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1. Introduction

1 Diné poet Sherwin Bitsui, from Baaʾoogeedí (White Cone, Arizona) in Dinétah, the traditional Navajo homeland, overlays the southwestern desert landscape—vast and cavernous but "always full of music" as the poet says—with the dominating presence of America's neoliberal urban structures, colonial confines, and decades-long dependencies on extraction from the reservation itself (Bitsui, 2020, Personal Interview)[1]. Having grown up with Diné traditions, climbing up the bute next to his grandmother's house as a shepherd, and later living in cities such as Tucson and Flagstaff, Bitsui translates the interactions between diesel-fueled, urban homogenization and the canyoned southwest landscape into densely woven oscillations. Sometimes ma-

terialising and dissolving snapshots, other times a continuous song of interrelationality, Bitsui's poetry is informed by Diné thought, practices and language, in which phrases may have "several different words", but "you can't isolate them" (Bitsui 2020), reflecting the poet's intensely transfused images. These compressed forms of expression, "dynamic in terms of their geometries" as Bitsui also says of Navajo rug making (Bitsui 2020), form a symmetry with the compression of the landscape. This constitutes, in part, Bitsui's poetic backdrop of the threatened southwestern landscape, and frees the possibility for imagistic fluctuations on the edge of expression.

2 In the first section, I examine Bitsui's translingualism in his poetry, including elements of Diné recreated in English, which forms what Bitsui calls a "continuum", through sound symbolism, a verb-centered sense of place, and iconicity, building off of Anthony Webster's work. I focus on Bitsui's italicised anthimeria[2] which generates a sense of active topophilia on either the reservation or a city setting, and contributes to a kinetic poetics which share qualities with Simon Ortiz's idea of poetry and song as perception, Gerald Vizenor's notions of transmotion,[3] as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Robert Delaunay's aesthetics of "movement without displacement" (1993 : 77). In the second section, I discuss Bitsui's references to Diné narratives fused into scenes of extractivist urbanism and its metonymies, and how Bitsui perforates an aphotic subconsciousness in which colonial containment and urban development are superimposed, and non-humans are often depicted as fragmented or lacking physicality altogether. In the final section, differing from Hooley's focus on ecopoetic efforts to thwart the politics of enclosure, I highlight Bitsui's translingual inundation and focus on somatic gestures as offering a "third place" as Bitsui describes, "to respond to 'a new birth cry'", even in the cacophony of urban, "steel-rimmed America" (2003 : 26).

2. Linguistic Iconicity and Verb-Centered Language

3 Bitsui's poetry is translingual, using Diné words and phrases, and infusing elements inherent to the Diné language in English. One effect of this translingualism is an assertion of cultural understanding over the colonial cartography of oil rigs and rerouted rivers, which often

exacerbate the distances between ourselves and the land we should be protecting, not merely receiving as guests [4]. "Feelingful iconicity" (2009 : 221-222)—"attachments that accrue to expressive forms" (Webster 2009 : 9) beyond mere references and play with contact languages—anthimeria, ideophony, or "hodiits'a'" (sound symbolism) (Webster 2009 : 56), are all present in Bitsui's work. Elaborating on these modes of expression, Bitsui says: "Diné is thought in motion, a very verb-driven language. Everything is tactile; everything is about moving within the world or having the world move within you" (Bitsui 2017). In addition, as Anthony K. Webster notes, symbolic sounds in Diné challenge the Western "semantico-referentialist" inspired criticism of words as things, rather than a phonic attention to their echoes (2013: 137). For instance, the sibilance and verb use in this line in *Flood Song*, Bitsui's second collection, creates multiple dynamics: "The song spilling seeds into your mouth / *sunflowers* a Yield sign" (2009 : 60). In this example, while the sibilance provides ideophony, mirroring the spilling seeds, the song itself germinates and "sunflowers" into a traffic sign—a measurement of urban comings and goings—from a person's mouth, both wilding and urbanising the sound of a song. The song performs simultaneous actions here, and a song can have a causal effect in Diné; poet Luci Tapahonso reminds us that the San Francisco Peaks were created in response to the holy people singing (Tapahonso 2014). Even more, the word "Yield" here is triple fold; to produce a crop, to acquiesce, and to give way to traffic. According to Bitsui, a song "attempts to create harmony, enact change, and metaphorically transform time and space […]. Through this activity, the lineage between past, present, and future is 'reconnected'—replanted, watered, grown, and harvested to counter what is considered inharmonious" (Bitsui 2011 : 29). "Yield" accentuates this growth and regeneration, and the possibility to transform time and quotidian space: the song spills *into*, rather than from the body, and surprisingly "*sunflowers*" an object measuring urban movements. This effect, as Bitsui says, engages in "pulling the colonizer's language into our own ways of knowing" (Bitsui 2013a). The line's shape-shifting "continuum" (Bitsui 2020) is strung together in a complete image, also reflecting Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz's notion of a song or poem as an act of perceiving: "[…] you perceive by expressing yourself", through an entire song as a whole, not a breakdown of its parts (Ortiz 2019 : 39). Therefore, if song and perception are simultaneous, then

Bitsui's condensed anthimeria and sound symbolism merge both sound and ways of seeing or understanding, "this all-inclusiveness" of "context, meaning, purpose" as Ortiz writes (39).

4 Even more, the "seeds" spilling in and germinating out of the mouth disrupt the perception that there is a separate "nature" exterior to the body, reiterated by Bénédicte Meillon in her opening remarks to the ecopoetics conference "Re-enchanting Urban Wildness". She mentions a 2018 survey in which city dwellers were asked about their experiences with nature; they noted "[…] their outings outside of the city", sharing the misconception that they exist "outside of nature". Meillon continued, "No one thought to answer, 'but I am nature […]'" (Meillon 2019). Bitsui achieves this tactility through sound symbolism and verb use which emphasise the possibilities of song and the daily synergic movements of non-human life within and outside our bodies, even in urban settings.

