

Reviews

Baudemann, Kristina. 2022. *The Future Imaginary in Indigenous North American Arts and Literatures*. London and New York: Routledge. 237 pp. Hardback: £108. Paperback and eBook: £31.99. ISBNs: 9780367754815; 9780367754822; 9781003162629.

Shaimaa Alobaidi
University of Duhok, Iraq

The work under review offers a thorough examination of Indigenous arts and literatures, where the concept of futurity emerges as a central theme. *The Future Imaginary in Indigenous North American Arts and Literatures* (2022) opens with Baudemann's discussion of *Walking the Clouds* (2012), an anthology of American Indian science fiction. Edited by Grace Dillon, this volume introduces the concept of 'Indigenous futurisms' (quoted in Baudemann 2022, 2), a notion that resonates with Baudemann because it summarizes perspectives articulated by contemporary Indigenous artists and authors across various mediums. For Baudemann, *Walking the Clouds* is a narrative archive manifesting Indigenous futurism through works of science fiction, speculative fiction and the fantastic (the three terms used by Dillon to identify Indigenous literary works of futurities). Accordingly, and this is what matters to Baudemann, Native American works of science fiction do not "link the Native to the exotic, lost, unknown, or belated" (42), as it is often the case in colonial narratives. Instead, they revitalize, revive and extend their voices and cultures. Moreover, while science fiction appears to be the main representation of Indigenous futurism, it is not the sole field of intellectual creativity mastered by Native American authors and artists that portrays Indigenous futurism. Indigenous futurism, which Baudemann believes to be a foundational element of Native American arts and literatures, is apparent in fictional narrative works and digital and nonfictional works such as video games and exhibitions.

Baudemann's primary cause for the study is the widely held belief that Indigenous peoples have been excluded from the colonial metanarratives of the future and, as her study implies, they have no counter-arguments. This ontology of supremacy is identified by Jason Edward Lewis (2016) as "future imaginary" (quoted in Baudemann 2022, 4) and characterized by Patrick Wolfe (2006) as "logic of elimination" (quoted in Baudemann 2022, 4). Meanwhile, to spotlight the presence of the "Indigenous future imaginaries" (4), which take shape through multiple, co-existing ways of anticipating, Baudemann aims to focus on the presence of "the cultural archives of the future in Indigenous literatures and new media arts" (4). She does, however, clarify her disapproval regarding the notion that digitality is replacing textuality. Thereby, in the analysis of some digital works of art, the author emphasizes the text behind the digital piece rather than accepting any "filmic or dramatic narrative theories" (10).

The Future Imaginary in Indigenous North American Arts and Literatures is a manifestation of Baudemann's readings and interpretations of "the hypothetical scenarios of coming times [, which] relate to Indigenous people's existence in a colonial past and [how their] present looms large over computer-simulated landscapes, post-apocalyptic rubble, space frontiers, and the hive-like structures of cyberpunk cities" (2022, 3). The book has three introductory sections: "Turning our Backs on Mars"—Futures Seen through the Window of an Indigenous Starship" (1-12), "Futureanalysis: Toward a Critical Paradigm" (13-35) and "Apocryphal Futures: Indigenous and Other Archives" (36-66). Then, the book is divided into two parts where the argument of future imaginaries is developed. In the first part, "(Un)Writing the Future" (67-172), Baudemann considers works by Gerald Vizenor and Stephen Graham Jones to articulate fictional textual imaginaries of Indigenous peoples' future. Then, in the second part of the book, "(Dis)simulating the Future" (173-232), she brings in her understanding of future imaginaries founded on cyberspaces, highlighting Indigenous challenges and viewpoints through new media, those which are designed by artists like Skawennati.

