

# **Following Deer: Moving from *Living With* to *Living Together***

(or, Treaty Praxis and the Undoing of Colonizing Biopolitics)<sup>1</sup>

## **A WORK IN PROGRESS**

*To the Pluriverse workshop participants: please forgive the slight extra length of this essay, and that it is yet a draft with much repetition and rougher sections, incomplete citations etc.. My hope is that I will be able to improve it all the more in its substance and its rhetoric, through our conversations together in this workshop and in the next iteration that will follow from this.*

## **Part One: Turning the Issue**

### ***First words. Turning Anthropology***

Over the last 15 or so years — but I think we could actually say over the last 150 years — anthropology has taken a relational turn, some even suggest it is an ontological turn, in the way it continually obviates that tired but resilient modern distinction between nature and culture, and then reconsiders matters more adequately as a nexus: natureculture (oneword, as Donna Haraway has put it). We have regularly been challenged by the modern constitution (as Bruno Latour has put it), and equally regularly have turned it back on itself. Two predominant loci for this turn have been in our work with land- and place-sensitive Indigenous Peoples’ practices (that is probably the older turn) and our

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<sup>1</sup> I am deeply grateful to Mario Blaser for organizing the Pluriverse workshop and for inviting this contribution, which is a second iteration of a paper prepared for the Society of Cultural Anthropology meetings in Santa Fe N.M, May 2010. I am also grateful to Michael Asch and Seth Asch for their enormously helpful, rigorous, and insightful writing and communications on treaty and on relational ontology, which have had a deep effect on my thinking and practices. I am particularly indebted to Reg, Rose, Joe, and Josephine Crowshoe, and the bundles that they have kept, who taught me about / engaged me directly in Nitooii, “parallel practice”, by making me live it with them, what it means to be in treaty. Finally, I am also indebted to the writing of Marilyn Strathern on the matter of relationality, who in one communication, assured me that she was not going to give up on it. I am always already so deeply indebted to Constance MacIntosh who — beyond any reasonable human endurance — listens to, reads, supports, and deftly challenges my constant meanderings and rantings around relations and treaty.

work with scientific-technical and other expert practices (a newer turn). And in both these turns we've been reckoning with how persons, animals, documents, things, and much else are co-constituted and transformed by each other through their relations, connections, disruptions, assemblages. But even more, as suggested by our Triphasic poncho-wielding hosts, we've come to some powerful apprehensions about political relations even between things seen *and things unseen, agents apprehensible to some if not all* (as in the case of Chief Maquinna coming back to inhabit the Orca Luna, or Panchamama in the Bolivian Constitution), and how these together are assembled into forceful political collectivities. The black tail deer is one such agent I will be bringing into my stories very late in this essay, after I have laid out some premises and propositions for thinking of how its political agency impinges upon our moment.

The important question now, as I see it, does not concern the distinctiveness in the diversity of political collectivities or assemblages and how they might co-exist or live alongside each other as a plurality of polities or worlds, but rather about how these political collectivities can *live together, how they can have effective, mutually fruitful inter-political relationships*. ***For me, the crucially important question to ask is what the contours of an inter-political philosophy might be, one that moves between ways of “living with” (relations among intimates of all sorts), and ways of “living together” (relations among polities of all sorts) — moves that allow us in our respective naturalpolitical assemblages to peacefully and respectfully co-generate a world in which we can, in every sense, live together.*** It is to search an adequate response, or one such response at the least, to Larry Grossberg's call for: “a commensurating logics that are not only capable of adjudicating otherness via (and not in spite of) their difference, but

that also refuse to universalize themselves.” Put simply, we are seeking anti-colonial, non-dominating, anti-violent logics and practices between diverse polities, however they are constituted and whatever may count as “world/s” for them.

One particular versioning of such a commensurating logics, or praxis, is what I try to capture in the term “treaty praxis”, and which I will attempt to contour over the course of this paper. My own interest here emerges both from long involvement with Blackfoot folks — some stories of this involvement I will be recounting — and more recently from an ongoing and quite unfinished conversation I have been having within a collective of colleagues called the Crabgrass collective over the last several years. Within that collective I have been immersed in an even more particular conversation with anthropologist Michael Asch, and also his political philosopher son Seth Asch, on how to speak adequately about practices of “treaty”. This falls within the ambit of what we might call “relational ontology”<sup>2</sup>, where what is apprehended as being, whether personally or politically, is effected by and through relations.

*Second words.*

*Anthropology and the multiverse in the making, vs. Coloniality / Biopolitics*

Anthropologists living closely with those we often strangely designate as “non-moderns” have never been far from intensive engagement with ontological possibility, forced as we have been over and over to inhabit ‘the between’, that is the zones between a “we” and a “them”. Indeed, and notwithstanding the functionalist framing of his moment in the 1910s and 20s, Bronislaw Malinowski’s keen tracings of Trobriand Islanders

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<sup>2</sup> I use the phrase as a provisional placeholder, to avoid as Haraway notes, a “premature hardening of the categories”.

sociotechnical natureculture relations of the Kula exchange complex — a political praxis through and through — lead him to his famous formulation on myth, which I truncate here:

*"Studied alive, myth . . . is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality... a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; These stories . . . are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, facts and activities of mankind are determined..."*<sup>3</sup>

Of course, Malinowski in his moment was still held to a conception of the “social” and the “mental” as entailing what anthropologists might apprehend about humans in their relation to a “world out there”, what binaristically would be set apart as nature. Nonetheless, Malinowski comes agonizingly close to a more extensive fabric, so to speak, that embraces and collapses the two modern polarities (after Latour) of nature and culture. From there, it is only small rhetorical moves that are necessary, to remove the modernist restriction. After all Malinowski speaks of myth as “alive” and a resurrection of “a primeval reality” — not a representation of reality, but instead a very resurrection of reality, reality made and kept real as it should! This is a generative reality in which the Trobrianders (to whom he probably is referring indirectly) are not merely believers in the reality, but agents who participate in the animation and generation of its very fabric.

