9

STAGES OF CROSSING

Transnational Indigenous futures

Birgit Däwes

Acts of mapping: Cambodia/Kassel

At the 2017 *documenta* in Kassel, Germany, one of the world’s most influential art shows (Mund), more than 5 percent of the artists from around the globe were Indigenous, and even more than 10 percent of the works exhibited dealt in more or less conspicuous ways with Indigenous issues. One of these was the immersive, three-channel video installation *Preah Kunlong* (2017) by Cambodian artist Khvay Samang, co-curated by The Mistake Room, an art space in Los Angeles. In this work, Khvay focuses on the knowledge system of the Chong, one of Cambodia’s and Thailand’s oldest surviving Indigenous groups (Schliesinger 2017, 170). The film segments of his installation, projected on to two diagonally opposing screens, show individual performers wearing animal masks made of woven vines. Framed in long shots or close-up shots, each masked performer moves around the vast rainforest landscape of the Areng Valley in Cambodia’s southwestern province of Koh Kong. This set-up represents a particular epistemological framework, since for the Chong, as curator Hendrik Folkerts reminds viewers in the catalogue, “knowledge is conveyed through speech and the body, which rather point to spiritual ecology and collectivity” (Folkerts 2017). Even though Khvay “embedded himself” (Folkerts 2017) in the Chong community of Koh Kong for one year during his research, the result is not a documentary film: Viewers do not see actual ceremonies but instead a performance designed by the artist, a dancer, and a choreographer in order to foreground the ways in which, for the Chong, the landscape, its non-human animals, and the human body are inseparably interlinked. Wearing animal masks of a bird, of a Siamese crocodile, or of an elephant, the dancers perform “the process by which the Chong people mark the edges of their land by enacting the movements of animals which inhabit the landscape” (Allen 2017).

At an obvious level, this performative process of mapping ties in with the redrawing of geopolitical boundaries that has been at the core of the “transnational turn,” as summarized by Shelley Fisher Fishkin in her seminal address of 2004. Fishkin described “the field of American studies” as “an increasingly important site of knowledge marked by a very different set of assumptions—a place where borders both within and outside the nation are interrogated and studied, rather than reified and reinforced” (Fishkin 2005, 20). At the same time, whereas borders between nations became increasingly criticized as generative frameworks of political analysis, the importance of land, sovereignty and nationhood was not diminished for
Native North Americans. Chadwick Allen writes that Native American Studies have been hesitant to adopt the new methodology and research agenda of the transnational turn because many scholars “question whether the ‘nation’ in ‘transnational’ can ever mean other than the settler nation-state” (Allen 2014, 110). Furthermore, as Jodi A. Byrd warns, “in collapsing Indigenous Peoples into the racial formations of national belongings, the transnational turns of the past few decades continued to produce the colonial histories of Indigenous dispossession as the condition of possibility for resisting the nation-state in the first place” (Byrd 2017, 176). For Indigenous Americans, therefore, the “transnational turn” needs to be revised along different lines of inquiry, and remediated by separate architectural rules.