Within the introductory sections, Baudemann takes on the concept of 'cultural archives' (2022, 4) to effectively clarify the construction of Indigenous future imaginaries. She emphasizes the significance of Indigenous archives articulated in digital and textual works to blur the structure of colonial future archives where Indigenous peoples are absent. Being concerned with the essence of archives arises from the perception that archives define the future. Based on Foucault's archive logic, Baudemann asserts that "the archive [...] manifests itself in a dynamic of exclusion as well as inclusion. It is a sorting principle according to which some pieces of information are selected to matter—and thereby become information—and others do not" (2022, 38). The archive is a "structuring force" (38) that determines why things are put together. In this sense, Indigenous peoples are not archived as present in the future because they are primarily identified as the past that the frontiers had to deal with. In any archive of colonial future imaginaries, "Indigeneity is [articulated as] antithetical to modern technologies, and, by extension, to the future" (47). However, in agreement with Derrida's (1995) thought on the "*archive fever*" (quoted in Baudemann 2022, 40) and its open-ended formation that resists and facilitates its deconstruction, the archive composed by Indigenous intellectuals, according to Baudemann, is understood and used to combat as a framework for the transformation of future imaginaries. It is so because "what is perceived as a disorder [, as it does not agree with the mainstream archive,] is nothing but an Other order threatening to interfere with it, an Other archive that collects and stores *differently*" (40).

With considerable interest in specifying works where archives of future imaginaries emerge on behalf of Indigenous peoples, Baudemann reports the archives of science fiction, examining how their cultural significance derive from imaginaries of the future that they construct. In this context, she draws on Dillon's (2012) argument that science fiction produced by Indigenous intellectuals and artists helps to "renew, recover, and extend First Nations peoples' voices and traditions" (quoted in Baudemann 2022, 41). Also, Dillon's (2012) concept of "apocryphal futures" (quoted in Baudemann 2022, 59) in science fiction triggers Baudemann's statement that "calling Indigenous futures *apocrypha* reveals such

texts, letters, and narratives as potentially dangerous, since their very existence points toward the fact that the archive is not an all-encompassing structure” (59). In this sense, Indigenous authors, who write science fiction have the ability to combine artistic practice with social and political criticism. Furthermore, Baudemann expands the notion of Indigenous future archives in science fiction to include works transmitted through other mediums, specifically those referred to as ‘new media.’ To her, “the term *new media* describes digital, computer-based systems, [...] it might also be applied to any information distributing technology that is new” (47). The emphasis on new media creation of literatures and arts along with science fiction is Baudemann’s way to show that Indigenous future imaginaries are not “an evolution, but a return” (58). Futuristic works of art and literature are modes to help Indigenous peoples’ return to their ancestors’ ways of understanding past and future times.

In the initial textual analyses, Baudemann employs three literary works of Gerald Vizenor: *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (1990, hereafter *Bearheart*), *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991, *Heirs*) and *Treaty Shirts: October 2034—A Familiar Treatise on The White Earth Nation* (2016, *Treaty Shirts*). Each work, as she reads them, presents a post-apocalyptic setting, and, in doing so, archives Indigenous future imaginaries. In *Bearheart*, some Indigenous pilgrims travel west, treading over the ruins of the Anglo-American civilization. They employ storytelling to express what they believe of the world’s temporality from an Indigenous perspective. “The pilgrims’ story, then, is not only *about*, but also *of the Indigenous* future: it consists of an act of creation that connects the end of the novel with its beginning, and thereby un-writes the metanarratives that constitute the colonial archive” (Baudemann 2022, 79). *Bearheart* retells the traditional Indigenous apocalypse that was popularized by the mainstream. It denotes the existence of an archive created by the marginalized (the Others), a canon of future imaginaries that speak of a different kind of temporality than the one preserved in settler colonial archives. Ultimately, *Bearheart* renders the colonial narrative of Indigenous peoples defunct.

Moreover, in the reflection on Vizenor’s *Heirs*, Baudemann emphasizes the author’s use of Columbus’s journal as an objective text to overwrite the colonial archive and anticipate the Indigenous future. Columbus’s journal, as the novel shows, indicates his scorn for Indigenous culture, emphasizing their primitiveness as a sign of his enslaving civilization. Yet, as the plot develops to its climatic scenes, Columbus’s successors, the heirs who have Indigenous blood, call for the right to reclaim the Indigenous land through deconstruction aiming at “ruination of the colonial archive” (2022, 84). To achieve this, the narrative unfolds through speculative fiction, which constructs a hypothetical science not grounded in empirical fact. Through storytelling and other Indigenous scientific practices, the author introduces the idea of genetic engineering, in which the ancestral genetic signature is reactivated and implanted in descendants.

