

Movement as Medicine and Screendance as Survivance: Indigenous Reclamation and Innovation During Covid-19

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Abstract

Indigenous screendance challenges US settler colonial constructions that drive political, environmental, and global injustices, which the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated. This article analyzes online workshops taught in 2020 by Rulan Tangen, Founder and Director of DANCING EARTH CREATIONS, as “movement as medicine” and “screendance as survivance.” By connecting Tangen’s workshops to Indigenous peoples’ historical and ongoing uses of dance and the digital sphere for wellbeing and survival, we show how and why these practices provide powerful possibilities to counter settler colonial concepts of anthropocentrism, Cartesian dualism, patriarchy, and chronological time. Tangen’s teaching offers ways for humans and more-than-humans—meaning land, cosmos, nonhuman animals, water, and plants—to (re)connect, drawing on the past to imagine the future and building human solidarity, which we theorize as “homecoming.” Ultimately, we link our concept of “homecoming” to the Land Back movement because of the vital connections among Indigenous bodies, sovereignty, and survival.

Keywords: Native American, Cartesian Dualism, Dance, Digital, Land Back, Survivance, Homecoming, Online, Settler Colonialism, Interdependence, Worldsense

I wasn’t sure if I was alive or not, and the reason why I thought maybe I was, was I looked down and saw my ribs were moving up and down. I thought, “That must mean I am breathing, and that must mean I am alive.”¹

—Rulan Tangen, Founder and Director of DANCING EARTH CREATIONS

Covid-19—which invades the lungs, making it hard to breathe—has exposed not only the disparities in access to adequate healthcare,² but also the fallacies of settler colonial constructions: Cartesian dualism and anthropocentrism.³ Whereas Cartesian dualism attempts to separate thinking from moving, our minds from our bodies,⁴ anthropocentrism is a worldview that assumes humans dominate their environments



and all other beings.⁵ As Dr. Sunaura Taylor writes, “We know that environmental destruction aided the conditions that led to this outbreak: deforestation, rising temperatures, and the loss of habitat, all forced species into closer contact with each other, including with our own.”⁶ Ongoing colonization, which dichotomizes humans and more-than-humans,⁷ drives environmental destruction, political injustices, and global inequities.⁸ More-than-humans is a term that resists the binary of “animal” and “human” life and emphasizes the indebtedness of humans to nonhuman beings.⁹ Such an interconnected understanding of humans and more-than-humans forms the core of many Indigenous epistemologies, including those of the 574 federally recognized nations in what is currently referred to as the United States.¹⁰

This article describes and analyzes online workshops taught by Rulan Tangen during the summer of 2020 that emphasize holistic epistemologies and serve as modes of resistance to colonization, which has attempted to fracture many Indigenous peoples’ ability to come home.¹¹ Tangen is of mixed ancestries—including Filipino, Norwegian, and Irish—and with ceremonial, community kinship ties to Lakota people.¹² Her workshops center a distinct approach to movement that we analyze in this article as a form of homecoming and a challenge to settler colonialism. According to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, the objective of settler colonialism is for settlers to make “a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain.”¹³ To do so, through policy and practice, the US government has attempted to annihilate Indigenous peoples and cultures in a multitude of ways, some of which we detail in our analysis. Tangen’s movement workshops occurred weekly during April and May of 2020, through Facebook Live and Zoom, and were viewed by close to 8,000 people. These circulations of Tangen’s teachings through our homes, as we shelter in place, call attention to the complexities of quarantining in our residences.

While some may view these restrictions on movement as simply “inconvenient,” they expose the multiple ways that governments have historically and contemporarily exerted “corporeal control”¹⁴ over Native mobilities—for example, through relocation, removal, and assimilation policies and institutions, including carceral contexts in which Indigenous peoples today are disproportionately represented.¹⁵ Addressing these settler colonial strategies allows us to attend to the ways that Indigenous peoples globally have mobilized movement both on-screen and off as medicine and liberation. Against concepts of anthropocentrism, patriarchy, Cartesian dualism, and chronological time, Tangen’s online workshops generate possibilities for connection, reclamation, and transformation, which we theorize as “homecoming.” Movement provides Indigenous peoples a way to (re)connect with their practices, languages, and more-than-human others, drawing on the past to imagine the future, linking ancestral knowledge and futurities, and building human solidarity.

In the quote that opens this article, Tangen, the Founder and Artistic Director of DANCING EARTH CREATIONS, shares a memory from the early 2000s when she was incredibly sick and unsure if she was alive.¹⁶ As a dancer, Tangen had trained and

performed with companies that span from ballet and modern dance to circus, film, theater, opera, and television. DANCING EARTH, established in 2004 and based in New Mexico and California, is known for its interdisciplinary projects that activate ecological awareness and include collaborators from Indigenous communities. Scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy has written about the importance of Tangen's stage productions, how she grounds dance-making "in Indigenous values—such as inclusivity, respect, and creative resilience,"¹⁷ and notes Tangen's ability to draw from her "researched, creative, embodied, genealogical investigations to enact ways of being in relationship to land, territory, water, human, and other-than-human others."¹⁸ Our paper extends Shea Murphy's scholarship and focuses specifically on the intersections of Tangen's work, screendance, and homecoming.

Tangen recalled the memory of questioning her mortality in the quote that opens this article, in April 2020, at the start of her *Movement as Medicine* online workshop, that took place a month after sequestering restrictions were imposed in some areas of the United States in response to Covid-19.¹⁹ In the memory, Tangen connects her breathing to movement to vitality, as her movement relays information to her mind, disrupting the Cartesian dualism of "I think, therefore I am." As Tria Blu Wakpa has theorized, a more relevant concept of Indigenous epistemologies is, "I dance, therefore we are."²⁰ Since time immemorial, Indigenous people have danced for a multitude of purposes. Dance has served as a healing practice as well as a mode of self-determination for peoples and their nations.²¹ Tangen's work centers Indigenous practices that challenge anthropocentrism, which seeks to hierarchize human life as more valuable than more-than-human wellbeing,²² and throughout her online workshop, Tangen emphasizes the reciprocities of our existence with more-than-humans, including air, land, water, the cosmos, and nonhuman animals. Tangen says, "When you breathe in, you are taking in oxygen that is made for us by the plant world, and when you give back that is clear carbon dioxide for our plants. It is a cycle of reciprocity."²³ The shelter-at-home restrictions during Covid-19 encourage us to reflect on how Tangen's embodied practices offer a form of "homecoming" for Indigenous peoples, which we define as a challenge to settler colonial policies and institutions that have often attempted to estrange peoples from their tribal teachings and epistemologies.²⁴ Our framework of "homecoming" simultaneously recognizes Indigenous peoples' vast diversity, and conversely, their commonalities in regard to interconnected "worldviews" and experiences of colonization and settler colonialism. Because the term "worldview" emphasizes ocular senses, we elect to replace it with "worldsense" which includes auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic engagements that are ways of knowing often overlooked in settler colonial constructions and discourses.

This paper focuses on how "homecoming" becomes visible through a multifaceted approach to dancing that includes linking movement to healing, to digital survivance, to time as cyclical instead of chronological, and to connections between human and more-than-humans as well as among mind, body, and spirit. We incorporate a capacious definition of screendance that includes three facets: 1. Tangen's workshops, defining

them more as process and practice than as product or performance; 2. Tangen's digital performances; and 3. circulations of social justice organizing and activism on social media and in physical spaces. Ultimately, we link homecoming to the Land Back movement because of the connections among Indigenous bodies, sovereignty, and survival.²⁵ Patrick Wolfe writes, "Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life."²⁶ Settler colonialism has unjustly dispossessed many Native peoples of their original homelands, creating a number of challenges to their wellbeing, lifeways, embodied practices, sovereignties, and survivance.

As co-authors of this article, we are dance scholars with a shared investment in interrogating and challenging systemic exclusions and settler colonialism, and come to Tangen's teaching with disparate experiences and training. Kate Mattingly is a white, ballet-trained dancer who has studied and taught canonical and non-canonical histories of dance for two decades. Her research focuses on circulations of dance criticism and the ways digital platforms such as Facebook support multiple voices and perspectives, particularly those of marginalized and disenfranchised communities.²⁷ Of Filipina, European, and tribally-unenrolled Native ancestries, Tria Blu Wakpa researches Native dance and movement practices, and trained and performed with Tangen and DANCING EARTH in 2014. In 2016, she published an analysis of the company's process and choreography called "Culture Creators and Interconnected Individualism." Because all research is subjective, we share our identities, so that readers have a sense of our relationship to Tangen's work. In this essay, we also include the identities of Indigenous scholars when they are explicitly stated.

