

Ghosts in the Archive: Re-Vis(ion)ing Transnational Perspectives with Anna Lee Walters’s *Ghost Singer* and Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire*

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ABSTRACT: This essay probes the limitations of current transnational perspectives in American studies by drawing attention to an often disregarded transnationalism within. Via a reading of Anna Lee Walters’s novel *Ghost Singer*, based on performance scholar Diana Taylor’s concepts of the archive and the repertoire, the analysis negotiates Western and Native American epistemologies regarding concepts of perception, haunting, and temporality that entail challenging implications for transnational scholarship.

KEYWORDS: Transnational; Native Americans; Presence; Archive; Repertoire; Haunting

What is called poetry or literature, art itself
(let us make no distinction for the
moment)—in other words, a certain
experience of language [...]—is perhaps only
an intense familiarity with the ineluctable
originarity of the specter.
– Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

Introduction: Towards a More Radical Transnationalism

“They would find that kind of thinking too frightening, Junior. There are people who work diligently toward a very structured world. [...] A lot of people want everything to be comprehensible and digestible, no mystery to being born, living, and dying” (Walters 204). Thus explains tribal official Russell Tallman the differences between Native and Anglo-American thought and the epistemological conflict that forms the core of Anna Lee Walters’s novel *Ghost Singer*. With this remark, Russell alludes to broader historical developments that point beyond the late 1960s, when the narrative is set, and still affect the Indigenous population of what is today called the United States. He refers to a Western epistemological attitude first introduced during the Conquest of the Americas and continuously perpetuated in different guises until today. “From the project of the *Orbis Universalis Christianum*,” writes Walter Mignolo, “through the standards of civilization at the turn of the twentieth century, to the current one of globalization (global market), global designs have been the

hegemonic project for managing the planet” (23; original emphasis). Within the logic of the ensuing “modern/colonial world system” (12), deviating forms of knowledge, such as Native American wisdom, have been relegated to the fringe of the epistemological horizon to be regarded as supposedly primitive or atavistic curiosities.

Extending its disciplinary perspective beyond the paradigmatic structures of the nation-state in an attempt to leave behind its tradition of exceptionalism, American Studies in the twenty-first century has been strongly affected by the so-called transnational turn. Focusing on such dynamic concepts as travel, crossings, and flows, the field embraces a more flexible and less restrictive framework that situates the Americas in a hemispheric or even global context in order to bring forth “a version of American Studies that is less insular and parochial” (Rowe 2). Defining the United States as a crossroads of cultures, Shelley Fisher Fishkin in her programmatic presidential address to the ASA in 2004 prophetically praises this paradigmatic shift as a development through which injustices, both past and present, may be done away with, namely by taking into account what was usually ignored (cf. 21). Nevertheless, skeptical voices in the field have pointed out that this change of perspective in itself does not go far enough. Bryce Traister, for instance, writes that in stylizing the paradigm into “our latest critical messiah” (14), transnationalism betrays an indebtedness to those exceptionalist fantasies of which it is supposed to rid the discipline. This suggests that American Studies still remains complicit with and spreads the gospel of epistemological superiority. Therefore, if the discipline wants to avoid falling short of its own revisionist ambitions and turning into just another reformulation of an older global design, then the transnational paradigm must entail more radical modifications.

According to Fisher Fishkin, a transnational perspective entails spatial as well as temporal modifications of the disciplinary structures. On the one hand, she claims, “we will probably make more of an effort to seek out the view from *el otro lado*” (23; original emphasis), that is, from outside the nation’s borders. On the other, this means that “we may well seek to recover chapters of the past that have eluded any archive despite their importance” (25) so as to fill the gaps in the tomes of historiography. However, despite these inclusionary efforts, there remains a telling absence of Native Americans in transnational discourse. For Hsinya Huang, Philip Deloria, Laura Furlan, and John Gamber, the reason for this lack lies in the

perspectival changes praised by Fisher Fishkin and others. They write that “while the dominant idea concepts [sic] concerning the transnational weight our thinking toward the global, there are internal national communities [...] that point in more complex directions” (8) and allude to a transnationalism within that holds temporal and spatial modifications yet mostly unfathomed in current debates within the new paradigm.

With the evocation of the idea of internal nations, Native Americans are drawing attention to a dimension of transnationalism often ignored in the dominant discourse surrounding the paradigm, namely a kind of “transnationalism produced by colonialism within [the nation-state’s] borders” (Warrior 123). Arguing in the same vein, Huang and her co-authors make clear that “[f]rom a Native perspective, the US has always been transnational, due to its relationships with sovereign Native nations within its borders” (1). These tribal nations, however, do not simply adhere to the Eurocentric concept of the nation-state and the colonial epistemology upon which it is founded. The appropriation of the term ‘nation’ here does not indicate inclusionary complicity with this type of thinking. It rather constitutes a subversive strategy that makes use of “alter/Native knowledges” (Tillett 89) in order to designate an irreducible *otro lao* within and thus to challenge the nation-state’s systemic impetus for closure and homogeneity. Drawing attention to the United States’ disavowed and repressed colonialist past (and present) (cf. Lonetree 326), this paradoxical notion of a beyond within the borders demonstrates that uprooting American exceptionalism requires a consideration of subalternized epistemological horizons; an awareness that does not exhaust itself in an enlarged perspective and integrative archival impetus, but which rather encompasses profound realignments of entire ways of seeing as well as an openness for understandings of historicity other than the Western notion of the archive.

