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Adopted

Trace, Blood, and Native Authenticity

JOSEPH M. PIERCE

This essay explores how critical ethnic studies has taken up the question of belonging for people with ambiguous Native histories and affiliations, bodies and speech, ways of embodying and speaking the self. My goal is to question the limits of self-identification when that very language, that narration, seems to challenge Native practices of cultural belonging and tribal citizenship. Concretely, I want to consider how a particular set of ambiguities that emerges around the legacy of extra-tribal adoption (people adopted out of Indigenous tribes, typically by white families) has strained the relationship between Native identities, tribal sovereignty, and histories of cultural appropriation in this era of increased reclamation of indigeneity in the United States. My thinking on this topic was inspired by the controversies around identity policing and authenticity that agitated the summer of 2015, though my aim is not to rehash contentious, emotionally draining, or distracting debates such as those that emerged around Rachel Dolezal, Andrea Smith, and Susan Taffe Reed.¹ I do, however, want to insist on a sustained critique of the ability to relate as Native, even when that ability may be tenuous or even ethically suspect. My central claim in this essay is that when taken in isolation genealogical trace, racialized blood, and cultural authenticity all fail to account for the complex ways in which relating as Native—particularly for children adopted out—is predicated on the intersection of all three. This intersection is uneven and problematic, but it is also essential to grappling with the ethical implications of relating, belonging, and claiming Native identity in times such as these.

To do so, in this essay I lean on the autobiographical, though it is not an autobiography. My reliance on personal experience owes in part to the lack of inquiry into the lasting effects of transracial adoption in critical Native studies and is also a methodological choice I have made to speak as a particularly situated subject/product of American Indian adoption policies.²

While recent work in fields such as social work and legal studies has tended to focus on the implementation and enduring viability of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), the long history of extra-tribal adoption, from the colonial period to today, remains underdocumented and undertheorized. One of the few historians who has written about contemporary extra-tribal adoption, Margaret D. Jacobs, attempts to explain this deficit as owing, on the one hand, to psychological processes: “this history involves trauma, shame, and controversy,” and on the other, to a disciplinary tendency to privilege the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s as an object of historical study.³ Jacobs’s work attempts to fill this gap and provides an important and nuanced historical framework without which my own intervention might seem overly introspective. But I do not want to ask how the U.S. government justified its assimilationist policies at midcentury before the passage of the ICWA. Rather, I am interested in asking what narratives we can engage in the present in order to negotiate the problematic positioning of adoption and return for Native communities. What does it mean to “return” to a community after having been adopted out? What language must exist in order for these stories to simultaneously reflect the lived experience of an adoptee, the structural framework of settler-colonial violence, and communal practices of kinship?

My approach to these questions is similar to what Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill calls “re-storying”: “a retelling and imagining of stories that restores and continues cultural memories.”⁴ For adoptees, the prospect of re-storying is both cultural and political because it shifts understandings of what it means to belong to a Native community precisely because the elimination of cultural practices, language, and identity was the central mandate and ultimate purpose of extra-tribal adoption. In the 1960s, in some states in the United States, up to 35 percent of Native children were removed from their families and placed in white homes.⁵ The lives of Native children were never meant to matter under this regime of settler-colonial violence. Indian kids were never meant to become Indian adults. This is not isolated, but part and parcel of the ongoing intent to remove, displace, steal, and ultimately exterminate Indigenous people by a settler state. Thus, for adoptees the prospect of “return” is predicated on settler-colonial violence, but it can also represent the possibility to “re-story” and resist settler logics and practices of Native erasure.

As I will argue below, this process is imminently queer. Not queer as an identity position, not a fixed claim of self, but as a relational possibility. It is, to use the Cherokee term proposed by Driskill, *asegi* (strange or queer). Our

practice of re-storying *asegi* is not identitarian, but narrative. The queerness of our stories is found in the very act of telling them, as well as in their silences, ruptures, and refusals. The queerness that I am describing is reflected in the refusal of settler imaginaries of self, in the search for new forms of narration that challenge contemporary understandings of “authenticity,” and in the willingness to challenge normative demands for identitarian legibility.

This essay expands on the first essay I wrote on this topic, “In Search of an Authentic Indian: Notes on the Self,” which was published by *Indian Country Today*.⁶ My goal with that piece was to contribute to the discussion at a particular moment, when, as I mention above, cases of “ethnic fraud” dominated both news and social media, pushing the limits of what indigeneity means, and how it means, in the United States. In that brief text I argued for what I called an “authentic” approach to self-identification, one that would require speaking openly about the shifting place of people with incomplete genealogical histories and ambiguous identity positions, namely, adoptees, children of adoptees, and mixed-race people. I wanted to put my own lived experience in dialogue with historical legacies of settler-colonial violence as essential to negotiating the difficult terrain of Native identification for such subjects. I described my personal history with racial ambiguity and situated my own relationship with blood quantum in that text. It may be useful for me to restate that I am currently registered with a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) as one-quarter Cherokee. That is, according to federal and tribal standards, I have a genealogical ancestor, one of my grandparents, who is a full-blood Cherokee. But I did not know this until I was twenty-three years old. This is because my father had been adopted by a white family, and he did not know anything about his biological kin until he was fifty-four, when we went through the process of opening his sealed adoption records. Thus, my father is one-half Cherokee, the son of a white father and a full-blood Cherokee mother. In that previous piece, I wanted to ask what sort of a relationship we could have to the Cherokee Nation and to those kin. I narrated how we managed to contact and eventually meet my father’s biological mother and the rest of her family, our family, our process of reconnecting and rebuilding kinship with them, and eventually becoming citizens of the Cherokee Nation. All of this is complicated. The answers to the questions I asked in the previous paragraph are not simple or straightforward. This is what I mean by the queerness of adoption policies. They create twisting relations, gaps, dissonant desires and identities. The narration of these stories is queer.

