Revisiting Stories and Voices of the Rogue River War (1853–1856): A Digital Constellatory Autoethnographic Mode of Indigenous Archaeology

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Abstract

The Rogue River War (RRW) between Indigenous peoples and settlers is historically overlooked and storied through settler-colonial lenses. This essay narrates participation in a digital restorying and archaeological investigation into the war in light of digital advancements in archaeology and communication. The author coins a reflexive approach referred to as a digital constellatory autoethnographic mode of Indigenous archaeology (DCAM) and details how Snapchats, iPhone images, digital memory cards, and artifacts/belongings have sets of logic, mood, and vocalic character. DCAM demonstrates how digital media not counted as "official" data enables Indigenous and ally researchers to have more honest engagements with histories.

Indigenous peoples have engaged in truth-telling movements to combat settler-colonial imperatives that have biased stories for centuries. Beyond being privileged in history books, public policy, and everyday discourse, settler-colonial stories naturalize invasion/conquest and script settler society as superior and innocent. Cherokee author Thomas King (2003) states, "stories are wonderous things. And they are also dangerous" (p. 9). Danger sits in settler-colonial (his)stories precisely because of what they are, a mode of communicative colonization or settler-splaining (comparable to man-splaining). Ultimately, these stories justify the continued presence of settlers on Indigenous lands and alleviate settler guilt through historical framing.

Settler-colonial stories are the building blocks of a lie that colonization is a thing of the past, a "post" colonial settled matter, obscuring complexities of even more recent threats to Indigenous sovereignty. Contemporary contestations include Standing Rock, Bears Ears, a multi-billion-dollar pipeline project through Wet'suwet'en land, and Trump's signature campaign promise of a border wall to be built splitting land of the Tohono O'odham Nation. Although a few cases are broadcast in popular press, across the hundreds of Indigenous nations "in" North America, there are many cases that are far less visible and threaten

sites of archaeological and spiritual significance throughout history. Thus, in addition to addressing contemporary problems, it is important to re-examine controversies and wars of the past.

It is vital that the field of communication and media be open to archaeological studies and partnerships, particularly those done by, and in consultation with, Indigenous peoples. Archaeological practitioners experience distinct communication problems: problems with sensemaking, translating the voices of belongings, crafting findings respectfully, and packaging them to be consumable to broad audiences. Advancements in methods of archaeology and digital communication symbiotically change the stories that we can tell and ultimately, are constituted through. For example, remote sensing, electromagnetic induction, ground-penetrating radar, aerial tools, earth resistance surveys, aerial photography, social media, and digital action cameras have emerged as actants in archaeological storytelling (Tveskov

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et al., 2019). While there is abundant testimony that colonial and decolonial imperatives are naturalized through stories and myths (Clair, 1997; King, 2003; Lake, 1991; Morris & Wander, 1990; Simpson, 2011), previous studies in communication and media do not adequately account for the complexities of this phenomenon. Specifically, these do not center Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies around digital forms of data and the methodologies that produce them.

In this article, I contend that since settler stories prevent historically accurate retroactive sensemaking, it is critical to actively restory them, displace problems, and better account for Indigenous digital ways of being and knowing through innovative methodologies. I propose in this piece a means of restorying that I will later detail as a digital constellatory autoethnographic mode (DCAM) of Indigenous archaeology. DCAM builds upon communication and rhetorical scholarship that navigates colonial stories and ideologies as well as Indigenous ethnographic works that are multi-sensory and experiential.

I narrate my experience producing digital media for an archaeological excavation in Gold Beach Oregon in the summer of 2016. This digital media, not counted as "official" archaeological data, will help Indigenous and ally researchers have more honest engagements with history. As a citizen of the Coquille Nation, this was an opportunity to be of service to the Nation and learn about the history and material culture of the Rogue River War (RRW) of 1853–1856 between Indigenous peoples and settlers. This understudied and misunderstood war changed the course of history for Indigenous peoples of Oregon. It ended with mass removal to reservations, intergenerational cultural genocide, and now a dedication to regain what we have lost. Leveraging newer data of the digital age enables restorying racist narratives and thus, prompts more honest historically mediated memories, and makes space for Indigenous epistemologies and projections of future stories and lands (that can finally return to being Indigenous).

Settler Coloniality

Settler coloniality, or the ideology that sanctions colonialism, "still hurts" centuries after America was formed as a project of democracy (Smith, 1999, p. 125). It is categorically different than forms of postcoloniality because colonizers have never truly left. Rather, people settled and refuse to leave (Wolfe, 2006). Colonization continues via the control of Indigenous lands, bodies, economies, and symbols by those that have refused to leave. In other words, colonizers also control resources, internally police Indigenous nations, appropriate their cultures, and make what they believe will be a permanent home on Indigenous

lands (Tuck & Yang, 2012). These dynamics make the settler colonial and Indigenous relationship one of power through discursive and non-discursive forms of domination concerning territory and capitalist accumulation (Coulthard, 2014). Settler colonialism requires strategies such as the pervasive settler deployment of false narratives to comfort themselves in the practices of usurping lands and genocide (Tuck & Yang, 2012). These are projects of White possession (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Such narratives and projects, however, can be challenged through decoloniality. Decoloniality centers Indigenous experiences and voices through acts of activism (Kelly & Black, 2018), rhetorical sovereignty (Lyons, 2000), and other material and symbolic actions.

Carrillo Rowe and Tuck (2017) recently curated a special issue of *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* to expose the complicity of cultural studies work in maintaining settler colonialism. They call for transformative work authored by Indigenous peoples to center Indigenous land and life. I take seriously their calls as well as those made Na'puti (Chamoru) (2019) to engage *Indigeneity as analytic*. Engaging Indigeneity as an analytic means that one must expose "historical and contemporary effects of colonial and anticolonial demands and desire related to a certain land," rather than view Indigeneity as a strict identity category concerned with authenticity (Arvin, 2015, p. 121). This analytic helps to expose how racialization and other structures of settler-colonial projects marginalize Indigenous histories.

