Indigenous comics against settler time

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Indigenous comics artists construct temporality not as an abstract, homogenous measure of universal movement along a singular axis, but as a multifaceted and shifting set of relations. This representation of temporality is set in neat contrast to settler societies' portrayal of Indigenous people as backward and disappearing. Like other minority groups, Indigenous creators explore different modes of telling to recuperate a neglected past, educate the audience about what is happening in the present, and investigate what the future might look like for Indigenous people. Graphic narratives can visualize traditional stories and past events, facilitating their transmission across generations, often sensitizing a heterogeneous readership (encompassing Natives and non-Native communities) and calling for ethical forms of remembering and activism. To discuss how (Indigenous) comics can be read as a challenge to settlers' temporalities this paper analyzes how *the past* has been articulated by two different graphic narratives: Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance* and Michael Nicholl Yahgulanaas' *Red: A Haida Manga*.

Settler time and the 'vanishing Indian' myth

Many Indigenous comics creators construct temporality not as an abstract, homogenous measure of universal movement along a singular axis, but as a multifaceted and shifting set of relations.[1] This representation of temporality is set in neat contrast to the dominant conception of time (and history)[2] adopted by settler societies, which cast Indigenous people as backward and disappearing to justify their claims over the land. In particular, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Historicism, which linked the flow of time to the idea of progress, enabled and justified European dominance in the colonies. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, Historicism "posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West"; "Europe was described as the site of the first occurrence of capitalism, modernity or Enlightenment," consigning other nations to "an imaginary waiting room of history" (2008, 7-8). Nonetheless, it is worth remarking that Historicism does not resume all Western approaches to time: philosophy and physics have strived to grasp its ineffable nature for centuries, often challenging the Newtonian idea of a universal common time, and theorizing multiple proper

times along different paths.[3] As Carlo Rovelli discussed, "None of these 'times' (plural) is the 'true' time. They are all related, but all different, because they are distinct by different properties" (2022, x-xi).

Given the above, "Indigenous time" can be seen as one of the multiple times that compose our reality. Native authors reclaim a different way of 'being in time', and it would be a mistake to consider these temporalities as deriving from critiques elaborated by Western thinkers, ignoring the presence of a different type of knowledge[4] (or *Weltanschauung*), and a temporal decolonial project. Even though Indigenous comics do not overlook the complexity and variety of theoretical positions about (historical) time in the West, they seek to defy Euro-American Historicism, since this worldview was responsible for the casting of Native people as an anachronism, as testified by several documents produced by settler states (Rifkin 2017, 49-94). For instance, the 'Vanishing Indian' myth suggested that Native Americans were fated to extinction as white civilization expanded on the continent. Yet, as we all know, Natives were not 'vanishing' at all: they were just being displaced by war and expelled from their ancestral lands through illegal seizures and illegitimate treaty negotiations. Many white settlers believed that territorial expansion was both inevitable and preordained by God and their technological superiority was often interpreted as proof of such (Manifest) Destiny.

As politicians used the myth of the 'Vanishing Indian' to legitimize settler colonialism, so did pop culture and art. The depiction of Indigenous people as a disappearing race made colonials believe that the extinction of the Natives was unavoidable and nearly complete. This colonial fantasy of disappearing Indians, in resignation or rebellion, can be observed, among other colonial texts, in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), one of the volumes of the *Leatherstocking Tales* series, and John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832), as they celebrated the pioneering spirit of westward expansion. In these narratives, Indigeneity fades into nothingness before white civilization. Cooper's Chingachgook even embraces his own displacement by "aiding in Natty Bumppo's wilderness acculturation" (Justice 2018, 51). As Leslie A. Fiedler explained, the archetypical Western story dealt with

the confrontation in the wilderness of a transplanted WASP and a radically alien other, an Indian – leading either to a metamorphosis of the WASP into something neither White nor Red (sometimes by adoption, sometimes by sheer emulation, but never by actual miscegenation), or else to the annihilation of the Indian (sometimes by castration-conversion or penning off into a ghetto, sometimes by sheer murder). (1968, 24)

Similarly, Deloria noticed that 'Indians' played a pivotal role in the construction (and performance) of a national identity by white American males: "Savage Indians served Americans as oppositional figures against whom one might imagine a civilized national self. Coded as freedom, however, wild Indianness proved equally attractive" (1998, 3).