Malinowski’s approach would serve as a good model for Bruno Latour’s comment on how “*anthropology [had] accustomed us to dealing calmly with the seamless fabric of ... nature culture*”. Latour adds that this kind of anthropological

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<sup>3</sup> B. Malinowski. *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. 1926; reprinted in *Magic, Science and Religion*. New York: 1955: pp. 101, 108.

tracing works as well for studying or engaging the practices of Indigenous peoples (such as the Trobrianders and their Kula exchanges of shell bracelets and necklaces, the mobilization of invisible forces, etc. across multiple islands via boat), as it does for studying technoscientific and expert knowledge-practices. Latour notes: *“If the analyst is subtle, she will retrace networks that look exactly like the sociotechnical imbroglios that we outline when we pursue microbes, missiles, or fuel cells in our own western society.”* He finishes this comment by suggesting how such tracings help all of us would-be moderns to reckon actions that aid in responding to fears of Malinowskian, mytho-factual stature. Says Latour: *“We too are afraid that the sky is falling.”*

Going further, as I read his pragmatic engagements, Malinowski is also consistent with the thinking of William James at a common moment near the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c, concerning his notion of the multiverse (which diverges some from the idea of the pluriverse in the Triphasic provocation, though I acknowledge that both resolutely refuse monist models, such as that of Kant). Will Durant, writing for a vernacular audience, helpfully paraphrased James in this way:

***The value of a multiverse, as compared with a universe, lies in this, that where there are cross-currents and warring forces our own strength and will may count and help decide the issue; it is a world where nothing is irrevocably settled, and all action matters. A monistic world is for us a dead world; in such a universe we carry out, willy-nilly, the parts assigned to us by an omnipotent deity or a primeval nebula; and not all our tears can wipe out one word of the eternal script. In a finished universe individuality is a delusion; 'in reality,' the monist assures us, we are all bits of one mosaic substance. But in an unfinished world we can write some lines of the parts we play, and our choices mould in some measure the future in which we have to live. In such a world we can be free; it is a world of chance, and not of fate; everything is 'not quite,' and what we are or do may alter everything.***<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Durant, W. 1961 (1933) *The Story of Philosophy* pp.515-16.  
[http://www.amazon.com/reader/0671739166?\\_encoding=UTF8&query=multiverse#reader\\_0671739166](http://www.amazon.com/reader/0671739166?_encoding=UTF8&query=multiverse#reader_0671739166)  
(Accessed Sept 2 2010). Also see, James 1896, *The Will to Believe* (An Address to the Philosophical  
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What I suggest then, is how the multiverse, as Isabelle Stengers remarks, is “in the making”, and we are all among the agents in its making, associated with various collectives, making it and assembling it along different trajectories (or networks, or patterns and periodicities to use terms coming from the papers submitted). To use Karen Barad’s terms, this is effectively *agential realism*, holding as much for Trobrianders as for Particle Physicist as for vegetable buyers lined up at a village marketplace in rural Nigeria or at a supermarket in Tokyo. Matter is unfinished, unprojected, or as Gillian Goslinga elaborates on Barad, we are making different *agential cuts* across a generative, open flux of possibility to constitute what comes to count as matter.

But let me stop there, to begin drawing on these notions as working propositions for the political questions that I believe to be crucial.

So pragmatically, what happens next, inter-politically, if we engage the Trobriander’s resurrected mytho-factual reality, their cut(s) in the multiverse, and provoke a conversation with Euro-modern mytho-factual realities, their cut(s) in the multiverse? Well, if we are concerned with translation (which I have suggested elsewhere is so often wrought in modernist circuits as a colonizing exercise, Noble 2007), we might well begin asking if the practices are commensurable or incommensurable — unless of course we are able, quite fully to engage the Trobriander ways as Malinowski calls us to, *to study them alive*, at which point, being alive and real to us as respectful anthropologists, they are apprehensible enough for us to speak effectively, mutually

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Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities). Published in the *New World*, June, 1896; and James 1895 “Is life worth living?”, *International Journal of Ethics*. vol.6 p.10, where he notes, “Visible nature is all plasticity and indifference, a multiverse, as one might call it, and not a universe.”

intelligibly notwithstanding these or those minutiae of difference present in the encounter. I argue that many anthropologists, along with Malinowski and Latour, would concur, and approach their work in this way, as a matter of course.<sup>5</sup>

But even then, we run into problems: in coming to live in accord with the modern constitution, “we” have been lead to recognize, at most, that “their” reality, their world or multiverse, is one of belief, while “our” reality, our world and multiverse, if not simply one of truth, at the very least is just more adequate than theirs. And there’s the rub — in the modern way of amplifying and multiplying these differences into risky bounded figures like worlds or cultures or ontologies, a relation is set in motion where we find ourselves as arbiters of the difference of stronger/weaker formations, and first or second order translators of such difference. We join the colonizing ranks in this move. Categorical difference, wrought in this manner, has been anthropology’s bane, as well as anthropology’s challenge. It is the challenge of *coloniality*, the challenge that one group’s engagement in (crafting) the multiverse trumps that of another’s, amplifying their distinction, amplifying the conditions by which they are reckoned as incommensurable, the conditions that then force us to attempt to translate across on over-determined alterity.

