



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

COLLABORATING WITH(IN) THE GARDEN: STEWARDSHIP, PERFORMANCE, AND THINKING BEYOND THE SPATIO-TEMPORAL FORMATIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL LEGACIES

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Mitákuye Oyás'īŋ (we are all related) is at the core of our cultural beliefs, structures, way of viewing and walking in the world [...] Our belief in *Mitákuye Oyás'īŋ*, that we are all related, becomes true when all species have a healthy environment to live in, learn from and enjoy that is free from oppression and greed.

—Cânté Sütá (Oglala Lakota), "Imagining the Oak Savannah" (2019)

Introduction: Gardens and Spatio-Temporal Formations¹

Much has been made recently of Land-Grant—otherwise known as “Land-Grab”—legacies at institutions of higher education in the United States. The Morrill Act, passed by the United States Congress in 1862, created a network of Land-Grant institutions founded on the colonial settlement of lands, the extraction of resources, and the displacement of Indigenous peoples. This policy created the foundation for state-run public universities to develop financial reserves, generating a system of support that allowed for sustained infrastructural growth and research activity. Recent studies, such as Robert Lee and Tristan Ahtone’s comprehensive research for *High Country News* (2020), have elucidated how Land-Grant policy incites a meta-narrative centered on settler notions

of land, privileging legal and administrative processes that constrain and transform the formation of knowledge in relation to the environment. The emergent research and analysis illustrates how Land-Grant institutes have played a pivotal role in sustaining selves and societies within a settler-colonial meta-narrative of progress, an entangled and complicated history of making Indigenous lands available for extraction, settlement, and investment.

As a finishing doctoral student of German and Polish ancestry studying at a Land-Grant institution, I have been vexed by the structural contradictions inherent in my desire to develop as an ally to Indigenous causes, and my need to refract this desire through the protocols of knowledge production haunted by a colonial legacy. Conscious of this settler-colonial metanarrative, I've found myself needing a space beyond the typical university classroom as a means of interrogating institutional structures. For this reason, I have become especially interested in the pedagogical potential of gardens. Through my work on, in, and with gardens, I came to realize the degree to which knowledge production at my Land-Grant institution was so often defined through notions of productivity tethered to economic gain. At the same time, I see the pedagogical potential of gardens growing within and as a part of the curricula of Land-Grant institutions to provide generative critiques and experiential engagements with nature as embodied practices of caretaking.



Figure 1: University of Minnesota Native American Medicine Garden signage

At the corner of Cleveland and Larpenteur avenues in Saint Paul, Minnesota, across the street from the Bell Museum of Natural History and surrounded by University of Minnesota research fields, is a one-third acre garden of plants native to the Dakota homelands of *Mni Sóta Maŋoce*. Three quarters of the plot is formed in the shape of a medicine wheel, which is a traditional, spiritual concept for health and healing used by numerous Native American tribes in North America. On the east side of the medicine wheel is signage for the garden where one will commonly meet *p̄hěží hóta wápe blaskáska* (ceremonial sage) growing near the posts. Within the medicine wheel is an arbor made from fallen branches. Within the arbor are several metal chairs for garden volunteers to rest. Surrounding the arbor are hundreds of plants indigenous to Mni Sóta Maŋoce: to the north is *p̄hěží wačhánġa* (sweetgrass), to the west is an abundance of *p̄hěží hóta wápe blaskáska* (ceremonial sage), to the east is *čhanlí* (North American indigenous ceremonial tobacco), and interspersed throughout is *p̄hanúnġpala waňčáhčča* (common milkweed).

The Native American Medicine Garden (hereafter, NAMG), located on the lands of the Dakota people ceded in the Treaties of 1837 and 1851, is a learning space that teaches and practices Lakota ways of living and being within the contemporary boundaries of a Land-Grant institution. Tawanciotawin Barbara Graham-Bettelyoun (Sicangu Lakota) initiated the garden as part of the Woodlands Wisdom project in 2003 within the administrative home of the medical school at the University of Minnesota. The initial work of the NAMG involved efforts to bring together a range of constituencies: tribal colleges and nations within the settler-colonial borders of Minnesota; University of Minnesota administration, faculty, staff and community; and non-Indigenous communities to support the work and to build alliances.²

In 2004, Tawanciotawin stepped away from the NAMG to found Buffalo Star People (buffalostarpeople.org), a grassroots movement to help Indigenous people heal from contemporary and historical traumas. In Tawanciotawin's place, Oglala Lakota Master Gardener and Landscape Designer Cânté Sütá Francis Bettelyoun was hired to implement the transition and to create a vision moving forward, serving as the garden's primary caretaker from 2007–2020. As explained in the personal documentation entitled "History of the University of Minnesota Native American Medicine Garden," Cânté Sütá has served as a staff member within the College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources (henceforth referred to as CFANS), commuting from his home on Nakota homeland in South Dakota to "free the land of the oppressive state of being, an oppressive state that much of the land of the Dakota still suffers" (Cânté Sütá and Tawanciotawin 2018, 1). Despite inconsistent institutional support and financial uncertainty, Cânté Sütá nurtured a garden that included *pšínġ šičámna* (wild onion), *chanġlógan hú wanžíla* (small leaf pussytoes) *p̄hěží hóta wápe blaskáska* (ceremonial sage), *čhanlí* (North American indigenous ceremonial tobacco), *wagmú* (Lakota squash), *waštémna* (wild bergamot), *kġánġa* (wild plum), *ápe kalúlu* (mallow), *waġpé tġothó* (lamb's quarter), and—of particular interest for this essay—*p̄hanúnġpala waňčáhčča* (common milkweed). Framed on all sides by meticulously managed research fields and pesticide warning signs, the common milkweed exemplifies how the garden—in the context of institutional relations—enacts stewardship as a multi-species performance with the capacity to mobilize acts of care in the present to imagine possible futures.



