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An Ethics of Assemblage: Creative Repetition and the “Electric Pow Wow”

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Q: What is your goal when you sample images or references to indigenous people from Hollywood movies or pop songs?

Bear Witness: *Reclaim, repurpose, and reuse.*

Q: Is it ever strange to bring music that samples traditional music into a club setting?

Bear Witness: *I don't think it's strange. . . . As for some people thinking it's disrespectful, we're not remixing any honor songs. I used to be a traditional drummer and understand that the pow wow was meant to be a gathering and showcasing of each other's music. Think of it as traditional 2.0.*

(“Q&A with Powwowstep Pioneers A Tribe Called Red”)

Kristin: IT WASN'T THAT LONG AGO WHEN I FIRST heard traditional powwow music mixed with rap. My brother, my coauthor and also a club DJ, sent me a mix including a portion of the track “Get It Up” by Santigold featuring M.I.A. and Gorilla Zoe. I was jogging when the song hit my ears. A steady rhythm of a powwow drum—tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump—crescendoing into Gorilla Zoe's deep bass laugh—mwaa heh heh heh. A group of powwow singers kicks in—aaayaa aaayaa aaayaa hey hey. The drumbeat continues, my pace follows the beat, my heart is happy. Gorilla Zoe's rap kicks in. “Hood nigga, I keep the purp by the pound . . . I keep a bad bitch around . . .” Wait, what?

My jogging nearly comes to a halt. Is this OK? I picture our mother, an Anishinaabe jingle dress powwow dancer. What would

she think? What would the tribe think? Is this assemblage OK? I love the sound of the drum at pow wows, the heartbeat that keeps the dancers moving, and in spite of myself I pick up my pace and continue to jog to the beat. Tha-thump, tha-thump, tha-thump.

Adam: As a club DJ I have come to attend to music on an exceptionally pragmatic level: will this song make people dance? What else can I mix it with? How will it facilitate my ability to move between genres or BPMs during my set? I am also always self-serving as a DJ, insofar as I can get away with it, and I have a long-standing love of percussion. Few things are as likely to make me dance as a good dancehall riddim. Just as my sister noted, this has always also included for me traditional tribal drumming of the powwow variety. I experience these rhythmic patterns as tapping into something deeper than the culturally inherited norms of what makes for a good dance record. Accordingly, I am always fast to incorporate any song into my sets that pulls from these musical traditions if I see it fulfilling a necessary function on the dance floor.

As a philosopher who is concerned with issues of culture, I am often at loggerheads with myself when confronted with songs, or even whole subgenres of dance music, that pull from more traditional, culturally specific musical styles—in particular when the music or musical elements being appropriated come from the global South or American Indian musical traditions. The Santigold track my sister referred to earlier is a perfect example. Insofar as the song itself was put together by world-renowned and highly respected DJ and producer Diplo, who as far as global-music connoisseurs go is generally respectful and thoughtful with regard to the traditions he may appear to be plundering, I was initially quite excited about the prospect of incorporating this track into my sets.¹ What I couldn't account for in the particular assemblage that emerged when I first played this song in the club was the response of the clubgoers. Regardless of how thoughtful Diplo may have been in his incorporating traditional powwow music into what is essentially a club rap song, this meant nothing with regard to the response of the crowd. I will never forget playing this track for the first time on a Saturday night at a club with about a thousand patrons. Rather than fall-

ing into the rhythm as I had hoped might happen, large swaths of the crowd started mimicking powwow dance, clapping their hands over their mouths to the beat while vaguely hopping around and making mock headdress feathers with their hands. **Imagine cultural lowlights such as Don Armando’s disco version of “I’m an Indian Too,” and you may form a picture of what I witnessed.**



Adam is a philosopher interested in philosophical psychology, race, and issues concerning novelty and authenticity in post-Kantian thought. He is also a professional club DJ and producer. Kristin is a composer who finds herself often looking to indigenous crafting practices in order to reconsider multimodal production. Through our mother, we are descendants of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community in Upper Michigan, and we are both what locals often call Finndian—a mix of Ojibwe/Anishinaabe and Finlander, a common mix in our homeland and perhaps an assemblage in its own right. **We use this opportunity to suggest that conceiving of composition as assemblage, and assemblage as creative repetition—a process of repeating that pays homage without insisting upon essences—opens spaces for rhetorical sovereignty** (Lyons, “Rhetorical”). As such, creative repetition both acknowledges Native people’s right to develop notions of their own identity through textual production and helps provide an ethical framework for engaging with assemblage theory.