As participants in Tangen's workshop, we are linking conscious movement with the intention of contributing to human and more-than-human connections: we are "coming home" through (re)connection. It is vital not to conflate Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences of homecoming through dance, because again, the aim of settler colonialism is for "settlers to make a place their home... [by] destroy[ing] and disappear[ing] the Indigenous peoples that live there."²⁸ At the same time, Native experts have articulated that Indigenous peoples in Europe have also experienced colonization—which has disconnected them from their bodies and more-than-human relatives—and alleviating the enduring climate crisis will likely entail non-Native allyship with Indigenous peoples.²⁹ Attending to the differences in our experiences of Tangen's workshop, as well as to our common goal of centering Indigenous epistemologies, we highlight how dancing offers collective and individual paths to connection, reclamation, and transformation, which we define as "homecoming." As Dance scholar Sammy Roth offers, "perhaps homecoming for non-Native people may allow them to connect to their own Indigenous ancestral lineages so that they could work toward becoming more of a guest than a settler on Native land (from Tuck and Yang's distinction), while it acts differently for Indigenous peoples by enacting sovereignty and survivance."³⁰

While some may refer to the Covid-19 pandemic as “unprecedented” or necessitating “new” approaches, our article, in both contents and structure, foregrounds Indigenous temporalities that resist linear or settler colonial constructs of time, and highlights Indigenous epistemologies that insist on human and more-than-human interdependencies.³¹ While chronological order presupposes a “progression” of time, Indigenous worldsenses tend to emphasize concepts of time that are cyclical, spiraling, and overlapping.³² If Covid-19 shifted dance practices to online formats that seemed new, of-the-moment, and/or “now,” our article focuses on movement practices that synthesize past, present, and future in ways that can challenge such settler colonial logics. A linear or chronological approach to time—made visible in words like “new” or “now”—may contribute to settler colonialism by dividing past from present from future. In this article, we challenge settler tactics by analyzing online workshops taught by Tangen during the summer of 2020 as activating cyclical approaches to time, as emphasizing holistic epistemologies, and as providing modes of resistance to settler colonialism, which have attempted to hinder many peoples’ ability to come home.³³ Tangen is not alone in centering these healing practices during this global pandemic, and we begin by showing how circulations of dancing, both on- and off-screens, challenge concepts of the “divided body”³⁴ and illuminate facets of dancing as healing and homecoming.

Dancing as Healing

Whereas settler colonial constructs rely on binaries and hierarchies³⁵—such as anthropocentrism and Cartesian dualism³⁶—which may result in divisions, antagonisms, and global pandemics, *Movement as Medicine* workshops offer holistic ways of activating ecological epistemologies and recalling peoples’ responses to previous catastrophes. Tangen says, “[W]e’re very lucky to be breathing right now. So many people are struggling for breath. One of the sayings that I’ve heard a lot of is, ‘We dance for those who cannot.’”³⁷ In this way, Tangen clarifies how movement has a healing potential beyond the individual dancer. Another activation of movement as medicine is the Ghost Dance, which scholar Gregory Smoak describes as “a prophetic expression of an American Indian identity that countered United States’ attempts to assert a particular national identity and to impose that vision on American Indians.”³⁸ Similar to Tangen’s online workshops, the Ghost Dance incorporated movement as medicine, promoted a pan-Indigenous worldsense, and resisted settler colonialism and attempts by Euro-Americans to annihilate Indigenous peoples. In her study of the Ghost Dance, Alice Beck Keho traces its roots among the Walker River Paiutes to the typhoid epidemic of 1867, which, along with other diseases, killed one-tenth of this Nation.³⁹ Although the Ghost Dance departs from Tangen’s *Movement as Medicine* workshops, ethnomusicologist and Jingle Dress dancer Tara Browner (Choctaw) clarifies that “[i]n the [Anishnaabeg] worldview, religion and spirituality are not separate from the business of daily life, and activities cannot necessarily be conceptualized within the

Western binary categories of sacred and secular."⁴⁰ Thus, the sacred/secular dichotomy is yet another division that Indigenous movement practices counter.

An additional example of movement as medicine, and response to an earlier disease, is the Jingle Dress dance, which historian Brenda Child (Red Lake Nation), traces to the Ojibwe Nation during the 1918 influenza pandemic.⁴¹ In regard to the Jingle Dress dance, Browner illuminates how music, like dance, is medicine, and inextricably connected to healing. Browner writes:

[O]ne of the most profound elements of the Jingle Dress dancing is its spiritual power, which originates as an energy generated from the sound of the cones that sing out to the spirits when dancers lift their feet in time with the drum. The very act of dancing in this dress constitutes a prayer for healing.⁴²

The dance's sounds, or the music's meter,⁴³ infiltrates our eardrums, brains, and nervous systems: listening, like dancing, is an embodied and interactive process that changes our patterns and perspectives. In musicology, this concept is called "entrainment," which describes how meter is internalized by dancers and listeners and becomes "a kind of motor behavior."⁴⁴

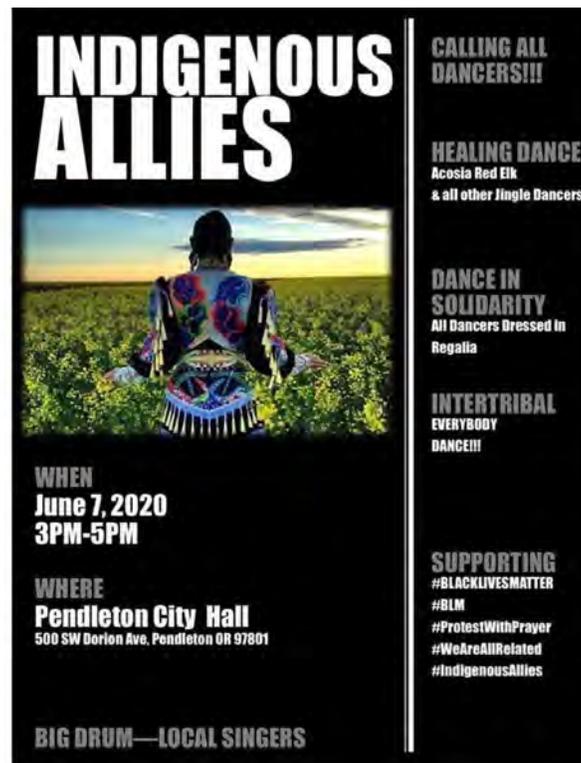
Origin stories about the Jingle Dress dance vary, yet many of them underscore interconnections among humans and more-than-humans, and the healing possibilities of relationships between sound and movement. Norma Rendon (Pine Ridge) describes the cones on the dress "'sound[ing] like the leaves on [our] sister the tree."⁴⁵ Acofia Red Elk (Umatilla), a champion Jingle Dress dancer, shares a less well-known origin story, gifted to her by elders of the Red Lake Nation: the dance was "a gift from the Northern Lights," given by the Northern Light Spirit Beings to a man who was in a coma.⁴⁶ Red Elk explains:

I don't know how long he was in his coma, but they kept him there [in the Northern Lights] for quite a while and taught him a lot of things. And they shared a lot of teachings about the future with him and a lot of information about what was going to happen in the future, and that the people were going to need a message of healing. And that there would be time of separation and that people would begin to separate from one another, and that Nations would be separating from one another, and that people would become separate from their own spirit and from the land. And that we would have poor leadership and a lack of communication. And there would be illness and there would be fear, and that the people needed a message of healing. And so they sent him home with this message and the message was actually a sound. It was the vibration and the frequency and the sound that the Northern Lights can make themselves. And it's a healing vibration, it's a healing sound. That's the sound that a whole bunch of jingle dresses make

together, and it's the sound of electricity. [...] They gave him that sound and he came home with it.⁴⁷

Red Elk's descriptions of separation, especially the separation of people "from their own spirit and from the land"⁴⁸ articulates the divided body and the divided body politic⁴⁹ for which "movement as medicine" can provide an antidote. In Red Elk's narrative the man literally "[comes] home" with the knowledge to heal peoples and their Nations, which takes the form of dancing.⁵⁰ Red Elk herself organized a "prayerful gathering" featuring Jingle Dress dancing at the Pendleton City Hall on Umatilla land in what is often referred to as Oregon, where she resides, following the horrific murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵¹ Red Elk emphasized in a Facebook post that the event was "NOT a protest," and that social movements can also be a form of medicine, aimed at building human solidarity to alleviate structural inequities.⁵² Scholar Cutcha Risling Baldy (Hoopa Valley Tribe) similarly explains how ceremonial dancing, specifically the Hupa Flower Dance, challenges settler colonial narratives by contributing to Indigenous knowledge and solidarity.⁵³ Baldy connects embodied practices to methods of "(re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing" that elucidate how and why ceremonial forms generate solidarity-building. For Baldy, "(re)riteing" counters settler colonial, patriarchal constructions by "foreground[ing] how Native women are central to Native cultures and to decolonizing Native futures."⁵⁴ The examples of "movement as medicine" that we analyze feature women prominently: Tangen's April 2020 workshop, hosted by the Native Wellness Institute, was co-taught with company artist Natalie Benally (Diné).

