessary, it is also critical to pay attention to connections between scribal practice, tools and materials, and textual interpretations (10). From sociohistorical events and the advancement of technologies, different forms of writing have emerged throughout the millennia. Writing practices are part of a material culture that is "preceded by and constituted through the material practices of human practitioners" (1). Thus, the practices of writing are diverse and unfixed and go beyond the conventional (Euro-Western) idea of writing as we know it.

Writing then is material not only due to its physicality but because of its connection to power and discourse. It gives and takes authority, constructs and is constructed by discourse; it is a medium of the language, its materialized form. Discourse not only refers to the world, objects, bodies, and practices but also creates them (Foucault 57–58); power "is not something held but something *practiced*" (Nealon, emphasis mine 20). The central idea of Foucault's work is materiality, as discourses emerge and function at the intersection of the verbal and material realms (Hardy and Thomas 681). Writing then is a form of power practice, as it constitutes the material world through discourse.

In a world where the conventional practice of writing has gained epistemological authority through the forces of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, *rewriting* has become a crucial tool in the political struggles of marginalized peoples across the globe. This includes Indigenous peoples in neoliberal settler nations, people in postcolonial countries, especially women, members of LGBTQ+ groups, and their intersections. The editors of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* stress that "literature offers

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1   The term "Turtle Island" is a creation myth shared by various Indigenous populations across the North American continent. It "is the name many Algonquian- and Iroquian-speaking peoples mainly in the northeastern part of North America use to refer to the continent" (Robinson and Filice).

one of the most important ways" to express and understand the influence of ongoing colonialisms on contemporary peoples worldwide (Ashcroft et al. 1). Feminist scholar Adrienne Rich remarks that it is crucial to "know the writing of the past" to disrupt popular ideologies (19). Rewriting functions as a disruption strategy in the hands of BIPOC authors, thinkers, and artists to provide fertile ground for the possibility of non-hegemonic lives. Acts of rewriting are playful and disruptive practices that authors use to unearth hidden naturalized discourses. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer: A Memoir*, and many other examples of rewriting allow us to question the legitimacy of established societal structures such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, and white-coded settler colonialism.

One such example, and the subject of this article, is *Jonny Appleseed*, the 2018 debut novel by First Nations author Joshua Whitehead (Oji-Cree).[2] The novel follows the eponymous protagonist and his life in a contemporary Canadian settler state. Jonny is a young Two-Spirited Indigenous person who has moved from Peguis, the First Nations reserve he grew up in, to the city of Winnipeg.[3] Living in the city and renting an apartment require money, and he must find a way to make ends meet. His goal is to earn enough money to go back to Peguis to attend his stepfather's funeral. Jonny earns money by performing cybersex and sending photos or videos of his erotic acts to his clientele. He also acts in live videos, offering additional explicit material for a higher price. Alongside the reserve and the city, one of the most important locations in the novel is cyberspace, which is not physically restricted to the other two locations; Jonny can be online and inhabit cyberspace anywhere as long as he has a reliable internet connection. Despite the omnipresence of the non-material cyberspace, I read the figure of Jonny Appleseed as maintaining some material qualities. The content is material, it transforms discourses around Indigeneity

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2   Throughout this article, I indicate Indigenous identity and tribal affiliation in parentheses following the person's name.

3   "Two-Spirited" in simplest terms is a pan-Indigenous concept that refers to non-binary, non-Western sexualities, sexual orientations, and ways of living that predate settler contact on Turtle Island. In the Anishinaabe/Ojibwe language, the term "*niizh manidoowag*, refers to a person who embodies both a masculine and feminine spirit" (Filice). It is however imperative to differentiate Two-Spiritedness from queerness as sexual orientation. Although a Two-Spirited Indigenous person can be queer and/or practice queer sexualities, queerness is a settler-coded term which falls short when referring to the self-defined Two-Spirit peoples. For more on the tensions between queerness and Indigeneity, see: Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*.

while shaping realities. In the novel itself, Jonny materializes his virtual self, rewriting his material body in cyberspace. His body becomes liquid, ergo he transforms the materiality of his body. As an Indigenous, Two-Spirited author, Whitehead produces new knowledges while rewriting some established settler-colonial definitions about Indigeneity, Indigenous sexualities, and the relationship between Indigenous peoples and technology.[4] Here, it is important to highlight Whitehead's (and other authors') Indigeneity. The meanings that texts produce change drastically when their authors change. In the fashion of the famous feminist slogan "the personal is political", the individual experience matters. Thus, by being Indigenous and writing about Indigenous characters (especially a Two-Spirited young male), Whitehead utilizes his individual experiences to provide space for a collectivity. Whitehead's Indigeneity is crucial because Whitehead's source of rewriting is what Donna Haraway would have called, his "situated knowledges" (590). Whitehead's situated knowledge functions for him to imagine a Two-Spirited character in modern-day Canada.