*Figure 2: University of Minnesota research field and pesticide warning sign immediately to the east of the NAMG.
Photo by author (2016).*

The term “stewardship,” like the term “performance,” is expansive and used by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers variously to establish an ethics of engagement, to motivate publics, to organize action, and to assess potential outcomes (Enqvist et al. 2018). The term “stewardship” is also connected to a complicated legacy of landholdings, being widely used to describe a guardian of an environment or place who makes decisions *for* something/someone else rather than *with* something/someone else. As explained by Jennifer Welchmann, “Traditional stewardship, whether of estates, ships, passengers or finances, was a kind of occupation performed in return for financial or other remuneration and for a limited period of time” (2012, 299). Contemporary views on the concept of stewardship have shifted towards adaptation, emphasizing the need for epistemological agility and adaptation when addressing environmental concerns. In contrast to contemporary conceptions of environmental stewardship, Lakota philosophy stands out for the emphasis on plural relations that are not managed by the human as guardian but, rather, that co-constitute possibilities for life.

Here, stewardship is defined by Cânté Sütá as a continuous process, an active and embodied engagement with an environment that’s shaped by Lakota philosophy—Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ (we are all related)—and an ethics of care informed by reciprocity. What this means is that stewardship is participatory; humans are not authoring the management of land from a privileged position outside of the environment looking in, but are, instead, acting as one of multiple species that collaborate to ensure “a healthy environment to live in, learn from and enjoy” (Cânté Sütá 2019, 3). In relation to the neighboring research fields that are managed based on the language of economic

progress, Cânté Sütá's practice of stewardship emphasizes the encounter between bodies (both human and nonhuman species) as the opportunity to nurture relations. Such an approach to stewardship (re)connects people with plants, subverting the distance created by the gridded formation of singular plant species on a research field. The garden, in contrast to the grid of industrial agriculture, liberates possibilities for people to care for and move with plants.

Previous work on the NAMG (Bell 2020) suggests that Indigenous farming practices offer a critique of Western mono-culture but doesn't account for the role plants play in the formation of subversive learning spaces. This study takes as its starting point the integral role that plants play in the formation of the NAMG, thereby refiguring stewardship as a multispecies performance beyond spatio-temporal formations of institutional legacies. The NAMG and the teachings of its caretaker Cânté Sütá are central to rethinking stewardship as a multi-species performance. In an interview that I conducted in June of 2020, Cânté Sütá elaborates on the contradictions of institutional relations:

In the short months that followed the announcement that the Mdewakanton community donation came to CFANS [...] I was asked to "make the garden pretty" to conform to (University of Minnesota) standards[...] In conversation with (University of Minnesota) research field staff over the years, I was told that CFANS administrators and their stakeholders didn't want the NAMG to exist [...] because "this is prime real estate". (Cânté Sütá and Tawanciotawin 2020)

The University of Minnesota's administrative approach ("make the garden pretty," "prime real estate") resonates with the historical definition of stewardship as "a longstanding association with landholdings," serving as a perpetuation of the legacy of stewardship as a method of control within economic frames of reference (Welchmann 2012, 299). Cânté Sütá's account emphasizes a different approach to stewardship by highlighting the tensions and contradictions of overlapping systems—ecological, institutional, and historical—so integral to understanding the NAMG as a pedagogical space that subverts the modern university's relationship to land, labor, and time.

In this paper, I seek to explicate this ecological mode of pedagogy through intentionally and carefully engaging with Lakota knowledge and institutional experience. With Cânté Sütá's permission, I've been a participant-observer at the NAMG since the fall of 2016, and his thoughts on relations guided how I took field notes on the ways bodies move in relation to the garden. I want to know about how bodies move together in the garden to better understand Cânté Sütá's stewardship, which he defines as an embodied collaboration with the "more than human" world. By tracking interactions between bodies (human and "more than human"), I aim to identify 1) how Cânté Sütá cultivates a critical space to reflect on and to assess institutional frames of reference shaping experiences in particular places, and 2) the capacity for stewardship as a multi-species performance to envision gardens beyond the grid of industrial agriculture.

Along with the participant-observation and interviews with workshop participants, Cânté Sütá and Tawanciotawin granted me interviews and access to their private papers and oral history of the NAMG. I gained access to the interviews and private papers due to the mentor-mentee relationship

that I've developed with both Cânté Sütá and Tawanciotawin since 2016. Given that the repertoire of Cânté Sütá's stewardship and the history of the NAMG have thus far been left out of University of Minnesota historical records, I don't take this privileged access lightly. I understand that the gift of interviews and private papers gestures towards the historically and contemporaneously fraught relationship between academic institutions and Indigenous ways of knowing.

