

# “Niagara as Technology”: Rupturing the Technological for the Wordy Ecologies of Niagara Falls

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## ABSTRACT

My research-creation examines how colonial language and words inspire the logic behind resource extraction, appropriation, and exploitation. Through found poetry—a creative and analytical process of using different (“found”) sources and various methods to critique and view the world—I create a collection of poems responding to Daniel Macfarlane’s *Fixing Niagara Falls: Environment, Energy, and Engineers at the World’s Most Famous Waterfall* (2020). Macfarlane claims that the “result” of Niagara Falls is a “compromise between scenic beauty and electricity generation” (208). However, I argue that Niagara Falls is not a “compromised” space but a hub of ecosystems coming into being. My poetic techniques emphasize the arbitrariness of colonial practices that classify beings as successful, political, and economic gains or progress. As such, I use various found methods to think with water and Indigenous modes of healing with Niagara Falls. By redacting, cutting, and layering the found words, I create an ethos of confusion, apprehension, unease, and responsibility in order to call into question the colonial logic that defines how settlers position themselves on Indigenous lands and in order to offer the possibility to listen otherwise.

## Keywords

Niagara Falls; Indigenous Knowledges; Found Poetry; Eco-poetics; Ecocriticism; Ecology and Affect; Environmental Justice; Decolonial Poetics

## 1. Introduction

I begin by acknowledging and giving thanks to the spirits and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, specifically the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas, where I currently reside, work, write, and embody the knowledges I have learned throughout the years. I was born on Treaty 13, the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. I also come from Iranian-Bakhtiari parents who immigrated to Canada and started a family benefiting from stolen Indigenous lands. As such, I am indebted to this land and to the peoples who have and continue to sustain the waterways. From this positionality of gratitude, I consider critically how I write about the environment, the land I am both from and not from, my ancestral relations in Iran, and my belonging with the more-than-human world without replicating the grammar of colonial violence.

Decolonial environmental humanities scholar Macarena Gómez-Barris states that ongoing Euro-western projects of civilization, such as settler-colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism, engage with Indigenous territories of the Global North and South “through the gaze of *terra nullius*,” which uses the language of coloniality to represent nature as “the other” and “Indigenous peoples as nonexistent” (6). As such, I begin this paper with a two-part provocation. The first part comes from a site of struggle; everything I write grapples with the past, present, and future aftermaths of the language of colonial singularity. I am writing in one of the languages of the colonizer, a language that divides “nature from culture,” “ecology from the vernacular,” and “land into private property” (2). The second part is of the nature of a wave: nothing that I write is new. There is a wide range of thinkers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors, who write about the ongoing practices of colonial capitalism, what it means to decolonize our languages and practices, and how to become better relatives to the more-than-human world, on Indigenous lands, with Indigenous peoples. Hence, this introduction is neither the beginning nor the end; it is where I can see you, dear reader, as a co-writer and collaborator in my work for decolonization and radical love. Here I include words from my “Conclusion”: *my work is ongoing and in motion. My poetic techniques subvert the idea that poetry centers on an “I” or one author and speaker. I use my poetic voice in conversation with Indigenous voices to create practices of care, respect, and reciprocity. I hope to revisit this work again with different scholars and thinkers because, as Stó:lō writer Dylan Robinson argues, it is through “another meeting” that decolonial art practices can expand and redirect “thought in motion” (253).*

In his book *Hungry Listening*, Robinson portrays how a violent listening experience embodies a settler’s complex “starving” orientation to Indigenous lands, resources, and knowledges (2). The settler subject’s listening positionality

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can reinforce the “persistent settler colonial listening regimes” that constitute structures privileging Euro-western practices of possession and extraction (10). As a settler and Iranian-Bakhtiari woman, I occupy what Unanga scholar Eve Tuck conceptualizes as the “thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance,” embodying a desire for both/neither reproduction and/nor resistance (419-420). As a result, in this “thirdspace,” or what we may also term a “thirding” listening positionality, I benefit from the colonial structures that constitute my western consumerist lifestyle, but I am also affected by and resisting its racializing structures of oppression and commodification. It is important, then, to consider issues of race, gender, culture, and privilege when thinking and writing about “the interlinked ecologies of the humanities and the environment” (LeMenager and Foote 5).

## 2. Poem 5<sup>1</sup>

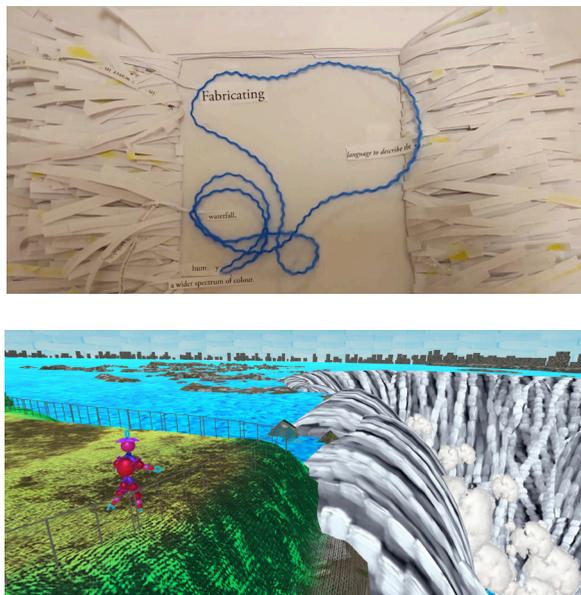


Fig. 1, Fig. 2. Conclusion: Fabricating Niagara Falls.

Source: Image by Tuscarora writer and game maker Waylon Wilson from *Čá·hu! (Is Anyone There?)* video game. Image included with permission from Waylon Wilson.