In what follows, I offer a reading of Anna Lee Walters’s *Ghost Singer* in conjunction with Diana Taylor’s study *The Archive and the Repertoire*. As a performance scholar, Taylor emphasizes the complementarity of the “supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)” of the archive and the repertoire’s “so-called ephemeral” realm “of embodied practice/knowledge” (19) as two different modes of relating to past events. I take Walters’s narrative as even going a step further by suggesting that the archival space always houses something it cannot fully contain. Revolving around ghostly apparitions

stemming from a collection of Native human remains and artifacts stored in the attic of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., the archived materials are shown to harbor a live spectral repertoire in which the past actively remains present or *presences*. Via reference to Indigenous cosmologies, the text thus indicates qualities of supposedly lifeless artifacts exceeding the limits of an objectifying Western epistemology, and it thereby raises questions concerning the validity of Eurocentric concepts of seeing and time which are relevant to transnational endeavors. In my analysis, I argue that it is necessary to take the Native American perspective into account so as to avoid turning the transnational paradigm into another extension of colonialism and exceptionalism on an epistemological level. My argument will be unfolded in three steps: First, I will analyze how *Ghost Singer* deconstructs a Western imperial gaze in favor of an alternative mode of vision. In the second part, I am going to outline how the novel employs this perceptual change to point towards performative workings of the repertoire within the archive. In the third and last section, I will finally investigate the resulting temporal and historiographical implications of the narrative.

Vision: Sensory Perception at the Edge of Western Epistemology

In *Ghost Singer*, the structure of the museum functions as an institutionalized spatial metaphor for a national archival logic and a particularly Western lens for looking at the Other. Set before the installment of the “Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act” (NAGPRA) in 1990—in a situation where “the dominant society is free to commodify Indian artifacts for the sake of historical study, profit, or plain amusement” (Aigner-Alvarez 49)—, these objects are reduced to the status of archival matter ready to hand for aesthetic contemplation or scientific experiments with no regard for Native concerns. The museum, Taylor writes, has always functioned as a space where the visitors repeatedly restage a colonial encounter with otherness and reaffirm hierarchical power relations as well as the historiographical accounts and values promoting this hierarchy (cf. 66). In the narrative, this gaze of “ethnographic surveillance” (Vizenor, *Fugitive* 145) renders Native American culture (again) as a vanished race right next to ancient fossils. *Ghost Singer* thus testifies to the continuance of “a particularly powerful way of seeing” (Tillett 90); a visionary mode which semiotician Tzvetan Todorov ties to the introduction of the central perspective during the times of the Conquest soon serving as the validation of a single Eurocentric gaze that forces

the perceived into a mathematical grid (cf. 121). Jean-François Lyotard, in this context, speaks of a “Euclidian bias” (155) and describes it as follows: the “*bridling of the gaze is the condition for the geometrization of the field of vision*” where “[t]he only possible convention is to prefer the straight to the oblique, the simple to the complex, the identical to the dissimilar, the one to the multiple” (188; original emphases). In Walters’s text, the museum stands in for the introduction of a reductive and unidirectional attitude towards the other, a systemic epistemology that structures the world by subsuming it under its imperial Western vision which brings with it the separation of knowing subject and known object. It ultimately serves to maintain the hegemony of a colonial mentality that dismisses other perspectives as irrelevant, irrational, or both.

The novel furthermore suggests that whatever might pose a challenge to the dominant mode of seeing, and to the national mythologies it preserves, can simply be hidden within the museum’s institutional framework in order to foreclose the option of taking into account other perceptual modes. In the narrative, the problematic collection of Native American (arti)facts is not on public display. In her reading of the text, Rebecca Tillett writes that the archival space here works “as the disseminator, of a specific cultural viewpoint, clearly choosing what should be seen and how” (88), which eventually results in the “perceptual inability to see beyond academia’s narrow definition of ‘history’” (93). In *Ghost Singer*, the Smithsonian locks away those objects with the potential to arouse anger (mostly) from American Indians. The museum worker Geoffrey Newsome considers this attitude towards Native claims, which assumes total control over the stored artifacts and remains—consisting of necklaces made of severed fingers, pairs of Navajo ears, scalps, skulls, and an entire mummified body (cf. Walters 42)—as a legitimate strategy to ensure scientific progress. Newsome’s character functions as the synecdoche of a Western epistemological superiority complex that disavows any necessity to question the predominant gaze.

