

Indigenizing the Curriculum:

A NEED, A CHALLENGE, READING ACROSS BORDERS, AND AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE

By Dean Ralph Stern

A Need for Balance:

It is imperative that we comprehend and engage our world in a holistic manner; as interlocking systems that, while they may be in constant flux, are kept in ultimate balance. Indigenous design offers great insights regarding systems of balance. What might the Faculty of Architecture's renowned undergraduate Environmental Design Program, together with a rigorous reframing of the Faculty's PhD Program, be able to offer in support of Indigenous design?

Significantly, the Faculty of Architecture embedded Indigenous Achievement in its new Faculty Strategic Plan 2015-2020 that was ratified by Faculty Council this past April. Having embraced the principle of Indigenous design in this central document, an ambitious implementation plan will enable the Faculty of Architecture to become a national and international leader in this field. This will enable us to attract and educate Indigenous designers to become leaders in professional design fields. Indigenizing the curriculum is a vital and necessary step towards achieving this goal. Achieving this would, in turn, support the advancement of Indigenous design in our professional programs.

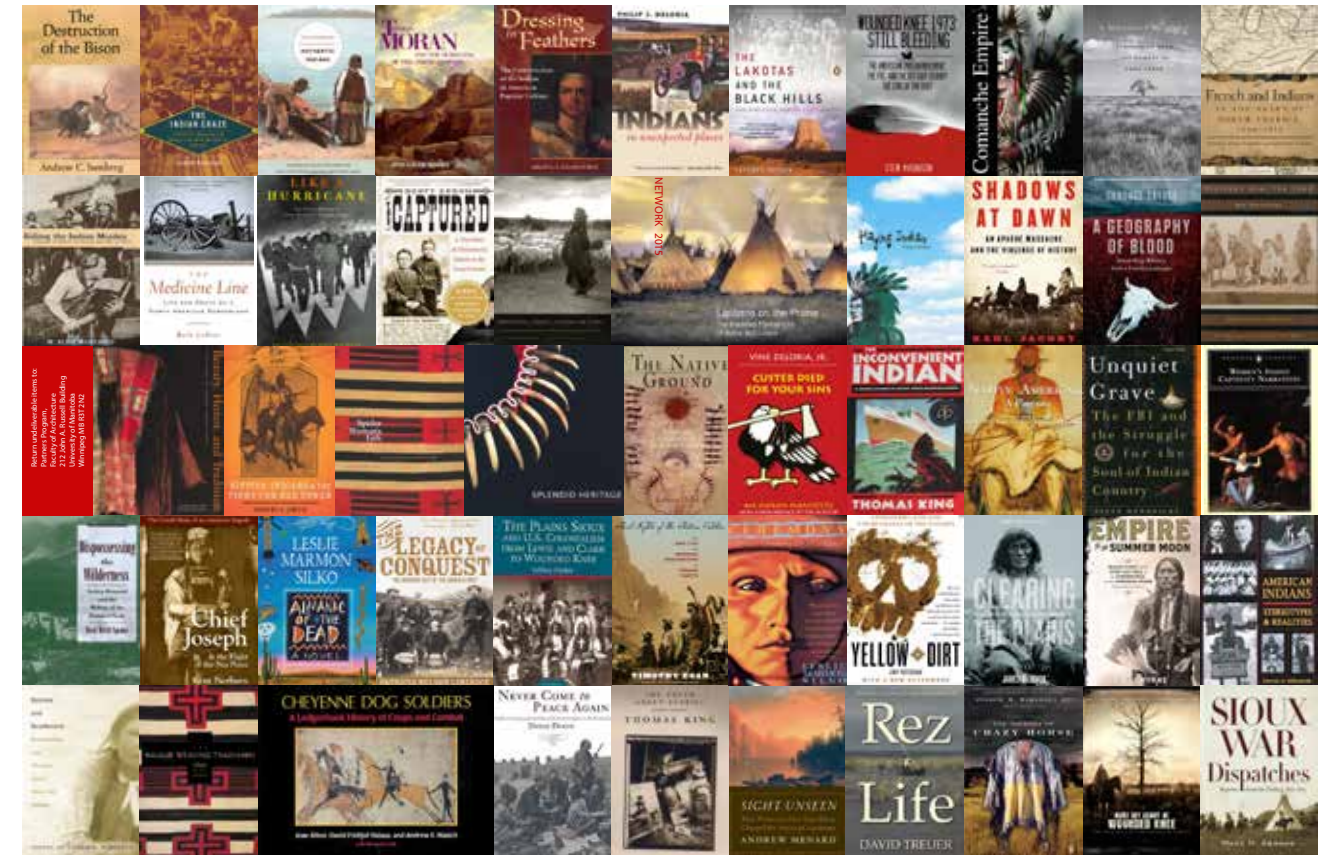
What, then, is Indigenous design? In what manner is it distinguishable from non-Indigenous design? Indigenous motifs have long been appropriated, trivialized, commodified, in many arenas ranging from coffee mugs to casinos. The text below does not purport to offer any design formulas or solutions. It does not speak about the work of specific Indigenous designers nor does it directly address "design issues" as such. Rather, it is intended to raise questions that may lead to a greater understanding of the richness of Indigenous history, culture, and values. A deeper understanding of Indigenous values would seem to be the appropriate starting point for engaging a meaningful dialogue with Indigenous stakeholders about the place of "Indigenous design" in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. Many of the books mentioned below are concerned with Indigenous history and this should not be understood as having little relevance to designers. To paraphrase from the *Introduction to American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History* (1980), it is essential to recognize that history "takes place" and that the places of Indigenous history are inextricably interwoven with specific environments. If there is a core value that might be suggested at this juncture, it is that Indigenous cultures do not understand their environments as commodities that can be readily utilized, rationalized, or instrumentalized as one sees fit. Rather, it is understood that the Earth itself is sacred. Perhaps it is precisely at this locus that Indigenous design and Environmental Design find common ground.