Tangen views dance as medicine and connected to solidarity-building and social transformation, which can be circulated and strengthened through online networks. In Tangen's words, the "idea of community engagement, that idea of social change through the arts, that idea of environmental, ecological dancing—that's embedded in what we're doing, what we're offering the world. I hope we can bring that sense of wonder, that connection, through this portal of online communication."⁵⁵ In Tangen's and Red Elk's understandings, Indigenous dance counters settler colonial antagonisms by facilitating respectful human-to-human and human-to-more-than-human connections. Indigenous dance can also provide insights into social transformation and illuminate Indigenous people as powerful visionaries and leaders in the contemporary scenario. In *High Country News*, Tovah Strong writes, "Dancing Earth engages in Indigenous futurism—art that incorporates Indigenous perspectives of what the future could look like—by embodying interconnected communities and social change in the company's story-like performances. In turn, the performances often function as both dance productions and contemporary rituals for audience and dancers alike."⁵⁶ Strong's description of Dancing Earth's "rituals" challenges the sacred/secular binary, and recognizes how observers benefit from Dancing Earth performances and interconnection. Likewise, Tangen's online workshops encourage linkages by asking participants to join in movement practices that activate healing and transformation.



Announcement for the Prayerful Gathering organized by Acosia Red Elk. Courtesy of Acosia Red Elk.

Pat Northrup, Umpaowastowin, (Dakota), is another example of an Indigenous leader activating the online realm as a platform for connection and reclamation. Northrup arranged a virtual Jingle Dress dance, which was posted on Facebook with the hashtag #jinglehealing: “Wear your jingle dress at home and be connected. Remember the reason we were given this dance.”⁵⁷ Native American women from Pennsylvania to Nebraska to Ontario to Northrup’s apartment in northern Minnesota joined the dancing.⁵⁸ Northrup explained, “This isn’t just an Anishinaabe prayer. This is an ‘all-people’ prayer... The virus isn’t going to have prejudice... So that’s what the prayers are for.”⁵⁹ In the online realm, these danced prayers of connection, reclamation, and transformation circulate and aim to heal, offering movement as medicine to humans and more-than-human relatives, who have long sustained our survival.

Screeendance as Survivance

Native Americans’ deployment of digital platforms and online circulations that activate awareness and challenge settler colonialism has far-reaching implications, historically and currently. Drawing on the work of Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor who coined the term “survivance” to indicate a combination of Native survival and resistance, we theorize Indigenous screeendance as a form of survivance.⁶⁰ Scholar Karyn

Recollet (Cree) writes about Indigenous dance on screen as a “form of radical imagination tantamount to social change” that “remixes dance, movement and gestures that ‘jump scale’ out of colonial cartographies.”⁶¹ Recollet articulates the transformative possibilities of Native movement forms, and the importance of digital transmission as a counter-narrative to settler colonial depictions and misrepresentations that have existed for more than a century. Instead of the screen being leveraged as a space for white settlers to capture or ossify Indigenous practices, Tangen follows a long tradition of resistance that began at least as early as 1894 with Thomas Edison’s first films to depict Native peoples.⁶² Tangen uses the digital sphere to heighten connections between Nations and communities. She acknowledges the violence of film histories:

Motion pictures were invented in order to document, capture the “vanishing breed.” So the very first films ever made were Native Americans... it was not too long after the Reservation Era, the expectation was that... the blood quantum would be basically lessening... There would be no Natives in about a couple more generations... So that’s where the film industry started and really depicting or sort of consuming versus now we can see incredible Native producers, Native filmmakers, Native script writers. ... The equipment’s gotten cheaper and people are telling stories their own way.⁶³

DANCING EARTH’s online workshops are free and open to the public, and part of the reclamation and circulation of Indigenous identities and knowledge.

Accessible representation of Indigenous epistemology can be essential to health and wellbeing, and, in the Covid-19 context, this often necessitates online availability. Cornel Pewewardy (Comanche-Kiowa) writes that media representations of Indigenous peoples “must be addressed in order to bring equality of identity and representation for all communities. Indigenous children must truly know their tribal histories before United States history. You will never know the history of America until you know and come to grips with its history of cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples.”⁶⁴ In a similar way, Tangen describes the “goal” of her dance-making as “world making, world change, transformation,” and this tethering of “world change” to the digital sphere reinforces her idea of the digital as a realm of Indigenous reclamation and liberation. Although some Native organizations hosted online events and workshops prior to the time of Covid-19, many have adapted to or increased their presence on digital platforms during the pandemic. For example, the Native Wellness Institute, which hosted DANCING EARTH’s *Movement as Medicine* workshop led by Tangen and Natalie Benally (Diné), began regularly posting videos of their “Power Hour” in late March 2020. Studies have shown that for Native people, engaging with Indigenous people and practices can be integral to promoting Native wellness.⁶⁵ The Native Wellness Institute’s mission is to: “promote the well-being of Native people through programs and trainings that embrace the teachings and traditions of our ancestors.”⁶⁶

The digital sphere also offers visibility to activists and artists who use online circulations to amplify social justice organizing, such as Land Back and the No Dakota Access Pipeline movements, and to share Indigenous priorities. Scholar Cutcha Risling Baldy recognizes the vital role social media plays in Native activism, noting that over a million Facebook users “checked in” at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation to try to prevent protesters at the reservation from being tracked. Baldy disagrees with the concept of “slacktivists,” a combination of “slacker” and “activist,” and states:

I don't think that there is any harm in Twitter or Facebook or social justice media. I actually think it helps to build a narrative that we, as people, do have stories that we care about that aren't just the stories that are on the media, or maybe aren't the stories that the media are covering. You have to be willing to fight from the land, but you also have to be willing to fight from wherever you can. I'm not trying to pretend that everyone can pick up and pack their bags and go someplace, but everybody can tweet, so why aren't you?⁶⁷

Although this quote was shared at Tufts University in November of 2017, its relevance is more apparent during Covid-19, when people must “fight from wherever they can.” However, Baldy's words are misleading in that many contemporary Native people—such as those living on reservations and those who are imprisoned—do not have access to the internet.⁶⁸ As Emily Siess compellingly argues, this “digital divide” can exacerbate social inequities—for instance, by limiting opportunities for employment, applying for state services,⁶⁹ and accessing cultural programming that may be essential to Native peoples' wellbeing.

Social media platforms, historically and currently, play a crucial role in facilitating a web of connections, which generate the ability to connect a wide range of like-minded individuals, creating opportunities and transformation.⁷⁰ For example, in September 2012, activist-scholar Jessica Metcalfe (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) posted about the “racist powwow” party that Paul Frank Industries LLC held.⁷¹ In response, the company's president instituted a series of “incredible, amazing, mind-boggling action steps” to rectify their missteps, including collaborating with Native people in various capacities and “donat[ing the proceeds] to a Native cause.”⁷² In another instance of digital activism contributing to social change, in the spring of 2016, Native activists known as the Standing Rock Youth led the #NoDAPL movement, which included this Twitter hashtag and a social media campaign, to protest the construction of an underground oil pipeline from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota to the Patoka Terminal in Illinois, and to support the Standing Rock Reservation. Shortly after its creation, millions of tweets used the hashtags #NoDAPL or #StandWithStandingRock. In addition, Facebook Live brought visibility to activities that were happening at the protest site at Standing Rock. In July of 2020, US District Judge James Boasberg issued a shutdown order, stating that the Dakota Access Pipeline must be emptied while the Army Corps of Engineers produces an environmental review.⁷³

In their article “Digital Survivance: Mediatization and the Sacred in the Tribal Digital Activism of the #NoDAPL Movement,” authors Lynn Schofield Clark and Angel M. Hinzo (Ho-Chunk, enrolled Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska) extend Vizenor’s theory of survivance to include practices of Indigenous peoples and their allies that advance Indigenous epistemologies and storytelling traditions through social media, which includes Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.⁷⁴ There are manifold examples of digital survivance: from socio-political movements like #MMIW for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, to music videos created by Native artists that center pan-Indigenous understandings, like “One World (We are One),” by IllumiNative and Mag 7.⁷⁵ The Land Back movement, which has arguably existed since the origins of Indigenous dispossession, brings together Native and non-Native peoples who support the return of Indigenous land to its rightful Indigenous owners. This movement has gained amplified visibility through online platforms: as of April 2021, an internet search of “Land Back Movement” yields 767,000,000 results, including the “Land Reparations and Indigenous Solidarity Toolkit.”⁷⁶ The LandBack Manifesto is available on [LandBack.org](https://landback.org), a website hosted by the NDN Collective, an Indigenous-led, South Dakota-based organization that is “dedicated to building Indigenous power.”⁷⁷

Similar movements exist on other continents: #SOSBlakAustralia serves to support all Aboriginal communities in Australia to remain in their homelands and country and to enable them to determine their own futures.⁷⁸ In October of 2019, Native and non-Native scholars from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada convened for a conference called “Indigenous Peoples Rise Up: An International Symposium on the Global Ascendancy of Social Media Activism.”⁷⁹ Digital survivance signals the importance of circulating information that fosters pan-Indigenous connection and challenges settler colonialism: Clark and Hinzo write, “[S]paces within social media have become sites for resistance as Indigenous persons use social media to gain visibility, mobilize support, and claim sovereignty, understood as the right to claim authority and autonomy in their (or our) own lands.”⁸⁰ According to this definition, *DANCING EARTH’S Movement as Medicine* workshops offer a mode of digital survivance.

