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Indigenous Science Fiction: Native American Temporalities in Gerald Vizenor's "Custer on the Slipstream"

Instead of being trapped in temporal stasis and belonging to the past, Indigenous peoples aspire for the future and organically belong to it, which is reflected in Indigenous science fiction. While the genre of science fiction has long and intense relationships with colonial ideology, it is also noticeable for its decolonial potential. Analyzing Gerald Vizenor's short story "Custer on the Slipstream" (1978), I will argue that the story makes use of Native American conceptions of time and temporalities, such as ceremonial time, plural temporalities/spiraling time, interrelations between the time and the land, and specifically Anishinaabe (spatio-)temporalities. Belonging to the slipstream subgenre, the story enriches and challenges the conceptions of time usually used by (Western) science fiction and rooted in Western epistemology.

Keywords: Indigenous science fiction; time and temporalities; science fiction; slipstream

While science fiction (SF) has claimed its place among other literary and film genres, growing from the pulp magazines and late-night movies of the beginning of the last century to large circulation and high box office returns in the new millennium, Indigenous science fiction (ISF) receives unjustifiably less attention from critics, scholars, and the public. Anishinaabe academic and cultural critic Grace Dillon, points out that SF, emerging in the context of evolutionary theory, anthropology, and colonial ideology, frequently depicts the atrocities of colonialism as adventure stories (Dillon 2). On the contrary, Indigenous writers use the plenitude of the expressive means of the genre to disclose the structures of racial inequality and colonial violence, claim their agency, and assert their rights to belong to the realm of SF literature. Analyzing the short story "Custer on the Slipstream" (1978) written by Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe/Min-

nesota Chippewa Tribe), I will argue that it makes use of Native American conceptions of time and temporalities and thus enriches and challenges the conceptions of time usually used by SF.

Concerning the aspect of time and temporalities, ISF often relies on and represents Indigenous temporal conventions, which adds to its decolonial potential. As colonization of the Americas was accompanied by the imposition of chronological time (Allen 207–208) “decolonization is perhaps not only about the return of land, but equally and importantly the return of time” (Hickey 177) as this means “a resurgence of ways of thinking about and experiencing time that stand up to temporal divisions enforced by colonial and capitalist norms” (177). Moreover, reflection of Indigenous temporalities is connected to temporal justice, a concept offered by Sâkihitowin Awâsis to discuss the temporal violence, namely “unequal valuations of time, the inequitable use of temporal power, the legitimization of power by means of control over time, and the institutionalization of a dominant time” (847).

The Slipstream

Borrowing Amber Hickey’s observation that “Indigenous understandings of temporality are often not clearly linear – they may be spiraling, slipstreaming, or rhizomatic” (166), I would like to discuss the (sub-)genre of slipstream, an intersection of SF, fantasy, and literary fiction, often described as a fiction of strangeness. The emergence of the term is usually attributed to Richard Dorsett (Caselberg and Sterling) who coined it as an alternative to the mainstream SF texts. Furthermore, Grace Dillon provides an array of definitions of slipstream, their common point being the experimentality of the genre and its potential to question SF generic conventions (3–4). She argues that Native slipstream deals primarily with time travel, alternate realities and histories and multiverses (3), reflecting the achronology which Paula Gunn Allen claims to be “the favored structuring device of American Indian novelists” (203).

However, it goes beyond mere literary experiments. Rather, it models a cultural experience of reality:

Native slipstream views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream. It thus replicates the nonlinear thinking about space-time. [...] Native slipstream is noteworthy for its reflection of a worldview. (Dillon 3–4)