Following this, I examine two different layers of re/writing as material practices in *Jonny Appleseed*, that are shaped through imagination and individual experience. On the extratextual level, the Two-Spirited Indigenous author imagines a Two-Spirited Indigenous character who exerts control over settler colonial narratives and challenges them to a certain extent. On the textual level, which I foreground in this article, Jonny reimagines and rewrites what Diana Taylor calls "scenarios of discovery" with a queer twist (53). Taylor describes the early encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples in the Americas as "theatrical scenario[s] structured in a predictable, formulaic ... fashion" (13). An oft-reproduced cultural script is found in the history of settler nations of North America. Beginning in the fifteenth century with Christopher Columbus' journals to the nineteenth-century romantic paintings of the American West, the script, in a nutshell, is: The settler arrives at a new, 'untouched space' and 'discovers' Indigenous people who welcome the settler with open arms. As "culturally specific imaginaries," these scenarios

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4   On a side note, whenever I write "white-coded" I refer to the idea of a universalized whiteness (and maleness) that is used to refer to people. By pointing out that whiteness is not "natural" phenomenon but a set of discourses and ideologies, I show that how non-whiteness gets othered. Similarly, I use "settler-coded" to show how settler subjecthood is universalized within nations with a settler-colonial context such as the US, Canada, and Australia. Although there is considerable overlap between "white-coded" and "settler-coded", they do not necessarily represent the exact structures.

create and reinforce a settler/native dichotomy and simultaneously hierarchize it as the settler superior to the native (13). Whitehead reimagines the performative act in his novel, in cyberspace where the Indigenous and the settler initially cross paths and the active latter 'discovers' the passive former. Through his re/imagination of the scenarios of discovery, Jonny rewrites the dominant scripts of the settler Canadian society. He 're-visions' the scenario in cyberspace; "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Rich 18). While Rich highlights the importance of re-visioning for women, this statement is valid for other non-hegemonic subject positions as well. Through his protagonist, Whitehead rewrites the settler-coded perception of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and modern technology i.e., that they do not gel. In contrast, Jonny is tech-savvy and navigates the online world with ease and it even helps him circumvent colonialist gender roles: As a young boy, he rewrites himself in virtual space by embodying a young girl; cyberspace gives him the freedom for his genderqueer performance.

Thus, cyberspace plays a crucial role in the novel. Yet in geographies that predominantly contain Indigenous populations in North America, such as federal reservations and reserves, information and communication technologies (or ICTs) are relatively scarce. There are (still) fundamental injustices in terms of infrastructure and access to ICTs between settler-dominant areas and Indigenous-populated spaces. Echoing the popular discourse on cyberspace, I frame the space in the novel as 'cyberwilderness.' This is a conscious decision based also on how Jonny pursues cyberspace and situates his virtual selves. It is important to note that Whitehead's novel contains ambiguity and Jonny's interactions with and in cyberspace are in no way black and white. Jonny plays into the settler exoticizations of Indigeneity by foregrounding his Indigenous background as a commodity for the settler gaze to enjoy. Moreover, he reproduces the established cultural script of "scenarios of discovery" (Taylor 53), with a reversed power positions: Jonny imagines himself being 'found' in the cyberwilderness by the colonizers and rewrites the scenario without giving away that he is the author and the others merely his characters. Zooming out from the textual level, Whitehead writes a novel that does not stereotype Indigenous peoples either as 'bloodthirsty savages' or 'noble savages.' Jonny is alive, he does not shy away from the city. He is messy, morally ambiguous, he is material.

Making it in the Modern World

Queer Indigenous Jonny writes his own virtual self in cyberspace, performing as a trickster in both the urban space and cyberspace, what I consider a material epistemological practice that opens new ways of thinking. Jonny's explanation of his clients' needs captures the intricacies of his online presence:

> Most times though, they only want me to play NDN. I bought some costumes a few Halloweens ago to help me: Pocasquaw and Chief Wansum Tail. Once I know what kind of body they want, I can make myself over. I can be an Apache NDN who scalps cowboys on the frontier, even though truthfully, I'm Oji-Cree. (Whitehead 25)[5]

To analyze what Jonny's online presence means for contemporary debates on Indigenous peoples within the naturalized settler coloniality of Canada, we must first discuss the material state of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the so-called 'Indian Country.'[6] This refers to geographies where Indigenous peoples are more densely located compared to other areas of North America.[7]

Information and Communication Technologies in 'Indian Country'

Marisa Elena Duarte (Pascua Yaqui) draws an interesting parallel between contemporary digital gadgets, such as notebooks, tablets, and smartphones, and Indigenous peoples. For her, the "sleek look and discreet design" of these

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5   "NDN" is a contemporary term used by Indigenous peoples especially online to refer to themselves. Moreover, this becomes an act of rewriting from Indigenous peoples by reappropriating and tweaking the misnomer "Indian" to "NDN."