A University Challenge:

In 2010, when, as incoming Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, I returned to North America from Europe, I had many questions around the programmatic purpose of Environmental Design Program at the University of Manitoba. The Environmental Design Program has a very strong reputation, both as the "ED Program" and as its precursor, the Department of Environmental Studies ("ES"). Coming from Berlin, where environmental performance and safeguards (both as technical achievement and as lifestyle) have high standards, I had developed a deep appreciation for the potential of performance-driven design. As a Colorado native, I knew the Prairie environment well and realized that Berlin's standards might not have broad applicability in Manitoba. What I came to understand is the potential for engaging the Manitoban environment in terms of both performance-driven design and within the context of Indigenous histories, rights, and, of course, Indigenous design.

For these reasons I gladly attended a workshop three years ago entitled "Indigenizing the Curriculum", organized and hosted by Deborah Young, the Executive Lead for Indigenous Achievement at the University of Manitoba. With her opening remarks, Deborah asked everyone in the room to tell something about themselves that no one else knew. At first I thought "oh no", but when my turn came I reflected on my Colorado origins, relating that I had attended Arapahoe Senior High School and that, had I been a member of the football team (I was not), then I would have been an Arapaho Warrior. Deborah burst out laughing and we were on our way to becoming close colleagues.

This anecdote illustrated, at least for me, some of the ways in which Indigenous culture has been appropriated, displaced, or misused. Colorado history, required course content in local public schools, taught us a great deal about gold and silver strikes, the founding of cities throughout the eastern and western slopes, and colorful characters such as the "unsinkable Molly Brown". And, years after I graduated, this school established a formal relationship with the Arapaho Nation to promote "awareness to the co-existence of two very diverse cultures" and renamed the gymnasium in honor of Arapaho Elder Anthony Sitting Eagle. However, when I attended we were taught nothing about Colorado's infamous Sand Creek massacre, about the Utes, the Cheyenne, or the Arapaho for whom my *alma mater* was named. We were never taught that Colorado itself was a colonized space. In retrospect, this erasure can be understood as a powerful act of violence in itself; an obstinate refusal to recognize the origins of the people, places, and names that so influence "settler colonial" culture.



Cover image citations found on pg 94.