However, there are disagreements in what constitutes Indigenous survivance, especially in the digital realm, and there are intense debates about call-out and/or cancel culture as survivance. Indeed, call-outs can provide groups marginalized by settler colonialism with a mode of political power for pushing back against harm. Such actions can lead to positive social change—as in the example of Paul Frank Industries LLC—yet, others consider it “toxic” and harmful. As Asam Ahmad argues, “Call-out culture can end up mirroring what the prison industrial complex teaches us about crime and punishment: to banish and dispose of individuals rather than to engage with them as people with complicated stories and histories.”⁸¹ Because settler colonial discourses by their very design eclipse Native peoples, issues, and sovereignties, many people are unfamiliar with issues of Indigenous identity. The primary criterion for being a Native person is citizenship in a Native nation and/or connection to an Indigenous community.

However, there are a multitude of other intricacies surrounding Native identity that extend beyond the scope of this paper. In some cases, to address/redress the pervasive structural injustices that have detrimentally impacted Native peoples, institutions have specifically designated resources and awards for Native and/or Indigenous people; this is a familiar practice in the arts and academia. In contrast, “calling-in” is an alternative, and means “speaking privately with an individual who has done wrong, in order to address the behavior without making a spectacle of the address itself.”⁸² Ahmad emphasizes the “performance” of “call-out” culture, aligning with Sara Ahmed’s theorization of the “non-performativity” of anti-racist work,⁸³ and we position these digital interactions as another form of screendance, albeit an at times divisive one. When people with controversial Native and/or Indigenous identities or ancestries are perceived to benefit from their claims, they may be “called-out” or “canceled” via the digital realm. Native people in and beyond the arts and academia have used the circulation or dancing of messages through screens as a “screendance of call-out culture” to contest, and conversely, confirm Tangen’s claims to Indigenous affiliation. Rather than engage in these debates regarding Tangen’s identity, we analyze her workshops for what they do. We center Tangen’s approach to screendance, which promotes Indigenous epistemologies that challenge settler colonialism by suturing the divides that colonization has caused.

Dancing as Homecoming

Tangen is well-aware of the complexities of Indigenous homecoming during a global pandemic, and centered these concerns in an April 18, 2020 online workshop called *Movement as Medicine*, which she co-taught with Natalie Benally through Facebook Live.⁸⁴ The workshop occurred approximately a month after restrictions due to Covid-19 were put in place in the US. The Native Wellness Institute hosted the free workshop on Facebook Live at noon Pacific Standard Time as a part of their “Power Hour” series. Different Native wellness experts led each session, and the workshop Tangen hosted with Benally received 7,700 views, as of January 2021.⁸⁵ Throughout the workshop, participants added comments of support and affirmation. Tangen titled this class *Movement as Medicine*, signaling holistic teachings that connect breath with physical and mental movement, as well as with physical, mental, and emotional equilibrium. She began the class with an affirmation: “People might also be feeling triggers of different ancestral trauma. We are reminding ourselves that we are survivors. We have been through epidemics, pandemics. We have been through all kinds of things, that are similar to this, and here we all are...”⁸⁶ Tangen continued the *Movement as Medicine* classes on Sundays in May of 2020, offered on a pay-what-you-can sliding scale, and hosted through Zoom.⁸⁷

During the April 18 workshop, Tangen incorporated the teachings and directions of a Medicine Wheel, an important part of the Lakota epistemologies of her *hunka* (adopted) grandmother, and chosen for this workshop because of the resonance between these

values and the mission of the host organization, Native Wellness Institute. Daystar/Rosalie Jones, an acclaimed Indigenous artist who created her own dance-drama company in 1980, has spoken about the significance of the Medicine Wheel as a representation of Indigenous philosophies: the circular form reflects the circles found in the shape of the earth and the sun.⁸⁸ In her solo *Dancing the Four Directions*, Jones bases her choreographic design and intention on the shapes and regions of a Medicine Wheel. Indigenous nations bring different interpretations of the Medicine Wheel to their teachings, and many represent each of the Four Directions—east, south, west, and north—by a distinctive color, such as black, red, yellow, and white, which for some stands for the human races and/or types of more-than-human animals.⁸⁹ The Four Directions can also represent stages of life, seasons of the year, ceremonial plants, and more-than-human others.⁹⁰ As she teaches her workshop, Tangen says, “These may look like dance movements, but they are movements that come from us and our Medicine Wheel, so in each direction I am going to ask you to think about four principles. Within the Native Wellness Institute these are Body, Mind, Heart, and Spirit, so you may want to dedicate each of the four directions to one of these, Body, Mind, Heart, and Spirit. You may have other principles that are part of how you see the world.”⁹¹ While Cartesian dualist constructions hierarchize the mind over the body, Tangen’s Medicine Wheel generates equivalences; like the Native Wellness Institute’s principles, Tangen does not promote a ranking system, and instead suggests the interdependence of body, mind, heart, and spirit.⁹²



Tangen, on the left, indicates the directions of the Medicine Wheel as Benally, on the right, names the Four Mountains. Screenshot of *Movement as Medicine* Workshop. Platform: Facebook Live. April 18, 2020.

Tangen begins the workshop by acknowledging patterns that accrue in our bodies during isolation, such as “rounded postures” that come from hours of sitting and working on computers, and a slouched spine which can be exacerbated by feelings of fear; Tangen suggests that this class can “undo these patterns.” She and Benally start

the workshop by standing and breathing, adding arm movements that lift as they inhale and lower as they exhale; then they add a bend of their knees on each inhale and exhale, creating fluid and seamless, cyclical actions. Throughout the workshop options are offered for people who are standing or seated, making the workshop accessible for a spectrum of participants. The movements tend to be functional, such as twisting the torso to “detoxify” the organs, and reaching towards the sun to stretch out the right and left sides of our bodies. Tangen often emphasizes the tethering of our bodies to natural environments: when she reaches upward she says, “To skyworld,” and when she moves towards the ground, she says “To the roots.” Participants are encouraged to move at the pace that feels best for their bodies, and consideration is given to the confines of our interiors: there are no large traveling movements and Benally and Tangen tend to stay in the same place when they change the directions they are facing.

During the workshop, Tangen and Benally, who has been a member of *DANCING EARTH* since 2014, collaborate. Tangen asks Benally: “I think you relate the four directions to the four mountains?” Benally responds to Tangen, “I do.”⁹³ Tangen continues to do the movements that indicate four directions around her, swinging her arms forward and then behind her, stretching to the left and then the right, which can be interpreted as indicating the directions: north, south, west and east. Benally says:

My homelands lie between the four sacred mountains of our people. The south mountain, which I live closest to, is called Tsoodził, also known as Mount Taylor. Then we have our west mountain near Flagstaff and San Francisco Peaks, what we call Dook’o’oosłíid. The north mountain is near Durango and known as Hesperus Peak, and in Diné it is Dibe-Ntsaa, which my mother told me translates to Big Ram. Our east mountain is Sisnaajini or Mount Blanca in Colorado. Within these four mountains lie the lands of the people, Diné Bikeyah: ‘Diné’ means “People.” I invite you to bring in your ancestral homelands as you do this with us.⁹⁴

By linking her movements to tribal lands and using her Native language, Benally clarifies how contemporary Native peoples and practices remain connected to their homelands—even when physically removed from them. Given histories of Native relocation and the ongoing settler occupation of Indigenous lands, Indigenous peoples have likely long employed similar tactics of resistance and (re)connection.