5 Also in *Flood Song*, Bitsui draws our attention to the word "*Nílch'i*", meaning "air" or "wind" in Diné, a word which can connote the spirit of holy beings, among other meanings:

> *Nílch'i*
> is wind breath
> the wave of stars
> pulled into a satchel
> scattered on the lake's slate surface. (2009 : 61)

6 The brightness of the vowels in "*Nílch'i*" and the compact sibilance that follows provide a luminous ideophony and iconicity; its italics trigger the rest of the poem to drift further across the page, like the "scattered" stars glistening on the lake. The italics thus imply not a shift to a marginalised language but a verbal quality, as in "*sun-flowers*" above. The poem's form mirroring the wind's velocity also synthesises Vizenor's transmotion with what Merleau-Ponty called "movement without displacement, by vibration or radiation" (1993 : 77).[5] While the poem reflects the air's borderless force, which created the "wind-carved rocks" of Dinétah (Bitsui 2011 : 28), wind is also an "invisibility that led us to take the air for granted", as David Abram notes, particularly in a city (2014 : 301). Yet, in Diné thought, it is represented on the body itself, in the "whorls" on our fingertips (Zolbrod

51), a present trace wherever the body moves along its path, urban or not. Indeed, Diné poet Esther Belin references this trace in her essay "In the Cycle of the Whirl": "I am in the cycle of the whirl. The circle to complete my journey" (1998 : 71). She refers to her origins in New Mexico, then being "raised urban among Los Angeles skyscrapers", and her journey back to New Mexico to enroll at the Institute of American Indian Arts, never neglecting instructions she learned at an early age, "s l o w d o w n a n d b r e a t h e e a s i l y", her spacing mirroring its content as in Bitsui's poem (1998 : 66). Wind, therefore, and its dual evocation of "breath" in Diné, provides the setting in Bitsui's poem for a meditation on natural motion, cultural significance and highlights our basic dependencies on clean air.

7 On the other hand, Bitsui's iconicity and verb-centered language often incorporate symbols of colonial "extractive legacies" (Powell 2018: 29) which permeate the poet's field of experience, whether urban or rural. Bitsui doesn't define himself as an ecocritical/eco-justice poet, perhaps given his linguistic aesthetic outside of delineated taxonomies; "I write out of another kind of space", he notes (Bitsui 2020). His images nevertheless reveal his "thoughts on the subject of ecology and our collective response (or lack of?) to shifts in our relationship with the land and environment" (Bitsui 2018). For decades, as Dana Powell points out in *Landscapes of Power*, "The urban development and consumption of the 'Sunbelt' cities in the American Southwest directly depended on the extraction of energy and water resources from rural, largely indigenous territories, primarily the Navajo Nation" (2018 : 34). The development in this area is also the result of an expansive federal project, along with the urban relocation program beginning in the 1950s, to "modernize" native populations through "industry, infrastructure, and distribution of technologies such as the U.S. electrical grid" (Powell 2018 : 34). To use Webster's example of how phonics can challenge territorial possession, the word for "yellow dirt" in Diné is "leetso", which also means "ochre and uranium". Phonetically resembling "leetso" is Yé'iitsoh, a giant monster who the Twin Warriors fight in the Diné creation story (Webster 2018 : 5), thus correlating monsters with uranium mining on the Navajo Nation. Mining was imposed by the U.S. military's "Manhattan Project" for nuclear weapon production in 1944, and continued until 2005, causing decades of widespread cancer and other health

concerns on the reservation due to radon exposure (Fettus 2012 : 18). Bitsui uses "yellow" as a verb in his poem "Asterisk"—"Pioneers wanted in, / and the ends of our feet yellowed to uranium at the edge of fear" (2003 : 4)—creating a disturbing, cinematic flowering effect of toxicity. Given the above Diné word play, a Diné reader might correlate the encroaching uranium, as well as the "Pioneers", with the monster image. Indeed, the monstrous extractive legacy of uranium mining isn't excluded from urbanity; Bitsui writes, "Ladders follow us from mines" in *Dissolve* (2019 : 38), archiving generations of long-term illness and the side effects of abandoned mines, beyond imposed colonial borders. Other lines such as "captured cranes secrete radon in the epoxied toolshed" and "leopard spots" that are "ripe for drilling" (2009 : 46) embody fluid-like, uncontainable consequences of mining on both humans and non-humans. The colonial mapping of "leopard spots", blotches on the land from extraction, is mirrored on the human body: Bitsui writes, "*What land have you cast from the blotted out region of your face*" (italics are the author's) (2009 : 13). Here, movement occurs in an often obscured continuity, the normalised cycles of consumption and discharge at the expense of indigenous communities which are "ripe" to exploit (Bitsui 2009 : 46).

8 In another example, Webster explains that Diné writers, such as Rex Lee Jim—whom Bitsui quotes in the epigraph for *Dissolve*—and Gloria Emerson, sometimes use ideophones to challenge "expectations of Western literary conventions" (Webster 2009 : 222). Bitsui's ideophony also achieves this in his one-word poem, "tó", the Diné word for "water", which appears seven times as a vertical drip down the centre of the first page of *Flood Song* (2009 : 3). The spatial iconicity in its repeated descending droplets implies water as a tactile verb. Bitsui explains that the pronunciation of the word sounds like water (Bitsui 2013b), thus producing auditory iconicity as well as visual. In fact, in one reading of the poem, Bitsui's voice becomes softer with each pronunciation, further replicating a diminishing drip [6]. Water is a vital lifesource and this minimalist poem is, as Bitsui says "a celebration" especially for desert dwellers, "to get to that moment, that glimmer" of gratitude, of life-giving water (Bitsui 2020). At the same time, the spatial and auditory iconicity in this poem have darker implications; the thematic *lack* of water, severe droughts exacerbated by rerouted and dammed rivers in the southwest to accommodate

