

Canadian Critical Luxury Studies

Decentring Luxury



Edited by

JESSICA P. CLARK
NIGEL LEZAMA

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1

Luxury and Indigenous Resurgence

Riley Kucheran with Jessica P. Clark and Nigel Lezama

Front matter

RILEY: Boozhoo ('hello')! This chapter reflects a series of conversations, engagements and mobilizations of Indigenous luxury, a new concept that has been percolating within a growing Indigenous fashion movement in Canada, Turtle Island and beyond. The conversational format of the chapter reflects the movement of this idea. The dialogue between myself and Jess and Nigel, friends and colleagues who have helped shape my own engagement with luxury, represents a certain moment in time, a blink in the movement. The format also models the relational aspect of Indigenous knowledge production. In the initial writing of this chapter I struggled with the scholarly inclination to capture in writing Indigenous knowledge and culture that is 'dynamic – ever flowing, adaptable, and fluid' (Absolon and Willett 2005: 111). The dialogue helped to locate the ideas as created within the context of a community, in the hope that this chapter honours those relations.

Throughout the discussion I use the term 'western' to differentiate luxury produced, distributed and consumed through the capitalist, institutionalized and globalized fashion system. When I refer to 'luxury', I am invoking a mainstream or dominant luxury that is historically owned and controlled by a small group of wealthy corporate or private firms and

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the study of this luxury within western academic scholarship – a philosophy of luxury in the humanist tradition, the emerging field of critical luxury studies and business management literature about the strategic use of luxury within the above system. The use of western is not without controversy: some have decried it as an essentialist oversimplification that's then mobilized to either uphold western ideals or critique imperialism (Appiah 2016). I agree that there cannot be *one* western history or identity, but in Indigenous scholarship, western is meant to differentiate *Indigenous* peoples and knowledge (Kovach 2009: 21). Western generalizes historical and ongoing systems of colonialism 'through the dynamics of opposition and resistance' and, with a 'utopian critical distance', allows us to imagine alternative futures (Tennant 1994: 10–11). In this discussion I also use 'Indigenous makers' since categories like artist and designer do not fit neatly with Indigenous forms of cultural production. Finally, I say *chi-miigwetch* ('thank you') to Jess and Nigel for initiating this discussion and for their enthusiasm in supporting Indigenous scholarship.

Situating ourselves

JESS: In initial discussions, Riley, you introduced us to the practice of locating ourselves, which is an essential means of making 'research more Indigenous and counter-colonial' (Absolon and Willett 2005: 97–8, 106–8). Why don't we begin by reflecting on location, including our relationship to our research and each other?

RILEY: Yes! The practice of locating ourselves was one of my first introductions to Indigenous research methodologies, and I return to it often. For Indigenous peoples, identifying our communal locations at the outset of any interaction is a form of accountability to our relations. Claiming a community (or having a community claim *you*) is a way of checking in. It establishes trust by addressing a natural suspicion of outsiders that Indigenous peoples use to protect ourselves and our communities. Stating that my maternal lineage is from the Desmoulins family and Bear clan of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg is therefore a form of care, but more context is needed. Locating ourselves identifies where our voice comes from and also who we do *not* speak for. I have opinions about Indigenous fashion and luxury, informed by my unique upbringing, but I don't speak for my Ojibway community, or the Anishinaabe nation, or Indigenous peoples in general. As Indigenous writer Thomas King noted, being Indigenous

does not impart a ‘tribal understanding of the universe’ (King 1990: x). Indigenous people are expected to have the answers to any questions about our culture and history. It’s assumed that we’re deeply connected to the natural and spiritual worlds, bestowed with ancestral teachings, as if the deliberate attacks during more than four hundred years of colonization had no effect. The truth is I don’t speak my language or know my cultural teachings. An intergenerational trauma runs through my family, triggered by European disease and assimilationist projects enacted by the Canadian state with the Residential School System, which prevented us from learning about ourselves. I grew up off-reserve, first in violently racist settler-communities where I denied my Indigeneity and then in the urban centre of Toronto. This means I’m in the bizarre position of being a cultural newcomer in my own community. It was during my graduate studies in the midst of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission that I started researching and reflecting on my own Indigenous heritage. Anishinaabe thought leader Leanne Simpson (2011) introduced me to the concept of *biskaabiiyang*, or looking back, a kind of personal decolonization. I moved past the guilt and shame I associated with my Indigenous past and began focusing on the Indigenous future I was meant to have. I started imagining how my research about fashion and luxury could contribute to reconciliation or support the communities I was reconnecting with.

My location also explains how I enter into discussions of luxury and how we’ve come to work together. I wouldn’t call myself a *consumer* of luxury. I had a middle-class upbringing that included aspirations towards standard notions of luxury – I read *Vogue* and *GQ* and was impressed by the mansions and decor on MTV’s ‘Cribs’ – but we could never afford luxury. While studying the humanities, I worked in fashion retail, first at fast-fashion companies and then for higher-end brands. I was able to climb the corporate ladder, but to advance any further, I was told to pursue an MBA, preferably in a program with a focus on luxury. With hindsight I see the problems in this hierarchy of fashion luxury, and I see how luxury misuses Indigenous culture in ways that continue to entrench colonial structures. I was enamoured with the glamour of luxury while deeply embedded in a fashion system that’s destroying the planet. I remember reading Dana Thomas’s (2007) *How Luxury Lost Its Luster* and deciding I would investigate luxury for my graduate research. In a pivotal moment I left the fashion industry and began to critique it – inspired by Marxism, decolonization and the emerging field of critical luxury studies, where we met. I’ve come to know luxury scholarship in

a very critical way because of you two, but my work is still informed by my time in the industry. My location also includes my two-spiritedness. I consider myself an *Anishinaabe-Agokwe* with the ability and responsibility to mediate relations and translate bodies of knowledge. I've always strived to combine the potentials of luxury management research, like the work of Kapferer and Bastien ([2009] 2012) in *The Luxury Strategy*, with the work of critical humanities scholars, and now I'm reconciling those two western lines of thought with Indigenous perspectives. This has been called two-eyed seeing by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall – the combination of western and Indigenous knowledges (Bartlett et al. 2012: 331), and I believe this type of hybrid looking could provide us with innovative strategies for a reconciliation in the field of luxury. So I guess I'm curious: what brings each of *you* to luxury and why?

NIGEL: Thanks, Riley, for launching our discussion with such an in-depth act of locating yourself as an individual and as a researcher. I am very interested to hear more about how you envision luxury theory and practice as a means of reconciliation in the Canadian context. But, first, I see how locating yourself is a way of maintaining a kind of ethical proximity to what we do and why we do it – as opposed to maintaining a (fictional) epistemological distance. I am, through training, a literary historian specializing in nineteenth-century French literature. I have always had a longstanding love affair with French culture, in part for its seeming authority in all things luxurious. As a teenager, I loved the idea of French high fashion, from Lagerfeld's Chanel to Lacroix and Gaultier. I was fascinated by this luxurious world that I saw as completely different from the 'ordinary life' I felt I was living. As an undergraduate, I was introduced to the poet Charles Baudelaire, whose work seemed to move from the lofty to the lowly but maintained the same refined aesthetic and gaze whether he was writing about fashionable cafés or sordid bars. Working on Baudelaire allowed me to think about an impoverished luxury – or a luxury of the impoverished – that helped me to understand luxury in a more complex way.