Indigenous culture was always around the edges, perhaps unrecognizable to those (like me) not used to seeing, but irrepressible. There were many traces. Somewhere, from the deep recesses of early childhood, I remember a powwow in an immense hall on a cold winter night. My grandfather, arriving from Cologne with a very different cultural background, proudly bought a plains headdress. A girl who I had a crush on, lived with a Hopi family for a transformative summer on tribal lands. The father of a best friend worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Denver. An early employer, a former President of the UC Berkeley SDS chapter who opted out of "corporate leftism" to become a stonemason, married a Cherokee who raised important questions for me about intersecting cultures during long days working construction in Colorado's remote San Juan mountains. "Red Power" and the activities of A.I.M. resonated along the seams of profound social change of all persuasions; the confrontation at Pine Ridge was yet another mark of the oppressively failed politics of the Nixon administration. Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, with its narrator "Chief" Bromden, left an indelible imprint on me in both its literary and film versions.

Later, after long travels in Africa and Central America (where I acquired a taste for Indigenous textiles) I collected a smattering of 1930s Navajo saddle blankets and silver, the abstract patterning of which reminded me of Bauhaus configurations from the same period. Little did I then realize the complex intersections of cultural transfer, tourism, trading, "primitive modernism" and the celebration of Indigenous design by institutions such as New York's Museum of Modern Art that brought these wonderful artifacts to

world. Studies in architectural history brought me to Aby Warburg's work on the Hopi Snake Dance as a study in art between "logos and magic". A colleague in architectural practice brought me to his father's classic work on the Pawnee Ghost Dance as a study in cultural change. I came to appreciate the visual poetry of ledger art and the stark, color-saturated portraits by Fritz Scholder. An encounter with Cree musicians left me amazed at the power and grace of their music. Road trips through the Southwest strengthened my understanding of the relationship of Indigenous culture to place and landscape. As N. Scott Momaday writes in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *House Made of Dawn*:

Dyaloh. There was a house made of dawn. It was made of pollen and of rain, and the land was very old and everlasting. There were many colors on the hills, and the plain was bright with different colored clays and sands. Red and blue and spotted horses grazed in the plain, and there was a dark wilderness on the mountains beyond. The land was still and strong. It was beautiful all around.
House Made of Dawn (Harper and Row, 1968)

It was through these writings and travels in the American Southwest that I came to understand why the renowned architectural historian and critic Vincent Scully would so movingly and convincingly discuss architecture and place in both his *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture* (1962) and *Pueblo: Mountain, Village, Dance* (1975), about which he writes:

This book is written in love and admiration for the American Southwest and its people. It is primarily about Pueblo architecture and dances ... The dances themselves I believe to be the most profound works of art yet produced in the American continent. They call up a pity and terror which only Greek tragedy rivals, no less than a comic joy, at once animal and ironic, that suggests the precursors of Aristophanes.

Pueblo: Mountain, Village, Dance
(University of Chicago, 1975)

For me it was, however, not in the southwest but on a trip to Guatemala, taken at a time of Reagan's presidency and the "dirty war", that I came to have an inkling of the tragedy that "colonization", or genocide, might mean in the context of the Americas. Arriving in a small Mayan town on the far side of Lago Atitlan, under towering tropical volcanoes, I was in a café when an army jeep mounting a 50-calibre machine gun pulled into the village square. Stopping adjacent to the public market, everyone in sight tensed: there was a sense of immediate and palpable fear. It was a haunting experience. It doesn't take aircraft carriers or stealth bombers to precipitate man-made catastrophes; the mere sight of a militarized jeep can be brutally effective against an Indigenous populace. In Guatemala thousands were "disappeared" or killed much as Indigenous populations have suffered since contact; a centuries-long tragedy continuing at the close of the twentieth century.

In intersecting Indigenous cultures in ways large and small, a great many probably have similar experiences to relate. For many of these, it is likely that such intersections have as fragmentary a nature as they had for myself. Ultimately, for me, this lack of coherence wasn't acceptable; certainly not if one lived in Manitoba. Therefore, when Deborah Young proffered the challenge to "Indigenize the Curriculum", I accepted. It is a challenge with moral urgency. Framed in the context of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, it has a profound purpose. Ultimately, it has a human purpose: to make visible that which has been invisible far too long, to right wrongs, to find a "common place" for engaging the future as equals. It offered a way for the Faculty or Architecture to take place as a leader in the field of Indigenous design.