In this context, Indianness becomes a malleable symbol, embodying, according to the rhetorical exigence, either courage or viciousness. Yet, despite their antithetic nature, both qualifiers are inscribed in a primal connection to the land and prehistory (Barbour 2016). Through this process, the 'Indian' becomes a commodity, an archetype, a romantic reflection of North America's imagined past. In particular, it is the visual that helps codify Indianness by reducing Indigenous identity to a series of symbols and clichés (the iconic feathers, the tomahawk, etc.) with little regard for historical and cultural accuracy (DeVoss and LeBeau 2010, 55), extracting Indianness out of the Indians (Slotkin 1973, 3-24). Unfortunately, as Vizenor remarked, these non-native (historical) accounts and "invented Indians" become "simulations of manifest manners," "the real without a referent to an actual tribal remembrance" (1994, 1-8). Hence, it is no surprise that caricatures of Native Americans have been part of popular culture for generations. The tracker, the warrior, the 'Indian' sidekick to the white savior, and the Shaman, among others, are all part of the standard North American image of the 'Indian', especially in comics, where Indigenous characters have become historical artifacts trapped inside a "Sepia-Toned Prison" (Sheyahshe 2008, 94).

Comics narrating the expansion of the Frontier (such as the 1950s retelling of the adventures of Daniel Boone[5] and other frontiersmen, and the numerous adaptations of *The Last of the* Mohicans[6]) often recuperated and enforced such racist tropes. In these works, the contraposition between the Indian male and the white frontiersmen often suggested that Indigenous people were stuck in the past, excluded from modernity and progress. A clear (and somehow extreme) example of the endurance of this trope is the comic book *Turok* (1952-1982), published by Western Publishing through licensee Dell Comics. Turok is a pre-Columbian Native American who is trapped in an isolated valley populated by dinosaurs and ancient beasts. Undoubtedly, this depiction is historically inaccurate as many of the animals portrayed in the series lived during the Cretaceous, when the *homo sapiens* had not made an appearance yet. Such portrayal of Native people as living in a temporal stasis (having disappeared, being remnants on the verge of disappearing, or being representatives of tradition) erases their resistance to settler governance. Settler culture confines Natives in an atavist past to prevent them from being participants in contemporary life, and political or social agents with whom non-Natives must engage.

Consequently, Indigenous traditions have been fixed as an essence that transcends time, locked in a temporal stasis that must be performed to be accorded the status of Native. Nonetheless, as Barbour demonstrated, many white superheroes (like Captain America[7] and Batman[8]) have temporarily performed (also through masquerades) as Indians, revitalizing and embodying the contradiction of the Frontier and allowing the protagonist to become free from urban weaknesses and domestic constraints (Barbour 2016, 145-182). Yet, it is worth pointing

out that the privilege of racially passing (even temporarily) as the Other is hardly granted to the Natives.

Whereas Euro-American Historicism presupposes a singular timeline, capable of reducing complexity through the notion of synchronicity, Indigenous comics invite the reader to think about temporal multiplicity, exceeding the dominant modes of settler time. Western history is often visualized through a time arrow that lines up an evolving continuous causal chain of events that leads towards an ineffable idea of progress. In contrast, Indigenous graphic novels seem to reject the display of a singular frame and display settler time in conjunction with and contraposition to their own temporalities, giving visibility to those events and experiences that were eliminated by the colonial governments in the construction of a national history, often questioning Western developmental narratives. Given the above, the essay aims to show how two different contemporary Indigenous graphic artists, Gord Hill and Michael Nicholl Yahgulanaas, based in the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada, use the potentiality of the medium 'comics' to contrast the 'Vanishing Indian' myth. The decision to focus on these two creators is motivated by their influence on the newer generation of Indigenous artists.[9] In this regard, it is important to notice how in recent years the number of alternative comics created by Native authors has increased in Canada thanks to independent publishers, like High Water Press and Arsenal Pulp Press, but also Kickstarter projects like *Moonshot* (2020), edited by Hope Nicholson.[10]