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1. This poem is discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

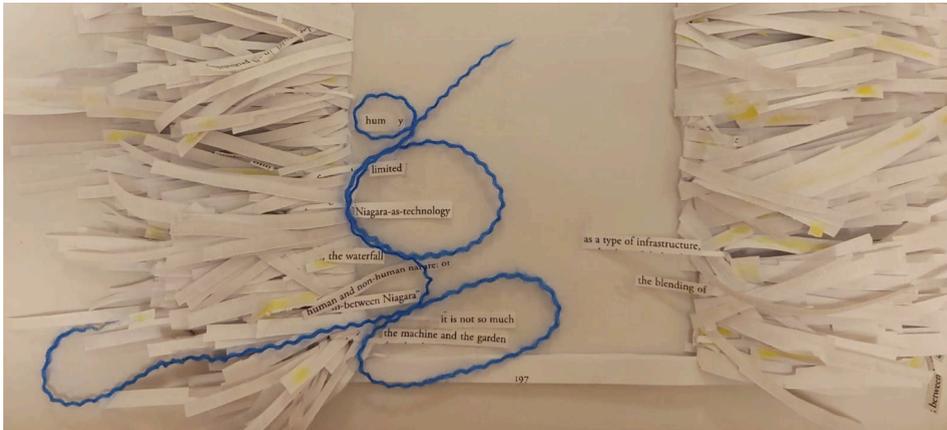


Fig. 3. and Fig. 4. Rupturing the "Conclusion" to Listen in Relation with Niagara Falls / A Decolonial Re-Introduction.

Source: Mixed media sculpture "1779" by Mohawk filmmaker and visual artist Shelley Niro from Shelley Niro: 1779 exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton. Image included with permission from Shelley Niro.

My affinity for Robinson's *Hungry Listening* stems primarily from the desire to unpack my listening encounters with my immigrant parents in relation to our sense of belonging as settlers on Turtle Island; what I could not understand then has become hauntingly familiar. Growing up in a low-income household meant

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spending most of our family vacations at Niagara Falls for its affordable attractions. "What luck," Baba would say, "to live so close to Niagara Falls." As I got older, I questioned what it meant to witness the Falls as often as I did and if my encounters were a product of luck or misfortune—is there a difference? According to Robinson, "as part of our listening positionality, we each carry listening privilege, listening biases, and listening ability that are never wholly positive or negative" (10). For Robinson, our listening privilege orients us "teleologically toward progression and resolution, just as hunger drives toward satiation" (50). For Baba, it made "sense" to imagine the Falls as a vacation destination because we lived "so close" and, ultimately, were poor. And as a child, I would listen to Baba romanticize and justify the Falls during our annual road trips, carefully explaining why travelling anywhere else would waste time and money when "so many people worldwide dream of seeing the glorious Niagara Falls." Although I listened to Baba and Maman sound happy and excited for these seemingly effortless Niagara trips, I also grew up listening to them yell, cry, and shake hopelessly during times of nothingness, when the only food we had to eat was free pizza from Baba's fast food job. This shifting and sonic relational experience of being lucky or unlucky became part of our quotidian identities, which I have come to understand as occupying a "thirthing" listening positionality.

Our hungry listening for moments of economic progress and resolution within settler-colonial systems determined what we said and heard and how we approached our environments. Hungry listening is thus a mental and physical orientation toward recognizing familiar things—the satisfaction of familiarity (Robinson 51). This sense of familiarity enables the settler to feel lucky and certain about how they "fit," as Robinson explains, "within a predetermined framework" (51). For example, when visiting Niagara Falls during the early stages of the pandemic, I was struck for the first time by a jarring feeling while walking around the Niagara landscape. One of the world's busiest tourist attractions was now empty, with hardly any cars or people. I found myself disoriented in this unfamiliar space as time slowed down and the booming thunder of the Falls echoed in the absence of bright lights and city noises. This juxtaposition is critical to Robinson's examination of how settler subjects can begin to hear beyond what he calls "the 'white noise' of daily settlement that guides the perceptual logic of settler colonialism" (258). Hence, what is important, says Robinson, is how we "becom[e] aware of [our] normative listening habits and abilities" so that "we are better able to listen otherwise" (11).

One of the ways in which we can learn to listen otherwise, Robinson affirms, is to reconsider "how we might write otherwise" (11). For Robinson, the "epistemic violence of listening experience... takes place at the level of language and structure of writing itself" (11). For example, in Indigenous cosmologies, time is presented as intergenerational/national and cyclical—a perspective in which we

consider ourselves as living side by side with our ancestors as well as descendants. While this notion is quite imperceptible in the language of colonial singularity, Indigenous epistemologies of time help us witness how the long-standing past is present in the landscape itself. As Potawatomi scholar-activist Kyle Whyte notes, "Indigenous conceptions of the future often present striking contrasts between deep Indigenous histories and the brief, but highly disruptive colonial, capitalist, and industrial periods" (159). Thus, according to Robinson, to write otherwise insists upon "disciplinary redress" (11). Robinson explains:

Disciplinary redress demands that individual disciplinary mischaracterizations of Indigenous knowledge are made known; that non-Indigenous scholars amend their citational practice to prioritize Indigenous writers, knowledge keepers, and artists; and that Indigenous methodologies and forms of writing and knowledge dissemination are not merely accepted within the areas of publication and peer review but are understood as vital contributions to scholarship. (11)

Integral to the process of disciplinary redress, Robinson tells us, is understanding that our present and future acts and actions cannot "seek to extract and apply a particular" Indigenous listening practice (51); to pick and choose our listening positionality "would also constitute appropriation" (11). Thinking with Robinson's notion of hungry listening and working through my own positionality as a settler, woman of colour, and poet/writer, I will explore how writing otherwise can engender a "thirthing" listening practice for minority settlers. A thirthing listening practice embodies the juxtaposition of knowing you are teleologically oriented toward progression and resolution but also actively resisting/refusing the colonial/capitalist structures of racial oppression. Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson specifically writes about "actions that engage in a general refusal of an aspect of state control," a refusal that "continues the work of dismantling heteropatriarchy as a dispossessive force" (*As We Have Always Done* 34-35). I consider this thirthing of Robinson's listening positionality as a desire to understand how minority settlers can participate in practices of refusal: "how to continue to resist and resurge in the face of ongoing colonialism" (19). For me, acts of refusal mean intentionally adapting my movements, writing justice, and practicing care to exist through radical love on Indigenous lands.