6   Duarte defines the term "Indian Country" as a "legal term that refers to the federally recognized tribes and state-recognized tribes, pueblos, rancherias, bands, and Alaska Native villages and corporations within the political boundaries of the United States. Colloquially, the term also refers to Native peoples' habits and norms in this somewhat parallel society … It inherently refers to an intertribal state of being for Native peoples in the United States" (166). I use the term in both double and single quotations, the latter to acknowledge its political and social implications.

7   I extend Duarte's definition to First Nations reserves, Métis, and Inuit settlements in Canada since the ICT conditions and solutions in these areas of both countries are similar.

gadgets leads to them being imagined as "devoid of historical legacies. Ironically tribal peoples are also imagined as beings without histories: prehistoric, precolonial and pretechnological subjects of a techno-scientific American empire" (9). This is a sardonic comparison, given that the hegemonic settler discourse situates Indigenous peoples as antithetical to modern technologies. Craig Howe (Oglala Sioux) takes this ironic parallelization further by suggesting that the concepts of time and space (or spatiotemporality) are becoming increasingly irrelevant with the advancement of Internet infrastructure and speed (20). Cyberspace is iconized as ahistorical and independent of spatiotemporal limitations, a description that sounds similar to settler notions of Indigeneity as anachronistic.

Duarte suggests that settler colonial discourse, especially its 'vanishing Indian' imagery, does not allow Indigeneity and modern technology to be perceived in harmony (11).[8] It constructs Indigeneity as a state of anachronistic stupor and locates Indigenous peoples, cultures, and philosophies as antithetical to the white and settler-coded narratives of progress. In other words, it imagines Indigenous peoples as antiquated, archaic, and thus antithetical to modern life.

This obscures the fact that pre-contact Indigenous cultures had ways of creating, storing, and transferring knowledge. During the Spanish missions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a wide variety of Indigenous writing practices existed.[9] These differed from the written narratives of Europeans, which perpetuated the myth that Indigenous societies lacked any form of writing. In addition to the extensive and well-established oral civilizations, which prioritize memory as the primary means of preserving and transmitting information (Levine 12), there are also the codices of the Mayan and Aztec cultures, called *amoxtli* in the Nahuatl language. In addition, "[m]any indigenous communities used visual records in subtle and sophisticated ways, with a notable example being the Andean quipu, a type of knotted string. North American recording devices included shellwork belts, known as *wampum*, and painted animal hides, tepees, and shields" (Levine 12). There were several similarities between these Indigenous methods of information preservation and written

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8   The myth of the 'vanishing Indian' is a settler-coded romantic idea that Indigenous peoples are destined for extinction due to being incapable of living in the modern world.

9   This timeframe corresponds to Diana Taylor's arguments when the discovery scenarios start to pop up in the narratives of the Spanish friars (16).

works from Europe, such as *wampum* belts, which were similarly used to written paper (12). For Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), *wampum* belts go beyond just documents; they depict intricate human interactions, and ought to be understood in the context of Indigenous rituals and cultural performances (23). These cultural products show how diverse the acts of writing can be, and foreground writing as a material practice due to their execution. These may be referred to as Indigenous *material* technologies and practices or Indigenous understandings of ICTs differing from the European ICTs of the time.[10]

The diversity of Indigenous writing and knowledge preservation practices demonstrates a clear démenti of the settler colonial epistemic institutions that are discursively produced to support Eurocentric adversarial attitudes toward Indigenous material epistemological practices.In light of this, Duarte directly addresses Indigenous thinkers:

> Indigenous thinkers should not imagine that notions of binary mathematics, categorization, classification, accounting, cartography, technique, and literacy were unknown in places such as the pre-Columbian Americas. There were the codices of Tenochtitlán, pictographic and woven systems for inscribing and calculating trade histories and outcomes, Incan quipu, bas-relief, astronomy, and, of course, the Mayan calendar and the continuing work of the Daykeepers. (12)

Similarly, Ashley Cordes (Coquille/KŌKwel) refutes settler colonial claims that technology and subsequently hypertexuality are inherently Western phenomena ("The Future of AI"). She also gives the example of *wampum* belts made by different Indigenous nations, especially the Iroquois. They are made "to tell stories, to mark occasions, to make contracts; there are layers of meaning that make them hypertextual. They are also arguably digital in that the beads are strung, they are code, and can be read; they are retrievable, decodable, memories of Indigenous epistemology" ("The Future of AI").

Studies on the present day state of Internet access in predominantly Indigenous-populated spaces blame deficiencies on "inadequate infrastructure, remote geography, and insufficient market demand endemic to reservation life …[which made it] an 'Indian problem'" (Duarte 29). However, Duarte rightly challenges these findings, stating that these studies did not consider

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10   This thought can be extended to understanding Indigenous forms of writing as a technology that is not a Euro-western specific practice.

settler colonialism and the consequent damages it did to Indigenous populations, which still defines the everyday realities of many rural Indigenous communities (29). For Duarte, this points to the "epistemic blindness" of governmental organizations such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and private Internet service providers (91). As we shall see in the next section, in Jonny Appleseed, the rural reserve and the urban Winnipeg are also juxtaposed in terms of ICTs, especially during Jonny's childhood on the reserve.