However, throughout the course of the narrative, Walters’s novel begins to challenge the homogeneity of the colonial perspective that is institutionally validated in the archival space of the museum. Juxtaposing multiple focalizers and their respective narrative perspectives, *Ghost Singer* lays bare the inadequacy of the Western visual monopoly. Dorothy Graber writes that, instead of a uniform epistemological horizon, “Walters consistently privileges

complex and multilayered indigenous perspectives over the dominant culture's rationality—a rationality that ultimately proves itself completely ineffectual in the face of generative indigenous spirituality" (13). Nonetheless, this does not result in a simplified static opposition between Native and Anglo-American viewpoints. The text emphasizes the inherent heterogeneity of both sides. As Heike Paul argues, Walters's use of these multiple narrative points of view permits her to contrast differing attitudes concerning the encounter with (cultural) otherness without subscribing to only one (cf. 108). By creating the impression of a dialogical dynamics between the different angles, *Ghost Singer* highlights their interrelatedness, deconstructs vulgar notions of homogeneity on either end, and encourages the experience of different modes of perceiving the world in one (literary) space.

Through these dialogues, the hegemonic perspective is constantly being renegotiated in different encounters between the Anglo-American and Native American characters. Only Geoffrey Newsome remains isolated. "[T]horoughly disgusted by [the contemporary Indigenous population's] appearance and presence" (Walters 46), he is rendered as "emblematic of academia's propensity to downgrade and dismiss alter/Native knowledges and worldviews" (Tillett 89). Newsome subjects the artifacts in the attic to "his rough and careless handling" (Walters 44), in order to align them into a coherent narrative conforming to the rules of Western rationality and the logic of the US nation-state. At the same time, Newsome gets angry upon noticing that somebody has "enter[ed] his space and violat[e]d his territory, without his approval" (42; original emphasis). Hence, he personifies the central irony and double standards of the museum's archival impetus: although the archive itself is based upon the invasion of the Conquest, reverse intrusions are unacceptable.

Newsome's colleague, Donald Evans, entertains a similar opinion: "American Indians were curiosities to him, people who should have become extinct by all rules of the game" (91). He views them as living anachronisms. Consequently, regarding the problematic collection as irrational "hocus-pocus" (128), Evans rejects tribal official George Daylight's explanation of Indigenous notions of ownership. He listens when Daylight tells him that these items "*were created to be extraordinary*" and "like people, these creations have characteristics and a nature [...] this nature, and their power are embodied in that creation" (127; original emphasis). However, Donald dismisses this as superstitious nonsense. Only in later chapters

does he find his opinion altered. The meeting of these two characters thus forms one of the many instances of conflicting epistemological horizons within the narrative.

Another such confrontation unfolds among three more individuals, namely the young Navajo Willie Begay, storyteller Jonnie Navajo, and the white historian David Drake. The latter is trying to write a history of the Diné that takes tribal self-representation into account. Willie is supposed to recruit Jonnie to help Drake with this project. From a position torn between his ancestors' Native wisdom and his own Western education, Willie tries to mediate between the two men as a translator, but he soon realizes that Drake's initial openness to tribal storytelling stems from the expectation that it is compatible with his own systemic logic and will simply complement his sources. However, the novel illustrates that instead of a quantitative modification, the incorporation of Jonnie's Indigenous take on the Navajos' past necessitates a qualitative one.

Nevertheless, although tracing the individual perspectives on both the Native and the Anglo-American side as well as their interferences, Walters's novel does not exhaust itself in providing counter-discourses to dominant ideological patterns. The narrative opts for more profound epistemological modifications. Through the juxtaposition of differing perspectives, *Ghost Singer* does not merely represent a pluralism of multiple legitimate points of view; it rather draws attention to modes of seeing beyond the limitations of the Western *ratio*. In the text, the medicine people Anna and Wilbur Snake explain this to Russell Tallman:

We doubt that there's anymore to his life than what we seen. You know, Sonny, sometimes too we can't see very good either—poor eyesight. [...] We try to know the whole universe, but we set our minds when we're like pups and learn to see only certain things. Maybe 'cause us peoples is scared sometimes—scared to look for something more, but even more scared to find it and accept it. (201)

Walters does not dissolve cultural conflict into carefree pluralism but evokes a more profound challenge calling for deeper engagement: "the mysteries in *Ghost Singer* are multi-dimensional and interrelated" and "many of those mysteries remain unsolved" (Fiesta 370). In the novel, Native and Anglo-Americans need to modify their perceptual modes from an ossifying archival gaze into a seeing that is open for the dynamic workings of the repertoire within.

This can be clarified with recourse to Vizenor's notion of an "aesthetics of survivance," which indicates "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; *survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction*" (*Liberty* 85; my emphasis). Through alternative perception, Native presences become distinguishable from the Western construct of the Indian; or, more precisely, within this sensory mode the repertoires of subalternized Indigenous knowledges (re-)appear as epistemologies of lasting significance which exceed archival closure. "Walters represents 'Indian' reality as vaster and more spiritually sophisticated than the conventional white man's materialist vision allows him to see" (*Rainwater* 50). As an instance of Vizenor's aesthetics of survivance, the mode of perception invoked by the Snakes in the narrative does not limit the term 'vision' as relating only to the sensory apparatus or particular future goals; it takes into account a third meaning, the experience of extraordinary apparitions. For Anna anything else would testify to a "lack of sensitivity" (Walters 143). This kind of vision transcends the limitations of rational world-appropriation dictated by the rules of Western reason and maintains an openness to the survivance of Native wisdom.