Put another way, we could say that we are up against and exercising our work within the *dipostif* (Foucault’s word) of a colonizing biopolitics, what I call simply, *coloniality*, an embracing term. So, let me offer how I have been thinking of this *dipostif* (one which folks like Dipesh Chakrabarty and Walter Dignolo might also recognize):

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<sup>5</sup> Clifford Geertz, as a hyper-culturalist and relativist, might well demur on this point, but isn’t it precisely to get past the lockdown of Geertz’s relativism and incommensuration logics, and the equal lockdown of universalist naturalisms, that motivates much that we are working through in this workshop?

*First, coloniality is premised on the modern opposition of the relation between a self and an other. In these terms, it can be thought of as the tendency of a “self” in an encounter to impose boundary coordinates — such as those of territory, knowledges, categories, normative practices, culture and/or ontology — on the domains of land, knowledge, ways of life, related agents, of an other who previously occupied or had dominant relations with those lands etc. Importantly coloniality makes the additional move to rationalize the dominant presence of this self and its assembly of agents within those coordinates and to make the presence of the other subordinate to it. It is an embracing term wherein we can speak variously of settler colonialism, geopolitical colonialism, administrative colonialism, cultural colonialism, colonial property, scientific colonialism, colonial law, the colonization of consciousness, etc.*

*Second, coloniality can be thought of as a corollary of Foucaultian governmentality (the conduct of conduct), in its imposition of such an apparatus of territory, ownership, knowledge, rule, technical practices, and much more over an other. **Crucial here**, is the way that coloniality appears to sustain the other and maintain a dialogue between the self and the other, while always ensuring by whatever flexible means, that the other remains other, partially welcomed into the arrangement, but necessarily in a subordinate position, subjugated, inscribed as other by self. Michael Asch notes how this accords with Foucault’s 1977 observation that colonialism also has “a boomerang effect”, performing a symmetrical internal colonialism on **both** the self and the other simultaneously, effectively naturalizing the relation.<sup>6</sup> As Asch says, “It is what we do to ourselves in making our lives”*

So my challenge (and ours) is to try and suggest alternative ways through all this, against such pernicious tendencies to do this kind of colonial boomerang work upon ourselves and upon others, in making our lives together. How is it possible to simultaneously co-generate a common world, and yet keep the many naturalpolitical collectives in non-colonial, nonviolent, mutually supportive relation? And how do we move within the rip-tide current of modernist biopolitics that otherwise urges us to project final,

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<sup>6</sup> Asch (2007) has drawn our attention to Michel Foucault’s observations of colonialism. Asch writes “It is what we do to ourselves in making our lives. As Foucault says: (1997:103):  
...while colonization, with its techniques and its political and juridical weapons, obviously transported European models to other continents, it also had a considerable boomerang effect on the mechanisms of power in the West, and on the apparatuses, institutions, and techniques of power. A whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself.”

encompassing outcomes? How instead, do we co-generate a common “world where nothing is irrevocably settled, and all action matters”?

***Third words.  
The moves I seek to make in the rest of this paper.***

So for the rest of my paper, I will try and lay out one still unfolding case which helps in reckoning the way in which we can be multiversal co-agents, can assemble somewhat distinct but not wholly exclusive political-natural assemblages, and then come to an interpolitical philosophy that can allow us not merely to live alongside one another, but to sort out the responsibilities we have in living together as collectivities.

I build this around an autoethnographic recounting of my own relations with Piikani Blackfoot folks in the last 25 years. The Blackfoot people entered into a formal Treaty with the Canadian Crown in 1877, and it is the praxis of treaty they follow that I am intent on developing, since it is also a praxis that is, in my estimation, fully within and recognizable to and livable for those steeped in everyday modern circuits as well. Cuing to my title, in the course of the paper I will talk about how something as prosaic and familiar as following Deer through mountain valleys can – and did – play a vital part in coming to an inter-political philosophy and praxis of living together.

I use these two sets of terms: living with, living together. Mario Blaser, in some previous writing, had adopted the phrase from Donna Haraway of “becoming with” (what Haraway speaks of when discussing human-animal co-presences, or naturalcultural co-presences of all sorts), which is roughly what I am trying to capture with the phrase, “living with”. Meanwhile, the alternative phrase “living together” has been offered by Michael Asch, one of Canada’s most highly regarded anthropologists who worked

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closely with Dene hunting people in northwestern Canada in the 1970s and 80s, and who has long immersed himself in the problematic of Canada's colonial legal-political set up in its relations with Indigenous Peoples.<sup>7</sup> Those seemingly tiny adjustments of phrasing, *with* and *together*, for me, capture a critical distinction, or as I will try to point out in this, they capture a move. It is the move between *interpersonal relations*, or relations and practices among intimates (human, non-human, visible, invisible etc.) in "living with", and *interpolitical relations*, or relations and practices among political collectivities (and all the agents and things that such collectivities assemble) in "living together".

I will try to tease out these two registers of action as two moves, moves that when brought into play together, constitute what we might call "treaty praxis" or "treaty ontology", a conjoined way of living-with and living-together, that can also give guidance to how we conduct an effective relational political anthropology. They are my small contribution to what Isabelle Stengers in her paper describes as "the adventure of the multiverse in the making that should be celebrated here."