In *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, Black writer and social/environmental activist Adrienne Maree Brown propels readers into an inward and outward momentous cycle, asking us to reflect on our feelings and interactions. For Brown, transformation arises from *intentional* movements or adaptations that oppose the colonial and capitalist legacies of the world (31). She terms this transformative and relational way of being the "emergent strategy" (5). Emergent strategy becomes an intentional "awakening" (23) of both our

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individual imaginations and our critical, vulnerable, and authentic connections with the world around us (10). Brown tells us that by decentralizing our imaginations about movement and healing and focusing on graceful acts of adaptation that recognize other beings' capacities for change, we become a species with planetary integrity (32). However, moving and adapting with intention does not mean there is no chaos or nonsense in transformation. For Brown, "existence is fractal," which means that large, relatively stable patterns recur on smaller scales through random and chaotic movement (9). Hence, Brown believes that regardless of the circumstances, we must develop our capacity for intentional adaptation at the smallest scale to foster "growth, relationship, and regeneration" (32).

Brown portrays the importance of micro-scale and collaborative movement through the affective-sonic vibrations in "murmuration" (32). An example she provides is "the way groups of starlings billow, dive, spin, and dance collectively through the air—to avoid predators" (32). A murmuration is when birds are "tuned in to [their] neighbors" and they "feel the micro-adaptations of the other bodies," so that each bird adapts its speed, direction, and proximity based on the information of the others in the group (32). We can also define "murmuration" as "the act of murmuring": a low and soft utterance of continuous sounds; "a half-suppressed or muttered complaint"; and the "atypical sound of the heart" ("Murmur," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). In this context, "murmuration" is both the attunement of bodies through movement and the affective-sonic experiences of unconventional or "atypical" love. To move as murmuration necessitates a radical love that comes with its own set of challenges because being in relation can sometimes feel frustrating and opaque, especially when cultivating "trust and depth with each other" (Brown 32). Due to the challenges of radical love, it is important to ask ourselves how we can be part of meaningful discussions and collaborations to cultivate a deep sense of trust with other beings. How can we "shift from individual, interpersonal, and inter-organizational anger toward viable, generative, [and] sustainable systemic change" (62)?

In order to exist in radical love, the pace and sonic interactions of asking and listening go hand in hand, like a group of starlings flying and changing pace together in unison murmurs of knowledge. Similarly, ecofeminist scholar Donna Haraway asks that we partake in active re-learning practices where "order is reknitted," and we become "with and of the [E]arth... in times that remain at stake" (55). Robinson also sees "collaboration and conversation between various settler, diasporic, immigrant or 'arrivant' subjects" (253) as necessary to embody "a critical positionality of guest movement, listening, and touch" (258). Whereas a tourist is conditioned to spend money in exchange for endless fun and possessions, a guest or visitor partakes in a relationship of respect and reciprocity with Indigenous lands and knowledges. Robinson, Haraway, and Brown explore kinship practices not through dishonest attempts for reconciliation or

what Robinson terms “positionality confession,” but by turning a critical lens toward how settler work can deconstruct colonial structures (254). As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith tells us, Indigenous peoples’ sense of history relies on “a principle of reciprocity and feedback,” which collides and crashes with the binary and codifying thinking of the discipline of settler history (15). In Indigenous worldviews, methodology and method are far more critical than the outcome (128). Hence, this work is a research-creation project that allows for a thoughtful, fluid, and cross-disciplinary engagement at the boundaries of diverging thoughts, means of making, and ways of knowing. Contemporary artist Natalie Loveless defines research-creation as the process of bringing together different matters, bodies, and ideas, loosely bound into various forms of connection and connectivity (30). For Loveless, “the crafting of a research question is the crafting of a story that is also the crafting of an ethics” (95). Engaging in ethical practices for Simpson requires a sense of responsibility for our thoughts, ideas, and interpretations (“Land as Pedagogy” 11). Simpson favours “ethical and profoundly careful” (11) modes of sharing knowledge that re-create the networks of “consensual relationships” (16) and Indigenous context “within which learning takes place” (9). Thus, for Simpson, ethical practices are “contextual and relational” (7), which means sharing and receiving knowledge within the limitations of what we are allowed to know and share.

To enter Indigenous sound territories as settler-guests necessitates “an inability to hear and sense the land” because not all voices, songs, stories, knowledges, and languages are accessible to our ears and belong to us (Robinson 53). Attempts to discern what we cannot and should not hear/know become practices of appropriation (53). As a writer, I actively work to prevent any opportunity to appropriate or digest other peoples’ works, knowledges, and ways of being. I also acknowledge that recognizing and opposing appropriating works about Indigenous lands, peoples, and histories is crucial to my “thirdspace” listening positionality. Robinson argues that deconstructing colonial practices and positionalities requires that we pay particular attention to “compositional methodologies” through aesthetic practices of “marking what has been previously unmarked” (254). To write otherwise has always required me to return to locations and settings that have influenced my sense of belonging. Thus, my transformative and relational way of being, or “emergent strategy,” emerges in how I engage in discussions about Niagara Falls—and how I “stay[] with the trouble” (Haraway 2) of reading books about the History of the Falls. This transformation materializes from my *intentional* understanding of the colonial and capitalist legacies of appropriation of the Falls—how I “withdraw and participate in uneven social structures” (Tuck 420) in order to exist in this “thirdspace” listening positionality *with* Indigenous modes of tending to land and beings. Through found poetry, which questions received notions of originality and

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claiming, I re-appropriate extractive practices of capture and transformation (by using aesthetic practices of erasure, redaction, and layering) to critique environmental historian Daniel Macfarlane's book, *Fixing Niagara Falls: Environment, Energy, and Engineers at the World's Most Famous Waterfall* (2020).<sup>2</sup> According to Macfarlane, the book documents "the physical manipulation of the waterfall, including the politics and diplomacy that enabled engineering alterations" (6). I have created a collection of found poems that contest Macfarlane's re-presentation of "Niagara-as-technology" (198) by portraying Niagara Falls as a critical place for ecologies coming-to-being.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Poem 1

In the "Forward" chapter, Graeme Wynn describes Macfarlane's work as the "fertile ground between environmental history and the history of technology" (xx). I argue that Macfarlane's "fertile" mediation reproduces what Smith calls colonial "systems of classification, representation and evaluation" (43) to rationalize colonial and extractive practices. In Poem 1, for example, I black-out the word "change" to read "cage," implying that the book's perceptions about Niagara Falls enact fixity instead of fluidity. For instance, Wynn describes the process of disguising the River's industrialization as "no simple trick," and he claims this demonstrates "humanity's growing capacity to bring nature into useful service" (xviii). Here, Wynn justifies the colonial and economic exploitation of Niagara Falls by evaluating nature's ability to be of "useful service" to humanity. As a result, the poem's black bars create a sense of entrapment and serve as a barrier to easily reading the words, illustrating how Wynn's re-presentation of Niagara Falls is limited and manipulative.