This modified perception turns the marginalization of Indigenous epistemologies into an enabling factor, for it does not operate along the clear lines of Euclidian seeing, but rather in the diffuse "field of vision which focalized attention represses" (Lyotard 154), a field located at the margins of the *ratio*. In the novel, Wilbur explains that "on the edge you can reach out and feel something else you can't get a hold of in this everyday world, some other thing that don't have no end to it" (Walters 143). In Lyotard's terms, within this vision at the "peripheral fringe of curved space" (154), the perceived always remains out of reach and shows itself only in a movement of withdrawal: "any attempt at *grasping* it [the perceived] loses it" (155; original emphasis). Contrary to the conquerors' imperialist gaze of prejudiced projections, this seeing at the curve does not strip what it perceives of its otherness by integrating it into a categorical grid. Wilbur's vision calls for a different (in)sight: "Learning how to see is unlearning how to recognize" (153). This entails a re-vision of national accounts of history and time produced by a vision of Western epistemological supremacy.

Ghost Singer not only transports this on the diegetic level but makes use of specific visual devices of language in order to point beyond the confines of the novel. As Tillett notices,

these sensory qualities of the text are tied to Walters's strategy of withholding simple solutions: for instance, "[t]he punctuation of the final line of the text, ellipsis, visually marks—and thus forces the reader to see—the significance of *Ghost Singer's* topic, and its lack of resolution" (106; original emphasis). Walters also frequently employs italics to emphasize another dimension of her text. When, towards the end of the narrative, Jonnie Navajo says "[t]hat we [Native Americans] exist, that *we are here*, this is the one thing that cannot be refuted" (246; original emphasis), Walters stresses a deictic utterance that designates a *hic et nunc* beyond the text's diegesis. From this angle, the juxtaposition of multiple narrative perspectives also contributes to this optical reconfiguration: in the interstices opening at the brinks of these angles, the challenge to a centralizing archival gaze figures on the stylistic level of the narrative, providing the reader with a vision at the curve of the imperial epistemological horizon introduced by the Conquest. Through this interpenetration of content and form, *Ghost Singer* renders visible the traces of Native survivance stored but ultimately uncontainable within systemic structures: in these archival remains the spectral repertoire of the other *presences* and returns the gaze.

Haunting: Presence at the Intersection of Life and Death

There are ghosts in the archive, haunting the Smithsonian. Everyone exposed to the collection in the attic—both Native and Anglo-American—is affected by spectral visitations. Jean Wurly, Drake's sister, is the first character in *Ghost Singer* to witness this: "I can't explain it [...], but there *are Indians there. I've seen them*" (5; original emphasis). In the archival absence of evidently lifeless objects remains a sense of Native survivance that defies the museological gaze of the museum workers and brings forth a different shade of the real. As Jacques Derrida writes in *Archive Fever*, "hauntedness is not only haunted by this or that ghost [...], but by the specter of truth which has been thus repressed" (87). This applies also to the spectral visitations in the novel. They allude to the disavowed colonial atrocities of the US national project. Walters's narrative suggests that the archival approach of dealing with Indigenous artifacts is complicit with and an extension of these acts of cruelty. Dorothy Graber explicates that

the terrifying histories of genocide, enslavement, and exploitation converge metaphorically and materially in related practices of collecting, possessing, interpreting, and marketing human remains. Death and profit are fused within the

logic of capital and communicated through the discourses that support colonialism and imperialism, anthropological knowledge production, and technological advancement. (13)

From the moment of first contact, hegemonic Western epistemology has largely treated Native American cultures as always already archival, thereby infantilizing, dehumanizing, and ultimately reducing them to the status of, first, curiosities and, later on, specimens for scientific investigations. In the narrative, however, the spirits inhabiting the museum defy objectifying displacement with their uncanny—here literally unhomey—presences.

Throughout the history of Federal-Native relations, the controversy concerning Indigenous relics has always been a central issue. Walters's text is set before the enactment of NAGPRA, and so prior to any legislation in place that would grant tribal communities a voice when it comes to the treatment of funerary items, sacred objects, and remains discovered on their territories. In the novel, a letter Evans finds in the attic illustrates how the pieces at the Smithsonian were obtained through repeated lootings, desecration of burial sites, and even bounty hunting:

Get what you can for this Indian stuff. [...] Try a museum first. [...] I don't know what the red stones are, but they came outta a woman's grave in Nebraska. Those people are extinct. [...] We dug up the jewelry near the Oklahoma/Louisiana line ourselves. We had a lot of this stuff, but our kids often played with these and broke a lot of them. [...] Daddy ran across the ears in New Mexico and won them in a poker game about 1890. (93; original emphases)

The text alludes to the practices of the so-called salvage anthropology of the nineteenth century, which organized macabre harvesting sessions in order to procure new specimens for research. Removal of remains from battlefields or fresh graves were not uncommon, and a significant number of these items ended up in the cabinets of the Smithsonian Institute (cf. Sommer and Krüger 29; Simpson 27; Cryne 102). Walters's novel implies that this attitude towards Indigenous culture is still largely in place more than a century later and portrays the anthropologico-archival impetus as completely blind towards Native concerns.

