

## Translating Indigenous Civic Ecologies

**Jessica Rachel Jacobson-Konefall**

**Abstract:** Art exhibits by the artists Jude Norris and Nadia Myre present Indigenous civic ecology as multifaceted relationships with animals and land. These perspectives translate liberal citizenship and civil society into visions of Indigenous civic ecology conveying related relational practices. Winnebago theorist Renya Ramirez emphasizes emotion, relationships, care work, and vernacular understandings of belonging as gendered aspects of Native citizenship exceeding and troubling liberal logic. Norris and Myre's art works extend Ramirez' human-focused discussion into civic ecology frameworks. These works develop Ramirez's theory of translocal Native citizenship in an Indigenist materialist vein (Kalbfleisch and Robinson 52), while at the same time showing the ways that theories of new materialism in art history and translation studies remain settler colonial when they do not centre Indigenous knowledge.

**Keywords:** Cree, Jude Norris, Anishinaabe, Nadia Myre, contemporary art, media art, civic ecology, Indigenous materialism

**Résumé :** Les artistes Jude Norris and Nadia Myre présentent l'écologie civique autochtone comme des rapports à multiples facettes avec les animaux et la terre. Ainsi, leur oeuvre traduit les notions de citoyenneté libérale et de société civile par le concept autochtone d'écologie civique et donne corps à des pratiques relationnelles interreliées. La théoricienne Winnebago Renya Ramirez, dont les travaux sont axés sur l'humain, souligne que l'émotion, les rapports, le travail de soins et la conception vernaculaire de l'appartenance sont des aspects genrés de la citoyenneté autochtone qui dépassent et dérangent la logique libérale. Les œuvres de Norris and Myre insèrent les notions avancées par Ramirez dans un cadre d'écologie civique. Elles ajoutent la dimension du matérialisme indigéniste à la théorie de citoyenneté autochtone translocale proposée par Ramirez (Kalbfleisch, 2014) et, en même temps, montrent que les théories du nouveau matérialisme en histoire de l'art et en traductologie demeurent coloniales si elles ne privilégient pas les connaissances autochtones.

**Mots clé :** Cri, Jude Norris, Anishinaabe, Nadia Myre, art contemporain, art médiatique, écologie civique, matérialisme autochtone

**Resumo:** As exposições das artistas Jude Norris e Nadia Myre apresentam a ecologia cívica indígena como relações multifacetadas com os animais e a terra. Estas perspectivas traduzem a cidadania liberal e a sociedade civil como visões da ecologia cívica indígena, transmitindo práticas relacionais afins. A teórica Winnibago Renya Ramirez enfatiza a emoção, os relacionamentos, o cuidado e as noções de pertença como aspectos de gênero da cidadania nativa que excedem e incomodam a lógica liberal. As obras de arte de Norris e de Myres estendem a discussão centrada no humano de Ramirez para modelos de ecologia cívica. Tais trabalhos ampliam a teoria de cidadania nativa translocal de Ramirez numa perspectiva materialista indigenista (Kalbfleisch, 2014), mostrando, ao mesmo tempo, como estas teorias do novo materialismo na história da arte e nos estudos de tradução se mantêm colonialistas por não focalizarem o conhecimento indígena.

**Palavras-chave:** Cree, Jude Norris, Anishinaabe, Nadia Myre, arte contemporânea, arte midiática, ecologia cívica, materialismo indígena.

**Resumen:** Las exposiciones de arte de las artistas Jude Norris y Nadia Myre presentan la ecología cívica Indígena como un conjunto de relaciones multifacéticas con los animales y la tierra. Estas perspectivas traducen las nociones liberales de ciudadanía y de sociedad civil a visiones de ecología cívica Indígena a través de prácticas de relación que vinculan con estas nociones en sus obras. La teórica Renya Ramirez, perteneciente a la comunidad Winnebago, plantea que la emoción, las relaciones, la labor de atención social y las visiones vernáculas de pertenencia son aspectos de ciudadanía Nativa marcados por el género que exceden y problematizan la lógica liberal. Las obras de Norris y Myre extienden el planteamiento de Ramirez, centrado en el ser humano, hacia marcos de ecología cívica. Estas obras desarrollan la teoría de ciudadanía Nativa translocal de Ramirez dentro de una perspectiva materialista Indigenista (Kalbflesch, 2014), a la vez que muestran el modo en que las teorías del nuevo materialismo en historia del arte y en traductología siguen operando dentro del orden colonial cuando no tienen como eje el conocimiento Indígena.

**Palabras clave:** Cree, Jude Norris, Anishinaabe, Nadia Myre, arte contemporáneo, arte mediático, ecología cívica, materialismo Indígena

Exhibits by the artists Jude Norris and Nadia Myre present Indigenous civic ecology as multifaceted relationships with animals and land. These perspectives translate liberal citizenship and civil society into visions of Indigenous civic ecology and relational practices through the arts. Winnebago theorist Renya Ramirez emphasizes emotion, relationships, care work, and vernacular understandings of belonging as gendered aspects of Native citizenship exceeding and troubling liberal logic. Norris and Myre's art works extend Ramirez' human-focused discussion into civic ecology frameworks against those of liberal individuals and property ownership. These works develop Ramirez's theory of translocal Native citizenship in an Indigenist materialist vein (Kalbfleisch and Robinson 52), while at the same time showing the ways that theories of new materialism in art history and translation studies remain settler colonial when they do not centre Indigenous knowledge.

Most often, settler theories translate Indigenous contexts. The directionalities of these exchanges signal ongoing settler power and the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge. These symbolic economies do not challenge settler colonialism, but uphold it, producing spaces of (impoverished) settler knowledge. These translations follow vectors of colonial power. In contrast, Myre's and Norris's works translate contemporary Euro-American critical theories; their works are vectors transmitting knowledge. Their knowledge, and that of the Indigenous theories I cite in this paper, reveal the coloniality of numerous domains of thought: citizenship, public spheres, biopolitics, animal studies, art history and translation studies. These works, and the theories I cite in discussing them, centre the knowledge and authority of Indigenous women in contemporary thought.