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2. My interest in Daniel Macfarlane's book arose while reading multiple environmental history books about the Great Lakes regions and also learning about the *Resilience project*. I started critically analyzing Macfarlane's book when I realized that his conception of the Falls as merely technological infrastructure embodies the various misconceptions and tensions that the curated *Resilience* collection portrays. This collection comprises 50 Indigenous women artists and their contemporary Indigenous art that speaks to the "ongoing racial tensions with non-Indigenous cultures" (Martin). The collection portrays Indigenous resilience through art and photography as a critical place for ecologies and bodies coming-to-being. The Indigenous artists re-appropriate photography from an colonial/anthropologist tool that documents and objectifies Indigenous peoples as a "vanishing race" (Martin) into an artistic practice where ecologies and women's bodies rupture from the colonial reservoir of (re)production and embody spaces of wellness, reciprocity, desire, love, and collective mourning.

3. This type of thinking originated from my reflections on the *Resilience project*.

FOREWORD

Iconic Falls, Contrived Landscapes, and  
Tantalizing Opportunities

*Graeme Wynn*

There are many ways “to fix,” but all imply action of one sort or another. It should be no surprise, then, that the chapter titles of this book form a hymn to change.

Deploying both the authority and increasingly sophisticated knowledge that was accruing to their professions, experts, engineers, and other technocrats such as planners embarked on a process that Macfarlane calls *disguised design* to industrialize the river and keep the tourists marvelling at the grandeur of the Falls. This was no simple trick. Certainly some industrial structures could be hidden from the gaze of casual visitors by placing them beyond the usual lines of viewer interest up or downstream. Others could be turned by cunning description into spectacles, themselves as examples of the industrial sublime and evidence of humanity’s growing capacity to bring nature into useful service.

Ultimately and perhaps most importantly, Fixing Niagara Falls also pushes readers to think more deeply about their own and their society’s roles and responsibilities in shaping the world. For all the alterations to the Niagara River and the changes made to the Falls, it is hard to find real villains in this piece.

In this age of hyperconnectivity of widely dispersed and powerful computing and communication technologies and impending environmental crisis, we have both the means and the imperative to radically reshape our ways of being in the world. Fixing Niagara Falls is not and was never intended as a manual for such reconstruction, but what large the story unfolded in these pages demonstrates that the course of change is neither predestined nor beyond contestation. It reminds us that humans determine the ways in which technologies are used and that it is we who must in times of crisis seek to create fresh integrations of work and art and life. The need is urgent. Let us not waste this chance by presuming collectively that we face an insurmountable opportunity. “As I make my way past the neon lights, the ferris wheel, the man’s voice urging you to take a chance, and all of the other cheap attractions, I remind myself of what this place used to represent and to whom. And where it is and why Canada is now Canada” - Mohawk filmmaker and visual artist Shelley Niro from *Shelley Niro: 1779* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Fig. 5. Poem 1

We can also read the black bars as “structural refusals,” which Robinson explains “are formal and aesthetic strategies that impede Indigenous knowledge extraction and instrumentalization” (23). For example, in the last paragraph of the poem, I place a structural refusal after Wynn’s last words where he urges the

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reader to "not waste" their "chance" and develop new combinations of "work and art and life" (xxvi). This structural refusal can be seen as what Robinson calls a "blockade" that disrupts the flow of resource or knowledge extraction and consumption (23). I place this blockade to stop or refuse Wynn's request for new re/sources and to center Indigenous perspectives such as Mohawk filmmaker and visual artist Shelley Niro's 1779 exhibition, which took place at the Art Gallery of Hamilton from 2017 to 2018. I portray Niro's writing in blue to symbolize water and how Indigenous knowledges, works, and practices are a conversation in movement, like Niagara Falls. Niro's reflection about her experience walking around Niagara Falls ironically responds to Wynn's assertion to not "waste" opportunities. Niro reflects walking past cheap tourist attractions, and a "man's voice," which we can presume is a voice like Wynn's, who urges her "to take a chance" (11). Niro reminds herself "of what this place used to represent and to whom," and by doing so, she reminds her audience where they are and why "Canada is now Canada" (11). Thus, Niro's refusal to engage with the settler's intellectual pursuit emerges through her relationship with the land, which for Simpson is "both context and process" ("Land as Pedagogy" 7). Simpson states that "the process of coming to know" (7) how to create and live on land cannot be appropriated within "hyperindividualism" (9) but must be "woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, [therefore,] it is contextual and relational" (7). By re-appropriating the practices of "blockade," I impede time and disrupt space. Through this out-of-place experience, the reader lingers in thought to possibly re-consider how they might work and belong as a respectful guest on Indigenous lands.

Macfarlane prefaces capitalism's Eurocentric and racist ideologies as ex post facto events, in which capitalism's appropriation of Indigenous lands and waters is a result of colonization rather than a condition of capitalist progress. For example, in the "Introduction" chapter, Macfarlane states:

Reading between the lines, what further distinguished Niagara Falls for many was racial and cultural chauvinism: the waterfall came to be controlled by cultures that believed they knew how best to appreciate and appropriate its liquid wealth so that it wasn't squandered by simply running to the sea. (4)

However, for Jennifer Wenzel, capitalist modernity begins with the "improving eye" of the European explorer that is "at once economic and aesthetic" (2). The Europeans were the first to gaze upon the "beckoning landscapes" of the "Americas" in a manner that envisioned the beautiful only as profitable (2). As a result, resource extraction is inextricably related to a colonial aesthetics that imagines Indigenous landscapes in need of cultivation in order to elicit their potential for capital, productivity, and technology.

## 4. Poem 2

## INTRODUCTION

# Characterizing Niagara

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Fig. 6. Poem 2

In Poem 2, I use a literal approach to “reading between the lines” by blacking out Macfarlane’s words, enabling the reader to deduce Macfarlane’s colonial approach to reading or “improving” the capitalist manipulation of Niagara Falls. I reveal the poem’s provocation through redaction: “Reading between the lines is racial and cultural chauvinism: controlled by appropriat/i/o/n.” With this provocation, I demonstrate how referring to the racial and cultural chauvinism surrounding Niagara Falls as speculative data re-appropriates the colonial mindset that continues to justify the appropriation of Indigenous lands and peoples. Macfarlane situates colonialism as a historical event that implicitly shaped the future of capitalism, thus reinforcing the logics of coloniality that see appropriation as cultural exchange, racism as past tense, and capitalism as progress.