Slipstream often deals with a set of alternative realities and plurality of time, covered by the umbrella term “multiverse” used in Western mainstream SF. Originating from the field of quantum physics, the concept implies the coexistence of an infinite number of universes (Gardner 16). Elana Gomel argues that SF departs from traditional linear narratives by presenting multiple, sometimes conflicting, conceptions of time (17). Time travel is a major trope, featuring various models – like fixed-loop (H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*, 1895), branching timelines (Ray Bradbury’s “A Sound of Thunder,” 1952), and solipsistic realities – each with distinct implications for causality and human agency (Slusser and Heath 13–14). Other SF temporal modes include *uchronia* (alternate histories that reimagine the past) and *anticipation*, which speculates about virtual futures or fictional pasts, reshaping our understanding of time and possibility. In contrast, Native slipstream is premised on Native American temporalities and a concept of spiraling time. Both approaches explain the plurality of realities and possible events from different positions. Native slipstream relates to Indigenous temporalities that include personal and intergenerational experiences of time, its plurality and spirality.

Indigenous Time and Temporalities

Generalizing on the commonalities of the conceptions of time for different Native American nations and tribes, Laguna Pueblo scholar Dr. Paula Gunn Allen explores the concept of what she calls “Indian/ceremonial time,” emphasizing the difference between chronological (settler, mechanical, industrialized) time and timeless, achronological time (tribal, ceremonial, Native American) (203; 205–206).¹ According to her, chronological time is “promoting and supporting an industrial time sense” (205), and is connected to the capitalist organization of society. Moreover, the imposition of chronological time as a “mechanistic process of dividing

¹ Before approaching Indigenous time and temporalities, I need to clarify that each Indigenous nation has particular epistemologies regarding time, yet the scope of this paper does not allow as deep a focus on this topic as it deserves. Therefore, I will focus on the conceptions of time and temporalities that are most prominent and/or generally true for many Indigenous American nations. Moreover, I will provide a deeper analysis on Anishinaabe time and temporalities, as the author of the analyzed short story, Gerald Vizenor, belongs to the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, White Earth Reservation, which is part of the Ojibwe peoples, who belong to Anishinaabe Nation.

temporality into successive, homogeneous units" (Rifkin 22) onto an individual may result in what could be considered a sense of alienation from time. In such instances, a person becomes detached from the environment and may struggle to perceive the natural flow of time. Allen explains it by saying that "time operates external to the internal workings of human and other beings" (205).

The ceremonial time, instead, is based on the assumption that "the individual [is] a moving event shaped by and shaping human and nonhuman surroundings" (Allen 205). The achronological sense of time among Native American people stems from their beliefs about the nature of reality, the lived experience of time, the way one can feel time as the flow of events and emotions (Rifkin 22). These beliefs are grounded in ceremonial understandings rather than the industrial, theological, or agricultural orderings prevalent in other societies (Allen 205). However, given that chronological time involves organizing and comprehending events in the sequence of their occurrence, Native Americans do incorporate it as a measure for recording their histories. Nevertheless, their customary practices extend beyond reliance on clocks. Instead, they embrace both achronological and ceremonial time references, aligning with the profound rhythms of human existence (Patton 9).

According to Mark Rifkin, Indigenous time should not be considered to be an "abstract, homogeneous measure of universal movement along a singular axis" (2) but rather to be consisting of plural temporalities:

[T]here is no singular unfolding of time, but, instead, varied temporal formations that have their own rhythms – patterns of consistency and transformation that emerge immanently out of the multifaceted and shifting sets of relationships that constitute those formations and out of the interactions among those formations. (2)

In addition, Rifkin suggests the concept of Indigenous temporal orientations, meaning that time embodies not a predestined set of events but rather divergent possibilities that might or might not materialize (2). He argues that without a unifying and thus limiting singular timeline, there are "disparate temporal formations" that emerge and develop in their own way while each has its own specific tendencies and itineraries (17). Hence, the present can be approached as "a series of slices of time" (Rifkin 17).