Ghost Singer contrasts this objectifying stance with a tribal wisdom that acknowledges the special status of remains and artifacts which, therefore, require adequate handling. Wilbur Snake elaborates that “[a] lotta old peoples thinks that nothing ever dies” and these items

“is wondrous things” (201), drawing attention to the fact that remains and funerary objects are considered live sacred entities. As animate and alive, they possess an affective presence beyond objectification which, when disregarded, results in dire consequences for everyone involved (cf. Fontein 215; Simpson 30). Several of the museum workers in the narrative commit suicide after having been exposed to these haunting presences. Law scholar Julia Cryne writes that “[i]t is commonplace belief across multiple Native American groups that the disturbance of the dead (either by desecration or grave-robbing) forces the spirits of those individuals to wander without rest” (101). Particularly in the eschatology of the Navajos, the tribe around which *Ghost Singer’s* plot revolves, the deceased are believed to return in order to retrieve missing parts and belongings (cf. Pensley 52). Walters draws on these cosmologies in order to point towards Native American survivance beyond systemic archival absentification which has repeatedly denied this sense of active *presencing*.

It is here that the novel explicitly points out the inseparability of Taylor’s concepts of the archive and the repertoire. Walters plays out Taylor’s remark that, with regard to haunting, archival remains can give rise to new performances (cf. 154-55) and potentially challenge Western notions of archival fixity and embodied liveness. Particularly the figure of the ghost singer—the specter responsible for the suicides—personifies the contradictory qualities of what Derrida has called a “paradoxical phenomenality” of the “*non-sensous sensous*” (*Specters* 6; original emphasis). In his first encounter with the angry spirit, Evans perceives “an unusual sensation” and, despite the ghost’s invisibility, can “feel the presence of a living breathing person” (Walters 130). The situation shifts between different phenomenal orders as the spirit materializes and inaudibly bangs on one of the storage cabinets, but then manages the physical acts of sweeping everything from a table, picking Donald up and releasing him again, only to eventually disappear once more. Throughout the entire plot, this (im)material and (dis)embodied specter—who is nevertheless capable of grasping—remains ungraspable for others (including the reader): “The mystery of the ghost singer is larger than life both literally and figuratively, and his mystery is never resolved” (Fiesta 371). Although *presencing* within it, the ghost singer’s repertoire withdraws from the archive’s filing system.

Uncanny presences not only haunt Anglo-Americans but also Natives themselves, as the novel shows when it portrays Willie as affected by apparitions after accidentally having

come into contact with a Navajo scalp while doing research at the museum (cf. Walters 50). In line with his tribe's beliefs, according to which touching such objects is equal to breaking a taboo, Willie Begay begins to suffer from "ghost sickness" (Aigner-Alvarez 55), which entails repeated hysterical fits, crying, and screaming in Navajo; a malady through which he is forced to relate to his ancestors' pain with his whole body (cf. Walters 54-55). The spirit people haunting him with this affective presence grant Willie an insight into their view of the (things of the) world. With his own perception being spectrally reversed, he begins to see the archival gaze fixed upon the other in the faces of the scholars around him:

They wore no expressions on their faces. Only their eyes were clear little lights. They looked like demons. Their terrible eyes lit the room and hurt Willie like stinging cactus needles when they looked at him. He covered his eyes with his hands to shut out the demons. He leaned over on the table, threatening to collapse. (Walters 82)

This ghostly performance brings forth what Taylor calls "a moment of revisualization" (144): through an inverted re-vision of the colonial gaze staring at objectified Natives as remnants of a vanishing race, this passage constitutes "a comment not only upon the history and reverberations of Federal Indian relations, but also upon the dangers and repercussions of an anthropological/museological view of the dead" (Tillett 102). In this spectral reversal, Walters's text draws Native and Anglo-Americans' attention to the dangerous impact of such a view, suggesting that both (internally heterogeneous) groups need to develop (sensorial) sensitivity for the others' vision at the curved periphery of the hegemonic gaze's focus.