I would like to use Khvay Samang’s video installation as a symbolic preface and structural outline for my approach, since it establishes three pillars that could be used for such a distinct architecture of Indigenous American transnationalism, especially in the context of drama and performance. First, and most obviously, it invokes the spatial and geopolitical dimensions of transnationalism by its engagement with boundaries and by the backgrounds of its production. In this context, Preah Kunlong can be highlighted as the work of an artist from Cambodia invested in an Indigenous agenda, presented in Greece and Germany, co-curated by a Dutch art historian and a US American museum. At a deeper level, the work also thematically links the Chong people’s performative engagement with boundaries in a specific locale in Cambodia to global concerns of identity, indigeneity, and environmental politics, underlining Shari Huhndorf’s dictum that “[w]hile the transnational indigenous movement is largely bound to local, even national, concerns, it brings to the fore issues that extend beyond the tribal” (Huhndorf 2009, 13). Second, in its repetitions, loops, and cohesive patterns projected onto two neighboring screens, the 25-minute installation calls attention to a dimension that has been largely overlooked in discussions of the transnational turn: “the status of time,” as Fredric Jameson calls it elsewhere, “in a regime of spatiality” (Jameson 2015, 120). Considering the colonial practice of displacing Indigenous cultures to a distant past, which frames them within what Louis Owens termed “ethnostalgia” (Owens 1992, 12), and which thus denies them “a syncretic, dynamic, adaptive identity” in a contemporary and future world (Owens 1992, 12), a revision of temporality is of the essence for an Indigenous concept of transnationalism. Third and finally, the concept of border crossing that is central to the transnational turn not only concerns geographical perimeters, but—as Khvay’s use of animal masks and his emphasis on Chong cosmology demonstrates—it crucially includes the transcendence of epistemological boundaries and an acknowledgement of alternative systems of knowledge. As Hendrik Folkerts writes in the exhibition catalogue, “the practice of cartography is inextricably connected with militarist and colonial histories. These histories dictate that to map land is to own it, that to draw the lines that signify borders, frontiers, and state lines is to align the future terms of power” (Folkerts 2017). In Khvay’s work, by contrast, the performative practice of mapping foregrounds the Chong people’s respect for the landscape and its non-human inhabitants. In its presentation of masked performers, and by its layerings within different media (the immersive projection of a filmed version of the performance of ceremonial movements), Preah Kunlong also draws attention to the performative nature of (national/transnational or local/global) identities and their embeddedness within a global, transnational, and “trans-indigenous” (Allen 2012, xiv) web of connections.

It has by now become something of a commonplace to state that Native North American genres have always been in and of themselves transnational through their generative conditions among the 567 federally recognized Native American nations in the US and 617 First Nations in Canada (Norris, Statistics Canada). As Scott Richard Lyons summarizes:
From global networks of production, circulation, and patronage that enabled Native American writers to emerge over two centuries ago, to the close involvement of cosmopolitan educational societies and universities, and finally to the importance of cross-cultural collaboration, transatlantic travel, and aesthetics (e.g. modernism) that respect no one’s imagined borders, Native American literature has always been [...].

(Lyons 2017, 13)

This is particularly true for Native North American drama, which has seen increasing numbers of international productions (of works by playwrights such as Tomson Highway or E. Donald Two-Rivers), tours (by theater groups such as Spiderwoman Theater or Deba-jehmuwig), and transnational agendas and themes in festivals such as the Native Voices Festival of New Plays at the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, whose mission it is “to develop and produce new works for the stage by Native American, Alaska Native, and First Nations playwrights” (Autry Museum of the American West 2017), or Native Earth Performing Arts’ Caminos, which presents “new works-in-progress from local Pan-American, Indigenous, and Latinx artists” (Native Earth Performing Arts 2017). Yet in addition to these obvious levels of geopolitical inquiry, performative work by Indigenous North American artists innovatively engages with dimensions of temporality and historicity and develops alternative modes of knowledge into an aesthetics of structural and epistemological border crossing. In the following, therefore, I will exemplarily use Drew Hayden Taylor’s Crees in the Caribbean (FP 2015, published in 2017), Tomson Highway’s The (Post)Mistress (FP 2011, published in 2013), Mary Kathryn Nagle’s Manahatta (FP 2014), and Cliff Cardinal’s Huff (FP 2015, published in 2017) to explore those dimensions in order to sketch some of the methodological cornerstones of transnational Indigenous Studies and to make a case for a more inclusive terminology of the transnational within American Studies.