In the context of Land-Grant universities and the language of economic progress, the NAMG is a space to think beyond spatio-temporal formations of institutional legacies. It also expands upon existing garden scholarship in crucial ways. As explained by Jennifer Atkinson, "gardening allows us to inhabit modes of thought and practice that may otherwise be suspended in daily life" (Atkinson 2018, 2). Atkinson's comprehensive overview of garden writing in the United States argues that the subversive practice of gardening exceeds the settler-colonial "New World Eden" narrative that displaces the subaltern, foregrounding how, "for many colonized, marginalized, and displaced growers, gardens are a critical site of resistance, an arena for imagining and creating their own visions of the good life, a place to reclaim a just relation to the land and the stories we tell about it" (172). Additionally, as stated by Rob Emmett, the formation of the garden and the practice of gardening are embedded in historical and political landscapes, and "by the start of the twenty-first century, urban and suburban gardeners increasingly connected their work to the values of environmental justice" (Emmett 2016, 6-7).

While the canon of U.S. garden writing has historically excluded the voice of Lakota, Dakota, and other Indigenous intellectual traditions, the radicality of Cânté Sütá's stewardship performs a different mode of garden writing: although it shares an emphasis on subversion, it is an *embodied* rather than textual engagement with plant life to make absence present and to imagine possible futures. Foundational to Cânté Sütá's practice of stewardship is Mitákuye Oyás'iny (we are all related)—a philosophy of the Oceti Šakowiy—which informs how the one-third acre of University of Minnesota testing fields has been laboriously revitalized to challenge the historical and contemporary impositions shaping experiences with the land. In his personal writing entitled "Imagining the Oak Savannah," Cânté Sütá describes his stewardship practice as being in relation with *Unci Maka*—Lakota for "Grandmother Earth"—and as "understanding and respecting the relationships that keep all our relatives (plants, animals, insects, air and water) healthy" (Cânté Sütá 2019, 1).

Cânté Sütá's deep consciousness of the agency and interrelatedness of more-than-human forms of life provoke challenging questions in relation to the field of performance philosophy: How does the garden perform? How do multi-species collaborations "write" a different spatio-temporal formation into existence? In this essay, I draw on Cânté Sütá's philosophy to make the argument that stewardship is a multi-species performance that contests the spatio-temporal boundaries of institutions. Rather than apply an intellectual framework to represent Cânté Sütá's stewardship, I suggest that Cânté Sütá's gardening practices *are* philosophy realized through how he sets the conditions for students and faculty at the university to embrace the garden as a learning space.

I begin by situating the garden as a multi-species collaboration stewarding not-yet-thought modes of belonging, paying specific attention to how Cânté Sütá collaborates with the milkweed to question models of institutional engagement that measure productivity in terms of economic gain, and sustainability in terms of fiscal responsibility. I assess the movement of participants at the NAMG to consider how stewardship as performance catalyzes a space to engage with plants beyond institutional paradigms. I then draw from Cânté Sütá's teachings to foreground how milkweed elucidates the duration of collaboration, a multi-species performance that has the potential to inform how we envision and enact coalition building within a Land-Grant university. I conclude by highlighting my experimental performance work at the NAMG in which the milkweed is a partner informing how I understand and enact collaboration, not as a linear production of knowledge but as a diverse and divergent stewardship practice.

Stewardship as Multispecies Performance

Stewardship is a multidimensional construct used by different disciplines in a variety of ways. Enqvist et al. (2018) advocate for an understanding of stewardship grounded in "the awareness of and ability to navigate different approaches to generating knowledge (and connecting that knowledge with action) among social and natural sciences and the humanities" (25). In different ways, the garden is uniquely situated to "navigate different approaches to generating knowledge" and to understand stewardship as an embodied performance that exceeds the boundaries and categories of settlement. At the same time, the NAMG presents us with an opportunity to question by and for whom stewardship is performed. By diverting from anthropocentric frames of reference and focusing on the garden as a multi-species performance, I suggest that we not only emphasize registers of performance beyond the human but also accentuate the sense of performance as a relational process that can't be reconciled within institutional procedures that privilege the language of economic progress.

By expanding which bodies collaborate to produce acts of stewardship, we begin to better understand how acts of care are composed of multiple species. Not only is the NAMG a coalitional space for humans, but also a multi-species endeavor. When the University of Minnesota announced that it would not renew the contract of Cânté Sütá in the spring of 2020, an alliance of residents, students, faculty, and staff organized to protest the decision. The coalition collected the oral histories of the NAMG, documenting the impact of Cânté Sütá's pedagogy and the efficacy of the garden as a space to subvert the logics of industrial agriculture. The organizers referred to the NAMG as a teaching space that articulates how to "live the land acknowledgment" and in what ways anthropocentric notions of stewardship are problematic. Such action prompts us to ask: who or what performs stewardship and where, and by whom stewardship is enacted?

Cânté Sütá teaches a mode of stewardship that animates an understanding of plants as collaborators, offering participants pathways to consider how meaning is co-constituted within a complex set of multiple and moving interactions. By emphasizing the multi-species dimension of stewardship, in stark contrast to linear forms of management and control, Cânté Sütá addresses the capacity of plants to create vastly different spatio-temporal patterns, a capacity foreclosed

when plant life is classified as unproductive or compromising outputs. For instance, Cânté Sütá teaches undergraduates about the cultural and medicinal qualities of *pěží wačhánġa* (sweetgrass) while he demonstrates the art of braiding. He gently braids the strands of sweetgrass together. At the same time, he explains how the braid is burned during ceremonies to call upon spirits and as a way to cleanse the space. Cânté Sütá's teaching also raises awareness to the plants sharing the space (including the milkweed) as he reminds the students to take their time: *move through the garden with care and intention*.