Renegotiating the relationship between the two allegedly distinct existential states of life and death, this diffuse mode of seeing other-wise exceeds the limits of Western reason. Haunted by the specter's uncanny presence, Donald Evans eventually has to seek help from the Native wisdom he has previously dismissed as superstition. Consequently, conducting a ritual to conjure forth the ghost singer, Wilbur uses similar paraphernalia to those stored in the Smithsonian. What Taylor writes in a different context also applies here: "the ceremony performs the [re-]sacrilization of the remains theoretically antithetical to performance [from the Euro-American perspective]" (142); it gives Donald the chance to drop his archival gaze and adopt a more humble sensory-epistemological outlook instead, as Wilbur's instructions imply: "When the man comes 'round here, don't look right on him. Watch him only out of the corners of your eyes" (Walters 215). This making room for the ephemeral workings of

the repertoire within the archive ensues in what Derrida refers to as “spectral asymmetry” (*Specters* 6): through Wilbur’s ritual, the vision at the curve “open[s] onto a dimension of irreducible *sur-vival* or *surviving* [survivance]” (185) where “[t]he spectral *someone other looks at us* [and] we feel ourselves being looked at by it” (6; original emphases). When Donald, failing to maintain this state, turns to the specter in a moment of being face-to-face with the ghostly other, he stares into a pair of “hate-filled eyes” (Walters 216), where he perceives what Vizenor calls the “stories of wounded bodies” (*Fugitive* 159) in the archive: also there/their *remains presence*. Insisting on the entanglement of archive and repertoire, *Ghost Singer* draws attention to Native survivance at the intersection of life and death.

The extradiegetic potential of this seeing other-wise again evinces that the novel not only constitutes a counter-discourse to hegemonic knowledge. Residing in the entanglement of archive and repertoire where survivance *presences*, Walters’s text transgresses notions of discursive closure altogether by (discursively) gesturing beyond representation into a spectral ‘reality.’ Within the ossifying impetus of Modern reason this is difficult to account for as Taylor explains: “Maybe because it’s so hard to get a handle on, *spec-ere* (to see) that phantoms, fantasy, and performance have traditionally been placed on the opposite side of the ‘real’ and ‘historical’” (141). Therefore, the novel, at first sight, intentionally works as an instance of the established ghost story genre conforming to the discourse of the literary archive. However, one needs to keep in mind that, according to Navajo cosmology, artworks, and particularly stories, constitute sacred live entities which harbor specific transformative potentials (cf. Momaday in Schubnell 45-46; Denetdale 45). Presenting her performance of active survivance in the guise of a ghost story, Walters turns her text into what Vizenor calls a literary fugitive pose which—in partial compliance with the *ratio*’s principles and not a complete dismissal thereof—sneaks a spectral Native presence into discourse. Like the trickster figure “coyote who played dead” (Walters 246) invoked at the end of the novel, Walters points towards a sense of survivance *within* the archival order. She thus designates something *other* inside the system “which sows havoc and generates effects of meaning deriving neither from signification nor from syntax, but from sight” (Lyotard 273). Through a vision at the curve of the colonial gaze, Walters pries open the rules of discursivity from inside and creates the possibility of relating to Indigenous ways of approaching the world. The text, ultimately, en-visions cosmologies where elusive repertoires go hand in hand with

fixating archives and bring forth a *presencing* survivance that opens up the (then no longer) hegemonic horizon of Western epistemology towards a different sense of time and historicity.

Historicity: Survivance in the Reciprocity of Archive and Repertoire

Native American scholarship often points out how works of fiction create a counter-history to the hegemonic Western narrative, but the re-vision of the past in *Ghost Singer's* literary performance emphasizes the necessity of conceiving altogether differently of temporality in order to circumvent the nation-state's archival logic. Taylor writes that this "is possible only through a history of spectacles and ghosts" (144). In line with Navajo thinking and as an act of storytelling, the novel breaks with linear Western concepts of history and functions as a means to summon forth bygone times into presence (cf. Denetdale 157). Wilbur explains that "[s]pirit peoples don't know time, don't care nothing 'bout clocks" (Walters 76). Likewise, instead of repressing and taming the past through archival absentification, the transformative force of the novel creates a haunting dynamics by re-negotiating the validity of Western historiography's focus on documentary stasis. The ghosts in the museum remain spectrally present to testify to the ongoing consequences of slave raids and termination policies initiated by the militant epistemology of the Conquest (cf. Tillett 85). In addition to drawing attention to these injustices, *Ghost Singer* points towards a complex configuration of intersecting and diverging temporalities that increasingly collapse into a spectral nexus of survivance.

Modern Western historiography does not allow for such a conceptualization of temporality as the novel demonstrates via the character of the Anglo-American historian David. Although at first intrigued by Jonnie Navajo's detailed knowledge of the past, he soon begins to realize that tribal storytelling does not meet scientific requirements and that taking the Native perspective into account would require a radical modification of his discipline's epistemological framework (cf. Walters 162). Not willing to relativize "the absolute legitimacy and veracity of written history" (Tillett 94), Drake gives in to his colleagues' logocentric critique. Like Newsome and Evans, these colleagues dismiss Jonnie's storytelling as "sentimental hogwash" and the irrational "romanticism" of uneducated and illiterate peoples, arguing that "without records, there is no history" (Walters 225). Afraid of

compromising his academic career, Drake's initial idealism consequently turns into professional pragmatism: "When he had a 'real Navajo history' in his possession, he could reject it in its entirety or in part, and he could even alter it to suit his needs. He would take care to be objective, fair, and thorough. He couldn't think of anyone who could do a better job" (228). Eventually, David's practical decision reaffirms the authority of a lifeless archive over the Native repertoire's liveness.