“We put the earth back together”: Geopolitical borders and transnational Indigenous trajectories

In Drew Hayden Taylor’s 2017 tragicomedy, Crees in the Caribbean, an elderly Cree couple, Evangeline and Cecil Poundmaker, has embarked on a vacation to the eastern coast of Mexico in order to celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. Since this is their first time away from their home in Saskatchewan (except for those five hours that Cecil spent in Montana once (Taylor 2017, 11)), their adaptation to the new environment is a little uneven: “Who cares about Mexico?” Cecil asks. “I don’t like their food. I don’t drink tequila anymore. We got beaches back home” (Taylor 2017, 7). While Cecil’s negative attitude turns out to have its origin in his fear of a fatal disease, Evie wants to “try new things” (Taylor 2017, 23) and embraces cultural diversity. Her enthusiasm for local food, cultural immersion and sightseeing is constantly curbed by Cecil (“If you want to look at an ancient, broken-down Indian ruin, we can go visit your cousin” [Taylor 2017, 31]), but she decides to be independent and even befriends the hotel’s maid Manuela, whose family of two baby brothers, parents and grandparents “depends on [her] working” (Taylor 2017, 53) since her father is sick. The women bond over Manuela’s pregnancy, and Evie offers her advice and consolation on the fact that the baby’s father, Robert, does not want to make a commitment. It turns out that Manuela is also part Indigenous, and the more Cecil learns about her, the more he sympathizes. In the end, after agreeing to visit her village and enjoying “chicken covered in chocolate” (Taylor 2017, 76), he even uses his skills as a former boxer to intimidate Robert and make him
accept his responsibility. When Evie wonders how he achieved this goal, Cecil tells her about the “Aboriginal Alliance”:

I told him how all the Native people in North America have a secret alliance where we pass on information to each other and call on our Indian brothers in other countries to keep an eye on other people. Maybe deal out some justice if necessary. Sort of a secret society. I told them I was actually here for secret meetings with some of the local tribes. He seemed properly impressed.

(Taylor 2017, 93)

This transnational network of Indigenous people, albeit fictitious, epitomizes a larger trend towards trans-Indigenous solidarity that was politically institutionalized in 2000 in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and that also includes organizations such as the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and the International Indian Treaty Council (Sissons 2009, 526). Along these same lines, the bond between the Cree couple and the Mexican hotel maid as well as the “Aboriginal Alliance” exemplify the “theories of cosmopolitanism and postnational conceptions of ‘global’ or ‘planetary’ citizenship” that John Carlos Rowe and Alfred Hornung, for instance, see at the heart of the transnational turn (see Rowe 2017; Hornung 2005, 70). Whereas these early works in transnational theory often overlooked the particular conditions of Indigenous Americans within a settler-colonial state, more recent criticism has taken on the challenge of rewriting the transnational turn from an Indigenous perspective (see Huhndorf 2009; Justice 2010, 2011; Allen 2012; Huang et al. 2012; Krupat 2013). This rewriting has been primarily concerned with the distinctions between national and transnational from the point of view of political sovereignty: “It is important to note,” Daniel Heath Justice writes, “that indigeneity—the constitutive lived relationship and kinship of a people to a particular land, its histories, and its other-than-human inhabitants—is, in many ways, inextricable from definitions of the transnational, even though both categories are often assumed to be oppositional” (Justice 2010, 171). At the same time, the discussion of nationhood is inseparable from the concerns of social and cultural identity, not only along the conventional, binary local/global divide, but also within the highly differentiated local conditions of contemporary life. In her study on urban Indigenous communities entitled Native Hubs, for instance, Renya K. Ramirez uses the term “transnationalism to highlight that many Native peoples remain connected to tribal nations, even while living away from reservations, rancherías, villages, or pueblos” (Ramirez 2007, 13). Indigenous transnationalism thus acknowledges the multiple affiliations, loyalties, communities, and living conditions that intersect and overlap in political, social, and cultural research arenas.