A BRIEF ATTEMPT AT DEFINITION: CREATIVE REPETITION AND THE ASSEMBLAGE

The objective in this section is twofold. First, we briefly introduce the concept of creative repetition as a key component of assemblage, one that provides a way of adjudicating between good and bad assemblages. Second, we intend to show how the epistemological and ontological framework that undergirds much indigenous culture **offers a model for considering good/productive assemblages, a point that the second half of this essay unpacks through the**

case of A Tribe Called Red, a First Nations electronic music group that blends traditional powwow music with musical elements from hip-hop, dubstep, moombahton, and more.

In an attempt to describe a benchmark for a good/productive assemblage, one that embraces and enacts the creation of novelty, we are using the concept of creative repetition. Creative repetition is simply a more succinct manner of gathering Deleuze’s notion that true repetition is “difference without a concept” (*Difference* 13). **For our purposes, creative repetition is repetition without an essence.** It serves as a measuring stick one can employ to adjudicate between good and bad assemblages. As a concept it helps answer the question: how can one repeat cultural gestures while maintaining the continuity and identity of culture without insisting on an essence to which one is beholden?

The issue of creative repetition is anchored in Deleuze’s ontology as presented in *Difference and Repetition*. For Deleuze, human beings’ general attitude toward repetition is based on an ontology dominated by a concept of being as self-sameness, wherein to repeat means to replicate in an identical manner. However, insofar as Deleuze creates an ontology wherein being is nothing more than a momentary freezing of the infinite process of becoming, repetition for him can never be repetition of the same as such. Repetition of the same is governed by nostalgia and is what Deleuze calls “bare repetition”; imagine one insisting that the only proper way to honor one’s tradition as an Ojibwe is to perform a fancy dance at a powwow in the exact same way as your ancestors. Here one has become enslaved or subjugated to an image of identity that has frozen time and treats oneself as the instantiation of some preexisting essence.

In contrast with bare repetition (performing a dance the precise same way as your ancestors), **creative repetition in this case would be to harness the expressive and disruptive force of the powwow itself insofar as it creates new prospective territories for becoming.** This requires that one repeat consistently, but not dogmatically. To repeat dogmatically would be to try to “get everything right,” as if there were a transcendent powwow in the sky that one must mimic. To repeat creatively but consistently requires that one repeat

a key question

by attending to the specificities of the current milieu, so as to create new ways of thinking and experiencing in the present circumstance, but disrupt in a manner that resonates with disruptions or deterritorializations caused by pow wows of the past.

To understand how we are using creative repetition, it is important to understand the active nature of Deleuze and Félix Guattari's assemblage, as developed in *A Thousand Plateaus*. An assemblage is not merely a collection of otherwise passive objects being thrown together. Such a definition of assemblage removes the active character of the creation itself while also taking for granted an ontological framework wherein static objects existed and were ripe for the picking. The concept of assemblage for Deleuze and Guattari is understood precisely in juxtaposition to any manner of thinking that posits something (the author, the object) as transcendent. Whereas our traditional tropes of identity assume self-sameness, consistency, permanence, and, most important, essence, an assemblage is alive and active, in flux and flight. It is the permanence of becoming. Moreover, the work of assemblage aims at ridding us of the concept of any subject of action that could be characterized as standing as the lone agent relative to the passive material of experience. There is no agent or subject standing over and against a world of objects that is passive and manipulable as one would see fit.²

Creative repetition opens up a new manner of both considering the ethical implications of assemblage and discussing the ontological and epistemological commitments made manifest in indigenous culture. What marks off the space of identity in Ojibwe culture specifically is what Scott Lyons (*X-Marks*) characterizes as the consistency of an "ethnie," which is to be understood as a pattern of behavior, a manner of comportment, a set of habits that are expressions of a particular milieu that may change and grow over time all the while retaining a degree of continuity at the level of function and action (52). As Mark Bonta and John Protevi put it, "[O]ne should look to the openness to novelty of each assemblage, the way it invites new connections with other assemblages" (55). Our contention is that Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage can serve as a conceptual bridge between indigenous concerns and the goals of the composition classroom. This bridge, one built on the

foundation of creative repetition, encourages us to consider experiential novelty, transformational ways of evaluating, tasking, acting, and living, all the while attending to concerns of appropriation. Not all assemblages are good assemblages.