urban hubs. The Navajo Nation has faced the systematic extraction of clean aquifers to power Peabody Energy's Kayenta mine that sent coal to the Navajo Generating Station, which shut down in November 2019 (Curley 2020). The energy provided electricity to growing urban hubs such as Phoenix, resulting in air pollution and coal ash in the water [7]. Leonard Selestawa (Diné) recalls that he would ask his grandfather what the slurry pipeline was, which ran through the rangeland; "[…] he'd say, 'put your ear to it'. And sure enough there it was. Shh, shh, shh", imitating the noise of the pipeline (Boudart 2008). Bitsui's iconicity and sound symbolism in "tó" propose simultaneous facets of celebration, the colonial control over water rights on Diné land, and even evoke the word for plastic, "tó doo bináká nílíní," meaning "Water Doesn't Flow Through It" [8]; Bitsui furthers this fusion by writing "[this night] licks dry—/ rain-moistened teeth / steaming in plastic bags" (original spacing, 2019 : 9). As Diné geographer Andrew Curley explains, the colonial power in water legislation results in "the inherent sense of injustice that water settlements reproduce" (2019 : 59). Bitsui likewise criticises an urban "hotel garden" boasting a gushing fountain of water sourced from "the slashed wrists of the Colorado" (2019 : 21), the word "slashed" echoing Selestawa's "shh" imitation. Typically seen as an aesthetic to enchant a cityscape, the fountain here embodies poet Chris Cheek's definition of "improvement"—"to settler-colonize and resource-dispossess, […] for the purpose of advocacy when justifying territorial seizure, in the sense that we will use the resources better than those who currently have use of them"—for which he evokes the Latin term *rus in urbs*, "creating illusions of countryside in the city" (Russo et al. 2018 : 41). Even more, Bitsui's parallel to suicide here is not a metaphor: the exploitation of water Diné communites face shares the same colonial roots as high suicide rates in Navajo youth on and off the reservation [9].

9 Another example of Bitsui's water-based anthimeria comes at the onset of his poem "River", which begins, "When we river" (2003 : 34), expressing "river" as an act, a verb, rather than objectified as a tool to dam, to comprehend its connections in order to exploit it (Diaz 2020b). As the oars glide through the water, "faces are stirred from mounds of mica", perhaps of those who have rivered before, superimposed on the narrator's own luminous reflection [10]. This ontological overlap again coincides with Ortiz's notion of expression as percep-

tion, the latter being "the road from outside" the body "to inside", and vice versa. Song or poetry is not only a way of perceiving one's "relationships to all things" but "a way of touching" or doing, as Bitsui's verb "river" suggests (2019 : 38). Similarly, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the biological rhythms of the river and "the rhythms that lie inside and move our body" create a reciprocity that emerges from a "point of contact" between "our body and the flesh of the world" (Angelino 2015 : 291)[11]. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Cézanne's "vibration of appearances" (1996 : 77) along with Delaunay's "rhythmic simultaneity" (1978 : 146) reveal a merging field previously separated by apparent contours (Angelino 2015 : 290-291), as in the reflections and ripples in "River", and the narrator's face superimposed on the faces in the stirred mica[12].

10 As the poem evolves, however, the narrator notices that the river's "back isn't as smooth anymore", "its blood vessels stiffen" because we "hack its veins" and "divert its course" (2003 : 34). The poem's curved form thus mirrors a river's mobile topography as well as its misaligned, rerouted spine. Bitsui's use of river as a verb—perhaps alluding to the Diné word for river, *tooh nílíní*, integrating the verbal *nílį́* meaning "it flows"[13] and a conjugation of the verb "to be", found in ʻáánílįgíí, "that which is occurring; the happening; the event" (Geller 2017)—and our interactions with it inform the connection to the urban wild because, as Iovino writes drawing on Wood and Clark, the "mere idea of externality" is "no longer possible" (Iovino 2019 : 5). We cannot maintain the "illusions" of an utter distinction between colonial borders, extracted Diné aquifers, and urban electricity, "the distant waste dump and the housing estate" (Clark 2014 : 82), or, I argue, the body and external life. Neglecting the injustice these distinctions engender is an attempt to be relieved of guilt when we are complicit, an aspect of what Natalie Diaz calls the "white ecstatic" (2020a). In "River", for instance, the water's migrations and reflections of light coexist with the city lights it helps generate. As Ortiz suggests that pieces of experience are inseparable (2019 : 34), and as Bitsui says that "several different words" in a Diné phrase cannot be isolated, Bitsui's act of rivering is an experience inseparable from the many diversions which serve city consumption. While the vast systems of tributaries defy the bifurcation of urban versus wild, Bitsui's kinetic poetics asks readers to acknowledge how, and from which diverted

course, their privileges are extracted. In contrast to Jonathan Schuster's proposal to observe more experimental contemporary poetry as a literal means of data-based, conceptual ruminations that mirror material forms, Bitsui uses verbal language as a physical loci where meaning and action begin.

11 Bitsui's use of verbal anthimeria, often superposing wild and urban, is particularly evident in his third collection, *Dissolve*. Keith Basso's study of Western Apache storytellers as "place-makers" (Bryson 2005: 8) explores topophilia, a bond between people and place, which results in "interanimation": "[…] When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind […]" (Bryson 2005 : 10). Bitsui's interanimation, in verbs such as "*mountaining*"—"This mountain stands near us *mountaining*" (Bitsui's emphasis, 2019 : 16)—or the night that "*abalones*" (Bitsui's emphasis, 2019 : 8), referencing the sacred San Francisco Peaks, offers a place-based qualia, asserting that Diné people "have always harmonised our languages with our environments" (2019, "Considering").[14] Likewise, Vizenor notes that descriptions of non-human movement in indigenous literary expression are often presented not as a "captured scene" but a continued "visionary motion of memory" (Vizenor 2019 : 40). Differing from Belinda Cannone's idea of "defamiliarising"—fixating on the insularity and humility of, for instance, a tree, by becoming the "wonderee", capturing its slowness (2017 : 15)[15]—Bitsui's verb "*mountaining*" is not fixed to one moment, but implies a continual, kinetic enactment in multiple ways: mountains can be seen from an urban setting or nearby; their directional and spiritual significance in Diné worldviews serves as a "lineage between past, present, and future"; and they are "full of music" as Bitsui describes, despite stillness (Bitsui 2020)[16]. In the same vein, Bitsui writes in *Shapeshift*, "we have finally become mountains […]" (2003 : 64). The human reactualisation of mountains here suggests that there is a "*mountaining*" of a storied landscape as well as a "peopled land" in the mind's eye (Bitsui 2020).