In section 1 I look at Indigenous theoretical challenges to liberal civic ecology in the specific context of cities. I contrast Indigenous arts relating to animals and land against art historical and translation studies theories of new materialism in section 2. Indigenous theories, as embodied by the artworks I look at in this essay, reveal the liberal humanist themes operating uncritically in new materialist theories as well as related scholarly projects of animal studies, biopolitics, and settler colonial studies. Section 3 analyzes Norris, and Myre's installations exploring animal relationships in terms of

gender; media technologies; ceremony and ecology; continuity and relationality; and the figurative and literal. Norris and Myre's works convey relationships with animals and the land between artists, viewers, communities, and participants. These works translate social ecological systems founded upon the exclusion of animals or land from the political community, as settler private property. These artists' translations compose in the relational ontologies of their Indigenous nations.

## 1. Indigenous Relational Materialism and Civil Society

Relational Indigenous ecologies are anathema to settler abstractions or separations of identity and citizenship, land and animals. Indigenous cosmology emphasizes relationality over separation: "in Indigenous cultural domains relationality means that one experiences oneself as part of others and others as part of the self" (Blaser et al. 8). Indigenous relational ecology has been ongoing for many thousands of years within specific epistemic and ontological conditions. These conditions, while changing over millennia, arise from different genealogies than those of Western thought. Poststructuralist ecological and translation theory is, in this sense, consonant with the epistemic violence of settler coloniality writ large. Applying it in Indigenous contexts can genocidally erase Indigenous understandings, subsuming Indigenous knowledge within Western systems. I chose not to apply it to Indigenous contexts for these reasons, clearly distinguishing between Indigenous and settler theories. I attend carefully, at the same time, to Indigenous artists' connections between worldviews, which never offer a full understanding of any Indigenous nation's epistemology or ontology.

Indigenous art works delineate specific relationships. Cree curator Daina Warren writes of Cree artists' ways of articulating space and place on the land. She foregrounds what she calls the "relational" in Indigenous cultures that connect with, or "relate to" their environments (13-14). Indigenous aesthetic formations articulate these fields, evoking the actual experiences of individuals and communities. Warren writes, in terms of these artistic projects, "individual Native contexts" are important to audiences, "based on the ways that each artist provides access to their particular cosmological environments" (2). Warren suggests that Native artists hold "differing philosophies developed through the artist's personal experiences and a variety of responses to surrounding environments, sometimes [...] with overarching Indigenous cosmologies" (2). Warren frames citizenship as belonging, emphasizing Indigenous place as a cosmology, in which a cultural "self" emerges out of the relationship between self and space, articulated through stories told by and about that "self", and its relation to all the components that make up "place" (90). Indigenous artists produce relations, configured through cultural knowledge, that create individual and communal Indigenous environments. For Warren, these philosophies generate, in her argument, specifically Cree experiences through art works. I build with and diverge from Warren's framework, looking specifically at how Indigenous artworks centre animals and land in ecological or land-based understandings of citizenship. These translate settler hegemonic understandings of cities into Indigenous landscapes.

In her book *Native Hubs: Citizenship and Belonging in the Silicon Valley*, Renya Ramirez theorizes Indigenous and gender-based citizenship against the liberal, implicitly

male and European emphases of mainstream understandings of citizenship. Ramirez describes Indigenous citizenship as spatial practice in relation to the colonial state, other nation states, and between Indigenous nations in relationships with each other. Ramirez claims that urban Native peoples assert translocal Native citizenship that differs from state-based citizenship, commonly understood to be a passive and abstract category bestowed upon those deemed worthy of inclusion within the community of the settler state or its cities. This settler form of citizenship also posits “civilization” as a product of Euro-American modernity, in which European male philosophers separated “nature” as its binary and gendered opposite. Ramirez writes specifically against this framework of liberal settler citizenship. She argues that urban Native peoples practice citizenship by composing “hubs” formed by cultural processes and geographic places, “re-member[ing] the native body torn apart by colonization” (23). Hubs embody relationships between city and reserve spaces, between Indigenous nations, and between settler and Indigenous peoples. Indigenous citizenship practices, oppositional to settler framings of the concept, originate from the grassroots practices of Indigenous communities on their own terms. These practices also engage with the land in ways that Ramirez does not describe, but that she includes in her theory by asserting the place-based nature of Indigenous citizenship. They are spatial and embodied rather than abstract practices, and thus inhere in specific spaces that become places, or hubs, through embodied citizenship practice. They include, furthermore, what Ramirez identifies as gendered dimensions of citizenship; specifically, emotions, care work, and participation in relationships, which continue to be excluded from prevailing conceptions of citizenship within a settler public sphere. Ramirez also emphasizes how Indigenous citizenship *shapes* cities, and is not merely shaped by them. Urban Indigenous citizenship is non-assimilatory to the settler state.

Settler and Indigenous understandings of the citizen also differ. Within liberal settler regimes, according to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiway Smith, the liberal citizen holds psychological, political, and phenomenological relations of dominion through private property extending in civic ecology. She identifies instrumental rationality, or reason, as the perceptual emphasis and strategy by which to extend liberal dominion (32). The liberal person’s proprietary relationship to the self and to land governs the public sphere with instrumental rationality. Indigenous artists, in contrast, articulate civic ecologies through Indigenous citizenship as practices of land-based belonging, including emotions and care work, with animals and land. Indigenous contemporary art articulates these relationships in cities.