Wolfe (2006) notably states that settler-colonial invasion is not an event but a structure; an ongoing genocidal project that "endures Indigeneity" (Kauanui, 2016, para. 1). That being said, this can be misread to minimize the importance of significant events and the interconnectedness among ongoing violence in Indigenous historical consciousness. In foregrounding historical events such as the RRW, as I will do, the structures of violence expose themselves and become far more amendable by responsible retrospective sensemaking.

Previous rhetorical communication studies balance the need to explicate structures and events in tandem when discussing stories of colonization and decolonization. For example, Sanchez et al. (1999) centered the AIM movement to discuss the ways Indigenous communities are rhetorically excluded and reproduced in documents by the federal government as dangerous to America. Endres (2009) builds upon the ways the federal government, namely the Department of Energy, rhetorically excludes Indigenous arguments in a very different context of nuclear decision making. Kelly and Black's (2018) *Decolonizing Native American Rhetoric . . .*, an edited book, forwards contemporary disciplinary thinking around rhetoric of Indigeneity,

decolonial theory, and the need to consistently displace problematic Eurocentric histories. Again, chapters in this book detail specific events and structures, such as Presley's (2018) work on violence during Dakota Access Pipeline contestations and Lake et al.'s (2018) focus on the Canadian Residential School system and colonial public memory. All of the aforementioned works emerge from different loci of enunciation (Mignolo, 2003), taking into consideration subjectivities and the geographic locations where knowledge and Indigenous conflict emerge.

Stories and Voices

Communicative mechanisms of colonization and decolonization matter profoundly and manifest in how and why we tell stories. Who is doing the speaking also matters (Spivak, 1988). As a consequence, stories inherently contain bias and agendas. My research is part of a growing body of Indigenous-centered work by ally and Indigenous scholars designed to help resist forms of academic and representational colonialism (Cordes, 2019; Said, 1978; Tveskov, in review). This makes space for Indigenous perspectives to frame and define an Indigenous communication research agenda/space as a mode of power. Also, it allows narratives to be transformative as opposed to supplementary (LaRocque, 2010; Vizenor, 1999). This is a pressing matter because it can take insider perspectives to navigate past *damage centered research*, which focuses myopically on poverty, genocide, dispossession, and substance abuse and to shift toward research based on desire, not just damage (Tuck, 2009). Tuck (Unangax̂) (2009) opines that desire-based research is future oriented, looking forward to more complete, progressive accounts of Indigenous experience. Furthermore, "desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities" (p. 417).

Archaeology and Communication

In addition to communication scholarship, this article contributes to ethnographic works that are multi-sensory and experiential. Prior work in this area, such as Spector's (1993) *What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village*, advocates for personalization of stories that emerge from archaeological contexts. My article intervenes and adds a focus on digitality while foregrounding Indigenous perspectives/truths. Rice et al. (2020) begin to take up digital truth telling in their work on re/turning the heteropatriarchal settler gaze through Indigenous feminist multimedia storytelling, a different, yet important, context. However, my article is unique because the intersection of

communication and archaeology is rarely discussed in interdisciplinary and disciplinary communication and media journals. The exceptions are studies on museums, historical memory, and the emerging subfield of media archaeology (Parikka, 2012), which has more to do with Foucault's (2002) *Archaeology of knowledge* than the stereotype of ramming a trowel into dirt.

Archaeology proper is germane to the field of communication and media has experienced noteworthy communication problems since its emergence in North America around the 1800s. These include interpersonal, ethical, and organizational problems between archaeologists and subaltern communities, and the problem of communicating archaeology to publics (Watkins, 2006). Professional archaeologists note difficulties in communicating "real" archaeological findings, sometimes considered dull, to publics that largely prefers the fantasy of archaeology (Harding, 2007). This fantasy is closely associated with media tropes bred by movies such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Marshall & Spielberg, 1981) and shows on *National Geographic* that seek to unearth Indigenous cultural mystery, adding in heaping pinches of racism. The narrative turn became an intervention, advocating for more reflexivity and honest, collaborative engagement when communicating with stakeholder communities and publics (Hodder, 1989). Part of this narrative turn asks researchers to be autoethnographic, to consider themselves as active characters inserted into unfolding history.

Methodological Attention

I engage autoethnography during the RRW archaeological project to sense-make and amplify the voices of others as well as my own, and of non-human objects (artifacts or belongings). I traverse the balance/wobble of being a researcher and a "participant/self-subject," one that has been well documented in scholarly works as the cause of cultural anxiety (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016; Griffin, 2012; Jacobs-Huey, 2002; Tillmann, 2009), particularly in archaeological contexts (Atalay, 2006; Spector, 1993). Autoethnography is generative and necessary, and, in the case of this project, allows me to highlight Indigenous-centered stories to displace settler narratives.

In this article, I propose a novel decolonial constellatory autoethnographic mode (DCAM) of Indigenous archaeology. DCAM can be viewed as a branch of autoethnography. It requires critically gazing upon relationships and politics of "data" as media of the past[1] by centering their importance through Indigenous perspectives and stories not included in colonial meta-histories. Leroy Little Bear (Blackfoot) as quoted in Lewis et al. (2018) shares, "the human brain is a station on the radio dial; parked in one

spot, it is deaf to all the other stations [. . .] the animals, rocks, trees, simultaneously broadcasting across the whole spectrum of sentience" (para. 2). While autoethnography itself requires deep reflexivity, DCAM relies on deep relationality and tuning into these other stations. The method honors "striving to understand the ever-multiplying connections linking us to the beginning of the universe and its constant expansion" and "also entails unraveling the intricate relations that make up our Earthly existence" (Cornum, 2015, para. 13). This includes understanding our connection to non-human objects and animals, specifically material culture (belongings), land, water, and time. Ultimately, sifting through dirt archaeologically and making sense of it is profoundly about relationality.