Kyle Powys Whyte (Citizen Potawatomi Nation/Anishinaabe) introduces a concept of spiraling time which enables a response to and reflection on the events, including the perspectives of not only the person living

through them but also their ancestors and descendants (228–229). To explain it, he uses the Anishinaabemowin word *aanikoobijigan* that stands for ancestor and descendant simultaneously. For Whyte this means “living alongside future and past relatives simultaneously as we walk through life” and illustrates the Indigenous American perspective on intergenerational time embedded in a “spiraling temporality” (228–229). The unfolding of spiraling time occurs as we undergo our own evolution from descendants to ancestors, engaging with the real or potential actions of both our ancestors and descendants (Whyte 238). This expansive web of relations can be conceptualized as spiraling through time in seven directions (based on the Anishinaabe seven generations principle meaning that these seven generations in the future and in the past affect and influence the present) moving inward, upward, downward, and outward in the four cardinal directions (Simpson, qtd. in Awâsis 841). Finally, experiencing the spiraling time is possible through “narratives of cyclical, reversal, dream-like scenarios, simultaneity, counter-factuality, irregular rhythms, ironic un-cyclical, slipstream, parodies of linear pragmatism, eternality, among many others” (Whyte 229).

Native American temporalities are remarkable not only for their variability and fluidity but also for their close relations to the land. Hartmut Lutz analyzes the concept of the land that is “deep in time” offered by the Métis author Warren Cariou (Lutz, “The Land”). It implies that the place “had been inscribed by generations of people” (Lutz, “The Land”). Therefore, he argues, the land-connectedness of Native Americans is rooted in their kin relations to the people who have lived on the land and literally became part of it after they passed away (Lutz, “The Land”). This allows the scholar to borrow Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope to explore how Indigenous land is narrated through history, memories, and time. Lutz distinguishes between a Eurocentric chronological approach to history and an Indigenous North American one that considers history “not as a chronology but as a chronotope” (Lutz, “Race or Place?” 17). He states that it is particularly crucial for Native Americans that

the historicity of place, understanding history not primarily as an outer chronology of years and related events, which are then selected and arranged in terms of a retrospective teleology, constructed to explain the present as the inevitable outcome of the past, but rather, history as related to and embedded in locality. Instead of “when?” this approach to history would ask “where?” Instead of identifying a specific event chronologically by the corresponding year it took place, a chronotopical approach

would locate an event in the specific locus where it took place. (Lutz, “Race or Place?” 17)

Furthermore, settler linear time constituting a unified and structured system, a network of institutionalized authority, affected Indigenous discourses of time and therefore their relationships to the land (Rifkin 2). Rifkin claims that during the Allotment Era, Native Americans were subjected to the “imposition of an alien set of [temporal] orientations” (96). Closely related not only to temporal aspects themselves but also to the “state’s policies, mappings, and imperatives [that] generate the frame of reference” (Rifkin 2), settler time denies Indigenous temporal sovereignty and disallows the idea of the duration of the land.

Anishinaabe Time and Temporalities

According to Sâkihitowin Awâsis (Courtney Golkar-Dakin), a Michif Anishinaabe two-spirit activist, writer, and a PhD Candidate in Western University, Canada, Anishinaabe time and temporalities constitute a distinct system, which differs significantly from settler time.² Awâsis contrasts Anishinaabe and settler temporalities, showing how Indigenous time is rooted in land-based cycles – moons, seasons, and ceremonies – while settler time follows abstract structures like election cycles and fiscal years (833). Anishinaabe timeframes span seven generations, emphasizing kinship and intergenerational responsibility, whereas settler frameworks prioritize the present and nuclear family structures. Nonoral knowledge plays a central role in Indigenous decision-making but is often dismissed in settler contexts (Awâsis 833).

Besides, settler time as a “single, linear temporality” is rather abstract, whereas Anishinaabe temporal multiplicity “is learned from the land” and is grounded in the natural rhythms of time, encompassing the creation of the multiverse, seasonal shifts, the Earth’s solar rotation, and the lunar cycle (Awâsis 832). While both settlers and Anishinaabe temporalities recognize recurring sun and lunar phases as well as the change of seasons, Anishinaabe governance practices and ceremonial life are based on these periodicities while settler time is rather detached from the natural flow of time (Awâsis 843).