RHETORICAL SOVEREIGNTY AND COMPOSING CREATIVE REPETITION

We believe composition and rhetoric has much to gain from understanding assemblage as creative repetition, yet we want to avoid an understanding of assemblage where cultural appropriation can enter under the auspices of a remix ethos. Repurposing a Salish woodcut print of a salmon into an informational video on salmon restoration is a very different act from repurposing a biological drawing of a Pacific salmon—the former runs a high risk of the negative reappropriation of a culturally specific text. A good assemblage, one that functions through creative repetition, would acknowledge this distinction.

Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber's definition of assemblage only works if we understand texts as active entities, inherently relational in nature, and if we understand the responsiveness of the assemblage as one that is innovative and productive. Consider Geoffrey Sirc's argument that digital literacy calls writing teachers to consider the value of "short, well-chosen bricks of meaning" (70). In considering what makes for a good/productive assemblage, we suggest a focus on the "well-chosen." An assemblage in Deleuzian terms is not a collection of passive objects, but instead a purposeful gathering of already active objects within a new neighborhood, a new context. Therefore, assemblage in and of itself isn't inherently good, for "[n]othing's good in itself, it all depends on careful systematic use" (*Negotiations* 32). What we want to bring to the fore within composition's discussion of the assemblage is that while assemblage can afford students with seemingly exciting new communication options, not all assemblages are transformative.

Lyons's work on rhetorical sovereignty is useful when we consider the potentials and pitfalls of including assemblage in the composition classroom. Lyons asks, "What do American Indians want from writing?" His answer is "rhetorical sovereignty," that is, "the

what does "acknowledge" look like oriental? is it simply "awareness"?

how do "good" & "transformative" articulate? is there some slippage here?

inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (“Rhetorical” 449). In composition studies this concept is often misused to suggest an individual, instead of collective, sense of agency. There are two key points from Lyons often brushed over that are important for thinking about assemblage.

First, Lyons’s definition of rhetorical sovereignty specifies that it is the inherent *right of peoples, plural*. For Lyons, the individual’s communication acts gain importance as they are understood as furthering, and positively transforming and sustaining, the group’s culture (455). We suggest that keeping both the idea of *peoples* and *culturing* in mind when working with the rhetorical potential of assemblages encourages a richer understanding of both purpose and audience. That is, if one chooses to compose an assemblage, a leading question should be, “Why, and whom does this benefit?” There is, then, a collective ethical obligation. “Rather than representing an enclave, sovereignty here is the ability to assert oneself renewed—in the presence of others” (457). In this act of asserting oneself and rebuilding in the presence of others, Lyons says, and we agree, that “[i]t is always the ‘we’—not the ‘I’—that concerns me most” (461). While students may become excited about remixing texts, they need to move from the “I,” that is, in the next cool new zoomy thing they can remix out of preexisting objects, and instead focus on the “we,” that is, on the question of whom this cool new thing benefits.

Second, Lyons acknowledges that rhetorical sovereignty works to revive a people’s possibilities and continuance. When considering assemblage, his notion of “possibility” is quite important. “Attacks on sovereignty are attacks on what it enables us to pursue; the pursuit of sovereignty is an attempt to revive not our past, but our possibilities” (449). Here, Lyons suggests “the possible” as an outcome of communication, resonating with John Poulakos’s definition of rhetoric as an “art that seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible” (36).