In seeking to extend and deepen that piece, I incorporate some of the broader discussions, longer histories, and more nuanced theoretical vocabulary that I hope helps to engage contemporary understandings of indigeneity as a mode of belonging that is necessarily framed by the self interfacing the collective, even if that interface is obscured by adoption. If in this text I focus on a sense of self, I want to be clear that I do not intend to romanticize the individual, the self, to the detriment of the collective. I do not want to romanticize indigeneity either, or elide the problematic positioning of racial ambiguity as supporting white supremacy and reifying antiblackness. Rather, by interrogating ambiguity, the possibilities of Native identification, and the challenges involved in identifying as Native today for adoptees, my goal is to probe the forms of narration that elide, engage, and subtend the type of Native identity that becomes salient through the friction between the self and the collective in the context of extra-tribal adoption.

In what follows, I turn to the reception of my first essay on Native belonging, and proceed to discuss the particular case of Cherokee citizenship as trace, blood, and authenticity. If in the previous three paragraphs I described a pan-Indigenous sense of belonging, I would like to note here that I am not interested in such grandiose claims. Rather, I want to situate my particular case within the literature on Cherokee diasporic citizenship. In this case, a form of belonging that is also inflected by adoption and return, queerness, and intersectionality. It is from this interchange that I dialogue with Cherokee scholars and activists. My own particular case cannot be taken as representative of all Native adoptees (or, in my case, children of adoptees), but it does illustrate some of the problematic issues faced by adoptees and subsequent generations, and it is in that spirit of a deeper engagement with our ambiguity that I write. I will argue that it is from this position of critical engagement with narrativity, queering the narrative possibilities of belonging, that stories such as mine, such as many others, can begin to make sense.

As an example of this queerness, I want to engage with some of the comments made on the *Indian Country Today Media Network's* Facebook page, which linked through to the article I wrote in 2015. One commenter wrote: “and he’s gay ,lol” [*sic*].⁷ It might be easy to dismiss this trolling, but what if we took it seriously? There are two things that the commenter points out: first, the “lol.” Maybe the “lol” actually means “faggot.” Maybe I had forgotten the centrality of homophobia in policing of Native identities.⁸ But the comment is not simply about “gay” as a fixed identity position, one that owes to contemporary understandings of sexuality as an essential identity marker. I think this comment is actually intended to highlight the absurdity of my

attempt to narrate myself in a way that accounted for the historical weight of colonialism on the contours of my own body. Or perhaps for the notion that there may be an authentic way to narrate the ambiguously Native self. Perhaps it seems a laughable circumstance. Laughable hues of racial ambiguity. Absurd attempts to link race and sexuality. And yet, unwittingly the “and” speaks to intersectionality, to the ways our racial and sexual lives are imbricated in myriad ways. The bodies we inhabit are always simultaneously gendered, classed, and racialized. This simultaneity is something that disquiets: the “ands” that populate our lives as multiple, as possibilities. The commenter was unable to take my “and,” but perhaps not only because the “and” indicates multiplicity, but also because it points out a limitation to what one is allowed to be, to embody, what one can bear as particular. *And* reminds us of what often gets overlooked in the binary structuring of race in the United States. *And* speaks to the discomfort of holding on to the multiple within the self. *And* speaks to the tremendous effort that is required to exist under the sign of racial, gendered, and sexual ambiguity. *And* is the first step toward queering the narrative possibilities of self.

However, *and* is not enough. I could be “and gay,” but that gesture creates an iterative set of possibilities. It imagines identity as a mathematical equation, as if we could block out these parts of self, as if we could add and subtract discrete elements of identity. What if we considered another way of belonging and structuring the imaginaries of self? What if we considered not “and gay” or “and Cherokee” but “of Cherokee” (or “of gay” for that matter)? To be *of* allows for a proliferation of identities. It allows for relating to others in diverse ways. Intersection is not only “and” things, but also “of” things. What is more, race is always “of” sexuality. Categories of self that, historically, emerge as always already imbricated in each other. It is something entirely different to imagine the self as “of” because “of” is about belonging and relating in a way that does not arrive at identity as the sum of its parts, but as textures of identification. By the possibilities of trajectory, and the links between people that are not beholden to identitarian essentialism. To be *of* Cherokee allows me to describe myself as being in process. This is especially important in the context of Native adoption and acculturation because process is, in most cases, all we have.