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<sup>7</sup> I thank Michael Asch for his simple remark about "living together" as something different from "living with" while walking across the U. Victoria campus one day in April of 2009. I have since noticed that much of Canadian s.35 jurisprudence on aboriginal and treaty rights uses the phrase "living together".

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## **Part Two: Making Moves (and Following Deer)**

### *Move 1.*

#### *The Interpersonal relational network of “Living-With”*

First of all, my suggestion is that ‘living-with’ stories are the more usual sorts of tales flowing from immersive but politically-committed engagements with Indigenous peoples and their seamless relations with the land, animals, spirits and more, yet simultaneously their relations with actors and practices in the apparatuses of the state, neoliberal enterprise, and/or new cosmopolitan arrangements. As I’ve said already, anthropologists have long worked their capacity to follow such complex, intimate relations of encounter across difference, working across border zones, conjoining and following relations and disjunctures across the yet-colonial set up.

Before coming to my ‘living with’ stories, I will recount one from Shauna McGarvey, a doctoral student of Harvey Feit’s, who has been tracking natureculture relations between Stoney people and Parks Canada officials, as they develop co-management arrangements with notable interest in continuing Elk hunting, mediated as always by the Stoney’s relations of offerings to the Elk, within the borders of Banff National Park which is also traditional Stoney territory. In a specific gesture to ‘living-with’, Shauna pointed to community and institutional encounters demonstrating how all have the capacity in order to act in such a relational way:

*The stories the Stoney shared with me had the ring of stories told frequently – it was often assumed it was the not the first time I heard a particular recounting of events. Interestingly, I would come to observe that Park officials were rarely surprised by what the Stoney had to say – perhaps because communities across the country share*

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*similar experiences, but also because the history of shared events and dialogue prepared them for what the Stoney would voice. Similarly, the Stoney often anticipated Park questions –and in a pattern that would be repeated time again, the Stoney would address Park concerns before they were even articulated. The familiar and at times personal nature in which these relationships emerged and evolved is an ongoing theme of this research.*

There is power in this kind of witnessing of interpersonal relational possibility. Yet, at the same time, Shauna tells stories of the limits met in the encounters within the colonial set up, the *stoppages* (Mario Blaser’s word) in these zones of encounter. She tells a poignant story of how one warden who supports the life-projects of Stoney elk hunting, finds himself covering the shoulder flashes of his Federal Parks uniform, the very emblem of what limits him, in responding to the Stoney’s wish to go hunting in the park. I paraphrase his response here as told to me by Shauna,

*“If it were up to me I’d let the Stoney hunt inside the park but [lifting his hands into the air]....we have these rules we have to abide by”.*

The warden and the Stoney have the capacity for ‘living-with’, but the modern dispositif (much more than an apparatus), this colonizing biopolitics, is precisely what puts limits on the relation, indicated by a simple embodied gesture here (akin to Latour’s deictic gesture). In this potentially co-generative situation, I believe we find that there are allowances for ‘living-with’ or “becoming with”, but without the next register move, that is the interpolitical move, we do not get to any kind of adequate condition for ‘living-together’.

Holding onto this gesture to *the condition of relation and stoppage* for the moment, let me try to personalize this more, by turning to the *living-with* conditions I have enjoyed and also been challenged by, with Piikani Blackfoot people. The anthropology that I will speak of here, comes not from the anthropology contained in texts<sup>8</sup>, but the anthropology of the Piikani and the anthropology of living-with the Piikani, which resonates in many ways, Donna Haraway's "becoming with" relations.

◇ *The scientific exchange story* ◇

I came to my engagement with Piikani folks in southern Alberta in a peculiar way back in 1985, not indeed as an anthropologist, but through an international joint dinosaur paleontology project, the Canada-China Dinosaur Project, in which we sought to acquire and use indigenous shelters, that being yurts and tipis, most suitable to the places we would work in — the Gobi desert of Xinjiang China, and the prairie badlands of S. Alberta. That is a story with an even larger life than I can cover now.<sup>9</sup> However, I will say that we recognized that in approaching the local Indigenous Peoples for these shelters, we also wanted to honour the fact that we were undertaking this research in their historic territories, and we eventually organized an exchange of shelters, where a yurt would go to the Piikani people, and a Tipi to the Khazah people.

As it turned out, for their part, the Piikani ceremonial leaders who would help us offered to come to Xinjiang with us to conduct a ceremony with local peoples and

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<sup>8</sup> I take some of my lead here from Sol Tax's Action Anthropology of the 50s and 60s, where he offered that it was his duty not to impart *his* anthropology in his engagements with the Mesquakie Indians, but rather to follow and so learn *their* anthropology from them, in the course of working-with, living-with them. I am grateful to Josh Smith for his insights Tax's approach on this point.

<sup>9</sup> Suffice to say that the paleobiogeographic histories of these parts of Canada and China were variously connected and disconnected, arousing many questions for palaeontologists.

scientists. The painted tipi they brought was that which inscribed the Snake Story, a story from the Blackfoot Creation cycles. Here's how it came about.

◇ *The First Meeting with the Oldman, Weasel Tail, Apoohksuyiis, and the Old Lady, Pyookhaminytepyaahki*

In seeking to find the most authorized persons to support such an interchange, I was directed by political leaders of the Indian Association of Alberta, and as well by an Archaeologist friend Jack Brink, to try and find this old Sundance ceremonialist by the name of Joe Crowshoe, whose Blackfoot name is *Apoohksuyiis*, Weasel Tail. It was 1986. They told me I could find him on the Piikani Reserve located in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in the southwest of the province of Alberta, and that I should take tobacco, a carton of cigarettes, to give to him when I met him.