12 Finally, in terms of recent ecocritical approaches to poetry, Bitsui's interrelationality and movement over inanimacy in verbs such as "*sunflowers*" "river", "*abalones*", and "*mountaining*", do not necessarily counter approaches behind material ecocriticism or new materialism. As Kate Rigby asserts, new materialism "challenges the prevalent view of matter as passive, mute and mindlessly mechanistic that came to

prominence with Cartesian dualism" (2017 : 61). Greta Gaard writes that material ecocriticism emphasises "the interconnectedness of life-forms" which "resonates with some Native American cultural narratives" (2018 : 292)[17], and Iovino and Oppermann explore, using the same framework, "possible ways to analyze language and reality" (2018 : 2). However, I add that Bitsui's renderings of human and non-human interaction, as I have described, reflect practices, linguistic expressions, and ways of life far older than Western ecocritical frameworks, which can more overtly acknowledge specific indigenous understandings of matter as meaningful[18]. In fact, Bitsui's verb-based expression leads us to a nuanced perspective; the reservation, he says, is "federal property essentially, and we're federal property", but he reminds us that "we don't really ever *own* the land. We're just hovering above it" (Bitsui 2020), which more drastically repositions our relationships to urbanity, federal extraction, and the sense of ownership that fuels it[19]. Certainly, twenty-first century networks of technological activity can lead to unpredictable "daunting side effects" in our biospheres (Clark 2019 : 116), but Bitsui's anthimeria, sound symbolism and iconity show the continuity in much older Diné understandings of complex, porous entryways between internal and external, despite the constantly shifting prisms of neocolonialism and its many "capitalisms" (Iovino 2019).

3. Diné Narratives and Fragmentations

13 Bitsui invites us to perceive simultaneities beyond cause and effect, not only through verb-based expression as I have explored, but also in his references to Diné narratives and their interactions with urbanity. In this section, I discuss *Flood Song*'s cultural references to sunbeams and birth—the implications of which, Bitsui says, are not always premeditated, yet likely part of a "deep symbolism" and possibly an "intentional desire for something new"—and the reference to Coyote in *Shapeshift*. I discuss how Bitsui's traditional allusions coalesce with chemical liquids, urban machinery as a tool to feed the myth of ownership, and light pollution. Secondly, I outline Bitsui's acute attention to articulating the often unseen and unnamed colo-

nial effects on animals, often depicted as ghostly fragments cut off from dependencies by extractive resources and their metonymies.

14 Firstly, in *Flood Song* Bitsui's line "A stoplight dangling from the sunbeam of a birth song" (2009 : 38) recalls the Diné narrative in which a strand of sunbeam which was given by the gods to Changing Woman, who pulled on it for pain relief during labour (Zolbrod 1984 : 183). Moreover, the Diné word for rainbow, "náátsʼíilid", is related to the word sunbeam in that the verb stem -déél, connotes a ropelike or rapid movement, as Holy Beings were also said to have traveled on rainbows and sunbeams as bridges between the human and spiritual worlds (Lee 2017 : 31). As Lloyd L. Lee writes, rainbows have their own songs, they guard sacred places, and represent an understanding of sovereignty: "Ask the Navajo person 'what is Navajo sovereignty', and expect the response to be, 'Náátsʼíílid nihinaztʼíí' (It's the sacred rainbow that surrounds us)" (2017 : 31). The divergent elements of luminosity—the stoplight and the "sunbeam of a birth song"—compress a sense of urbanism with imagery that might resonate differently for a Diné reader. However, in Bitsui's line in *Shapeshift*, "[…] Two birds spit oil: sunbeam, soot, sunbeam" (2003 : 53), he marries an implied rainbow effect on oil with the birds' toxic ingestion. Here, birds spit out oil which, in its light refraction, creates a thin-film interference in the form of a rainbow. These complex connections of fuel-driven urban life are therefore entangled with non-humans and Diné associations to reflect the often destructive relationships that go unseen, a way to articulate "what's not there" as Bitsui says (Bitsui 2020). Bitsui's other references to birth, as seen in "birth song" above, often coexist with similar industrial metonyms. In *Flood Song*, for instance, he writes, "amniotic cloud of car exhaust" (2009 : 34) and "the birth sac's metallic fumes" (62). Fetal fluids cohabiting with urban fluids suggest industrialism's stillbirth, the wild made infertile where the extraction of fossil fuels is most rife.

15 Secondly, the poem "Atlas" (2003 : 6), from the collection *Shapeshift* features Coyote ("maʼii" in Diné), a notorious trickster and transformer in Diné stories (Webster 2009 : 30). During the "rush hour traffic", Coyote is seen "biting his tail in the forklift / shaped like another reservation" (2003 : 6). While Vizenor's trickster characters "luxuriate in the challenges posed in the modern world" as one reviewer notes (qtd. in Schweninger 2008 : 166), Bitsui's coyote is the

one who is tricked; the forklift shapeshifts into what Goeman calls "the logics of containment", perpetuating the "too easy collapsing of land as property", which here shapeshifts the land itself into a metropolitan megalith (2015 : 72). The poet describes a materialised version of Coyote, faced with real threats posed by dependencies on urban development. Coyote resurfaces in Bitsui's line "Coyote scattering headlights instead of stars" (2003 : 6); in the Diné creation story, First Man was arranging the stars—pieces of mica—to light up the night sky, until Coyote impatiently scoops them up and scatters them across space (Zolbrod 1984 : 93). Here, the poet is the trickster, replacing headlights with stars and reframing this myth in our present reality, where overwhelming urban light pollution usurps the luminescence of the cosmos. Whereas Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957) warn against the dominant myths of consumerism, Bitsui's shapeshifting actualises traditional Diné myths, which become forklifted and hijacked by the normalised narrative of industrial progress.