Time and/in comics

As Giordano Nanni observed, the imposition of Western temporalities was (and is) a prerogative of settler colonialism, often enforced in conjunction with territorial conquest: "European territorial expansion has always been closely linked to, and frequently propelled by, the geographic extension of its clocks and calendars" (2012, 4). Hence, time is a powerful means to co-opt 'colonial subjects' inside a master narrative created by the colonizers, "conscripting human subjects within the matrix of the capitalist economy, and ushering 'savages' and superstitious 'heathens' into an age of modernity" (Nanni 2012, 4). For this reason, it is worth remarking that in comics space and time tend to coincide, as our way of reading them seems to be influenced by the conventions set by the first experiments with photography (such as the late 19th-century stereoscope and the zoetrope), which aimed at producing the illusion of motion by displaying sequences of static pictures. As McCloud observed in *Understanding Comics*:

Portraying time on a line moving **left to right,** this puts all the **images** on the same vertical axis. And **tangles up time** beyond all recognition! Perhaps we've been too conditioned by photography to receive single images as **single moments**. After all, it does take an eye **time** to move across scenes in **real life**! Each figure is arranged from **left to right** in the sequence we will **"read"** them, each occupying a different **time slot**. (1993, 97)

Even though the juxtaposition of frames can be used to convert space into time, Hatfield (2005, 32-67), Groensteen (1999; 2011), and Miodrag (2013, 12-78) argued that, in comics, meaning (and consequently time) is not generated exclusively from sequentiality: the medium creates both linear and tabular relations, and the linear (diachronic) reading of the panels is often accompanied by a global (synchronic) reading of the page. Moreover, as Hatfield pointed out, "we can see that the image-series alone does not determine timing in comics, for it is possible to have a series of panels in which no time seems to pass, as well as a single panel into which moments, hours, even days, are compressed" (2005, 58). Similarly, Baetens and Frey (2005, 104-105) discussed how in long-form comics panels are structured on various levels simultaneously and can be organized horizontally, vertically, or in a combination of both. Hence, the reading of a comic does not occur only diachronically (moving from panel to panel through linear connections) but also synchronically, as the spatial arrangement of the panels on the page interferes with the sense of time. Panels can be sequential, but also autonomous, and their arrangement can be "rhizomatic" (Sousanis 2015, 58) or painterly.

Moreover, the composition might also affect the reader's subjective sense of time in reading, influencing the duration and rhythm of the narrative. Indeed, "duration and rhythm in narrative comics are relational terms also in the sense that they correlate the relationship between the time of the event in the story and the space given to their representation in some narrative unit, such as a scene, with another unit or the narrative as a whole" (Mikkonen 2017, 52). Given the above, it is no surprise that the manipulation of the narrative tempo might allow the injection of different temporalities, giving representation to "experiences of time outside the dominant 'proper' time of global capitalism and its networks" (Gardner 2015, 36).

Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that experimentations with temporal relativity are not a novelty: in many works created by early twentieth-century avant-gardists, different temporalities converge into a single space. These experiments have been particularly relevant also for the world of comics, because, since the very beginning, the medium was "the first and arguably most important of the new vernacular modernisms" (Gardner 2012, 7). Given that comics oscillate between modernist and postmodernist stances (Earle 2017, 149), it is not surprising to find experimentations with space and time throughout the medium history, from Gustave Verbeck"s *The Upside-Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo* (1902-1905) to contemporary graphic novels, such as Moore's *From Hell* (1989) or Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993), among others. Yet, what is distinctive in the graphic narratives created by Indigenous authors is their decolonial agenda, as they manipulate (settler) time to counter dominant narratives.

Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance*: an alterNative historical time

While dealing with Indigenous temporalities and revisionist histories, we must be aware, using José Rabasa's words, of the "paradoxical integration of the onetime non-historical peoples into what ends up constituting by definition a universal single history" (Rabasa 2010, 175). Hence, it might be useful to consider (historical) time not as a neutral medium into which experiences are transposed, the product of a universal clock, but as the result of an inertial reference frame. Indeed, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty, we should always question the way Euro-American Historicism considers time, assuming that "it is always possible to assign people, places, and objects to a naturally existing continuous flow of historical time" (2008, 73). Whereas the narrative behind the 'Discovery of America' has long been questioned (O'Gorman 1958; Jennings 1975; Todorov 1982), Native American contemporary graphic narratives seem in tune with Thomas King's invitation to forget Columbus and cease picturing history as a grand structure and a "national chronicle, a closely organized and guarded record of agreed-upon events and interpretations, a bundle of 'authenticities' and 'truths' welded into a flexible, yet conservative narrative that explains how we got from there to here" (2012, 3). They do so by reclaiming the existence of another set of (hi)stories, excluded from the narrow straight line traced by settler time, showing a network of experiences that encompasses colonialism, but it is not defined by it; Indigenous people inhabited those territories before the arrival of the Europeans, survived the apocalypse, and are now prospering.