Contemporary cities are specific ecological locations in which Indigenous perspectives interface with situations of citizenship. Social theories of cities are now emerging which advance the concept of civic ecology through notions of stewardship and resilience as central themes. Marianne Krasny and Keith Tidball, directors of the Civic Ecology Lab at Cornell University, explore ecological understandings of civic life. They describe civic ecological stewardship as practices that “interact with the people and other organisms, neighborhoods, governments, non-profit and business organizations, and ecosystems in which they take place” (xiv), offering “frameworks for understanding the role these practices play in larger social-ecological systems” (xvi). In short, these authors link the

two words -- civic and ecology -- to reflect the ties “between traditions of engagement in civil society and of a land ethic based on humans’ deep connections to nature” (xv). Civic ecologists realize these traditions by engaging in “hands-on restoration and ongoing stewardship of land, life, and community. Through such caring actions, civic ecology stewards develop an ongoing relationship with the rest of nature that contributes to their own and their community’s well-being” (xv). Their theory advances terms of enlightened self-interest, centring human beings and, indeed, the liberal citizen. These ecological understandings help to envision cities where a new kind of nature – linked with civic life – thrives. This supposedly “new” nature may be genuinely new in the context of settler cities. Indigenous contexts differ from mainstream accounts such as the one offered by these authors. Indigenous peoples’ links between nature and collective life reflect a profound continuity across space and time for peoples who have stewarded the environments now called North America for tens of thousands of years in traditions of continuity and change. Krasny and Tidball describe stewardship “actions [that] embody a longing for – or perhaps a collective memory of – nature, place, and community” (xiii). Their insight can be deepened to an unfamiliar level by Indigenous ecological relationships extending beyond all of Western history since antiquity. Indigenous peoples in North America act on memories that are not accessible to settlers. Krasny and Tidball seek to “explor[e] new thinking about our relationships with the rest of nature, about stewardship and civic engagement, and about ecosystems and the ways we govern ourselves” (xiii). While this is a useful framing, Indigenous nations relate to ecosystems in their systems of civic governance in relationships of *continuity*, both as stewards of nature in city locations and as participants in an animate world wherein agencies exceed the human.

Indigenous artists’ use of new media technologies in specific places relationally externalizes the artist’s experience in technology, articulating Indigenous relationships of responsibility to perceptual worlds. In Indigenous ecologies, “humans interact with rather than upon non-human others” (Horton and Berlo 22). Theorizing community in terms of Indigenous conceptions of land-based relationships translates the impositions of global markets and settler framing of place in relation to Indigenous community. These ecologies instantiate “an ethical vision exceeding binaries such as colonizer and colonized,” and including “transnational Indigenous materialities” (Horton and Berlo 24). Such materialities are component parts of resurgent Indigeneity.

Artists produce these materialities. Tahltan artist Peter Morin stages Indigenous ecologies of place that conceptually produce translocal Indigenous citizens. Morin, theorizing his own performance art work, argues that his people are “people in motion on the land” who “share stories of travel with each other” creating “fluid organizational structures”. Morin centres Indigenous subjectivity and cultural practice in relation to these “fluid systems of organizing knowledge,” and asserts “a creative process, connected to Indigenous-based objects and knowledge structures that tells the history of Native communities”. For Morin, Indigenous artists become “the historians of these ways of knowing”. He explains:

Artwork is the history of our people. We are philosophers. We understand that History and Philosophy are closely aligned. We have thought about the theoretical components of ceremony and applied material production. This supports the spiritual well-being of the community. Land, History, Identity, Story, Singing, and Drumming create Ceremony. Ceremony is well developed. The objects that support history become prayers for the survival of our community. This knowledge about the process to create these objects is often missing from the western museum. Ceremony is our Museum. Ceremony interrupts colonization. This is significant. (Morin)

Morin conceives of ecologies within Indigenous methods. Warren also argues that contemporary Native artists are “deterritorialized” not so much “by the settlers or confluence of governmental pressures to leave their traditional territories but through their own interests and goals” (50). Artworks translate settler civility by mapping translocal Indigenous cosmology.

## **2. Euro-American Materialist Theories: Biopolitics, Animals, and Land**

Indigenous precepts are conversant with aspects of the recent “material turn” in mainstream art history and translation studies. Indigenous artists’ materialist framings, at a glance, seem to resonate with their focus on material rather than discursive conditions. Benedict Anderson describes the Euro-American nation-state form as an imaginary based on linguistic or discursive constructs (Anderson, 1983). Mainstream art history’s new ontological perspectives, nuancing and even opposing the emphases of discursive criticism such as Anderson’s, like Anderson himself do not challenge settler colonialism. Indigenous nations, then, resurge against these Euro-American theories of materiality.

Australian settler art historian Jane Bennett argues for an animist approach to the material world, identifying and empathizing with objects. Bennett eschews liberal framings in some ways, arguing for “active powers issuing from non-human subjects” (ix), and troubling liberal figuring of agency solely through the individual. Bennett, looking at the material world as “assemblage,” claims that it is in one’s best interest to support the overall assemblage. She argues for an enlightened, self-interested, perceiving subject to take action, reiterating a liberal political stance on environmentalism. Her argument, understanding agency distributed across the assemblage, still centres the perception of the human subject. Bennett seems to think that human perception holds the power to imbue non-subjects with life, as she writes that “a careful course of anthropomorphism can help reveal that vitality [of matter]” (117). She extends affective relationship into an overall “live” assemblage as a foundation for new political community. New materialism, in both art history and translation, needs to be decolonized by Indigenous framings.

Indigenous community formations are ongoing, not new, and they do not express any settler philosophy. Bennett’s imperative to feel the world in a new way through animistic perception seems helpful in moving away from worldly relationships based on private property. I am troubled, though, that in an Australian context Bennett is not self-reflexive about writing as a settler. Bennett’s work clarifies how settler materialisms do

not engage with Indigenous understandings of animacies, agency of objects, animal-human relationalities, or the land. Theories of “intangible materiality” (Kalbfleisch and Robinson 52) in contemporary art theory or translation very often do not support Indigenous ecological or citizenship formations in Canada. They therefore orient in a colonial relation to the land.

Aspects of Indigenous art works may seem to resonate with the new materialist art history. They take place within Indigenous relationalities instead. Norris’s and Myre’s works theorize who and what gets included in the political community, and in what ways. The works understand relationship between humans, animals, and land as ecological stakes of Indigenous citizenship.