Through a split-screen, Tangen and Benally teach in their homes, which suggests a link between their presences and their participants, who may be similarly sheltered in place in residences.⁹⁵ In spite of hundreds if not thousands of miles between the teachers and some of the attendees, there is a commonality in this shared experience of tuning into the event on Facebook Live and making space to dance while we are isolated. Seeing their movement within the confines of their domestic interiors, decorated with textiles and the warm glow of a kitchen area, also enhances a sense of home as a place where we are nourished and comforted, a place of protection and support. Their class

reinforces a definition of dancing as “coming home,” or in Tangen’s words, dancing with the intention of “keeping our communities healthy, caring for each other, and connecting to our more-than-human relatives.”⁹⁶ By inviting participants to move their bodies while imagining their ancestral homelands, Benally provides tools that allow Native people to navigate these complexities during the current pandemic and beyond. For many people who are following restrictions and limiting outdoor activities, quarantining has led to more sedentary lifestyles and increases in experiences of isolation and depression. While the World Health Organization has recommended creating daily routines that involve regular exercise, they also suggest limiting screen time.⁹⁷ As free workshops that are available to people with an Internet connection, Tangen’s teaching uses the screen as a form of digital survivance, and her class can increase participants’ feelings of connection, wellbeing, and mental health. When, as participants, we see her navigating the tight space of a domestic interior, we may feel less alone in our confinement. Our physical activity during the workshop releases endorphins and neurotrophic factors, as well as improves heartrate and aerobic capacity, such that we are changing our emotional outlook without leaving our homes, thereby creating a sense of possibility, self-reliance, and self-determination.⁹⁸



Tangen and Benally create a Three Sisters Garden during the *Movement as Medicine* Workshop, embodying the growth of squash, beans, and corn, and using movements evolved from hand gestures of botanical growth patterns shared by ‘milpa farmer’ Mykel Diaz. Platform: Facebook Live. April 18, 2020.

In a settler colonial world, the term “homecoming”⁹⁹ is fraught and complicated. Settler homecoming occurs through the imposition of Eurocentric laws and logics, which attempt to fracture and undermine Indigenous peoples’ relationships to home, including their inherent sovereignty. Whereas settler colonial constructions aim to create a “divided body,”¹⁰⁰ Tangen’s classes are a method, or “medicine,” for suturing

the fracturing of colonial destruction and violence. Online workshops that promote movement as medicine nurture homecoming as a holistic approach to being and knowing, and work against 500 years of colonial oppression that have sought to eradicate Indigenous peoples and knowledges and reduce Indigenous cultures to Hollywood caricatures. Pewewardy writes, "This distorted and manufactured reality is one of the most powerful shackles subjugating Indigenous People today... [W]e can see that boundaries and colonial structures created by the European invaders are, first, transient and, second, barriers to our self-determination."¹⁰¹ As Pewewardy describes, stereotypes of Indigenous people create material confines that detrimentally impact Indigenous sovereignties.

While settler colonialism attempts to separate cultures from lands in order to justify Indigenous dispossession, Tangen emphasizes how our identities and aesthetics are inextricably linked to specific places and histories. Similarly, scholar Megan Red Shirt-Shaw writes, "As a Lakota person, I feel my own strength when I am 'home' in the lands that were my ancestors, and no one can take that feeling away from me."¹⁰² Red Shirt-Shaw's words powerfully express a phenomenological relationship between Indigenous peoples and the lands they are indigenous to. Settler colonialism has sought to divide Native peoples from their identities, homes, and land; as Tangen, as well as scholars like Tuck and Yang emphasize, the return of land to Native communities is inseparable from decolonization.¹⁰³

Tangen's imagery throughout her workshops emphasizes Indigenous ways of knowing that arise from the land and more-than-human relatives. As Daniel R. Wildcat writes, "If we indigenize or re-indigenize self-determination, then it will entail a re-ordering of values and signal an effort to live in a manner respectful of the power, places, and persons surrounding us."¹⁰⁴ This insistence on Indigenous epistemologies disrupts the multitude of ways that settler colonialism has sought to divide people from their home/lands. Jodi Melamed writes, "By upholding an epistemological formation that separates culture and lands (turning culture into aesthetics and land into private property), multiculturalism has undermined Indigenous land claims based on culture and enabled Indigenous dispossession."¹⁰⁵ Through a tribally-specific approach to movement that makes a direct connection between Benally's body and Diné land, Tangen's workshops directly counter multicultural discourses and illuminate imagination—in this case, coupled with action—as a tactic of resistance, reconnection, and homecoming.

Histories of governmental policies such as Termination Acts sought to "take that feeling" of belonging away from Native peoples. Author of the termination policies, Senator Arthur V. Watkins, was elected chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs in 1947. Watkins brought his Mormon (Latter Day Saint) faith into the policies he promoted to eradicate Native practices to "help the Indians stand on their own two feet and become a white and delightful people as the Book of Mormon prophesied they would become."¹⁰⁶ Watkins words—"on their own two feet"—emphasizes

individualism, a Eurocentric, anthropocentric, and ableist fallacy. He also implies that Native peoples are not self-sufficient; meanwhile, the US government created conditions which caused Native peoples to depend on the settler state.¹⁰⁷ Alongside boarding schools that sought to eradicate Indigenous cultures and knowledge, and the reservation system that sought to destroy connections among Native peoples, land, and more-than-humans, these governmental policies decimated communities and wellness by treating Indigenous epistemologies as “problems” that needed fixing.¹⁰⁸ Beginning in the late 19th century until the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act, US policies largely prohibited Native spiritualities, including Indigenous dance.¹⁰⁹ These policies sought to destroy Native peoples’ sovereignty by socializing them into settler society and undermining their unique political status as citizens of Native nations, thereby attempting to secure settler access to Native lands and resources. Colonizers recognized that Indigenous dance—which is underpinned by and enacts Native epistemologies, including relationships with more-than-humans—interfered with Indigenous assimilation.¹¹⁰ To this day, settler colonial narratives seek to deny and dismiss the ongoing physical and cultural genocide Native peoples endure as a result of systemic injustices, conditions that Covid-19 made glaringly visible.

Tangen’s inclusive approach to her workshops, which are accessible to Native and non-Native people, and simultaneously center a tribally-specific and pan-Indigenous approach to dance-making, operate as a form of homecoming. The workshops provide an entryway for Indigenous people who are physically and culturally disconnected to learn more about Indigenous worldsenses and bring Native people from diverse Native nations together to celebrate their commonalities.¹¹¹ Tangen’s Filipino ancestry makes her keenly aware of the importance of solidarity, since Filipino people, like Native Americans, have endured US colonization and assimilative policies and institutions, and a Filipino performer regularly appeared alongside Native actors in a Wild West show.¹¹² For Mattingly, as a non-Native, Tangen’s workshop accentuated Indigenous knowledges and ingenuity that have been used to combat white supremacy and settler colonialism. For Blu Wakpa, as a woman of color with Native ancestry, the workshop offered a positive atmosphere to move consciously and pleasurably in forms rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, and to learn more about Diné teachings and geographies. For both of us, the workshop reinforced the importance of homecoming as a place of connection across borders and differences: that every person deserves a safe place to call “home.”

There is also a critique of pan-Indigeneity, which some scholars view as contributing to “cultural appropriation,” “marginalizing” Native people, and reinforcing typecasts of them by creating a monolithic notion of Native American identity or culture.¹¹³ Tangen counters this view by collaborating with dancers who are Indigenous to the partition of Turtle Island referred to as the US and beyond, in order to highlight both pan-Indigenous and tribally-specific elements.¹¹⁴ Tangen is part of a long lineage of artists and activists who incorporate pan-Indigenous approaches as resistance to settler

colonialism: historians have attributed the emergence of pan-Indigenous identity in the US to a variety of different circumstances, including Indian boarding schools and the spread of the Ghost Dance.¹¹⁵ Historian Gregory Smoak states, “The Ghost Dance movement of 1870 was the first recorded pan-Indian religion to emerge in the Great Basin,” and dancing was an appeal to a spiritual power to overturn a world that was “not of their making.”¹¹⁶ The Ghost Dance highlights shared values among nations, and “a shared Indian identity,” which was an important defense against aggressive demands of white settlers and the US government.

Scholar Benjamin R. Kracht highlights powwows as integral in sustaining a “sense of ‘Indianness,’” and argues that Native dances and US prohibitions of these practices have helped to unify Indigenous peoples.¹¹⁷ In other words, Native dance has long been at the heart of the development and endurance of pan-Indianism. Tangen, who has experience as a powwow dancer, describes her online practices as “movement as medicine” and views digital platforms, both for workshops and performances, as solidarity-building as well as “reclaiming a realm of Indigenous liberation.”¹¹⁸



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Natalie Benally. Photo by Pam Taylor. Courtesy of Rulan Tangen.