This willingness to go beyond the colonial temporal frame is well represented by the changes that occurred between the 2010 and 2021 versions of Gord Hill's comic *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance*.[11] Whereas the 2010 version features on the first page the heading "1492: INVASION," using a font that mimics 1950s EC comics, a publisher that inaugurated a new way of narrating history often in contrast to official narratives (Witek 1989), the 2021 updated version starts with a map describing the cultural regions of the Indigenous Americas.

To contrast settlers' temporalities, Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book* (2010) chronicles past genocidal practices, but it also establishes that Natives have not disappeared after their encounter with Europeans. It shows the endurance of colonial practices, arguing that in the American continent there has never been a transition from a violent past to a democratic present. For instance, it denounces the use of tear gas and automatic weapons by Québec police officers during the Oka crisis in 1990; the torture, imprisonment, and assassination of Indigenous people in Mexico in 1997; and the presence of laws jeopardizing Native languages and cultures, *de facto* enacting a cultural genocide. Even though the comic describes diverse contexts and situations, portraying different degrees of endangerment, it vehemently criticizes the persistence of colonial structures, the semantic fil rouge that connects all these events, and celebrates Indigenous resistance: "This is the world

we live in, and the history that has made us who we are. Generation after generation, our peoples' resistance against European colonization has continued. Long live the warrior" (Hill 2010, 87).

The comic uses the power of images to shock the reader and contrast the official propaganda, historiography, and iconography. The narrative is not structured along an evolving continuous chain of events. Temporal and spatial ellipsis eliminates any sense of causality and progress. The sequencing of the different chapters is not always chronological (there are temporal breaks,[12] overlapping and non-sequential events[13]) nor spatial (the episodes covered span from North to South America, adopting a pan-Indigenous perspective). Coherence is created mainly through a 'presentational sequencing', as the argumentation is structured in four main thematic chapters: Invasion, Resistance, Assimilation, and Revolt. Because of its didactic intentions, the comic does not follow a linear order, as the sections entitled "Invasion" and "Resistance" cover overlapping time periods. Thus, the narrative focus is not just on the events per se, but on the resistance practices enacted by Indigenous people. Taking advantage of the possibility of comics to display different times at once, Hill suggests that both invasion and resistance are part of the Indigenous past, present, and future. The presence of temporal ellipses invites the reader to seek the linkages among the Mapuche resistance to colonization, the genocide in Chile during the sixteenth century, the birth of the American Indian Movement in 1968 in Minneapolis, the Mohawk Warriors at Oka, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the Warriors defending Secwepmac rights at Ts'peten in 1995. Through this narrative solution, Hill deconstructs the description of Indigenous recourse to violence as unprovoked and unmotivated outbursts, as it becomes clear that violence might be in certain circumstances the only way to resist colonialism.

Whereas this didactic chapter structure helps to create a narrative coherence and explain how settler colonialism works, the focus of the chronicle is still centered on the settlers. Hence, the revised, expanded version of the comic abandons such structure, indigenizing history even more by focusing mainly on historical episodes of Indigenous Resistance, from the arrival of Columbus to the present day, arguing that the colonization process is still in place, even though in different forms. Coherence is no longer created through chapter titles, but through "figural solidarity" (Braithwaite and Mikkonen 2022). For instance, the modalities in which private securities used dogs to stop nonviolent Indigenous protesters manifesting against the construction of a pipeline across the Missouri River, a vital water resource for the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, visually is reminiscent of the scenes depicting Spanish colonials using war dogs to hunt down the Taino. Though these visual echoes, the comic indirectly argues that colonial violence is not situated exclusively in the past. Hence, historical abuses cannot be redressed while the structures of colonial rule are largely left unscathed (Coulthard 2014). Moreover, in the preface to the original edition, Hill argues that the settler history of the

Americas conceals the stories of Indigenous resistance, claiming that this is an intentional strategy "to impose capitalist ideology on people, to pacify them, and to portray their struggle as doomed to failure" (2010, 5).