² The scholar claims that the viewpoints from her article are not meant to encompass all Anishinaabe temporal modes or concerns, and they do not constitute an essential definition of time for the entire Anishinaabe community.

Awâsis explains that Anishinaabe seasonality differs from the settler model of four fixed seasons; instead, it follows six fluid seasons that vary in length based on environmental changes each year (843). She further outlines key aspects of Anishinaabe spatiotemporalities, emphasizing kinship as an intergenerational relationship shaped through shared origins, inheritances, and ongoing connections to the land (844), including the concept of *aanikoobijigan* discussed earlier. Time is also queered in this worldview – nonlinear and relational – where the past, present, and future are intertwined, and a “desired future” influences how the past and present are engaged with (839–840). Prophecy plays a role through teachings such as the Seven Fires Creation Story and Seven Fires Prophecy,³ while the notion of relativity is rooted in the idea that time does not exist abstractly but only through its relationship with land (831–832). Finally, the concept of continuity is expressed through *biidaaban*, as described by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and a member of the Alderville First Nation), which captures the simultaneity of the future, present, and past in a single transformative moment:

The prefix *bii* means the future is coming at you; it also means the full anticipation of the future, that you can see the whole picture. *Daa* is the verb for living in a certain place or the present. *Ban* or *ba* is a verb used for when something doesn’t exist anymore or someone who has passed on. *Biidaaban*, then, is the verb for when day breaks, the actual moment daylight appears at dawn, not as a prolonged event but the very moment. (*As We Have Always Done* 193)

The Reflection of Native American Time and Temporalities in Gerald Vizenor’s “Custer on the Slipstream”

Gerald Vizenor’s short story “Custer on the Slipstream” (1978) challenges and enriches the mainstream SF time conventions by being rooted in spe-

³ The Seven Fires Creation Story and Seven Fires Prophecy comprise seven distinct prophecies, each associated with a period or “fire” in the Anishinaabe historical timeline. The prophecies encompass critical events and teachings that guide the community through different eras, also for the future, emphasizing the importance of spiritual and ethical values. While interpretations may vary, the story serves as a cultural cornerstone, providing a framework for understanding the Anishinaabe worldview and their interconnectedness with the natural world.

cifically Native American temporalities and applying the concept of slipstream.

To begin with, “Custer” relies on the plural temporalities and spiraling time. The past, present and future are intertwined and hardly distinguishable. For instance, the majority of characters are somehow related to historical figures. Farlie Border is resurrected General George Armstrong Custer. Crazy Horse (Lakota: *Thašúŋke Witkó*) and Sitting Bull (Lakota: *Thašáŋka Íyotake*), famous Lakota war leaders of the second half of the nineteenth century, speak and appear through an Indigenous person. Saul Alinsky, American community activist and political theorist, is mentioned by Clement Beaulieu, who might allude to colonel Clement Hudon Beaulieu, Gerald Vizenor’s ancestor of mixed French-Anishinaabe descent, or to John Clement Beaulieu, his granduncle (Vizenor, *Interior Landscapes* 4; 7; 9). Finally, this name is often used by Vizenor as *nom de plume* to “represent [his] actual presence as a character” in his texts (Vizenor, *Literary Chance* 36). By intermingling the real and fictional characters Vizenor blurs the line between the “real” and imaginable temporalities.

Furthermore, the writer’s way of using the grammatical category of tense adds to the multiplicity of time in the story. While the whole story is written in the Past tense, the first paragraph, introducing resurrected General Custer, is in the Present tense as if to emphasize the common fact that the “old generals never die” (Vizenor, “Custer” 17), and thus, that Custer’s “loathsome voice and evil manner [...] prevail on hundreds of reservations” since his death in the battle of the Little Bighorn alludes to his resurrection in white people: (white) public adoration of “America’s top Indian fighter” (Urwin) and extreme popularity of the Custer Myth despite Native Americans’ efforts to critically approach his persona.