Dancing as Pan-Indigenous Futurities

Whereas settler colonial discourses frequently represent Native peoples as a monolith and relegate them, their practices, and languages to the past,¹¹⁹ Tangen's *Movement as Medicine* workshops illustrate how they persist, innovate, and foster futurities in the present. During the online workshop, Tangen invites Benally to teach the movements using Diné, tribally-specific language, as in the example of the sacred mountains, and pan-Indigenous concepts, such as the four directions. The Diné language that Benally uses can reinforce the idea that dancing, a practice we create through our bodies, cannot be separated from our lived experiences and identities: our positionality informs our movement intentions and interpretations. Offering the names of the mountains in Diné words is an act of reclamation and restoration. By sharing this information with Tangen and the viewers, Benally demonstrates how dancing provides a decolonial tool to teach about Indigenous presence, understandings, and connections. Teaching Indigenous languages can be a way of ensuring their endurance and the futurity of the Indigenous worldsenses which undergird them.¹²⁰

Another pan-Indigenous concept is made visible again through a tribally-specific approach about halfway through the workshop when Benally translates the movements of a Three Sisters Garden—corn, beans and squash—into Diné.¹²¹ (See the Three Sisters Garden image above.) She notes how the word for beans, Naa'ókí, suggests the sounds of beans boiling in water. "When my family would make beans," she says, "They would boil them. 'Okí' sounds like something full of water. The sound of the word suggests something that is buoyant and floats."¹²² As Tangen's movements imitate the growth of a strong corn stalk wrapping around a bean plant, making physical the connections between our bodies and our food, Benally's words illuminate the process of cooking food. This moment evokes an Indigenous worldsense that shows respect for the personhood of plants, as well as reciprocal relations among humans and more-than-humans.¹²³ Robin Wall Kimmerer writes in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, "Reciprocity is an investment in abundance for both the eater and the eaten... In some Native languages the term for plants translates to 'those who take care of us.'"¹²⁴ By highlighting the Three Sisters Garden and the specificity of Benally's language, Tangen calls attention to commonalities and generative differences among Indigenous traditional and contemporary practices. Dancing becomes a mode of connectivity and collectivity, and a creation of healing environments, which facilitate Indigenous reclamation and innovation.

Blu Wakpa articulates DANCING EARTH's worldsense through her theory of "interconnected individualism."¹²⁵ This concept foregrounds interdependence which "transcends human-to-human interactions and presents an alternative to Western epistemologies,"¹²⁶ and emphasizes the importance of valuing differences rather than suppressing them. By decentering the human as dominant, Indigenous epistemologies expand the concept of "interconnected individualism" to include both connections among humans and more-than-humans in tribally-specific contexts as well as in a pan-

Indigenous worldsenses. For example, the foundational Diné philosophy of *Hózhó*,¹²⁷ activated through movement practices, clarifies the interconnections among human and more-than-humans and the mind, body, and spirit.¹²⁸ These relationships are similarly visible in the Three Sisters Garden which upholds cooperation, interdependence, and connection among humans and more-than-humans. When Tangen and Benally embody the Three Sisters Garden, they highlight human-to-human and human-to-more-than-human relationships as well as more-than-human interconnections with other nonhuman beings.

Interconnected individualism exists in contrast to value systems that prioritize individual gain and human domination over more-than-human animals and nature, which is a worldview associated with the Anthropocene and described succinctly by Donna Haraway as, “Nature is only the raw material of culture, appropriated, preserved, enslaved, exalted, or otherwise made flexible for disposal by culture in the logic of capitalist colonialism.”¹²⁹ As scientists investigated sources of Covid-19, they traced its origins to a pathogen that jumped from more-than-human animals to humans at a meat market or wet market.¹³⁰ Primatologist Jane Goodall has explained how wildlife trafficking and its ubiquity have created disastrous conditions by bringing people and animals in closer contact, creating opportunities for viruses to jump from animals to humans, crossing the species barrier. Goodall notes that this proximity is particularly present in meat markets, the wet markets, and “there are no borders for a virus,” as is being demonstrated so well in this current pandemic.¹³¹ Our relationships with more-than-humans have a direct impact on human survival, an awareness that many Indigenous peoples, such as the Diné, uphold and enact.¹³² Notably, humans are also animals, which anthropocentric constructions can, at times, conceal.

Throughout her online workshops, Tangen creates linkages between our sheltered presence and healing possibilities by activating the use of imagination. During the warm-up portion of her *Movement as Medicine* class, she describes the warm-up as engaging “our arms, our minds, our imagination, and our memory.”¹³³ Tangen views her classes as undoing patterns that accrue in our bodies during times of crisis through imagining sensory experiences with more-than-humans. Given that global colonization has often attempted to separate Indigenous peoples from more-than-humans, and human interference has caused the extinction of entire nonhuman species, (re)connection may require imagination. This emphasis on healing and imagination was reiterated in May of 2020 when Tangen visited students at UCLA through an online class. Again, Tangen drew connections between our minds, bodies, spirit, and emotions.¹³⁴ Tangen encouraged us to “train” our imagination, to “exercise” it like a muscle:

[W]hen you're breathing in, if you can just take a moment to imagine a beautiful sense that you might've experienced, whether that's the desert and the rain or some fresh flowers. Because what we're trying to do is use

our memory to bring back this idea of pleasure and of something enjoyable, because I believe that's where the body tends to learn the most... Reclaiming pleasure and joy as one of the steps of decolonization.¹³⁵

This linking of conscious movement with healing not only challenges Cartesian dualism that separates our minds from our bodies, but also illustrates how more-than-humans contribute to human wellbeing. In Tangen's teaching, her deployment of "imagination" offers another way to "jump scale," to return to Recollet's theorization of Native screendance, and to experience different possibilities, to transcend current conditions, and to build a realm of "liberation." The online workshops are tactics of survival in a settler colonial world, honed over centuries of genocides, violence, and limited access to rights and opportunities. The digital sphere makes the wisdom of artists like Tangen known and available to wider communities.

Given the 2020 quarantine restrictions, Tangen encourages participants to use their imaginations to maintain vital connections with more-than-humans, which can be important to wellbeing during the pandemic and beyond. Arieahn Matamonasa-Bennett notes, "While each remaining Indigenous culture has vastly different social structures and cosmologies, there are strong common themes that form a lens with regard to animal-human relationships."¹³⁶ These relationships include honoring human connections to more-than-humans, connections that are stored in a "collective unconscious."¹³⁷ Tangen foregrounds dancing as a mode of connectivity and collectivity, that simultaneously celebrates a tribally-specific and pan-Indigenous worldsense, and honors both traditional and contemporary practices. To return to Baldy's conception of ceremonial dance as methods of "(re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing," we view Tangen's screendance as similarly "(re)writing, (re)righting, and (re)riteing" Indigenous survivance and futurity.

For Tangen, the digital sphere bypasses geopolitical borders and encompasses a global world as a realm of Indigenous liberation. Speaking about recent circulations of her performance *Between Underground and Skyworld*, which was planned for theater stages and now exists digitally, Tangen says:

We had been doing this whole dance on stage about young Native people escaping the apocalypse and finding ancestor knowledge, and dreaming, and then coming up, waking up to embody the future. So, perhaps the internet is an incredible place to do that, this internet cyber world, because this international Indigenous relationship building, or even beyond indigenous... There's been people in our classes that simultaneously have been in India, Peru, Canada, Albuquerque, San Francisco all at the same time. So, maybe this is the way for messages that we've been asked to carry to reach further.¹³⁸

It is especially important that these messages circulate through digital platforms because dance within this realm opens possibilities for (re)connection and solidarity-

building during a global pandemic that disproportionately impacts Indigenous people.¹³⁹

Asked about the original full name of the company, DANCING EARTH: Indigenous Contemporary Dance Creations, Tangen responds that the choice of words emphasizes the capaciousness of pan-Indigenous practices:

I chose the word Indigenous contemporary dance when people were not always into that word “Indigenous.” In a way, I liked it because of its ambiguity. It’s not something that’s defined by the US government, which is exactly what I was thinking that’s where I want to be. I don’t want to have somebody’s identity defined by the US government... what I’m more interested in is creating a place of belonging. And that belonging transcends borders. Mexico, that’s a recent border. Canada, that’s a recent border. The Pacific, that’s a place with connection.¹⁴⁰

For Tangen, this “place of belonging” is made visible through the disparate identities of the dancers in her company, the connections created through her online workshops, and the welcoming and inclusive atmosphere Tangen cultivates in them. These elements reinforce a worldsense that centers reciprocity and interdependencies shared among humans and more-than-humans.



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Rulan Tangen. Photo by Pam Taylor. Courtesy of Rulan Tangen.