Hill's comic book shows how settler societies created their own temporal formation, with their unique way of apprehending time through maps and (temporal and spatial) frames of reference. Settlers used cartography to expand and exert their control over a territory and establish borders and possessions.[14] Hill, however, uses the same iconography to show that those territories were already inhabited, disproving an ideologically questionable representation of American history. Those maps no longer testify to the expansion of European colonizers in the Americas, but they symbolize the resistance of indigenous communities. The land is at the center of this book not only because of the colonial policies which aimed to acquire Indigenous territories and control lucrative trade routes, often getting rid of the so-called Indian problem through cultural and/or physical genocidal practices, but also because the relationship with the land informs Indigenous cultures, practices, and identities: "Most Indigenous societies relied on hunting & gathering (including fishing), for sustenance. Plants were an important source of both food and medicine & were used to treat illness & injuries" (Hill 2021, 16). In a few instances, the comic reminds us that nature is also a victim of colonialism, as settlers often killed animals to starve the local populations and force them to surrender.

Like many other visual artists,[15] Gord Hill takes advantage of the possibilities offered by comic art, "remediating" (Bolter and Grusin 1999) and manipulating well-known historical images, photographs, and iconographies to challenge the reader's (preconceived) understanding of history. For instance, Hill adapts and manipulates the iconic "Face-to-Face" shot that immortalized the Oka Crisis (a 1990 land dispute in which the Mohawk peoples fought against Canadian police and military forces to defend their traditional lands against the construction of a golf course) in the memory of many Canadians. Hill abandons realism, and adopts symbolic imagery to cast the Canadian soldier as the aggressor: his face is turned into a skull and his helmet is painted with a Canadian flag, challenging the image of Canada as a peaceful nation.

Finally, settler States celebrate events considered essential to the national identity and insert them into a straight timeline that symbolizes progress. Consequently, any divergent element needs to be discarded. As Mark Rifkin discussed, "[s]uch imposition can be understood as the denial of Indigenous *temporal sovereignty*, in the sense that one vision or way of experiencing time is cast as the only temporal formation – as the baseline for the unfolding of time itself" (2017, 2). To challenge those timelines, *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book* shows how the War on the Plains occurred in simultaneity and

conjunction with the American Civil War, complicating the image of the latter as a conflict for the liberation of oppressed people. Indeed, Gord Hill observes how

During the **US Civil War** (1861-1865) with military forces being removed from Texas for the war effort, the Comanche & their Kiowa allies pushed the frontier back 100 miles, leaving scores of **abandoned & burned** out settlements & farms. When the Civil War ended, more troops became available to fight the plains natives. Despite their small numbers, the Comanche & Kiowa still presented a **dangerous** military threat to settlers that would continue until the 1870s. (2021, 102)

Therefore, Gord Hill's comic book seems to suggest an alternative way of being in time that is not reducible to a unitary flow determined by non-native patterns and flows. Yet, Native and non-native temporalities should not be considered as mutually exclusive, as they are open to change and able to affect each other even though they cannot be reduced to a single common frame.

Indigenous temporal frames in Michael Nicholl Yahgulanaas' Haida manga *Red*

Whereas Gord Hill's *The 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Comic Book* presents an alternative historiography through an Indigenous perspective, capable of denouncing past and present injustices, in *Red: A Haida Manga* Yahgulanaas retrieves a Haida oral narrative known to his family, showing through his art relations across time outside the conventions of Euro-American historicism. By retrieving personal narratives, the comic gives attention to those stories and experiences that fell off the map because they did not fit into settlers' timelines.[16]

Red tells the story of two siblings, Jaada and Red, who live on Haida Gwaii. One night the village is attacked and Jaada is abducted. When Red grows, he directs his energy and the resources of the community to find his lost sister. Blinded by his crusade, he neglects his responsibility as a chief. The story turns into a tragedy when Red reunites with his sister Jaada, after having murdered her husband. To prevent a war between the two communities, Red commits suicide. The story ends with Jaada and her son, who physically resembles his uncle, being accepted back into the community.