A Personal Beginning:

How does one begin? How does one find an appropriate and workable starting point? Is it utterly presumptuous of a white male to attempt this at all? Other than anecdotal encounters, what qualifications for engagement might one need to possess? I was well aware of many pitfalls and the possibility of gravely offending. I was well aware of Vine Deloria Jr.'s satiric, and trenchant, commentary:

"Our foremost plight is our transparency. People can tell just by looking at us what we want, what should be done to help us ... What we need is a cultural leave-us-alone agreement, in spirit and in fact."

Custer Died for Your Sins (Macmillan, 1969)

Sounding an even more cautionary note were the Indigenous objections to Ian Frazer's *On the Rez* (2001), including Devon Abbott Mihesuah's scathing review:

"Frazer entered a place where he does not live and garnered information from a few confidants to whom he apparently gave money. Then he observed, exited to write his memoir, and now collects royalties. ... This strategy has been used with great success by many white scholars for decades, but the difference between Frazer and most white scholars is that scholars know that they had better thoroughly research their topics prior to blurting out what is on their mind. And, I hope, they undergo the processes dictated by university and tribal institutional review boards, entities that were created to keep biased white perspectives about Natives— such as *On the Rez*—off the shelves."

Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism (University of Nebraska, 2003)

I struggled with these questions, with a sense of being, potentially, an intruder into a world to which I had been neither initiated nor invited. Nonetheless, it seemed essential to begin somewhere and so I began by extending research I had previously done on the exploration, settlement, and urbanization of the American West. This work included an extensive review of literature and

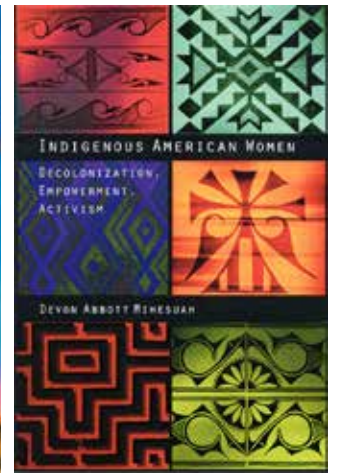
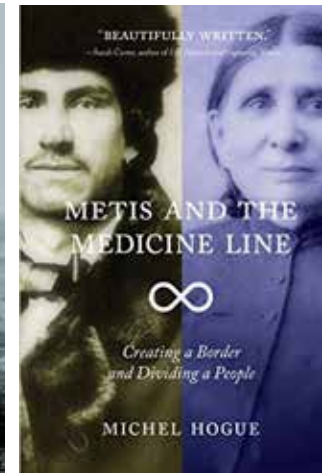
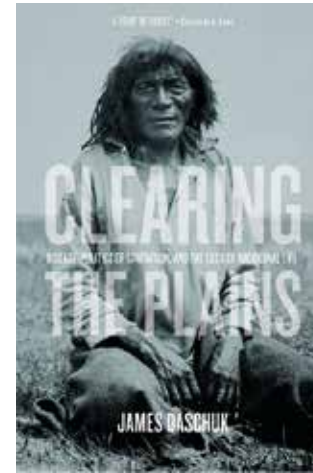


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representations associated with American exceptionalism, Manifest Destiny, topographical expeditions, extractive industries, militarization, and tourism. In doing this work, which involved extensive photographic documentation, I had crisscrossed Navajo, Hopi, and Shoshone lands. This was complemented by a review of cinematic representations covering this territory.

With this background, I developed a "western" landscape course cross-listed with Native Studies and Film Studies. Over the years, I'd taught courses on "city films" (Berlin, New York, Los Angeles), and utilized films as documentary material extensively in studio instruction. This new course became my first seminar on "landscape films", with compelling narratives embedded in environments such as Monument Valley, Death Valley, or Zion. Renate Eigenbrod, the late (and sorely missed) Head of Native Studies, was very supportive of the Indigenous content proposed. George Toles, Chair of Film Studies, was also supportive of the course. The course was open to students from both these programs in addition to students from the Faculty of Architecture. Inter-Faculty exchange is, I believe, a path to opening the curriculum for Indigenization, particularly for a Faculty such as ours with a low percentage of self-declared Indigenous students.