16 In addition to these cultural references, the notion of the "non-place" extends to the non-human in Bitsui's work. The reader is haunted by present and future phantoms of non-humans in urban and mental landscapes, often perceived as cut off from necessities or killed. In *Dissolve*, he writes: "What crows above a city's em-dash / doused in whale oil, / hangs here—named: *nameless*" (2019 : 12). Not only does he enlist punctuation ("em-dash") in its word form to describe the city's inarticulable void, but "crow" is used as a verb, denoting only the sound of an innominate being in the cityscape. In the same line, whales exist in an absent presence, only an idea attached to their commercial product. In another example in *Dissolve*, Bitsui writes, "their secret conversations / thatching howls to whimpers exhaled / from an isthmus of drowned wolves" (2019 : 32). The ghostly mass or "isthmus" of dead wolves accentuates the gravity of biodiversity depletion. The Mexican wolf, for instance, was hunted and poisoned in Arizona and New Mexico to near extinction by federal programs to accommodate new settlers and the agricultural boom (Robinson 2017). This hauntology bears similarities to Serenella Iovino's exploration of artist Tamiko Thiel's app-based installation, *Gardens of the Anthropocene*, featuring virtual, mutant "neospecies" of plants (Iovino 2019 : 8). Iovino notes that Thiel's virtual exhibit suggests we are already coexisting with eerie "absent beings and unwanted pres-

ences: these are the ghosts and monsters of the Anthropocene" (Iovino 2019 : 5).

17 Similarly, in *Flood Song*, the poem is "held out to the wind" and "speaks *juniper* to the wilderness / as August slithers into September's copper pipes / searching for a paw print of a waterfall on the mind's lunar surface" (2009 : 68). Here, the poem itself utters to the wilderness, another gesture similar to transmotion [20], and a synergic communication which Linda Hogan evokes in her essay "Ways of the Cranes" [21]. Yet, the line's sibilance ("speaks," "wilderness," "slithers," "September") suggests the more elusive, hidden shift; the "paw print of a waterfall on the mind's lunar surface" is an apparitional trace in the memory, and the change of seasons is obscured within industrial copper pipes, rather than in the exterior world.

18 Finally, Bitsui's place-based verbs as previously illustrated coexist with urban realities: "*mountaining*" contrasts with mountainous city structures: "cisterns of smog" (2019 : 32) and "buildings / weaving upright where bayonets / stab the sea for warmth" (59). These architectures parallel Marc Augé's notion of "non-place"—anonymous spaces of transience such as an escalator, airport, or shopping mall (Fisher 2012 : 19). As urban metonymies, these carbon copies impede place-making—a "deep connection to home"—and depict placelessness: "*Nowhere* streams in blips and beeps" (2019 : 32) in the anonymous "*somewhere* parts" (20), Bitsui writes. In fact, these interstitial zones parallel author David Heska Wanbli Weiden's (Sicangu Lakota) challenge of the overly simplistic split between an "urban and reservation" experience: "[…] many reservation Natives often move between the rez and nearby cities", and, coupled with dual-citizenship, he suggests that "Natives exist in a liminal space […], we belong everywhere and nowhere" (Weiden 2019). Bitsui's poetry nevertheless maps these liminal spaces which widen the "spatio-legal imaginaries", as Antonio Fernandez describes (2019), between urban and reservation, *our* land and *yours*. Bitsui writes: dawn's "scalp *scalpeled* alongside what is 'ours'" (2009 : 10), "[…] the hairline fracture between *us* and *them*" (2009 : 24) and a grandmother's "pigment" is "'a violation to the city ordinance'" (2003 : 21). While place-making defies fixed frames, urban infrastructures and reservation borders are federally defined bifurcations of the racial laws of place, and consequently, designated zones become a disturbing "*Nowhere*" (2019 : 32). Bitsui expands our con-

ception of the boundaries between story and actualisation in his renderings of Diné cultural narratives, and superimposes the normalised shifts of radically altered landscapes in which non-human presence becomes hauntingly fragmented.

4. "A Third Place": Linguistic Liberation

19 I would finally like to underscore Bitsui's visionary impulse of flight and agency in distinction from the disquieting scenes of fragmentation outlined above. Vizenor's transmotion involves yet another aesthetic: it works on evading "the tiresome politics of native victimry" with "visionary characters in magical flight, native scenes in the bright colors of survivance [...]" (2010 : 5). Bitsui parallels this vision by offering "a way out" (29), as he describes in *Dissolve*, with a lyricism that doesn't descend into what has been called Anthropocene Anxiety Disorder [22]. Yet, Vizenor's use of the word "magical" risks a misinterpretation towards an essentialised shamanism, which is why Bitsui notes that the "English language fails to describe work that is doing something in between" (Bitsui 2020):

> It's not ceremony; I wouldn't call my work ceremonial, I wouldn't call my poems ritual, because there's already a lineage, and there's already a dimension for that. And I can't call it spiritual because I already have that here, or it's all around us. [...] Everything is projected on native people, from the outside. Everything has to be spiritual or all of these other tropes, so [...] how do I share, but also maintain some kind of control, or some kind of agency? How do I offer this but not fall into these trappings where I'm dehumanised, objectified? (Bitsui 2020)

20 Reaching this agency, defying oppressive trappings and denouncing violence involves what Bitsui calls a "third place". In his essay in *Blueprints*, Bitsui describes this as a place "where the edges of difference are folded back and new ways of seeing emerge [...]", in reference to engaging students in the Diné language (Bitsui 2011 : 35). In a personal interview, he elaborated that he also sees this as the "resonance" that language achieves beyond itself. When composing *Flood Song*, he explained that if the text's "sound or cadence [...] could easily live inside

my mind, projected back at me, then I felt like, 'OK, that's sound at this point'. That was the sort of 'third space' in a sense." (Bitsui 2020). This "third place" or "way out", reaches towards a sonority beyond the text which stirs language to its far-reaching limits, an undefinable "entrance" as well as "a gateway outward", "a pass, a kind of escape from this particular world I created", Bitsui says (Bitsui, Interview with Diana Nguyen 2019). The poem itself, then, can exemplify an unfixed—rather than captured—linguistic channel.