Instead of essentializing this split by attempting to revert the hierarchy or simply aiming to establish tribal repertoires in addition to a national archive, *Ghost Singer*, more radically still, portrays both as always already interrelated by a transnationalism within the borders of the United States. With the presence of ghosts in the Smithsonian, the novel does not only assert survivance, but simultaneously stresses Western historiography's own specters which recur at the margins of the re-perpetuation of a colonialist centralized perspective. Walters's narrative, as Catherine Rainwater writes, "suggests that mechanical time diminishes our sense of personal power when we assume that the past is beyond our control and thus outside of our responsibility, and that the future is a clean slate where no ghostly messages from the past may appear" (122-23). This implies that digesting past horizons within the archive, at worst, may turn into a strategy for the disavowal of liability altogether. *Ghost Singer*, however, argues that the repression of past atrocities is never successful and that it is this very epistemological stance which continually re-invokes colonialism as an ongoing reality for Native American communities (cf. Denetdale 21). Instead of a reversed hierarchy or an indifferent equality, both of which imply mutual exclusion, the text opts for a reciprocal supplementation of Western and Indigenous conceptualizations of the past; or, in Jonnie Navajo's words: "It seems like we are told that we can choose one source of knowledge or the other, but we are discouraged from having both, because it seems that the two don't go together. Some day we are going to have to do something about this" (Walters 138). *Ghost Singer* picks up on this by pointing towards an entanglement of repertoire and archive that harbors survivance and an adequate (performative) (re-)working of the national past without alleviating the weight of cultural difference.

In another cunning literary move, Walters's novel indicates this reciprocity by inscribing specific Western dates into the novel's performance as a living act of storytelling. The

narrative's linear chronological progression—from the prologue set in the Jacksonian era of the 1830s, via the events of the late 1960s which make up the main part, to its prospective ending in 1976—is undercut by the spectral *presencing* of the spirit people at the museum who introduce a different sense of temporality into the text: "Sacred or 'unitary' time is encoded in the novel together with mechanical time," tying the atrocities of the first half of the nineteenth century to the event more than one hundred years later so "that the past appears actually to impede the forward flow of time that is measured by clocks and western-style calendars" (Rainwater 119). This poetic inscription of Western temporal markers into a Native American story not only serves to position the novel in a historical context filled with connotations; the performative gesture alters the entire meaning of these codes: as *dated* (i.e. pointing toward historical events) but not dated (i.e. simply past), *Ghost Singer* participates in what Taylor calls spectral history (cf. 141) and invokes a haunting continuance in which the past (re-)presences as still or again to come.

A closer look at Derrida's notion of dates between iterability and singularity, explicated in his essay "Shibboleth," can help elucidate these workings of poetic inscription. Designating the singularity of a here and now and simultaneously effacing it in the encoded repeatability of the signifier that makes it readable, the date has presence and absence—present and past—converge in a performative sign which takes on the character of "a future anterior: it gives the time one assigns to anniversaries to come," and as such "gives access to the memory of the date, to the to-come of the date, to its proper to-come" (25), in the form of an invoking act where something comes to *presence*. As such, Derrida continues, "the inscription of a date (here, now, this day, etc.) always entails a kind of signature: whoever inscribes the year, the day, the place, in short, the present of a 'here and now' attests thereby his or her own presence at the act of inscription" (16). In Walters's novel, this signing is not that of an individual, but, as apparent in the deictic gesture "*we are here*" (246; original emphasis), constitutes the collective signature of tribal communities; an active autographing that unhinges the rules of evidence which guide Western historiography by negotiating "the *constative* value of a certain truth (here is when it took place) and that other order of truth which one would associate with poetic *performativity* (I sign this, here now, at this date" (Derrida, "Shibboleth" 47; original emphases), and therefore exceeding the appropriation through static discursivity from within. As singular and yet iterable, the inscription of dates

brings forth an ir-*ratio*-nal (dis)order of truth where the ephemeral repertoire constantly irrupts into the archive's allegedly static written (hi)stories.

Walters's narrative emphasizes these ghostly continuances over the irrecoverable pastness of the past by poetically inscribing two particularly significant dates with regard to Federal-Native relations. Through the invocation of the year 1830, *Ghost Singer* establishes a spectral connection to President Andrew Jackson's infamous Indian Removal Act as well as the Mexican slave raids on the Navajo during this period. The text offers an account of tragic tribal wisdom concerning the Indigenous population's bilateral Hispanic-English relocation and enslavement, which national histories have been "skipping over carelessly" or given only "casual and doubtful" (Walters 78) treatment, through a retroactive countersignature of active survivance next to Jackson's decree of absentification. Bespeaking both the remaining presences of tribal communities and the ongoing effects of physico-epistemological violence of the Conquest, the haunted and haunting collection in the museum's attic bears witness to the spectral living-on of the past within and simultaneously transgresses the epistemological system of archival closure.