Wynn calls Macfarlane’s book an “innovative[] and well written work on the interaction of people and nature through time in North America” (ii). However, when we examine Macfarlane’s work on Niagara Falls in light of its omissions and gaps, we begin to challenge Macfarlane’s historical portrayal of the Falls. We might ask, who benefits from racial and cultural chauvinism? Who is responsible? Macfarlane’s limitations in acknowledging the specific effects of settler-colonial manipulation of Niagara Falls on Indigenous peoples (such as the linguistic, social, and economic consequences) become the appropriative practices that legitimize resource exploitation. For Macfarlane to create alternative (decolonial) interpretations of Niagara Falls’ history, the voices and narratives of Indigenous peoples, whose perspectives have long been excluded from the “official narrative,” must be amplified. According to Simpson, this requires Macfarlane to abandon hyperindividualism in favor of “the process of coming to know” how to learn, create, and live on Indigenous lands. It begins with an unsettling question: are Macfarlane’s reading and writing practices innovative or appropriative?

5. Poem 3

INTRODUCTION

Underpinning this study is the notion that nature and the infrastructures we create by blending nature and technologies exhibit types of agency and historical causation.<sup>18</sup> The Rivers and waterfalls are historical actors. Rivers are shaped by humans, but they also shape human history. Water provides both opportunities and constraints; it opens up many possibilities while simultaneously limiting in any others; it inspires dreams and frustrates ambitions; it provides life and takes a life. A river can serve as a major power source, transportation corridor, nurturing source for agriculture, quenching font of drinking water, sustainer of fish and fowl, artistic inspiration, and nationalist or regional repository of identity. But it is also a receptacle of waste and pollution, wrecked of ships, conduit of disease, and food hazard. The embedded energy in water, which humans try to capture in various forms, thwarts as many plans as it enables.

Notes

18. At the same time, in the quest to recognize the influence of a non-human nature, it is possible to go too far in the opposite direction by overascribing intentionality and imaginative powers to non-sentient forces and erasing the types of autonomy that do exist between humanity and the rest of the world. For example, Sheila Jasanoff makes the point that only humans can "imagine" in her "Future Imperfect: Science, Technology, and the Imagination of Modernity," in *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*, ed. Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 7.

"One of our teachings as Akunęhsye'ni? is to make decisions for the faces yet unseen, or, translated from Skarü-rę?, 'for the ever-coming faces.' Nyuhtawe?e is a site with multiple histories and responsibilities pertaining to this philosophy. The Skarü-rę? Ekwęhe'we (Tuscarora people) plan on being there for immeasurable amount of time into the future. This is in contrast to populations that are often just passing through or receive government buyouts to leave after environmental disasters. In this thesis I explore how the future imaginary of Nyuhčire?e (Tuscarora Territory) and Nyuhtawe?e (Niagara Falls) can be used to predict healthy beings rather than toxic bodies."

– Tuscarora writer Waylon Wilson  
From *Cá-hu- Is Anyone There: Video Games, Place-Based Knowledge, and the Future Imaginary*

"Indigenous people drove the conversation and encouraged a broader understanding of monument that is immersed in an Indigenous perspective: land is monument. The response of the Indigenous women present shifted the perception from ornamental concepts of monument to lived and active forms of monuments like corn and lakes.<sup>34</sup> This brought forth the idea that the condition of the land reflects the relationship humans carry with that land<sup>35</sup> and that there is a lot to be learned from these relationships."

"Nyuhtawe?e was considered an 'American icon' in the 1800s and continues to be a popular tourist destination.<sup>73</sup> The Akunęhsye'ni? have many stories about its cultural significance as the home of the Thunderers. Each spring we listen for the thunderclap signaling the return of our Grandfathers or Thunderers, to awaken and renew E'ne? U?wneh, our Mother Earth, with life sustaining water. We respond by giving thanks to the Thunderers for another year of rain and protection from the benevolent forces.<sup>74</sup> We listen to the Thunderers and observe the beings around us, as each of us share a role in shaping our collective futures."

Fig. 7. Poem 3

In the "Notes" section of his book, Macfarlane explains that he is conscious not to "overascrib[e]" intentionality to "non-sentient" forces like the Falls (215). In Poem 3, I break apart Macfarlane's words to create what Robinson terms an

“intellectual impasse” where the contours of space are obscured and “open out into anxiety” (257). I argue that this anxiety is necessary to think outside Macfarlane’s teleological view of Niagara Falls’ history so that we can listen otherwise. I awkwardly expand the superscript 18 through the ruptures to offer the possibility of moving across Macfarlane’s linear and static bounds of space and time that characterize our perception of the more-than-human world.

In his thesis, Skarù·rę? (Tuscarora) writer Waylon Wilson portrays the land as a place of learned relationality where all beings share a role in shaping collective futures, which include, as Wilson tells us, “the ever-coming faces” of Niagara Falls (17). Wilson’s thesis, for example, is about a computer game he created that “explore[s] how the future imaginary of Nyuhčireꞓe (Tuscarora Territory) and Nyuhtaweꞓe (Niagara Falls) can be used to predict healthy beings rather than toxic bodies” (17). The game is called “Čá·hu,” a Skarù·rę? phrase which, according to Wilson, “one uses to call out to see if anyone is there and listens for a response” (2). Wilson’s closest English equivalent is “yoo-hoo” (2). In the game, the player calls out “Čá·hu!” to “Nyuhtaweꞓe,” the home of the Thunderers, and listens to who responds (16). Wilson encourages his player to engage with Skarù·rę? landscape and helps “Skarù·rę? youth specifically and Akunęhsyę̀·ni? [Haudenosaunee] youth in general understand the importance of reciprocity in giving or returning thanks” (16). The game objective is to show how the “future imaginary” of Nyuhtaweꞓe as an environmentally devastated landscape can become one of wellness when humans re-establish their relationships with the natural world, allowing humans and more-than-human beings to fulfill their obligations to one another, including sustaining a healthy environment for future ancestors (2).

