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Karrmen Crey, **Producing Sovereignty: The Rise of Indigenous Media in Canada,** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024, 224 pp., $27.00 (paperback).

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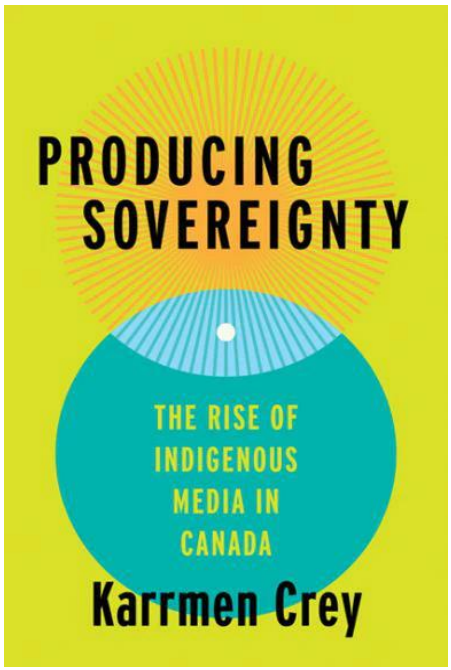

Producing Sovereignty: The Rise of Indigenous Media in Canada offers an urgent and compelling examination of the institutional infrastructure that has shaped the growth of Indigenous media production across Canada over the past three decades. Through a series of illuminating case studies, Karrmen Crey (Stó:lō) demonstrates that Indigenous media practices are deeply intertwined with the structures, policies, and discourses of contemporary institutions such as media broadcasting, arts and culture organizations, and institutions of higher learning. One of the book's larger arguments is that the rapid expansion of Indigenous media production in Canada since the early 1990s cannot be properly understood without first examining the institutional frameworks that have supported it. As such, Crey traces institutional trajectories that combine the better-known legacies of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and Banff Centre for the Arts with the lesser-known histories of the Saskatchewan Communications Network (SCN) and Aboriginal Film and Video Art Alliance (AFVAA), among others. In doing so, the book makes visible both over- and underexamined areas of Indigenous media production and collaboration, all the while asserting the notion that institutional analysis is essential to comprehending the "critical sophistication and complexity of Indigenous screen strategies" (p. 23).

Producing Sovereignty contributes not only to Indigenous media studies but also to communication scholarship more broadly, particularly concerning debates surrounding media institutions, cultural policy, and alternative media. By situating Indigenous media production within broader transformations in Canadian media industries since the 1990s, Crey demonstrates that Indigenous media should not be treated as a marginal, peripheral, or separate field of study, but rather as central to understanding how media systems evolve in response to political struggles, cultural demands, and institutional change. Crey situates these questions within broader political and historical contexts in Canada, including but not limited to the Indigenous sovereignty movement, the constitutional recognition of Indigenous rights, major conflicts with the nation-state (e.g., Oka Crisis), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Together, these historical developments have created the conditions through which Indigenous media producers and practitioners have been able to engage with existing media institutions as a means of furthering Indigenous sovereignty. As Crey observes, the 1990s marked a significant period of institutional support for Indigenous cultural production, laying the foundation for what she describes as cultural and

visual sovereignty. Crey shows that Indigenous filmmakers and media practitioners used resources such as funding structures and institutional access to actively negotiate how far and wide their stories could be told and/or circulated. In doing so, they did not operate outside the state or its cultural apparatuses but rather engaged them strategically, transforming their conventions and priorities in the process. Extending previous research on visual sovereignty that documents the ways in which Indigenous agency is expressed under the structuring logics of colonial ideology, Crey's work actively affirms the role Indigenous media production plays in the elaboration of Indigenous sovereignty. To put it another way, Indigenous control of media apparatuses can be seen as tangible extensions of Indigenous self-determination (p. 8).