Indigeneity and Cyberspace in Jonny Appleseed

I read Whitehead's fiction parallel to Duarte's investigative and academic work. Jonny recounts a childhood event when he visited the "shoddy little makeshift library" in the Peguis First Nations Reserve (10) to do some research. This indicates that at the time, Peguis did not have an internet connection or at least not one stable enough to service the reserve's library. From this, we can infer that households in the reserve did not have internet connections either. While there are no distinct references to years in the novel, we can deduce that approximately five years pass between Jonny's visit to the local library without internet and fifteen-year-old Jonny accessing a stable internet at home (7).

Interestingly, Jonny's first mention of the internet is on the first page of the novel (7), where he encounters the "It Gets Better" campaign.[11] From early on, Jonny's relationship with the internet is defined by his trickster/shapeshifting abilities. He describes the excitement in which cyberspace "was packed with people wanting to connect with other people, especially there in Peguis. We had Facebook and cellphones to keep us in the loop. I used to sext with others in chatrooms on a gaming website, Pogo. I went by the name Lucia and pretended to be a girl to flirt with other boys" (8). This passage not only foreshadows Jonny's urban life, where he pretends to be someone else with a different gender identity, but portrays cyberspace as a safe space for Two-Spirited Jonny to pursue his same-sex desire, albeit pretending to be a girl. At this point in his life, Jonny is bound to the geographical space of the reserve and the reserve's oppressing habitus as an Indigiqueer boy. It is cyberspace that frees him from these material and societal constraints.

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11   "It Gets Better" is a nonprofit online campaign to increase LGBTQ+ visibility and aims to empower LGBTQ+ peoples to share their stories with other LGBTQ+ members.

Cyberspace for Jonny becomes a place "where access to information does not depend on who you are, where you are located, when you are visiting, or what you are seeking" (Howe 20). Howe refers to the dwellers of cyberspace as "netizens," claiming that cyberspace allows them to "transcend their biological, cultural, and social backgrounds by presenting themselves on the Internet as whoever they imagine themselves to be" (20). Corroboratively, Jonny transcends his biological sex and performs as a woman in cyberspace. Howe recognizes the potential of the World Wide Web for democratizing access to information regardless of identity markers and lists a strain of enthusiasts amongst Indigenous communities who hold the Internet in high regard for the betterment of Indigenous conditions in North America. They believe that access to cyberspace provides an opportunity for Indigenous peoples "for the first time in five hundred years … to be the avant-garde of a new technology" (21). However, he goes on to argue that Indigeneity and cyberspace are antithetical. The crux of his argument focuses not on cyberspace but on tribalism, and the disharmony in between (22). For Howe, cyberspace is "founded on the ideals of Western civilization" (26), which he lays out as democratic, "paperless …, economical, … and nondiscriminatory in that any person with access to the information superhighway may become a netizen" (20). Therefore, he argues that performing in cyberspace does not reflect Indigenous tribalism in which land is seen as "fundamental to tribal identity" (22). Further, Indigenous identity is relational whereas in cyberspace, it is the individual who stands out (22). Thus, Howe's article begins with excitement over the then-budding World Wide Web and the opportunities it gives to the individual, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. However, his enthusiasm ends there, as he goes on to construct Indigeneity on a notion of tribalism that regulates 'Indigenous selves' as related to space, time, and specific spiritual and cultural practices in certain ways.

There are other scholars following this line of thought, such as Taiaiake Alfred (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk) suggests that Indigenous communities have been in a "precarious state" since the 1990s "with personal technology—omnipresent television, computerization, Facebook, all that kind of stuff—where there is really no accountability to *community* anymore" (emphasis mine 83). Alfred argues that social media severs the individual's ties to the community and is detrimental to Indigenous community building and kinship. Social media addiction is a legitimate and serious problem, and not only in the Indigenous context; people's screen time has been increasing exponentially across the globe. It is noteworthy that both the Indigenous scholars' criticisms toward the In-

ternet and cyberspace are based on the contemporary ICTs' discrepancy with community and tribe.