On the day I arrived to meet the Old Man, I had driven all over the prairie past many reserve houses, and by chance arrived in this encampment of tipis. It was a Sundance camp. No one had planned the timing of this meeting. It just happened to coincide.

The son of the Old Man welcomed me, and took me to the Old Man's tipi. The son then told there was this Old Lady in this larger white Tipi, to the side of which a large stack of logs had been set on fire. I later learned her Blackfoot name , *Pyookhaminytepyaahki*, Far Away Nez Perce woman.

We talked together, the Old Man speaking in Blackfoot, myself in English, the son Reg interpreting. I gave him the tobacco, which he accepted with a nod. I later came to learn that the Old Man *Apoohksuyiis* and the Old Lady *Pyookhaminytepyaahki* had been involved in Sundance since the late 1920s, at a time when ceremonies like this

and the Potlatch had been banned under provisions of the 1885 Canadian Indian Act, a ban that was not lifted until 1951 when the Act was revised. The prohibition was an action that, as Debbie Rose put it in speaking of Australian relations with Aboriginal Peoples, was meant to “bust up all kinds of relationships” so as to clear the way for the modern alternative — to live under the protection of the state, to get civilized, to learn to labour, etc.. There were other ways the state advanced such a project, as in the case of Indian residential schools, that would remove children from their families and get them away from the cultural practices they might otherwise be exposed to. This had happened to the Old Man in the first decade of the 20thc., to his son Reg in the late 1950s.

I also later learned that this Sundance, a practice centered in the fulfillment of a vow by a Holy woman who would fast for four days in the Nattooas lodge, that this was only the second one put up by Piikani people since the revisions to the Act.

Even in this first moment of meeting, we were already deeply entangled in the play of colonial history.

At one moment, as we spoke, a dust devil, one of those fierce little whirlwinds that seem to come up out of nowhere in the grasslands, stirred on the prairie bluffs, causing us both to pause and look up, and we silently watched it course down the slope and across the grassy coulee in which the camp had been set. I didn't know what happened, why this took our attention so as to halt our conversation, but it was clear that we shared a sensation was that it was significant. We didn't talk about it.

Behind us flames in the pyre shot up more than five metres, heating the 100 rocks to be used in the 100 willow sweat that would support the vow of the Holy Woman, *Pyoohkmaniitepyahki*, in her lodge. Her vow, and her sacrifice, would support and act

with everything that took place in the Sundance. A group of younger men leaned on shovels tending the fire, prepared to douse flyaway embers and ash with spadefuls of sand.

After a while the Old man, who was leading the ceremony told me he had to get back to it all, but he said it was an important thing to do this exchange.... That he would provide the Snake Tipi for the ceremony in China, since its story told how his people knew about dinosaurs (“studied alive”), and since the design was once transferred to him how he had been a rightful keeper of it, he was related to it, and so he had the right to agree for this to take place. He shook my hand returned to his lodge, where I soon heard him drumming and singing a ceremonial song.

◇ *Some Story on the Snake Tipi*

The Snake story is part of the Blackfoot Creation cycles. Indeed, Blackfoot accounts are that the bones found in badland areas (that is, the fossils studied today by palaeontologists and assigned to the Dinosauria) were remains of the ancestors of the buffalo or the ancestors of rattle snakes. In the Blackfoot accounts, the Snake People lived in a time before there were humans, but they went astray of Creator, who then wiped them out in a storm and a flood. As with palaeobiological accounts about dinosaurs, this was a rich and complex extinction story.

The Snake Tipi design includes two serpents painted across the white surface of the canvas (formerly hide) tipi covering. Blackfoot painted tipis often bear what are transferable designs, some from Creation stories and others from dreams, with specific ownership or keepership relations, where those who keep them are responsible to the tipis

and their stories and designs, and other important items which when assembled together constitute the tipi bundle. Transferred keepers are more or less parents of the tipi design and its bundle, and when they transfer the design rights to others later, they then become former keepers, the equivalent of grand parents and elders to the design, still fully part of the relational network of the Tipi. Different tipi stories and designs have different protocols of use, complexes of law, mobilizing both tangible and intangible agents, a complex of constant gifting, feeding of the Tipi bundle with tobacco and actual foods. Many of the Tipi bundles and designs have powers that can be put to work in healing or fixing up folks individually, socially, or resolving all manner of problems — even political ones.

People can also be adopted into the bundle of the tipi, and so into its stories and all the co-present beings that are part of it. So folks and tipi Bundles are not just figurative relatives, they are literal relatives, as both are animated, persons, so to speak. This is not about translation. People and Tipi bundles are co-adopted, co-enrolled into relational networks. The matter of commensuration is obviated. Rather they collect, adopt, capture, and enroll each other, as well as unseen agents, and do so by *practices* of continual gifting, exchange, ceremonies, songs, smudging, and more.

◇ *The Tipi Gifting in the Tianshan Mountains*

In due course two tipis were brought to China, one painted one not, the unpainted one to be given as a gift to the Khazak people. Again, in an event that defied my sense of the possible, deep in the Tian Shan mountains, and by what most would call a coincidence, just moments before we began the gifting ceremony inside the Snake tipi, there was a total eclipse of the sun. None of us had been aware in our arrangement work

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this would occur on this day or at this moment. Lots of chance, improvisation, serendipity, attention.

