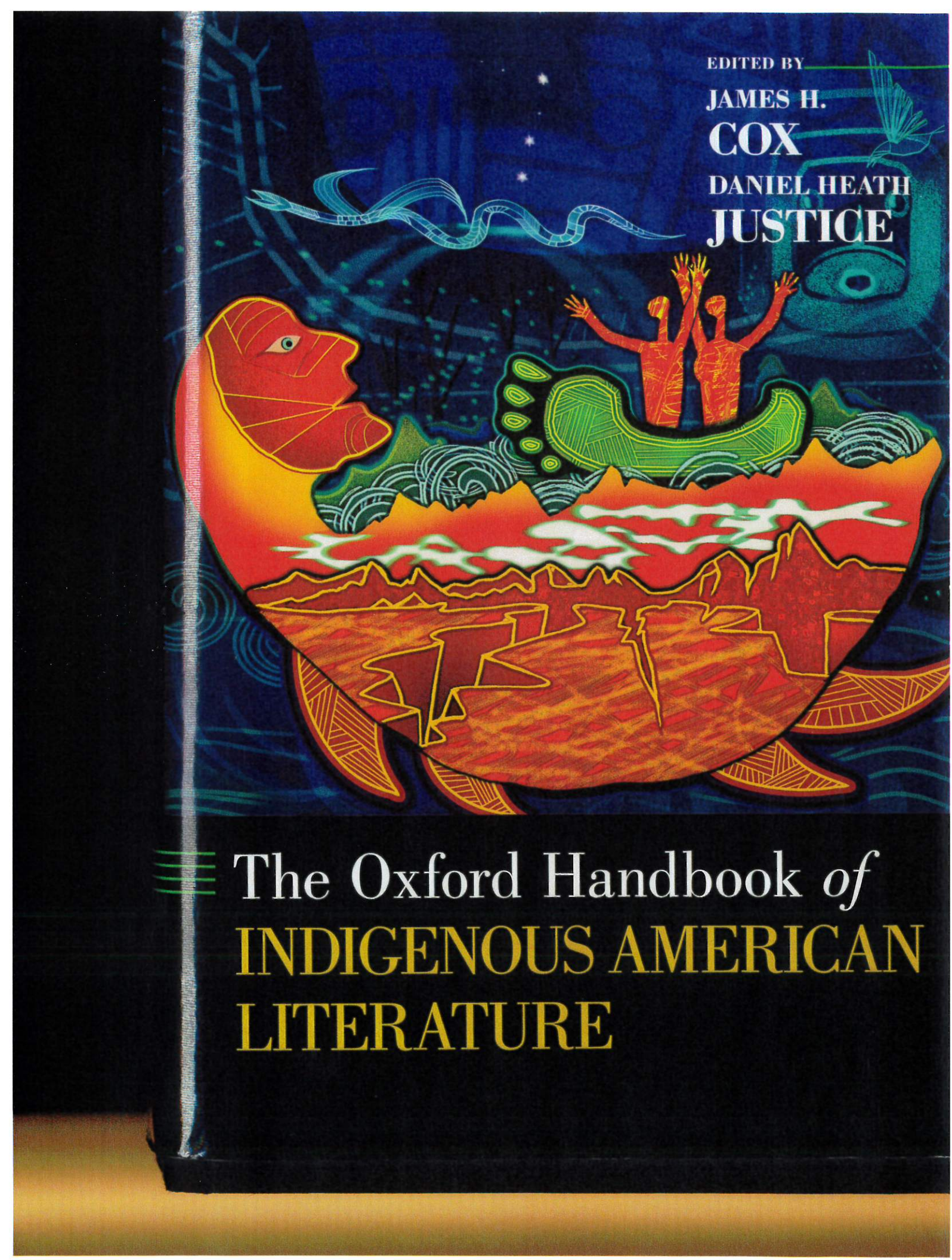
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The Oxford Handbook of
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LITERATURE

CHAPTER 19

READING THE VISUAL, SEEING THE VERBAL

Text and Image in Recent American Indian Literature and Art

DEAN RADER

MUCH has been made over the past twenty years of the astonishing ability of American Indian writers to cross genres. Figures like Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, LeAnne Howe, Simon Ortiz, N. Scott Momaday, Sherman Alexie, Linda Hogan, Diane Glancy, Eric Gansworth, and a host of others have enjoyed success in poetry, prose, nonfiction, criticism, and even drama. LeAnne Howe has published novels, poetry, and short stories; has had plays performed; has written screenplays, memoirs, a history book, and literary criticism; and has had works published on culture and colonization. That ability to challenge traditional boundary restrictions has come to characterize Native literary production, making it among the most interesting work out there. Conversely, that fluidity has made its writers among the hardest to classify. One area that has received very little critical attention in Native studies is the fascinating interplay between text and image. In both literary works and visual art, Native artists and writers frequently seek to augment the primary palette of their work with infusions from another source. Painters like George Longfish, Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, and Edgar Heap of Birds do paintings often comprised of nothing but words. Similarly, writers like Silko, Gansworth, and Joy Harjo regularly use images to augment their poetry and prose. Of course, these moves are often primarily aesthetic, but they can be thematically and perhaps even culturally motivated decisions that have to do with the overall atmosphere of a piece. For artists and writers, blending text and image is a way to inhabit, to more fully populate, the visual and verbal landscape of a text.

Any comprehensive understanding of American Indian literature must take into consideration the work language does, in particular language's ability to be both verbal and visual. It is this profound overlapping of sign and signification that makes this issue compelling but also complicated. These words on this page are, first and foremost, visual texts.

We tend to think of written language as just that, *written* language, but since this is a written essay in a printed book (not a story being told orally), it is comprised entirely of visual symbols; those tiny little works of art we call letters. Of course, the eye moves over letters differently than it scans the canvas of an oil painting or follows the curves of a sculpture, but printed text exists in and makes meaning in the visual realm. A painting is, after all, little more than colored canvas or paper organized by highly structured visual language. It is no coincidence that works on paper and reproductions of original works are referred to as *prints*, reinforcing the shared ontology of books and art. Although I do not want to argue that Native writers and artists enjoy a special relationship with text and image, I do want to suggest that paying attention to how image and text enter into conversation with each other within the realm of Indian cultural production can serve as a particularly useful lens for looking at the sophisticated manner in which Native art and literature *speaks* to us.