Indigenous relational ecological art practice translates liberal humanist citizenship and property regimes through an Indigenous lens. I follow settler scholar Elizabeth Kalbfleisch and Dylan Robinson, then, in using her term “Indigenist materialism” to describe their work (52). Norris presents the continuity of Cree cosmology in her exhibit *Affirm/Nation*. She collaborates with caribou, deer, and moose constituting Cree ontology in contemporary city environments. Myre approaches spaces of civic modernity, layering advertising language, print media, city streets, and animal metaphors set in relationship with multiple scars figuring femininity, embodiment and trauma. Myre translates settler discourses of animality that abject Indigenous femininity and womanhood under the Canadian settler regime.

Settler animal studies discourses in North America include animals in theorizing the social and thereby align with new materialities that expand biopolitical theories beyond the human. Animal studies theorist Colleen Glenney-Boggs points out how Giorgio Agamben’s theory of biopower excludes animals within its Eurocentric and ahistorical framing, recapitulating the very structures of sovereignty that it would critique. His framework does not include animals or land, in contrast to Norris’s and Myre’s works. Animal studies, in contrast, troubles who and what counts as a subject by centring animals in this question (Glenney Boggs, 2013). Animal studies asserts that subjectivity isn’t always human, through a) animal rights discourses, where animals have subjectivity and deserve rights, and b) poststructuralist animal-human relationality undoing the autonomous liberal subject (2013). Glenney-Boggs aligns with the latter stream, thinking biopolitics, following Roberto Esposito, as affirmative or constitutive relations between “bodies, forces, technologies, disciplines, and institutions” (50) in liberal capitalist modernity. See the resonance with new materialism.

I both align and dissociate my interests in this paper with those of animal studies. I align myself with them insofar as Indigenous art works allocate and compose subjectivity through human/animal relationalities that translate settler colonial humanism, citizenship, and cities. I dissociate myself from the field’s centring of subjectivity per se. While animal studies’ treatments of subjectivity are valuable, the works in my study reframe civic ecology instead. These works, instead of centring any subject or its undoing, animal or not, present a much broader ontological field through Indigenous cosmologies. These fields are precise contexts requiring more specificity than theories of biopolitics or liberalism can provide.

Esposito's expansive framework falls short for me as it does not account for the work of liberal dominion on the land in settler colonial contexts, which, through an Indigenous lens, is first-and-foremost a matter of land (Coulthard 13). Settler-of-colour Suneri Thobani focuses on the land in Canada's biopolitical composition, arguing Canada envisions the landscape as "*humanitas nullius*," (50) denying the existence of Indigenous nations. The liberal law establishes racial violence on the land. Critical settler geographer Mark Rifkin extends this insight that nation-state sovereignty "relies upon a prior geopolitical mapping" (91) of the land. Canadian mapping communicates that a proprietary individual owns the land, and that this person matters most in the political community. Sovereignty appropriates the land as "the biopolitical 'body' of the people relies [firstly] on the geopolitical territory of the nation, displacing claims of other political formations as *bare habitance*" (92). In this vein settler historian Ian McKay writes:

Perhaps the piece de resistance of the Canadian liberal order was to carve upon the map, in lines that majestically remind us of Euclidean geometry and panoptical state power. This quadrilateral demonstration of panopticism was the molecular checkerboard of quarter-sections and individual properties contained within the new province's boundaries – a social ideology set down on the land and hence made part of everyday western experience. (638)

These critiques together, albeit in piecemeal form, support Indigenous artists and theorists who expand solely human-centred frameworks. I bring these accounts together in relation to Indigenous lands, however, to show that political theory continues to colonize them when it uncritically recapitulates liberal understandings centring the individual person, or when it does not centre Indigenous relationships to the land. Indigenous artists animate rich ontologies beyond their criticism of liberalism's proprietary relationships to land.

My discussion of art works below figures relationalities between humans, animals, and land, or citizenship and ecology through Indigenous relationalities. Canadian dominion over the animals and the land geopolitically mapped Indigenous peoples as objects of liberal knowledge, so that Euro-American individuals could freely exploit land and animals. Settlers massively reorganize the land to position First Nations under the sway of the colonial sovereign nation. This mapping delimits the potentials of life within both space and time. Eradicating Indigenous nations also relies on excluding animals from the political community. The new media artists in my study oppose these genocidal processes. The Indigenous artists in this article "reclaim a territory for their voices" (Townsend xii) as peoples in sovereign land-based relationships. Their practices shape constitutive relations of Indigenous civic ecology.

### **3. Affirm/Nation and The Want Ads and Other Scars**

Norris's and Myre's artworks relate with animals in land-based ways. Relationship unfolds between artists, viewers, communities, and participants, the land and urban space. They

make human and animal relationships visible. They express translocal Native citizenship and its imbrication with the land.

Artist Jude Norris's Cree cosmology in her work relates animals and humans in Cree ontology, specific to the Plains and the history of her people, a history that is ongoing in the Cree people's civic practices. *Affirm/Nation*, the title of Norris' 2005 exhibition, suggests affirmative constitution of nations, both in settler colonial and Indigenous framings, as well as the rhetorical device of "affirmation." Affirmation suggests a specific sort of semantic or linguistic content as well as embodied practice, bringing two domains often considered separately, as in Anderson's argument that language and media found the nation, together. This titular doubling recasts relationships between representation and embodied practice.

Norris organizes her exhibit in concentric circles. On the outer walls hang large rectangular paintings of vertical scars or slits. Each painting is a different colour, and together they form the installation's outer circle.



Jude Norris. "The Scar Series." *Affirm/Nation*. 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

These paintings, which Norris calls the "Scar Series," are teal, red, yellow/green, dark brown, orange. Norris describes each scar painting in this way:

These are works on canvas in which the canvas itself is 'wounded' and then 'healed.' This is done by making cuts in the canvas and sewing them up with sinew stitching. The canvas is then painted, accentuating the resulting 'scar,' which is either left as a stark and simple central element, or embellished with carved sticks that pierce the canvas's surface for the length of the sinew seam.