Evidently this borrows from a Deleuzian framing, one that I will return to later, but I want to finish this introduction by restating the problematic positioning of intersectionality, which poststructuralist scholars have critiqued as being aggregative, as mere addition, rather than opening possibilities of becoming.⁹ Narratives like the one I am trying to tell depend heavily

on an underlying possibility of being of, being for, that reminds us not of the discrete identity categories that we all embody, but the responsibility to others, to the multiple within the self, and to the extension of the self toward the multiple. This is mutuality rather than individuation. Thus, the type of self that I am describing is not a partitioned, Rousseauian self, but rather a self that weaves, as Driskill might put it, experience and history, collectivity and particularity, self and other. These textures are both communal and individual. They mark belonging as process rather than essence. For adoptees, this belonging must pay attention to both lived history and the pressures of colonial violence; it must include a “return” that does not attempt to assert the self as divorced from the collective. But there are no scripts, no maps, for this “return.” Rather, the possibility of this belonging is based on trace, blood, and authenticity.

TRACE

What are the rhetorical forms that we have at our disposal? What devices can we use to describe how the self becomes multiple, collective? The federal census asks us to check a box, or now, multiple boxes. We indicate graphically based on a list of available options, reducing history, experience, and diversity to a set of predetermined squares. The Cherokee Nation also relies on a census, the Final Rolls of Citizens and Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes, conducted between 1899 and 1906. This census registered Cherokees by blood, Cherokee Freedmen, and intermarried whites living in Indian Country at that time.¹⁰ As the Cherokee Nation website points out, in bold, for all those in search of a genealogical connection to the tribe: “If your ancestor did not live in this area during that specific time period, they will not be listed on the Dawes Rolls.”¹¹ This is a question of territory, of fixing belonging through a connection to a people living in a particular place at a specific time. There is no blood quantum requirement for Cherokee Nation enrollment. Rather, the tribe requires direct filiation to an individual listed on the Dawes Rolls. This process foregrounds the trace of genealogy over phenotype or even culture. To be a citizen of the Cherokee Nation you must be directly related to someone on the Dawes Rolls. You need a paper trail to an enrolled descendant. Here, citizenship is a line of sight that follows the contours of genealogy. Births and deaths that become you. For adoptees, this may be all we have. Or not.

The genealogical trace that is required for tribal enrollment is a technology of self, to borrow from Michel Foucault, a technology that inscribes

genealogy as blood and tears.¹² Trace of the materiality of Cherokee bodies as related. Is it not also the Trail of Tears that we trace as Cherokee Citizens? Those lines on a map of forced removal, a braid of dispossession twisting through winter. This is settler-colonial violence as a point of origin, or as historian Gregory D. Smithers demonstrates, a fracture that marked the inevitability of a diasporic Cherokee identity from the nineteenth century to today.¹³ Of course not all Cherokees came west by way of the forced removal of 1838–39, the Trail of Tears. Indeed, many voluntarily left their ancient homelands decades earlier. But the Trail of Tears marks a break in Cherokee history and in the U.S. settler-colonial imaginary that is impossible to ignore. It is an example so poetic, so prone to romanticization, so enshrined in U.S. constitutional law, so easy to remember, and yet so hard to fully grasp. It serves as shorthand for Native nobility in suffering and the despair that must always accompany the Indian in the eyes of the settler state. It is a cipher for historical belonging, territory, and theft.¹⁴ It is a moment in which the Cherokee people were not only attempting to redefine themselves amid internecine political struggles, but also one that marks the beginning of a series of traumatic debates over identity, land, and sovereignty. From removal to allotment to contemporary neoliberal forms of relating to the settler state, it is the trace of relation to fellow Cherokees, as much as the trace to the insidious forms of theft, dislocation, and cultural genocide that we negotiate as contemporary members of the Cherokee Nation.

Cherokee, here, is a function of archived dispossession. But we know that this archivization of Cherokee bodies was incomplete and fraught with difficulty. Many were not registered, or misregistered, by census takers; still others refused to be enrolled. Thus, trace has its problems, its gaps. When someone claims tribal heritage but cannot link their lineage to a member of the Dawes Rolls, claims of Cherokeeness are frustrated by a genealogical gap.¹⁵ On the one hand, this gap has been exploited by self-identified Cherokees, who, through family lore, wishful thinking, or outright fraud, have attempted to claim Cherokee citizenship. But on the other, this gap also affects Cherokees adopted out. This is the interstitial space that I am interested in exploring. This gap produces a desire. A gap in family history is like a wound that you want to heal, and perhaps you graft onto that gap something that you want to know, something you wished you knew, but do not, cannot. In the case of adoptees, David Eng and Shinhee Han call this gap “racial melancholia.”¹⁶ It is an aspirational desire for completeness that is inflected by the willingness—and the privilege—to perform as a wholly constituted self. Eng and Han point out that for Asian Americans and other

groups of color, as a psychic process, melancholia signals the incompleteness of multicultural demands to assimilate to whiteness. It is this unresolved quality that I want to harness for my own critique of Native American trans-racial adoption and return. This melancholic desire is traumatic, messy, and ghostly. For adoptees, this technology of self is speculative and spectral. We need to be able to think through Native adoption as a symptom of the enduring logics of settler colonialism's mandate to erase Native cultures. Likewise, we need to recognize that this is not simply a question of "acceptance," as Joshua Whitehead points out, but of engaging in a practice of decolonial belonging that can also account for the histories of theft and forced acculturation, adoption, and reconciliation with Native communities.¹⁷ Our bodies haunt the colonial imaginary. We exist as traces of colonial theft. We exist as trace bodies and yet we are undone by both tribal and settler-colonial demands for legibility and authenticity.

