

Akokisa River Pedagogies

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Abstract

The loss of relational networks and life-sustaining capacities of the Earth resulting from the Anthropocene/Capitalocene provoke ambiguous pedagogical experimenting with the limits of the known. The Akokisa River of Texas is more than its extractive use-value based on humanist rationality. Water connector Ángel Faz approaches the River as more than a passive and endless resource to be extracted and manoeuvred for profit, but as an ecology of relations entangled with humans—the River is us; we are the River. As a boundary agitator, Faz speculates into unresolvable and reciprocal voids located in the excluded middles between humans and more-than-humans ripe with potential percepts and affects across River multiplicities. Such gesturing generates transcorporeal, multi-linguistic, uncanny, trickster, and shimmering pedagogies bewildering the capacity to participate in the dynamic indeterminacy and interconnectedness of the River's ongoing becoming.

Keywords

Anthropocene, Indigenous knowledges, new materialism, pedagogy, transcorporeal, uncanny

There is a River by here that dazzles and shocks. I am drawn to the River, or rather, the River imperceptibly draws meⁱ out. The River strains and enchants, escaping my capture as the River moves through new relations at every moment. We are linked and communicate in alluringly indiscernible ways.

At 710 miles, this river, known as the Akokisa (also referred to as the Trinity), is Texas' longest river, running from far North Texas, near the Oklahoma border, south to the Gulf of Mexico. Ambiguous connections to the Akokisa were provoked by my encounters with Ángel Faz, a non-binary, queer, Indigenous (without tribal affiliation), Dallas-based water connector whose works are often ephemeral and immersive. As a fifth-generation 'Texan' (before it was Texas), their work explores creative environmental change with the Akokisa River's Land, human and more-than-human inhabitants, River politics, River spirits, and River histories to reconsider the decolonisation process related to settler misuse (Adams 2023). Faz (n.d.b.) River inquiries incorporate their durational 'art of searching' involving listening, testing, sampling, observing, consulting, and reflecting on sounds, chemistries, values, and fluidities (para. 9–10). Their affiliation with the Akokisa provokes a multiplicity of ecologies and pedagogies.

New materialist theories have forwarded the ontological indivisibility of natural phenomena such as rivers and humans, undermining the Anthropocene's rationality safeguarding boundaries between us and 'them,' humans and more-than-humans

(Braidotti 2013; Haraway 2016). However, first-wave new materialism and posthumanist theories on which this essay relies have erased non-European, relational ontologies (Byrd 2011; Sundberg 2014; Todd 2015, 2016; King 2017; Ravenscroft 2018; Rosiek *et al.* 2020; Pratt & Rosiek 2023). Faz's work and thinking are grounded in Indigenous materialism and spiritualism, which predates posthumanism and new materialist theories. Non-western, Indigenous worldviews open alternative possibilities for reconceiving the relationships and abilities between specific humans, cultures, objects, spirits, and Land (Deloria 1999). Indigenous materialism honours relationships with the Land as spiritual and connected with coming to know yourself, so nurturing a relationship with the Land is also caring for the self as in land-self body (Henriksen *et al.* 2022, 468). Rousell (2020) cites the many resonances amongst new materialist theory, Indigenous knowledge systems, and the life sciences as 'dynamic notions of the 'environment' as an interpenetrating series of geo-bio-cultural milieus' (1394). Land as pedagogy (Simpson 2014) not only seeks to reconfigure what is knowable via material-discursive structures by dwelling with nature and attending to the more-than-human and untamed place (Jickling *et al.* 2018, x) but also embraces Land pedagogies as non-dominating and nonexploitative, reciprocal relations (Coulthard 2014, 9).

The geo-bio-cultural milieu of the Akokisa is dominated by larger-than-life mythologies of Texan land as idealised, unpeopled wilderness encouraging colonial expansion and domination. The Akokisa (renamed the Trinity River in 1690 by Spanish explorer Alonso de León) runs through Wichita, Tawakoni, Kiikaapoi, Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache Land in North Texas. The River has been forcibly moved, straightened, and reshaped to serve settler colonial interests in capital accumulation strategies. The region's colonial genocide and forced displacement of Native American and Indigenous peoples, along with the severing of Indigenous place-based knowledge systems (Deloria 1999; Ng-A-Fook 2009; Marker 2019), and the elimination of Native American history from curricular requirements in the state of Texas in 2021,ⁱⁱ all enforce the colonising west's epistemic power while risking the perpetual assimilationist supremacy of knowledge systems based on western intellectual and cultural heritage.