Although the comic presents at first glance a linear narrative, which progresses page after page, the composition of this work complicates our notion of temporality, favoring the idea of relation, as the panels are fluid and interpenetrate each other. Whereas Euro-American comics usually feature discrete sections (the panels) organized into grids and separated by the gutter,[17] Yahgulanaas creates a saturated environment, which mirrors the Indigenous worldview, where "the whole is everything and everywhere: it extends to each individual its identity as a fraction of itself" (Harrison 2016, 53). Yahgulanaas' black gutter is not just a recoloring of the traditional white gutter of Western comics, but it has shape and mass, becoming a character of the story, more than a (time) regulating and compositional feature. Yahgulanaas' black frameline divides and joins the panels, but also participates in the

narrative. For instance, in one of the panels the gutter becomes an element of the story: the bow with which Red brings the story to its end. Thanks to the author's training in the Chinese brush stroke technique, the frameline has a calligraphic quality that allows it to have different presence, intensity, and texture.

Hence, the content and the form seem to argue against the notion of America (the continent) as *Terra Nullius* and reject the idea of Indigenous time and space as empty areas that settlers can freely occupy. As Yahgulanaas himself wrote, "gutters are like **Terra Nullius** so beloved by colonizers because empty land means my land" (Yahgulanaas 2011). According to Yahgulanaas, the gutter represents the erasure of Indigenous histories through the imposition of settler timelines. Hence, in his point of view, in comics the decolonization of space can only occur through a decolonization of time, and vice versa. To eliminate any sense of void, Yahgulanaas makes the gutter dense. Here, the gutter does not signal a static fracture that the reader must recompose through closure. On the contrary, it is a fluid line that creates movement through moments of expansion and contraction. It generates a flow that seeks to find a balance. Indeed, the frames are no longer static borders regulating Indigenous life, but re-signified dynamic and hybrid places capable of offering a genuine "representation of the lifeline of the Haida people" (Gray 2016, 183).

The relationship between the panels and the whole comic goes beyond the limits of the page, pushing to the extreme the possibility that comics have to create multiple reading paths that might exceed linearity. Inside the back of the dust jacket, there is an invitation to destroy the book by ripping the pages out of their binding, because "following the layout provided overleaf and using the pages from two copies of this book you can reconstruct this work of art [that is, the mural it originated from]" (Yahgulanaas 2009). The act of ripping out the pages can be seen as an act of defiance towards the sacrality accorded to the book in Western cultures. Albeit the comic can be read sequentially, it can only be fully appreciated when the pages are put in order and displayed as part of a whole piece of art. In this regard, it might be worth pointing out that *Red* was initially conceived as a large mural, composed of a static image of three interlocking figures. These figures constitute the structure of the narrative, as they function as framelines. Hence, in this comic, time is not connected to a particular sequence or reading order (left to right, top to bottom), but it informs and connects all the panels simultaneously. The black frameline that encapsulates the panels recalls the images found in traditional Haida bentwood ceremonial chests. Such compositional density forces the reader to pay close attention to the scene to unveil its meaning.

The dynamism created by Yahgulanaas's irregular paneling and lack of rectilinear lines evokes the characteristics of an oral space where different voices may overlap in unison or interrupt each other. Yahgulanaas experiments with the comics format rejecting the linear and sequential frames associated with Euro-American comics: balloons, bubbles, and captions,

which frame the characters and narrator's voice respectively, are blended with the environment, often shaping and moving across panels. Yahgulanaas creates an explosive environment in continuous flux. The curves symbolize the continuity among all things, an interconnectedness through a network of relations that encompasses both the human and non-human. Indeed, according to the narrative, Red is equally guilty towards men (being blinded by his desires for revenge) and nature (as his killing of the whales goes against the rationing of resources and the respect due to the animals and the environment). The comic also underlines how Red's unwillingness to comply with the rules of the community and nature do not only hurt the protagonist, but also those around him. The compositional compression and expansion created by the frameline mimic the movements of water underlying Natives' connection to the natural world, which has pedagogic functions, teaching the importance of respect and balance. Yahgulanaas' work is full of images of water in motion, a not surprising element if one considers that Haida Gwaii is an archipelago traversed by waterways.