The NAMG—a space that was brought into being through the embodiment of land-based cultural values—sets the conditions for participants to recognize and respect the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings. As Cânté Sütá explains in a personal statement to University of Minnesota administration,

Simply stroll through the research fields where the University of Minnesota's Native American Medicine Gardens are located and you will instantly see differences that reflect these practices. It is the only plot that grows more than one crop. It is an environment that is home to hundreds of different varieties of plants, dozens of insects, birds, and animals. (Cânté Sütá 2020)

More than merely a passive walk, to “simply stroll” through the NAMG is an embodied performance that invites an awareness of the relations constituting a particular place. Whereas the industrial spaces surrounding the NAMG perform a linear movement based on logics of outcomes and progress, the NAMG—as a multi-species performance—exemplifies a regenerative movement in which bodies interact with, support, and restrict one another to create and maintain balance.

Scattered throughout the garden are plants that Cânté Sütá refers to as medicine: *pšínj šičámna* (wild onion), which can be applied to wasp stings to relieve the pain and swelling. In addition, *pšínj šičámna* can be consumed for heart health and to detoxify the blood. The *čanġlólóġan hú wanġžíla* (small leaf pussytoes) can be used to treat swellings, while the sweet flower head and leaves are sometimes chewed like gum for pleasure and as a cough remedy. Growing in patches throughout the NAMG and at the base of the signage, the leaves and stems of *pěží hóta wápe blaskáska* (ceremonial sage) are burned to purify one's self during smudging ceremonies. Another ceremonial plant, *čanġlí* (North American indigenous ceremonial tobacco), is often found growing near the communal arbor located in the center of the Medicine Wheel. This plant can also be used to treat stomach disorders, colds, sore throats, and diarrhea. Often found weaving its way between other plants in the NAMG, the *wagmú* (Lakota squash) is harvested by volunteers in the fall and serves as a staple during the lean winter months. Other plants that commingle in the space include the *waštémna* (wild bergamot) and *kňánġta* (wild plum), along with non-native plants such as the *ápe kalúlu* (mallow) and *waġpé thóthó* (lamb's quarter). Each of these relations have been used by the Lakota and Dakota people to treat a variety of maladies, from asthma to abdominal pains to bruises and inflammation. While not an exhaustive account of the hundreds of plants residing within the garden, the overview gestures towards the stark difference between land as resource and land as relation.³

Indeed, for many scholars, artists, and activists, expanding horizons to think beyond anthropocentric notions of co-existence is vital to combat settler colonial structures that isolate humans from all other species. As ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer (Citizen Potawatomi Nation) deftly explains,

Philosophers call this state of isolation and disconnection “species loneliness”—a deep, unnamed sadness stemming from estrangement from the rest of Creation, from the loss of relationship. As our human dominance of the world has grown, we have become more isolated, more lonely when we can no longer call out to our neighbors. (Kimmerer 2013, 208)

Kimmerer notes that it’s not too late to repair damaged relationships but that doing so will require symbiotic modes of meaning making that are co-constituted within a web of relations, both human and more-than-human. Likewise, Cânté Sütá’s emphasis on relations situates stewardship beyond anthropocentric frameworks, especially as it pertains to unlearning settler views of the land and relearning relationally expansive modes of attention. Stewardship as a multi-species performance turns up as an opportunity for exposing settler-colonial frames of reference that delimit multi-species relations, a task that may liberate the senses and call forth modes of being in relation that are contingent upon reciprocity rather than extraction.

From this perspective on stewardship, then, there is potential for performance—as an embodied process of care—to align with Kimmerer’s call to cultivate modes of perception that account for the multiple species that co-constitute gardens. On the garden as multispecies world-making, Catriona Sandilands (2020) suggests,

World-making in the garden is not only about human desires, and many gardeners have understood this reality for a long time before me. Although there are garden traditions that aspire to tight control [...] the reality faced by people who actually work in gardens is that these worlds are very much multispecies endeavours and, further, that they are also beholden to even more elemental actors: light, heat, cold, water, air, minerals. (180)

For Sandilands, gardens reveal the inadequacy of human visions and endeavors, indeed unsettles the ego, potentially revealing the worlds made possible through multi-species collaboration. Like Donna Haraway’s “response-ability”—from which Sandilands draws inspiration—this is worlding understood in terms of ongoing processes, rather than as a cumulative product, a worlding in which species respond and co-create conditions for life. Accordingly, I agree with Sandilands’s generative framing of the garden as a multispecies worlding. The NAMG, too, cultivates a space to practice multispecies relations, signifying modes of attunement that might enable the formation of pedagogical spaces that explore embodied practice as a means to unsettle institutional boundaries in both time and space.



Figure 3: View milkweed (to left) and other collaborators within the NAMG. Photo by author (2016).

Rather than presenting a binary that separates the body from the land, Cânté Sütá foregrounds a mode of embodied practice beyond the predetermined grid of the neighboring research fields. Within a decolonial context, reimagining land/body relations is part of a much more spatially and temporally expansive process to return lands to Indigenous peoples. From my field notes on October 19th, 2016, I identified moments when the milkweed acted as a catalyst to think beyond rigid spatio-temporal boundaries. As a participant-observer, I engaged with Cânté Sütá's teachings and participated alongside undergraduate students. The moment proceeded as follows:

Cânté Sütá invited everyone to kneel on the ground before the patch of sweet grass, and, before beginning, Cânté Sütá invited participants to think differently about stewarding relations. Rather than stewardship as a linear progression or return to a "norm," Cânté Sütá encouraged participants to attune themselves to varied temporal scales and durations. As an example, Cânté Sütá focused on the milkweed plants peppering the garden. Cânté Sütá described how the milkweed seeds—carried by the wind currents—redistribute and germinate over the winter months, and the seedling emerges from the soil in the spring. Cânté Sütá referenced a neighboring milkweed plant, carefully articulating how the milkweed produces rhythms and interacts within a broader network of bodies. Drifting between storytelling and braiding sweet grass, Cânté Sütá elaborated on the pivotal role the milkweed plays in sustaining migratory patterns of monarch butterflies. Minnesota—situated on the northern range of the monarch's

migratory movement—served as a generative site for breeding. Cânté Sütá glides his fingers along a milkweed leaf and notes, “During the breeding process, the monarchs interact with the rhythms of the milkweed. The milkweed is a sign of future sustenance to the monarch butterflies, and they deposit their eggs on the base of the milkweed leaves.” Cânté Sütá then gently lifted a leaf to reveal the underside. On the base of the leaf is an egg. Once the larvae emerges from the egg, the milkweed leaf will become sustenance.

The vital engagement between the milkweed and the monarch performs a land/body relation that diverges from the meticulously managed research fields, revealing a system of communication within the garden that exceeds anthropocentric temporality. Attuning to the future sustenance provided by the milkweed informs the movement of volunteers as well, creating acts of stewardship that prompt participants to look for the diversity of species that co-constitute a particular environment. People begin looking for the movement between species, carried out over time and beyond anthropocentric boundaries.

The interaction between milkweed, monarch, humans, and an assortment of additional species illustrates ways by which the garden is co-constituted by other-than-human forces, foregrounding a thoughtful reconsideration of performance as points of encounter between plant and human bodies. I'm intrigued by what horizons are made visible when our individual and collective movements resist the spatio-temporal boundaries of the institutions one inhabits. And, as expressed by Cânté Sütá, collaborating with the plant life of the garden names processes of oppression and displacement, the challenges these processes create for food sovereignty, and the possibility for an otherwise.

Stewardship as Critique

In an interview with me, Cânté Sütá refers to his stewardship as a practice in “decolonizing the land,” emphasizing a continual practice of embodied knowledge as a means to make visible histories and ways of knowing that all too often appear as marginal or counter to an understanding of land as a monetary investment and resource. Moreover, the NAMG inhabits a university system with a Land-Grant legacy, an educational infrastructure founded on land appropriation and the displacement of Indigenous peoples. Such tension gestures towards institutional contradictions, while also reminding us that one frame of reference doesn't simply dominate or replace another frame of reference. Rather, it is through stewardship that we might better understand and field a diverse set of distinct orientations.

Furthermore, this notion of stewardship grows directly from Indigenous relations to the land. On this topic, Dakota scholar and activist Waziyatawin states,

One of the reasons that I embrace the term “Indigenous” over others is that I love the notion of coming from the land or being of the land. [...] According to our oral tradition, we did not come from anywhere else; rather, we were created from the clay of Mother Earth at the place where the Minnesota River joins the Mississippi River. In the most vital sense, we are the earth. (Waziyatawin 2008, 39)

Waziyatawin articulates a relationship to land founded on autochthonous identity, rather than a claim to land that relies upon settler logics of property or ownership. As Waziyatawin explains, the Dakota's conception of land is deeply relational ("we are the earth") and counters the settler-colonial conception of land as a resource to be managed. In this way, the philosophical and ethical stakes of Dakota and Lakota intellectual traditions invite us to consider the concept of "land" beyond the scientific or policy-oriented frames of reference that undergird Land-Grant institutions. Considering "land" beyond property or ownership, as Waziyatawin and Cânté Sütá have done, troubles the very economic and historical foundation upon which Land-Grant legacies depend. And resonating with Cânté Sütá's practice in "decolonizing the land," Dakota and Lakota intellectual traditions are continually practiced and require one to think beyond the meta-narrative of chronological progress articulated in Land-Grant/Land-Grab historical accounts. Both Waziyatawin's philosophical writing and Cânté Sütá's embodied practice—such as the aforementioned braiding of sweetgrass or reflective walks—invite thinking beyond land as a measurable resource and to foreground land as a plural formation of species in relation.

Cânté Sütá's stewardship illustrates the necessarily subversive qualities of decolonization within higher education, what Moten and Harney might refer to as the "undercommons of the university," "the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back, where the commons give refuge, where the refuge gives commons" (Moten and Harney 2004, 102). This philosophical horizon for thinking with and from the undercommons of the university signals the prophetic possibilities realized through how pedagogical spaces are organized to think against institutional power dynamics. Moten and Harney explain, "What the beyond of teaching is really about is not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing [...] It is not so much the teaching as it is the prophecy in the organization of the act of teaching" (ibid.).

Cânté Sütá, too, puts into practice the prophetic by (re)organizing resources to cultivate an initiative intended for the Dakota Oyate. Cânté Sütá explains in an interview,

The garden [...] served to help create a space for our people and Mitákuye Oyás'ínj to learn our land-based cultural knowledge. It helped create an Indigenous movement that involves food sovereignty, the open sharing of our cultural knowledge, the history of the land and people of the land, colonizer/settler history, and an address to the health disparities of our people. (Cânté Sütá and Tawanciotawin 2020)

In distinct ways, the NAMG and Cânté Sütá's teachings illustrate what's ethically at stake in Moten and Harney's theoretical proposition of the undercommons. At the core, both projects put forth an ethics of institutional engagement that's not about abolishing the oppressive symptoms, but instead about abolishing a society (and complicit institutional infrastructure) that creates the conditions for those oppressive symptoms to exist. Tending to the garden requires reimagining the university's relationship to the land.