In conjunction with the 2017 *Decolonize Dallas* events and exhibitions activating historical memory in contested sites towards reconciliation, artists and collectives asked, 'Who gets to speak for Dallas? Who claims its history? Who claims belonging?' (Faz n.d.a., para. 3). The need to decolonise Dallas from its colourblind and troubled history, present, and future requires a commitment to peeling back layers of colonialism and violence detailing forced migrations, occupations, chattel slavery, genocide, resettlements, segregation, racism, income disparity, disenfranchisement, economic injustice, over-policing, and ongoing exploitation of peoples, Land, and resources. As the powerful located in regions such as North Texas rekindle the white supremacist thirst for Anglo-American mythologised version of settler colonialism into the West, they aim to eradicate Native American and Indigenous perspectives from the next generation. With legislation and policies across the US banning the teaching and sharing of more accurate versions of history, including the factual truths of the systemic displacement and intentional elimination of Native Americans and Indigenous peoples, in particular, art as sites of public pedagogy persist even in contested and censored locations such as the region of North Texas.

Faz's (n.d.a.) contribution to *Decolonize Dallas* focused on reshaping dominant narratives associated with the area of West Dallas and the Akokisa River as a

community on the margins. This area has been subjected to environmental racism and a lack of public health protections by Dallas' zoning and permitting practices that almost exclusively allow heavy industry, such as a lead smelter and its pollution, to be located next to Black and Brown neighbourhoods as they do in West Dallas (Erickson 2024). An asphalt shingle manufacturer has spewed toxic pollution, noxious odours, and sulfur dioxide emissions into the neighbourhood since the 1940s (Emerson 2021). Populations of West Dallas salamanders, Texas Prairie crawfish, and Gulf Coast toads once thrived in the area around the fresh waters of the Akokisa River. Faz examined the relationships between environmental injustice, building inequality, and displacement for the people, ecologies, and native animals of West Dallas in a series of prints displayed as banners in the atrium of the West Dallas Multipurpose Center. The native animals and current and former residents of West Dallas share the narrative of being driven or poisoned from their habitat. Faz's banners echoed the neighbourhood sentiments, making visible their displacement struggles in text, stating, 'We are here, and we are not leaving / This house has value to me.'

The banners were removed after being displayed for only two days (Decolonize Dallas 2017). Reflecting on the censoring of their art, Faz (n.d.a.) stated:

This signals to me that the slightest dissent from the city-wide narrative of progress is not a welcome one. And it raises some important questions about what it means to have community spaces and what kinds of art and stories are deemed palatable enough to remain. The irony is not lost on me that my art about removal was removed. (n.p.)

This essay sticks with the River—its inconvenient stories, ancestral power, multi-species multiplicities, and imperceptibility—while twisting and flowing with the immersive interventions of water connector Faz. In the sections below, I first outline transcorporeal elements of the Akokisa's situated pedagogy, explore the uncanny and bewildering aspects trickster pedagogy might conjure in the River's void, and then close by considering the possibilities of the River's shimmering pedagogy.

Transcorporeal pedagogy

Unlike dehumanising fictions of human exceptionalism, progress, and independence, humans exist in a multiplicity of worlds and are made of these permeable boundaries. According to Alaimo (2018, 2022), transcorporeality reckons with entangling, interconnecting, and transforming social, political, economic, biological, and technological systems, events, processes, and agencies traversing substances, bodies, environments, and objects (436–37). Nothing exists separate and apart from something else. One just has to look at such phenomena as climate change, environmental racism, and pandemics to recognise that we are immersed in transcorporeal, multi-species assemblages and ecologies. A transcorporeal pedagogy seeks attunement to the intersecting flows of destruction, extinction, oppression, creativity, and reinvention, requiring that we 'combine a critical ethical and political awareness of shared trans-species vulnerabilities with a critical grasp of human ecological accountability overall' (Carstens 2023, 13).

Trans-corporeal crossroads occur within Faz's situated and embodied knowledges (Haraway 1991), which do not stem from the role of humans as polluters, colonisers, consumers, extractors, or destroyers of ecologies at the base of capitalism and liberal humanism. Instead, Faz explores the River's substances, objects, bodies, histories, stories, and environments through durational, multi-disciplinary, and Indigenous Land-based knowledge. Faz's transcorporeal pedagogies are alive with the world of the Akokisa.

When asked to participate in Teatro Dallas' call for Monuments of the Future, Faz submitted *Welcome to the Great Arkikosa*, a postcard with the text: 'Greetings from Arkikosa River: Ancestral Homeland of the Hasani' featuring an image of the Dallas skyline with the River in the foreground. This postcard was subsequently replaced by Faz in 2023 by *Updated Postcard from the Future with Updated Spelling of Akokisa* with the text: 'Greeting from Akokisa River: Dallas is Apache, Camanche, Kiikaapoi, Kiowa, Tawakoni, and Wichita Land' to reflect Faz's ongoing research and consultation with Native American representatives.ⁱⁱⁱ Even though the name was contested and changed, Faz stands by the work, the name change, and any subsequent revisions as this and future generations seek to honour Indigenous peoples through dispelling and unlearning histories written by conquerors and settler colonial myths of this Land to acknowledge past, present, and future Indigenous thriving (Faz in Adams 2023).