The spiral temporality of the story is enhanced by the overlapping of Farlie Border (a fictional character, probably living in a future/alternate reality of the story) and General Custer (a historical figure, depicted as such). It is difficult to distinguish who exactly is acting in a certain moment as Vizenor uses these two characters completely interchangeably.⁴ The literal resurrection of Custer is depicted with all his hate and disparagement of the Indigenous people: The poster with a malnourished Indigenous child and a mocking inscription over it provides quite a telling picture of his attitude towards the “tribal people and the poor” (Vizenor, “Custer” 18) whom he is meant to serve. Some of the traits depicted give the reader a hint at Border’s temper: “evil curl on his thick lips” or his

⁴ I am going to use their names in the same fashion.

“sinister smile” (Vizenor, “Custer” 18). Other descriptions of his look illustrate the ties between Border and Custer: his white hair as if he were old, or the way he stacks his fingers “one over the others [...] like bodies” (18). The bone-white carpet in Border’s office enhances this allusion to Custer’s past full of atrocities and violence. While how the resurrection happened is not explained, tribal people claim that “Custer has taken [Farlie Border’s] heart” (22). Being possessed by Custer’s “specter,” as Vizenor calls it, Farlie Border’s appearance is “all from tribal memories” (18), meaning his resurrected version looks as he looked in the nineteenth century.

The story’s sense of spiraling time enhances the incomprehensibility in the sense of chronological time. For instance, Crazy Horse claims he has an appointment with Custer from the past and promises to be back sometime in the future (Vizenor, “Custer” 18; 24). Unresolved tensions between Custer and Native people account for the fact that Custer’s resurrection is followed by the (re-)emergence of his enemies from the past, namely Native American war chiefs. “Crazy Horse is here, [...] he said he has an appointment with you from the past” (18), says Custer’s secretary. Later during the direct encounter, the Native person claims, “Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse and I have come down here to see you alone” (23).

Besides, the experience of plural temporalities and spiraling time is enhanced by Vizenor’s narrative style. For Custer, as well as for the reader, there is no singular unfolding of the events. The narration is fragmentary and nonlinear. Different settings, chronotopes, narrators, and flashbacks interrupt the development of the main plot line and complicate it. Dreams, memories, reported dialogs, and events happening in Border’s office feel equally real due to the writer’s style.

The queerness of time is reflected in the story on various levels. Firstly, it is completely unclear when the story is set. On the one hand, it might be some remote future when (white) people have learned how to resurrect someone and embody them in someone else. On the other hand, as an example of a survivance story (Dillon 16) the temporal characteristics of the story are of less importance than its outcome (the disappearance of General Custer). Therefore, while the reader is trying to locate the events on a chronological axis, the story successfully resists this attempt.

From this perspective, unresolved tensions between Custer and Native people account for Custer’s resurrection and the following (re-)emergence of his enemies from the past, namely Native American war chiefs. The embodied Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse “waited for recognition” (Vizenor, “Custer” 23) from Custer, being sure the latter would remember the

previous meetings with him/them. Seeing Custer alone is an important requirement to perform a spiritual revenge. Crazy Horse has spiritual control of the situation while Border is increasingly uncomfortable: His office feels “too warm,” he breathes faster, “the veins in his neck throbbed harder and his stomach rose in sudden shifts beneath his light-blue summer suit” (23–24). When Border finally looks into the eyes of Crazy Horse, he sees the same “deep black pools,” the same “unknown” and “tribal shamanism” (24) he encountered when he met Native persons for the first time. Finally, by losing “his vision and consciousness” (24) he loses this battle of minds the same way he was defeated the previous time.

The revenge of the tribal people happens on a spiritual/ceremonial level in both cases when Border encounters them. He is firstly recognized as General Custer by tribal people he meets at his parents’ summer cabin when he is fifteen. They ask him to pay for the wild and to give back the land that belongs to them. When he refuses and attacks the shaman, the latter “possesse[s] him with his shamanic powers” so that he loses consciousness, and his vision is crossed and weakened (Vizenor, “Custer” 23). After Border’s encounter with Crazy Horse in his office, the white man disappears and probably dies. Tribal people claim that “his vision crossed” while he was driving, so that he slipped “from grace in a slipstream” (25). By using the same words to describe Custer’s bodily reactions to tribal shamanism in different situations, Vizenor suggests Border’s death is not an accident but rather a consequence of his encounter with Native Americans in Border’s present and Custer’s past.