The black framelines never constitute a boundary, a fence superimposed by external forces. In contrast, characters seem able and willing to exploit their porousness, virtually bending time and space. For instance, in a sequence, a raider bends the black gutter separating the panel in which he is situated to observe the canoe in the adjacent panel (Spiers 2014, 46). This formal fluidity raises ethical questions about how human actions influence the rest of the (story)world, as each action has an impact on the panel and the narrative as a whole. Hence, the Haida manga demands to look at the bigger picture when judging the worthiness of a decision. Yahgulanaas' work invites the reader to adopt a non-linear way of thinking as past and present are visibly interconnected by the water-like movements of the frameline. At the same time, this association of ideas and temporalities has a sensory quality, being framed by and in conjunction with the natural world.

The aesthetic of the Haida manga, a genre created by Yahgulanaas himself, is intrinsically hybrid as it moves beyond the traditional stylized and symmetrical forms of Haida art. It embraces a palette that is not limited to the traditional colors used in Indigenous North Western art (red, black, and blue), and it introduces "a kind of 'realism' that speaks to a Western modernist sensibility" (Levell 2021, 31). At the same time, it is worth pointing out how Yahgulanaas' formation and aesthetic go beyond the dualistic contraposition of Western-settler and Indigenous art. As Nicola Levell argues,

In line with its etymology and historical meaning in Asia, it [manga] encompasses the serialized as well as the singular expression, be it a cartoon, a sketch, a drawing, a painting or some other form. By prefixing manga with Haida, Yahgulanaas is patiently asserting his hereditary right to engage and play with Haida's tangible and intangible cultural heritage forms. (2021, 42)

Therefore, by imagining his art as intrinsically hybrid, Yahgulanaas avoids being inscribed in essentializing Nativist discourses, that do not talk to contemporary Indigenous reality and are

somehow reminiscent of the interpretation of early twentieth-century anthropologists, like Franz Boas,[18] of Indigenous art. He is well aware that the label of ethnic art might make his work seem like a relic, a simulacrum, a reiteration of the romantic 'Vanishing Indian'. Hybridization is therefore an active attempt to resist settler societies' cultural appropriation and fetishization.

Conclusion

As hitherto discussed, Indigenous graphic narratives do not display a single master narrative, but a cumulative repertoire of narratives through which to give historical density to their experience. By retrieving their history, these artists point to the wounds left by the past, and reclaim sovereignty and the right to self-determination, while projecting Indigenous people in the future. In Hill's comic, the corporeal experience of the contemporary political (and cultural) struggles testifies to the continuities of settler violence, which is no longer displayed as an event located in the past, and thus demands actions in the present to ensure a prosperous future for Indigenous people. Yaghulanaas pushes the reflection about time and space further. He does not simply introduce his readers to an AlterNative timeline, erased by the settlers, but he uses oral histories, transmitted across generations among his family, to retrieve experiences that precede and are not shaped by colonialism. Even when colonialism is directly addressed, as in his latest work *JAJ*, Yaghulanaas does not solely describe how settlers dispossessed the Natives, but he also recognizes how many settlers were in turn dispossessed by capitalism. Many migrated hoping for a better future. Therefore, his comics do not just indict what is wrong, but they encourage the creation of dialogue, reminding the reader (also through the form) that all things are connected. For this reason, he has invented a new genre, the Haida Manga, capable of decolonizing time and space, and intrinsically hybrid. Hence, both authors use the potentiality of the medium to show the interconnectedness of past and present, while encouraging decolonial practices.

Notes

[1] Whereas the essay focuses on two graphic artists based in the Pacific Northwest Coast of Canada (Hill and Yahgulanaas are members of the Kwakwaka'wakw and Haida nations respectively), the term Indigenous is here used to underline the existence of a "global web that connects Indigenous and first nation peoples across the planet" (Aldama 2020, xii). Yet, as Rachel Adams discussed, the recognition of a transnational network "does not seek to ignore borders or bypass the nation altogether, but to situate these terms within a broader global fabric" (2009, 18). At the same time, it is worth pointing out that some First Nations people may not identify themselves as Canadians (or other settler nationalities) due to the historical and ongoing challenges they face in asserting their own self-determination. Canadian identity was imposed on Native peoples through the enactment of laws, among which the Indian Act (1875), that did not recognize their sovereignty.
[2] These comics do not criticize History as a discipline, but the way it has been narrated by the settlers, often erasing Indigenous experiences.
[3] For instance, one can name the space-time of General Relativity, the Lorentz times of Special Relativities, the oriented time of thermodynamics, and the experiential time experienced by our brains.