Following Monuments of the Future, Faz continued to reconsider the River's history, animacy, and potential justice by designation of legal personhood. Like the Klamath and Ganges Rivers, Faz has been investigating bestowing the Akokisa River with certain rights, such as the right to flow (Faz n.d.b., para. 5). This led them 'to pursue a first-person narrative with the Akokisa' (Faz n.d.b., para. 5) and, inspired by Citizen Potawatomi Nation Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* along with the failing of human language to represent living beings, Faz chose 'they/them' (instead of it, he, or she) pronouns. This shift respects the River's fluidity, sentience, animacy, and spirit as a nonhuman living being (Faz n.d.b., para. 6). Spending time with the River and its personhood, Faz kayaked, mapped, attended, and questioned the River's essence and stories related to memories of human interventions and the River's returning or remembering (after Toni Morrison [Faz n.d.b., para. 7]) through what humans have termed 'floods.' Legal personhood for the River is responsive to what the Akokisa has endured over the Anthropocene epoch and before.

In Faz's 2021 multi-media exhibition, *The Grammar of Animacy*, Faz includes a Decree for Land Autonomy and Stewardship, where the Arkikosa (since amended to Akokisa) petitioned to the City of Dallas for autonomy, liberation, and legal personhood. The legal document is stamped LAND BACK in red and attached to a stick tightly wrapped in different coloured threads. The Decree outlines Arkikosa's bid to naturally evolve, flourish, and, if properly cared for, 'provide the City of Dallas with a clean and healthy environment.' While this initiative seeking consent and autonomy of the River through personhood reaches beyond Land acknowledgements to sovereignty (Faz n.d.b., para. 12), Faz could not find a lawyer in Dallas to take the petition forward (Á Faz, personal communication, 2 February 2024).

In acknowledging the discursive slippages of the River's name, gender, and personhood, Faz highlights the misrecognitions and limitations of language to encapsulate 'the existence of another living being'—the animacy, sentience, spirit, and sacredness of more-than-human beings (Faz n.d.b., para. 5). To not personify or anthropomorphise the River forces us to dwell on the specificity of a singular

individuation without categorisation or generalisation as framing or subtracting fictional devices to tame 'the world as its intensity overwhelms it' (Jagodzinski 2022, 594). While slippages of anthropomorphism and personification may over-rely on discursivity for matter's meaning and further humanistic determinations to over-control for chaos and paradox, they also point to a slippery pedagogy of undoing and unlearning the individualised self by allowing for what humans cannot know about the more-than-human. Faz's intentional gestures around slippery signifiers and dissolving discursive boundaries provoke a zone of indiscernibility between the human and the more-than-human that may generate variation.

Justice may currently be elusive for the Akokisa. Still, the extension of humanist subjectivity in the form of autonomous personhood through the legal petition is a speculative proposition for a possible future justice to come forwarding a posthuman, socially just pedagogy, shifting the pedagogical concerns from the epistemological to the multi-species and response-able possibilities for living justly (Bozalek 2018). While disrupting normative beliefs about human exceptionalism and anthropogenic impacts on the River and its biodiversity, the petition as a micropolitical event triggers a paradoxical reconsideration of the River, not only as an autonomous person but also as multiplicity eluding human capture.

Rousell's (2020) little justices, Manning's (2016) minor gestures, and Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) minoritarian propositions all focus attention on the uncertainties, entanglements, and fragilities associated with living in the Anthropocene under majoritarian and homogenous regimes. Informed by Whitehead's speculative philosophy and new materialist thought, Rousell's (2020) concept of 'doing little justices' proposes 'a way of enacting micropolitical interventions into everyday patterns of environmental thought, learning, sociality, and behaviour' such as issues of human exceptionalism and ecological sovereignty that 'proceed through a speculative process of creative experimentation and negotiation in the pursuit of unforeseen openings and potentials for co-existence' (1391).

Considering the more-than-human rights of the River constitutes 'the enactment of a 'little justice' that re-arranges the real potentiality for new patterns of thought and behaviour to emerge. This proposition gestures towards an immanent ethics that is in and for itself (you do justice by thinking it, and think justice by doing it)' (Rousell 2020, 1403), bringing it 'into productive tension with more normative conceptions of rights as they apply to the lives and activities of 'persons.' 'Yet this does not necessarily entail a reduction of rights to transcendent humanist ideals' (1402). The River's rights, for example, would be specific to the circumstances of the River's ongoing becoming instead of a false equivalent to human rights. Anthropomorphically extending legal status as a person to the River may have unknowable consequences, including weakening human exceptionalism and dominion over nature, provoking a different relationship of 'mutual co-existence' (Rousell 2020, 1396) between humans and the River.