The primary character of the game is an iconic Skarù·rę? figure known as the Jitterbug. The “Jitterbug person” starts in a grey cityscape with a “red wireframe... without any beads attached to it” (27). The Jitterbug is lost in this “disorienting maze” and calls out “Čá·hu” in the hopes of eliciting a response (33). Remnants of nature still survive in this region (like “the birds that fly overhead”), and they assist Jitterbug in finding the bridge that crosses the Niagara River (33). When Jitterbug moves across the bridge from the “chaotic urban landscape” to the green islands with “vibrant blue waters,” the player notices that everything in this world is made of Skarù·rę? beaded designs (27). The Jitterbug shouts “Čá·hu” once more, and this time a beaded woman made of wampum (“an ancestral being to the Jitterbug”) appears from the belt to welcome the player (29). She welcomes the player to Nyuhtaweꞓe and sets the standard for gameplay—how to play the game right—by teaching the player the Ha? Kanęherathečreh, or “Thanksgiving Address,” also known as the “Words Before All Else” (29). When Skarù·rę? and their Akunęhsyę̀·ni? sister nations gather, the Ha? Kanęherathečreh is recited to unite minds and to “remind [them] to be thankful of the non-hierarchical relationship between [themselves]

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as humans and all other living things” (1). By patiently observing and thanking the many “beings throughout the entire beaded island,” the Jitterbug transforms into a fully beaded figure with “a beautiful array of colors” (30). Through Jitterbug’s metamorphosis, Wilson teaches his readers that the condition of the land “reflects the relationship humans carry with that land,” emphasizing the importance of reciprocity with nature, how to listen to more-than-human beings, and how to respect the boundaries they share (8).

Jitterbug’s listening experience represents what Robinson calls the “critical listening positionality”—the meeting point between attentive listening and the Thanksgiving Address (52). In this critical listening positionality, humans are attentive and grateful to the relations they carry with other beings, which means “listening-in-relation” to the knowledges and histories they share (51). In the game, Jitterbug’s critical listening positionality engages with Tuscarora knowledge as land-based pedagogy, teaching the player that when they respect the freedom of the more-than-human world, they are in a relationship of physical and spiritual growth with all beings, similar to Jitterbug’s “ever-coming” transformation in the game.

Wilson’s portrayal of Niagara Falls as relationality and a place of becoming can be connected to Brian Massumi’s notion of an affective event and his comments on “the nature of a *gesture*” in his book, *Politics of Affect* (105). An affective event sets in motion and activates the entire configuration of the environment, involving a multiplicity of bodies and relations, interruptions and ruptures. Similar to Robinson’s notion of listening positionality as involving opposing forces—“never wholly positive or negative” (Robinson 10)—an affective event encompasses both “tendencies towards free action” and “tendencies towards capture” (Massumi 104). As bodies relate in the affective event, they have the capacity to affect or be affected, thus intermixing their potentials and leaving traces on the bodies. Here, the traces left on the body are the memories of past events that create tendencies and gestures. These tendencies and gestures can become habits that bodies reproduce and can either make a body’s actions too predictable and close off its potential to change, or they can augment the body for new possibilities. For example, Wilson explains that the bridge between the grey landscape and the beaded landscape “represents an in-between state of being where a definitive path, or way of life, must be chosen in order to advance in the game” (34). If the player chooses to stay in the grey landscape with very few affective relationships, their actions (game play) become too predictable, preventing Jitterbug’s transformation. However, if the player moves into the beaded landscape, the Jitterbug also transforms into a beaded figure by interacting with the “language materials,” the “peaceful soundscape,” and “the beautiful artistry of beadwork inspired by Skarù:rę? women” (45). Hence, the player learns that if their actions and habits in the game limit their relationality with the Niagara River such that the Jitterbug is

not affecting *and* being affected by the Niagara landscape, then their relationship with Niagara Falls is one-sided, making Jitterbug's positionality vulnerable and dangerous. However, by constituting a relationship of respect, openness, and reciprocity with the River and the environment, the player can augment Jitterbug's habitual tendencies to create what Massumi terms "counter-tendencies" (105). These "counter-tendencies" enable Jitterbug to be in a creative and transformational process with the beaded landscape and "become-otherwise" (105).

Wilson's understanding of Niagara Falls as a critical place for ecologies coming-to-being contrasts with Macfarlane's categorization of the Falls as "a built architecture" (199) with limiting qualities. While Macfarlane cautions his readers about the power of nature to "thwart" human objectives (8), he also embodies the conventions of Robinson's hungry listening. According to Robinson, a person's hungry listening "is hungry for the felt confirmations of square pegs in square holes, for the satisfactory fit as sound knowledge slides into its appropriate place" (51). Thus, when Macfarlane refers to water as a "historical actor" that may either help or hinder humanity's future (8), he is essentially "listening for" the satisfaction of familiarity (Robinson 51); how humans can employ the "hidden energy in water" (Macfarlane 8) to fit within the settler's future plans for development. Envisioning Niagara Falls as both a historical actor and an architectural wonder allows for a starving and controlling orientation to the Falls, where the hungry listener's "'fevered' pace of consumption for knowledge resources" (Robinson 53) transforms Niagara Falls into a reservoir of productivity. Robinson argues that in order to move beyond hungry listening and toward the positionality of critical listening, we must disorient ourselves from "antirelational and nonsituated settler colonial positions of certainty" (53). This move toward critical listening is what I refer to as "an ethical (s)pace of being." In my poem, I break Macfarlane's words to create an ethical space that slows the pace of listening. With this poetic technique, as well as the number 18 cascading through the ruptures and connecting to Wilson's thesis excerpts, I disorient Macfarlane's annotative practice from a mode of white and colonial justification to a practice of kinship.