These sticks are a recurring element of my sculptural work. They are small and carved so that both ends are pointed. In the scar wall pieces, the sticks can be read in a number of ways. They may represent elements of repair, security, trial, or adornment.

I first began carving these pointed sticks intuitively, and using them sculpturally – being almost compulsively drawn to them as processes and objects. I found out after some years of this that the practice of using very

similar painted sticks as ceremonial offerings was once widespread in Cree territory, and still continues with some people today.

Piercing the canvas as they do, the sticks also look like the pegs used to seal the front surfaces of a tipi. These 'scars' may also be read as seams – helping create structures which provide shelter and/or safety. Spaced down the length of the scar, they have also been said to resemble a backbone – perhaps another subconscious reference to safety and stability. (2)

These paintings convey a complex consonance of homes, wounds, repairs, and Indigenous women's bodies. They remind me of the words of an elder at Urban Shaman during the *Walking with Our Sisters* installation, a memorial to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, in 2014. This elder discussed the importance of wearing a floor-length skirt when entering ceremonial space or the lodge. She described how part of the skirt's significance is that the woman's body, thus adorned, is shaped as a tipi, representing her embodiment as a home for herself, her children, and the foundation and stability of her community's thriving. Norris's scars as sites of healing gain a resonance that speaks to the present moment of her community while also continuing ceremonial practices of offering. The positioning of the scars/sticks as an outer circle or enclosure for her installation further confirms a notion of tipi, home, or structure in which gendered activity plays out. Norris's iconography also refers to the works of modernist painter Rothko and the pre-contact aesthetic traditions of Arapaho clothing (4). These two references combine painting, as an autonomous, masculine, freestanding object, with clothing, associated with embodied and feminine activity. Norris sets masculine and feminine energies in collaboration, creating a healing environment.

The next outermost circle of the installation, bounded by the *Scar Series* paintings, displays the animal content of the exhibit. Norris uses sculpture and screens as distinct media conveying this content. As sculptures, six antlers, caribou, deer, and moose, painted, array the outer edges of the installation space resting on white display boxes. She has written repetitive affirmations on each antler in small print to completely cover their surfaces, painted in the colours dark metallic grey, gold, red, white, and blue. Affirmations such as "I am brave. I will be braver", "follow your instinct", "I will survive" and "make every step like a prayer" repeat until each covers its antler completely. These sculptural animal components resonate with animal studies' critique of an ontology that distinguishes proprietarily between humans and animals. Norris, in contrast to such a frame, writes "I've approached the creation of this series as a collaboration with male individuals from the Deer, Moose, and Caribou Nations, whom I consider to be great artists." She writes that "these animals may be seen as teachers – not just in their behavior, but in their ability to create objects that are not only superb tools, but are also aesthetically stunning" (8). She writes that she sees this collaboration as gendered male and female, bringing different gendered ways of being together across species towards healing.



Jude Norris. "Braver Antler." *Affirm/Nation*. 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Jude Norris. "Make Each Step Like A Prayer Antler." Detail. *Affirm/Nation*, 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg

Norris includes wall mounted, "coded" antlers, melding sculpture and screen, on other iterations of this exhibit.<sup>1</sup> Norris combines Plains Cree tipi pole teachings with her antler aesthetics, asserting the tipi teachings' cultural values. However she encodes these teachings in a radically innovative way. The antlers' surfaces, similar to her affirmations, are covered with the teachings. These works translate each teaching into binary code, or computer language. Norris, in a juxtaposing strategy, handwrites the code on the antlers. Binary code is both a computer language and a method for divination in ancient Africa. Norris notes that she enjoys the "tribal" effect of the numbers when handwritten.

The first gesture here, towards computation, references the traditions of rationalism and logical empiricism that characterize computing epistemologies, emerging out of the same philosophical foundations as the settler state. Terry Winograd, philosopher of computer science, identifies an important consonance in the logic of computation with that of the rational liberal tradition overall. What he calls the "new patchwork rationalism" attempts to abstract and separate logic from the context of situated knowledge. This approach, obviously resonating with Tuhiway Smith's critique referenced above, reflects what Winograd calls "the depersonalization of knowledge" (214). Winograd writes:

When a person views his or her job as the correct application of a set of rules (whether human invoked or computer-based), there is a loss of personal responsibility or commitment. The "I just follow the rules" of the bureaucratic clerk" has its direct analog in "That's what the knowledge base says." The individual is not committed to appropriate results (as judged in some larger human context), but to faithful application of the procedures. (214)

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<sup>1</sup> This work was exhibited at Woodland Cultural Centre at Six Nations, Ontario (2007), Grunt Gallery in Vancouver (2007), and Harcourt House in Edmonton, Alberta (2008).

Winograd regards this lack of responsibility as a pernicious outcome of patchwork rationality. In computing, the programmer who creates the “rules” has no direct relationship to the situations in which they will be used. The computer user similarly does not perceive any responsibility for the operations by which a computing system creates an “answer” or “solution” to their task. The set of relationships characterizing computation systems are fragmented, thus affirming the individualist and rationalist, decontextual thrusts of liberalism. This decontextualized and abstracted application of “procedures” further resonates with Norris’s treatment of “affirmations,” as the pat application of an “answer” to various challenges. She has also written of these practices as a kind of degraded and commodified attempt at finding spiritual meaning (5). This one-size-fits-all stance reflects the abstractions with which settlers aim to replace Indigenous ways of knowing. Norris treats them in a decolonizing way. As she puts it, “[t]aking something so heavily associated with Western digital technology and (re)infusing it with an organic quality becomes an entwined act of wry/playful decolonization or ‘reverse appropriation’ with an emphasis on the relationship between nature and technology” (7). This ritual and contextual Cree practice makes these practices, paradoxically, local and situated knowledge. She positions them within an ecological understanding of the civic including animals and land.