Pedagogies of the void

Flowing Blades of Growth (Figure 1) is an ephemeral performance projected on tall prairie grass along a pond of the Akokisa River. Faz wields a machete and reed in either hand while the grass sways in the breeze and dances with the light, acting as backdrop or support to the projection intertwining with the human performance (Faz 2023, para. 1). The projection is its own shimmering as it glints off the prairie

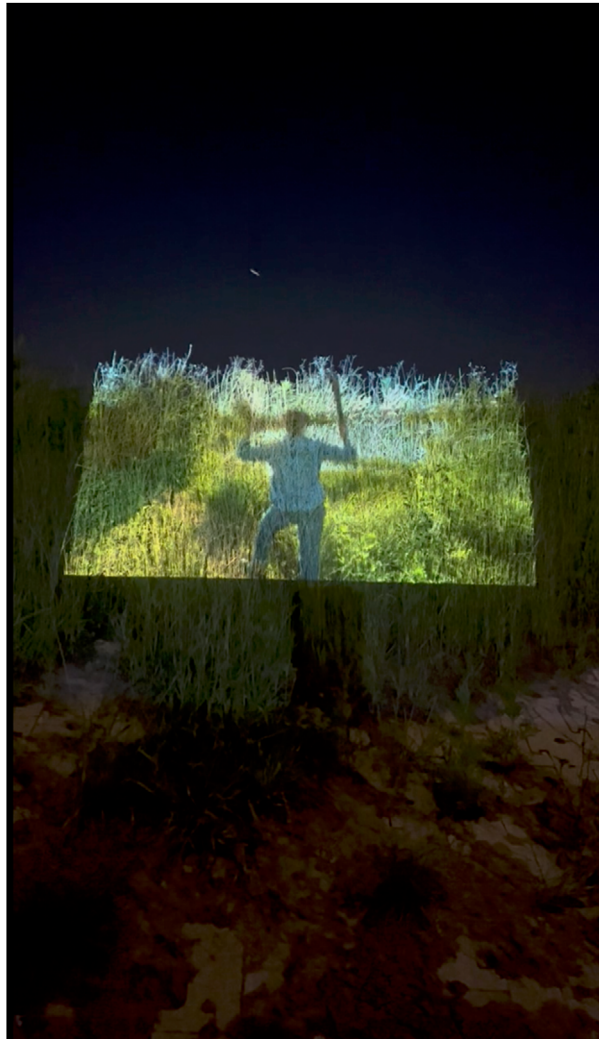


Figure 1

Still from *Flowing Blades of Growth* (Projection) Ángel Faz [2023](#), used with Permission.

grass. The top limit of the projection frame is severed or dissolved by the swaying grass so as to stretch the top of the frame to infinity. 'Water is both knife and life force, and this human has the power of both' is the statement Faz chose to encapsulate the transformative potential of moving water as a fluid, creative destruction (Faz [2023](#), para. 2).

While the artist moves the reed and machete across their body, it is unclear what power is being yielded. Is Faz fighting, taming, or dominating this fluid life in their flowing movements? If so, the River is non-conforming. In conversation with Faz (Á. Faz, personal communication, February 2, 2024), they shared that the reed and machete can both be forces for the creation of new life and the destruction of life. The machete can clear and release as well as violate and terrorise life. The common reed or phragmites can be invasive and native—the former, if unmanaged, can cause adverse environmental impacts, and the latter can filter water and

provide habitat for animals and other plants (Van Zeghbroeck & Sturtevant 2023). The River can destroy through flood and provide for life's creation. The human is capable of annihilation and salvation. But other forces might also be at play, indwelling the excluded middles of the incongruence of creative destruction. In *Flowing Blades of Growth*, Faz seems on the edge of a breakdown and breakthrough, perhaps conjuring something 'different' to open (Jagodzinski 2022, 592).

MacCormack (2013) proposes 'a non-anthropocentric pedagogical ethics' through 'pedagogical grace' activated by unthinking 'the self in order to open up the thought of the world' (13). Inspired by Serres' (1995) concept of grace as stepping aside, making room, and giving over of place, MacCormack (2013) forwards the teaching of grace as learning 'how to forsake the demand for knowledge in favour of seeking to cause liberty toward unthought of ecosophical relations' (17). This essay's third section writes into the void left in the wake of pedagogical grace.

Faz's artworks divert my humanist will to resolve indeterminacy into language. In such a pedagogical void, I wrestle with ontological vulnerability and wound-ability (Daigle 2022, 151). Similarly, Barad's (2017) interpretation of a void is that it 'always already inhabits the core, the nucleus of your being' (83) and is accessible through shared risks and vulnerabilities of material wounding. Returning to the Akokisa with Faz, new relations and entanglements stretch my wound-ability, affect-ability, and response-ability (Haraway 2012, 2016) as a porous material willing to make room for the unthought. The soothing narcissisms of humanism are undermined and re-emplaced by Faz's speculating in the terrifying void of radical, meaningless, and creative plenitude (Bennett 2010, 53–54). In such acts of pedagogical grace, Faz initiates possibilities for the release from the thresholds of human exceptionalism toward ontological flexibility into the void—the stuff of percepts and affects of life. These new relations, however, are primarily prelinguistic and imperceptible (Braidotti 2006, 2013) as affective relations of materiality do not fall under the discursive regimes of language.