Through the lens of rhetorical sovereignty, creative repetition necessarily includes a sense of *culturing*, one that is done for the “we,” and one that suggests a way of moving forward, of producing more culture, more life. There should be, then, qualifiers of what counts as a good representation, a good writing act, and by proxy, a good assemblage. In this spirit, we propose the following criteria for engaging with assemblage as creative repetition:

- A good assemblage is responsive, responding to situations and enacting new functions;
- a good assemblage is innovative and productive;
- a good assemblage is novel, opening up new ways of thinking, seeing, and living; and
- a good assemblage does all of this with a focus on the “we” as opposed to the “I,” always considering, “Whom does this assemblage benefit?”

Returning to Lyons’s question, “What do American Indians want from writing?” he suggests, “I hope to have identified a few things Indians generally do *not* want from writing: stereotypes, cultural appropriations, exclusion, ignorance, irrelevance, rhetorical imperialism” (462). What is at stake here “are the peoples defined by the writing itself; thus one important tenet of rhetorical sovereignty would be to allow Indians to have some say about the nature of their textual representations. The best way to honor this creed would be to have Indian people themselves do the writing, but it might also be recognized that *some representations are better than others, whoever the author*” (458, emphasis ours).

The world is not full of concepts just waiting to be plucked from their contexts. Concepts carry with them the resonance of their contexts. So while Diplo may have had good intentions remixing the Santigold track with a powwow song, that powwow song carries with it a cultural specificity that, when understood by outsiders to that culture (the clubgoers the night Adam played the track), is lost, the song itself reterritorialized through the lens of a fixed essence of what an Indian is and does. In this way, it is not a creative repetition

but a bare repetition, a replication of the same colonized understanding of Native culture. Such bare repetition grants us precisely all the things Native folks *do not want* from writing.

As described earlier, a bare repetition would assume that an identity such as Ojibwe could only be upheld through a precise reenactment of past cultural activities, whereas a creative repetition would attend to the specificities of the current milieu so as to create new ways of thinking and experiencing. In such moments of deterritorialization, no essence is made manifest. Rather a particular tendency of becoming is expressed in a moment of actualization, wherein our culturing—which is always a historical process; we *are* our history after all—is what is made manifest. Our style is what provides consistency, and it is also what permits us to improvise without losing all sense of identity. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, “one launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 311). We suggest that A Tribe Called Red ventures from home in exactly this manner, through a process of creative repetition that attends to the broad historical circumstances of their milieu. As such, they serve, at least in outline, as an example of what a well-formed assemblage ought to look like and do.

A TRIBE CALLED RED, CREATIVE REPETITION IN ACTION

Compeau took a loop from a pow wow song. Bear Witness put a beat under it. That’s when, Bear Witness says, they tapped into cultural identity and power, and it all clicked. “*It was the reaction from the aboriginal people in the crowd, where they’d take over the dance floor. This is us now.*”

—David Sommerstein, “Beats and Politics at A Tribe Called Red’s ‘Electric Pow Wow’”

A Tribe Called Red (ATCR) is a group of three First Nations men (Bear Witness, DJ NDN, and DJ Shub) with deep ties to their respective communities and a profound concern for issues of iden-

tity and propriety. They are explicitly concerned with fans wearing what they refer to as “redface” at performances and have performed at festivals where they ask organizers to ban the wearing of what they refer to as “hipster headdresses” (Risk). They have an explicit concern for the idea that it is possible to exhibit oneself as indigent in a manner that is not anchored in any form of essentialism, cultural voyeurism, or, as Deleuze and Guattari would call it, transcendence (*What Is Philosophy?* 15–34).

ATCR serves as a nearly perfect example of the nuances at work in understanding assemblage as creative repetition. They are involved in a creative process that pulls its influences from wide and disparate terrains, fusing together seemingly wildly incompatible genres of music, thereby generating novelty through creating connections in light of the “image of thought” that they bring to bear on experience. Further, the fact that they are a popular act, headlining festivals all over the world, brings their creative process and its set of relations into further contact with an audience whose expectations, engagements, and reactions lie outside of their own control. As such, we look to ATCR through the lens of creative repetition, exploring how ATCR’s texts attend to the specificities of the current milieu so as to create new ways of thinking and experiencing while also disrupting or deterritorializing. This lens allows us to ask of ATCR’s assemblages a multipart question that embodies our criteria for a productive assemblage: “Why this assemblage, what community does it benefit, and how does this act of culturing produce or encourage transformation?”