I'm a first-generation immigrant to Canada. I was born in Trinidad. My family moved from the working classes to the professional middle class. Our immigration was one of class aspiration. I think this history impacts my positioning as a researcher, in that I see class identity and aspiration as the engine of history. In the context of consumer culture, I think living in economic scarcity and with consumer longing is a very productive place – as a kid, I had to create my own luxurious state of being without the economic resources I imagined others had access to. Reading Baudelaire and studying the *Bohème* and, later, the Decadents,

I understood that this type of need can inspire great creativity. It's the same type of creativity that I later gleaned in hip hop culture. Luxury is a perception and a personal form of valuation. In our hypercapitalist and neoliberal era, certain groups seem to be detached from economic concerns, which gives them a seeming authority to determine luxury, fashion and culture. But figures like Baudelaire's dandy and the courtesan or, later, individuals like the ballroom queen, urban economically marginalized African-American women or even a middle-class gay Brown kid in Toronto create luxury through their gaze, through personal investment, through choice.

My current work in critical luxury studies focuses on ways that racialized or otherwise marginalized people, and groups use and – important for me – *misuse* or *play* with luxury, whether it's fashion, objects, speech acts or writing. These 'outsiders' to mainstream culture create luxurious selves and at the same time undermine the authority of dominant classes, groups and institutions to determine what is deemed luxurious and what is not. I guess luxury is a very personal state of being to me, one that can entail a consumer act, but I don't believe that luxury is prescribed, universal, timeless, necessarily rarefied or expensive.

JESS: I completely agree, Nigel. My approach to luxury studies is deeply rooted in the labour that undergirds it, which also undercuts any notion of luxury's timelessness or exclusivity. This doesn't necessarily reflect my personal relationship to luxury, though. I didn't think about it much growing up in a suburb of Toronto in a white, middle-class, settler family of Anglo descent. My mother is from the south of England and my father was from Newfoundland. Throughout my youth and much of my education, I didn't often reflect on luxury, just as I didn't reflect on my privilege. My move to the States to study at a private research university changed the latter. Cultural differences between the US and Canadian systems made me more conscious of power imbalances based on class, gender and race. I soon understood that there was no less inequity in the Canadian academy; it just manifested in different ways. It prompted me to more actively explore my privilege and subjective relationship to my research, which I interrogated via feminist frameworks and methodologies. I've continued on this path in the past ten years, learning from scholars, community members and my peers. There are still many things I don't know, and the more I learn, the humbler and more unknowing I feel. My main priority is to listen, acknowledging my subject position and privilege in the western academy while identifying and challenging its historical underpinnings.

I try to incorporate this awareness into my research. Since my undergraduate days, I've almost always researched historical subjects who were working- and middle-class white women of Anglo descent operating in nineteenth-century Britain. This reflected my family background and who I felt comfortable studying, despite its limitations. Now, I try to write histories of people who led, according to some, 'ordinary' lives but were in fact crucial to broader socio-cultural and economic developments. This is the roundabout way by which I came to critical luxury studies. I was writing histories of businesspeople and working-class labourers in a particular luxury industry in nineteenth-century London, starting from the 'bottom' up, if you will. This background means that my interest in luxury always comes from a desire to seek out the backstage conditions – and inequities – that underpin its creation. Structural inequities continue to define not only what is and isn't designated as luxury but also consumers' relationship to it. They also remain at the heart of many forms of luxury production, even in the case of the most sumptuous goods and services.

What is Indigenous luxury?

JESS: There have been a number of attempts to define 'luxury' as an idea, practice and experience. Could you tell us how you define luxury, particularly in relationship to your work on Indigenous luxury?

RILEY: I think 'attempts' is an apt word as I've struggled with this question for a while now. Defining luxury is notoriously difficult because it's subjective and dependent on social and historical contexts (Armitage and Roberts 2016b: 2), and defining a specifically *Indigenous* luxury is difficult because doing so requires a collaborative and ongoing process – it's being defined for itself right now by Indigenous peoples all over the world. I also hesitate because I'm not yet convinced that defining an Indigenous luxury is possible, or even appropriate. It feels like dangerous territory – using a western concept so synonymous with inequality and injustice. But part of me is convinced we can mobilize the concept of luxury for our own decolonial aims. We're in the midst of what's been called an Indigenous renaissance of art, fashion, film, photography, music and literature (Elliott 2018), and there's now a growing movement of Indigenous makers who are actively creating elevated cultural products or experiences that I feel are suited to some notions of luxury. I don't believe luxury has to be elitist and exclusively tied to wealth,

and I hold onto definitions of luxury that signal quality – fine craftsmanship, high functionality, superior materials and a sustainability or timelessness that can be passed on through generations. I can envision this Indigenous renaissance producing a luxury hybrid that has these conventional qualities combined with Indigenous ethics and values.

NIGEL: Totally! Indigenous making is a luxurious production. I remember one of your talks at NeMLA when you presented Angela Demontigny’s atelier and spoke about her creative process (Kucheran 2019a). I was completely taken by her method of spending time with her clients to learn about them and their hopes and then investing the pieces she makes with the hopes of the client. If I remember, when she is beading a garment for someone, the work is not only highly skilled but also extremely tailored to the wearer in that beading is also a very spiritual and generous craft. I think that this type of collaborative making can also add new depth to the idea of luxury. There is something quite symbolic in this gesture – although I know in this context, it is a very real act. Angela’s ‘weaving into’ the garment the future wearers’ hopes reminds me of *Phantom Thread* (2017) and Woodcock’s sewing a secret embroidered message into the hem of a wedding dress he was making. I think that P. T. Anderson, the filmmaker, uses this gesture to evoke a kind of poetic incantatory power in the luxury object. A luxurious garment can be empowering for the wearer. All of this is to say that, without falling into the fallacy of an Indigenous ‘mystical understanding of the world’ that you rightfully push back against, can we talk about the personal and the spiritual aspects of Indigenous making as part of what constitutes its luxuriousness?

RILEY: You’ve put this beautifully! I think that some of the practices of European haute couture come closest to the personal depth that Indigenous luxury provides. I figure that tailors on Savile Row might also build a life-long relationship with a client. The notion that someone could preside over a lifetime of clothing with a devoted client is very special. You’re also right that Indigenous making is luxurious, but its production is *spiritual* because making passes down teachings. Our culture is continuously made and remade in communal processes accompanied by stories embedded with instructions on how to live in a harmonious way. When Angela makes something for a client, she’s embodying teachings about the responsibility we have for one another, she’s ensuring she’s in a good mindset to take care of her client; it’s generous, but it’s also just the Indigenous way. I owe much credit here: Angela is entirely responsible for my thinking about Indigenous luxury. In the time I spent