After the eclipse, we began and the Old Man enrolled my assistance, directing me through ceremonial gestures which I respected but little understood at that time, exchanging and smoking a pipe, offering burnt sweetgrass. Khazakh elder women and men attended the circle, as did Chinese and Canadian palaeontologists from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and from Canada's leading state-run natural science museums.

I could go on, but my main interest is giving a sense of how my own relation with the Piikani began, and what was being put into action. This is to bring our attention to the relational network, the "living with" relations, that were emerging, the matter that we were getting along just fine, without problematic equivocation, even within colonizing biopolitical conditions. Translation was put in abeyance by way of our practiced interactions.

In the many years that followed, I was enlisted by the Piikani to help out with a number of repatriation and cultural renewal actions, often mediating relations with provincial and federal museums, government agencies, curators, administrators, etc. All the while in undertaking this work, we continued to make many workaday exchanges, more and less formal, and I was learning about the importance of how giving good things to people was crucial to keeping, animating and extending the relationship bonds, human and non-human. I will only give example to a few without much elaboration, but in all of them, we mutually kept generating, invoking rich co-presences with animals and spirits, with people from before, stories, bundles, and much more.

- I brought ceremonial folks my parents prized old Hudson's Bay blanket (which had been a wedding gift to them in the 1950s), which the two ceremonialists adopted as a special outer wrapping for a particularly powerful Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle. In the years following, I would see that blanket at the beginning of every ceremony with the Bundle at the time it was carried in, and then unwrapped.
- In time, the Old Man and Old Lady chose to transfer a Blackfoot name to me which is from a particular part of the Nattooas Sundance ceremony, *Mystoohsiwasjs*, Crow Tail Feathers, the story of which drew the story of Crows into close relation with those of the Snakes, Lizards, and the Snake People. No one ever said this, but my apprehension has always been that this was an extension of the original relation with the Snake Tipi and its exchange in the Tian Shan.
- One day, while sitting together on the prairie, the Old Man pointed to a small rough stone lying at my foot among the grasses, asking me to pick it up. After looking at it, he said it was a buffalo stone, *Iniskim* — such stones, often conjuring the shape of buffalo (this one had the figurative contour of a buffalo laying down), and conferring personal powers to protect those who carry them. I still have this stone.
- At a sweat lodge ceremony enacted to give support to the museums projects we were working on, and which I supported directly by bringing tobacco, cash, and other gifts, a spirit person was seen by my Blackfoot friends sitting next to me. I had sensed something there though I did not see it the way they did.

Now, having presented all this, you may well be getting frustrated that I am not quite explaining things about the meaning and consequence of the specific events noted.

In part, because the engagements were, in their moment, not undertaken so as to produce an exegesis (contra the modern constitution), but were about making, living relations.

So I hope one thing is apparent: I am working here to recognize that I was *living with* the Piikani in a respecting fashion, and they with me likewise. I learned well that we were increasingly bound as persons with the many enshadowed animals and spirits and stones and bundles, in this complex of human and non-human intra-actions (within the network) supported by a continual gifting and unfolding exchanges to support the relations. I was invited, again and again, and as I reciprocated by gifts and actions, I became increasingly a recognizable being co-present with them in their relational network. In Blackfoot language, I was increasingly becoming *Nitsiitapii*, a “real person”. And yet I remained myself (without even having to renounce my Canadian citizenship!). Even though my apprehension was not quite as theirs was, it was more than enough so. We lived well working on things, and good things came of it. The mutuality and respectfulness of our engagement allowed us to be in a common world, even while our “agential cuts” (after Barad) might not have been in some precise, metrical correspondence (as if they ever could, without a metric of measurement to mediate it, and as this was not about metrics in any event), we were, all the same, co-participants in the unfolding, reshaping of something important — an unfolding that very much plays like James’ multi-agential multiverse.

This story I have told with the Piikani and Palaeontology and museums and buffalo stones and Indian Acts, and that of Shauna’s with the Stoneys and the Parks are

both what I characterize as *living-with stories*. They “prove” it is possible to live with and in relation with others according to mutually intelligible ways, meanings, practices. And one might feel compelled to settle with such unfolding relations — except that the conditions of coloniality yet hold sway.

I am still left with the question of how far such “living-with” transactional engagements, on their own, help us out of our colonial impasses of translation, and the persistence of the marginalizing effects of state apparatuses, of colonizing biopolitics? As interpersonal or intercultural engagements the politics implied in these respectful living-with arrangements, are still left to contend with forces understanding themselves and whatever we might be doing (scholars, activists, Indigenous peoples) as subsuming these practice within an already given political order — still packaging what the Stoney or the Piikani do as either culturalist or naturalist stories, with researcher-interlocutors as translators and interpreters at the end of the day.<sup>10</sup>

So, what other kinds of moves could be made that complement and extend the potency of such living-with moves, ones that might help us in a more resolute fashion to undo colonizing biopolitics?

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<sup>10</sup> Hopeful and caring as they are — as we may be — the limits met in moving through “living with” engagement appear to leave intact the constraining, incorporative effects of modern colonizing biopolitics (via Reserves, Indian Acts and Constitutions, museological praxis, Institutional badges that stop us, Residential schools and their aftermath, theory, modern anthropologies that still explain it all, etc.).

*Move 2.*  
*The Inter-Political Relational Network of “Living Together”, treaty praxis*

So, what I want to tell now are stories that treat the political in another way. And I can be more succinct here, given the accounts so far. Here the move is to *engaging beyond interpersonal, inter-being, or intercultural relationality* (or even inter-ontological relationality if that is the language one wishes to choose), and *next moving to interpolitical or intercollective relationality*.