Faz opens up the River as an 'aesthetic phenomenon' prior to aesthetics, and restages the Akokisa as an unknowable, 'becoming-process' emerging from a void or an 'excluded middle of an aesthetic-affective encounter' (Jagodzinski 2021, 160). Before perceiving and interpreting, the body responds at the neurological level through shifts in the affect and 'the body's motor capacities' (Snaza 2019, 110). In such pedagogical voids, our cognitive biology moves towards corporeal sensing and responding, priming the body for affect, emotion, feelings, and, eventually, conscious thought (Snaza 2019, 100). Here, we cannot claim linguistic equivalency or mastery over the impossibility of languages or subject/object divisions (Clemens 2022, 72). However, communication is still possible, albeit multiple, becoming, and contradictory (Deleuze 1990, 173–74).

Based on Deleuze's (1990) notion of the impossible as contradictory and co-existing relations, Clemens (2022) outlines linguistic impossibility as incompatible, multilingual worlds 'caught in a tangle whereby they each contradict the others and yet their existence is constituted by their multiple relations with each other', thereby permitting 'affirmatory possibilities of divergence, disjunction and difference' (72). My human language is impossible to the River. Nevertheless, indwelling this generative yet unresolvable gap of interspecies communications is where Indigenous knowledge is gathered and shared within communities based on unusual incidents, relationships, dreams, and visions (Deloria 2001, 60). These are not voids to a-void or de-void as in 'the coloniser's continuing practices of avoidance' (Barad 2017, 83), but in befriending more-than-human relations, we may still

facilitate the de-centring of the human subject and rationalist mechanisms of capture to remain open to imaginative leaps. For as jagodzinski (2022) proclaims, '[c]reative thought only 'thinks' when it encounters the cruelty of what is not-thought, the violence of that which is disparate, and not comforting' (592). To embrace the River in mutual wounding and invisibility 'is to undo the conceit of our 'humanness' by facing our impotence' (jagodzinski 2022), 'a move from "art" to aesthetics' (592) requiring 'the artist to face impossibility, which may perhaps end in failure rather than breakthrough' (593).

Uncanny

The uncanny is indicated by the imperceptible at the limits of our sensibilities. Dramatic encounters and intensities with the uncanny may provoke thought by linking actions and signs into interpretation and creation in unconscious complicity between mind and nature (Deleuze 1968/1994). However, approaching the uncanny reductively prevents 'both thought and action by resisting capacities for acting and being acted upon that might be available at as yet unimagined somatic, social and even cosmic levels' (Ramey 2013, 181). The indeterminability of our affective encounters and relations with the uncanny of more-than-human worlds renders the familiar fictions of separations between human and more-than-human strangely unfamiliar, ghostly, and slippery (Carstens 2017, 93). Human attempts at sense-making or conscious cognition of events are deferred, capturing only "afterwardsness" of thinking/feeling' through belated reason and delayed fictionalisation of the materiality of events that have already occurred (Carstens 2020, 78). It is as if our minds cultivate expertise in filtering out the uncanny that might surprise us out of our perceptual passivity, stupefaction, and anthropocentric hubris, preferring instead to leave any knowledge generation spurred by the uncanny at the quantum levels for fear of facing our impotence (jagodzinski 2021, 2022).

Learning itself is uncannily stimulated through embodied and distributed flows across material and immaterial forces commingling perceptions and 'non-cognitive processes, entangled in environmental places and relations with other sensing beings, caught up in a flow of events, becomings, and haecceities' (Carstens 2023, 3). Such transversal relations across special and material boundaries that primarily lay outside human comprehension require reworking intellectual, affective, and desiring forces in our activities, habits, and frames of reference (Braidotti & Fuller 2019, 23). When encountering such confounding elemental intimacies, Cohen (2018) recommends proceeding with 'an ethics of wonder and cautious regard' (305) so that the uncanny, instead of signalling conscious withdrawal, moves us to indwell such inconceivability. This uncanny pedagogy attends to the processes of aesthetics underway related to assemblages, composing affective 'maps of physical sensations, matter, and force, rather than representational forms' (jagodzinski 2021, 155).

To remain open to encounters with the uncanny of experience is to be curious about new potentialities from the genesis of thought. Uncanny pedagogies defamiliarise the parameters of deadly humanistic logics, anthropocentric conceits, and limiting habits by making strange and indeterminate the epistemological comforts and humanist desires derived from mastery, control, and correlationism. Such uncanny learning modalities extend the possibilities of perceptions being otherwise, drawing out possible future thinking through engaging in 'speculative more-than-human meaning makings' (Carstens 2020, 79).

Faz's water connecting doesn't translate or mediate the experience of the River, shrinking its unknowability. Rather, Faz troubles our interpretations of the River's differential relations and dynamic becomings. Such River encounters provoke pedagogical shocks to the self-satisfactions and securities of human exceptionalism. The River is made strange and otherworldly. Its uncanniness provokes novel potentials beyond my comprehension. Faz's performances (see Figures 1 and 3) offer events where the River moves beyond the actual into a strange manifestation that can be sensed as a presence of matter but has now become an unrecognisable and unthinkable virtual of undefined multiplicities, forcing creative thought (Deleuze 1968/1994).