The course was structured such that weekly readings included a text on the history of the actual events represented (or generally misrepresented) in the film being screened. The encounters in the course were marvelous with some students speaking on confrontations of "civilization" and "wilderness" while others quickly interjected: "Wait !!! Whose "civilization"? "Whose "wilderness"? and "This is not our narrative"!

The class discussions were honest and frank; many of the films screened and texts read were challenging. The students, however, rose to the challenge, understanding how very embedded, indeed internalized, narratives of colonization are and how difficult and complex any attempt at "decolonization" might be. For myself, I began screening films positioning Indigenous counter-narratives to prevalent tropes: *Powwow Highway* (1989), *Smoke Signals* (1998), *Winter in the Blood* (2013), *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013). And, the course brought a wealth of literature that, as literature often does, opened the doors to a world as illuminating as it is extensive. Taken together these presented an opportunity analogous to that

of music as a way of bridging "between familiar and strange lands" described in Joy Harjo's memoir *Crazy Brave*:

I wonder what signaled this moment, a loop of time that at first glance could be any place in time. ... My rite of passage into the world of humanity occurred then, through jazz. The music was a startling bridge between familiar and strange lands.

Crazy Brave (W.W. Norton, 2012)

This was a compelling starting point, immensely rewarding, and one now actively being consolidated, in an exploratory manner, into a comprehensive and integrative approach to Indigenous design with academic and professional colleagues.

Reading Across Borders:

It isn't possible to review all the books illustrated, the many worlds of humanity, that I've intersected on the topic of Indigenous culture over the past few years. Almost all deserve extensive write-ups. Collectively they cover a broad range of cultural history, environmental history, material culture, and political activism. The collage of book covers picture many of these, though the list continues to rapidly grow. Missing from the large image are texts such as Vine Deloria Jr.'s still powerfully biting *Custer Died for your Sins* (1969), James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), Leslie Marmon Silko's moving *Ceremony* (1977) and magical *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Winona LaDuke's insightful essays in *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (1999), Sean Kicummah Teuton's critically acclaimed *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* (2008), Paul Chaat Smith's wry *Everything You Wanted to Know about Indians is Wrong* (2009), David Treuer's regional perspective in *Rez Life: An Indian's Journey through Reservation Life* (2012), Paul McKenzie-Jones's recent biography *Clyde Warrior: Tradition, Community, and Red Power* (2015), and several books by Devon Abbott Mihesuah: *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing About American Indians* (1998), *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* (2003), and *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities* (2012). Recent perspectives on Canadian issues are rigorously articulated in

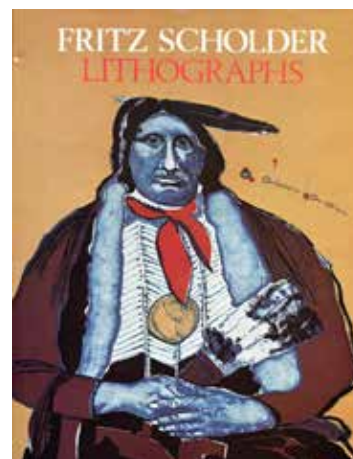
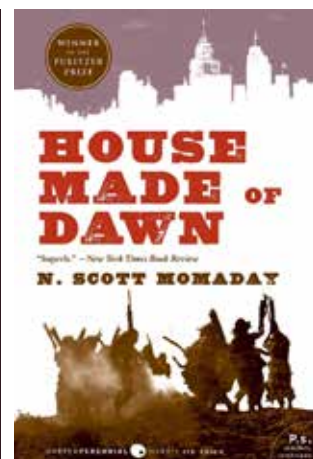
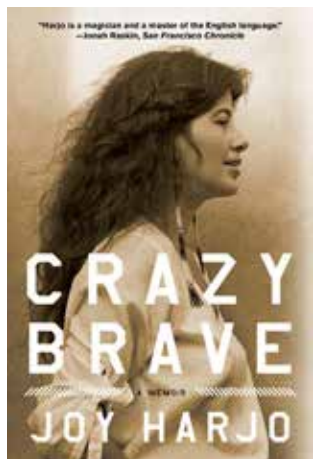


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Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (2014), Audra Simpson's and Andrea Smith's (eds.) *Theorizing Native Studies* (2014), Gerald Sider's *Skin for Skin: Death and Life for Inuit and Innu* (2014), and Glen Sean Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) to name a few.