Norris also uses digital technology (reliant on the very code languages discussed above) to portray bison through a reconfigured shopping cart called “Buffalo Basket”. The cart is freestanding on the left-hand side of the space. Norris has woven red willow to create a basket through the metal slats of the cart. A DVD player sits on the bottom, and the top part, hide-domed, is fashioned to resemble both a “carriage” and, for the artist, a sweat lodge. For me these qualities also connote both a baby carriage and a settler covered wagon. Inside the carriage/basket/cart is a nest made of moss, ensconced in which she has placed a small screen streaming footage of bison grazing. Norris writes that this work “Buffalo Basket” was inspired by the phrase “the bison was the supermarket of the prairies” prior to settler colonization (3). The bison in shopping cart, in my view, elaborates both affective and material economies. Firstly, the work conveys a notion of the biopolitical subject of Western modernity in terms of her constitution as consumer. Norris conveys the machinery of consumption. The shopping cart is literally part of that machinery at the supermarket. Norris also embeds the machinery of media consumption, screens, with the frame of the cart as a whole. This fashioning obviously references the genealogy of settler colonialism in its “covered wagon” visual trope, perhaps also referencing Western films. All these threads come together in the “Buffalo Basket” shopping cart. The nested screen within the carriage, which displays bison and calves grazing, figures the embodied practice associated with these objects in terms of colonial domination and the alienation of Plains peoples from what were constitutive relationships with the bison. A more emancipatory reading emerges, however, when read in tandem with the centrepiece of the installation.



Jude Norris. "Buffalo Basket." *Affirm/Nation*. 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Jude Norris. "Buffalo Basket." Detail. *Affirm/Nation*. 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.



Jude Norris. "Buffalo Basket." Detail. *Affirm/Nation*. 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Jude Norris. Installation View. *Affirm/Nation*. 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

A set of four video monitors faces outwards in a circle in the centre of the installation, on a circular table, with a beaded blue band, six metres long, wrapped around them and supported by twigs, almost like a fence. Soil covers the surface of the table on which the sticks are propped. A phrase on the beaded band, "The most beautiful things are now happening to us", surrounding the screens, is repeated like a mantra. In Norris's words "the beaded English text forms a screen through which to read the oral culture on video. The beaded strips convey 'no signal' blue of TV screen" (4), perhaps functioning as impenetrability, or a non-representational quality. The video shows Norris' hands handling the beads. She argues "the beaded screen divides the work into two spheres, inscribed with different languages:" the blue "screen" that is the "writing is easily penetrated" by the viewer's gaze (4). The video installation reveals the process of artistic production and community reflections on these undertakings. Images in the video loop include hands fiddling with sewing kits, and mouths speaking about the value of these Indigenous women's practices. Norris's installation, beyond creating an object for viewing, highlights multiple ongoing space-times. Norris writes, "The very activities which produced the work being included as a real-time element of the same work creates a 'reality loop' – at once actual and indicative of the circularity of things – especially, in this case, creativity" (4). This beading practice conveys women's work and community practices in constitutive formation with animals.



Jude Norris. *The Most Beautiful Things*. Detail. 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Jude Norris. *The Most Beautiful Things*. Installation View. 2005. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Norris's surrounding animal iconography is one of the most significant aspects of her portrayal of recursive human activity in the centre of the exhibit. Freestanding painted caribou, deer and moose antlers, as described above, surround the main station of the installation. Inscriptions of repeated mantras cover the surface of the antler. The video of grazing buffalo, bulls, cows, and calves, in the carriage, from which the sound of lowing emanates, sits with a light streaming through a hole in the top of the hide dome. Ceremonial paintings of scars and slits, made of sticks, encircle these elements, creating synthesized discourses of healing, ceremony, femininity, sociality, animality, trauma and recovery.

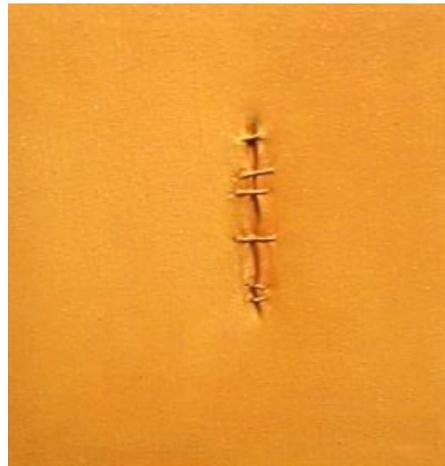
Norris reframes media technologies in "Buffalo Basket." They are not merely hegemonic market-driven mediums. She does this through a specifically Cree and gendered relationship to animals that clues viewers in on this re-articulation. The shopping cart is gendered female, part of the embodied practices of domestic economy and conveying a baby carriage, or women's care work. The labour of shopping is also gendered under liberal capitalism, and this care work is diminished, or devalued compared to paid labour in the patriarchal "public sphere". The hide-covered dome of the "carriage" conveys the labour of Plains women as members of their traditional communities, articulating an anti-capitalist continuity advanced through tradition. The use of code languages (rational, gendered masculine) to portray the buffalo on the screen again reconciles the binary of male and female codes, or representations, and practices.

Norris's work reframes the theme of care work in the gendered civic practices of Indigenous women. She enunciates continuity between animal-human relationality in Cree practices and Indigenous practices of civic ecology in contemporary urban spaces. Norris claims that this piece is "a remembering" of the relationships between her people and the bison in terms of material practices, but also a "strong spiritual connection" to the Buffalo Nation. She writes: "[t]he piece remembers how even though we no longer rely on the bison to anywhere near the same degree for food and shelter, this spiritual connection is still strong and fundamental" (3). The figurative affirmation and the literal animal antler rely on each other for their meaning, and trouble binary distinctions between opposing Western epistemological categories. This work asserts Cree animality and rhetoric in both ceremonial and ecological relationship, decolonizing settler binaries of figurative and literal. As Norris writes:

I can start out covering the “indian world” in words, but at some point the words become part of the physical object or whatever they cover. They are as much imbued with the energy and life of that things as it is changed by the meaning of the words (5)

Her method composes Cree ontology in city spaces, the exhibit as meeting place, as well as the media, shopping, and the creative spaces that the installation commingles. The composition records linguistic and interpersonal communication, including beaded and spoken affirmations, on beaded bands and audiovisual recordings. These more properly semantic components, all uttered or encoded by women or girls, signify Indigenous women’s traditional care work and creative production, such as beading. This show’s multimedia works form parts of Indigenous civility on the plains over time, including grazing buffalo, nests, shopping carts, beading and video screens.