The queer dimension of time is connected with the presence of ceremonial temporality. As Allen claims, in Native American texts “dream, ‘actual’ event, myth, tale, history, and internal dialogue are run together, making it evident that divisions do not lead to comprehension,” which reflects the ceremonial temporality (211). Moreover, in Anishinaabe tradition, dreams and visions are equally real as the physical reality (Simpson, “Stories”) and can ensure the experience of the spiritual world. Furthermore, dreams and visions can be controlled by the actions of humans or other persons (Simpson, “Stories”). In that respect, Border’s haunting dreams about “falling with the setting sun into deep black pools, like the deep dark eyes of the old tribal man” (Vizenor, “Custer” 23) mean much more than just an aftermath of the traumatic experience. After meeting Crazy Horse, his dreams become even scarier: “His dreams were about people falling into deep pools, dark pools, people he could not reach. In some dreams he saw his own face in the pools, slipping under before he could reach himself” (24). These visions constitute another reality where

Custer encounters tribal people and is defeated over and over, thus creating a survivance story in which Native people triumph over “the loathsome voice⁵ and evil manner of this devious loser” (17).

Moreover, Border’s dreams foreshadow the future of Custer who will slip “from consciousness into the deep dark pools of tribal shamanism” (Vizenor, “Custer” 24) and pass away. Not being capable of processing this contact with spiritual reality, Border collapses. Besides that, Custer’s inability to see clearly after the encounters with Native Americans, his crossed and weakened vision indicates the transition between the spiritual and physical realities, illustrating Jeannie Patton’s claim that “one can move into and out of ceremonial time” (10). Another reason that the encounter between Crazy Horse and Custer happens, at least partially, in some other reality is that no one noticed they had actually met. Border’s secretary claims that Crazy Horse “waited for a few minutes while you were on the telephone” (Vizenor, “Custer” 24).

The realities of the present, past, and spiritual/ceremonial dimension are intertwined in Vizenor’s story not only through the presence of people from the past but also through the way these realities are experienced. In addition to the tangibility of the dreams, the past can be felt as the “smell of leather and blood and horses on the prairie” (Vizenor, “Custer” 18) in Border’s office. While being defeated and lying face down in his office, Border can smell “the prairie earth that dropped from the boots of the shaman” (24). Nevertheless, it is not clear whether Crazy Horse comes from the prairie, or whether this smell appears because of the transition between realities.

Moreover, Vizenor’s engagement with ceremonial time is complicated through another layer of reality, a metaphorical one. According to Kristina Baudemann, animal metaphors in Vizenor’s texts can indicate the “shadow presence of levels of existence other than human life in linear time from birth to death” (152). In “Custer,” Border faces four reservation mongrels chasing a domestic black cat before his first contact with the tribal people. Later, four Native Americans emerge. The parallels between the four dogs from the reservation and the four people to whom they belong as well as the domestic cat and Border himself are obvious. Custer claims the dogs are wild, while tribal persons advocate that all the land is wild and equate wild with tribal. The domesticity of the cat in this case might allude to the civilization Border belongs to (civilization as an op-

⁵ Also literally, as during both encounters Custer loses his ability to speak, and his silence enhances the spiritual power of the Native person.

posite to wilderness). What is more, later in the text Border springs “from his chair [...] like a cat” (Vizenor, “Custer” 24). Mongrels jump over Custer two times forecasting his two encounters with Native people. Besides, his shooting at the cat and two dogs might be read as signifying that his present and past violence towards Indigenous people will inevitably result in his own death. By choosing the way of violence he symbolically kills himself.