In precisely this sense, Tomson Highway’s play The (Post)Mistress (Highway 2013), is structured by a wide variety of letters from Rio de Janeiro, New Orleans, Montreal, Val-d’Or (Quebec), Lake Menard (Ontario), Toronto, Buenos Aires, Saskatoon (Saskatchewan), and Ottawa, in addition to the two fictitious towns of “Lovely” and—most tellingly—“Complexity” (Highway 2013, 3). The play’s protagonist, Marie-Louise Painchaud, is a francophone woman with Cree heritage who has been working at the post office—and thus at one of the emblematic switch points of border-crossing communication—for 31 years (Highway 2013, 8). Her programmatic array of love stories across the hemisphere promotes transnational and intercultural alliances without any diminution of tribal specificity: large parts of the play (including some of Highway’s signature songs) are performed in Cree, partly “without surtitle translations” (Highway 2013, 4) and thus a powerful endorsement of cultural sovereignty. Whereas Taylor’s Crees in the Caribbean also brims with cultural stereotypes
to reinforce its humorous effects, and Highway’s Marie-Louise Painchaud is fascinated at the thought that “it’s so hot down there in Rio de Janeiro that they wear nothing but dental floss” (Highway 2013, 4), both plays promote what Joseph Bauerkemper has termed a “complementary, rather than oppositional, configuration of nationalism and transnationalism” (Bauerkemper 2014, 396). For this configuration, Bauerkemper suggests to use the term “trans/nationalism,” with the slash indicating “both the sovereign integrity of Indigenous nations and the relations that move between and across them” (Bauerkemper 2014, 396)—a theme that runs through a large number of contemporary Native North American plays, from Spiderwoman Theater’s Power Pipes (Spiderwoman Theater 1993)—in which the protagonists emphasize that they “put the earth back together” (Spiderwoman Theater 1993, 156)—to Donna-Michelle St. Bernard’s (2011) Gas Girls, and from Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl’s (1998) The Story of Susanna to The Turtle Gals’ (2002) Scrubbing Project.

“Intergenerational continuity and community”: Borders of time

In their foreword to Spiderwoman Theater’s 2007 play Persistence of Memory, the authors state that “[i]t is important to build and support a generational memory”:

Every day we fight to remember who we are, to hold on to the memories of our great-great-grandparents and the memories of their children, and to keep them fresh in our minds. […] It is important to be home again and connect our stories of the past to our future. Our future is the generations who will take their stories out into the world of the new millennium and who will create a new legacy for their future generations.

(Spiderwoman Theater 1993, 42)

This quote not only highlights trans-historic memory as a key element of Native North American Theater, but it foregrounds a connecting arch that has been largely absent from both non-Indigenous and Indigenous discussions of transnationalism: the correlation, especially in Indigenous American cultures, between space and time. “Far more than a geographic location,” Jaye Darby writes, “home is the timeless source of spirituality, the site where intergenerational continuity and community nurture the continuance of traditions and sacred responsibilities” (Darby 2010, 55, emphasis added). Many Native North American plays underline this connection: LeAnne Howe’s and Roxy Gordon’s (1993) Indian Radio Days presents a historical tour of European and Native American relations, in Bruce King’s (1994) Evening at the Warbonnet, the characters work their way through twentieth-century history in a mythical set-up that becomes timeless, and The Triple Truth by the Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble (2003) covers the time from pre-contact America to 9/11 (Nolan 2015, 42–43), to name but three examples.

Mary Kathryn Nagle’s (2014) Manahatta particularly focuses on the interface between spatial and temporal dimensions of transnationalism. It tells the story of Jane Snake, a young Lenape woman from Oklahoma, who returns to her ancestral homelands in Manhattan to pursue a career in investment banking. Between these two places, she has to deal both with the reverberations of the 2008 global financial crisis at Lehman Brothers and with a number of family conflicts in Anadarko, OK. Structurally reflecting the multiple sites of her conflictedness, the experience of Jane’s family is closely intertwined with the historical purchase of Manhattan by the Dutch in 1626 and its devastating consequences for the Lenape. The plot accordingly shifts back and forth between the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries, with fluid boundaries between the time levels: When Jane is learning her trade of selling investment packages on
Wall Street, a parallel scene shows Peter Minuit, the historical governor of the Dutch West India Company, trading beaver pelts and guns with Lenape leaders Tamanend and Se-ket-tu-may-qua. Following the revisionist historical agenda that is characteristic for contemporary transnational and trans-Indigenous perspectives, the scene is underscored by critiques of imperialism and capitalism when Minuit envisions the future of the piece of land he believes he just purchased: “Now picture the southern tip of Manahatta, full of boats. From all over the world. Sweden. Britain. Russia. France—and here they have come because they want to trade furs. Picture us, the fur trade capital of the world. The price of fur is sky rocketing, and this is where the world comes to get it. And only we have it” (Nagle 2014, 43).