With respect to those aforementioned works of Vizenor, Baudemann suggests that *Treaty Shirts* has a different plot which depicts a more vivid futuristic archive of Indigenous futurities. In her understanding, “while *Bearheart* and *Heirs* both map out ways to transform the archive from within, *Treaty Shirts* envisions a sovereign Indigenous archive, with the Constitution of the White Earth Nation at its core” (2022, 100). *Treaty Shirts* restructures the concept of the future by

positioning it as the primary narrative setting: the story unfolds in 2034, with 2013 functioning as a flashback.

Following Vizenor, Baudemann articulates an examination of three works by Stephen Graham Jones—*The Fast Red Road: A Plainsong* (2000, hereafter *TFRR*), *The Bird Is Gone: A Monograph Manifesto* (2003, *Bird*) and *Ledfeather* (2008)—to argue that “the future arises from an Indigenous archive of apocryphal texts” (2022, 112). Although these novels employ fragmented, non-linear and experimental narrative forms to depict the persistence of colonial violence and trauma, they also offer glimpses of Indigenous resurgence and hope by presenting Indigenous perspectives on the horrors of coloniality. Jones, as Baudemann notes, crafts narratives that “weave an atmosphere of horror into the colonial vision of Indigenous disappearance”; yet their resolutions affirm that “the Indigenous future arises as the final, and logical, step in a natural order of things” (112). Jones’s works, then, function as fictional manipulations of colonial ideologies, suggesting that “the [sad] future these texts hold is, albeit pre-scripted rather than pre-destined, no less real for the characters” (Baudemann 2022, 115). In other words, the bleak futures predicted by colonial narratives are shown to be forced constructions, not inevitable outcomes, so long as Indigenous nations continue to exist and contest their dark histories of oppression.

In Dillon’s (2012) classification of science fiction by Indigenous writers, Jones’s *TFRR* is described as “Native Slipstream,” which means that the text “views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream” (quoted in Baudemann 2022, 125). Building on this, Baudemann argues that Jones depicts time as layered and space as twisted, enabling his characters, who are both surviving and anticipating futurities, to slip through the plot while carrying ideas and experiences that cannot be excluded, such as oppression, neglect and marginalization. In this way, the reality of colonial destruction of Indigenous lives and cultures remains active within Indigenous future imaginaries, challenging the utopian visions that sometimes appear in Indigenous narratives, where the painful realities of being Indigenous are often left unacknowledged. To highlight Jones’s role in shaping future imaginaries, Baudemann draws on John Blair Gamber’s (2014) argument that Jones creates compelling visions of the future. She writes:

The Territories [in Jones’s works] appear like a cruel mockery of the Ghost Dancers’ dream of eutopia, a ‘good place’ without white people to which the buffalo and lost loved ones would return. The characters’ stories speak of domestic violence and rape, rather than healing, and many of the Indigenous people in the Territories cover up blue eyes with contacts and hide blonde hair beneath black wigs to fake an absence of whiteness in an all-Indigenous state (Baudemann 2022, 137).

Accordingly, Jones’s works reflect a postmodern reality that rewrites colonial histories. They bring to light issues that are frequently overlooked in dominant historical and future narratives. Consequently, through Jones’s future imaginaries, marked by violence and harm, Baudemann (2022, 114) emphasizes that a future envisioned through nostalgic recollections of the past is toxic and can never be optimistic or utopian.

As a central idea running through her interpretation of Jones's works on Indigenous future imaginaries, Baudemann (2022, 116) highlights the concept of 'apocalyptic apocrypha,' which Jones introduces in *TFRR*. This concept draws inspiration from the notion of apocrypha as biblical texts excluded from the New Testament due to their dubious authenticity. In relation to dominant narratives of coloniality, the mainstream archive has similarly excluded many apocalyptic narratives—narratives that Jones's plots recover and return to the archive of Indigenous futurity. The apocalyptic apocrypha narratives, then, function as acts of resistance, offering alternative storytelling that challenges mainstream colonial narratives about the supposed apocalyptic destiny of Indigenous peoples and their exclusion from the future. These apocryphal futures are dangerous to colonial structures precisely because their very existence reveals that the colonial archive is selective and not all-encompassing.