Through Faz's interventions, I'm attempting to avoid jumping to closure around the River to harness its uncanniness through deconstructive strategies and fictive modelling of its boundaries. I'm not invested in its translatability to the discursive or needing new parameters of the River to be re-set and calcified. We've communicated unconsciously and imperceptibly, but in my reductionist and instrumental view of the environment as resource, I haven't relinquished all of my loyalty to borders between nature and culture, subject and objects, self and other. We are linked and communicate in fascinatingly imperceptible ways, compelling my patience.

Bewildering

Snaza's (2013) articulation of bewildering refuses to subordinate pedagogy to pre-determined destinations. Instead, bewildering provokes attending to relational encounters through non-western and 'emergent worldviews that recognise life, feel energy, and hear rhythms where there appear to be none' (Singh 2018, 173). Bewilderment challenges human exceptionalism and its colonial logic at spatial, temporal, and molecular scales (Snaza & Singh 2021). Abandoning the reliefs of stable and predictable knowability gained through human rationality justifying domination via industrialisation, violence, and colonisation is humbling, disorienting, and unsettling. Such discomfort also signals the possibilities of processional becoming and the generating of difference as the instability as the principle of the excluded middle can no longer be contained, causing subject/object relational indeterminacy (Pratt & Rosiek 2023).

The human body perpetually senses flavours, smells, movements, colours, atmospheres, sounds, materials, processes, and affects across multi-species. As an alternative to normative, humanising educational systems, pedagogies of bewilderment transverse embodied, perceptual, affective, and sensuous modalities. The disorienting set of corporeal relations associated with affective and sensorial experience bewilders the cultured and conscious mind before we order these unknowable swirls into cognition (Snaza 2019). Before interpreting, our cognitive biology moves towards corporeal sensing and responding, priming the body for affect, emotion, feelings, and conscious thought (Snaza 2019, 100).

Matter and materiality's multitemporality and scale elude single meanings and reductionist paradigms disconnected from more-than-human processual relations. Attempts to generalise beyond the specificities of situated intra-actions are the stuff of myth-making. Pedagogical cultivation of ecological noticing compels more fluid and distributed, inter-woven subjectivities spanning more-than-human environmental and social ecologies beyond human-centred exceptionalism and separatism (Carstens 2023, 9). Calling to attend to patterns we don't know and can't control, this disorienting intra-zone summons curiosity.

Trickster

Faz works with the objectively unknown and unthinkable beyond human reason and culture through uncanny thinking-becoming-movements in relation to the River's multi-species perspectives. While post-Enlightenment, western rationality rejects the uncanny and bewildering as abhorrent and use-less, porous boundaries are revered by Indigenous and spiritual materialism as rich pedagogical sites. For instance, Lakota Indigenous beliefs maintain that 'the spiritual world and visible world are one reality. They interpenetrate to such a degree that the line between them is but vaguely drawn, if at all' (Bunge 1984, 225). Watts (2013) encourages a decolonial operationalisation of more-than-human agency as being connected to the spirit found in all things. According to Todd (2015), spirit refers to the relationship, knowing, will, and sentience of all things (248). This essential spirit in the agency intra-acting around us is unresolved, reciprocal, and ripe with potentialities and affects involving the enigmatic suspensions of certainty and habitual perception.

Gregory A. Cajete (2010), a Tewa Indian from Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, asserts the Indigenous belief of accessing this essential spirit through connecting to one's knowing Center. This knowing Center 'reflects the knowing Center of the Earth and other living things' that may lead to the 'potential healing and whole-making power in each person' (Cajete 2010, 1130). Cajete (2010) describes anticipating one's inner Center as unpleasant and not easily attainable, leading to 'the development of a variety of ceremonies, rituals, songs, dances, works of art, stories, and traditions to assist individual access and utilise the potential healing and whole-making power in each person' (1130). Such rituals assist individuals with connecting to their knowing Center across their life's journey through rites of passage. The trickster figure could be one such connector.

The trickster, as 'indigenously posthuman,' baffles 'fictions of separation' (Carstens 2017, 113) between humans and more-than-humans, including spirits. Carstens (2020) offers that tricksters 'are potent pedagogical avatars' (85), citing Deleuze's (1968/1994) claim that tricksters operate 'in the intervals,' leaping over and confounding boundaries (Deleuze 1968/1994, 37), delivering 'violent learning' to deterritorialise predetermined and habitual thought (168). Tricksters of Indigenous African origin play in unifying, yet ambiguous, liminal spaces between the excluded middles of dichotomies, bringing our attention to the shattering of boundaries (Pelton 1980, 105). Trickster activity between non-conscious and conscious thought may act as 'speculative pedagogical aids' to the uncanniness and open-endedness of human and more-than-human relations (Carstens 2020, 87).