While the lion’s share of my engagements with Piikani folks took place between 1986 and 1995, it has only been in the last several years, living at some distance from the Piikani and their territory, that I recognized something else, another register of politics, that was put into play in our relations. It is this: the Piikani, through all these engagements, were welcoming me into their territory or lands, lands understood and animated by the very relational engagements they continually invited me into. They were sharing the land with me as an ally who would enact with them, as they would enact with me. As I have been alluding, I realize now that the respect I have enjoyed with them, was directly animated not just by my feelings or willingness to respect them, but through my direct involvement in the transactional, relational network in the same places that they inhabit (i.e. their territory), that all along was conjuring seen, unseen, and other agents securing our relations. We were behaving together as treaty people.

I will tell two stories here to convey more of what I am getting at — one about their orally-told and transmitted accounts of interpolitical, transactional relations with Ktunaxa (Kootenay) people to the west — and a second one about the 1877 Treaty

between the Canadian Crown and the Blackfoot people.<sup>11</sup> The first of these brings us, at last to how following deer are key to these possibilities — now it is specifically Black tail deer for the Ktunaxa and Piikani rather than Elk for the Stoney and Parks Canada.

Some years back, I asked some Piikani friends how they understood the extent and borders of their territory, and interestingly enough I was told stories not of delineated borders, or borders defended, but of transaction as the basis of mediating a zone between lands that counted as their territory and that of other peoples. The Piikani have long had excellent relations with the Kootenay's to the West, into the front ranges of the Rocky mountains. The defining situation occurred some 200 years ago when when the Piikani found the Ktunaxa following 'blacktail deer', as they called them, into Piikani territory. In short order, a lodge or tipi was set up for the two groups to meet and sort matters out. The Ktunaxa said the hunting was good, they followed the deer here, in effect the deer drew them there, and they felt obliged to follow. Knowing well they were now in Piikani hunting territory, and to set relations right, the Ktunaxa proposed that they would transfer to the Piikani rights to a powerful medicine ceremony, the Black Tail Deer ceremony, the very ceremony that animated the conditions of their following of the deer. A ceremony was undertaken, the transfer of rights made, and the Ktunaxa and Piikani to this day understand they both will follow and hunt these deer in this border zone: through a formal, protocol-rich exchange of medicine and promises to allow free movement in the area, they agreed to share the border zone, to live together there.

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<sup>11</sup> Treaty 7, still in force today, included the Canadian Crown, the three Blackfoot First Nations (Piikani, Kainai, Siksika), as well as the Stoney's and the Sarcee (Tsu'tinna), and took in the entire area south of the Red Deer River to the current borders with the USA, British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

I will add this as well, that the Piikani speak of the ongoing strength of their political relations with the Kootenay's as linked directly to the ongoing efficacy of the deer medicine ceremony in healing people. The living-together relations (through the transaction of the ceremony for the right to hunt in an area) are re-enforced by their living-with relations, the efficacy of the medicine.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, here, we can recognize that the political autonomy of these two peoples was secured in the same moment that their interpolitical relational networks were entangled. Their alliance, their treaty, their resolution of conflict by acknowledging the co-presence of the black tail deer, and its ceremony establishes and assembles their autonomous, as well as their conjoined collectivity. **Put another perhaps more helpful way, it was through the necessary action of *living-with co-presences* the relations among intimates, that the Piikani and Kootenay were able to intensify and adjust their *living-together co-presences*, the relations between polities within their territories, so that they could eventually share their territories.**

It is a non-colonial interpolitical relation, where multiple co-present beings, agents can live together respectfully without any of them problematically subordinated to others, and yet they retain their difference, sharing a common territory, living in a common world.

Now, to return to the possibility of living-together relations flowing from the earlier stories of my living-with relations with the Piikani, of course I am but one person,

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<sup>12</sup> Blackfoot people often speak both jokingly or seriously, about their mistrust of the Plains Cree folks to the north, and tell of warring relations, and bad medicine. In similar accounts where Crees were encountered in Piikani territory, and where transactions of ceremonies, bundles and medicines took place, it seems that more often than not over time, those ceremonies have proven not to have efficacy, or even to have caused further problems, exacerbating the inter-political relations rather than resolving them. Hence mistrust. Here, I would argue, the living-with relations have failed the living together relations. These exchanges gone bad are not conditions for peace-making, but rather result in conflict, the absence of peace.

*Following Deer: Living-With, Living Together (Newfoundland iteration)*

not a people like the Ktunaxa, the Cree, the Sioux. However, as a Canadian citizen, a subject to the Canadian Crown, I am certainly politically part of the collective of people who were represented by the Crown in right of Canada, with whom the Piikani formed a Treaty in 1877, at a place called Blackfoot Crossing.

In the events surrounding the signing of that Treaty, many of the conditions allowing for *a living-with to living-together move* were put into play, co-enacted by all the parties involved. Notwithstanding the frequent modernist, biopolitical readings that there were cultural misunderstandings in the making of numbered Treaties of which Treaty 7 was one, I am compelled to consider the actual enactments that took place. The Commissioners who came to Blackfoot Crossing undertook a series of exchanges of promises, bound ceremonially in the lived practice of smoking ceremonial pipes together, in the exchanging of signatures on a page which had inscribed on it some indexical lines about the transaction, in an exchange of gifts, in the handing over of physical cash (“treaty annuities”) to all the Blackfoot present, in hearing and acknowledging the willingness by the Blackfoot to share their land with settler folks, in promising a range of provisions to be made, for all time, to be given to the Blackfoot; in promising to act together upon the honour of the Crown (the Queen is mentioned explicitly) and the honour of Creator in perpetuity.