Wilson's game is "deeply invested in historic and specific Skarù·rę? references" and empowers "Skarù·rę? youth to engage with Skarù·rę? place-based teachings and ways of knowing using an updated digital format" (1). As Wilson explains, Indigenous peoples have used technology for millennia in many types of media, such as pottery, beading, and wampum (8). *Čá·hu* brings the two technologies together: "the video game space and the beading space" (45). Thus, Wilson's use of digital media to transform the Jitterbug from a red wireframe into a beautiful beaded figure portrays the Skarù·rę? peoples' past and present use of technology "to create and activate Indigenous futures and future imaginaries" (9). These technological structures and systems are monuments "for Skarù·rę? peoples as [they tell] the story of [their] ancestors, [their] history, and [their] culture while

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also carrying the geographical tracings of [their] generational development" (8). While technology for Indigenous peoples means the transmission of land-based knowledge and ways of knowing in order to "strengthen human relationships to place" (44), "Niagara-as-technology," for Macfarlane, is a "compromise between scenic beauty and electricity generation" (208) that transforms the Falls into a technological sublime, appealing to both the European aesthetic gaze and their "improving eye." As such, in Poem 3, I juxtapose Wilson's and Macfarlane's descriptions of Niagara Falls to create an in-between space where the poet and the reader meet through a destabilizing and perplexing orientation to the Falls. The poem creates an apprehensive environment that forces both the reader and the poet to reconsider their knowledge of Niagara Falls, what the landscape should or should not look like, and how they should connect to this Indigenous territory.

**6. Poem 4**

Empowering Niagara:  
Diversions and Generating  
Stations

The existing plans placed the reservoir primarily on  
the reservation of the Tuscarora Indian Nation. This was  
potentially problematic, not only because of Tuscarora objections  
but also because it was difficult for PASNY to obtain bond financing  
without knowing what the final works and thus the cost would be.

The types of power projects built at Niagara in the 1950s were, to be fair,  
more ecologically benign than most other large-scale hydroelectric  
developments of the same era.

The types of power projects built at Niagara in the 1950s were, to be fair,  
more ecologically benign than most other large-scale hydroelectric  
developments of the same era.

"In the 1900s, Nyūhtawē?e  
waters were harnessed  
for the then largest  
hydroelectric project in  
the world. Robert Moses  
and the New York State  
Power Authority  
dispossessed the  
Skarū-rē? Nation of almost  
a third of our land-base for  
the reservoir facilitating  
pumping water  
through the turbines."<sup>79</sup>

The existing plans placed the reservoir primarily on  
the reservation of the Tuscarora Indian Nation. This was  
potentially problematic, not only because of Tuscarora objections  
but also because it was difficult for PASNY to obtain bond financing  
without knowing what the final works and thus the cost would be.  
more ecologically benign than most other large-scale hydroelectric  
developments of the same era.

"The reservoir and forced  
dispossession  
eliminated our access to the  
Niagara River and  
severely damaged clan and  
family relationships  
within our nation<sup>80</sup> as well  
as fueling further  
environmental degradation."

Often women and children were at the front lines of protests, since the men were  
working.

"In the 1800s the Skarū-rē? Nation faced economic marginalization stemming from devastating  
colonization that threatened our Nation's existence. Skarū-rē? women came  
together, analyzed the situation around them, and devised an economic strategy: to capitalize on the  
developing 'Niagara Falls tourism' industry as a means of survival that would  
ensure our Nation's presence in the future.<sup>81</sup> This strategy manifested itself, in part, through the  
transformation of glass beads, cotton velvet, and sewing materials into the iconic Skarū-rē? beadwork of the  
1830s-present.<sup>82</sup>" — Tuscarora writer Waylon Wilson  
From *Cá-hu- Is Anyone There: Video Games, Place-Based Knowledge, and the Future*

Fig. 8. Poem 4

In the book's "Empowering" chapter, Macfarlane chronicles the creation of the Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant and accompanying infrastructure at Niagara Falls. He notes that these efforts drew "Tuscarora objections" since they infringed on their territories and lifeways (113). However, he then paradoxically counters his critique of the Power Plant by stating, "The sorts of power plants established at Niagara in the 1950s were, to be fair, more ecologically benign than most other large-scale hydroelectric operations of the same era" (129). In Poem 4, I obfuscate Macfarlane's re-presentation of the Power Plant as a "more ecologically benign" hydroelectric development, as well as his dominant settler-colonialist and capitalist ideologies, to introduce an Indigenous point of reference for how we read and grasp Niagara Falls' history. I replicate and layer sections of Macfarlane's chapter to create a vortex of noise and chaos that collapses Macfarlane's dialectic reasoning of history and temporality. As the words and phrases pile on top of one another, it becomes increasingly difficult to read and comprehend Macfarlane's work, slowing time and widening space for keywords to emerge from the chaos. For example, I extract the words "to be fair" from this chaotic cloud and set them in the margins. I also copy and paste the words "Tuscarora objections," "women," and "working" next to their fixed counterparts. These repeated extractions serve as keywords for the chapter's core themes as well as entry words for establishing ethical (s)paces (ongoing spaces and paces of responsibility and kinship) around the margins. Through these ethical (s)paces, Wilson's Indigenous counter-histories emerge and annotate Macfarlane's representation of hydroelectric development on Indigenous lands. Wilson's excerpts are in blue and embody the ebb and flow of water. As a result, the reader enters the ethical (s)paces in shifting positionalities to observe and pay attention to Wilson's seascape.

The keywords are meant to question Macfarlane's re-presentation of Niagara Falls by accentuating the "systems of classification, representation, and evaluation" (Smith 43) he employs to justify the Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant operations. For example, by measuring ecological safety against Eurocentric environmental and resource management systems, Macfarlane undermines Tuscarora people's sovereignty over their lands and the knowledge, protocols, laws, and ethics that come from their relationship with the more-than-human world. Through the use of repetition, the keywords echo back to the reader and haunt them into a critical listening positionality to question Macfarlane's hungry listening. According to Robinson, "a decolonial practice of critical listening positionality actively seeks out (or allows itself) to become haunted" (62). This means that the listening subject recognizes and confronts the "aural traces of history," or keywords as I refer to them, that "productively haunt" and ontologically reorient their listening positionality (62). In this sense, the listening subject seeks after the "echoes, whispers, and voices" of history that make possible

"a potentially insurgent form of aural redress" (62). The listening subject finds themselves affectively oscillating between different strata of listening positionality that escape the boundedness of representational fixity.