In this framework, it would seem that there is no room for *becoming* Cherokee. There is only relating through a line of vertical descent. But for many adoptees all we have is *becoming*. An adoptee or the child of an adoptee may always have an unstable relationship with tribal affiliation. Whitehead describes this problem with a bit more dexterity: "Often, Indigenous adoptees and their children must *play* Indian in order to *feel* Indian lest their indigeneity be continually questioned and disregarded."¹⁸ Is that a possible place? Is that inhabitable as an ethical position? Whitehead's "playing Indian" refers to a performative process that brings extra-tribal adoptees dangerously close to those who would seek to claim tribal belonging without having a genealogical connection to a particular tribe. At the same time, Whitehead relates the temporality of extra-tribal adoptees to the haunting of our spectral bodies for Native practices of identification. I am persuaded by this argument, and would encourage more work that engages, for example, Avery Gordon's conceptualization of the haunting unfamiliarity of colonial subjects in the case of extra-tribal adoption.¹⁹ As the child of an adoptee, I am a ghost performer of Cherokeeness. My body, out of (genealogical) time. My relationship with kin, spectral. Or, as Daniel Heath Justice might say, we are an "anomaly" of tribal belonging precisely through our unstable relationship with the Cherokee Nation.²⁰ In this essay, however, my focus is on our queer narrativity—and this is not to divorce haunting or anomaly from narrativity—but I will leave it to others to develop those ideas. Here, I want to continue theorizing the queer narrative aspects of Cherokee belonging for adoptees.

In most cases extra-tribal adoptees must build or rebuild a cultural connection to the tribe from which we were removed. But this does not mean

that we cannot ever have one. We can have both blood and trace (even if we don't know it), but work toward community and mutuality. I want to expand on this by turning to the work of Circe Sturm, and in particular her monograph, *Becoming Indian: The Struggle over Cherokee Identity in the Twenty-first Century*. Sturm's work on "race shifting" has shed light on the amazing increase in Native-identified people in the United States over the past two decades, and on the discourses and meaning that "race shifters" derive from identifying as Cherokee. Sturm makes a distinction between "race shifters" and "citizen Cherokees." Race shifters are people "who have changed their racial self-identification on the U.S. Census from non-Indian to Indian," and while they may claim Cherokee heritage or belong to a self-identified Cherokee tribe, they do not belong to a federally recognized tribe.²¹ On the other hand, "citizen Cherokees," for Sturm, are "citizens of one of the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes."²² The first time I read Sturm's work, I felt so hailed by her analysis. I felt somewhere caught between "race shifter" and "Citizen Cherokee." I was a Citizen Cherokee, but I didn't "feel Cherokee." I couldn't *feel* something that I didn't have access to: memories, kinship, oral history. My father's adoption had produced this gap, and in opening his adoption records, in finally meeting his biological family, spending time with them, hearing their stories, we were attempting to engage with this history, those people, and their experiences as Cherokee.

In fact, this "feeling" of Cherokee-ness is something that I struggle with deeply. It is an affective deficit for me, it is something that, in my earlier piece I called, also, an authentic experience. Not knowing, for me, was exactly how I felt. Not feeling "as" Cherokee. That I am a Cherokee citizen today, after having met and spent time with the Cherokee family I did not know I had, that I was able to trace my genealogy (to bridge that gap) and fulfill the requirements for Cherokee citizenship and the federal CDIB card—still problematic, does not mean that I can allow myself to relinquish my actual, lived experience of benefiting from white privilege. It is also my past (and of course, my present). I tried to address this in the previous essay, when I wrote, "My present—all of our presents—is imbued with the past, *even if we do not know that past*. The past doesn't simply dissolve because we don't know it. But what do we do in the face of this historicity?"²³ I called this, too, an "authentic" experience. The history of Native adoption and assimilation, or assimilation by adoption, is in fact the truth that many, thousands, of Native people have lived.

This ontological history of belonging, what I called "historicity," might be better recast as trace. But importantly, this remains a trace *of blood*. As Kim

TallBear has argued, even if many Native tribes have been moving away from blood quantum requirements since World War II, “a blood *link* is still imperative” to tribal understandings of citizenship and belonging.²⁴ TallBear notes the origins of the concept of “Indian blood” in Euro-American racial paradigms, and yet she insists on the inconclusive nature of “blood” as a semiotic marker for identity. There is an inseparable connection between blood as material *and as a trace* to a historical ancestor. The latter usually takes the form of lineal descent requirements, as in the case of the Cherokee. But this conjuncture is also, crucially, about performing as kin, rather than simply belonging as trace. What I find important about TallBear’s contribution, at least for my purposes, is that it advocates for an understanding of blood as simultaneously historically flexible, potentially essentializing, and also socially or ritually constructed. It is about both tracing blood and the performative belonging of kinship. I explore this admittedly problematic positioning of blood for Native adoptees in the following section.