I disagree with the discursive juxtaposition between cyberspace and Indigeneity, which is reminiscent of the era of the early Native American Renaissance when urban space were portrayed as 'the evil' and a settler trap for Indigenous characters in novels. If settler colonial discourse constructs Indigeneity as antithetical to modernity in the 'conventional' sense, then describing Indigeneity from this perspective can also be a limiting discourse. Framing tribalism or reducing Indigeneity to an individual's relationship with their community, although important elements in Indigenous peoples' daily lives, can be harmful by reproducing oppressive discourses. Furthermore, there are countless benefits of contemporary digital technologies, *especially* from an Indigenous context. The Internet has become a tool for Indigenous means. Neal Mcleod (Cree) has a positive approach to the Internet and views Facebook as one of the primary sites for preserving the Cree language. For Mcleod, "[d]igital technology can be quite liberating .... It has to be a living, daily language. You have to text in Cree. You have to be cool in Cree. If you're cool in a language then people want to speak it" (207). Thus, Mcleod extends what Howe found emancipating about the Internet for the individual to an important issue for Indigenous rights and self-determination: The preservation and transfer of Indigenous languages by being fun.

Like Mcleod, Margaret Noori (Anishinaabe) also has a positive approach to contemporary ICTs and focuses on the Internet's ability to teach and spread Indigenous languages, in her case, Anishinaabemowin.[12] I surmise from Mcleod and Noori's examples, contemporary Indigenous peoples use the power of the World Wide Web to repair the damage done to Indigenous languages by hundreds of years of ongoing settler colonialism. Ergo, contrary to Howe's and Alfred's views, cyberspace can act as a source of kinship and community where Indigenous people from different geographies who speak/learn the same language come together as a *community*, as a *tribe*, and thereby create contemporary Indigenous kinships. In the novel, Jonny's relationship with the internet does not make him less of an Indigenous person nor is it detrimental to his Indigeneity. In this sense, Whitehead rewrites the internet in a different light. Although ahistorical, cyberspace here becomes a material place where Jonny practices his non-cis femininity as a young girl. Following Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), the Internet gives Jonny the ability of "transmotion" (65). Indige-

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12   Anishinaabe language.

nous literatures "are instances of natural motion, and transmotion, a vision-
ary resistance to cultural dominance" (65). In cyberspace, he creates a safe space
within the heteropatriarchal and homophobic reserve for himself where he can
perform freely.

Practicing Authorship: Rewriting Indigeneity

Taylor claims that in Western thought, writing (or the Euro-Western under-
standing of writing, conventional pen and paper) "has become the guarantor of
existence itself" (xix). These limited conceptualizations of writing are designed
to consolidate European imperialism and allow colonial powers to maintain
control over Indigenous populations from across the Atlantic (18). The Indige-
nous author of *Jonny Appleseed*, Joshua Whitehead, holds a PhD from (and is
currently an assistant professor at) the University of Calgary, which is a settler
colonial institution situated on the "traditional territories of the people of the
Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta" ("Territorial Land Acknowledgment").
Both the book's success and Whitehead's authority in academia, which is a
legitimized and state-backed epistemic institution, show Indigenous peoples'
agency in changing the dominant narratives of settler colonialist material
practices. Even though Whitehead did not hold a PhD when *Jonny Appleseed*
was published, his continuing oeuvre that involves non-fictional essays and
anthologies alike shows that Whitehead (re)writes what it means to be an
academic in a Western setting.

   For his protagonist Jonny, the fetishization and erotization of Indigenous
bodies play a crucial role in Jonny's self-marketing. His clients are mostly non-
Indigenous men, some of whom are married to women, have children, and do
not openly identify as homosexual or queer. Jonny is aware of the interest in
him as he 'catches' his customer's gaze and interest in cyberspace. In this re-
gard, his Grindr profile functions as a well-lit sign for interested buyers, and
there is certainly no shortage of them. "The funny thing about Grindr is that it's
full of treaty chasers. They'll fetishize the hell out of you if you tell them you're
a real NDN wolf-boy, that you got arrows pointing at their faces and cocks"
(Whitehead 18). Jonny calls them "treaty chasers" (18) in a word play collage
of the problematic term 'tranny chasers' with the official treaties between the
Canadian Government and First Nations in Canada. The non-Indigenous men
in cyberwilderness desire an Indigenous body. Jonny checks the "Native Amer-
ican" option on Grindr, which he confesses, "did a lot of leg work for me. 'You're

Indian, eh,' someone would message me, and I'd reply, 'Yeah, wanna see?' and link them to my websites" (18). Jonny experiences an immense amount of fascination and desire toward Indigeneity in settler Canada. The settler customer is mostly ignorant and reduces Indigeneity to what Vizenor highlights as a simulacrum of the 'Indian.' "The *indian* in this sense, is striven, a hyperreal simulation" (27, emphasis original), that is devoid of actual referents.[13] When Jonny chooses the bear as his tribe name on Grindr, since that is his clan (Whitehead 19), he gets reactions claiming he is "a twink [rather] than a bear" (19). In a queer context, the term "twink" refers to a young, slim gay man whereas the "bear" is used to refer to men with big and hairy bodies. The responses from the clients show how little informed the public is in terms of Indigenous cultures, only being aware of the meaning of bear in the context of contemporary gay male slang.