Speaks appears in italics because orality might seem to figure only tangentially in any discussion of visual space, and yet the oral component is part and parcel of any work of art— especially one that combines art and text. More often than not, we tend to rely on conversational metaphors for talking about both art and literature, as I have done just now. Indeed, literary and visual texts find a shared expression through similar modes of communication, and it is surprising how frequently one uses the vocabulary of the other to explain itself. For many of the writers and artists I discuss, the mode of communication is as important as what is being communicated. One might argue that Native artists combine text and image in order to replicate the immersive experience of the oratory and the visual experience of ritual and performance.

What connects oral, written, and visual gestures is that they rely on language and they intend an audience. They are communicative, communal, collaborative. They participate in the signifying world of semiotics, especially text and image. For Native cultural texts, blending the lexical and the pictorial is critical for Native people because it replicates the doubleness required to negotiate the symbolic meanings of two integrated worlds. This goes for both current everyday realities, as well as for larger historical ones. Consider early treaties and maps. The part image/part text *Deed in Trust from Three of the Five Nations of Indians to the King* (1726) is an interesting example of this phenomenon, as are the sketches of Shanawdithit in the early 1800s or the fantastic maps of the Mandan by Sitting Rabbit.[1] Although these documents tend to rely less on writing and more on images, they are profoundly ordered in much the same way we think of writing as possessing grammar. What's more, these artists and mapmakers have relied on the dual power of words and images to ensure accuracy and truthfulness. One might argue that Native artists and writers see the distinction between *writing* and *image* as a false distinction, that merging image and text is a symbolic act—a unified field of expression.

However, Western art criticism, literary criticism, and philosophical inquiry have been reluctant to see these two modes of expression as symbiotic. Here is the legendary art historian W. J. T. Mitchell on the "word/image" question:

> If the central task of art history is the study of visual images, the issue of "word and image" focuses attention on the relation of visual representation to language. More broadly, "word and image" designates the relation of art history to literary history,

> textual studies, linguistics, and other disciplines that deal primarily with verbal expression. Even more generally, "word and image" is a kind of shorthand name for a basic division in the human experience of representations, presentations, and symbols. We might call this division the relation between the seeable and the sayable, display and discourse, showing and telling. (51)

In this passage, Mitchell channels Michel Foucault as well as Gilles Deleuze, not to mention a tad of Jacques Derrida. What I find fascinating is the word *division* here. For Mitchell (and Foucault and Derrida), speech and image are always already bifurcated; there is no unity. That (mis)assumption lies at the heart of any discussion about the interplay of text and image in American Indian literature.

Consider, for example, what Gerald Vizenor has to say about this issue. One of the most overlooked of his books is the beguiling *Anishinabe Nagamon* (1970), a wonderful collection of short poetic songs with accompanying drawings—what Vizenor calls "song poems" and "song pictures" (Figure 19.1). In his excellent introduction, Vizenor talks about how, for the Anishinabe, the visual and the verbal were two sides of the same coin:

> *Anishinabemowin* is a language of verbal forms and word images. The spoken feeling of the language is a moving image of tribal woodland life... The *anishinabe* drew pictures of ideas and presentient dreams. The song pictures of the *midewiwin—the* sacred life of *the people—were* incised on the soft inner bark of the birch. These scrolls of pictomyths and sacred songs are taught and understood only by members of the *midewiwin* who believe that music and the knowledge and use of herbal medicine prolongs life. (15)

Notice how different Vizenor's language is from Mitchell's. Gone is the sense of a split, a loss, a fissure, a tension. Present is necessity of interconnectedness and exchange. In an important essay on text and image in Indigenous art, Karen Ohnesorge argues that Native artists use the hybrid power of words and images to counter, from two different positions, mis-truths about American Indians: "Indigenous American artists... create what might be called 'critical imagetexts': in other words, their imagetexts are effective critiques of received truths about Native America" (51). This essay asserts that Native artists combine text and image to create an aesthetic landscape of dialogue and collaboration that underscores Native autonomy and collectivity.

Innovations with the Text/Image Book: N. Scott Momaday and Gerald Vizenor

I love multigenre books, especially those that feature both art and literature, and Native literary history is particularly rich in this arena, ranging from novels to anthologies to poetry to short stories to the often maligned coffee table book. One of the reasons that so many

books by Native authors include images is to fully communicate the importance of place. Words about land only do so much; but images of that landscape help bring a space and a people into being. As history has shown and continues to show, Native landscapes and cultures find themselves perpetually overwritten by Anglo narratives; thus, Native narratives about those spaces often prove to be important examples of authorial and tribal autonomy. Two seminal texts in this regard are the above-mentioned *Anishinabe Nagamon* and the iconic N. Scott Momaday collection, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969).

Every serious student of Native literature has read (and probably fallen in love with) *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, especially the original version with ink drawings by Momaday's father, Al. For me, the drawings are as much a part of the narrative as the words; in fact, in places, it is the action of the images—the spear-wielding warrior on horseback, the descent of the cow skulls, the galloping horses, and the upward thrust of Devil's Tower beneath the pulsing of the seven sisters of the big dipper—that truly activate the text. It is a misreading of the book to claim the drawings break up the stories. Just the opposite is the case. They connect them. The images function as landmarks, icons, that indicate the right *way*. They are signs on a path. They complete the incompleteness of Momaday's verbal journeys. So important is the communication between image and text in these pages that it becomes a model for people like Joy Harjo, Luci Tapahonso, and Sherman Alexie of how a book of poems might utilize images as a collaborative typography to print.

In fact, the entire book is a love letter to cooperation and interaction. "*The Way to Rainy Mountain*," Robert F. Sayre correctly notes, "is in a sense a collaborative autobiography, a tradition in Native American personal narrative. Coup stories and hunting stories were often told by several people, with one supporting or adding to what another said, and the tribal histories such as "Winter Counts" were kept by one person, but when they were told, they could be filled out by other people's memories" (647). What will become evident throughout this essay is how frequently artists and writers turn to others—and even to other genres—to create a more inclusive, more collaborative story.