working at her Hamilton, Ontario-based boutique, I learned so much about what it means to *be* Indigenous. Angela's Cree-Métis heritage is present in all of her operations. I remember the first time I walked into her boutique I felt like I had come *home*. In a strangely familiar way it felt like I had *returned* somewhere, and upon further reflection I likened the feeling to visiting my grandmother's home when I was a child. Present there and instantly brought back from memory was a sense of comfort and warmth created with familiar scents and sounds – hide, burning sage, fresh flowers and sweetgrass, the flickering of candles and the hum of music. I was transported and lovingly welcomed by Angela with an embrace that felt like kinship. I didn't know it at first, but it was a spiritual experience. Like any luxury brand on a Canadian 'mink mile', Angela provides exceptional customer service in a luxuriously appointed boutique, filled with beautiful made-to-measure designs. The intimate setting allows clients to view and be fitted for designs made with superior quality materials and craftsmanship, either privately or at trunk shows where Angela unpacks the latest collection with Champagne and her wardrobing expertise. These are standard features of luxury retail, epitomized by large luxury brands owned by global corporations, but Angela's boutique offered something different. The store I entered on that cold day in November 2015 is routinely smudged, for example. The cleansing smoke of Indigenous medicinal plants creates sacred space by clearing the air of negative energy, which brings clarity and openness to those present. Angela's intent is not to capitalize on these sacred gifts – clarity is not for the purpose of consumption – it's a strategy to create the conditions in which meaningful and reciprocal relationships can flourish. 'Clients' are more like *collaborators* engaging in mutually beneficial exchange, and the designer acts as a mediator with a supply chain that's rooted in community. At the end of the supply chain, the retail store itself draws on Indigenous values. I likened it to a gathering space, where community could meet and share stories, participate in a workshop or just socialize. Angela also sold products of other Indigenous makers, thus supporting those who couldn't otherwise afford a physical retail platform, again, embodying Indigenous values of sharing and taking care.

I may have entered Angela's boutique looking to make a purchase and meet the designer, but instead we bonded over our shared interests and goals and spoke for hours about the history of Indigenous design, the challenges of being Indigenous in the fashion industry, the pains of cultural appropriation and our dreams for better Indigenous futures. What

normally would have been a simple commercial interaction became a life-long partnership. Undoubtedly, my feeling of home created by the smudge contributed to the realization of a shared path between Angela and myself. Instead of luxury goods, I found community and purpose, and I left that day dreaming about the future of Indigenous luxury.

Luxury and Indigenous resurgence

- NIGEL: It seems to me that, for each of us, luxury is a mode that exists outside of the centre. But, am I right to say that for you, Riley, the question of what is luxury focuses somewhat less on the act of personal or group legitimization and engages with a broader political concern for restructuring how luxury is produced?
- RILEY: I think it's interesting that we have all taken similar roundabout paths to studying luxury, from the periphery inwards, perhaps, and I'm excited that we share a similar politics around the inequities luxury produces. My work is definitely engaged with the political concerns around luxury production, but I also see some value in that 'legitimization'. You both mentioned that you don't give credence to the notion of a true or pure luxury – that timeless, rare and expensive commodity – but I can also see how that idea could benefit Indigenous makers. What if we valued pieces of beadwork or tanned hides like a luxury? At the inception of the *Luxury* journal, Elizabeth Wilson (2014) noted that most contemporary usage of luxury simply means expensive, and at a practical level I think this is how Indigenous makers are employing the term. *Luxury branding* is a method of elevating Indigenous cultural products in the minds of consumers.
- NIGEL: I see your point that luxury brand strategies can be useful for highlighting the special qualities inherent in Indigenous making. I'm always a little nervous when Kapferer and Bastien are invoked. Their perspective, for me, is really problematic in reifying luxury as a status symbol.
- RILEY: I absolutely want to disrupt the notion that the central tenets of luxury – superior quality, longevity and timelessness – are reserved for wealthy social classes, while most people wear mass-manufactured and disposable clothing. Let me state unequivocally that for Indigenous peoples, access to our cultural products is a right, not a luxury. I just also think that many of the qualities of Indigenous cultural products align with those luxury tenets. To create Indigenous products, makers typically draw on certain universal Indigenous cultural values like respect and

responsibility. Indigenous fashion, for example, nurtures a better relationship to land and its relations through sustainable production practices. Indigenous modes of making are also inherently communal because the process involves reciprocity and requires participation of many different kinds of knowledge holders. The ‘supply chain’ of Indigenous fashion consists of Elders who share stories that provide direction to hunters, hide tanners, plant dye and medicine cultivators, weavers, sewers and the designers who coordinate the process. This means that more of the community participates and shares in an economy that regenerates culture. From a business perspective, then, could we not tap into the market that buys into reified luxury? I’m also thinking about recent work around notions of craft. Richard Sennett argued for a return of craftsmanship or ‘the skill of making things well’ (2008: 8), which is an ideal philosophy but hard to manage under capitalism, but Adamson noted that craft actually harmed artisans because once their skills were mechanized, craft became another tool of domination (2013: xvii). Jess, this is likely more your area of expertise, but there’s something in me that’s holding onto these ideal notions. I’m stuck thinking ‘if only we could turn back time’, to when the hand of the artisan was valued so that making could be a more viable career path for Indigenous youth. Is this utopian thinking? Am I delusional?

JESS: Not at all! Historically, there were ‘ideal’ moments when artisanal and craft labour was, as you note, socially and economically valued in more definitive ways. But sadly, I’m not convinced this could be disentangled from broader relationships of power. I’m thinking, for example, of eighteenth-century British luxury production. As Maxine Berg shows, this was a highpoint of innovation and invention (2005; Styles 2000). But in this case, artisans’ work wasn’t recognized for its material or production value alone; its significance lay in its *symbolic* value to the nation and Britain’s reputation on the global stage. State and public support derived in large part from these national and colonial imperatives, rather than a ‘pure’ appreciation for the work itself. It’s just one example, but I think it’s telling of the ways that historical valuations of artisanal labour were rarely only about skill.

But that doesn’t mean that these broader power relations can’t be marshalled in productive ways, especially for contemporary creators like Indigenous makers. Before we get to that, though, can you describe how you see the current relationship between Indigenous cultures and mainstream fashion and luxury brands?

RILEY: I actually don't think there is a real relationship between mainstream brands and Indigenous culture. Every engagement has been surface level and unsustainable. One of the things I wanted to establish at the outset of this interview was that there is no singular 'Indigenous' culture. It might seem obvious to academics, but harmful generalizations happen everywhere, including the luxury sector. The beautiful diversity of Indigenous cultures is constantly conflated as one homogenized stereotype. I'm thinking about shows like Chanel's *Métier d'Art* 2013 in Dallas, Texas – a literal mash-up of 'cowboys and Indians' complete with all-white Plains-style headdresses – or Dior *Sauvage*, the perfume 'inspired by wide-open spaces' that is 'wild and noble all at once'. The campaign stars Johnny Depp, who 'reconnects with his deeper nature' (Dior 2020). These tropes draw on centuries-old stereotypes about the savage Indian versus the virtuous white settlers or the shaman more connected to spiritual and natural realms. The myth of the 'dead Indian' is a static characterization of Indigenous people that persists in popular culture (King 2013: 53). It relies on the notion that upon contact, Indigenous peoples were either non-existent (*terra nullius*) or that they vanished upon 'conquest' and colonization. In the vacuum left by colonialist domination, Indigenous cultures have been defined by non-Indigenous people as sinful, backwards or non-existent. We are either positioned outside of modernity or swallowed up by it. If luxury/fashion is constitutive of modernity itself, then the luxury sector has a particular responsibility to correct modernity's injustices. Mignolo and Walsh have argued that coloniality constitutes modernity, and thus 'the ultimate decolonial horizon' is the end of modernity itself (2018: 4). While my politics point in this direction, decolonization is likely too lofty a goal for luxury. Brands abandoning stereotypes would be a big win, especially given that the purveyors of luxury have the power to dictate notions of taste. If we accept that the 'trickle-down' theory has real social and economic consequences, then luxury is largely to blame for cultural appropriation. The structure of the fashion industry gives luxury the power to decide what's 'in' fashion and thus what gets emulated by less-luxurious brands. There's a direct correlation between the high-fashion headdress at Chanel and the hipster headdress at Coachella.