Indigenous communities are concerned about negative cultural reappropriation. Such acts, as Lyons suggests in describing what American Indians *do not want* from writing, include “stereotypes, cultural appropriations, exclusion, ignorance, irrelevance, rhetorical imperialism” (“Rhetorical” 462). Images such as the Washington Redskins and the Cleveland Indians provide an example of the type of image *not* wanted, particularly when it is composed by and authored for non-Natives. Consider also the hipster headdress worn by concertgoers at large music festivals, or fashion designer Paul Frank’s 2012 “Dream Catchin’ with Paul Frank” “pow wow,”

hmm, I'm
curious as
to how the
"bare"/"creative"
repetition
binary is
overlaid here:



which the *Hollywood Reporter* described as “a neon–Native American powwow theme. Glow-in-the-dark war-painted employees in feather headbands and bow and arrows invited guests to be photographed on a mini-runway holding prop tomahawks” (Garcia). We feel fairly confident saying these are examples of what American Indians *do not want* from assemblage. These assemblages do not enact a creative repetition. They do nothing more than repeat preexisting, essentialized tropes of identity, born of an image of thought that treats indigenous populations not simply as subjugated persons, but more drastically as objects stripped of a world of their own. However, this is not to say that indigenous texts cannot be put into assemblage in a productive way. As opposed to a hipster head-dress or Frank’s “Dream Catchin’” “pow wow,” the assemblages put forth by A Tribe Called Red enact a creative repetition, one worth examining when considering how to foster productive assemblages.

ATCR are recording artists, yet the true force of their project comes to the fore in live performances. In 2013, Adam attended an ATCR performance in Portland, Oregon. While on stage, the group’s members all handled different tasks: NDN and Shub took turns on the turntables and midi controllers, playing and reconstructing ATCR originals alongside electronic dance music hits. These hits were remixed live, often while Shub manipulated recordings of traditional indigenous songs over the beats. All the while, Bear Witness mixed movie segments and still photos, twisting and distorting in various ways to accompany the music. These images were projected on multiple walls of the club interior.

The fusion of traditional tribal rhythms with contemporary, bass-heavy beats of multiple genres in and of itself created a novel manner of hearing dance music. Listeners were confronted with the fact that the desire for dance driven by rhythmic propulsion cuts across time, history, and culture. Yet Bear Witness’s employment of often explicitly racist visuals from classic Hollywood exhibitions of the Native other brought something more to the fore. It explicitly challenged the audience members to consider their own uptake of the fusion of musical styles being presented. Moreover, the fact that the performers themselves were First Nations people who identified

now it's
really
chickin'
for me.

as such multiple times during the performance caused even greater interpretive tension. That ATCR exhibit phenotypical characteristics that one would generally identify as indigenous while attiring themselves as your average urban hip-hop fans in hoodies, jeans, and fitted baseball hats was also a simple marker of the rhetorical force of their performance. Through the fusion of musical styles, the employment of repositioned and repurposed imagery, and their own self-presentation, A Tribe Called Red created an aesthetic assemblage that exhibited their indigeneity while also challenging the audience to confront presumably unconsciously held prejudices regarding what being Native could and should mean.

This performance thus enacted a creative repetition of traditional forms of indigeneity; as the classic American imagery of the noble savage, or cowboys versus Indians, flashes across the screen, engaging the audience with the familiar, ATCR are physically present, actively challenging the audience’s conception of indigeneity. Their performance employs sonic and visual elements that are easily recognized as belonging to the purview of the indigenous—e.g., powwow drums and vocals—while recasting those traditional elements alongside musical and visual offerings that few members of the audience are likely to consider “authentically Indian.” What truly secures their performance as an act of creative repetition, however, is the fact that through all of this dissonance, ATCR draws no attention to the dissonance itself. Rather they present what they are doing as precisely an exhibition of indigeneity, an exhibition of the living, moving, changing, and constant becoming-Indian.