Recalling the RRW research experience, I blink my mind at a metaphorical constellation, a limited series of nodes that radiate voice and guide my understanding of the war. Each is a segment of history mediated by social media, specifically Instagram images and Snapchats, but also forms that are ostensibly respected and less milieu, such as professional photographs, memory cards dense with digital footage, and artifacts. These "data" were produced when waking up each morning in the summer of 2016, packing into vans among colleagues, students, and Indigenous peoples to the archaeological sites of Miners' Fort and Geisel Monument—sifting through the earth and "doing history." This work, led by Southern Oregon University's Lab of Anthropology (SOULA), along with my 3 years of follow-up research,

communicates/re-stories Indigenously revised histories and illustrates the benefits of merging communication and media studies with archaeology (Cordes, 2019; Tveskov et al., 2019, in press).

To apply DCAM, I first offer an abridged timeline and weave a brief background of the RRW. Next, I share and theorize various forms of digital communication/media that became the substance of my relational sensemaking—what I refer to as my digital constellation of the RRW. I share how an old photograph and text message began my investment in this project as personal and familial. Next, I narrate a flashback by describing an irreverent Snapchat, which underscores the racial and international implications of the war. Then, I show how my iPhone photos represented a belief in the *belongingness* of excavated "artifacts," and the ways hoarded memory cards of digital footage signal my refusal to let go of the project. During these sections, I illustrate sets of logic, mood, and vocalic character afforded by the various media of the constellation (the digital nodes are the voices that shape my restorying of the RRW). Finally, I circle back to advocate for DCAM as healing, and as valuable to publics still grappling with the legacy of colonialism.

The Rogue River War

The below table summarizes a chronological timeline of events important to Oregon's colonial era.

Chronological Timeline of Events Important to Oregon's Colonial Era.

Date	Event	Brief description
1848	The Organic Act	This act allowed Oregon to be declared a territory.
1848	Gold found in California	
Early 1850s	A wave of settlers arrives in Oregon	Notably, European and Chinese immigrants come looking for gold.
1851	Gold Found on the Coast, North of Bandon, and in Jacksonville, Oregon	
1853	Table Rock Treaty	
1853–1856	Rogue River War	
1854	Gold found in Curry County	
1854	Nasomah Massacre	Approximately 20 from Nasomah Band of Coquille Indians killed.
1855	The Battle of Hungry Hill	Led by Captain Smith and ended with the defeat of the United States by Tekelma people (Tveskov, 2017).
1855	Lumpton Massacre	The height of the Rogue River War begins after vigilantes killed over 25 Indigenous people on the Table Rock Reservation. Indian Agency employees were killed, and homesteads were burned in revenge (Sutton & Sutton, 1969/2013).
1856	The Battle of Big Bend	
1856	Ending of War	Most Indigenous people in Oregon were moved to reservations.
1856–1857	Treaty that was never ratified promising Indigenous peoples land	

The RRW (1853–1856) is part of a large string of wars hanging in the backdrop of early American imperialism and a changing world. The Gold Rush and fur trade pushed waves of tens of thousands of miners and settlers into Oregon in the middle of the 19th century. The Oregon Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 emboldened U.S. White men immigrants over 18 to take 320 acres of Indigenous land each, 640 acres if they had wives (Robbins, 2019). Most of the 2.5 million acres that were claimed under this act were west of the Cascade Mountains and part of the Willamette, Umpqua, and Rogue Valley. The Indigenous population in the Pacific Northwest was reduced by a conservative estimate of 80% from the beginning of the 1700s to the beginning of the 1800s (Boyd, 1999). This is largely attributed to settlers bringing diseases such as smallpox, malaria, measles, cholera, and influenza, and aggressively enacting practices of domination such as violence and rape (Beckham, 1971; Schwartz, 1997). The RRW does not fit neatly into the contemporary constructs of warfare as it had no front lines, involved guerilla tactics, and defied gender norms as Indigenous women served as cultural intermediaries and battle leaders (Tveskov, 2017).

Engaging the Personal and Familial

I have a positionality as an enrolled member of the Coquille Nation, as stated, and I am a descendant of Gishgu, Susan Adulsa Wasson, Mildred Ashline, and Marianne Cordes tracing my ancestry, as we do, from women. While proud Coquilles, many women in our Tribe (Nation) do not readily admit to being experts in Tribal history, including history of the RRW, because they are humble and strong in more subtle ways. They lead with love, sharing, and story. In this section, I offer heightened self-reflexivity (called for in the Native feminist tradition and in autoethnographic work) during a time when I sought contextual information for nodes of my constellation to move beyond basic historical descriptions of the war and toward personal and community investments.

A few days after the excavation of one site, Geisel Monument, Mark Axel Tveskov, SOULA Archaeologist, invited me to talk with a Coquille Elder at Curry Historical Society Museum. At the time, I did not know it would be Betty Hockema, mother of our Nation's Cultural Anthropologist, and someone who knows my family. Figure 1 shows this meeting that took place in the back room of the museum, with me positioned on the right side of the photo listening to Betty as we sat at a table with photos strewn about. Her facial expression is one of kindness and urgency as she holds up a single photo. She tells me she wants me to keep it, along with the other photos and shares that as she gets older, she feels a desire to pass them along to people who care about our families' histories.
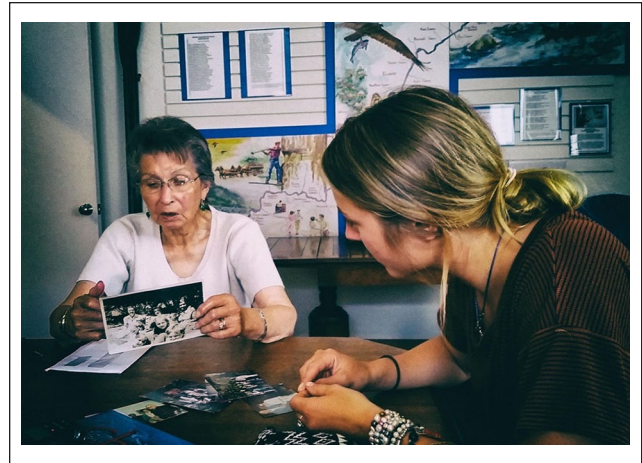

Figure 1. *Image of Ashley and Betty Hockema.* Tribal Elder showing me a photo of family. Figure 1 image is taken by Mark Axel Tveskov.