These combined living-with transactions multiply, assemble together, and move into a living-together transaction involving all the political collectives participating in this interpolitical action. Rather than the legalist-normative document named “Treaty”, my attention is drawn here to the relational network imploding and radiating in a living-with array of exchanges at the moment of affirming a living-together relation. As with the

Ktunaxa Piikani living-together transactions, this is what I have been referring to as “treaty praxis”, an instance of interpolitical, or inter-collective relational ontology at play. It is one way to recognize how political collectivities, which might assume different “worlds” and have different means of apprehending these, can be in relation with others without subsuming others, but rather in ways that honour the source of authority informing the other, including the seen and unseen agents that are active.

So, it has reached me after all these years, that the Piikani were always and already approaching me as treaty people do when meeting those with whom they are in a treaty relation, whose doubly personal and political principle is to welcome folks, even strange colonial Euro-Canadians and multiple other folks from elsewhere, into their territory in a relation of sharing the land. They were comporting me as a “treaty person” from the collective with whom they had in 1877 entered into treaty. And I believe they engaged me this way because I had, within the limits of my living-with capacity honoured the material, intangible, agentful, transactions *AND the obligations* that flow from having entered into those transactions (i.e. not from any kind of categorical imperative). I found myself deeply entangled in their (actually *our*) fully political, relational anthropology.

So, when I say treaty praxis as an instance of relational ontology in practice, it is to say, more simply, that we begin in relation, we *live with each other* and multiple co-presences (apprehensible to some but not all) in relation, and *we live together* as collectives in relation. It is a political-transactional engagement that pays tremendous respect by *recognizing*, humbling oneself, and acting upon the source of power and

authority of the other not simply in the moment but also in the perpetual unfolding of relations.<sup>13</sup> Treaty praxis.

Such a move offers an alternative role for the scholars, for anthropologists. We are no longer translators or interpreters between worlds, nor arbiters of difference. We become instead actors, as the Blackfoot in their relational networks are, adopting and being adopted into the practices of our assemblages and those of others, working across difference. We become animators of relations, agents for anti-colonial alliance.

Borrowing on Bruno Latour again, enough of the “war of the worlds, what about peace?”

When recognized as conjoined moves, living-with, and living-together (or indeed becoming with and becoming together) provide us with all the more robust ways for thinking about and moving generatively through the problematic of “anthropology’s colonial impasse”, which, in a larger way, we could call modernity’s colonial impasse. In more strictly applied terms, these matters are also salient in thinking about the resolution of relations between First Nations peoples and the Canadian State, especially if we are to disrupt colonially-persistent modernist presumptions flowing from Hobbesian models of *terra nullius*, and Leviathans, or multicultural models that would reckon various Indigenous Peoples as only an array of cultures — regardless of how land- and place-connected those might be. Such moves disrupt the denial that such naturalcultural collectives and the multiverse possibilities aligned with these might constitute polities

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<sup>13</sup> In this sense of respect (so different than the Kantian one), people act not because they are forced to do so, but because they recognize an obligation, a responsibility to do so in regard to honouring the source of authority of the other.

worthy of their own autonomy, worthy therefore as people with whom we should interact honourably.<sup>14</sup>

With Foucault and Agamben in writing of dispositifs, we might be able to discuss how treaty praxis suggests a mutually engaged, non-colonial dispositif of responsible interpolitical transaction. It becomes a locus where we both live with each other as our own forms of persons who are intimate, nonetheless, with each others practices, and where we also “live together”, allowing for mutual, reciprocal polities practicing our freedom together, thriving together. Intimate polities where we may stay ourselves, living with and together, without dominating one another. The dispositif of treaty praxis, in this sense, displaces modernity’s dispositif from its hegemonic, expansively incorporative position.

So at the end — by extending on the relational encounters of the Stoneys and the Ktunaxa and the Piikani — this is what the following of Deer has lead me to consider, to seek to enact. What I have been searching for through such engagements is a means of enacting power in another way, one that builds around alliance and conversation, where any sense of obligation among inter-political allies is co-crafted — in the ‘moment’ that the multiverse is co-crafted as well — through an exchange not just between various actors, actants, agents, but between their collectives, their assemblages. I derive great hope from this, as it suggests an interpolitical conviviality (*a flourishing* as Donna

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<sup>14</sup> A further matter to extend on is how we might frame this in term of dispositifs, from Foucault and Agamben. We might be able to discuss how Indigenous peoples operate in their own particular dispositifs where they live, and modernity poses another those who would be ‘cosmopolitan’ live, then the “in between”, the treaty praxis, suggests a mutually engaged dispositif. It becomes a locus where we both live with each other as our own forms of persons who are intimate with each others practices, and where we also “live together” where we allow for mutual, reciprocal polities practicing our freedom together. Intimate Polities where we may stay ourselves, living with and together, without dominating one another. The dispositif of treaty praxis displaces modernity’s dispositif from its hegemonic position.

Haraway and Deborah Bird Rose have said) that does not have to live in denial of the scope of a common (though not univesal) world shared between “Peoples”, since the word “peoples” now can mean their complex, more or less autonomous, but inevitably relational assemblages of varied agents and co-presences.

I thank the Black tail deer for leading this way.