NIGEL: Completely! There are campaigns and products that pass through the atelier, the marketing department, through merchandising of many of the European luxury brands, and I'm astounded that there's no one who 'hits pause' and asks, 'Is this appropriate?' I think that questions of cultural appropriation and insensitivity, inclusivity and representation are

really not registering with fashion and luxury brands founded in the big fashion centres. Even when some brands tout their inclusivity on the runway – I’m thinking of the beautiful Valentino Spring–Summer 2019 couture show with over forty Black models – I can’t help but wonder whether it’s simply a form of racial capitalism (cf. Leong 2013) at play. Are brands merely including non-white bodies to build social capital through the appearance of racial equity? I wonder if it’s effective to hold these companies to task at an ethical level, like the backlash in response to the Dior *Sauvage* campaign, or to count on governments to impose fines on brands like the New York City Commission on Human Rights did with Prada in February 2020. Maybe the only pressure that might work is if, as ethical consumers, we act more critically about where we put our dollars.

RILEY: I’m never surprised when one of these fiascos happens because it’s indicative of the systemic problems within dominant forms of capitalist luxury/fashion. The speed of the industry today is largely to blame – brands are constantly looking to create their next collection without ample time for proper research or engagement with the communities that ‘inspire’ them. But there’s also the lack of diversity within luxury organizations, an issue of equity in itself, and there’s an inability to voice concern because of hierarchical structures that dictate organizational culture. Importantly, the system itself was originally designed this way – it’s been predicated on theft. Voyages for luxurious rarities fuelled European mercantilism; colonialism relied on the fur trade. Searches for fashion inspiration in the ‘exotic other’ are all connected processes. It’s a sweeping generalization, but there are real patterns here, and I believe a disturbing lack of education about the real issues at hand is ultimately why *Sauvage* passed by so many people. At a foundational level there’s complete ignorance. In North America the histories we learned are completely ahistorical; they mask unspeakable atrocities and unrelenting forms of oppression that continue to perpetuate injustice. In Europe, where many luxury brands are headquartered, there’s even less knowledge or engagement with colonial injustices. Cultural appropriation is the logical consequence of colonialism. It’s ‘offensive’ because it painfully reminds Indigenous people of the dispossession, the dehumanization, the genocide they endured under colonial regimes of power.

Adrienne Keene is a member of the Cherokee Nation who’s been writing about cultural appropriation for a decade now. She often begins the discussion by reminding us that for centuries Indigenous peoples were prohibited by law from practicing culture; that these policies have

devastating legacies that are not in the distant past but present in Indigenous communities today; and that Indigenous cultures only exist because of the hard-fought battles of previous generations (2016: 56). Luxury is ignorant of this history and complicit in the ongoing process of colonialism. So to your point about ethical consumption, is history on the mind of the average consumer? We have a long way to go. Engagement is aesthetic: for consumers these purchases are seen as trendy or edgy or more ‘authentic’ because of their cultural affiliation, and for brands it’s about sales. Everyone shares the responsibility of engaging with the past, but luxury brands have yet to do so meaningfully.

NIGEL: You’re completely right, Riley. ‘Authenticity’ is a very slippery concept when applied to historically and culturally marginalized people and practices. Who determines what is the ‘authentic’ representation of an Indigenous person or of a Black woman, for example, and to what political ends? How can we overcome this hegemonic perception?

RILEY: Challenging those harmful narratives and stereotypes is a first step, but most important is that Indigenous people are defining authenticity *for themselves*. Unfortunately, the first part is difficult because the problem is so widespread, there are few legal avenues and all are largely ineffective. Patent and trademarking laws inadequately address Indigenous cultural production, and the legal costs of challenging brands are prohibitive for individual makers. There’s been success when states themselves protect cultural heritage, like the Mexican government’s push to protect Indigenous communities from plagiarism, most recently with Carolina Herrera, who copied traditional Saltillo shawls (Jones 2019). These are the kinds of interventions needed so that Indigenous makers can claim for themselves what is authentic and hopefully obtain the means to control if, how and when certain elements of culture are commodified. I see room for critical luxury studies to make pragmatic engagements with those in positions of power, like Kim Jenkins, a colleague at Ryerson University who has provided training for global luxury brands and industry-level organizations to set broader goals concerning diversity and inclusion, but also engagements with Indigenous makers themselves. I’m interested in supporting what Indigenous academics call ‘resurgence’, the everyday decolonizing acts of embodying Indigenous values. I want to see what resurgent practices create.

JESS: Given the historical – and contemporary – ties between luxury producers and colonization that you rightfully underscore, your argument that luxury brands should be at the forefront of global efforts at

decolonization is particularly powerful. If you were acting as an advisor to a major luxury operation, what kind of guidance would you offer?

RILEY: I think luxury brands could be at the forefront of supporting cultural resurgence through economic development, but decolonization requires sovereignty, which is in the realm of Indigenous political and legal activists. True decolonization means the return of stolen land so that Indigenous nations can regenerate. As the land base is secured and the environmental health of land is restored, cultural resurgence can occur. So thinking *through* land might be an ambitious place to start, but I would encourage a luxury operation to think critically about the rightful owners of farm or factory land used in luxury supply chains. Can an Indigenous population benefit from luxury production? If a raw material is farmed in South America, can the infrastructure be developed to employ textile weavers, instead of bringing the material to Europe? Land includes urban places, so we need to think about how luxury-induced gentrification displaces people of colour. In my review of *Making Prestigious Places* (Kucheran 2018) I noted how luxury often has negative connotations in urban planning because of this displacement, but the power of luxury could in fact be harnessed for more social justice-orientated aims. Finally, some of the most beautiful and pristine lands left on earth are central to luxury tourism, and I speculate that the industry is not benefitting Indigenous populations as much as it could. Indigenous tourism is a burgeoning industry itself, but I worry that 'Indigenous experiences' offered by tour groups are tokenistic and reinforce harmful narratives or that they contribute to environmental degradation. That said, I can envision a community-led luxury operation in my own territory that honours Indigenous ethics, where luxury consumers experience our beautiful lands and waters, are able to learn from us and have the opportunity to purchase our cultural products. The distinction is between voyeuristic helicoptering – dropping in and quickly leaving – and sustained attempts at relationship building. If a luxury fashion brand wants to incorporate Indigenous beadwork into their haute couture collections, I'd advise them to develop a long-term strategy. Rather than a one-off commission for a collection (which happens often and can be a double-edged sword), I'd advise a brand to help open a beadwork atelier in an Indigenous community. They could consistently make orders, consult with expert beadwork artists to explore new designs, connect the community directly to clients and ensure that the working conditions were equitable. I see little difference between the elderly tailors in the Chanel ateliers and Indigenous grandmothers

beading in a community circle, in terms of skill, creativity, and so on. The difference is in their status and social position, determined by colonialism and what's considered 'fashion'. When Jamie Okuma created her infamous beaded Christian Louboutin boots, the company sent her a cease-and-desist letter, but they're so beautiful! I can imagine her beadwork becoming coveted items for luxury consumers, but instead it was an incredible missed opportunity. The underlying question behind all these ideas is whether luxury can be divorced from social inequality. I'm typically pessimistic, but part of me hopes that luxury can become a force for social good. It will depend on whether luxury is willing to build authentic relationships with Indigenous peoples and make long-term investments in Indigenous communities.