One photo is a black and white copy, and in it I immediately recognized the face of my grandmother as a young child. My grandma is the focal point, surrounded by relatives. Her eyes are squinting from a day out in the sun with a slight smile and youthful glow. She is now 89 and the eldest Elder of our Tribe. She has told me on several occasions that her childhood was idyllic and that her mother was a saint, something this photo captures in perpetuity. Having her hold up a photo of my grandmother as a child immediately internally pulled at me and piqued my interest as my grandma is one of my favorite people, as grandmothers are to so many.

Figures 1 and 2 show the droste effect[2] of sorts: the photo Betty showed me with my grandmother in it, a photo of her showing me the photo, and a photo of text messages that included the photo; memories within memories. Figure 2 is a screenshot of the text message exchange I had with my dad. In it I sent that same photo accompanied by a brief note. I let him know that I met someone at the excavation that knew our extended family and wanted me to feel that connection as I continued with excavations.

Beyond teaching me some specifics of the RRW, this meeting with Betty and the photo and text message I sent to my dad invested me in the project as something that became personal and familial. In being able to step forward into the story of the RRW as something of value to my own family and our history, I was afforded a different type of space to step back out to understand that this war, this archaeology, this whole thing, is about something larger. It is about connecting to the Indigenous experience in Oregon in the mid-1850s and understanding how various traumas associated with the war dramatically changed the course of history and land for Tribal Nations. This Indigenous experience is something that creeps its way down intergenerationally as
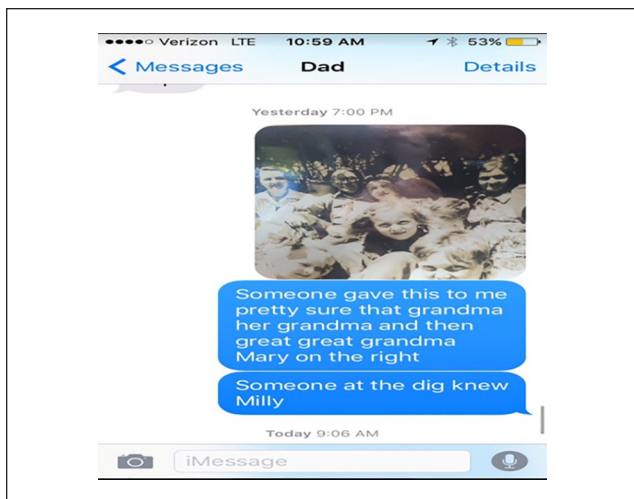
Figure 2. *Text Message.* A screenshot of a text message I sent to my dad.

memories encoded into our very beings and is the story that needs to be listened to.

Part of this Indigenous experience is grappling with the fact that the RRW ended with federal reservation policies. These policies outlined the removal of Indigenous people in the region to the Coast Reservation, Grande Ronde, and Siletz reservations by 1856. The exodus from ancestral homelands was devastating and what many Indigenous peoples "in" Oregon refer to as their trail of tears. Some Indigenous people found ways to stay behind by making choices to hide, marry White men, ally with settlers, migrate elsewhere, slowly assimilate, per U.S. policies, into American culture, or resist (Wasson, 2001). These historical facts must be centered to expose the blamelessness that White settlers claim, particularly for settlers who still live on stolen lands under a veil of protection by their stories. The RRW period has had lasting repercussions for Tribal sovereignty and the mental well-being of those who experience postcolonial stress (Duran & Duran, 1995). All else that was lost—lives, Indigenous epistemologies and technologies, ideas of lands as sacred and not as commodities—is immeasurable.

With that said, as much as the RRW is a story of dispossession it is also useful to consider Vizenor's (1999) conception of survivance, that involves taking an active sense of pride and presence in the face of victimry to build a healthier Indigenous future, and Tuck's (2009) conception of desire. In this regard, my work on this project and others like it have, as the Coquille Tribal Historic Preservation Officer stated in a letter of support for my project, "engender[ed] a spirit of healing" (Rippee, 2017). The fact that many generations have passed, yet Tribal Nations "in" Oregon are still invested in understanding the RRW period through new lenses but are even more invested in creating the conditions for Tribal Nations to prosper in the future, is

what Vizenor's survivance and Tuck's conception of desire is about. It is about a desire to trouble that which does not serve us, continuing to heal on our own terms, honoring our values and unique ways of finding truth.

Captivity Narratives

Settler stories undermine Indigenous truths. To illustrate the mechanisms through which this happens, I will share a flashback from the excavation and the retrospective sense-making process. It is fitting to start with how preeminent RRW historian and scholar Stephen Dow Beckham (1971)[3] begins his book on the era, *Requiem for a People*:

> Sacred to the Memory of
> John Geisel
> Also his three Sons
> John, Henry
> & Andrew
> Who were
> Massacred by the Indians
> Feb 22, A.D. 1856

> A single fern frond, seldom stirred by the wind, reaches across the top of this marker. The entire scene appears frozen and unreal, but there in the forest deepness is a lingering memory of an era when Indian and pioneer faced each other. This was an era whose story has been told in almost endless fashion as America was settled and the inhabitants of her forests, river valleys, and shores were forced to yield before the strong push of civilization. (p. 3–5)

While scrolling through my phone's photo gallery after the archaeological excavations, I came upon a copy of a Snapchat[4] that documents my guttural reaction to the same gravestone Beckham referenced. The Snapchat (Figure 3) shows the gray gravestone cracked diagonally, discolored from age, atop soil, and edited by me to include a banner of text that reads, "Lol 😂 😂 😂 white ppl." A red circle highlights the words "Massacred by the Indians" engraved in a romanticized cursive font on the gravestone. The absurdity and acontextual nature of that phrase is laughable and frustrating. To be sure, the emojis contained in the Snapchat laugh to the edge of tears, not as a response to the fact that a family died, but at the way settler society so flagrantly framed/s this ordeal and, for that matter, the entire war. In response, my Snapchat annotation conflates settler society with the text, "white ppl." As I pause to consider this choice, particularly as a woman who also identifies as white in addition to identifying with my Coquille citizenship and ancestry, I engage in "a responsibility to interrogate whiteness critically," a process that Alley-Young, (2008) advocates for in communication research (p. 319).