The creative repetition of ATCR benefits the “we” (one of our key criteria for a productive/good assemblage) insofar as it challenges the audience to consider the force of colonialism and territorialized imagery, and to experience the possibilities of reclaiming, repurposing, and reusing for transformative ends. This is a productive assemblage, one instructive for composition. When considered through the questions, “Why this assemblage, what community does it benefit, and how does this act of culturing produce or encourage transformation?” ATCR provides a site for examining how objects can be placed into new neighborhoods without fixing identity, reterritorializing cultures, or colonizing meaning.

Deleuze and Guattari remind us that reality is not fixed, and therefore that the world is not there waiting to be plucked out of context (*What Is Philosophy?* 163–200). This is not to say the world isn’t always already being reassembled, but it is to say that no one object—take the concept of the American Indian for example—is a static being. Instead there is, as ATCR highlight, a lived experience of being indigenous. Bear Witness describes this creative repetition:

I’m a strong believer in the idea that culture and tradition are living, growing and changing things. We learn to understand our past to guide us into the future. I will always remember going to pow wows when I was a kid in the early ’80s, right around the time break dancing was getting really big. There were fancy dancers who were adding break dancing moves in with the pow wow steps and things like checkered bandannas to their regalia. (Keene)

Kristin is reminded of a Nez Perce colleague whose uncle’s powwow regalia from the 1980s included an elaborately hand-beaded Space Invaders mural.

Bear Witness, and the Space Invaders regalia, make clear that the conception of *being* Ojibwe or Nez Perce has nothing to do with an essentialized Indian standing still, frozen in time. There is nothing anachronistic about fancy dancers adding break dance moves or novel articles of clothing to their powwow regalia; this is creative repetition, as it **attends** to the specificities of the **current** milieu (the cultural expectations and context of the pow wow itself), while creating new ways of thinking through acts of disruption (the break dance or seemingly nontraditional item added to one’s regalia, acts that function as a means of culturing, of transforming and fostering the culture). This may seem somewhat startling if pow wows are understood as sites wherein one can observe Indians behaving “authentically,” insofar as authenticity is taken to mean comporting oneself in a manner that embraces and exhibits one’s supposed nature or essence. **However, if “culture and tradition are living, growing and changing things,” then the very idea of authentically exhibiting a culture becomes significantly more complex, if not im-**

possible. There is not one authentic model American Indian whom all other American Indians must mimic in order to *be* Indian, yet that is not to say that *being* American Indian has no meaning and can be anything. There is both the neighborhood of existing meaning and the possibility for transformation.

Creative repetition, then, asks composition instructors to consider the materials students use to compose assemblages while also considering how we might conceive of authenticity or propriety differently. In the case of Paul Frank’s Dream Catchin’ pow wow—which one might argue is an assemblage of modern fashion, club-like visuals, and stereotypes of the Indian—indigeneity is being repurposed for the sake of a fashion statement, one that takes an object out of context and assembles it not for transformation but for reterritorialization. As such, it is not a good/productive assemblage. Similarly, ATCR’s pleading with fans not to wear headdresses to their shows also indicates that some objects in some contexts with some intentions are not good/productive assemblages. As Bear Witness says, “[The wearing of headdresses] gives the impression that Natives are something from the past. Not here today. If you were to think of an ‘Indian’ you certainly aren’t going to think of me, tattooed in a hoodie with a Sens cap on. We, as First Nation people, have never had control of our image in colonial media since its birth” (Risk). Reclaim, repurpose, reuse.

Insofar as one tends to think of the indigenous as something past, something essential, the idea that there could be a form of music and art that is indigenous and that has become other than its past while maintaining continuity may be difficult. But by using images of Hollywood Indians from the 1950s, over which is laid a tribal beat and an electronic rhythm, ATCR’s assemblage specifically challenges existing styles and stereotypes by incorporating juxtapositional media, media generally considered out of place in the context of indigenous works of art. The usage of stereotypical, clichéd, often racist imagery is a means of rhetorically evoking the sedimented conceptions of the indigenous that may lie in the audience. The performance itself exhibits a new manner of presenting oneself as indigenous, one that is growing and changing, and as a

result it is a good/productive assemblage. It illustrates “the ability to assert oneself renewed—in the presence of others” (Lyons, “Rhetorical” 457). The assertion of A Tribe Called Red is that they are still First Nations people, but that First Nations people are in a perpetual process of becoming.