Taken altogether, these books form just part of a vast mosaic offering countless pathways to engaging the history of Indigenous culture and knowledge, an "infinity" of paths to borrow loosely from Michael Witgen's trenchant *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (2013), a publication selected by Choice as an outstanding new academic title. Along these paths topics may be grouped geographically, historically, politically, or thematically. It is possible to group them nationally (Canada and the United States), recognizing that these nations are not Indigenous constructs, and to delve into the borderlands immediately to our south. Significantly, however, an understanding of "borders" and "borderlands", whether spatial or institutional, might inform our willingness to reject rigidity and accept permeability with regard to an understanding of the "other", of embracing hybridity, and of accepting difference on equal terms.

The beautifully written *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (2002) by Beth LaDow describes with alacrity the arbitrary character of the national division running along the 49th parallel. Without distinctive geographical features for much of its length, the permeability of this early division to the north-south movements of buffalo hunters and fur traders is eloquently documented, a permeability holding through the late nineteenth century and taking on special significance as Metis fled to the south and Sioux fled to the north:

"By the late 1870s, the American side meant exposure, pursuit, and captivity; the Canadian, sanctuary. Cross the line into the Great Mother's country, and there was still hope of living as hunters rather than the hunted."

Medicine Line (Routledge, 2002)

Michel Hogue, from Carleton University, has recently added a significant dimension to the discussion of the medicine line "borderlands" just to our south. In his *Metis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People*, Hogue writes:

"As a framework, the idea of the borderlands allows us to reimagine the northern Plains as a place of multiple, layered, and conflicting claims to territory. ... Embedded in the contests over the physical space of the border were broader efforts to contain or suppress the alternative territorialities and sovereignties that these Indigenous communities represented"

Metis and the Medicine Line (Chapel Hill, 2015)

And, of course, even within these fine works there lurks the possibility of creating discursive divisions reinforcing the divisions created by the spatial reorganizations of settler culture. As Benjamin Johnson and Andrew Graybill note:

"... despite the fact that the fur trade from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries created its own broad notions of territoriality, scholars have too often shuttered their own views of stories emerging from the other side of the subsequent national divide. In this way the solidification of boundaries in the nineteenth century has circumscribed the work of North American historians, creating discrete, state-centered histories rather than a single history with continental scope."

Bridging National Boundaries in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories, (Duke University Press, 2010)

This word of caution is apt, in Indigenizing the curriculum we should not create discrete boundaries that mirror or re-inscribe—intentionally or not—national, tribal, institutional, or disciplinary boundaries. It should strive for a single endeavor with, as the authors quoted above have called for, a "continental scope". And, if we are to become leaders with a focus on Indigenous design, then this focus too must be inclusive and continental, if not global.

An Inclusive Future:

In 2012 the University of Manitoba recognized the renowned Canadian architect Douglas Cardinal for his outstanding contributions to Indigenous architecture. As Dean of the Faculty of Architecture I was honored to serve as both Host and Citation Reader for the Convocation events surrounding this important recognition. Discussions with our esteemed guest gave great insight into the challenges faced in the realization of seminal projects such as the Canadian Museum of History. The 2014 Dean's Lecture Series furthered discussions in the Faculty of Architecture by inviting three individuals prominent in their respective fields: architectural design, cultural geography, and history. Edmonton architect Vivian Manasc, a past President of the RAIC, spoke eloquently about her work with First Nations communities in Northern Canada. Laura Harjo, a Muscogee Creek cultural geographer at the University of New Mexico, spoke on mapping and the work of Apache artist Douglas Miles, founder and owner of Apache Skateboards. Jeffrey Ostler, whose *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (2004) presents a seminal over-view of Indigenous histories just to our south, spoke on *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: The Struggle for Sacred Ground* (2010). Both of his works—the first scholarly and the second more readily accessible—are among publications highly recommended.