Exposing the greed behind Minuit’s illegitimate act of dispossession, this blending of spatial and temporal categories into a historical continuum acknowledges the necessity to “connect our stories of the past to our future,” as Spiderwoman Theater summarize their goal. Temporal boundaries are not only coded as permeable, they are dissolved to the point of indistinction in the interest of a larger, spatiotemporal continuity. On the level of form, this effect is reinforced by the fact that all actors play characters on both time levels, and the transitions between the seventeenth and the twenty-first centuries are smoothly effected by semantic themes or material objects rather than by a separation of scenes. Jane’s historical interconnectedness, for instance, is symbolized by the traditional wampum necklace that she receives from her father: Robert tells her that “[w]hen your grandma, your great-great-great—however many greats grandma made this necklace, wampum meant something very special to our people. To the Dutch, it seemed as though it was a form of currency. But it was more than that. […] Wampum was sacred, and it was a sign of respect” (Nagle 2014, 134). In the parallel scene from the seventeenth century, the audience learns the exact history of this necklace when Lenape leader Tamanend gives it to his daughter: “Your mother made this necklace, just before you were born. Made it from shells she collected right here, on this shoreline. I give it to you now, so that you can carry it with you. And someday, when your daughter is born, you will give it to her. And when she has a daughter, she will give it to her daughter” (Nagle 2014, 125).

As the necklace demonstrates, geographical places and temporal categories are merely transitory constructions in a larger continuity of “generational memory” (Spiderwoman Theater 2009, 42). On the one hand, the continuity between the different time levels underlines the close ties between contemporary characters and their ancestors in the interest of national/tribal sovereignty and the assertion of historical heritage and ownership. On the other hand, when Jane moves to New York and unwittingly returns the wampum necklace to its place of origin, the play embraces a larger transnational logic that goes beyond any binary or linear concept of nationhood or time. Like countless other works by contemporary Native North American playwrights (including Hanay Geiogamah, Floyd Favel, Margo Kane, Yvette Nolan, or Marie Clements), Manahatta follows a cyclical structure (see Däwes 2007, 428–430) to the effect of deconstructing any sense of linear history. In its transnational and trans-historic conceptualization of “home,” it thus powerfully demonstrates the inseparability of the temporal dimension from discussions of space or nation.

Stages of involvement: Indigenous knowledges and border-crossing aesthetics

At the end of Tomson Highway’s play The (Post)Mistress, we learn that Marie-Louise’s letters did not merely cross national boundaries on their way from sender to addressee: It turns out that she talks to us from the afterlife, since she “died ten months ago, from breast cancer”
“[N]ow that I’m dead,” she tells us, “I work in this great big post office up here in the sky handling mail between the dead and the living, letters they send to each other through their dreams” (Highway 2013, 64). In an Indigenous revision of transnationalism, boundaries of space and time are evidently not the only ones crossed: It is equally important to open the perimeters of cosmology, mythology, and knowledge. As Yvette Nolan writes in her 2015 survey of First Nations drama, “[m]edicine, in my community, is not about curing, not even really about healing. Medicine is about connection, about health. [...] The Medicine of the Wheel is that it endeavours to teach us to apprehend the interconnectedness of all things” (Nolan 2015, 1). This “interconnectedness of all things” is central to Native North American theater and other modes of artistic expression, and it requires any redefinition of the “trans/national” from an Indigenous point of view to not only take into account Indigenous epistemologies and Indigenous knowledge, but to emerge from their very center. In addition to their spatial, geopolitical, and temporal boundaries, many Native North American plays accordingly perforate borderlines between individuals and communities, life and death, history and mythology, as well as art and life (or diegetic and extradiegetic spaces).