Returning to the question our opening story raises, is Santigold and Diplo’s “Get It Up” track a worthy assemblage when played by Adam in the club? Probably not, given the audience’s predisposed compartments and subsequent reactions. Additionally, the track itself was not created by indigenous folks with an explicit intent to deterritorialize colonial concepts of the Indian. **That said, the track may find itself in context (say, remixed in an ATCR performance) where the subsequent assemblage may be productive.** In the case of ATCR, they cannot control the manner in which their audiences may interpret or respond to their activity, but it is possible for them to attend to this fact in advance and to act with specific intent. One cannot fully predict or control the outcomes of communicative gestures, yet insofar as the gesture of ATCR is **motivated** by the desire to open up new ways of thinking and being while still retaining consistency with the culture from which they emerge, one can certainly recognize their existence, their songs, their performances as moments of creative repetition.

For Deleuze and Guattari, a worthy assemblage is one that opens up new possibilities for thought (*What Is Philosophy?*). Whether it be through direct confrontation with non-Native fans who wear headdresses to their performances or through subtler means of re-appropriating explicitly racist visuals from the colonial (not so far gone) past, ATCR attempts to shock their audience, breaking down sedimented notions about indigenous life. Again, Bear Witness:

[The images work because] we can confront people with misrepresentations [of Indigenous people] in a different environment. Their guards are down, and they get hit with the imagery. [They can] think it’s funny or entertaining, [but we’re still] confronting people with what’s racist, stereotypical and one-dimensional. Allowing people to make their own connections from the way they’ve been exposed, [to the way that

we’re exposing them] lets people create a new interpretation [of Indigenous people]. [Our sets] help us to be able to articulate our side of the argument. [Through music], we’re able to discuss and have those conversations [about respect for the rights of Indigenous people]. The music helps people come to grips with colonialism. [Ideally], we’re a doorway to having [those conversations] happen. (Dowling; bracketed insertions in original)

Insofar as ATCR challenges its audience to think anew and outside of their assumed image of thought without betraying their own “ethnie,” their performances, their recordings, their very manner of moving through the world serve as an excellent model of assemblage as creative repetition.

While assemblage as creative repetition is, we believe, a worthwhile pursuit for the composition classroom, we hope the specificities of American Indian composing practices remind us that the world is not full of concepts just waiting to be plucked from their contexts. Even if our objective is to create in such a way as to open up new worlds of possibility in response to a confrontation with problems that we presently lack the resources to resolve, we still **must be cautious that our employment of and engagement with the world do not unconsciously repeat and reinforce the world from which we are attempting to find lines of flight.** This requires attention, attentiveness not just to individual concepts, ideas, or images, **but to the neighborhoods they inhabit and their genesis.** Let us proceed with assemblage theory making sure to keep the question “Whom does this assemblage benefit?” at the forefront of our assemblage-making practices.

NOTES

1. For example, in the mid-2000s, when Diplo first began incorporating elements of what is generally referred to as baile funk, funk carioca, or favela funk—a tradition of dance music popular in the favelas of Brazil that in itself fuses elements from Miami bass and freestyle along with West Indian rhythms—into his production, particularly his work with M.I.A., he was constantly insistent that if you were into what he

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ATCR's
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sneak back
an "I"?

was making, you really needed to attend to artists such as DJ Marlboro or Edu K from Brazil. And, moreover, he was emphatic that the cultural circumstances of life in a favela was an inextricable element of the music. In a sense, he attempted to bring to light issues of social justice through his incorporation of music from the global South into "First-World" club music.

2. We would be remiss were we not to point out that similar notions of being and becoming are also represented in indigenous thought as represented in tribal stories, as well as in the halls of academe through such Native philosophers as Vine Deloria Jr., Brian Yazzie Burkhardt, Anne Waters, and Viola Cordova. We recommend you read these scholars if you are interested in the intersections between indigenous thought and any Western philosophy focused on issues of becoming or relationality, yet for the purposes of this article in this collection, we move forward with a focus on the affordances of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage.

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