The frontier narratives of Manifest Destiny, which justified expansion onto Indigenous lands, and John Gast's famous allegorical painting *American Progress* (1872), for example, reappear in Jones's fiction not as celebrations of technological and religious expansion, where Indigenous people remain "parts of a pre-modern world order" (Baudemann 2022, 116), but as horror stories that obscure the death and devastation of Native characters (114). Thus, in Jones's depiction of the Goliards—a pro-Indigenous sect committed to rearguing narratives of the epic Old West, who ultimately perish—he modifies visions of an Indigenous future. The Goliards, who adopt a logo of a happy face with eagle feathers, carry symbolic weight: as Baudemann argues, this emblem "connotes an existence of the characters beyond death, i.e., beyond the Native Apocalypse of colonialism" (118). The Goliards embody a logic that "the future is the temporal past: the pre-historic past is the place in the direction of which everything is inevitably headed" (122). Believing in that, the Goliards perceive the necessity of performing a postmodern Ghost Dance capable of wiping out coloniality (120).

In the second part of *The Future Imaginary in Indigenous North American Arts and Literatures*, Baudemann examines works of cyberspace that articulate Indigenous futurist imaginaries through internet technologies and digital media practices, highlighting how their development of virtual reality offers a distinctive level of imaginative reflections. The author conducts these spaces since it is expected that new media technologies will be the emerging platforms for commenting on the future. Accordingly, cyberspace imaginaries may have the agency to surpass fictional tale imaginaries. It is worth noting that Baudemann reports personal interactions with these cyberspaces, which lend authenticity to her insights and give her a credible engagement with Indigenous futurist imaginaries.

As a first example of cyberspace works, Baudemann explores Skawennati's machinima *TimeTraveller*TM and stresses its innovative virtual power articulating future visions of the Indigenous past and present. For Baudemann, the series of *TimeTraveller*TM offers cyberspaces that "explicitly discuss representations of Indigeneity in the archive of sf futures" (2022, 180). Skawennati's *TimeTraveller*TM is a virtual reality depiction of key Indigenous historical events, presented through unanticipated narratives. Hunter, the main character of *TimeTraveller*TM, time-travels to several historical periods and tells different Indigenous stories. He, for example, conducts traditional ceremonies on

cyberspaces rather than on Earth. At some point of watching *TimeTraveller*TM, Hunter's universe and words grow into digital universes populated by Indigenous countries. Hunter, the Indigenous time traveler, does not appear to be culturally lost, yet he maintains his sense of belonging. Time, then, is presented as a stream of people, events, traditions and objects. Eventually, in Baudemann's words, the importance of Skawennati's digital creations of Indigenous worlds lies in her "acts of 'retelling and reimagining' [...] the future on her own terms" (181). They are her method of connecting narratives of "the Indigenous past with an imagined positive future" (181).

Second, Baudemann offers several examples of *The 2167 Virtual Reality (VR) Project*,¹ all created within cyberspaces that simulate the future of Indigenous peoples, organized by imagineNATIVE presenter, and featured in Canada's 150th-anniversary festivities. As the digital new media generate an alternate temporality, viewers—whether Indigenous or not—notice a glaring absence of conventional images of the future. All virtual presentations concentrate on the daily Indigenous rhythms of cultural heritage and progress that may cross or go against the time narratives of Canadian and American nation-building. In the end, "[each] VR piece imagines an Indigenous sovereign usage of their traditional homelands and a restoration through traditional practices" (205). They dispel misconceptions about Indigenous peoples' futures, inaccurately argued by the mainstream as a single group, and they reflect Indigenous authority and opposition.