White supremacist ideology accounts for specific moves in the gravestone's existence and text, specifically
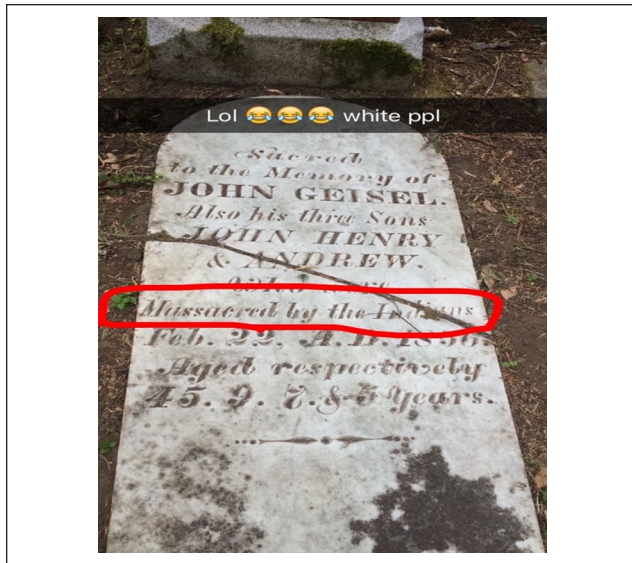
Figure 3. *Geisel Gravestone.* Snapchat taken by author.

concerning the entitlement that White settlers/invaders claimed with regard to property, privilege, and power. They displace the historical truths and settler-splain even on their graves by blaming Indians, peculiar given that settlers usurped Indigenous homelands by killing Indigenous peoples in the first place. They were and are still intent on hiding this truth. This Snapchat's voice, though intended as a quick jab, is one of visceral honesty, asking recipients to think about the suturing of Whiteness and settler colonialism. The two work together to create a façade of White blamelessness and Indigenous savagery, a history codified in stories and stones (the landscape itself).

While Snapchats, described as an ephemeral "lightweight channel for sharing spontaneous experiences with trusted ties," are intended to be shared for 10 seconds and then deleted, its temporality was extended when I screenshot it, giving it a long-term home in my library of some 2,864 photos (Bayer et al., 2016, p. 973). The Snapchat became a vehicle to question the simplistic, matter-of-fact nature of the words "Massacred by the Indians" that appeared on the gravestone and served as a "field note" that urged me to look more closely into this marker of history. As I looked back at this "field note," a guiding point in my digital constellation of retroactive sensemaking, it became clear that the Geisel story needed more unraveling.

The Geisel's, named on the gravestone, are an immigrant family from Germany that were retaliated against during the RRW by Indigenous peoples and their story is indeed one of the most famous captivity narratives of the war. Captivity narratives, a common literary frame of history at the time, cast White people, particularly women, as pure symbols of civilization, and function to villainize Indigenous men (Derounian-Stodola & Zabelle, 1998; Vaughan &

Clark, 1981). This is a discursive means to frame the Geisel family as entirely innocent, as massacred.

According to an *Evening Star* article on February 27, 1980, John Geisel, the father, mined fine gold dust on the beach near their home in what is now called Gold Beach, Oregon ("More Thrilling Than Fiction," 1980). He supplemented income through stock on the prairies, provided lodging for travelers, and hired Indigenous people to work for him. As the story/captivity narrative begins, on February 22, 1856, an Indigenous man who worked for the Geisel's entered their home with others, killed John Geisel and the sons, and burned down their home (Curry History, 2019). They then took Christina, his wife, and their two daughters as hostages to a Tututni camp. In captivity narrative fashion, this ignores the previous attacks on the Tribes which triggered the attack (see previous timeline for various precipitating events). Under threat, around 100 people living in the lower Rogue Valley then sought refuge in Miners' Fort, close to the Geisel's home.

A few weeks after the "capture" on March 7, Charles Brown, a Russian fur trapper, and his wife, Betsy Brown of Tolowa/Chetco Tribe, left Miners' Fort to try to get the Geisel women back. As Betsy was Indigenous and able to speak Athabaskan, she could broker their release. In exchange, other Indigenous women being held at Miners' Fort and an additional number of blankets and monies were given to the Indigenous men. However, while Betsy Brown and her language skills gave her intercultural communicative capacity, Charles Brown is historically given credit (Tveskov et al., in press). Betsy, like other Indigenous women in Southern Oregon, was economically capable and multilingual. Indigenous women were uniquely positioned to communicate cross-culturally (Tveskov, 2017; Wasson, 2001), yet they are consistently erased out of settler stories.

Archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence suggests that the town stayed for over a month in the fort fighting Indigenous peoples until U.S. forces came to end the occupation (Tveskov et al., 2019). The length of the occupation and the active violence resulted in many artifacts (belongings) being left behind and many stories untold. While captivity narratives are characterized by univocality and the suppression of diverse perspectives, they became the launching point for SOULA and others, including me, to find more to the story.

Material Culture as *Belongings*

Archaeological and ethnohistorical communication work, done with critical orientation, can challenge historical memory. Being new to archaeological excavations back in 2016, I remember Chelsea Rose, another SOULA Archaeologist saying, "It's not what you find that's important, it's what you find out." The following sections concern some of what I found out by turning to what actually was
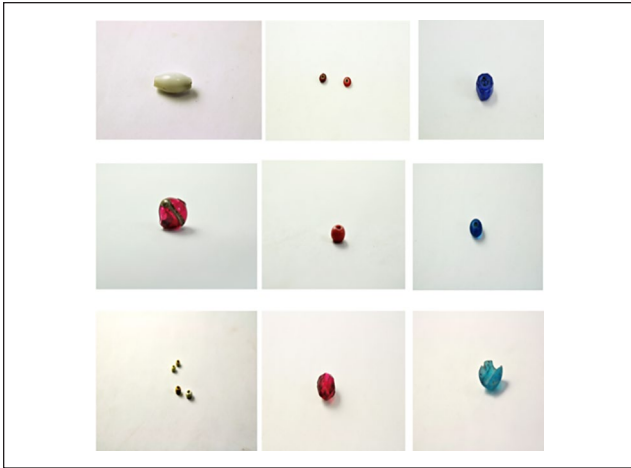
Figure 4. *Beads, Batch one.* Professional images taken by author at SOULA lab, include white hearts, blue Russian, and seed beads.