Additionally, the use of words and images within the same field activates the textual landscape in exciting ways. Text animates the visual because our eye moves in order to read; thus, the static nature of a photograph or a drawing enjoys movement from the words it enters into conversation with. Furthermore, words supplement the pictorial plane with verbal action. The words speak the picture into action. Conversely, the image enlivens the written page; it irradiates it. For example, in section XVIII of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Momaday tells a story about a group of Kiowa hunters trying to find the sun's home. On the facing page, he splices into that narrative a quote from James Mooney in which Mooney foregrounds the importance of the horse for Indians: "With the horse he was transformed into the daring buffalo hunter, able to procure in a single day enough food to supply his family for a year, leaving him free then to seep the plains with his war parties along a range of a thousand miles" (61). That passage is followed by a short paragraph in which Momaday recalls summers on Rainy Mountain Creek. However, as soon as the reader turns the page, she is greeted on the left hand page with the lone phrase "he was transformed into a daring buffalo hunter" while on the right page the reader is

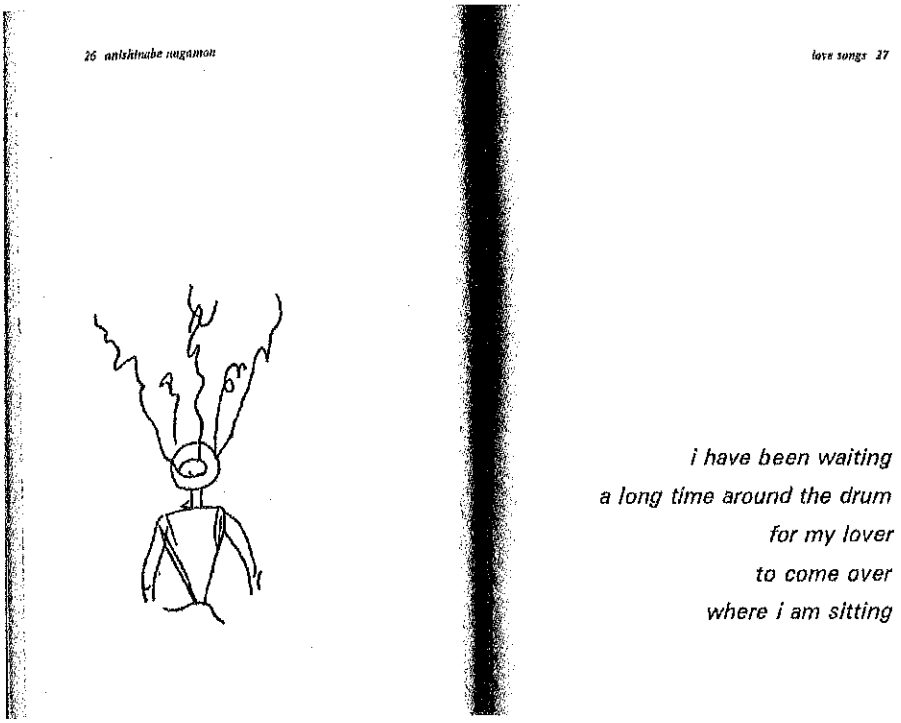

FIGURE 19.1 Page from *Anishinabe Nagamon.*

confronted with a nearly full-page drawing of a shirtless hunter riding bareback, a long lance above his head, while turbulently chasing down a racing buffalo (Figure 19.2 top). Mooney's relatively innocuous use of "transformation" takes on new properties with this text/image combination. The transformation moves from theoretical to actual, from historical to the palpable. Its active presence (as opposed to his passive historicity) is made manifest not just by the drawing but by the repetition of the text used as a kind of intertitle with the image. The image concretizes the text, the text elucidates the image.

The same can be said for *Anishinabe Nagamon.* As Vizenor himself notes, it is impossible to present the song-poems without also including the song pictures or pictomyths. So important are each to the other that there are pretty much equal numbers of poems and pictures. "The *anishinabe* did not have a written history," Vizenor notes, "The past was a visual memory and oratorical gesture of dreams plaiting an endless woodland identity between the conscious and unconscious worlds of the people. The song poems of the *anishinabe* are intuitive lyrical images of woodland life" (13). I want to focus on Vizenor's notion of "plaiting" for a moment. The limitations of print make it impossible to braid together image and text in any useful way, but the hybrid book, the combination of text and image within the same cover, replicates that agrarian, even arboreal, metaphor of grafting two differing strands. This is a key metaphor within the worldview of the book but also within the larger Indigenous worldview. The necessity of plaiting

Native and Western modes of being, of weaving American and Indigenous notions of space and land, into one sophisticated mode of being is, as Vizenor would write much later, a form of active survivance.

If the poems are an aural representation of the world, then the pictures are the requisite visual representations of the same world. What is interesting about this book is how the images are not so much illustrations of the poem but visual enactments of the kinds of emotions and ideas the song poems also tackle. For instance, in the poem and picture in Figure 19.1, the song poem links desire and sound. The drawing on the facing page recreates the five sounds of the singer, suggesting the degree to which the song is an *embodiment*. Here, the drawings populate the wilderness the poems map out. They give human form to the song poem's terrain. They link a people and a place.

Poems, Prose, and Place: Pictoral Collaborations

No Native space is more misunderstood and mis-seen than the Southwest. It is not surprising, then, that some of the best text/image books focus on this area in an attempt to recast how we visualize Indian Land. Two excellent books combining photographs, fiction, and poetry prove to be innovative in this regard. *Secrets from the Center of the World* (1989) and *Tséyi' / Deep in the Rock: Reflections on Canyon de Chelly* (2005) present gorgeous landscape photographs by Stephen Strom with accompanying text by two great authors—Laura Tohe and Joy Harjo. While Vizenor and Momaday's words get rounded out by drawn figural elements, Tohe and Harjo's enter with photographs of figureless landscape. Although both books are published by the University of Arizona Press and show work by the same photographer, the projects themselves are quite different. First, Tohe's texts are lineated poems, often in both Navajo and English. Second, the poet interposes herself (often her own body) onto the landscape, making it, her voice, and her memories part and parcel of the past, present, and future. Third, Strom's photographs, always cropped and bordered, appear on the left page, whereas Tohe's poem is printed on the right page. The effect is interesting. Your eye sees the curated landscape first, then moves over to the poem, which in almost every instance is far more lush—and certainly more personal—than the strikingly minimal image. Conversely, Harjo's fragmented prose poems appear on the left page, whereas Strom's pictures (slightly more generous in this volume) are on the right, so that the reader confronts the text first before trailing over to the images. In Tohe's case, the poems feel as though they narrate the land, whereas in Harjo's, you get the sense that Strom's photographs illuminate the poems. It is a fascinating phenomenon that has more to do with document design than with aesthetic functionality. Here are Harjo and Tohe on their respective projects:

> Harjo: "Strom's photographs emphasize the 'not-separate' that is within and that moves harmoniously upon the landscape... The photographs are not separate from

the land, or larger than it. Rather they gracefully and respectfully exist inside it. Breathe with it. The world is not static but inside a field that vibrates." (iii)

Tohe: "Through Stephen Strom's images we are led to that harmony of color, light and form that pronounce the earth as possessing siihasin, living, breathing, and thinking... We discovered that as we moved through the process of creating this book, our work revealed the evocation of the beauty and spirit of place and people, the power of stories and images, and in this way we hope these works touch the universal spirit." (xiv)

It is that lack of separation, that intimate connection figured as breath, which marks these two books and the necessity of cementing text and image. Just as the art is not separate from the land, the two genres are not separate from each other. Ultimately, these two books are about landscapes, both visual and verbal, and how the two necessitate each other in order to be fully realized.

Poems and Pictures: The Illustrated Collection

An astonishing number of important collections of poems by Native poets include some sort of illustrations. This was especially the case in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. It is no surprise that Native artists and poets collaborate on projects, but it might be startling for some to note just how common it is for a book of poems by a Native writer to be augmented by visual art.

Perhaps the most famous contemporary collection of poems/pictures by a Native writer is Joy Harjo's iconic *In Mad Love and War* (1990) featuring memorable black-and-white illustrations by Jaune Quick-To-See Smith. Although the images don't necessarily illuminate any one poem, the tribal motifs that adorn the cover get re-encoded throughout the book, lending it a notably visual component. Harjo may have gotten the idea for a Quick-To-See illustrated collection from her fellow poet and friend, Luci Tapahonso. In a much lesser-known but perhaps more beautiful book, *A Breeze Swept Through (1987)*, several Quick-To-See paintings punctuate each section with a thematically appropriate image. For example, the section "A Spring Poem" is illustrated with two primitive figures "springing" from star to star to Miro-esque circle to what looks like the tops of pueblos. Like *In Mad Love and War*, the cover of *A Breeze Swept Through* foregrounds a colorful painting by Quick-To-See-Smith, replete with indigenous imagery as well as a notably Southwest color palette.

For me, the use of images here serves two main purposes. First, it does some semiotic work in that it reinforces the Indigeneity not just of the poems but also of the book itself. It drives the point home that this is an Indian project. It does this because in America—for better or worse—Indianness is communicated first and foremost visually. Second, and more importantly, the images aestheticize the poems indigenously. Often, readers like to read Native literary texts through the lens of "ethnicity" or "anthropology" or

"sociology." The use of the paintings pair figuration with figuration. Symbolic act sidles up next to symbolic act. The images remind readers that the poems are aesthetic texts to be decoded as art, not artifact (Figure 19.2 bottom).

The use of active images in these books is, I believe, yet another way Indigenous writers remind readers that Native cultures can, concurrently, utilize iconic Indigenous imagery *and* be active and transformative. If I can return for a moment to the facing pages from *A Way to Rainy Mountain* and the action of the word/warrior interchange, I'd like to point out some similarities between those pages and two from Tapahonso's *A Breeze Swept Through*. Of course, there is an obvious semiotic and aesthetic resemblance (a testament to the magnitude of Momaday's book), but more importantly a dual sense of movement and change is seen in which the tribal and personal become interchangeable. Tapahono's dream and her reassurance of love finds resonance with the facing page's title "There Is Nothing Quite Like This" (indeed), and the galloping ascent of the horse over mountains and into the mind's night. Similarly, the racing hunter on the horse comes directly after Momaday's very personal memory of summers at his grandmother's house. The two—the personal and the cultural—find reflection and imitation in the two planes of signification.

Sherman Alexie's *Old Shirts & New Skins* (1996) takes this project one step further. Published by the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA and featuring an introduction by Adrian C. Louis and drawings by poet/artist/activist Elizabeth Woody, this collection of poems and images does a fantastic job of creating a distinctive if harsh landscape of broken dreams and failed promises. Louis's introduction praises Alexie's truth telling: "Filled with poems that can make you laugh and cry, this book is neither strident nor self-pitying. It is remarkable in its candor, and gracefully constructed" (ix). Louis closes his introduction with the following command: "Read on and taste the soul of the Indian and hear the drum, which is not the sound of the heart, but the booming of thunder" (x). Surprisingly, he does not mention Woody's art, despite the fact that no less than a dozen of her drawings accompany individual poems. If, as Louis claims, *Old Shirts and New Skins* enables the reader to taste the soul of the Indian, Alexie's poems can't be the only dish on the plate. Woody's drawings are just as fierce (Figure 19.3).

In fact, just as Alexie refuses to soften Indian realities, so too does Woody refuse to temper her images. They are gritty, heavily shaded, and sometimes intentionally "ugly." They stand in stark contrast to the soft dreamy images of Santa Fe galleries that so often romanticize the Indian past rather than confronting the tribal present. In one poem/picture combination, Alexie's ironic poem "Archeology" sits next to Woody's black-and-white drawing of what appears to be an angry or scowling skull. But, just when one is tempted to offer an oversimplistic reading of the book, both Alexie and Woody shift gears. For example, Alexie's "Horses" gallops headlong into a lovely sketch of four horses, replete with a kind of crown of stars and mountain peaks in the background. In truth, it is a drawing that looks like it could have come from Quick-To-See Smith herself, even paired with the Tapahonso and Momaday versions above. When, in the middle of the poem, Alexie writes

> The Plains Indian rode her horse 18 hours a day, the Plains Indian rode under her horse's neck into battle, the Plains Indian shot seven arrows consecutively, the Plains

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IN CERTAINTY, I MOVED TO YOU

I was lying against the warm length of your back
and I dreamed
we were going through an intersection
when the car ahead stalled suddenly.
I swerved around it but
still metal scraped the back of the car

as I got out,
our daughters watched, peering through the back windows,
faces solemn with fright.

I woke then
In certainty, I moved to you
you gathered me in beneath cool sheets
and we slept again.

It did not suprise me then to find the stereo gone,
a gaping hole in the dashboard
the open window waving in the morning air.
And I swam back into the night,
the dream,
that old feeling.