What is worthy of attention here are the modern circumstances of Jonny's environment. Jonny as an Indigenous young man is tech-savvy, comfortable both in the city and online. He juggles his digital material around with ease to accommodate more clients and earn more money. "I was a professional—work smart, not hard. I used the collage that I had made of dick-pics to help me gather clients" (18). His online presence disrupts the settler colonialist discourse that ascribes Indigeneity to the concepts of savagery, backwardness, and primitiveness. Furthermore, he is almost constantly online, checking Facebook during breakfast, and replying to potential clients through other networks (24). The author of the 2018 novel *There There*, Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho), highlights an alternative perspective regarding the urbanity of Indigenous peoples, equating urbanity to being present in the cyberworld. "Plenty of us are urban now. If not because we live in cities, then because we live on the Internet" (9). Jonny makes a living from being online and occupying cyberspace. In this vein, Whitehead's Indigenous protagonist embraces urbanity with all its 'raw' and 'gritty' realities.

Cyberwilderness

Although cyberspace offers a certain freedom to Jonny, the way it is conventionally framed is deeply connected to Euro-American imperialism. As I men-

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13   Vizenor writes the word "Indian" without a capital 'I' and in italics to indicate the artificiality and emptiness of the word.

tioned, I view the cyberspace in the novel as a 'wilderness,' a site where the In-
digenous and the non-Indigenous meet. I am aware that by referring to cy-
berspace as "cyberwilderness" I evoke the settler colonial understandings both
on the concepts of 'space' and 'wilderness'. By *materializing* an otherwise vir-
tual cyberspace, people in the tech industry have superimposed settler colonial
frameworks of land grab and ownership onto the internet. Furthermore, the
concept of "wilderness" brings the spatial understanding of cyberspace to an-
other level. Within a North American settler context, the lands Indigenous peo-
ples lived on were considered wilderness, empty, wild, and dangerous spaces
that were up for grabs and the God-given right of the European settlers due
to the help of national narratives such as the myth of Manifest Destiny. These
ideas also entailed thinking that the wilderness was an opportunity for many
European settlers. In *Jonny Appleseed*, cyberwilderness becomes an opportunity
not for the European settler but for the Indigenous individual. Jonny reclaims
this "wilderness" by setting up his profile on cyberspace. Whitehead's fiction
foregrounds Indigenous agency, and to a certain extent, Indigenous self-deter-
mination in which his protagonist reproduces the scenario of 'discovery,' with
him as an Oji-Cree being in a position of power over these easily led white men.

Going back to the roots of theorizing cyberspace, Cordes emphasizes that
in the early days of the Internet, cyberspace was:

> anticipated and imagined by techno-optimists for its potential to act as a
> new gathering place. However, cyberspace has been discoursed and materi-
> alized in a manner that frames it as commodified land, reproducing colonial-
> ism as well as the exclusionary gendered and raced notions that undergird
> it. ("Meeting Place" 285)

She refers to Dave Healy's framing of cyberspace as a frontier, as "a tired
but useful metaphor" to understand the dominant discourses surrounding it
(285).[14] Framing cyberspace as a frontier comes with certain connotations and
a discursive framework. Frontier imaginary is filled with settler colonialist
rhetoric and stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. Duarte claims that associated
frontier discourse, such as the crucial myth of Manifest Destiny, is dominant
in discourses around the Internet and cyberspace. She asks her readers to

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14   Healy draws his ideas from US historian Frederick Jackson Turner's famous "The Signifi-
      cance of the Frontier in American History" thesis. Turner's thesis constructs the frontier
      as the defining trait of Americanness, distinct from Europeanness or Indigeneity.

"[c]onsider the terms and phrases *information wants to be free, Electronic Frontier Foundation,* and *Internet pioneer.* For Native peoples, it is as if the imperial urge to westward expansion moved into the cybersphere" (113, emphasis original). This shows that the dominant discourses on cyberspace or referring to the Internet as a spatial concept mirrors the hegemony of settler colonialism in North America.

This frontier imaginary works on the premise of normalizing and justifying the removal of Indigenous peoples from Indigenous lands and is inherently connected to settler colonial violence. Using the frontier metaphor, cyberspace is closely associated with warfare and land conquest with terms such as "(cyberwar, doxing), terrain conquest (owning networks), and rule" (Cordes, "Meeting Place" 286). Duarte, on the other hand, refers to the internet as a "richly featured terrain, with the topographies of technical networks shaped by a mixture of the personal agendas, political will, mundane habits, and desires of the individuals who create and use them" (32), and argues that a single conceptual framework to understand cyberspace is grossly inadequate.