21 One pull towards this "gateway" occurs in "The Caravan", which acts as an overture to *Dissolve*. In the poem, an inebriated native man is freezing on a street in Albuquerque, which as Bitsui reminds us, like other border towns, can be brutal for native people: "you see so many of our relatives out on the streets. The violence here against Native people is really prevalent and painful", he says (Harjo 2018). As Jennifer Nez Denetdale asserts, border towns were originally established to exploit lands to the advantage of settlers for mining resources; in the cases of Gallup and Winslow, coal seduced more settlers and traders along the Santa Fe railroad where saloons served ranchers and "bootlegged liquor to the Natives" (2018 : 21). A culmination of land grabbing, extraction, and the introduction of liquor comprises the constellation of exploitative practices, poor infrastructure, high poverty rates, and violence against Native people who are "beaten, murdered, and arrested at much higher rates than any other population in these spaces" (Denetdale 2018: 22)[23]. In Bitsui's "Caravan", the man's body itself is mined: he is drunk and shivering in front of the Caravan pub, his turquoise bracelet has been "snatched for pawn, / by the same ghost who traded his jacket / for a robe of snow and ice," and he is asking for "one more" drink. Natural non-human elements in this cityscape are condensed and fragmented; a "shallow pond" in the man's mouth is a stagnant embodiment of addiction, and his knees are "thorning against his chest" (4). The comfort of the narrator, however, helps the brother shapeshift from his drunken state to a more recognisable self: "he thaws back into the shape of *nihitsilí*", meaning "our younger brother" in Diné (4). The recaptured "shape" may indicate the active roles of "K'é", the family structure, which Bitsui says is "the web"; "everything follows that kind of symmetry" and "deep love. This is what we do. We sacrifice for other people, and we pray that things will be OK again" (Bitsui 2020). Thus,

toxic extraction and fragmentation are contrasted with a dynamic agency; the italicised linguistic shift, or textual dynamism[24], is accompanied by a somatic shift, the brother's reshaping into this structure of care. After the narrator rescues him, they drive away from the bar: "We steal away, / our wheels moan / through sleet and ash. / Death places second, third, / and fourth behind us" (4). The car's progressive gear shifts accelerate their escape from the violence of this world and into another, recalling Bitsui's line in *Flood Song*, "the reed we climb in from" (5), which could be an allusion to the reed that the Diné Holy People climbed through to reach the Fourth World (Levy 49). In this poem, the car seems to replace the reed as an liberating mechanism, towards a somatic "third place" beyond the text, and beyond this racist, border town violence.

22 A final example of this "gateway outwards" occurs in the end sequence of *Flood Song* as an act of "reimagining and re-practicing" relations, to quote Audra Simpson (Simpson 2016). What begins with the precious drip of water ("tó") in this book-length poem reappears as a cloud bursting open: "The cloud wanted to slip through the coal mines and unleash its horses […] It wanted to crack open bulldozers […] so that a new birth cry would awaken the people who had fallen asleep" (2009: 71). This linguistic deluge is an incantatory climax—"I sang, sang until the sun rose" (71)—which embraces cultural significance, so that no one "wandered the streets without / knowing their clans […]" (71). While the city eventually "drags its bridges behind it" and collapses "in a supermarket" (70-71), non-human life synergises in and out of the body again: "Everyone planted corn in their bellies and became sunlight washing down plateaus / with deer running out of them" (71). The urgency in this incantation harmonises with Aja Couchois Duncan's meditation on the Anishinaabemowin adverb *azhigwa*, indicating "now"; "now is not a time for grief or silence. The earth spits forth its seeds; new life germinates in even the narrowest crevices. The waters surface and rush" (Russo et al. 2018 : 22). It incites physical boundaries to dissolve in a feelingful reassociation and restoration, while the presumed naturalness of colonial, neoliberal structures collapses. In his essay "Toxic Recognition", Matt Hooley enlists the same sequence, challenging a "toxic discourse framework", to explain that Bitsui's "opposition to ecological harm" is not "narrowly environmentalist" (2018 : 167) but aims to thwart the "politics of

enclosure", in which settler colonial powers sanction what is harmful or not, and deem themselves the main actors of "reform" (147). Hooley therefore sees Bitsui's poetry as "ideally positioned" (168) to advance the work of contemporary ecopoetics, whose priorities should be to "rethink the role of state power in environmentalism" and emphasise "dismantling empire" (167), to join forces with discourse privileging marginalised voices, and to reflect Moten and Harney's term "the surround", "any living or thinking outside the terms of harmful compliance" (168). There is no doubt, as I have shown, that Bitsui denounces imperial power. However, framing his work as a flagbearer for what ecopoetics should probe neglects his poetic reaching towards a "third place", not simply as an anticolonial stance beyond environmentalism, but a physical gesture of language beyond the text itself. Bitsui asserts:

> Language fails in a sense. […] In the Western context, you're coming into an institution, an academic institution and you're expecting literature, poetry. But the English language fails to describe work that is doing something in between. […] How can you dissolve one's language, or the gravity of one's language? How can you do that in English? I don't know. Navajo is this continuum, and it's constantly adding new words, and then it chooses what to keep in. […] How do you really come to it? How do I just create tone? How do I just create feeling in the space, so that people feel the deepness and heaviness of the moment? […] Being native […] we can't be vulnerable in a sense. The history is so heavy and everything that's happened is so dark, but we also have this energy and quest for beauty, beautifying things all the time. But how do we just own that? […] I don't know if "own" is the right word but, I wanted to present it, not in a defeatist way but in a human way. Just to make people feel again. To make them feel it. (Bitsui 2020)