BLOOD

“Blood is blood you cant change your blood” [*sic*], wrote Goddess, the first person to comment on my 2015 article on the *Indian Country Today* website.²⁵ Maybe you cannot change your blood, but what is it that your blood says as an adoptee? If blood is a central, though not exclusive, component in Cherokee identity, channeled not solely though its materiality, but also its trace and genealogical legibility, then is to *become* Cherokee also to shift blood? Or was my blood always the same? Sturm argues in *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* that the Cherokee Nation’s politics of racial belonging have oscillated between reproducing federal models of blood quantum and the current model of citizenship based on filiation. She writes: “The Cherokee Nation reproduces federal standards, in general, when it requires that all citizens document their Cherokee blood as a basis of tribal belonging. However, it also challenges this hegemonic notion that Native American identity is based on blood degree.”²⁶ It is not that the muster of trace is divorced from blood, but rather that the demands of citizenship are historically contextual, and have varied over the course of the last two centuries according to internal and external pressures. That is, even though the Cherokee Nation does not differentiate citizenship based on blood quantum but rather on lineal descent, this trace is still imagined as a technology of self that links the present to the past and to a tribal member from that past who had a significant connection to the tribe through

blood. Likewise, if “blood stands for culture and culture stands for blood,” as Sturm’s ethnographic work shows, then is it ever possible to escape the circular logic that underlies contemporary understandings of Cherokee belonging? Is the Möbius contour of citizenship ever imaginable as both upholding sovereignty while critiquing its failures? As should be clear by now, I am not interested in privileging any one of these concepts—trace, blood, or authenticity—in the narration of adoption and return. This is about a sense of belonging *asegi* that can encompass all three simultaneously. It is about responding to blood not simply as trace, but as community and commitment, as an expansive form of kinship. It is in the queering of how we relate, how we describe relationality, by refusing to simply acquiesce to either trace or blood as the only ways of performing kinship.

A colleague recently told me that he had used my “Authentic Indian” piece as a point of departure to talk about the imbrication of race and sexuality. I was happy about this, but when I asked him what his students thought, I was a little surprised. He said that they thought I was “disidentifying” with blood quantum. I hadn’t really imagined that I was doing that, but I want to explore this possibility, to imagine what would it mean for me to disidentify in this context. This is a term coined by José Esteban Muñoz, whose work joining queer of color critique with performance studies has been crucial in situating Black and Latinx artists within a broader context of colonial violence. Muñoz defines the term as describing “the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.”²⁷ He goes on to write that disidentification is about “working on and against dominant ideology” in order to “transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance.”²⁸ If we can say that the logics of racial identification in the United States regarding Indigenous nations are tied to the politics of tribal enrollment, and that tribal enrollment depends on blood quantum, though not exclusively, then perhaps the “everyday struggles of resistance” might entail a liquidity of self or a sleight of hand that misdirects, disidentifies. Perhaps this might be thought of in terms of “working on” tribal enrollment, but also “working against” its exclusionary principles such as those that take tribal citizenship as only predicated on trace. It would mean not depending solely on trace or the racialized paradigm of blood quantum either. This would involve a type of identification that refuses to accept a version of self that acquiesces to settler channels of citizenship.

It might link to recent theorizations of Native refusal, such as Glen Sean Coulthard's call to reject multicultural recognition as "other" in an anticapitalist reinvigoration of Native self-determination. Coulthard proposes that any viable movement of Indigenous self-determination "must challenge the relationship between settler colonization and free-market fundamentalism in ways that refuse to be co-opted by scraps of recognition, opportunistic apologies, and the cheap gift of political and economic inclusion."²⁹ With the increasing pressure to acquiesce to normative frames of identity, normative modes of belonging and recognition, the refusal to eschew Native epistemologies in favor of the politically expedient is a queer form of narrativity: the refusal to belong through settler narratives of dispossession and blood-trace. This is not to undermine Native sovereignty by refusing the logics of enrollment, but to be able to position the self-in-relation as a point of departure for a radical politics of Native refusal, which is necessarily based on a refusal of the colonial logics of theft, assimilation, and erasure. Likewise, Audra Simpson's work has taken up the question of Native refusal as a method of "not disappearing" when confronted with the violence of colonial administration of bodies, culture, and legality.³⁰ This is a refusal to consent to the legal framing of settler nations' unwaveringly colonial approach to citizenship. It would be to engage, to inhabit, a version of self that simultaneously upholds and questions what it means to be Cherokee. In search of an authentic way to disidentify as Cherokee. Not to not identify as Cherokee, but to seek ways of being and becoming that are true to the multiple communities to which I belong, to those whom I claim, and those who claim me. This is what it means to rebuild kinship with the family that I never knew I had, and yet I do, and yet I can, and yet I must. And this is a project that we, as a family and as a community, undertake together. The affective valence of Simpson's argument asks us to question, in the case of Native adoption and reconciliation, what *presence* is possible in the wake of colonial incitement—indeed the colonial imperative—that Indigenous peoples exist only to be disappeared. To *not disappear* as an adoptee who returns is also to refuse adoption as a method of settler-colonial erasure. While this gesture may seem small in comparison with the broader political structures that Simpson and Coulthard analyze, I want to insist that this queer narrativity is also a form of resistance to the logics of settler colonialism. It is, to turn to Coulthard's engagement with Frantz Fanon, a form of "self-affirmative recognition."³¹ Yet, as I am arguing, this affirmation must also disidentify. To *not disappear* as Cherokee in this context is to disidentify with the framework of self-recognition and self-narration that is demanded by

the settler state through trace. It is not to disavow the self or to reject the self and the powerful ways in which decolonial scholars have mobilized self-affirmation, but rather to insist on a self that is both affirmative in its linkages to past and present modes of freedom and also reflexive in its insistence on questioning narrative normativity. The mode of narration here turns blood not into a symbol of Indigenous essentialism, but rather a material that opens up possibilities of re-storying, becoming, and disidentifying.