Cliff Cardinal’s (2015) award-winning monodrama Huff, which toured to London, England, in June 2017, fundamentally expands this border-crossing aesthetic into metaphysical, mythical, and meta-dramatic realms. Huff’s protagonist Wind, who is—like all 21 characters—played by Cardinal himself, unravels the story of his dysfunctional family, his mother’s suicide, the consequences of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, domestic violence as well as physical and sexual abuse. Set on a nameless reserve somewhere in North America, the story generically deplores the consequences of colonialism, racism, and poverty in First Nations communities. Wind and his younger brother Huff not only suffer from violence within their home, but they are also “products of the reserve school system” (Cardinal 2015, 29) where they encounter discrimination instead of empathy and support. They escape into drug abuse (the eponymous “gas-huffing” [Cardinal 2015, 29]), fictional stories, and Huff’s sense of optimism: Huff believes that, as a “sacred gift from creator,” he is able to blow happiness into people (Cardinal 2015, 7). After the terrifying climax of the play, when their cruel older brother Charles rapes Huff, this gift is lost, and the youngest child follows their mother’s path and hangs himself. In this intense, episodic, and time-shifting plot, Wind and Huff epitomize by their names the various dimensions of air in motion, including their breathing, their inhaling of chemicals, Huff’s technique of blowing “that feeling you get when you laugh” (Cardinal 2015, 7) into others, the natural gust of wind that causes them to accidentally burn down a motel (Cardinal 2015, 14–15), and the fatal lack of breath in the choking of Huff and their mother, as well as Wind’s multiple suicide attempts. Just as air easily and invisibly pervades the performative space, the protagonist’s story interlaces material and mythological worlds. The boys’ dog Angelina as well as Skunk, the animal “messenger” who “show[s] your shame” (Cardinal 2015, 19), are talking characters, and the shape-shifting and border crossing figure of the trickster plays a central part, as Wind tells the audience:

He turns back to the audience.

Trickster.

See for my people “Trickster” is a real thing.
Ask anyone’s Kohkum [Cree for “your grandmother”].
If you listen, you can hear the lessons.
And through the generations we’ve heard the lessons so many times, we came up with a word for it: Trickster.
That one drink too many before the drive home: Trickster. 

[...] That the very story that brought you into the darkness is the only one that can lead you back to the light: Trickster. 

(Cardinal 2015, 2–3)

As this last metafictional line illustrates, Trickster also dismantles the fourth wall, and in addition to the smooth transitions between time levels and natural/supernatural domains that characterize a majority of contemporary Native plays, Cliff Cardinal accordingly challenges the boundary between reality and fiction itself. In the opening scene of the play, he enters the stage with a plastic bag around his head, “duct taped below his throat to create an airtight seal” (Cardinal 2015, 1). Greeting the audience members as “imaginary friends” and as “a hallucination brought on by [my] brain screaming out for oxygen,” he tells them that “[t]his is a suicide attempt. I say ‘attempt’ but it’s looking pretty good. I should know. I’ve done this before” (Cardinal 2015, 1). Adding information on death by anoxia, and promising that “[y]our normal show will be on again soon. This isn’t life and death. Not for you” (Cardinal 2015, 1), Wind not only blurs the line between the diegetic and extradiegetic spaces, but he makes that line the essential theme and target of his performance. As the actor visibly struggles for air, even “fall[ing] to the floor trying to get the bag off” (Cardinal 2015, 2), audiences accustomed to illusory experiences within a theatrical space will wonder whether the plastic bag will be punctured or removed soon within the fictional realm of the stage. However, as this is not happening, an intervention becomes indispensable; at the latest when Wind addresses an audience member, asking “Hey can you get this off me? Seriously. This isn’t a metaphor. If you don’t help me I’ll suffocate right here” (Cardinal 2015, 2). Radically breaking down the fourth wall between stage and auditorium, the actor’s and the character’s bodies are fused in an actual emergency that requires the audience to take responsibility, and to interfere, beyond any cultural convention, on an intersubjective human basis. This is when the aesthetics of boundary crossing also takes on an ethical dimension: not only do the play’s setup and cyclical structure dissolve linear notions of time and foreground Indigenous cosmology, but the simultaneous dismantling of the institutional boundary between stage and audience (and thus the boundaries that separate human beings by cultural codes) remind us of the ethical necessities at the heart of “‘planetary’ citizenship” (Rowe 2017). Seen in this light, Cliff Cardinal’s Huff is easily the most radically trans/national of the plays discussed above, even though it never mentions either national or transnational concerns.