Nadia Myre’s exhibit *The Want Ads and Other Scars* delineates some similar themes to *Affirm/Nation*. The invite card design is a diptych. The words “SPREAD EAGLE SEEKS GOOD WOLF ON FULL MOON” on one side resonate with the language of the newspaper want ad. The other side portrays a scar which, to my mind, can’t help but suggest the word “slit” and thereby vaginas. These two juxtaposing images raise the gendered violence of settler framings of Indigenous women’s sexuality through the discourse of animality, in the specific context of national imaginaries *pace* Benedict Anderson, which the newspaper reference “*Want Ads*” overtly raises. The scars resonate visually with Norris’s scar paintings, and with her overall exhibit, which contains discursive forms within a boundary of scars conveying femininity, teepees, home, safety, and ceremony.



Nadia Myre. “Spread Eagle Looking for Good Wolf on Full Moon.” *The Want Ads and Other Scars*. 2006. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Nadia Myre. “Untitled Scar Paintings.” *The Want Ads and Other Scars*. 2006. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.



Nadia Myre. *Untitled Scar Paintings. The Want Ads and Other Scars*, 2006. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Myre's exhibit displays many ads, again suggestive of newspapers in the formation of the nation state, capitalism, print media, and, in this context, desire or want as synonyms as per the title: *The Want Ads and Other Scars*. Many of the exhibited "Ads" reference urban encounters, in transit or dwelling, across public and private spaces. These include "I SAW YOU ON THE BUS" and "I WANTED TO KNOW YOU" or "762-916 W. BROADWAY, V5Z 1K7, X," and "SLEEPING BEAUTY LOOKING FOR VOYEUR". Playful phrases accompany many scar paintings in various flesh-coloured tones. Myre stitches scars in her painted canvas. The exhibit explores what might be called language wounds or scars. The most evocative *Ad*, chosen for the invite, conveys desire, reversing the passive metaphor of "SPREAD EAGLE", on one's back, as active. An eagle in active voice is predatory or even threatening, certainly majestic. Canada's national parks protect eagles as endangered species, as part of a settler-sanctioned nature, in contrast to abject or bare habitance forms of nature. Myre reframes agency through "passivity" and "animality", eschewing liberal subjectivity in desiring and producing a voice. Myre situates the animal of her phrase in a number of ways.

This particular phrase touches on "the domain of animality whose complicated sociocultural history is deeply rooted in colonialism, slavery, and sexism" (Glenney-Boggs 33), where "animality" figuratively creates literal socio-political locations for individuals. Settler discourses of animality framed Indigenous peoples in opposition to the human, to structured colonial civility on the basis of legislating these distinctions (51). Western hegemonic terms understand Indigenous peoples as anathema to cities, civil society, and "human" rights. Agamben's notion of "abandonment" is useful here only in understanding

the framings of Indigenous women and girls as not only bare habitance but also in opposition to the human through animal connotations. I associate Myre's treatment of these themes with missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. The Want Ad we've been discussing is, for settler critic Stacey Abramson, suggestive of the location of Vancouver's lower east side, where Myre was living when she created these works. This area was home to many of Robert Pickton's victims, many of whom were Indigenous women. Myre's treatment of Indigenous women's sexuality and the national imaginary, particularly in the reference to media technology, underscores how, as Carrie Rohman writes, "[t]he coherence of the imperialist subject often rests on the abjecting of animality" (69). Myre uses animality to articulate an interests-bearing subject *within* the rhetoric of print media or settler nation states, thereby frustrating the binaries of racist settler colonial modernity.

Myre brings the bifurcated discourses of animality and print media together in a decolonizing way. Her conflation merges the domains of the corporeal and the representational. Myre conflates scars, on the surface of the body, or in this case the painting, and text in the newspaper through the animal metaphor. She resignifies the figurative language of settler colonialism and critiques its material effects. She gestures at the same time towards invisible animals, or the memorial or testimonial function of a scar, as a bite for example. Just because we can't see an animal doesn't mean that it wasn't there. Scars can gesture towards animal presence that is otherwise invisible. This is key to Myre's treatment of her themes in the visual register. The scar, as a now-stronger boundary between inside-and-outside, a firmer skin that testifies to now invisible harm, marks communal acts of witnessing Indigenous histories in cities. This stance ratifies what settler critic David Gaertner argues is "the decolonizing potential of a witnessing that is contingent on community, rather than the possessive individualism of the Western "eye witness". Myre explores how relationships to animals unsettle settler cities, making way for Indigenous civic formations. Myre's work resonates with the words of Glenney Boggs, who writes: "[just as] subjectivity relies on sexualized animal bodies, these can [also] be a site for emancipatory subject formations" (166). I would frame these, taking a cue from these artists who do not focus on individual subjectivity per se, as civic ecological formations. Many of the works in *The Want Ads and Other Scars* reflect a graffiti-like style in cities. Myre spray-stencils the words "SPREAD EAGLE" on the sidewalk, photographs it, and includes the image in the exhibit. Myre's semantics of civility engages sexualized animal bodies and Indigenous them as ongoing Anishinaabe articulations.