Jonny's rewriting practices stem from exploiting the conventional ways of thinking about cyberspace as a site in need of 'settlement.' As a scholar of performance studies, Taylor conceptualizes colonial encounters as a defining act, performance, or embodied action that goes back to the first contact between Indigenous populations and Europeans in the fifteenth century (16). She sees performance as "an episteme, a way of knowing" and through performing, "we learn and transmit knowledge" (xvi).[15] Scenarios of discovery are material practices because they are bodily manifested and mediated through the practice of writing. They include contact narratives, and stories of colonial encounters, which are "theatrical scenario[s] structured in a predictable, formulaic, hence repeatable fashion" (Taylor 13). Ultimately, they are Eurocentric and imperialist renditions of encounters between Indigenous peoples and Europeans.

Taylor goes back to 1493, to Christopher Columbus' first letter to the Spanish queen in which he describes that the islands he 'discovered' were in fact inhabited by people (55). In the Canadian context, *The Jesuit Relations* is considered one of the first encounter narratives between Indigenous populations and Europeans. These written reports by Jesuit missionaries date back to 1632 in what

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15   This corresponds with Judith Butler's idea of gender as learned performance. By repeating embodied actions/performances passed down to us by our families, schools, and other institutions, we reproduce hegemonic gender binaries and associated gender roles in our societies. In other words, we learn discourse and reproduce it.

is now called Quebec (Boon et al.). The scenarios within create a spatial (also latently temporal) distance between a here and an "exotic 'there'" (Taylor 54). Scenarios of discovery are self-explanatory in that they are narratives based on the act of discovering. However, they are also quite successful in obscuring their discursive position. They give complete agency to the non-Indigenous subject, as in they are there to be discovered and their entire existence relies on it and render the Indigenous subject passive and powerless.

In the novel, the Indigenous subject, Jonny reproduces these scenarios to the extent that the settler 'discovers' the Indigenous in cyberwilderness. Jonny sets his online profile to be discovered by potential clients, deliberately setting it up to cater to the "treaty chasers" (Whitehead 18) in Canada. Jonny's body in cyberspace becomes the object of desire for the non-Indigenous subject. Additionally, there is a queer twist in the scenario where the desire for the Indigenous is infused not only with colonialist exoticization but is a homosexual desire where men are looking for other men.

Indigenous Rewriting of Discovery Theatrics

Exploring the intersections of male queerness and Indigeneity means being simultaneously aware of the dominant heteronormative settler ideology, as well as the stereotypes of Indigenous manhood oozing with hyperbolic masculinity. For Sam Mckegney, the term "masculindians" personifies popular representations of Indigenous manhood (1). He claims there is a "settler North American appetite for depictions of Indigenous men that rehearse hypermasculine stereotypes of the noble savage and the bloodthirsty warrior (as well as their ideological progeny—the ecological medicine man, the corrupt band councillor, and the drunken absentee)" (1). Jonny's identification as Two-Spirited and Indigiqueer man challenges this supposed hypermasculinity of Indigenous men. From his stereotypical Halloween costumes of 'famous' Indigenous figures to the black velvet bodysuit of Catwoman (Whitehead 26), Jonny shifts his appearance for the occasion, dressing as feminine, masculine, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous. Noori highlights the importance of the Internet to Indigenous communities: "If Nanabozhoo were among us (and he might be) …, he would be a hacker, a gamer, a halfhuman, half shape-

shifting avatar" (18).[16] In this regard, Jonny is Nanabozhoo, an oft-mischievous shapeshifter trickster.

Furthermore, Jonny's hyperreal Indigenous costumes allow him to participate in settler America's practice of "playing Indian," which Philip J. Deloria (Standing Rock Sioux) describes as a "persistent tradition in American culture" (7). Starting with the Boston Tea Party, where members of the Sons of Liberty dressed as Indigenous peoples and threw chests of tea into the Boston Harbor, "playing Indian" has become one of the quintessential American performances (8). As a material practice, "playing Indian" portrays the complexity of settler-native relations. In the quest for establishing a distinct idea of 'Americanness,' Indigeneity serves the settler-colonialist rhetoric as the 'other,' which delineates the contours of Americanness with a distinct European descent. In American identity formations, Indigenous subjects also function to separate Americans from their European counterparts, with Americanness thus achieving a unique position that is neither European nor Indigenous. In the novel, Jonny's participation in the performance of "playing Indian" is complex; he plays not just one but multiple Indigenous figures with male and female gender identities. In this sense, Jonny becomes the ultimate trickster: He participates in a non-Indigenous, settler 'practice' and subverts it by tricking settler males into believing he is someone he is not. He plays the caricatured, hyperreal 'Indian' characters in his self-made scenarios of discovery. Social geographers Steve Pile and Michael Keith remark that resistance is not about killing the oppressors; it is practiced in the "deceptive spaces of costume and trickery, through which people blur the edges of political identity" (14).[17] Thereby, Jonny's performance in the cyberwilderness builds a "geography of resistance" (Pile and Keith 23).