AUTHENTICITY

In this section, I will provide four examples of possible engagements with authenticity and self-identification that can help to provide at least provisional answers to some of the questions I have been asking. First, I turn to the work of Michelle Koerner, who puts into dialogue George Jackson, an understudied figure in Black radical thought, and French philosopher Gilles Deleuze.³² What Koerner notes in Jackson's letters, written in prison, in the 1960s, I think, has a lot to do with what I am attempting to think through regarding the ability to narrate the self *asegi*. Jackson's *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, published in 1970, according to Koerner, "expresses the persistence of a capacity to reject—and reject absolutely—intolerable historical conditions of enslavement, imprisonment, and social death."³³ It is this rejection of the intolerable that I am interested in underscoring here. I am not attempting to assimilate blackness to indigeneity, or simply to lift this theoretical move. However, Koerner notes in Jackson's letters an important rejection of the social death that is inaugurated by the hailing of the subject-of-color by the state. One example of this rejection, this refusal, has to do with speed, with the velocity at which one runs from the state, from interpellation. According to Koerner's reading of Jackson, escaping the capture of interpellation can be achieved through the *absolute* speed of he whose velocity allows him to pass beyond view. Or he whose feint, or whose tactic, outwits, outruns, outmaneuvers, the settler state. This is suggestive of a type of self-identification that cannot be seen, read, or reached by colonial interpellation, though, importantly, these gestures, these bodies, may still be seen by complicit community members. I am interested in theorizing this gestural practice that positions the self beyond the limits of movement, of sight. This, in turn, reminds us of the straightness, the directness, that comes under scrutiny by social theorists like Deleuze and Guattari, who propose minoritarian "lines of flight" that befuddle normative practices of social and ethnic identification.³⁴ If in the previous section it was the

“line of sight” of genealogical trace that allowed Native identification, here it is the “line of flight,” away from the state, *en diagonal*, evading the gaze of the state, because of the visceral desire to continue living. Or to live. Period.

We find an alternative in Gloria Anzaldúa, who in combining Native and Chicana Feminist Studies argues for a different type of gesture: “The ‘I’ is only one of the many members, imaginal figures, that compose the psyche. Other imaginal figures wander in and out within and without a person, all with lives of their own. ‘I’ am not in charge of ‘my’ images. Images have lives of their own and walk around as they choose, not as ‘I’ choose.”³⁵ This is from the posthumous publication *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro*. Anzaldúa describes “wandering” and altered states of shamanic journeys, between the fantasmatic and the scientific. I would like to suggest that this is a possible mode of self-imagination, of self-imaging, that escapes the tractor-beam gaze of settler colonialism by imagining the self as not-yet-real, or not-yet-finished, or not-yet-whole, that would allow for not only a line of flight escaping the calcification of identity through interpellation, but also an experiential and perceptual framework of self that possesses more than one self, that harnesses these multiple selves. In the case of Jackson, as elucidated by Koerner, the sheer speed of escape, or the agility and guile of he who escapes, can serve to undermine the ability of the state to interpellate. In Anzaldúa, it is the subjective draping of selves that confounds. This is a more liquid self—a self the state cannot grasp, cannot address. This involves not a spatial distancing between the self and the state, but a cunning sense of pose, of gesture. Of a gesture that diverts the eye of the state. A sleight of hand that joins the horizon of self with that beyond. This conceptualization is similar to the haunting of extra-tribal adoptees that I mentioned earlier. It asks us not simply to re-story, but to re-image, to re-relate to our own stories, our kin, and our tribes. Anzaldúa provides a method of loosening the psychic grip of racial melancholia by engaging with the spectrality of our own bodies.

The third example comes from Kwame Appiah’s *The Ethics of Identity*, because of the historical situating that he does around the construction of self *as authentic*.³⁶ Appiah attempts to chart a middle ground between the Romantic tradition of finding a self, an internal, true self that emerges through reflection and awareness of one’s own nature. One discovers this true self that must already be there, waiting, to be found. By contrast, Appiah describes an existentialist camp in which one’s authentic self exists first and then must be set on its individual path. That is, the existential self needs to determine what type of self it already was. He critiques this schematic, turning to John Stuart Mill, and later Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Charles Taylor,

advocating for the role of creativity in shaping the self. He is quick to remind us, though, that this creativity is neither cavalier nor divorced from historical or systemic pressures on self-identification. He insists that the self involves both a personal dimension and a collective responsibility. It is dialogic. But Appiah points to something more. He reminds us that these responsibilities to the collective are also channeled through the scripts that allow us to make those claims. That is, the dialogic self must also contend with the available narratives of belonging to and being claimed by a particular community. And though Appiah moves on rather quickly from this point, he does make one final argument that I want to point out: only collective identities have these scripts, and only those identities that count as part of a social group refer to the “kinds of person” that are available through these scripts.³⁷ I want to dwell on this point because I think this distinction is something that may be getting lost when we take up the ethics of “racial appropriation” or “race shifting.” I propose that we should think of these cases not only as Appiah suggests, not only in terms of their veracity of self, their self-truth, but in terms of their narrativity—in terms of the narrative arc that they follow, and the politico-ethical effects of that arc on the collective ability to determine who counts as Native. That is, we should think about the ambiguity of racial subjects not by way of an authentication of blood, but based on narrative possibility. This is not blood performativity, or even blood authenticity, but blood narrativity.