Whereas Cânté Sütá draws on the Lakota philosophy Mitákuye Oyás'ínj (all are related), the language used by administrators to define the garden—"make the garden pretty," "prime real

estate”—illustrates the power dynamics at play between institutions and the formation of both knowledge and plant life. By attempting to market the garden as a means to manage cultural knowledge and to render plant life as a resource to aestheticize the institution, the administration continues to ensure that the contents of a particular region are harnessed in service of progress within the Land-Grant/Land-Grab meta-narrative. In the words of Moten and Harney: “This is not merely a matter of administering the world, but of administering away the world (and with it prophecy)” (Moten and Harney 2004, 109). Even as administrative moves attempt to order space and disorder networks of life upon which sovereignty relies, Cânté Sütá’s emphasis points toward the not-yet realized possibilities immanent in stewardship as a multi-species performance.

Relational Gift of the Milkweed

Following Lakota and Dakota cultural knowledge, the p̄hanúǰpala (common milkweed) is a source of sustenance for both humans and non-humans. In Lakota and Dakota tradition, infusion of the milkweed is used as a diarrhea medicine, the flower buds are edible, and the young pods are cooked with meat. The white sap of the milkweed can be applied topically to treat warts, and the roots can be chewed to soothe intestinal inflammation. The milkweed also provides sustenance for non-human species—like the *kimimilagleshka* (monarch butterfly)—generating patterns that shape movement. The seeds depart from the confines of its milkweed pod during the early days of autumn, being carried by the wind currents and redistributed across the terrain. Once the snow melts and the ground warms in the spring months, the warming temperatures amplify the potential of the seed. The emerging milkweed plant continuously overcomes initial tensions and incompatibilities: breaking through the earth, getting exposed to sunlight, competing for space with other seeds. The milkweed plant continues to adapt and modify itself in order to survive. Its emergent form is composed of information. This information records the plant’s relation to a collective, elicits a system of communication and continually tends an interplay of bodies.

Cânté Sütá’s pedagogical collaboration with the milkweed cultivates a space for reflexive and critical practice by setting the conditions to think about the duration and performance of stewardship, an intensely local encounter between forms that subverts the global force of large-scale agriculture. As part of his collaboration with the milkweed, Cânté Sütá called attention to the infrastructures that delimit the possibilities of the NAMG stating, “The NAMG sits on unceded treaty land owned by the Oceti Šakowiŋ, stolen by the University of Minnesota, which benefits from it every single day by replicating the modern agricultural system which is destroying Unci Maka” (Cânté Sütá and Tawanciotawin 2020). Cânté Sütá then carefully moved between several milkweed plants, placing his hand delicately on the pods and removing them. Surrounded on all sides by University of Minnesota research fields, Cânté Sütá comments on how reprehensible it is that the one-third acre Indigenous-led garden is “constantly threatened and asked to prove its worth because this university does not recognize Indigenous knowledge as valid.” After calling attention to the inequitable and exclusionary legacies at the University of Minnesota, Cânté Sütá concludes a gathering in the fall of 2016 by gifting each person with a milkweed pod, not as an object to own, but as a body each is responsible for. Cânté Sütá has all of the participants gather in a circle along

the western edge of the NAMG. He then walks the circle, thanks each participant, and gently places a milkweed pod in the palm of each hand. The milkweed pod is already beginning to split apart, the seeds on the verge of bursting forth. As exemplified in Cânté Sütá's pedagogy, the participant is figured as inheriting past violences and inhabiting a desire to steward the pain. The milkweed pod signals the interplay between doubt and hopelessness (e.g., surrounding fields of industrial agriculture that exhaust possibilities for the milkweed's movement to flourish) and resilience and hope (e.g., the interplay between participant and milkweed that may allow for emergent possibilities). Cânté Sütá prompts each of us to walk away from institutional expectations and settler mappings, to steward the movement of the milkweed seeds and imagine different pathways for co-existence.

If, as the NAMG and Cânté Sütá would have it, connecting participants to place and environment involves weaving between complex relations, then stewardship as performance emphasizes a plurality of bodies in motion. By attending to the milkweed as a body, participants stewarding the milkweed seeds exemplify the necessity to foreground different modes of thinking, being, and performing with the world. Moreover, walking away from institutional expectations marks the will to think otherwise within seemingly exhausted spaces, to materialize not-yet known possibilities for co-existence. Based on my interviews with NAMG participants, individuals noted the dialectical relationship between shaping and being shaped by the world around us, citing the movement of milkweed seeds as an exemplar of how stewardship demonstrates the state of things while also being attentive to the interconnectivity of life. Participants also highlighted the intimacy between palm and pod, the in-between of bodies in motion that prompts participants to think differently about how and for whom subversive spaces are produced. Set with the task to steward the repopulation of milkweed on the grounds of a Land-Grant/Land-Grab university, participants set forth in a plurality of directions to sow their seeds in various campus green spaces. The emergent milkweed addresses the issue of homogeneity (ordered lawns on campus that erase ecological diversity) and has the potential to shape movement in generative ways.