23 Bitsui re-envisions poetic expression as somatic agency to affirm this "third place"—the gesture of saving a relative, the song that incites a continuity of kinship and relation existing long before America's capitalist myths—declaring a non-institutionalised "quest" for beauty and desire, which might falsely be conceived as vulnerability, yet it is no less political or anti-colonial in the face of chemical toxicity, water mongering and the archeology of extraction. Furthermore, the poet notes the "humanness" of the Diné language which, during his up-

bringing, "just *was*" (Bitsui 2020); in other words, the purpose of his poetics is not directly to resist "apocalyptic and Edenic closures" (166) as Hooley suggests, but to reiterate ways Diné exists prior to and outside of the influence of Western ideologies as a pre-enclosure language with its own complexities. Because English fails, the rush and urgency of this final sequence becomes a "tone" and gesture of "human intentionality" (Russo et al. 2018 : 30) to be felt beyond the declared appropriate discourse or political rhetoric innovative poetics should or should not present in a given framework.

5. Conclusion

24 Through Bitsui's kinetic language and personal perception of place, non-human and human relationships are enmeshed with colonial, urban-driven extraction such as mining, water rerouting, toxicity, and the violence it induces. Hooley suggests that Bitsui "thwarts the way American ecocriticism asks us to look at environmental health" and helps "reconceive politics beyond the terms of settlement" (2018 : 148). I have argued, however, that Bitsui's verb-based iconicity and shapeshifting symbolism are not only tools for the dismantling and "disarticulation of colonial power" (2018 : 148) but gestures towards community relations, particularly the poet's own, with which these celebratory and dissonant snapshots might resonate. While the "vitality of matter" (Bennett 2010 : ix) in what we call America has long existed in many pre-colonial indigenous dispositions, Bitsui's chronotope is nevertheless grounded in the present; "Poetry allows me to speak to the present as honestly and truthfully as I can," he confirms. "I think (in terms of ecology), we're not considering the present enough", Bitsui writes (2019, "Considering"). In order to more critically consider the present, Bitsui creates a linguistic pull between a "flowing" inundation and a "stalling" density (Bitsui 2020) to express a place-based topophilia, often disrupted by the chiasmic relationship of industry ingesting nature and nature ingesting industry.

25 Nevertheless, as I have finally outlined, Bitsui continuously veers us towards a space for living, outside the "trappings" of dehumanisation. As Jeffrey Jermone Cohen asserts, "resignation to calamity is far less demanding than an embrace of the ethics of relationality that bind us to living creatures […]. Despair is easy. Composing with hope requires

work" (Cohen 2014 : x). "Hope", however, carries a stagnancy and potential impossibility; Diaz writes that hope "is a shape that remains within the structure of [...] colonialism, within what is America or the Americas, within what is Christian or white". She seeks, therefore, a reality "beyond hope—a place, a space, a body, or a love that is real", instead of catapulting "our imaginations toward a future in which we are waiting to be real [...]" (2020c : 33). Bitsui dissolves the anticipation of hope by textually enacting care and association—in "The Caravan", he overrides the "shape" of hope, with the "shape of *nihitsilí*" (4). Likewise, his densely woven imagery acknowledges the bilateral movements of non-human life within us and outside of us, and, as an echo of this interrelationality, speaks to the ever-emerging present.

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1 I will be citing this personal interview with Bitsui as (Bitsui 2020) henceforth.

2 Used to describe nouns acting as verbs, though it can also pertain to adjectives, as in Simon Ortiz's use of "canyon" in "the canyon darkness" (2002 : 103).

3 Transmotion, in Vizenor's definition, is a "spirited and visionary sense of natural motion", a component of survivance which renunciates "dominance, tragedy and victimry" (1999 : vii), involving scenes such as the "migration of birds […] shadows in the snow, shimmer of light on a wet spider web, […] traces of the seasons […]", appearing in "native creation stories, visionary dream songs, and literature" (2019 : 37).

4 Natalie Diaz notes that people are starting to acknowledge they are a "guest" on lands that are hosting them, but she asks "how can I participate in receiving my land, in caretaking the land so that the power structure has been shifted?" (Diaz 2020b)

5 Merleau-Ponty's original French, in reference to Cézanne: « Comme elle a créé la ligne latente, la peinture s'est donné un mouvement sans déplacement, par vibration ou rayonnement » (1964 : 144).

6 The reading took place on April 8, 2014 at the Lannan Center for Poetics and Social Practice at Georgetown University, and can be viewed here: https://vimeo.com/93272921.

7 In the first half of 2019, almost 60% of New Mexican land was determined D3, exceptional drought ("Drought" 2019), worsened by wildfires, CO2 levels linked to overproduction, and diversions of the Colorado River to serve Phoenix, Tucson, L.A., and San Diego (Runyon 2019).

8 "Navajo Word of the Day-Plastic", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0nA29BDgn0&t=5s.

9 According to a 2003 study of indigenous teenagers in British Columbia, a reduction in suicide rates were attributed to cultural vitality and "seeing oneself as part of a continuum". The study concluded that "counting oneself as continuous in time", engaged a concern for one's well-being (O'Brien 171).

10 For a parallel poetic study of Natalie Diaz's expression of river as a verb, see "Translating the body-land union in Natalie Diaz's poetry" (Papa 2020).

11 This approach allows for a poet-reader reciprocity, differing from Schuster's view of conceptual ecocritical poets which see language as "matter" and "data" rather than content and emphasise the "execution of ideas rather than expression" (2018 : 209).