Finally, turning to Joanne Barker’s *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity*, I want to consider, briefly, how blood and genealogy fail to account for colonial demands for authenticity.³⁸ What future terms will we have to call ourselves? How has the impoverished ethical position of racial ambiguity led to such misunderstandings, such misreadings, such violence? Barker writes:

The census rolls produced during the allotment period provided a federal record for tribal members’ blood and lineality and served as the administrative venue for the institutionalization of the identification of tribal members by blood as a not-so-subtle proxy for race. . . . Blood’s institutionalization on the census rolls, then, served as the mechanism for the racialization of a culturally authentic, rights-invested “Indian member” whom both federal and tribal governments would claim jurisdictional power over.³⁹

The most important takeaway from the above citation, it seems to me, is that relying on blood as an “objective” category for tribal enrollment cannot

be separated from the work that blood can also do to truncate Native sovereignty. The trace of blood that secures cultural authenticity necessarily inscribes the legitimacy of settler logics of race and culture. Blood becomes a performance of ontological presence, proximity, belonging, within the framework of Native elimination. What if I disidentify as Native rather than attempting to trace this identity and to position myself in what is authentic to that individual experience? What does that mean to the types of communities that we belong to? What does that do to the ability we have to claim a sense of self?

I hope that we can think of authenticity not as something prescriptive or something tethered to the poles of subjective interpellation, not authenticity as striving to become a racialized subject based on the scripts of settler colonialism, but rather, a disidentifying, a mystifying, a wandering and multiplying sense of self that becomes inassimilable to the logics of the self as natural, or the self as discovery. This is not to suggest that one simply “discover” that he is “Indian,” even if for some of us adoptees that is actually true, but rather that that discovery must engage in a process of communal, reciprocal, belonging as well as self-affirmation. This is not authenticity as mimesis. Rather, it is to refuse the narrative underpinnings of speaking the self as authentic. It is to connect to the chimeric maneuvers of authenticity, to authenticity at its most fragile moment. To inhabit authenticity’s fragility, when at any moment the self becomes hailed, becomes racialized, falling—it would seem—inexorably back into subalternity, but in that moment withholding that part of self that cannot be expressed, that lingers, that haunts. Doubling back but not glancing back. Identifying but not capitulating. Speaking but not saying. Refusing. Disidentifying. Queering.

I imagine that this might not be authentic singular, but authenticities plural. That there is no one way to mobilize the sense of an ethical self, a self that relates, and is related, a self that speaks without saying, a self that critiques from within, a self that negotiates the colonial within, a self that imagines its own path as parabolic rather than circular. A baroque, queer, self. This means that the most capacious rendering of adopted Native selfhood may actually be to imagine the multiple ways in which authenticity is engaged. It is to engage these authenticities, to respect the full breadth of authentic possibilities, the free flowing, the inescapable velocity, the shimmy, the feint. It is to base the imaginary of authenticity on the effervescent qualities of self that populate our imaginary, rather than limiting the idea of the Native self as authentic only through the trace of tribal enrollment, but also

through becoming and through acting; through belonging in multiple ways, through being related and relating; through belonging to and being of.

CONCLUSION: EMBODYING HISTORY

Last year I went to a performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music called “Umusuna: Memories Before History.”⁴⁰ Umusuna is an ancient Japanese word that combines birth and place, the beginning of one’s life and one’s native territory. The company works with Butoh technique, movements that contrast fixity and control, balance, iteration. It was a haunting show, bodies painted white tracing arabesques on a stage covered in sand, a lingering soundtrack. But two things stuck out to me about the performance: (1) generation: bodies emerging together, bodies as if suspended in time or space, and (2) schooling: groups of three or four not moving in complete synchronicity, but as a group completing a collective gesture. It reminded me of fish schooling. Those flecks of light under water, the instant, kinetic reaction, the way it is not as an individual but as a group that the school maintains its integrity. It was that sort of organic movement, privileging kinesis over mimesis. Electric connections to others, aching together, yearning together. And I wondered if this show, “Memories Before History,” might also say something about a type of relationality that I have been exploring. What are the limits to history when we think about what our bodies express both as sign and gesture? What types of memories can we have that exist before history? Or, to riff on a very different dancer, Martha Graham, what can blood remember?⁴¹