Figure 5. *Beads, Batch two, image one.* Beads in palm. Image taken by author with iPhone.

found in the soil, along with the iPhone photographs I took as representations of them.

First, a significant perspective shift is required. Excavated material culture from the sites, for example, beads, pipes, bullets, must be reframed from artifacts to belongings or technologies. It is limiting to view them as generic, antiquated, sterile items that should be handled with white gloves, destined to be held in a neo-colonial museum (Classen & Howes, 2006). Rather, it is more generative to see them as more connotatively personal and to be intentional about calling them belongings. They belonged to real people with real lives and real stories (Schaepe et al., 2017).

Take for illustration two sets of images I took that document beads excavated from Miners' Fort. Figure 4 is an edit of nine different sets of beads that were all excavated. I emptied the beads out of small plastic bags that they were stored in and photographed them centered with a white background. Figures 5 and 6 show some of those beads in my palm, a few still with bits of soil hugging them. The first batch was taken with my professional Nikon D1550 camera in SOULA's lab and the other batch was taken with my iPhone immediately after each belonging was excavated. The context in which these are viewed is pertinent. Can't you hear that the beads with the sterile white background as somewhat upset or indifferent?

"What am I doing here?"

"I'm cold."

"This voyeur and machine blinding me with each flash."
Beads taken with the iPhone after they were found in situ, somehow spoke in a different tune to me:

"I'm warm."

Figure 6. *Beads, Batch two, image two.* Another bead in palm. Image taken by author with iPhone.

"I belonged to someone, to something, to myself, to a whole necklace or bracelet, to perhaps a German immigrant woman or an Indigenous person in the fort, to the raw materials I was born from, to Bohemia where I was produced and shipped among 360,000–900,000 pounds of seed type beads that were exported to Oregon, Washington, and California per year during the height of production years" (See Crull, 1998). We all, humans and non-human objects, belong to so many things and ultimately to the Earth in a relational manner.

I took those photos for research purposes, but I also recall posting a select few of the iPhone photos to my personal Instagram account. The iPhone photos are inherently more portable to social media than the professional images, and by putting them on social media they transmuted into

more social beings. They became frameable, able to narrate a story about themselves and their place in time. However, I experienced an internal tug-of-war that became even more pronounced in the process of autoethnographic sensemaking. I struggled with how I potentially subjected the beads to commodification within a social economy while forcibly removing the beads from their burial home in the soil. While I negotiate with whether my choices were appropriate, I still choose to be positive about how sharing them through this social medium resulted in narrative change and productive curiosity via comments and questions about the RRW. Questions social media users asked centered around what the RRW even is, or why they have never heard about it, or how "artifacts" like the beads that were found are important in the context of war. Belongings like these do pique interest and thus, there is value in selectively and ethically engaging communication around their agency. This became even more clear in my post-"field" follow-up conversations.

Necklace as a *Belonging*

"What if things could speak? What would they tell us? Or are they speaking already and we just don't hear them? And who is going to translate them?" (Steryerl, 2006, para. 2). Since material culture is valuable, agentic, and imbued with stories, then, as Steryerl (2006) suggests, certain translators are needed for us to understand them. A few months after the archaeological excavations, I consulted with a Coquille Elder, family member of mine, jewelry maker, and artist named Toni Ann Brend to gain insight into the beads' meaning during that era. While she was, of course, not around at the time of the RRW, her voice brings cultural presence to the belongings and shares truths that emerge via alternative historical memories (i.e., non-settler memories). What I *found out* was how those beads not only elicit stories of the RRW era but they elicit meaningful intergenerational memories. This include memories of the Assimilation Period, the Restoration Period, and the connections to lifeways in Indigenous histories "in" Oregon. She shared a wide range of stories passed down through family conversations from how her father told her about contested locations of war and how precipitating violence was often misattributed to Indigenous people, to the types of weapons and everyday technologies that were used.

After I showed her my images of the beads, she showed me an image of an intricate Coquille necklace (see Figure 7) made by a family member of ours, Laura "Lolly" (Hodgskiss) Metcalf,[5] daughter of Susan Adulsa. Toni Ann made a replica of this same necklace and her replica was on display in an exhibit "Strung Together" at the University of Oregon Museum of Natural and Cultural History for a period until February of 2017. The necklace became a touchpoint of pride for Tribal Members who visited the museum, given

Figure 7. *Necklace.* Image taken by author and used with permission of Tribal Elder. This is an image of another annotated image of a necklace made by Laura "Lolly" Metcalf (Coquille) made around 1862.

that our Elder was able to recreate the piece using traditional skills. It shows people that the Coquille peoples are still here and that we are connected to the past through belongings that were significant to our ancestors.

In the necklace (Figure 7), you can see many specific types of beads that bear a resemblance to the white hearts, blue Russians, and predominantly seed beads I photographed during the excavations (Figures 4 to 6). In this necklace, some of the beads like the blue Russian were used only one time, signaling that the bead was limited, or it was special in some way. Although not likely from the same batch of beads that were found at Miners' Fort, her discussion of their similarity helped me to solidify my hunch that there is more personal, political, and familial relational value of those types of belongings than immediately meets the eye.