In an interview with Rhoda Carroll, Walters draws attention to the second inscribed date, the year 1968, which not only signifies the peak of transatlantic Civil Rights struggles—among them the American Indian movement (cf. 69)—, but also marks the one hundredth anniversary of the United States' military victory over the Navajos and their subsequent removal to the limited space of the reservation at Bosque Redondo. The novel's main plot takes place between the suicide of Jean Wurly in August 1968 and the death of Jonnie Navajo in 1975. Consequently, it mirrors this first episode of relocation, which ended in 1875, exactly one century later (cf. Denetdale 3) and directs the focus on the lasting effects of a violent epistemology, as Anna Snake renders explicit: "I'm afraid that our people are still being bought and sold, even though they are dead—and have been dead for hundreds of years! [...] When does it stop?" (Walters 207). Although the watershed events of the 1960s have also led to the improvement of Native Americans' living conditions in the United States, *Ghost Singer* again stresses the lasting impact of the Conquest, as becomes evident also in the text's hint towards the Vietnam War. George explains to Begay that "[t]here's savagery here alright, no doubt 'bout it. It's always been here. We perpetuate it. Willie, right now, it's

probably over in Saigon. They're probably taking ears and scalps over there. And then there's a more subtle touch. . . " (81). He implies that physical savagery is only a symptom of a more profound civilized form of epistemological barbarism that in a sweeping objectifying gesture subjects the things of the world reductively to its categorical grid. As the elliptical dots (not) concluding George's comment imply, the further course of the developments since the late 1960s remains undecidable and unpredictable.

Ultimately, Walters's narrative does not resolve these issues of epistemological conflict and abstains from creating a sense of closure. The ellipsis just mentioned creates a lacuna as a visible space for the irruption of the repertoire's excessive workings from inside the archive. En-vised in the perception at the curve of Eurocentric rationality, the novel designates a spectral nexus where Native and Western (hi)stories, with their respective conceptions of temporality, are inherently interwoven in the reciprocity of archive and repertoire. The text does not re-perpetuate reverse hierarchical binaries on either end: it neither promotes complete archival closure that would deny Native survivance nor does it strive for absolute performative openness that would dismiss the validity of writing. Rather, *Ghost Singer* brings forth a dynamic reciprocity of iterability and singularity that always at the same time favors both and neither and thus maintains a productive aporetic tension between hope and disillusionment instead of imagining simple solutions. In this Native American revenance, closure and continuance intersect in a spectral history where the past is never simply past, but *presences* as so many ghostly events of a future anterior.

Conclusion

Before concluding with the broader ramifications of this essay's argument, a brief summary of my analysis is in order. First, I drew on Taylor's work to identify the epistemological structure of the museum and its unidirectional mode of objectifying perception within Walters's narrative as a paradigmatic expression of institutionalized US national logic and its colonial inheritance. I then showed how *Ghost Singer* challenges this centralizing imperialist gaze by outlining a diffuse mode of vision that arises from the interstitial space of juxtaposed cross-cultural narrative perspectives, a way of seeing where the boundaries of repertoire and archive—life and death, material and immaterial—are blurred and which consequently renders visible the traces of Native survivance from within archival absentification. In

contrast to the rules of Western historiography, I eventually illustrated how the text—as an act of storytelling—thereby collapses mechanical linear conceptions of temporality into a performative spectral nexus always already at work within but simultaneously exceeding the discursive notions of archival closure.

Hence, if the sole insistence on an archival impetus constitutes an extension of the Americas' colonial legacy, it follows that the transnational paradigm—if indeed restricted to Fisher Fishkin's quest for the retrieval of forgotten or marginalized knowledge by expanding the discipline's perspective beyond the national borders—does not constitute such a novel scenario. This strategy creates the impression of a complicity with the larger developments of globalization in the West since the sixteenth century (cf. Jay 33), including its imperialist epistemological superiority complex. At worst—in a fashion that is reminiscent of the Anglo-American characters Drake, Newsome, and Evans in Walters's novel—Fisher Fishkin seems to believe that other cultures' ways of coming to terms with the past are readily compatible with the Western concept of the archive and, consequently, easily integrated into the *ratio's* historiographical accounts.

Ghost Singer's Native American perspective suggests that more profound epistemological modifications are necessary. Western methodology alone cannot again form the core of an emerging transnational thinking; a thinking where also such central concepts as temporality, space, and perception, as well as their interrelationship, are at stake requires negotiating Western reason with other epistemological horizons. Transnational endeavors in the context of American Studies need to shed the “willed ignorance of this nation to face its colonialist past and present” (Lonetree 326) and take the decentering insights of the United States' transnationalism within as their point of departure towards an openness for other radically different modes of relating to (the things of) the world—otherwise also the paradigm's more dynamic concepts will turn into just another static grid. Moving outside the nation's borders without repeating the violent gestures of epistemological exceptionalism and thus not compromising the promising potentials of the transnational paradigm becomes possible only when American Studies is willing to leave behind the systemic structure of hegemonic Western rationality and take into account previously subalternized forms of thinking.

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