Nadia Myre. "Spread eagle in-situ graffiti." *The Want Ads and Other Scars*, 2006. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Myre raises, with Norris, the disjuncture of figurative and literal and the complicated commingling of agencies therein. Settler critic Stacey Abramson describes *Hover, Baby, Hover*, another work from this show, as:

a thick mess of deep red, coated in a layer of light gauze [that] gives the visualization of a fresh wound. Soiled and fresh, it speaks of the creation of scars and the onset of wounds, after which the healing work of scars takes over. The breaking of the skin and the wrapping of the gauze for protection reads as an emotional blanket, shielding the opening from harm. (Abramson)

The title of this difficult work, to me, suggests a perpetrator hovering over a victim on the sidewalk, or perhaps spectators gawking at or over the bodies or discourses of sexually brutalized women. The painting's materiality suggests a literal wound, emphatically corporeal. The work's title, inviting the gaze, interpellating viewers, draws attention to the "mess" of "breaking skin" and "wrapping of gauze for protection". This work, in conversation with the other works in the exhibit, suggests the healing or protective quality of language or text that can protect as well as an open fresh wound not yet healed. Myre's authorship of this work troubles the idea that the open wound is Indigenous women's social location in Canadian nationalism, and how it plays out in cities, on sidewalks, in the newspaper, on bodies. I think perhaps my consciousness has become "an open wound", with the possibility of healing held out as a potential to be realized in the future. For me, this painting, along with the other scars, arouses discomfort that remains unresolved and in sophisticated tension with the sexualized and animalized *Want Ads*.



Nadia Myre. "Hover Baby Hover." *The Want Ads and Other Scars*. 2006. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.  
Nadia Myre. *The Scar Project*. Detail. 2006. Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg.

Myre's scar project also figures in this show. In *The Scar Project* she worked with community participants in many cities to produce scars with sewing on material. The sewing was a way to work through their own scars. A description of the project reads:

Scar Project, an open lab experience where people sew, with various fibres and threads, a canvas representation of a physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual scar they may have, and write out the accompanying narrative. Over the last 6 years, in workshops with youth groups, cultural centres, seniors' centres, prison circles, and schools, she has accumulated a collection of over 800 scars and stories which have been exhibited in galleries and museums in Canada and the US. (n.p.)

Myre sees this work as slow research, and describes it as a grassroots study of how people describe their wounds, both literal and metaphorical, as well as a study in symbology. However, *The Scar Project* is more than her iconographic findings and symbolical distillations. As a vehicle for people to anonymously share their personal narratives and traumas with others, the project creates a space that is simultaneously contemplative and transformative.

Myre draws on translocal Indigenous citizenship practices of scarring and sewing, which resonates with women's beading in Norris. Myre reframes discourses of gendered and sexualized animality, and the framing of city spaces and encounters as both textual and embodied together.

Walls of scars surround animals, languages of affirmation, feminine city practices and creative work in both Norris and Myre. These scars are protective. Myre's ecological framing, like Norris's, unsettles liberal civility's established ontology and articulates Indigenous civic ecology. Collaboration with animals as well as embodying animality in paradoxical emancipation convey ecological formations in the city. Both women artists

translate city environments, gendered communication, and “pat” or clichéd language: that of personal advertising and that of the affirmation. Both point out how these are embroiled in the nation-state form. Myre’s register emanates outwards, towards “the stranger”, connoting the city in modernity. Norris’s phrases are often directed inwardly, as a part of personal practice, gesturing at a neoliberal milieu. Her phrases, set in the context of women’s work, both care work and creative labour, emphasize the relational quality of the Indigenous women’s selves in their nation (“The most beautiful things are happening to my people right now”). She encircles and entrenches, by collaborating with caribou, deer, moose, and buffalo, continuous traditions of gendered labour within relationships with other animals and lands. The textual enunciation in Myre, more obviously part of civil society tradition in liberal understandings, interestingly renders the animal invisible, though the hegemonic gendering, in part through animality, of Indigenous women is at the fore. Making the invisibility of animals visible in what, at first, looks like a cheeky participation in the straightforward capitalist public sphere is a powerful paradox. Myre surrounds this discursive work with scars, making the juxtaposing power even stronger. The imprint or “presence” of the animal-human relationship is there, even as it is absent, as with a scar from a dog bite years ago. Myre combines the extreme gendered violence of liberal discourses of animality with the empowering alignment of animal agencies with feminine desire. These two artists, then, powerfully stake their claims for the continuity of Indigenous women’s nationhood in that foremost site of modernity: the city.

These exhibits concern relationalities composing Indigenous civic ecology. The artists’ understandings translate liberal settler civility, inflecting settler theories of urban ecology. Norris’s and Myre’s formations, reflecting the work of Renya Ramirez on translocal Native citizenship, exceed human-focused paradigms and expose the liberal humanism inherent in both settler hegemonies and new materialist theories. The works resonate with, while exceeding, the materialist theories of art historians such as Jane Bennett and translation studies theorist Alfred Gell, both of whom espouse new materialist philosophies to explore contemporary art. Norris’s and Myre’s work also exceed the vectors of biopolitics, animal studies, and settler colonial studies because they centre Indigenous knowledge. These works of art reveal the shortcomings of all of these discourses as they variously retain the very liberal humanist understandings they purport to critique.

Norris and Myre emphasize continuous relationships with the natural world, as fundamentally collaborative and specific to their sovereign nations. They composite various aspects of their life-worlds in visions drawing upon specific histories intersecting with and critiquing, but not flowing from, Euro-American traditions. These artists’ visions of belonging are composed through ecological relationalities in contemporary cities in Canada. They convey insights that exceed critiques of biopower and liberalism. Norris, in *Affirm/Nation*, emphasizes the near extinction of the buffalo on the plains and the capitalist territorial possession of the same ground. Myre’s animal metaphors sprayed on city sidewalks speak the invisible violence against Indigenous women, while her want ads announce desire from a place that renegotiates passivity/activity, animal/human, male/female, and public/private from a powerful and elegant Anishinaabe aesthetic voice. Norris and Myre reframe civil society by playfully teasing out the continuity of Indigenous

women's traditions and desires, within what are resolutely contexts of modernity: the supermarket, the city sidewalk, the newspaper, the screen. These formulations are vectors of Cree and Anishinaabe relationalities. Their translations radiate rigorous translocal praxis throughout numerous domains: material, aesthetic, and intellectual.

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