During the Assimilation Era, following the 1850s and lasting until the 1920s, participation in ceremonies and wearing traditional items like necklaces was sometimes illegal, discouraged, or shamed. In response, maintaining and contouring traditions became a form of resistance or survivance. Toni Ann shared:

> People did not wear necklaces or regalia because you couldn't be Indian in those days . . . We didn't start wearing it again until the Tribe was recognized. You never let people know you were Indian. People coveted it and kept it in jewelry boxes but seldom would wear it.

The significance of making and wearing necklaces based on traditional items, or even commodified supplies that are similar to those traditional items, is highly symbolic. As Toni Ann stated, many Indigenous peoples in Oregon did

not start wearing them again until around and after the 1980s when some Tribes in Oregon were beginning to be restored/recognized. They are worn now at meetings, ceremonies, and in everyday life to perpetuate traditional practices that were assumed to be lost around the time of the RRW. The beads signify wealth and are a sociotechnical nod to Tribal Citizens' commitment to honor and survive in the past, present, and future. Wealth was often based on acquiring goods that had particular signifiers, including shininess, rarity, often pertaining to the realm of aesthetics and scarcity, but for the Coquille Nation, there is also value on the basis of sentiment tied to the land.

In this regard, the knowledge gained from beads, translators of belongings, and images is relational knowledge as humans and belongings depend on one another for sensemaking. Beads and the images of them are important and as I suggested, they speak. They have stories, are storyers, and can be restoried. Toni Ann passed away this winter and this was a difficult loss for our community. I will continue to cherish all that she has shared with me over the years. I will remember the connections she had with our community and with our cultural belongings that are integral to our cultural survivance.

Oregon's Indigenous Land as Magic and Memory Cards

Belonging analyses were just one element of my participation in the archaeological process and nodes of my digital constellation of retroactive sensemaking. I was also tasked with filming the excavation and conducting interviews. As a former journalist, this came naturally. I was later asked to be a part of a documentary film-making process and this was a welcomed challenge. I spent time capturing artistic shots of the excavated beads and other belongings and brought them prominently into the story. Next, I storyboarded the scene of the Geisel captivity narrative where Betsy Brown brokered the exchange of the Geisel women. Further, I consulted with experts about Indigenous people who were written out of history and interviewed living members of Tribal Nations involved. I did this to make history come alive the way the excavations helped us to see it and to symbolically flip-off settler-colonial history in the process. What I produced was a short documentary with some sparkle, drone footage, and ample meaningful interviews. The dregs of the documentary took the form of a box full of memory cards and sheets of paper with logs of the footage I painstakingly cataloged.

Adams and Holman Jones in Moon and Strople's (2016) article note that self-reflexivity regards "listening to and for silences and stories we cannot tell–not fully, not clearly, not yet" (p. 1322). The seemingly abandoned memory cards enable self-reflexivity. When I listen to the memory cards, their exterior silence and their cold stagnation signal that I


**Figure 8.** *Image of Author with Camera on Beach.* Photographer unknown. Image owned by author.

am not ready to let go of being a part of this RRW project. I have held on to it and still have more reflection to do, and more space to step in and out of both the personal and group Indigenous experiences. I still turn to those memory cards to radiate the voices of those I interviewed and for the digital "data" that I need to tell more stories on my own terms and in my own time. Perhaps, they will also be useful and speak loudly to another Indigenous researcher, filmmaker, or family member in the future.

Figure 8 is a photo of me using my camera and tripod on the windy beach by Miners' Fort, capturing the sunset in what I recognize in hindsight as a fairly blissful state. Figure 9 shows that same sunset that I recorded through the viewfinder of the camera, a finale to a long day of archaeological and documentary work. Finally, Figure 10 depicts a bridged area in Gold Beach at yet another sunset time with the blues and pinks of the sky reflecting on the river.

When I consider the body of footage that I have on those memory cards, the most visually stunning and quietest are shots of the Oregon Coast, the cotton candy sunsets, and the rock formations. I took this footage as potential b-roll to supplement archaeological shots, but I was left with a more potent feeling that Oregon land is simply magic. It is home, full of safe soul places for me and for other Indigenous peoples whose families have been there since time immemorial and who were likely shaken by the RRW and larger colonial waves that crashed in the era. To be clear, this land was not owned by pioneers, gold fetishizers, makeshift governments, and squatters in the 1850s, usurped from the caretaking of Indigenous peoples. The land that I (re)saw through the
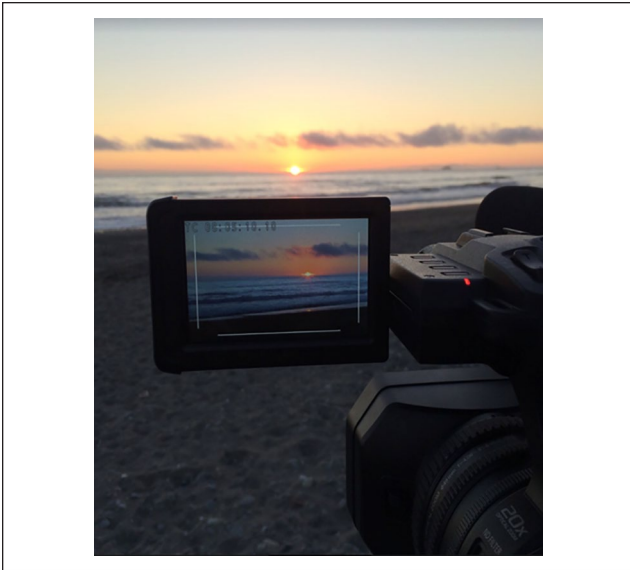
Figure 9. *Image taken of Camera and Beach.* Image taken by author.
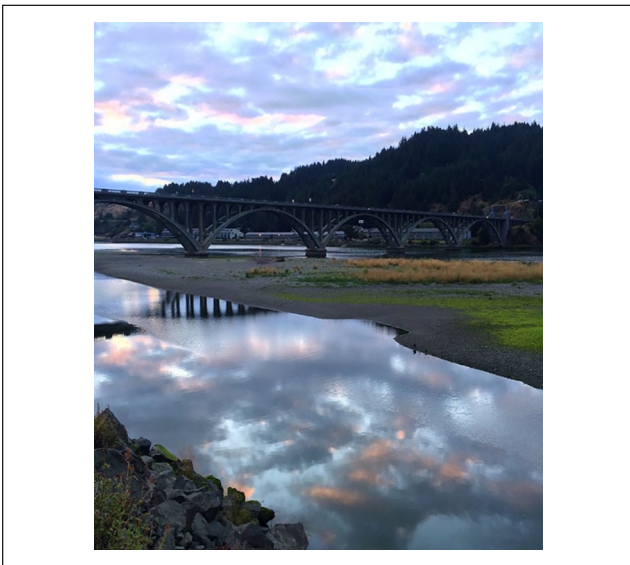
Figure 10. *Image of River and Reflection in Gold Beach.* Image taken by author.

viewfinder of my camera is not owned by anyone at all, but to nature as a sovereign entity.