Finally, the interrelations between time and land are also represented in Vizenor’s story. The conflict between Custer and tribal people is rooted in the history of the conquest of the territory of Turtle Island by white colonizers. General George Custer was an active participant of the violent attacks, murders, and other atrocities against Native Americans. The conflict brought from the past to the present keeps being focused on the land now owned by white people. “Custer is sitting everywhere” (Vizenor, “Custer” 20) Crazy Horse claims while referencing the reasons for the distressful situation in which a majority of the “original people on our mother earth” live (20). “The land will be ours again” he predicts and concludes “[w]e still dance” (20–21) alluding to the Ghost Dance ceremony,⁶ the aim of which is to end colonial oppression and bring peace and prosperity to Indigenous people. This also hints at the prophecy-oriented Anishinaabe temporalities. Hence, one of the reasons for the resurrection of Native American heroes in the story is the ongoing dominance of the white people over the Indigenous land – the continuity and repetitiveness of time.

Also, the kinship-based relations to the land are reflected in the Native Americans’ responsibility for the land and its close ties with them. Crazy Horse claims that earth “talks through him in a vision” when he speaks (Vizenor, “Custer” 21). Therefore, his perspective on the idyllic future when “[t]he earth will revolt and everything will be covered over with the new earth and all the whites will disappear, but we will be with animals again” (20) can be considered the will of the land. Earth thus becomes an active agent talking through the shaman, feeling angry for being “polluted and stripped for coal and iron” (20).

⁶ Ghost Dance is a ceremony among many Native American Nations that emerged in the late nineteenth century inspired by a prophecy made by Wovoka, Northern Paiute spiritual leader. The dance should call the spirits of the ancestors to unite with the living and fight the colonizers to finally end the dominance of white people. It should also bring peace, prosperity, and unity among the Native American peoples.

Conclusions

As shown by this paper, Indigenous science fiction exhibits the distinct generic sensibility, reflecting the notion of Indigenous Futurities. Mediating the Native American ideas about non-linear time and its particular features such as plurality, spirality, ceremoniality, and relation to land, Gerald Vizenor builds his short story “Custer on the Slipstream” around recognizable Native American temporalities and time conventions.

If Native slipstream “replicates the nonlinear thinking” and reflects “a worldview” (Dillon 3–4), its relationship to science fiction becomes less about adherence to traditional genre conventions and more about the epistemological function it performs. Rather than projecting speculative futures or alternate multiverses, Native slipstream reconfigures SF’s estranging techniques to reflect Indigenous experiences of time, memory, and reality. This challenges the assumption that SF must always extrapolate from technological or scientific premises. Instead, it suggests a form of narrative that is speculative not because it imagines the impossible, but because it insists on ways of knowing and being that defy Western linear temporality. Vizenor’s use of slipstream illustrates this shift. Phrases such as Custer slipping “from grace in a slipstream” or Border’s dreams of “pools” and “slipping under” (Vizenor, “Custer” 24–25) invoke both the literal and metaphorical dimensions of slipping and streaming. These images do not merely evoke disorientation; they root the story in Indigenous modes of perception, in which time is cyclical, layered, and embodied. Here, the term “slipstream” becomes more than a genre label – it is a literary and ontological strategy. Vizenor transforms the slipstream from a fiction of strangeness into a fiction of survivance, using it to foreground historical continuity, cultural resilience, and the refusal to be bound by colonial narrative structures. Moreover, the slipstream as a physical phenomenon suggests belated temporality and a sense of being dragged along. It invites the question of agency: If someone is riding another’s slipstream, who is setting the direction, and who is being pulled forward (or held back) by historical forces? In “Custer on the Slipstream,” this metaphor could be read as a reversal of settler colonial temporality, where Custer – once a symbol of imperial progress – is now caught in the wake of Indigenous survivance. Framing the story within Indigenous futurities allows for a reading in which history is not escaped or denied but reworked through Indigenous epistemologies, humor, and resilience.

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