This brings me back to the case of my father’s adoption. My father met his mother for the first time when he was fifty-four years old. I met my grandmother and her daughter, my new aunt, when I was twenty-three. Later, we met more family members, cousins, aunts, uncles. I remember that scene as measured and dense. Our voices were tentative, our faces scanning, searching for a gesture, a look that might connect us. Faces yearning for recognition and, perhaps, forgiveness. But there was nothing to forgive. “We always knew you existed,” my aunt said, a phrase that marks the position of the adoptee both in the past and in the present. It is an arc of relation that is continuous. My father was not forgotten. Quite the opposite. His presence was always there, his body perhaps absent, but the memory of that presence, or the imagination of what and where his body might be, continued, if even spectrally—hauntingly, from the day of his birth to the moment he was

reunited. A history, a memory, before history. I wonder if this stretching of time and affiliation might contribute to a mode of self that eludes the formal requirements of settler-recognized personhood. Because these memories, these gestures, speak without having to say, they are reflexive, they are about a state of becoming rather than identification. And yet they must be both at the same time. To work toward a Cherokee identity in this way is to feel the movement, the weight, of time and body, to build, to structure, to work toward the relations that you might never have known, but always knew were there.

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NOTES

1. Joanne Barker, "The Politics of Distraction," *Tequila Sovereign* (blog), July 2, 2015, <https://tequilasovereign.wordpress.com/2015/07/02/on-the-politics-of-distraction/>.

2. Important exceptions include Margaret D. Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Allyson Stevenson, "The Adoption of Frances T: Blood, Belonging, and Aboriginal Transracial Adoption in Twentieth-Century Canada," *Canadian Journal of History / Annales canadiennes d'histoire* 50, no. 3 (2015): 469–91; and Laura Briggs and Karen Dubinsky, eds., "The Politics of History and the History of Politics," Special issue, *American Indian Quarterly* 37, nos. 1–2 (Winter–Spring 2013): 129–35. For a useful overview of adoption policies in the United States, see Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

3. Margaret D. Jacobs, "Remembering the 'Forgotten Child': The American Indian Child Welfare Crisis of the 1960s and 1970s," *American Indian Quarterly* 37, nos. 1–2 (Winter–Spring 2013): 138.

4. Qwo-Li Driskill, *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 3.

5. For more information, see note 2. For a broader perspective, see Eva Marie Garroutte, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* (Berkeley: University

of California Press, 2003), 17, and *Stolen Generations: Survivors of the Indian Adoption Projects and 60s Scoop*, ed. Trace L. Hentz (Greenfield, Mass.: Blue Hand Books, 2016).

6. Joseph M. Pierce, "In Search of an Authentic Indian: Notes on the Self," *Indian Country Today Media Network*, July 28, 2015, <https://indiancountrymedianetwork.com/history/genealogy/in-search-of-an-authentic-indian-notes-on-the-self/>.

7. Comment on *Indian Country Today Media Network's* Facebook page, August 3, 2015 (2:02 p.m.), <https://www.facebook.com/IndianCountryTodayMediaNetwork/>.

8. For more information, see Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

9. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 211–15.

10. Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002), 79.

11. "Citizenship," *Cherokee Nation*, <http://www.cherokee.org/Services/TribalCitizenship/Citizenship.aspx>.

12. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16–49.

13. It is important to note here that I am not considering all Cherokees as products of this forced removal. The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation is a clear example of Cherokee resistance and adaptability in the face of militarized dispossession.

14. "Theft" is a term I borrow from Audra Simpson, one that deserves to be more fully engaged than I can accomplish here. For more information, see Audra Simpson, "Consent's Revenge," *Cultural Anthropology* 31, no. 3 (2016): 326–33.

15. Circe Sturm's *Becoming Indian* delves into much more detail about the problematic deployment of "Cherokee" for those who cannot document ancestry for tribal enrollment. I discuss this work below.

16. David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 10, no. 4 (2000): 667–700.

17. Joshua Whitehead, "Adapting the Indian in the Child," in *Stolen Generations: Survivors of the Indian Adoption Projects and 60s Scoop*, ed. Trace L. Hentz (Greenfield, Mass.: Blue Hand Books, 2016), 197.

18. *Ibid.*, 197.

19. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

20. Daniel Heath Justice, "Notes Toward a Theory of Anomaly," *GLQ* 16, nos. 1–2 (2010): 207–42.

21. Circe Sturm, *Becoming Indian: The Struggle over Cherokee Identity in the Twenty-first Century* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2010), 5.

22. *Ibid.*, 26.

23. Pierce, np.

24. Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 59.

25. Comment on *Indian Country Today Media Network*, July 30, 2015 (3:10 p.m.), <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/07/28/search-authentic-indian-notes-self-161129/>.
26. Sturm, *Blood Politics*, 89–90.
27. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.
28. *Ibid.*, 11–12.
29. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 173.
30. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 26.
31. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 144.
32. Michelle Koerner, “Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze’s Encounter with George Jackson,” *Genre* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2011).
33. *Ibid.*, 157.
34. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 9–10.
35. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. Analouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 36.
36. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
37. *Ibid.*, 65–72.
38. Joanne Barker, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
39. *Ibid.*, 90.
40. *Umusuna: Memories Before History*, by Sankai Juku, choreography, concept, and direction by Ushio Amagatsu. Brooklyn Academy of Music, Howard Gilman Opera House, Brooklyn, October 31, 2015. Performance.
41. Martha Graham, *Blood Memory: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).