Land is indeed pedagogy (Simpson, 2014). As I have argued elsewhere, land and its "borders are nodes of relationality, where past and future stories of people, spaces, and non-human beings collide to form slices of knowledge" (Cordes, 2020, p. 258). Land teaches and is the substance from which many settler-colonial stories were born. Yet, a landscape holds much of the evidence that is needed to begin to restory history in an Indigenous manner.

Challenging Pro-settler Stories with Digital Data, Archaeology, and Communication

Ultimately the excavations, and the larger digital projects I engaged in, were discussed collaboratively among Tribal communities and various stakeholders (i.e., Tribal governments, "landowners," and publics), done conservatively, and with an altruistic purpose of better understanding and correcting fraught histories (Cordes, 2019; Tveskov et al., 2019, in press). Collaborative, community-based, partner-focused, and public archaeology projects like these are becoming more common. Like other scholars including Atalay (2006) I agree that archaeology, despite its myriad of practices that disrespect Indigenous peoples can certainly do good for Indigenous communities; archaeology can be educational, therapeutic, and counteract cultural stress (Schaepe et al., 2017). It is also a method of challenging pro-settler stories. My work contributes by showing how an additional layer of interpretation of digital material not counted as "official" archaeological data can build upon "good" archaeological practices—and why communication and digital media are now central to "good" practices.

My hope is to offer this digital constellatory authoethnographic mode of Indigenous archaeology as a generative approach to other communication, media, cultural studies, and archaeology scholars. This can help them process historical events as always already mediated, and to consider the mechanisms through which different types of media tell stories and thereafter help us to process those stories. DCAM is an extension of the aural, the ocular, and the corporeal connectedness to a critical cultural researcher's ontological experience in contested (de)colonial spaces. It is particularly generative when retroactive sensemaking becomes increasingly personal as "decolonizing autoethnography troubles the categories we breathe in, think through, and live in" (Dutta, 2018, p. 95). By looking at the constellation of digital data I built in my reflection, I was better able to challenge the strategies employed by settler societies to naturalize their own narratives of conquest. In turn, I advocate that narratives that are maintained as settler-moves-to-innocence[6] (Tuck & Yang, 2012) uphold problematic settler stories that must not be uncritically consumed.

As I shared in the beginning of this piece, scholarly and non-institutionally affiliated researchers frequently experience problems communicating intra-personally about the postcolonial trauma and guilt that can come with excavations. They also experience problems with finding ways to intertwine digital and social media into the larger narratives. To gain insight into these problems, they could be turning to the field of communication and media. Based on our lack of scholarship around these topics, and our comparative lack of commitment to projects regarding Indigeneity beyond representation and rhetoric, they simply are not turning to us at

this time. Hopefully, this article activates productive momentum. To engage anticolonial archaeological communication, ethical issues concerning colonial praxis in the academy, contemporary intellectual property politics, museum fetishism, mistreatment of human remains, and violations of NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act), must be met with more ethically and socially responsible practices. This requires that we continue to rebuild and refine methodology to honor descendant communities, and educate publics and ourselves, a decolonial contribution that my article makes.

Final Thoughts

Through multimodal/polyvocal textual throughways, and power of restorying from the margins, colonial stories can be decentered and demystified. Like other Indigenous scholars, I choose to chip away at the problems with colonial stories and to find in them opportunities. The opportunity here is to share my experiences, approaches, and commitment to restorying aspects of a monumental and severely overlooked war in light of a now digital age. Again, I shared the value of a process of autoethnography, DCAM, that included reflecting on, observing, and sharing a digital constellation built of Snapchats, text messages, iPhone images, and memory card content. To be clear, I am not advocating for the generation of non-colonial versions of colonial stories or for folding tokenized Indigenous stories into dominant cult stories like captivity narratives. Rather, I advocate for interdisciplinary critical cultural considerations throughout the entire process of knowledge production, methodological application, and especially in the presentation of pivotal events and structures in history that continue to affect Indigenous communities. For me, this includes elevating communicative archaeological belongings and forms of digital media that are staples of our daily life rather than ignoring them as digital fluff—DCAM is about carefully listening and seeing them as truths. This leads me to circle back to Chelsea Rose, SOULA Archaeologist's suggestion that "it's not what you find that's important, it's what you find out." What I found out is that to "do" archaeology on contested Indigenous land, to "do" history, and to "do" media and restorying makes aural, audio, visual, and sentient relationships between land, people, spirited non-human beings, and belongings less opaque in their swirl of time. These truths about settler coloniality and Indigeneity can only be communicated through stories and the "the truth about stories is that's all we are" (King, 2003, p. 153).

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. For more on politics of data in non-Indigenous contexts, see Winner (1980).
2. A picture that repeatedly appears within itself.
3. Depending on who you ask, Beckham is a hero to many Oregon Indigenous people, and a villain to many others. An Indigenous person that I consulted for this article requested that I include a note regarding his ethics.
4. A Snapchat is the media, typically annotated photos or videos, of Snap Inc.'s multimedia smartphone application for messaging.
5. Lolly is my great grandmother's half-sister.
6. The deployment of false narratives that comfort settlers as they seek to maintain innocence.

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