Stewarding Relations

The NAMG as a space to think stewardship differently emphasizes an engagement with ongoing acts of settlement, institutionalized land management, and logics delimiting ecological thought. To think from the duration and movement of the milkweed, it's imperative for those working within institutions—including me—to emphasize stewarding relations as an ongoing process without abstracting, extracting, or making commensurable diverse ways of knowing. As the NAMG teaches us, plants don't just grow in the garden; they make the garden. The interplay between bodies isn't an endpoint, but rather an active instantiation of temporal durations and scales not immediately visible to human perception. The emergence of the milkweed and the redistribution of the seeds traces temporal conditions beyond the management of land as a repeated set of practices, foregrounding a duration shaped by how systems interact. The exhaustion of nutrients in the neighboring fields doesn't vanquish possibility for stewardship but, rather, creates an incompatibility for stewardship to address: a depletion of minerals, microbes, and organic matter

that's incompatible with the Cânté Sütá's vision to help Unci Maka recover and heal from the abuse of industrial processes. In "History of the University of Minnesota Native American Medicine Garden," Cânté Sütá and Tawanciotawin explain that by reintroducing necessary minerals, fungi, and bacteria back into the soil, "the healing process can begin, giving (Unci Maka) the ability to engage in the building of healthy soil" (Cânté Sütá and Tawanciotawin 2018, 1). Cânté Sütá's pedagogy calls attention to processes incited by human disturbance, suggesting that the land (as itself a process of becoming) exerts a force from which the institutional boundaries of space and time can be rethought.

There's an important provocation that Cânté Sütá and the milkweed foreground: reharmonizing bodies. Cânté Sütá notes the importance of reconnecting with a plurality of bodies, de-mechanizing the ways in which movement is delimited, and reharmonizing the collective to produce an ethics of being that's attuned to the dynamics of the whole. The process is durational, attuning yourself to the divergent lifeways that gather and the interplay of temporal rhythms and scales. For example, Cânté Sütá's pedagogy emphasizes the histories of settlement and institutional legacies that have displaced Indigenous peoples. Cânté Sütá reminds students, faculty, and staff visiting the garden how the oppression of Dakota and Lakota peoples involved a strategic disruption of ecological relations, constraining possibilities for self and society contingent on relations to the land. Cânté Sütá's pedagogy in response to the movement of the milkweed is one example of how systems interact: ecological and institutional, contemporary and historical. I close by highlighting gatherings I've facilitated in collaboration with Cânté Sütá in an effort to nuance the impact of ecological disruption on social formations and to understand and reharmonize the relationship between bodies—both plant and human.

Medicine Garden – October 23rd, 2019. The gathering, set at the NAMG, focuses on the act of walking as both critical and creative. The participants include undergraduate and graduate students from both the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources, faculty from performing arts programs at the University of Minnesota and Luther College, and NAMG volunteers from the area. I begin the workshop in silence by leading the participants on a silent walk between the perimeter of the NAMG and the edge of the testing fields. The intention is to set the tone for our gathering: highlighting the boundary between two distinct modes of engaging with the land. We return to the initial meeting place and I provide a brief orientation of the NAMG's history, Cânté Sütá's ongoing efforts, and an acknowledgement that calls attention to the contemporary, ancestral, and traditional land of the Dakota people. Following the opening acknowledgement, and to frame the opening prompt, I introduce the distinction between managing and stewarding, resource and relation. The opening prompt was crafted with Cânté Sütá's relational work in mind: *This evening I invite each of you to co-steward an experience with a partner. Together you'll reflect on individual and collective ideas that the NAMG makes possible. You're responsible for the ideas your partner shares, for stewarding and moving with and through those ideas in a way that's both careful and critical.*

The gatherings are centered around movement, with pairs receiving prompts to walk throughout the NAMG while reflecting on and sharing a story from a moment when they felt limited in how

they could move or think, and to discuss common threads between the two experiences. The meditative walks ask for each pair to practice a heightened awareness and to rely on the milkweed as a beacon that guides where they move. The movement is shaped by the distribution of the milkweed and asks participants to modify their movements in relation to incompatibilities and human disturbances. As the facilitator, I both observed the movement and participated as part of a pair. The movement of the groups varied: most of the pairs walked around the perimeter between the NAMG and testing fields, while others carefully maneuvered within the NAMG itself. In a voluntary post-workshop interview, one participant explained:

We meandered all over the place, and it honestly felt a little like Catholic confession, but without the judgement and anxiety. It made me think about how walking and thinking cleanse the mind from all the artificial barriers that this social media and hyper-consumptive world we live in imposes. They don't go away so much as they become visible in different ways. In some ways, I could see my mind [...] reflected in the Medicine Garden [...] an entity surrounded by fields of disciplined behavior designed to enhance the subjugation of the natural. That which exists for itself, and not expressly part of a process of production and consumption to which it is made to belong.

The idea of seeing one's mind "reflected in the Medicine Garden" gestures towards the overarching theme of stewardship: *What is being cleansed, both in this activity and also the activity of the NAMG?* The participant notes the discipline of the surrounding fields and the subjugation that these forms of discipline produce, the artificial barriers they create, and the excess they impose.

In another interview, a participant echoed these thoughts, "my partner and I [...] talked about how societal norms and 'rules' limit our movement and thinking. We also talked about how personal experience and culture has influence over thoughts and movements." The responses gesture toward the ways in which self and society have lost equilibrium, the need to imagine a different sense of self or collective identity. Each set of reflections highlights the "barriers," "disciplined behavior," and "rules" that create an artificial limit to how one moves or thinks in relation to the world.

Whereas some participants noted the structures delimiting how individuals, collectives, and environments co-exist, others marked the possibility of being otherwise contingent on stewarding pathways for the future. One participant stated:

Together, we came up with this idea of "shoulds"—the things that the world tells us we should do. It was helpful for me to share that I'm trying to shed a lot of the "shoulds" weighing me down right now. My partner came up with this excellent image of "shoulds" as rocks that we carry around, and my efforts were like reaching into my bag of rocks and taking them out to leave behind and walk on lighter.