Staging trans/national futures

According to the Anishinaabe prophecy of the Seven Fires, the era we currently live in is “the time of the seventh fire, a time when there will be a rebirth of the Anishinaabe nations and a re-kindling of the sacred fire” (Nolan 2015, 117). As Yvette Nolan explains, the “eighth fire is an extension of the prophecies, a suggestion and a wish that now is the time for the Indigenous people and the settler communities to work together to achieve justice, to live together in a good way” (Nolan 2015, 117). It may, at first glance, seem a far stretch from the performative mapping practices of the Chong people in Cambodia to an Indigenous reconceptualization of the term “transnational” along categories of time, epistemology, and ethical commitment. At an obvious level, contemporary Native North American theater and drama do not—for the most part at least—explicitly engage with the theoretical debate of the “transnational turn.” Yet if we take into account the “growing understanding in critical circles that literary nationalism and cosmopolitanism are—or can be—complementary
approaches” (Justice 2011, 338), and if we read this in correlation with Yvette Nolan’s claim that “Indigenous performance offers one of the most generative means for Indigenous people and Canadians to explore their shared history and work towards some kind of conciliation” (Nolan 2015, 19), the genre does indeed provide the coordinates to remap the field of Indigenous American Studies along transnational lines. On this alternative map, recent works by playwrights such as Tomson Highway, Drew Hayden Taylor, Mary Kathryn Nagle, or Cliff Cardinal highlight arenas of territory (both national and transnational) in the context of their interconnections with sovereignty, history, and futurity, as well as their embeddedness within Indigenous cosmologies and aesthetic designs. They thus substantially contribute to Transnational American Studies, illustrating that this arena of research is and remains, as Nina Morgan has it, “by method, approach, and strategy non-monolithic, even ‘anti’-monolithic” (Morgan 2016, 2), while simultaneously envisioning distinct forms of human interaction on a global map of commitment. In a field of tension between local/national and global/cosmopolitan forces, of “tribal internationalism” (Huhndorf 2009, 140), and of a dedicated “Indigenous scholarship of the future, when Indigenous identities will be only more and not less diverse and complex” (Allen 2012, xxxiii), these performances show that rather than an irreconcilable contradiction, transnationalism is a *conditio sine qua non* of Indigenous American Studies. Within this arena, the genre of Indigenous American drama may be seen as a road map—much in the Chong people’s sense of the word—for a future-oriented, inclusive understanding of trans/national co-existence, in spatial, temporal, and epistemological terms.

**Notes**

1 I would like to express my particular gratitude to Mary Kathryn Nagle and Cliff Cardinal for providing me with the manuscripts of their work at a time when these plays had or have not been published yet. I would also like to respectfully acknowledge Native Earth Performing Arts’s production of Cliff Cardinal’s *Huff* at Aki Studio in Toronto in October 2015, which was the core inspiration for my re-conceptualization of Indigenous transnationalism.

2 In 2017, these included, for instance, Rebecca Belmore, Beau Dick, Dale Harding, Gordon Hookey, Kevi Selie (Hans Ragnar Mathisen), Britta Marakatt-Labba, Joar Nango, Nathan Pohio, and Abel Rodríguez. The art exhibition has been open to the public since 1955. Since 1972, the exhibition has been taking place every five years for 100 days each. In 2012, the *documenta 13* was visited by nearly one million people; it presents, according to Heike Mund, “the latest trends in the art world and is a lab for artistic experimentation.” In 2017, the exhibit was displayed in two locations, in Athens and Kassel; and it continues to be a visible site of negotiation for issues of politics, transnationalism, decolonialism, even though it has not entirely shaken off its root structures of hegemonic, Eurocentric art history (Hoffmann 2013, 124–25).

3 For details on the geographical contexts and the making of the installation, see Folkerts (2017).

**Bibliography**


Stages of crossing