Conclusion

As the digital realm offers Tangen the ability to circulate her performances and workshops on a global scale, frequently centering Native women as leaders, she uses these forms of screendance to emphasize interdependencies of land, histories, people, and cultures. Reconfiguring how we perceive relationships between people and geographies requires shifts in conceptions of time, from linear or chronological towards

cyclical and spiraling forms. By insisting on the interconnectedness of past, present, and future, Tangen is activating a challenge to settler colonialism, which aims to relegate Indigenous peoples and practices to a past or “historic” era. Dance scholar Ananya Chatterjea explains this hegemonic notion of time as linear or chronological: quoting Ranajit Guha, she writes that one strategy of domination used by the settler state is to “forbid any interlocution between us and our past.”¹⁴¹ In other words, linear or chronological models fail to take into consideration the ways that dance practices activate and illuminate past/present/future simultaneously: steps and phrases are passed through generations of bodies, transforming current practitioners and making visible their potentiality. Tangen evokes this sentiment when she describes her dancing and her classes as “a chance to bring out an alternate way.”¹⁴² One reason why embodied practices are so frequently surveilled and policed is because they hold the potential to link traditions and futurities, activating ancestral wisdoms and potential transformations.

Like other peoples who have existed without access to adequate healthcare and living conditions, Indigenous peoples have been impacted by Covid-19 in far more damaging ways than white, affluent communities.¹⁴³ Tangen responds to these conditions by thinking of the most marginalized communities, “What I’m looking at is what the most radical inclusion of folks who have been pushed out to feel not enough for many different reasons, all of which are not their fault.”¹⁴⁴ Tangen continues:

For all people who have been exposed to life threatening disease, so that could be European people going through the plague, that could be the people who encountered smallpox-laden blankets here that were given as germ warfare. So, this triggering of ancestral trauma and the idea being like, okay, now you have to stay in this place, only this place, if you come out of this place, you're in trouble, that's a reservation... There's been a lot of policing of reservations in the not too distant past. So, of course, that would be triggering for people...¹⁴⁵

This concept of time as overlapping and cyclical—the past cannot be separated from our lived present—is essential to Tangen’s activation of imagination.

Non-linear conceptions of time are also essential to dancing as healing and to dismantling settler colonialism, and the Land Back movement makes these connections vividly clear: it is a vision, impulse, action, and dance, made visible in the Ghost Dance, the Jingle Dress dance, and *Movement as Medicine* workshops. Dancing provides Indigenous peoples a way to (re)connect with their bodies and more-than-human others, drawing on the past to imagine the future, connecting ancestral knowledge and futurities, and building human solidarity. It is a form of homecoming that insists on the return of Indigenous lands to Indigenous stewardship. As the movement states, “To truly dismantle white supremacy and systems of oppression, we have to go back to the roots. Which, for us, is putting Indigenous Lands back in Indigenous hands.”¹⁴⁶ This is

the inseparability of lands and people, and Tangen is keenly aware of this tethering of land to worldsenses to embodied practices. As Tangen says:

Once you've taken in the scent of dancing in the rain, seeing those flowers blooming, the dew coming off, and that one time where the rain comes to the desert, the experience of the senses, the smell, the taste, the touch, that is what makes you want to love that desert enough to not want to build a mall there. Otherwise, it's a theory. It's something that's good on paper and you can march on it, but we have to be able to engage the pleasure centers, the senses of the body, and the pure of love. Love brings compassion; compassion moves us to action.¹⁴⁷

Biographies

Kate Mattingly teaches courses in dance histories, dance studies, and dance criticism. She received her doctoral degree from the University of California, Berkeley in Performance Studies with a Designated Emphasis in New Media. Her research interests include disciplinary formations, dance criticism, and systemic exclusions. In 2019 she was awarded a Dee Grant from the University of Utah to host *Dancing Around Race: Whiteness in Higher Education*, co-organized with Gerald Casel, Rebecca Chaleff, Kimani Fowlin, and Tria Blu Wakpa. Her current book project, *Set in Motion: Dance Criticism and the Choreographic Apparatus*, analyzes how and why critics have played an influential role in the shaping of aesthetic hierarchies.

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Tria Blu Wakpa is an Assistant Professor in the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance at UCLA. She is a scholar and practitioner of Indigenous dance, North American Hand Talk, martial arts, and yoga. Her book project, *Settler Colonial and Decolonial Choreographies: Native American Embodiment in Educational and Carceral Contexts*, theorizes Indigenous performances in and beyond institutions of confinement. She has received major fellowships from the Ford Foundation, the Fulbright Program, the UC President's Postdoctoral Program, and the Hellman Fellows Fund. She has taught a wide range of interdisciplinary and community-engaged classes at public, private, tribal, and carceral institutions.

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Notes

¹ Tangen, "Dancing Indigenous Futurities."

² For inequities in healthcare specifically pertaining to Indigenous peoples during Covid-19, see Givens, "The coronavirus is exacerbating vulnerabilities Native communities already face," Morales, "Coronavirus Infections Continue To Rise On Navajo Nation," and Power et al. "COVID-19 and Indigenous peoples."

³ Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," 6.

⁶ Taylor, "What Would Health Security Look Like?"

⁷ Tuck and Yang, 4-5.

⁸ Ibid. 6-7.

⁹ Blu Wakpa, "From *Buffalo Dance* to Tatanka Kcizapi Wakpala, 1894-2020."

¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior: Indian Affairs, "About Us."

¹¹ Tangen; Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

¹² For decades, Tangen believed she had Indigenous, ancestral ties to Turtle Island through her estranged father. In October 2020 via her "Artistic Director's Personal Statement of Identity," which was posted to the Dancing Earth website, Tangen clarified that she "do[es] not claim bloodline, enrolled membership, or citizenship to any North American tribal nations or First Nations." Dancing Earth, "Artistic Director's Personal Statement of Identity."

¹³ Tuck and Yang, 5.

¹⁴ Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*.

¹⁵ Lakota People's Law Project, *Native Lives Matter*.

¹⁶ Tangen.

¹⁷ Shea Murphy, "Dancing in the Here and Now," 537.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

²⁰ Blu Wakpa, "Native American Embodiment."

²¹ Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 19; Shea Murphy, "Dancing in the Here and Now," 536.

²² Tuck and Yang, 6, 19.

²³ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

²⁴ Native experts have discussed movement practices as a way of "coming home" to their Indigenous identities and ways of knowing. Haley Laughter also specifically delineates how settler colonialism impacted the domestic sphere in which she grew up: "I dealt with a lot of historical trauma in my own home—alcoholism, addiction, abuse, domestic violence, all those types of things are what I went through." See Blu Wakpa, "Yoga Brings You Back to Who You Are," 8, 9, 11.

²⁵ Our research expands upon the concept of "dancing sovereignty," coined by Dr. Mique'l Dangeli, and defined as self-determination carried out through the creation of performances that adhere to and expand upon protocol that is foundational to Indigenous nationhood and governance. Dangeli, "Dancing Chiax, Dancing Sovereignty."

²⁶ Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," 387.

²⁷ See for example Mattingly, "Digital Dance Criticism."

²⁸ Tuck and Yang, 6.

²⁹ See for example Iron Eyes, "Carceral Liberation?"; Tuiimyali, "Uncovering the Relationships Between Native Dance and Marital Arts."

³⁰ Roth, comment on paper.

³¹ Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 39-40.

³² *Ibid.* 42.

³³ Tangen; Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

³⁴ Blu Wakpa's concept of the "divided body" references dichotomous and hierarchical, settler colonial constructions—such as Cartesian dualism and gender norms; capitalist logics that render more-than-human relatives as "resources"; blood quantum—which literally uses division to calculate a person's "Indianness"; and the body politic. Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

³⁵ Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Tangen.

³⁸ Smoak, *Ghost Dances and Identity*, 10.

³⁹ Kehoe, *The Ghost Dance*, 33.

⁴⁰ Browner, *Heartbeat of the People*, 35.

⁴¹ Child, "When Art Is Medicine."

⁴² Browner, 92.

⁴³ Meter is the measurement of the number of pulses between more or less regularly recurring accents. Therefore, in order for meter to exist, some of the pulses in a series must be accented—marked for consciousness—relative to others. Merriam-Webster Online. s.v. "meter."

⁴⁴ Music scholar Pieter C. van den Toorn writes, "[L]isteners entrain to meter, which in turn becomes physically a part of us. Entrainment is automatic (reflexive) as well as subconscious (or preconscious). Like walking, running, dancing, and breathing, meter is a kind of motor behavior." See van den Toorn, "The Rite of Spring Briefly Revisited," 172.

⁴⁵ Browner, 55.

⁴⁶ Red Elk, interview with Blu Wakpa, June 18, 2020.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

⁵⁰ Red Elk, interview.