Whether it concerns personal, familial, environmental, or dominant economic systems, each of these experiences gestures toward disruptions that prompt the will to think about relations differently. In the case of the rocks, the partners steward an experience for one another, offering

sightlines and perspectives to navigate institutions and frames of reference that delimit possibilities for personal and social movement.

To go further with the notion of sightlines made visible by multispecies collaborations, participants were given the prompt to generate short movement-based pieces based on their movement among milkweed plants. The responses were varied. One pair ran among the milkweeds, collapsing to their knees and slamming their fists against the ground the closer they were to the neighboring research fields. Another group took the time to “shake hands” with each milkweed that they encountered on their walk. A third group huddled around each milkweed, creating a human-imposed barrier, and then burst backwards in slow motion. The movements, both the paired walks and the collective movement, highlight what’s distinct about the NAMG and Cânté Sütá’s teachings, that is the important work of negotiating the incompatibilities to envision possibilities beyond the categories and boundaries disconnecting humans from plants. It’s not about denial or avoidance, but the ability to think critically about the systems that overlap and inform the way in which bodies co-exist. By understanding the contours of dominant systems, we might discover the breaks and pathways towards a different mode of thinking and being. The movement of participants in relation to the garden is—akin to the NAMG and Cânté Sütá’s stewardship—an opportunity to understand formations of power and to envision possibilities for life beyond the grid of industrial agriculture.

Movement in relation to the NAMG is neither an answer to the conundrums of Land-Grant legacies nor a direct repetition of what’s immediately visible. Rather, it sparks questions about institutional frameworks within a much more expansive duration and set of relations. While the recent facilitations illustrate the possibilities for embodied practice to engage with ideas central to stewardship as a multi-species performance, they also indicate the limitations: the abstraction of the systemic and epistemic violence decolonizing projects like the NAMG seek to undo. The movements—encoded with meaning from their walks throughout the NAMG—envisions ways of moving with the land that isn’t an endpoint but a question to provoke a different set of relations. However, we’re left with a vital provocation to consider: *instantiating a different set of relations without abstracting the very violence one seeks to address.*

Conclusion

By figuring stewardship as a multi-species performance, we’re presented with horizons to understand how the Native American Medicine Garden “writes” a different spatio-temporal formation into existence. In this way the duration and movement of the milkweed sketch possibilities for reflecting on co-existence while also questioning the idea that dominant frameworks (i.e., settler-colonialism) necessarily determine the shape of social and cultural formations. The NAMG does not offer a privileged insight or definitive answer, nor does it provide *the* way to reimagine the stewardship of environments and knowledges. Instead, it emphasizes the uneven processes that are the effect of settler and institutional policy, and the multiple species that set the conditions for a different set of relations. As exemplified by students braiding sweetgrass in response to the location of the milkweed, stewarding the pod of seeds, and paired

walks in response to contours of the garden, thinking of possibility beyond the visible invites us to perform stewardship beyond imperatives to produce an outcome.

Like milkweed, the movement of the participants emerges in response to the plant life that makes the NAMG. As the monarchs responded to the milkweed, Cânté Sütá's pedagogy responded to the interplay of species within the garden. The garden, understood as a multispecies performance, points to an understanding of stewardship at odds with rhythms and trajectories of ongoing history and policy. Being at odds with dominant expectations and nurturing an awareness of the interplay of bodies helps us understand stewardship as a multi-species performance with the capacity to mobilize in the present to imagine possible futures. The migration of the monarch, the redistribution of the milkweed seeds, and the movement of participants refuses the boundaries of settlement and subverts linear teleologies framing our experiences, reminding us that stewardship carries with it the capacity to move beyond human-centric modes of management, control, and ordering. Whether we are interested in experimenting with pedagogy within institutions, choreographing movement in collaboration with distinct environments, or meandering in response to milkweed, we might learn from the NAMG and cultivate spaces within and beyond institutions that are an invitation to envision gardens that exceed the grid of Land-Grant legacies.

Notes

¹ I write this essay in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a city located on traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands of the Dakota people, whose origin story begins at a sacred place they call Bdóte, a point where the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers converge. Additionally, I acknowledge the Ojibwe, whose homelands extend northward from where I live, work, and study.

² Woodlands Wisdom grew out of Visions of Change, a project funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Food Systems Professions Education initiative in 1998.

³ For more on culturally important plants for the Lakota and Dakota peoples, see Linda Black Elk's primary investigation for Sitting Bull College (1998). Additional information on the uses and medicinal properties of prairie plants can be found in Kelly Kindscher's comprehensive study of prairie ecosystems (1987, 1992).

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Biography

Chris Bell is a PhD candidate in theatre historiography at the University of Minnesota. His research is on contemporary and historical Indigenous performance collaborations, legacies of settlement that continue to shape academic and cultural institutions, and the pedagogical potential of gardens. He is also a community-based theatre practitioner exploring the interplay between ecology and performance, previously collaborating with Tidy Villages (Cloneen, Ireland), Unlisted: Second Steel (Pittsburgh), Lac qui Parle Historical Society (Madison, Minnesota), and Five Acres Farm (Coventry, England). His ongoing collaboration with White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP) of White Earth Nation in northern Minnesota is part of a community effort to devise a community-based performance initiative and to envision what mutually beneficial fieldwork might look like.

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