NIGEL: Listening to you, Riley, it seems that the real issue isn't appropriation, as such, but is more a question of the structural imbalances in power relations that permit appropriation. You've told us of how the luxury/fashion industry is instrumental in correcting this imbalance. What about Indigenous peoples themselves? What is their role in establishing their position in the industry?

RILEY: It's unfortunate that so much energy has to be spent challenging cultural appropriation. Correcting representation is an important battle, but there are pressing issues concerning the material reality of Indigenous communities – defending land from encroaching resource extraction, environmental degradation, language preservation, ensuring safety and improving standards of living. Sometimes I feel like we don't have *time* for cultural appropriation when there's so much work needed to rebuild our nations, which is why I'm excited to see the energy of the burgeoning Indigenous fashion movement turn inwards. For the past few years I've been working with Sage Paul, founder and artistic director of Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto (IFWTO). We've spent a lot of time theorizing about Indigenous fashion, and we've both landed on the need for a real departure from the mainstream fashion industry. Sage created IFWTO because she saw the need for a platform that more accurately represented Indigenous design, which up until recently has either been tokenized or entirely absent. But given the structural problems of the industry, the model of 'fashion week' itself had to change. IFWTO grew organically *within* the Indigenous community; it wasn't introduced by the non-Indigenous old guard of fashion. This was perhaps most evident on the front row of the runways, which was saved for Indigenous Elders. I'll always remember the face of a disgruntled old-guard fashion type when she realized she'd have to sit in the back row to see the show.



FIGURE 1.1: Tania Larsson, a Gwich'in and Swedish designer based in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and her 2018 'Protect the Caribou' runway look. Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto 2018. Modelled by Lio Francis Keahna Warrior (White Earth Anishinaabe and Meskwaki) and photographed by Nadya Kwandibens of Red Works Photography (Kwandibens 2018). (CC BY-NC-ND - Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License.)

I laughed then and still smile, because it's just such an *Indigenous* thing to do – respect your Elders – so of course the front row was saved for them. There were plenty of these subtle differences throughout IFWTO. A 'marketplace' brought direct economic benefits to artisans, workshops weaved together textiles and storytelling, and there was certainly a powerful politics. With art exhibited alongside the runways and in the clothing itself, environmental protection, food sovereignty and land reclamation were all brought to the forefront of discussions. Tania Larsson was one of the designers who showed at IFWTO and her 'Protect the Caribou' look drew attention to the interconnectedness of all relations – when fracking threatens caribou habitats, Indigenous fashion is threatened because we can't have one without the other (Figure 1.1).

Ultimately IFWTO is about *holding space*, perhaps the most important factor in supporting the Indigenous fashion movement. In my own work, I lean on 'visiting', which is the nishnaabeg methodology of taking time

to build reciprocal relationships and deeper understanding by physically being with someone (Simpson 2011), and when this happens, it requires theoretical frameworks founded on the place-based practices and local knowledges of the territory being visited, what Glen Coulthard calls ‘grounded normativity’ (2014: 53). So, for example, I’ve also worked with Otahpiaaki Indigenous Fashion Week in Calgary, which is produced with Blackfoot theory in mind, like the concept of *sahpahtsimah*, or ‘collaborating in a good way’ (Otahpiaaki Fashion Week Website 2019). Ultimately it is inside these spaces where decolonization materializes. There was once a time when, in order to quash political uprisings, Indigenous people couldn’t gather in large groups, so Indigenous fashion weeks are powerful events of resistance. When carefully crafted with love and good intentions, Indigenous makers are able to gather and socialize, but also strategize and mobilize. After the inaugural IFWTO I realized that creating spaces like Indigenous fashion weeks is our best hope for challenging cultural appropriation. In addition to correcting narratives by telling our own stories, we also build entire industries, so that there comes a time when luxury comes to us, hoping to collaborate, rather than ignoring us and misusing our culture.

Indigenous luxury, critical luxury studies and capitalism

- NIGEL: Broadly speaking, critical luxury studies has, since the first publications in and around 2016, focused on a western, if not Eurocentric, approach to the question of luxury. In the introduction to their edited volume *Critical Luxury Studies*, Armitage and Roberts tie the concept of luxury to ‘the disciplines of art, design, and media’ (2016a: 1). They also insist that the concept of luxury ‘entails recognition that all human beings live in a world that is created by human beings, and in which they find meaning in sumptuous enjoyment’ (2016a: 2). I think there is something very noble and correct in the premise that ‘luxury’ is a human phenomenon. But I think the definition of luxury is limited by the hegemonic underpinnings and the colonial history of the terms of engagement. Art, design and media are privileged areas of human activity. What has been historically deemed ‘art’ – by this I mean creative cultural production that has been considered aesthetically acceptable and meriting critical engagement – in the past has been tied to ideological and hegemonic conceptions in the university.
- RILEY: First, I agree that luxury is a human phenomenon, but I don’t think it should be. Historically, luxury has been so focused on ‘sumptuous

enjoyment' for humans, at the expense of our non-human relations. From an Indigenous perspective that demands respect and reciprocity when engaging with plant and animal life, luxury has been selfish, abusive even. I wonder what mainstream luxury would look like if it honoured those non-human relations at the level of Indigenous ethics. And I absolutely agree with you that defining luxury has been limited by colonial underpinnings. Colonialism extracts resources from Indigenous land to produce luxury and fails to recognize Indigenous sovereignty, let alone recognize that Indigenous culture produces what should be upheld as luxurious. I wasn't surprised that *Critical Luxury Studies* focused on western luxury, but I feel that evoking criticality today needs to come with an interrogation of Eurocentrism, an acknowledgement of colonialism and a commitment to mobilizing social justice. Is that too much to ask? Some of the most needed kinds of *critical* knowledge production is happening outside academia. And I know many Indigenous fashion designers who call themselves artists or fashion artists and that fashion weeks across Canada have had to define themselves as artistic or cultural festivals to qualify for grants. Both examples are connected to the historical privileging of art and marginalization of specific forms of cultural production – here fashion but also any form of Indigenous making. This divide is perhaps most stark in museum spaces, where Indigenous artefacts have been housed in ethnographic wings for centuries, and only in the last few decades has Indigenous art made its way into contemporary galleries.

NIGEL: This makes me think of the reaction to my work in hip hop and luxury. I've been asked whether hip hop can offer critical responses to capitalism or to feminist concerns. I remember a discussion I had with a nineteenth-century colleague who felt that hip hop celebrities, like Cardi B, don't express a discursive position in their manipulation of luxury fashions or in their artistic creations. I firmly disagree with this kind of perspective. I think that hip hop consciously and unconsciously expresses a use *and a misuse* of luxury signs that forces us to rethink luxury as simply a mode of exhibiting one's cultural capital or demonstrating an aspirational drive to climb the social hierarchy. Essentially, making or embodying luxury by historically, economically and racially marginalized people is a demonstration of luxury's artificial function as status symbol. And, as an artificial construct, new meanings and values can be attached to the luxury object.