I should have known.

I have only your warm self for certain.

There Is Nothing
Quite Like This

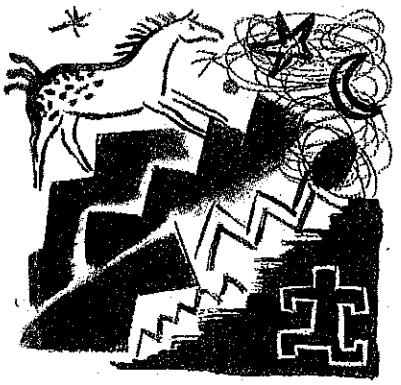

FIGURE 19.2 (Top) Text and image from *A Way to Rainy Mountain* and, below, a poem and drawing from *A Breeze Swept Through*.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Beginning at that river
where spring floods uncovered

the long forgotten
burial ground of some tribe

or another, I search
for skulls and extra ribs

in the past. My hands reach
down, an exact process

into water, my own
reflection, and what it changes

I recognize. A shovel-shaped incisor
is all I need

to prove mouth
and face, eyes

set free, down river
to float nameless and see.

FIGURE 19.3 Alexie's poem on the left; Woody's drawing on the right.

Indian had seven arrows in flight simultaneously, the Plains Indian rode her horse 18 hours a day.

There are witnesses. (29)

we realize we are also witnesses, especially when we turn the page and see the horses again in motion under the stars.

What I like about the Alexie/Woody poem/painting correspondence is just that—they seem to be in conversation with each other. So integrated are the verses and visuals, one might wonder if Alexie wrote some of the poems in response to the Woody drawings, rather than the other way around. Most importantly, the illustrations escort the poems to another level. Instead of closing off interpretation, Woody's images open up the interpretive space so that word and world enter into a dialogue that enhances both.

The master of the text/image book is Eric Gansworth. Like N. Scott Momaday and Elizabeth Woody, Gansworth is both an artist and a writer. Nearly all of his books are innovative mash-ups of poetry, painting, prose, and drawings, but none is as seamlessly (or as provocatively) integrated as his 2008 masterpiece *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function*. Impossible to summarize, Gansworth's hybrid text pulls from sources as diverse as science fiction, the binary code Haudenosaunee traditions, wampum figures, John Lennon, Pink Floyd and, perhaps most significantly, the death of Gansworth's brother in 2000. Text informs image, image informs text. Throughout, the figures of the wampum belt are encoded into the visual and cellular structure of the poems, which are textual manifestations of the visual code itself. Susan Bernardin makes a connection between Gansworth's form and its intentionality: "As a crossover, cross-pollinating

artist working simultaneously in painting, prose, and poetry, Gansworth challenges conventional, limited methods of reading visual and narrative art" (174). As Bernardin correctly notes, the complexity and interconnectedness of the book functions as a metaphor for parsing the complex interconnected realities of Haudenosaunee histories and presences. Put another way, just as Gansworth challenges traditional notions of reading "a book," so too does he challenge limited methods of reading an "Indian."

In this way Gansworth's multiplicity of genres is both aesthetic and experiential. He acknowledges that Indigenous communication methods cannot always be confined to one medium. "I suppose in some ways," Gansworth says, "I write very static graphic novels, in that, the images are never solely for the culture of 'illustration.' They are separate, parallel, visual narratives, for a visually adept reader. There are always multiple levels of communication among paintings, and in the cases where I've done Multi-panel paintings (like those that separate the sections in *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function)* they have to inform the work as you read, narratively and aesthetically, the images individually, collectively, and then in context of the words" (Gansworth Email). One reason the image/book is so powerful—especially in the hands of someone like Gansworth—is that one is perpetually reminded of issues of visual representation. How one writes about Indians can be a political act, but visually representing Indians, Indian symbology, and Indian cultural items is even trickier.

Nowhere is this more evident than in his use of the friendship belt. As Penelope Kelsey notes, the controlling metaphor for this book is the visual power of the friendship belt: "Gansworth repeats the friendship chain throughout the collection visually and narratorially; male wampum figures, naturalistically drawn men, and cornhusk dolls recur in differing settings, while allusions to treaty rights as vested in the Canandaigua Treaty are affirmed through these images and also directly alluded to in subject matter" (Email). The twelve paintings interspersed throughout the book try to do on a visual plane what the poems explore linguistically—even to the point of coloring. For example, all of the paintings are done in purple and white, the colors of the wampum beads, and the book itself is printed in purplish ink on white pages. Everything is connected.

When I look at these books of poems and pictures, words and windows, I am reminded again of Ohnesorge's claim about the imagetext as a valenced "critique of received truths about Native America." The interpenetration of the lexical and the visual forces the reader to rethink and to reinterpret the entire history of how America has *read* and internalized Indianness.

Scrapbook Aesthetics: Leslie Marmon Silko and LeAnne Howe

No discussion of the text/image book would be complete without mentioning two other important projects, neither of which is, technically, a collection of poems. LeAnne Howe's *Miko Kings* has almost single-handedly redefined the multidisciplinary

Native novel, whereas Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* is arguably the most important text-image book ever written by a Native author. What *Miko Kings* and *Storyteller* share is what we might call a "scrapbook aesthetic." There is no central narrative or narrator, no single genre, no meta-voice over determining reality. Rather, the books are patched together with pictures, letters, notes, journalism, and journals. In the case of *Storyteller*, you can throw in family photographs, poems, and artwork. Both books play with the real and the unreal, the factual and the fictional, and both use the interactivity of visual and written texts to simultaneously enhance and undermine easy assumptions about land, tribes, identity, the past, and the present.

In *Miko Kings*, Howe fuses historical fact with literary fiction in order to raise questions about a series of sacred American cows, most notably that Abner Doubleday invented baseball. Spliced between pages of fiction, readers come across articles seemingly clipped from actual newspapers, diary entries written in a turn of the century cursive script, and actual photographs of early Native baseball players. What makes this book so radical is that we tend to trust visual texts to *verify* the written texts. But, in *Miko Kings*, distinctions between truth and reality are slippery indeed. Are the newspaper clippings "real?" Did Indians truly invent baseball? The photographs are authentic; are the diary entries? The verisimilitude of *Miko Kings*' visual culture grounds the topography of the book in the actual, again, facilitating an authentic immersion. It is the handwriting that sends us back, the obviously antique photographs that balance the tensions of the prose. Everything is part of the story.