Jonny confesses that sometimes it is difficult "to create an entire world for clients that fits your body and theirs … [but to no surprise] [m]ost times, though, they only want me to play NDN" (Whitehead 25). These relations of power are evident in scenarios of discovery where the active party, i.e., the discoverer, is the "one who 'sees' and controls the scene" (Taylor 61). As clients

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16   "Nanabozhoo," "Nanabozo," or "Nanabush" is a trickster figure who appears in Anishi-naabe and Cree creation stories and plays a crucial role in and representing the vitality and perseverance of Indigenous cultures.

17   Interestingly, Sons of Liberty also use 'costume and trickery' to rebel against their oppressors, the British Crown. Thus, the Boston Tea Party achieves a complex position as a simultaneously subversive and oppressive practice.

view Jonny's online profile, they enact the colonial gaze between screens, in other words, there is a "*mechanics* of spectacle" at play between Jonny, the 'brown found object,' and the clients, the 'discoverers' (13, emphasis original). This is one of the important elements of the novel that foregrounds its complexity. Classic attempts, to either situate the book as a cultural work of complete resistance and defiance or treat it as an artifact that surrenders itself to the status quo, fail to capture the depth of Whitehead's novel. Continuing the 'tradition' of rejecting closed analyses and fixed interpretations, the novel neither does so nor accepts reductionism from either side. Jonny's practice of cybersex is a gray area where Indigenous stereotypes and settler reductionist perspectives on Indigeneity are reproduced, even if for Indigenous means, which still complicates Jonny's position. Taylor is clear on the delineation of power between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous: "No matter who restages the colonial encounter from the West's perspective—the novelist, the playwright, the discoverer, or the government official—it stars the same white male protagonist-subject and the same brown, found 'object'" (13). Even though Jonny is the author/creator of the scenario, questions inevitably arise. If queer Indigenous Jonny ultimately does what he is told by non-Indigenous men in terms of putting on an erotic show with various costumes of 'Indian' stereotypes, how much authority does he exercise on his own body and self-formation? To answer this, I suggest we look at the way Jonny transforms cyberspace as his own.

Both parties in the scenario, the settler, and the Indigenous play their roles in one of the oldest practices in North American nation-building rhetoric that has "appeared constantly throughout the past five hundred years in the Americas" (Taylor 28). What is noteworthy here is that Jonny is the creator of the digital discovery story. He is not a passive figure waiting to be discovered. He creates and initiates a scenario where the non-Indigenous user believes he 'found' Jonny in cyberwilderness, and a new type of colonial encounter ensues. Jonny sells an image—a settler colonial fantasy resonating perfectly within Canadian settler society—which demonstrates his awareness of these structures. He can play into settler colonialist expectations, however faulty and ignorant they are. Along the lines of New Age ignorance, the buyers of the 'NDN' image are clueless about the rich cultural and spiritual landscape of Indigenous peoples in North America. They desire not the real person but a hyperreal image, a colonial simulation that derives from the accounts of Columbus and other Europeans who came after him. And this is exactly what Whitehead's protagonist exploits in the novel.

Conclusion

Whitehead's fiction functions as a contemporary example of a material writing practice that offers and validates contemporary and alternative Indigenous lives that are Two-Spirited, tech-savvy, and not drenched in narratives of victimhood. Queer studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz argues that queerness "is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1). Whitehead's writing of Jonny's rewriting of the scenario of discovery is an active form of a (queer) utopian imagination where Whitehead rejects the heteronormativity of settler Canada and insists on a world in which Jonny claims agency for his life. What are scenarios of discovery if not material practices? They are narratives with established tropes and characters. They are embodied practices, material in nature, and then mediated through writing. Whitehead is the one who writes and transforms the scenario into a contemporary setting that is cyberspace. Moreover, he shifts the perspective of the scenario and exploits the established structures that non-Indigenous men look for and expect. Jonny's exploitation of expectations is twofold. First, Jonny exploits the material practice of the scenario of discovery, the encounter narrative. Second, he exploits the 'Indian' stereotypes by dressing up in a hyperreal fashion as 'famous' Indigenous male and female figures.

Looking back at his early years of online shapeshifting into 'Lucia', Jonny confesses to the reader: "I always liked to let them think they were the ones in control. I'm a sadist like that, I guess. I may be the sexual fantasy but I'm also the one in the *driver's seat*" (Whitehead 8, emphasis mine). This is the exact same metaphor Cordes uses to talk about the implications of Indigeneity and artificial intelligence in the future, when she remarks:

> By making AI serve us [Indigenous peoples] and owning it as an Indigenous project, efforts like these … break down the epistemological underpinnings and exemplify the fact that Indigenous people are not only surviving in the digital age, but are in the *driver's seat* of envisioning futurity in an increasingly digital and globalized world. ("The Future of AI," emphasis mine)

Not just AI, but contemporary ICTs in general serve Indigenous peoples and Jonny is able to use the Internet and cyberspace keeping authority to himself. To share in Cordes' and Jonny's metaphor, Two-Spirited Indigenous Jonny is the one driving and deciding where to go in the cyberwilderness.

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