⁵¹ Red Elk, "Calling all dancers to the Pendleton City Hall."

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You*, 34, 144.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 25.

⁵⁵ Strong, "Finding Indigenous futurism through dance."

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Kraker, "'Every step you take is prayer.'"

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*.

⁶¹ Recollet, "Gesturing Indigenous Futurities Through the Remix," 91.

⁶² Carter, Davis-Fisch, and Knowles "Circulations," 98-99; Musser "At the Beginning," 17.

⁶³ Tangen.

⁶⁴ Pewewardy, "To Be or Not to Be Indigenous," 84.

⁶⁵ Hodge and Nandy, "Predictors of Wellness and American Indians"; Fiedelvey-Van Dijk et al., "Honoring Indigenous culture-as-intervention."

⁶⁶ Native Wellness Institute, *Facebook*.

⁶⁷ Blough, "Native American Scholar Talks #StandingRock."

⁶⁸ Donnellan, "No Connection."

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ An individual's social capital is a measure of the degree to which they can bring together, or bridge, a wide range of other actors who are themselves not connected.

⁷¹ Metcalfe, "Paul Frank's Racist Powwow."

⁷² Keene, "Paul Frank Powwow Party Update."

⁷³ Wamsley, "Court Rules Dakota Access Pipeline Must Be Emptied For Now."

⁷⁴ Clark and Hinzo. "Digital Survivance."

⁷⁵ Taboo, "One World (We Are One) - Official Video."

⁷⁶ Resource Generation. "LAND REPARATIONS & INDIGENOUS SOLIDARITY TOOLKIT."

⁷⁷ NDN Collective, "Home Page."

⁷⁸ Noone, "SOS Blak Australia protests."

⁷⁹ Northern Arizona University, "Learn how Indigenous peoples throughout the world use social media for activism at inaugural symposium."

⁸⁰ Clark and Hinzo.

⁸¹ Ahmad, "A Note on Call-Out Culture."

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness."

⁸⁴ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Dancing Earth, "Movement As Medicine."

⁸⁸ Daystar, "THE ANISHINAABE MEDICINE WHEEL."

⁸⁹ Mawhiney and Nabigon, "Aboriginal Theory."

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ World Health Organization, "#HealthyAtHome - Mental health."

⁹⁸ Harvard Health Publishing, "Exercise is an all-natural treatment to fight depression."

⁹⁹ The word "homecoming" has multiple interpretations. In dance contexts, the word "homecoming" may refer to events held at high schools and colleges that welcome students back to campuses; In 2019 Beyoncé released a film called "Homecoming," that has been described by Michelle Obama as "a celebration and a call to action." In March of 2020 a global rewatch of the film, using the pseudonym #HOMEcoming, a playful take on the name given the global pandemic, garnered over 500,000 tweets and trended at #1 worldwide. *Homegoing*, a 2016 book by Yaa Gyasi, won the PEN/Hemingway award. There are also tragic "homecomings" such as the return of the bodies of 16-year-old Oneida girls who attended Carlisle. See Fox, "The bodies of three young Native American girls are returned to the Oneida Reservation."

¹⁰⁰ Blu Wakpa, "Settler Colonial Choreography and the Divided Body."

¹⁰¹ Pewewardy, 83.

¹⁰² Red Shirt-Shaw, "Beyond the Land Acknowledgement."

¹⁰³ The Land Acknowledgement that is growing ubiquitous in university settings is a useless statement without linking words to actions, such as a commitment to free tuition for Native students, financial contributions to social justice organizations, and dedicated action to return land to Native nations. See Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor."

¹⁰⁴ Deloria Jr. and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 140.

¹⁰⁵ Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, xxii.

¹⁰⁶ Watkins's correspondence to the LDS church general authorities written on 13 April 1954. Grattan-Aiello, "Senator Arthur V. Watkins."

¹⁰⁷ Estes, *Our History Is the Future*, 133-134.

¹⁰⁸ Grattan-Aiello, 283.

¹⁰⁹ Shea Murphy, *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing*, 85, 199.

¹¹⁰ Castillo, "Dancing the Pluriverse," 55.

¹¹¹ Blu Wakpa, "Culture Creators," 115.

¹¹² Hunziker, "Playing Indian, Playing Filipino."

¹¹³ Parsons, "Pan-Indigenism and Cultural Appropriation."

¹¹⁴ In his book *Ghost Dances and Identity*, Dr. Smoak describes how Ghost Dances united different nations while allowing each tribe, in Smoak's writing the Shoshones, Utes, and Bannocks, to retain distinct intentions and purposes for their dancing. Smoak writes, "The Ghost Dance movement of 1870 was the first recorded pan-Indian religion to emerge in the Great Basin" (114). Dancing was an appeal to a spiritual power to overturn a world that was not of their making, and a way of strengthening communities while resisting assimilation programs and the imposition of white culture. These were shared values among nations, and "a shared Indian identity" was an important defense against aggressive demands of white settlers and the US government (203). However, Bannocks practiced the dance "more intensively" because of deprivations of reservation life were felt more keenly and in different ways (118). As an embodied practice, meaning the material of dancing is literally our bodies, movement can be generated individually and shared collectively: dancing produces distinct and communal priorities simultaneously. The Ghost Dance, which derives its design from a Paiute round dance, is an ideal example of this, as is Rulan Tangen's *Movement as Medicine* workshop wherein Tangen draws from shared priorities among nations without changing the distinct knowledge and approach of each Indigenous community.

¹¹⁵ Gibson, "The Last Indian War."

¹¹⁶ Smoak, 114.

¹¹⁷ Kracht, "Kiowa Powwows."

¹¹⁸ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

¹¹⁹ Dunbar-Ortiz, and Gilio-Whitaker, "All the Real Indians Died Off," 3.

¹²⁰ Chew et al., "Enacting Hope through Narratives of Indigenous Language and Culture Reclamation," 132.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Robin Wall Kimmerer explains, "[I]n the Potawatomi language, as well as many other Indigenous languages, that's not how the grammar works. It would be impossible in Potawatomi to refer to that same sugar maple or the squirrel sitting in its branches as 'it.' It's not possible. We refer to them with the same grammar that we do our family members because they are regarded as our family members." Roach, "lessons in the plants."

¹²⁴ Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 200, 229.

¹²⁵ Blu Wakpa, "Culture Creators and Interconnected Individualism."

¹²⁶ Ibid. 119.

¹²⁷ Definition of *Hózhó*: *Hózhó* is a complex wellness philosophy and belief system comprised of principles that guide one's thoughts, actions, behaviors, and speech. The teachings of *Hózhó* are imbedded in the *Hózhóójí Nanitiin* (Diné traditional teachings) given to the Diné by the holy female deity *Yoolgaaí Asdzáá* (White Shell Woman) and the Diné holy people (sacred spiritual Navajo deities). *Hózhó* philosophy emphasizes that humans have the ability to be self-empowered through responsible thought, speech, and behavior. Likewise, *Hózhó* acknowledges that humans can self-destruct by thinking, speaking, and behaving irresponsibly. As such, the *Hózhó* philosophy offers key elements of the moral and behavioral conduct necessary for a long healthy life, placing an emphasis on the importance of maintaining relationships by "developing pride of one's body, mind, soul, spirit and honoring all life." Kahn-John and Koithan, "Living in Health Harmony and Beauty," 24.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 27.

¹²⁹ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 592.

¹³⁰ Covid-19 traced to bats and pangolins: Cyranoski, "Mystery deepens over animal source of coronavirus." Scientists assume that the pathogen jumped to people from an animal, as has been seen with other coronaviruses; for example, the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is thought to have jumped to humans from civets in 2002. Dozens of people infected early in the current outbreak worked in a live-animal market in the Chinese city of Wuhan, but tests of coronavirus samples found at the market have yet to identify a source.

¹³¹ NowThis News, "Jane Goodall on Wildlife Trafficking and COVID-19."

¹³² For the Ute Nation, it was the depletion of natural resources by the white Mormon settlers that led to conflict in the 1850s. Duncan, "The Northern Utes of Utah," 187.

¹³³ Dancing Earth, "Movement as Medicine with Dancing Earth."

¹³⁴ Tangen.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Matamonasa-Bennett, "Putting the Horse before Descartes," 32.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Tangen.

¹³⁹ Power et al.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Chatterjea, *Butting Out*, 141.

¹⁴² Tangen.

¹⁴³ Power et al.

¹⁴⁴ Tangen. This quote continues: "It has to do with colonization, people who might be fully native but they were adopted out of their culture, or people who are living in the city so they're not connected to land base, or people who are speaking their language, but there are so many different variants, but people are often carrying this wound like they're not enough."

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ NDN Collective, "Land Back Home Page."

¹⁴⁷ Tangen.

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