RILEY: I've faced similar questions about the legitimacy of fashion as an object of Indigenous scholarship, and they can feel dismissive. Fashion is a historically marginalized field of study partly because the industry itself

has been feminized (Lipovetsky 1994: 3; Kawamura 2004), and in Indigenous studies there's a natural (and justifiable) focus on issues in education, health and self-governance. So asking if hip hop or fashion can offer criticality is an incredibly important question, especially when the stakes are so high. Can Indigenous luxury fashion truly contribute to decolonization and Indigenous resurgence, or is it doomed to participate in the capitalist economy and therefore contribute to the machine causing our imminent environmental demise? Can Indigenous fashion be emancipatory? Similar questions have been asked before – can 'political dressing' serve actually progressive aims (Parkins 2002), does 'critical fashion' lose its transgressiveness when co-opted (Geczy and Karaminas 2017: 5) and how effective is 'activist fashion' in Black and Indigenous political movements (Ford 2017; Maynard 2002)? Sadly, I think that Hoskins provides the answer that most resonates with me: that these various 'resistance fashions' do not amount to any serious challenge to capitalism (2014: 164). Of course, there's a spectrum: there's been uncritical 'critical fashion' and shallow 'activist fashion' that exist within the capitalist system and barely support its cause, and I think Indigenous fashion is strongest when it comes from community and its politics draw attention to systems of oppression and ways of moving forward. But ultimately the capacity for change – the real power – is within the movement itself (2014: 153). This is why I see Indigenous luxury as only one component of an integrated decolonizing movement. The movement has to get dressed every day, and what will we put on? In conversations with Métis fashion designer Evan Ducharme, we've theorized that '[t]he Indigenous resistance will be MAJOR [*sic*]' (Kucheran 2019b). Every community member in the decolonizing movement should be dressed in ancestral couture that regenerates our relations to land and creation. Any movement needs its fashion, its music. We just have to ensure that cultural production rejects capitalism – not attempt to reform it – and we have to rebuild our own systems.

NIGEL: This is an important question that I've struggled with. I wonder about the radical perspective that considers the only ethical position in regard to the capitalist system is that it must be dismantled. Absolutely. I agree – my perspective is fundamentally Marxist-based. But the fashion and luxury system is a capitalist system. There are creatives who subvert the system and, now, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are designers and brands who are refusing the hegemonic fashion week cycle. I don't know if this constitutes a rejection of capitalism or a productive circumventing of the system's hegemony.

RILEY: I think we're hammering down on *the* most important question here. My biggest critique of fashion studies is that it overvalues those symbolic acts. Even within 'critical' fashion, there's always this relation to commerce and capitalism. 'Anti-fashion' (Polhemus and Procter 1978; Davis 1992) only amounted to countercultural styles whose power was subverted by the fashion system; fashion is an outlet for queer gender expression (Moore 2018) but at what cost? Even scholarship around 'the end of fashion' – Tansy Hoskins's (2014) *Stitched Up: The Anti-Capitalist Book of Fashion*, Lidewij Edelkoort's (2015) *Anti_Fashion Manifesto* and Geczy and Karaminas's (2018) *End of Fashion* – to me they advocate for minor incremental changes that fail to depart from the fashion system. Most scholars in fashion studies have yet to witness 'fashions' that are truly outside of the system, but I see it emerging in Indigenous communities. I also work for Dechinta, a land-based Indigenous university in Dene territory near Yellowknife, and there we actively model decolonization. There's less capitalism in 'the bush'. No roads, no plumbing, no electricity: we literally live off the land. It sounds dystopian from a western perspective, but it's the way Indigenous people have always lived. As we creep closer towards a time when the most disastrous effects of climate change become unavoidable, Indigenous communities are doubling their efforts to live sustainably off the land. I've always imagined a time when western fashion ends, when we can no longer physically outsource clothing production, and I've asked: will we be ready? Will we be able to clothe ourselves? I'm preparing for that future.

Indigenous methodologies

NIGEL: Our discussion has highlighted that luxury is a discursive practice, which means that luxury mirrors and counters power. Luxury materializes Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, which, we know, is a way individuals and groups harness the symbolic power of commodities and cultural objects to assert dominance. Luxury is not just an 'idea' but a practice, an act, that can be used to situate an individual, a group or a collectivity in the social world. Do Indigenous creative practices operate in a similar discursive mode?

RILEY: I think that Indigenous makers are also interested in harnessing cultural capital and symbolic power – for Angela the idea of luxury is indeed mobilized to situate her brand in a luxury consumer's world, and it's interesting that she's been most successful in product categories most

synonymous with luxury consumption like furs and fine jewellery. But yes, the motive is definitely different: dominance implies an exploitation of power for personal gain, whereas the Indigenous makers I work with are incredibly community minded. Everything they do is motivated by strong desires to help their family, their community and their people at large. Perhaps it's a different set of motivations depending on if the consumer is Indigenous or not: for non-Indigenous consumers, the goal is often education, to refute stereotypes and teach someone about our history or cultural values. For Indigenous 'consumers' I think the goal is the development of a relationship itself. I've only ever *consumed* Indigenous products after meeting the producer, coming to know them and offering my services by sharing my own cultural capital, the connections I've been able to make in the academic and business worlds.

NIGEL: For me, luxuriousness is imbued when a commodity is considered to have a surplus value, that is, some kind of value that exceeds its use value. For example, developing a relationship between producer and consumer invests surplus value in consumption. Luxury can materially and symbolically improve the lives of individuals who adopt a kind of luxurious world-view. It seems to me that Indigenous luxury operates similarly, or is luxuriousness created through different practices?

RILEY: I'm not sure! I once asked an Indigenous Elder what was luxury, and they said 'having enough fish to eat'. It was telling, informative about the material conditions of Indigenous peoples. I'm not entirely sure where I'm going with this, but conceptions of luxury change when there's been such a prolonged deficit of basic human rights, which is (I think) similar to where you're coming from.

NIGEL: That's it exactly. Luxury isn't a category or an innate quality; it is a phenomenon that practically, intellectually or spiritually better the life of the individual and the community. Indigenous making and the ways you work with makers epitomize this form of luxurious improvement.

JESS: Practices and methods are central to Indigenous luxury makers but also to you, as a scholar of Indigenous luxury. From your work, it's clear that you devote careful attention to the relationship between method or form and your intentions as a scholar. That's why, as you describe in the opening of this chapter, we decided to organize this chapter as a discussion rather than an essay, since this form more closely aligns with your current conceptualizations of Indigenous luxury: ideas that are fluid, evolving and collaborative, as in a conversation. In your scholarship, then, what underpins your methods for studying Indigenous luxury, and how are these practices reflected in your relationships with your

subjects? How can scholars move beyond ‘colonial research agendas and methodologies’ (Absolon and Willett 2005: 106) that continue to dominate the academy to broaden not only our definitions of luxury but also the means and forms through which we study these phenomena?