I return to Faz's performances (Figures 1 and 3) as a possible experimental protocol to intra-upt my intransigent thinking about the River. Offering the River as an ambiguous, porous, and liminal space, Faz's performances 'express a trickster-consciousness that is immanent to the world of matter-in-movement and matter-as-energy' (Carstens 2017, 94). For Faz, creativity comes from their connection with the Land and themselves; both activities are imbued with spirit. Shaman can take on nonhuman characteristics and communicate with spirits and animals using a secret language accessible to all nature (Eliade 1989, 104). Faz's artistic praxis might constitute shamanic communication attempts across multiple realities using a language that transverses differences across more-than-human communications of flowing languages of energy, force, affect, and spirit 'searching out symbioses and novel alliances between them' (Carstens 2017, 101).

In *Flowing Blades of Growth* (Figure 1), Faz appears to be cutting through or fighting with the air, or are they communicating with the River or trying to tame it or play with its flow of force or knowledge? Is this a shamanic connection or affinity? Many communicative possibilities exist between the River, Faz, machete, reed, prairie grass, River pond, and more without a single language. Still, in pointing to nature's radical multiplicity, there is an impotent attempt performed that is life-affirming in its unknown and chaotic array. This trickster pedagogy operates on me as a 'strange attractor' (Carstens 2020, 88). Their uncanny gestures transform the River into an absurd event site, moving the once familiar River into uncertain territory, conjuring collisions and engendering 'crises of feeling and cognition' (Carstens 2017, 113) 'where new possibilities of being, thinking and doing beckon' (112).

The impotence of our Western and humanising forms of dominance through discursive regimes are displayed here as Faz's attempts at alternative communications surface the lack of control culture and intellect can have over nature and affect (Carstens 2017, 112). Is the machete and the reed indifferent to taming the water, or is the river indifferent to this taming attempt? Is the artist risking impotence to conjure spirit in between this assemblage of nature/culture? While Faz takes on the spirit of the River and its flow, they, too, are on the edge of creative/destruction where non-western ontologies are destabilised to make way for the unknowable. Floating, slipping, distorting surfaces and projections of performances reverberate with trickster consciousness.

Shimmering pedagogy

Many of Faz's works assert a shimmering as being everywhere and all around us (Á. Faz, personal communication, 2 February 2024). I first encountered this shimmer in their projected animation of *Water Has a Memory/Remembering*, in conjunction with the New Stories: New Features exhibition in 2021 in Fort Worth, Texas. Building from Faz's Future Monument project postcard, *Water Has a Memory/Remembering* reconsiders the memory and personification of the River water through projected visuals, writing, and sound. In blue and gold, the flowing River's surface textures are indicated in moving, hatched patterns following the path of the Akokisa and its banks. Native American pottery and teepee/reed structures dot the landscape, replaced by colonist settler homes. At the same time, linear mappings track the River's forced redirection and straightening over time, all against a black backdrop pierced by sister raindrops to open and close the video.

In the animation, the Akokisa shimmers as stars and the moon reflect the sunlight glinting on the River's surface, indicated through the grooves in Faz's woodcuts. Shimmerings are also generated from little dot-like spatters mingling around the Native American pottery vessels (Figure 2). I was curious to know what these spatterings were. Still, their appearance intra-acting with the wind, river, insect, and bird sounds in the background made me speculate that perhaps a presence not ordinarily visible to my eye was being revealed as gold gleaming. Faz later asked me to think of shimmering as the River's spirit taking different forms as it travels in and around and with us (Á. Faz, personal communication, February 2, 2024).

Deborah Bird Rose (2017) describes the shimmering biosphere of life as 'an aboriginal aesthetic that calls us into this multi-species world' (53). For Rose (2017),



Figure 2

Still from *Water Has a Memory/Remembering* (Animation) by Ángel Faz 2021, Used with Permission

the relational elements of shimmer are coordinated through the Aboriginal Yolngu term *bir'yun*—a shimmering into brilliance of patterns emerging from more-than-human, multi-species dreamings, pulsing with ancestral power. The Yolngu people located in the Victoria River region of Australia's Northern Territory consider shimmer as arising through relationships and encounters of multi-species worlds, calling upon us to radically reconfigure our processes of attending to nature's allure, affect, energy, and ancestral power (Rose 2017, 52). Shimmering affects are generated via a temporal ecological patterning 'from dull to brilliant,' 'foregrounding and backgrounding,' absence and presence, coming forward and receding (Rose 2017, 54). Land shimmers with its more-than-human rhythms. Rose (2017) uses the example of the sun on water as *bir'yun* exceeding human action across interzones of varied life relations manifesting (54).

Shimmering as a materialisation of spirit acts as a lure through enchantment and curiosity to those open to its presence. While shimmering perplexes and grabs me through motioning, dissolving, and surfacing, once I turn away and re-turn to dullness of my surroundings, I am provoked to ponder what else in nature/culture/spirit is shimmering below my perceptual gaze across the biosphere. Rose (2017) contends that shimmer is susceptible to what Stengers (2010) calls *reciprocal capture* with western thought wherein 'different ways of being and doing find interesting things to do together' (Rose 2017, 51). Instead of dominating or absorbing an entity, western thought, for example, might undergo encounters with shimmer that act as gateways to new, transformative modes of existence based on noticing our multi-species worlds and caring for nature (Rose 2017, 52).