[4] In Western countries, the term Indigenous knowledge has often been associated with the primitive and the wild. In contrast, Indigenous knowledge must be understood as the way in which Indigenous people have come to understand themselves in relation to their natural environment. The revival of this knowledge does not imply a desire to return to an uncontaminated pre-colonial past, but is a way to move away from colonial frames and procedures. See also Semali and Kincheloe (2002).

[5] Some of the most famous adaptations are DC's *The Legends of Daniel Boone* (1955-1956), Quality Comics' *Exploits of Daniel Boone* (1955-1956), and Avon's *Fighting Daniel Boone* (1953).

[6] For instance, one can quote: the 1944 adaptation made by Al Kanter, published in *Classic Comics*; the one created by Jack Davis, featured in *Two-Fisted Tales #40* (1954); the one that appeared in *Classics Illustrated #4* (1958); the one published in the series Dark Horse Classics in 1992; and Roy Thomas's 2007 adaptation for Marvel comics, among many others.

[7] In the 'What If' comic *1602* (2003), written by Neil Gaiman, an Indian tribe adopts Steve Rogers. Yet, the tribe soon disappears from the story to let Rojhaz (Rogers' Indian persona) become the central character (the forerunner) and locus of American identity. This time-displaced Steve echoes somehow the White Indian archetype popularized by the character Natty Bumppo.

[8] For reference, see the story "Batman--Indian Chief!," featured in *Batman #86* (1954).

[9] Due to page limits, I decided to focus on the two most famous works of these two artists, as they paved the way to new narrative paths. Even though Yahgulanaas' early political comics date back to 1976, it was only in 2001 that he created a new genre, the Haida Manga, through his debut graphic novel, *A Tale of Two Shaman*. This visual aesthetic was perfected and adopted also in later publications, among which the critically acclaimed *Red: A Haida Manga* (2009) and the latest *JAJ: A Haida Manga* (2023). For a brief discussion on their influence on younger artists see Rifkin et al. 2002.

[10] She retrieved comics previously published by Alternative History Comics, an Inuit (small) publisher.

[11] It might be worthy to point out that Hill's graphic narratives do not just cover Indigenous decolonization, but also anti-capitalism, anti-globalization, and anti-fascism, with a specific focus on armed struggles. The relationship between anarchism, colonialism, and indigeneity is at the center of his political and artistic reflections. Hill authored numerous zines and three graphic histories: *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* (2010), *The Antifa Comic Book: 100 Years of Fascism and Antifa Movements* (2018); *The Anti-Capitalist Comic Book: From the WTO to G20* (2012).

[12] Time jumps are frequent as the comic moves rapidly across several centuries, covering, for instance, in the span of two pages, the Pontiac rebellion (1763) and the Seminole Wars (1835-1842).

[13] The comic covers the colonial invasion of Haida Gwaii after discussing the War on the Plains, even though the former started before.

[14] Of course, the comic does not criticize cartography per se, but how maps and frames were ideologically used.

[15] A famous example is Art Spiegelman's use of Margaret Bourke-White's iconic photograph in *Maus* (cf. Hatfield 2005; Hirsch 2012; Chute 2016).

[16] Interestingly, only *JAJ: A Haida Manga* (2023) discusses in an explicit way colonialism, showing the early colonization of the Northern West Coast of Canada through the life of Johan Adrian Jacobsen, a Norwegian fisherman and aspiring anthropologist, who traveled to Haida Gwaii to collect Native Art for a German Museum. Even though the comic condemns colonialism, it offers a sympathetic depiction of Jacobson, recognizing that he was also a victim of capitalist forces: his wishes to improve his status would not be granted even though he managed to retrieve a totem pole.

[17] The recognition of the existence of this convention (or grammatical feature) does not imply that all Western comics rely on the gutter. Nonetheless, the absence of this feature is often exploited and problematized by Western artists to impose a reflection on the language of comics and create temporal stasis or lyrical moments, among other uses.

[18] Franz Boas' *Primitive Art* (1927) and Bill Holm's *Northwest Coast Indian Art: an Analysis of Form* (1965) provided a detailed account of the formal characteristics of Indigenous Art. However, their descriptions created rigid criteria against which Native Art was evaluated (and essentialized), often hindering the opportunities for innovation.

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