One of the best examples is Ezol's diary, which is itself a mastertext in terms of blending images and words (Figure 19.4). For those not familiar with *Miko Kings*, the middle portion of Howe's novel is a "reproduction" of the diary of one of the protagonists, Ezol Day, a young Choctaw postal clerk. When the narrator, Lena, opens the diary and begins to read it, we the readers, read along with her. We see what she sees. The diary contains Ezol's own writing, but it also includes a trove of other fascinating items: poems from anthologies in which she has written notes in between the stanzas, printed pages she's torn from books and pasted inside her own, some of her drawings, and letters. By far the most compelling come near the beginning of the diary. On the left page is handwritten script, while on the right page is one of Ezol's drawings, with the title, "Eye Tree" hovering beside the trunk. A lot is going on here.

First, Howe's decision to present the diary using human penmanship (that looks as though it is, indeed, quite old) is an ingenious amalgamation of text and image. The words are text but the *penmanship* is visual. The look of the words, the atmosphere the handwriting creates, is just as integral to the novel as what the words say. Also, by including Ezol's drawing (and its written title), the diary leaps off the page. It grows the way the tree grows. What's more we *see* the tree, perhaps much the same way the Eye Tree sees us. Even the visual text is about visual texts. It is about seeing and being seen. It is a drawing about reading.

Previously, I argued that the images in these text/image books animate the text, that they are about action. Here is Howe on the same subject:

> Images are verbs. We see in verbs, just as our languages are verb driven. This is why we are drawn to text/image book. When Ezol appears to Lena on page 27 in *Miko*

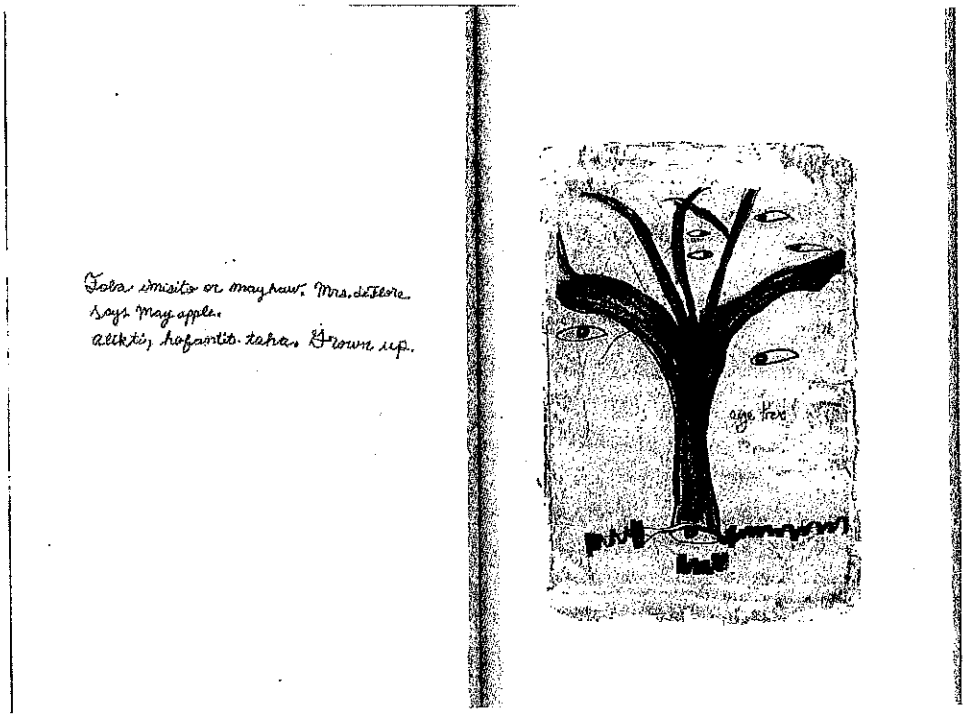

FIGURE 19.4 Entry and *Eye Tree* drawing from Ezol Day's diary in *Miko Kings*.

Kings, she says, "she [Ezol] examines all the family pictures on the wall of my office." Images are animate, they tell a story, just like a vision does for medicine people. Ezol see the images, becomes alive through the photographic image/memory on the wall. She tries to tell Lena how to vision words on page of the novel in their discussion of *chifitokchaya* (Howe Email)

Images making words animate, making words "come alive" is not mere rhetoric here. It's about understanding that aesthetic creation is part of a living language both visual and verbal. The concreteness of text hooks up with the consciousness of image (or vice versa) to help create a "portrait" that is three-dimensional.

One last point here. For decades—even centuries—the standard representation of Indians by non-Indians has been one-dimensional. Part of the cultural work done by books that blend print and visual culture is to explode the legacy of representational one-dimensionality. Ironically, there has been an aesthetic taxation without proper representation. Authors like Howe are out to collect back taxes.

Silko also has some collecting to do. In *Storyteller*, Silko acknowledges that, in order to tell a full story and to tell it comprehensively, she needs it all. And so everything goes in. As in *Miko Kings*, she lets everything be a story. What's more, she makes everything a story loaded with history and culture and meaning. We are left to wonder in some instances what is "tribal" and what is "personal," but of course, as the book suggests, the seamlessness of these things is part of what makes Pueblo identity complex. Linda

Krumholz argues correctly that "this breakdown of generic boundaries challenges Western aesthetic categories and reading methods" (72). Indeed.

Storyteller defies the very foundational roles of text and image Foucault and Derrida's work exemplifies. In his important book *This Is Not a Pipe*, Foucault asserts that "the two systems [text and image] can neither merge nor intersect... What is essential is that the verbal signs and visual representations are never given at once. An order always hierarchizes them, running from the figure to discourse or from discourse to the figure" (32–33). Nowhere is this less true than in *Storyteller*, where a basket, a poem, a photograph, a letter, a Pueblo tale, a contemporary short story all tell stories at the same time on the same level. It is not that one is subservient to the other; it is that one is interchangeable with the other.