Faz's works did lure my attention and puzzlement around the recurrent shimmering. The humanising/westernising numbing of my aesthetic noticing (Carstens 2023, 7) was awoken from its banality to cultivate my bewilderment of nature and its 'glittery shine' (Rose 2022, 143). This brilliance attracts us 'into the

experience of being part of a vibrant and vibrating world' (Rose 2017, 53). It captures attention, yet it is everywhere if one relinquishes this humanised world's apathy. Our careful attention lures us into relational encounters and responses so that we might participate in life's shimmer (Rose 2017, 58). The captivation of shimmer provokes joy from the experience. Still, over time, it may also lure us into mutual care practices between Land, nature, and humans while providing a gateway to access ancestral power moving across the world (Rose 2017, 54).

Another mode manifesting multiple realities at once is Faz's projection onto surfaces. Much like the sun's rays glinting on the River's surface, projections are transient and coalescent. In the video performance *Worth More Than Gold* (Figure 3), Faz isn't a safe distance behind a secure border protecting them from nature, but instead corporeally and co-extensively enmeshed with the River, posed in the River's bed with the River blanketing Faz's torso transforming the surfaces and their being. Faz projects themselves within the overlapping, multi-species ecology and assemblage of the River as if they are 'thinking as the stuff of the world' (Alaimo 2022, 147) in its inter-penetrating layers.



Figure 3

Still from *Worth More Than Gold* (Video Performance) by Ángel Faz 2022, used with permission

Worth More Than Gold positions Faz lying in the Akokisa's shimmering spirit, indwelling dreaming and waking, night and day, human and more-than-human, comfort and discomfort, realism and mysticism, in ambiguous and flowing transformation. In the River's intra-action with the sun's rays, the River's shimmering dissolves Faz's body as it becomes background and foreground and vice versa in rhythmic patterns. Faz calls this 'becoming shimmering' (A Faz, personal communication, February 2, 2024), orienting viewers to moving sensations evoking ephemeral vibration of life's potentiality. Shimmer in relation to the River awakens an honouring of its glimmering becomings and cyclical journeying carrying with it ancestral forms of life and knowledges into other-than-human futures, intra-upting apathy, misrecognition, exceptionalism, and othering so many humans passively adhere to in the Anthropocene.

Conclusion

Anthropogenic disturbances reveal the violence of human superiority and its techno-scientific power. Human fidelity to discursive regimes coupled with ontological separations based on Cartesian myths of individual rationality and human exceptionalism have justified and perpetuated systems of violence, pollution, dehumanisation, extraction, and exploitation. As a water connector, Faz provokes us to think beyond what the river does for us to question what we do for the River. Cascading biodiversity brought on by the Anthropocene/Capitalocene's impact on the River's ecosystem and Faz's work, as extinction marks the end of certain connectivities and the capacity to perceive certain multi-species connectivities. As with the genocide and forced migration of Native Americans and Indigenous peoples, connections between specific ecosystems and Land-based knowledges are severed and lost through extinction. Humanising, dehumanising, and colonial forms of education adhering to techno-scientific mastery and progress deaden and shrink our abilities to notice and connect with the more-than-human environment, therefore threatening our multi-species survival (Carstens 2023; Rose 2017, 2022).

While the River still has a memory in its dynamic indeterminacy, pedagogy might yet terrify and enchant, speculating in the void between humans and the more-than-human. Uncanny, bewildering, slippery, trickster, transcorporeal, and shimmering pedagogical invitations to notice the worlds of the River invite us to vulnerably and response-ably risk being lured to a future abundant with connectivity and justice. Rose (2017) asks us to take 'a stand for faith in life's meaningfulness. We are called to live within a faith that there are patterns beyond our known patterns and that, in the midst of all that we do not know, we also gain knowledge' (61).

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Endnotes

- i. To situate my comments, my background is relevant here. I am a white, cisgender female descended from members of settler colonial heritage communities and raised in Vancouver, British Columbia, until moving to Texas almost 20 years ago.
- ii. The elimination was accompanied by the chilling caveat that if a teacher does tackle such a 'controversial issue' from history as colonisation, no deference is given to one point of view, so the teacher would have to make a case for why colonisation was beneficial.
- iii. In efforts to revive its Indigenous name starting in 2018, Jerry Hawkins of Dallas Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation established Arkikosa as the river's Caddo name, which was amended in 2022 to the correct spelling of Akokisa attributed to the language of the Atakapan Indigenous Peoples in Galveston/Houston area who are currently seeking federal recognition (Faz [n.d.b.](#), para. 3). Akokisa translates to 'river people' in the language of the Atakapa tribe (Faz [n.d.b.](#), para. 3).

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