12 Delaunay's original French: « La Lumière dans la Nature crée le mouvement des couleurs. Le mouvement est donné par les rapports *des mesures impaires*, des contrastes des couleurs entre elles qui constituent la Réalité. Cette réalité est douée de la *Profondeur* (nous voyons jusqu'aux étoiles), et devient alors la *Simultanéité rythmique* » (Delaunay's emphasis, 1957 : 146).

13 "tooh nílíní" – WordSense Online Dictionary. https://www.wordsense.eu/tooh_nílíní/.

14 Doko'oosliid, the San Francisco peaks, is said to have been adorned with abalone by the holy people. Frank Goldtooth Sr. said the mountain has "[…] Apache teardrops and abalone" and is "sitting there with life", similar to Bitsui's "this mountain stands near us" (Zolbrod 1984 : 346).

15 From S'*émerveiller*, read by Cannone at the "Reenchanting Urban Wilderness" conference, 2019: « […] chacun peut, […] réussir à "défamiliariser" le réel à le voir "en nouveauté", et ainsi devient-il l'émerveillé—le néologisme est nécessaire pour désigner celui qui est saisi momentanément par cette émotion » (Cannone 2017 : 15).

16 Belin remembers her heritage and relationship to the Diné culture when in L.A., writing, "I always forget L.A. has sacred mountains" (1999 : 9).

17 This phrase the "interconnectedness of life-forms" risks a "general appeal to indigenous environmental consciousness" rather than "distinct tribal histories and traditions", as Goeman asserts (2015 : 63).

18 Steve Pavlik reminds us of Christopher Stone's 1972 essay proposing legal rights for non-humans, which was praised by Vine Deloria Jr. as it welcomed a "somewhat belated show of support by Western thinkers for a concept that had long been accepted by tribal societies" (Pavlik 2015 : 7).

19 Indeed, Diné writer Danielle Geller writes that "federal land-allotment policies have resulted in too many heirs for too few acres" (2017).

20 Vizenor cites an Anishinaabe dream song in which the singer "listens to the turnout of the seasons, then directs the words of his song to the natural motion or the wind and sky" (Vizenor 2019 : 38).

21 Regarding the sandhill cranes, Hogan writes: "Tribes have told stories about them, told stories to them, for centuries, and they have told the tribes the stories of their own entwined journeys" (Hogan 2016).

22 Allison Cobb defines this as "a feeling of hopelessness about the future from within the Anthropocene, and a sense of helplessness about doing anything to change the trajectory of the era" (Russo et al. 2018 : 21).

23 170 Native people were killed as a result of border town violence in Gallup, New Mexico between 2013-2015 (Denetdale 2018 : 23)

24 Angelino describes Merleau-Ponty's observations of "figural dynamism" in painting (290).

English

Poet Sherwin Bitsui (Diné, of the Todich'ii'nii or Bitter Water Clan, born for the Tl'izilani or Many Goats Clan) translates a particularly dissonant perspective of "extractive legacies" (Powell 2018: 29) and colonial violence in America, overlaying interrelational movements, sounds and images in the desert landscape of the Navajo Reservation with southwestern urbanism and the extraction that fuels it. In this essay, I firstly explore how Bitsui translates a continuum of dissolving and emergence using linguistic iconicity and the verb-centered Diné language to pull "the colonizer's language" into "our ways of knowing", as the poet says (Bitsui 2013a). His place-based topophilia of a sacred, "storied place", to use Christina Bacchilega's term, in-

termingles with urban settings (2007 : 7-8). However, in all three of his collections, a disturbing and drastic imbalance caused by ecological distress and colonialism—mining and water control in particular—toxifies the interactions between human and non-human bodies so that urban hubs can thrive. Secondly, Bitsui writes Diné narratives into the modern backdrop of extractivist urban life, weaving a linguistic sense of place with a haunting non-place. Yet, despite these realities, Bitsui displays possibility in the present, pointing to "a way out", even in the cacophony of "steel-rimmed America" (2003 : 26). Integrating Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz's notion of song as perception, "transmotion" as defined by Gerald Vizenor (Anishaaabe, White Earth Nation) and Merleau-Ponty's "vibration of appearances", this article approaches Bitsui's simultaneities which challenge boundaries of colonial maps, and perceived boundaries between bodies and the exterior world.

Français

Le poète Sherwin Bitsui (Diné, du clan Todich'ii'nii ou Bitter Water, né pour le clan Tl'izilani ou Many Goats) traduit la réalité des environnements coloniaux actuels, superposant le paysage du désert du sud-ouest de l'Amérique à l'urbanisme. Dans cet article, j'explore comment Bitsui traduit un continuum de dissolution et de réémergence malgré la violence coloniale persistante. Premièrement, il utilise les verbes, influencé par la langue Diné, le translinguisme et l'iconicité linguistique pour apporter « la langue du colonisateur » dans « nos manières de savoir » (Bitsui 2013a). Sa topophilie basée sur le lieu d'un paysage sacré et chargé d'histoire se mêle et parfois enchante les milieux urbains. Cependant, dans les trois recueils de Bitsui, des forces de vie naturellement changeantes se frottent à la turbulence inquiétante et au déséquilibre drastique causés par une situation écologique désastreuse et la violence coloniale—l'exploitation minière et le contrôle de l'eau en particulier—affectant les corps humains et non humains pour que les centres urbains puissent prospérer. Bitsui intègre également des récits Diné au contexte moderne de la vie urbaine extractiviste, tissant ensemble un sentiment du lieu linguistiquement riche et un non-lieu hanté. Pourtant, malgré les réalités actuelles, Bitsui indique « une sortie » de la cacophonie d'une « Amérique bordée d'acier ». En intégrant la notion de perception de Simon Ortiz, « transmotion » tel qu'il est défini par Gerald Vizenor et la « vibration des apparences » de Merleau-Ponty, j'explore les simultanéités dans la poésie de Bitsui qui défient les frontières des cartes coloniales et les frontières perçues entre les corps et le monde extérieur.

Mots-clés

éco-poétique, écocritique, poésie, autochtone, décolonisation, justice environnementale

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