In the third section, Skawennati, a Mohawk multimedia artist, reappears with her subsequent machinima *She Falls for Ages* (2017) and *The Peacemaker Returns* (2022). Baudemann underlines the use of Indigenous women's tremendous potential engagement in constructing a futuristic archive in these pieces. She stated that Skawennati's female avatars' mediation "challenge colonial future imaginaries as patriarchal" (211). *She Falls for Ages* is a cyberspace digital production that recreates the traditional Haudenosaunee oral story of Turtle Island's origin. Skywoman, Otsitsakaion's avatar, is pregnant when she departs her Skyworld. Pregnancy is effectively used as a metaphor for re-productivity that provides women with the power to structure the future. The journey of Skywoman through the ages signifies the female rite of passage from the past to the future. It is a journey that, according to Baudemann, "disrupts the male gaze common to colonial discourses where Indigenous women become metonymic representations of the New World and their bodies inanimate vessels for the explorers' desires" (214). The fictitious elements of *She Falls for Ages*, according to Baudemann, are a "Native slipstream" (213) of science fiction because Skywoman does not employ any form of travel machine in her journey. Skawennati eventually transforms Indigenous apocalyptic legends into stories of renewal by using *Second Life*'s cyberspace. The forever embroidery suggests regeneration in the sense of belonging to historical traditions, as argued in the debate between Skywoman and her daughter concerning needle works on their clothes.

¹ See <https://grunt.ca/exhibitions/2167-an-indigenous-vr-project/> for further information.

Baudemann's examination of *She Falls for Ages*, as well as all other examples of Indigenous future imaginaries, encourage readers to pause and consider how hazy the concept of the future is often perceived in mainstream culture. According to this hypothesis, Hollywood, mainstream media and dominant cultural narratives will not constitute future resources since counter-narratives may arise. Imagining the future is a time story that utilizes numerous structures conducted by different nations. As a result of Skawennati's active endeavor, Indigenous viewers who are culturally related to the story become decolonized and reconciled with their beliefs about the future. Skyworld is Skywoman's past, and living on Turtle Island (the New World) is the future instead of the mainstream widespread habit of inspecting the sky for the future. *The Peacemaker Returns* is significantly more complex and intertwined with Indigenous beliefs. Tekanaw: ta, the traditional male Peacemaker, joins forces with two female peacemakers on a quest: Kahentéhshon and Iotetshèn:'en. The first represents the 2017 viewers, living during Trump's presidency, while the latter is the thirty-first century's future. Iotetshèn:'en "embodies a non-colonial archive, storing, preserving, sharing, and interpreting historical data" (Baudemann 2022, 223). Her national affiliation is not explicit, whereas her traditions are. In popular culture, as Baudemann argues, these future visions are typically portrayed as utopias. Indigenous future images, as Baudemann borrows from Lucy Sargisson, are eutopias, "reflect[ing] aspirations and worlds that people would like to see" (quoted in Baudemann 2022, 220). Skywoman and Iotetshèn:'en's narration are Skawennati's tools for female archive functions. It is essential to say that emphasizing future aspects does not mean having an insufficient past. For Baudemann, "catastrophe and renewal happen in cycles" (2022, 222). There is no time when Indigenous lives are not overshadowed by tragedy or when they delight in their rebirth. None of those choices are available in real life. Everything happens in a recurrent pattern.

Having gained a good understanding of Native American paradigms of studies before reading Baudemann's book, I found it incredibly helpful in its modern approach to examining Indigenous arts and literatures. The book's richness provided me with valuable insights that I would not have otherwise discovered. As Baudemann concludes, the Indigenous authors' and artists' profound vision of the future in its "post-apocalypse [narration] is neither new nor *the end*" (2022, 231). They are creating their canons for which they must discover new methods to express their provocative views of the future. Each method then is an "archive," and each work is a "manifesto," forming a web of many alternative future imaginaries, "entire worlds" (231).

References

- DERRIDA, Jacques. 1995. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Translated by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P.
- DILLON, Grace L. 2012. "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms." In *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, edited by Grace L. Dillon, 1-12. Tucson: U of Arizona P.
- GAMBER, John Blair. 2014. "The End (of the Trail) Is the Beginning: Stephen Graham Jones's *The Bird Is Gone*." *Western American Literature* 49 (1): 29-46.

- JONES, Stephen Graham. 2016. "Observations on the Shadow Self: Dialogues with Stephen Graham Jones." In *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones: A Critical Companion*, edited by Billy J. Stratton, 14-59. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P.
- LEWIS, Jason Edward. 2016. "Preparations for a Haunting: Notes toward an Indigenous Future Imaginary." In *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, edited by Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne and Tamar Tembeck, 229-249. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- SARGISSON, Lucy. 2012. *Fool's Gold? Utopianism in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- WOLFE, Patrick. 2006. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4): 387-409.