An astonishing series of texts link together midway through *Storyteller*. The first, "A Geronimo Story," is a masterful corrective texts that blends Laguna oral and written history in hopes of debunking Cowboy mythologies of Geronimo, Indians, and the Southwest. That article is followed by an amazing 1928 photograph of The Laguna Regulars forty-three years after they rode in the Apache Wars. Next to that is a photo of Wesson Peak, the highest point in the Tucson Mountains. Bookending the photographs is a letter about roosters Silko wrote in 1978 to the poet James Wright. At first, it seems like these four texts clustered together have little in common, but in truth they are all attempts to represent a people and a place in a multifaceted way.

All of these books share one important component—they use images to narrate and words to sketch. They ask readers to reverse expectations of genre, in part because each of these books also, in some way, asks readers to reverse expectations of Indian representation and Indian truths.

Epilogue: The Verbal Landscape of Text/Image Art

One of the most interesting details about the Indian Occupation of Alcatraz from 1969 to 1971 is the dozens of examples of "graffiti" the occupants painted on doors, buildings, towers, and walls. "Graffiti" is the term journalists and government officials used, but in truth such a term is a misnomer. The buildings were never defaced; rather, they were converted into canvases, and they were rehabilitated into pages. I write *pages* because virtually every instance of public painting during the occupation was text (as opposed to images). Given the long history of Indian iconography, one would expect the occupants to adorn their new home with visual markers of residence. And although that did happen on occasion and on a very small scale, the vast majority of aesthetic communication was rendered via text, complicating Foucault's assertion even more. Put bluntly, for the occupiers, the text *is* the image and the image *is* the text. The writing is the art and the art is the writing. There could be no gap between sign and signifier; Indianness could no longer afford to be misre(a)d.

As a kind of epilogue to the sections on print culture, I'd like to close with a quick tour of some examples of Native visual culture that do their part to ensure Indianness is no longer misread. They serve as a counterbalance to the traditional lexical texts of print culture while also demonstrating how "writing" in a similarly hybrid form can do different but complementary semiotic and cultural work.

If Native writers turn to image to aestheticize, Native artists often turn to words to politicize. Take the Alcatraz occupiers for example. Instead of sketching large images of warriors, arrows, tomahawks, and rifles, they opted instead to paint in large strokes phrases like "RED POWER," "INDIAN LAND," "PEACE ON EARTH," "HOME OF THE FREE," and "INDIANS OF ALL TRIBES."[2] In this way, the paintings (which I prefer to "graffiti") function as a mode of public art. It is fascinating how frequently public and street art depends on text to help carry its message—everything from actual graffiti, to the OBEY images to murals to billboards. It is that notion of message that distinguishes much public art from what we might call gallery art. It is through that combination of message and media that this work looks less and less like gallery art and starts to resemble texts like *Storyteller* and *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function*.

Groundbreaking artists like Edgar Heap of Birds and George Longfish understand this better than anyone, as both have been mining the canvas/page overlap for years. Although many of Longfish's popular works, such as *Modern Times* (1993) and *The End of Innocence* (1994), are composed of text on top of images, some of his most powerful work is pretty much text only, what he calls "warrior information." The best example is *Blood Line or Accepted Federal Governmental Standard for Blood Quantum* (2005; Figure 19.5). Atypically horizontal, this piece stretches out like a ruler. This is appropriate because it is an ironic measuring stick, enabling the viewer to quantify blood quantum levels on a visual scale.[3] What's fascinating about the piece is that it is not a traditional "painting"; there are no people, no horses, no shapes, no notable brushstrokes, no innovative uses of color. There is only a red background and black letters, and yet, much the way the images in printed books create a kind of atmospheric landscape, the letters in Longfish's paintings enact what Molly McGlennen calls a "verbal landscape". "I want to continue to look at the artwork of Longfish as a means to understand his use of text toward spiritual, cultural, and historical healing," McGlennen argues. "Understanding the text in his work as a dialogue, a verbal landscape, therefore, brings communication—being in communion, in unity, in close association with the truth" (212).[4] Readers familiar with Silko's *Storyteller* or her essay "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," or any of Howe's writings on tribalography will immediately recognize that text in Longfish's paintings does work quite similar to what Silko and Howe claim language and landscape do—restore balance and order.

Like Longfish, Heap of Birds uses text and image to inhabit a political and cultural landscape. Known for his "text drawings" (walls and panels of phrases that appear to be scrawled as opposed to "painted"), Heap of Birds has spent his career playing with the semiotic power of words, images, and signs. Pretty much everything he's done—from his stunning *Ocmulgee Sign Project*, an installation of street signs along the Trail of Tears, to the massive *Wheel*, a phenomenal sculpture of text-laden "trees" outside the Denver

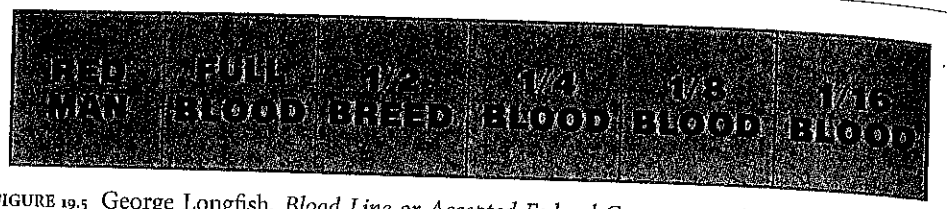

FIGURE 19.5 George Longfish, *Blood Line or Accepted Federal Governmental Standard for Blood Quantum* (2005).

Museum of Art—has merged the visual and the verbal. According to Ohnesorge, Heap of Birds is "deeply engaged in using image and text to establish a dialogue between the landscape genre and Indigenous arts... For him... art is simultaneously textual and pictorial" (58). In his 2011 piece entitled *Dead Indian Stories* (Figure 19.6), Heap of Birds returns to his text drawings in order to make a sweeping statement about identity, politics, race, origin, skin color, and historical murder. Rendered in crude, almost "primitive" script, Heap of Birds loads up his canvas/page with a series of incendiary proper nouns: *Indian, Obama, Bin Laden,* and *Geronimo.* The painting reads less like a picture and more like a haiku, drawing its energy from the power of not just signification. Seeing/reading these names recreates the act of seeing/reading skin color, seeing/reading "threat," and acting with brutality. It is no coincidence that Longfish's and Heap of Bird's paintings address skin color and have a red background. Connoting both Indians and bloodshed, the paintings play with contrasting text with a shared visual landscape in order to punch up the synergistic power of the imagetext to speak truth to power.