RILEY: I think the answer is in your question: relationships. Indigenous research reconfigures relationships as essential: knowledge is collaboratively generated through a relationship over a lifetime, whereas colonial research might view a relationship as a prerequisite for data collection, and even then the relationship is usually superficial and non-reciprocal; it’s a means to a predetermined end. I cringe at the word ‘subjects’ because it reminds me of the immense imbalance of power entrenched through the anthropological research tradition: researcher and researched, expert and native. That tradition stripped Indigenous peoples of their agency and ability to tell their own stories and represent themselves. Decolonizing research attempts to correct this injustice and is underpinned by an understanding that we have responsibilities to all of our relations and that knowledge is carried in all of us. I view Indigenous designers themselves as the experts. People like Angela carry with them immense lived experience and an embodied knowledge passed on to them through generations, which manifests in the clothes they produce. I see my role primarily as a facilitator, to help bring their knowledge to wider audiences. Of course, this must be done with the utmost caution: when knowledge is disseminated, it becomes susceptible to exploitation, so there’s a delicate method of translating the right knowledge to generate academic or industry collaborations. While doing this I try to share any helpful experience I’ve gained during my time as a scholar and fashion professional. I’ve been afforded privileges in life that brought me to the academy, and I’m going to spend my time sharing the advantages it brings.

NIGEL: I see the importance of reconfiguring the relationship between researcher and researched ... that there is the potential for a true sharing, a kind of generosity that has been completely eclipsed in the historically colonial approach to ethnographic research. Decolonizing the academy, then, to my eyes is introducing a more balanced relationship between epistemological subjects where the knowledge flow is reciprocal and not simply ‘top-down’. Is it possible, then, for non-Indigenous scholars to adopt decolonizing methodologies in their own research?

RILEY: I think it’s possible. If it’s done slowly, with care and respect. It’s funny, as a master’s student I actually described my research as ethnographic because I didn’t know otherwise, but reflecting back on my time with Angela, it more closely resembles the nishnaabeg practice of visiting

that I spoke of earlier. In the Anishinaabe creation story, extensive visiting is done by the sacred being Nanabush, who travels around the world twice to recognize and build relationships with all of creation. Knowledge is first generated by observation – at one point Nanabush imitates the shape of *gitchie manameg* (‘whale’) and the tail of *ahmik* (‘beaver’) to build a canoe and paddle to cross a large body of water – but theory is generated by relations. Interactions with *mushkodayn bishikee* (‘buffalo’) provide lessons about survival, respect and sustainability, *odayminnug* (‘heart berries’ or ‘strawberries’) teaches Nanabush about human biology, and when Nanabush embarks on this journey the second time with a *mhiingnag* (‘wolf’) companion the dual perspective changes everything. For thousands of years, visiting has provided Indigenous peoples with the time and space required to share stories, take care of each other and mobilize politically. Visiting nurtures the intimate connections needed for consensus building, organizing and direct action, making it a necessary component of decolonization. Visiting mitigates the chance of power asymmetry prevalent in ethnography because it requires consent and collaboration. All of these components of visiting are present in my fieldwork, but non-Indigenous researchers can engage in visiting as well. Indigenous methodologies use methods that resemble critical feminist methods. The difference is in the political aims of Indigenous methodologies and the Indigenous theoretical paradigms they rely on, which are unique to the local Indigenous culture. A ‘sharing circle’ uses Indigenous protocol and takes care of participants more than a focus group. Indigenous research requires constant reflection, which makes autoethnography a suitable method. An Indigenous form of narrative enquiry could take years because the same stories are shared over a lifetime, and with each new context, they present different teachings. These methods and the methodology of visiting embody an ethics of care that is affirmed through life-long relations. If a non-Indigenous researcher is ready for the long-haul, they just have to start. I think it’s more about the journey that will reveal itself than mastering a set of Indigenous methods.

NIGEL: Can we ask you about the key thinkers or writers that we can draw from to think about Indigenizing and decolonizing fashion/luxury?

RILEY: Of course! My first entry into Indigenous methodologies was Shawn Wilson’s (2008) *Research Is Ceremony*, which makes it clear that Indigenous methodologies cannot be divorced from Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies. I’ve worked personally with Leanne Simpson at Dechinta, where I witnessed her methodologies in action, but her body of work is highly influential in my thinking and in

Indigenous studies. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back* (2011) and *As We Have Always Done* (2017) are great because they provide historical and theoretical contexts: there might not be a typical 'methodology' section, but the methodology is there in the stories, in the way Simpson moves in the world. In a similar way, Jeff Corntassel's (2018) edited collection *Everyday Acts of Resurgence* describes some of the daily decolonizing acts of Indigenous people: fishing, preparing traditional food, adorning oneself with clothing made by kin, recalling forgotten place names, witnessing the truth-telling of children – the 'everyday' might seem mundane, but Corntassel, following Hunt and Holmes (2015), emphasizes that these intimate and relational acts are just as important to decolonization as are the more obvious political interventions. Our friend from earlier, Kathleen Absolon, also wrote *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know* (2011), and the stalwarts of Indigenous methodologies are Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1998) *Decolonizing Methodologies* and Margaret Kovach's (2009) *Indigenous Methodologies*. The latter provides the important context of 'colonizing knowledges', the history that must be understood before Indigenous knowledges can be engaged.

The future of Indigenous luxury

JESS: Much of your work, including your collaboration with Angela, explores current developments in Indigenous luxury that are dynamic, forward-facing and actively foregrounding sustainability, community and socially conscious industry practices. How do you see these developments in relation to the future of Indigenous luxury, but also luxury more generally? How do you envision the effects of Indigenous concepts, cultural values and practices on the luxury industry as well as on the field of critical luxury studies?

RILEY: When I think of decolonization as simultaneously dismantling colonial structures and rebuilding Indigenous worlds, then the work that is being accomplished by Angela, myself and the Indigenous fashion movement at large has a dual function. It supports community and has the potential to shape luxury more generally. It's my hope that these concepts and mobilizations of luxury are brought directly into Indigenous communities. I want to see rural and remote Indigenous communities engaging with their own cultural products and valuing them as luxuries. Artisans I know are aware of this already: they know their beadwork shouldn't sell for twenty dollars, but when makers don't have access to urban

markets and are not online, less fair in-person sales are the only option. It's also my goal to help mobilize traditional skills already present in the community and reorientate part of the output towards luxury retail. For example, hide tanning is a beautiful act of resurgence. It's an incredibly laborious process: it's difficult and you get exhausted from scraping the animal hide over and over again until it's soft enough to work with. It also involves many community members: the hunters or trappers who harvest the animals in a respectful manner, the knowledge holders who guide the process, the workers themselves, the tailors who use the finished material – the making brings people together, and of course, the process comes with traditional stories and teachings. Some of the leather will go directly back to the community, but what if some of the leather then went to a fashion designer and was sold in a community-based store where everyone shares in the profit? This Indigenous luxury looks like practices that we have engaged in since time immemorial, and now it's about marketing those practices and creating a closed-loop system that benefits the community. Next on my research agenda is investigating alternative management structures and cooperatives: I can see a time where each Indigenous nation has its own brand, and consumers can support entire communities with their 'luxury' purchases.