In working collaboratively with local institutions, the Faculty partnered with the Manitoba Association of Architects in co-sponsoring the successful Indigenous Architecture Group Exhibition Project (Fall, 2014), which was held at Winnipeg's Urban Shaman Contemporary Aboriginal Art Gallery. Following another trajectory, Michael Maltzan, who won the international design competition for the Winnipeg Art Gallery's expansion housing the WAG's significant collection of Inuit art, gave a splendid talk on architecture and the design for the WAG expansion.

These activities were, in turn, complemented by two further important Faculty events featuring a number of Indigenous speakers. The first of these, *Coming to a Common Place* (Fall, 2014), addressed how Indigenous "values and cultural narratives inform approaches to urban design". This event, opened by University President David Barnard, featured a discussion by Ovide Mercredi, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations and Senior Advisor to the University of Manitoba. The second of these events was the *Honouring Indigenous Identity through Spaces and Names section of the Indigenous Awareness Week: Treatise, Traditional Knowledge, and Elders* (Spring, 2015). Organized by Deborah Young, the panel discussion included several of the Faculty's distinguished Indigenous alumni including Michael Robertson, who is current Chair of the Faculty's Partners Program Advisory Committee. Attracting a range of Indigenous stakeholders and developing active conversations around the diverse topics presented, the Faculty's response to these presentations was immensely positive.

For 2015 the Faculty of Architecture's Dean's Lecture Series has invited three more speakers to continue the discussion. Devon Abbott Mihesuah, Cora Lee Beers Price Professor at the University of Kansas, (some of whose books are mentioned above) will be speaking on traditional foodways and health. Her

Recovering our Ancestors' Gardens: Indigenous Recipes and Guide to Diet and Fitness (2005) won the special award of the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards. James Daschuk, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies at the University of Regina as well as a University of Manitoba alumnus, will be speaking on his recently published *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (2014). Lastly, Michel Hogue, Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Carleton University, will complete this triad with a discussion of his *Metis and the Medicine Line* (2015).

These presentations and ensuing discussions will move the Faculty of Architecture along the trajectory of Indigenizing the curriculum. Many of the issues facing Indigenous communities today are environmental in nature: they are issues impacting watersheds and food sheds, contamination and reclamation, as well as designing healthy environments for future generations. The locus for this, as mentioned at the opening of this text, is most appropriate in the Environmental Design Program, embracing all students and all design disciplines within the Faculty. It would also be appropriately located in a Faculty-based PhD Program for those interested in developing specific expertise in topics addressed broadly in the undergraduate program. It is these loci, undergraduate and post-graduate, in which disciplinary borders for a professional Faculty must be permeable: supporting and expanding the professional disciplines at the graduate level. International borders must be equally permeable, and the Faculty of Architecture is well positioned to serve as a conduit for Indigenous peoples to move across all borders in order to facilitate and implement Indigenous design. This must be led with a vision, now outlined in the Faculty Strategic Plan 2015-2020, that is not only continental, but truly global in ambition and scope. ■

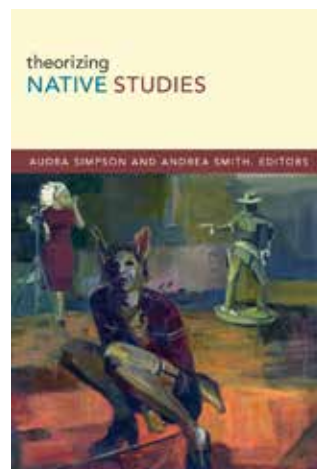
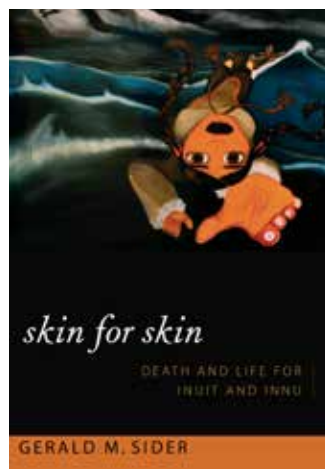


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