Less brutal but equally physical is Erica Lord's smart *(Untitled) I Tan to Look More Native* (2006; Figure 19.7). I love this piece because of its complexity and its brilliant intertextual references to art history. If Longfish and Heap of Birds deploy text to draw attention to cultural identity and the physicality of race and skin, Lord *literally* draws text *on* skin to make her point. "My art," writes Lord, "explores the next wave of cultural examination, an evolution of new ways to demonstrate cultural identity beyond the polar ideas that exist within a strictly two-worlds discourse" (Lord). Earlier, I argued that writers like Gansworth, Silko, and Howe incorporate images along with text in order to challenge facile black-and-white modes of interpreting the world, especially issues of race. That is exactly what Lord is doing here. Like Longfish and Heap of Birds, Lord uses text (and image) to confront race, identity, and skin color. Here, though, that message is encoded *literally* on the body.[5] The body is a canvas, and the canvas is a body, and both function as a page that we, as viewers, are invited to look at, to *read.* Again, we are being asked to read the body as a text. In this case, Lord's photograph seduces us in a troubling way. She eroticizes what she critiques. Or is it the other way around? Either way, savvy viewers and readers get the brilliant intertext of this piece as it participates in the long history of the nude female form in which the body becomes a text to be dissected, entered, and interpreted.

Perhaps unwittingly, Lord brings us back to Vizenor and the drawing of the singer's embodied voice. Lord's voice is the model's embodied text, but we get the connection.

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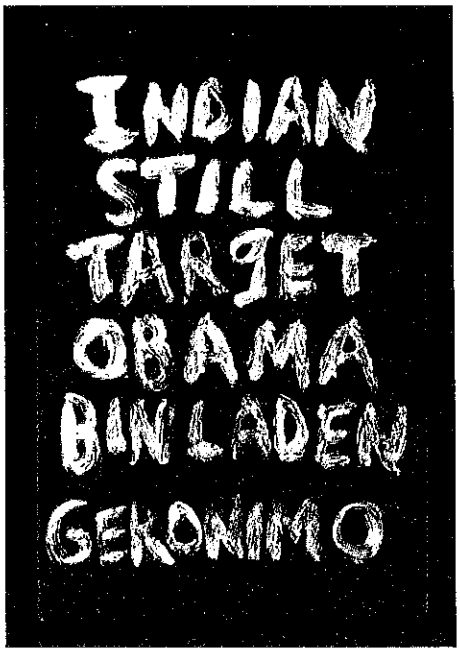

FIGURE 19.6 Edgar Heap of Birds, *Dead Indian Stories* (2011).

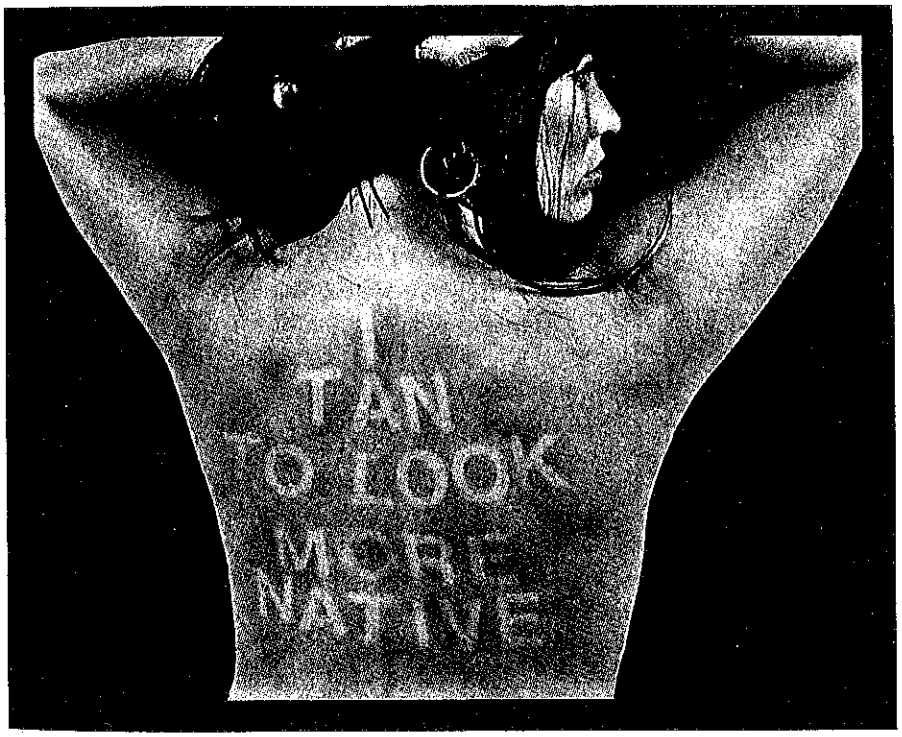

FIGURE 19.7 Erica Lord, *I Tan To Look More Native* (2006).

Whether it's a voice, a poem, an imagetext, a hybrid panel of word and picture, a scrapbook quilt of woven materials, or a picture beside a poem, Native visual and verbal texts do more than problematize genre, they alter epistemology. They tell us how to be and show us how to know.

Notes

1. Segments of both of these maps are reprinted in Mark Warhus's *Another America*.
2. Many of these paintings are reproduced in what I think is among the most fascinating image/text books, *Alcatraz Indian Land Forever*, ed. Troy Johnston. I also go into the semiotics of these paintings in great detail in the first chapter of *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI*.
3. Elizabeth Woody's fine poem "Translation of Blood Quantum" and Esther Belin's excellent "Ruby in Me #1" both use innovative typography to create visual texts that puncture the optics of *seeing* identity solely through the lens of blood: Woody:

   31/32 Warm Springs-Wasco-Yakama-Pit River-Navajo
   1/32 Other Tribal roll number 1553

   thirty-second parts of a human being (Luminaries *of the Humble*, 103) Belin:

   middle child
   smart child
   1/4 Navajo
   1/4 Navajo
   1/4 Navajo
   1/4 Navajo

   four parts equal my whole #311,990 (In *the Belly of My Beauty*, 39).
4. See McGlennan's essay for a funny story about how visitors interact with Longfish's canvas (214).
5. Readers familiar with Franz Kafka's "The Penal Colony" and/or J. M. Coetzee's *The Life and Times of Michael K.* will recall the scenes in which prisoners literally have their crimes written on their bodies.

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