Working at Angela's boutique revealed some of the unique challenges inherent in being an Indigenous luxury fashion designer, but it also opened up conversations about luxury itself. Some of her challenges would also be shared by any independent luxury producer, and addressing these problems would make for a more equitable industry. As an entrepreneur, Angela largely works solo: she was responsible for the design, production, marketing and sales of her products because she doesn't have teams of people like a larger luxury brand has. She doesn't have access to the financial capital that would be available in a larger brand or the manufacturing capability to outsource production. I guess this also means I'd like to see critical luxury studies collaborate with the business world more. Our friend Thomaï Serdari, a luxury strategist and adjunct professor at NYU Stern School of Business, once told me that her best MBA students had humanities backgrounds – that those with critical theoretical foundations were able to mobilize management tools for greater good. If Indigenous research methodologies are action orientated and require reciprocity, I want luxury scholars to work *with* independent makers to support their businesses. This is where I would encourage our efforts, but there's also room to 'Indigenize' larger corporations. To me decolonizing luxury means minimizing the harmful

effects of luxury operations, which largely encompasses environmental sustainability. There's no Indigenous land-base on a dead planet.

JESS: This emphasis on longstanding practices seems a way to push back against long-held designations of what was historically deemed 'luxurious' and *not* luxurious. As you point out, the expertise and skill that goes into hide tanning aligns the practice with many other artisanal production processes deemed central to 'luxury' production. But the industry seems bound by historical designations, centuries old, through which dominant settler societies give value to certain production processes, while denying that of others, including traditional Indigenous practices. In this way, you're subverting historical categories in productive ways, revising systems that have, for too long, defined luxury. Are there other production processes among Indigenous designers that are pushing back against these dominant ideas?

RILEY: I think that's what makes the hide tanning process special, and these qualities are shared among any Indigenous craft. I'm reminded of beading circles, these often informal spaces for artisans to come together and bead. There's food, laughter, gossip, but also elements of ceremony: the act of coming together creates a sacred space that facilitates the transmission of stories. Anyone can learn how to bead from YouTube, but if you're not beading in the context of community and traditional knowledge, beading is just a technique and not a carrier of our culture. The same can be said for any land-based practice. Quillwork, hair tufting, fibre weaving. Because land-based cultural production relies on Indigenous epistemologies and values, any cultural product is going to have the same potential to heal communities, to heal our relationship to land. There are other areas of cultural production that need improvement, however. I often contrast this land-based, community-grounded, made-to-measure 'luxury fashion' with the burgeoning category of Indigenous streetwear design. There are several T-shirt companies, for example, that are using Indigenous aesthetics or political statements on garments sourced from dubious producers. While not immediately associated with luxury, these companies are doing incredibly important work. There are direct financial benefits for communities when Indigenous artists and other employees are hired; there's a critical unpacking of complex colonial histories that's done very publicly – the brand Section 35 is named for the article in the Canadian Constitution Act that recognizes Indigenous and treaty rights, and they sell a shirt that says, 'All These Treaty Rights and Still Not Treated Right'; another OXDX-brand T-shirt reads 'Native Americans Discovered Columbus'. These are powerful forms of

representation that open up possibilities for engaged conversation – I’ve been stopped on the sidewalk and asked about the OXDX shirt – and conversations that change the narrative about Indigenous peoples is a good place to start. However, it can’t be the only action: changes in representations need to be tied to transformations in material conditions, and I think that starts with production. It is my hope that utilizing a luxury strategy could elevate this streetwear to a level more akin to Indigenous design. When visiting Indigenous fashion weeks or Pow Wows, I’ll tell streetwear designers to invest in their supply chain: build relations with local and organic cotton producers, find local cutters and sewers and aim for price points above \$100 for T-shirts. There’s much work to be done to repair consumer perceptions of T-shirt costs post fast fashion, but that relational work, if founded on reciprocity, is how luxury can move Indigenous streetwear forward. Again, it’s the ethics and values of Indigenous design, like sustainability, that make Indigenous luxury so forward-facing. Those values are attainable in our everyday clothing practices.

NIGEL: Completely. Indigenous streetwear can look to hip hop culture as a model for how to ‘up their luxury game’. Fashion networks like Harlem’s Fashion Row and designers like Kerby Jean-Raymond of Pyer Moss are changing the American fashion scene through a similar rethinking of fashion networks. African-American creatives have borne the brunt of cultural appropriation and a surprisingly obtuse use of images that show that working within the system is not a mutually beneficial cultural model. These designers are building networks with other Black creatives and Indigenous makers to reinforce new, beneficial power structures. You are proposing a similar type of buttressing through an Indigenous creative power structure. I wonder, however, about a silo effect, where a wider conversation and exchange of ideas is foreclosed when marginalized and racialized cultural producers cut the dominant group out of the system. Do you think there is a possibility for Indigenous luxury to engage with the mainstream, maybe in subversive ways, that can lead to a change in the power dynamic?

RILEY: I’m either not sure or not yet convinced that it’s possible. Why can’t the independent Black creative networks remain siloed and only engage the mainstream on their own terms? I return to the question of power: who’s in control? Who’s dictating the narrative? Who’s hiring who? I’m all for supporting wider conversations and exchange, but I’d only be comfortable if the decisions to engage are being made by Black creatives in constant dialogue with Black community members and if their engagement

is on their own terms. It shouldn't be that Black or Indigenous creatives *have* to 'fall in line' to take their businesses to the next level, but then again I'm interested in destabilizing the notion that any Black or Indigenous business *needs* to be elevated to another level. Small is good, and slowness is needed now more than ever.

For Indigenous makers, how can trust be rebuilt when the dominant mainstream has been so dangerous for us? I think that decolonization would first and foremost mean a more honest form of luxury – a luxury that continues time-honoured traditions and upholds values like longevity, quality and timelessness – but also a transparent luxury. Most importantly, an honest luxury would reckon with its past. Historically speaking, luxury purveyors have reaped the benefits of colonization and global imperialism. One only needs to compare global poverty levels to the amount of capital accumulated by large luxury conglomerates – which now collectively generate over a trillion dollars in sales annually – to make the connection that luxury exists because of social inequality. So where does this leave us or leave luxury? European luxury houses especially need to examine their own histories and the roles they played in colonization, and reparations must be made. I'm not entirely sure what that looks like – I know it's not tokenizing collaborations on capsule collections, and the charitable arms of these companies are not doing enough. The COVID pandemic, still in its early stages, has shown us how quickly power dynamics can change, and post-pandemic, climate change will bring us to a similar critical nexus. I believe that Indigenous luxury provides us with a beacon to weather the coming storms, but change will depend on how well we listen.

Canadian Critical Luxury Studies

Decentring Luxury

Canadian Critical Luxury Studies: Decentring Luxury is a dynamic new contribution to the study of luxury. The essays in this collection challenge Euro- and US-centric perceptions that bind luxury to either a colonial past or a consumerist present.

The book announces a new collective of thinkers who focus on Indigenous and Canadian instances of luxurious production, experiences and sites to propose a new definition of luxury. Each of the interdisciplinary contributions analyses luxury from different vantage points to understand why luxury has succeeded or failed in the Canadian context.

From the history of the fur trade to the latest Indigenous fashion movement, from the T. Eaton Co.'s 1920s Made-in-Canada campaign to the on-again-off-again Toronto Fashion Week, from Vancouver public art commissions to Montréal's future-forward fashiontech sector, the essays explain what makes and breaks Canadian luxury.

These original case studies redefine luxury for Canada – a former colonial possession and contemporary second-tier cultural market – and lay the foundation for the critical study of luxury in other historically secondary geographies that produce, consume and circulate material and symbolic luxuries. The collection challenges old myths and the mystique surrounding luxury to give it a new lustre that shines light on those actors who have been historically excluded from its privilege: Indigenous peoples, immigrants and the working classes.

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