This listening oscillation is activated when the reader comes into contact with the visual-sonic affective keywords that haunt the reader's positionality. Through this haunting, aspects of the reader's listening positionality come to the surface. The reader begins to identify "the ways in which those aspects allow or fore-close upon certain ways of looking, kinds of touch, or listening hunger/fixity" (Robinson 60-61). For example, the first time the reader reads a keyword, they are introduced to its virtual implications in Macfarlane's work. However, as the keyword echoes back through its repetition in the poem, the reader has the opportunity to augment their affective relationship with the keyword and reckon with the material that is at stake through Wilson's excerpts annotating Macfarlane's work. Wilson's work teaches the reader about the tangible repercussions of "Robert Moses and the New York State Power Authority" on Indigenous lands in this new positionality (16). For instance, Wilson details their forced dispossession from their lands due to the power plant development, which eliminated their access to the Niagara River and severely damaged their clan and family relationships within the Tuscarora nation (16). The reader then oscillates between a virtual positionality with the Power Plant and a material listening positionality through Wilson's excerpts. According to Massumi, an affective event is the oscillation between the virtual and the actual through which inventions are formulated, extricated, modulated, and reinvented ("Autonomy" 99). As a result, the reader is not only influenced by the haunting of the term but also brings into existence a separate stratum of listening positionality. Thus, when the reader comes across the second keyword, they will interact with it through a modulated listening positionality. The reader's relationship with the power plant is now different than how they related to it before as a novice listener.

Robinson suggests using "such haunting as a very literal strategy for whispered interventions to take place" (62). As such, the keywords embody the "echoes, whispers, and voices" of history "that become audible momentarily" and offer the potential to listen-otherwise (62). For example, Macfarlane also mentions that, Tuscarora women and children were often "at the front lines of protests since the men were working" (114). Through keywords that lead the reader to a passage from Wilson's thesis, I question this colonial re-presentation of Tuscarora women as not "working." Wilson portrays Tuscarora women in the 1800s strategizing and selling their beadwork in response to the nation's economic marginalization as a result of colonization. Wilson's excerpt teaches the reader about Tuscarora women's "ability to adapt or transform through their critical thinking and action" (19). As Wilson explains, "What we create, tourist item or not, serves as a reminder of our spiritual, cultural and

economic survival" (18). Thus, this ethical (s)pace resists Macfarlane's hungry listening by "dislocating the fixity and goal-oriented teleology of" coming-to-know about the history of Tuscarora women and their actions (Robinson 58). The keyword also haunts the reader's "listening ability, privilege, and habit" (61) by contesting Macfarlane's colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal understanding of "work" and productivity. The meaning of work then shifts from capitalist and Eurocentric origins to Indigenous resistance, sovereignty, and existence.

## 7. Conclusion

In Poem 5 (see page 65-66), I re-appropriate extractive practices of mining by cutting sentences, words, and letters from the "Conclusion" chapter of Macfarlane's book. Here, the erasure technique breaks textual fixity by fragmenting sentences and words. Through the erasure technique, words linger in the empty spaces and each letter, word, and punctuation opens up space for the new words and letters to emerge. New subjectivities accumulate and adhere to the gravitational forces of other subjectivities by opening up space for the particularities of words and sentences to confront each other and accent MacFarlane's appropriating practices. For example, in the second part of the poem, I ask: "hum y/ limited/ Niagara-as-technology/ it is not so much/ the machine and the garden." In both sections of Poem 5, I pose questions and react with imagery from Wilson's and Niro's work.

In the first part of the poem, I ask "hum y" MacFarlane fabricates language to describe the waterfall. According to MacFarlane, "Niagara Falls is a place marked by hubris and selfishness," and "we, and the waterfall, require humility and grace" (209). However, by asserting that both humanity and the waterfall "require" humility and grace, MacFarlane frames the waterfall and humans as equal collaborators in constructing the history of Niagara Falls, whereas in fact, humans are to blame for Niagara Falls' reputation as an arrogant and selfish place. Indeed, it is we humans who require humility and grace to understand the non-hierarchical interactions we share with the world around us (Wilson 23). As a result, when humans demonstrate humility, responsibility, and reciprocity towards nature, nature responds with grace.

I use one of Wilson's game images to portray the significance of the words "hum y" in relation to MacFarlane's mischaracterization of the Falls. The Jitterbug is still in the image, "listening to the loud waterfall" (39). The "hum" of running water pauses time as the Jitterbug upholds Akunęhsye`ni? teachings and values, such as "recognizing all beings of this world and beyond as being of equal importance" (23). As a result, I also pause time by interrupting MacFarlane's statements with the fragmented syllables spelling "hum y," inviting

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the reader to pause, listen, and think about how MacFarlane's use of language re-establishes a manipulative connection with nature.

Both works portray Niagara Falls as a place of well-being for their present and future communities and a site of Indigenous resurgence. For example, both Wilson and Niro use beadwork practices to portray what Wilson calls Indigenous "survival strategy and transformation of culture" (5). For Niro, her beadwork over stiletto shoes depicts the year that "5000 Iroquois began walking north after the extreme violence they experienced during the American Confederation of 1776" (4). Niro also states how the beadwork represents her people's patience, strength, wisdom, and resistance (4). Similarly, Wilson uses the figure of the "Jitterbug," which is made from beadwork, to portray the strength and dedication of the Tuscarora women at the Falls, particularly, Wilson explains, when they had to sell their beadwork because the nation "faced economic marginalization" (17). Indigenous beading methods represent Indigenous practices of self-determination, survival, and creativity (5). Beadwork also symbolizes for Wilson the "transmission" of land-based knowledge through the transformation of the Jitterbug (31). In the game, the Jitterbug's ability to learn from the land becomes what Wilson calls "the survival and resiliency of Indigenous ways of knowing" for the future health of all beings (43).

Through the anxious encounter with Macfarlane's words and the different types of relationships created with Wilson's and Niro's works, the found poems ask the reader to question and analyze their current relationships with nature and land. However, as Robinson explains, it is important "that in entering Indigenous sound territories as guests," we recognize an "incommensurability" that prevents us from hearing "these specific assertions of Indigenous sovereignty" (53). With this in mind, I portray the boundaries and limits of settler listening positionalities by placing blockades in my poems. By re-appropriating the blockade, my goal is to acknowledge Indigenous voices and bodies while, echoing Robinson, not "acting as a container of Indigenous content" (25). *I conclude by stating that my work is ongoing and in motion. My poetic techniques subvert the idea that poetry centers on an "I" or one author and speaker. I use my poetic voice in conversation with Indigenous voices to create practices of care, respect, and reciprocity. I hope to revisit this work again with different scholars and thinkers because, as Robinson argues, it is through "another meeting" that decolonial art practices can expand and redirect "thought in motion" (253).*

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