These questions come to the fore in chapter 2 in a captivating analysis of the AFVAA, a trailblazing organization founded in 1991 to advance Indigenous self-government through arts and cultural production. AFVAA was dedicated to removing "systemic barriers to Indigenous participation in the arts" (p. 61)—an undertaking they sought to address directly by cultivating partnerships with public libraries, friendship centers, and sympathetic organizations like the Banff Centre. An early manifestation of visual sovereignty is discussed at length via an early collaboration between AFVAA and the Banff Centre, in which visiting Indigenous artists engaged in a public service announcement (PSA) project centering the theme of "Self-Government: Talk About It" (p. 71). Of the seven PSAs produced, participating artists and activists presented a wide array of interpretations of and approaches to self-government, a feat undoubtedly attributed to the Banff Centre's broader support for these interventions. This case study offers a powerful example of how visual sovereignty is produced through ongoing institutional interactions where Indigenous creators assert control, reshape representational practices, and embed Indigenous perspectives within the very structures that once marginalized them.

Far from reducing Indigenous media to questions of aesthetics, politics, or representation, Crey begins her work by foregrounding the "materiality of production: its economic and industrial conditions, and the people doing the work" (p. 10). Crey's approach to distilling some of the key characteristics associated with Indigenous media production culture in Canada is nicely encapsulated through the book's examination of five discrete case studies featuring the work of multimedia producer Doug Cuthand (Cree), filmmaker Lisa Jackson (Anishinaabe), academically trained documentarians Arlene Bowman (Diné) and Banchi Hanuse (Nuxalk), the AFVAA, and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). In centering endeavors that prioritize Indigenous-led media production, Crey asserts that the above case studies reflect the values, principles, and traditions of Indigenous sovereignty in the production and processes of film, video, and media created by and for Indigenous peoples (p. 56). For example, in her exploration of Cuthand's work in documentary film, Crey highlights how the form plays a multifaceted role in asserting Indigenous identity, affirming Indigenous politics, supporting Indigenous movements, and challenging settler audience expectations. Crucially, the funding envelopes and institutional supports directed toward Indigenous producers themselves—richly described via Cuthand's work with SCN and NFB—enabled the latter to disrupt long-standing colonial structures in which non-Indigenous gatekeepers controlled story development, approval, and narrative form. Such disruptions have the capacity to create friction with institutional partners who espouse different priorities in terms of the completed work (as was the case with NFB producers of Cuthand's *Donna's Story*; see pp. 43–53). Tensions of this kind have inspired Cuthand and his contemporaries to bypass production constraints tied to mainstream conventions imposed by non-Indigenous producers. Crey's analyses of Cuthand's work highlight how Indigenous media producers

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negotiate with and against supporting institutions to convey the lived realities, perspectives, and storytelling traditions of Indigenous communities, often reshaping the traditional formal structures of a given medium to better align with Indigenous epistemologies.

Throughout the book, Indigenous media is reflected via a limited set of genres and platforms—educational television, PSAs, reality television, documentary film, and virtual reality (p. 143)—capturing a representative range of production practices. One of the most powerful case studies in *Producing Sovereignty* features an in-depth discussion of the "intersection of reconciliation-era politics, industry trends toward VR technologies, and the phenomenon of 'immersive journalism'" (p. 144). The focus in chapter 5 addresses the ongoing presence of coloniality in Canada, as witnessed through the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) crisis. Lisa Jackson's *Highway of Tears* (2016) (see pp. 143–166), a 360-degree immersive VR documentary produced in collaboration with CBC's current affairs program, *The Current*, explores the gendered colonial violence documented along the infamous Highway 16 section of the Trans-Canada Highway. *Highway of Tears* foregrounds the unsolved disappearance and murder of 16-year-old Ramona Wilson, as recounted by her mother Matilda (Gitxsan) in her living room. According to Crey, this VR piece splices together various images of Highway 16 (along which dozens of Indigenous women have disappeared or been murdered) with interview footage of Matilda sharing the story of her missing and murdered daughter (p. 23). For the VR user to assume a seated position directly across from Wilson places the onus on the viewer to come up against the "discomfort generated by proximity" (p. 144) and to acknowledge that the MMIWG crisis is not an Indigenous issue but a national one (p. 163).

In presenting *Highway of Tears* as an example of Indigenous media that advances Indigenous visual sovereignty, Crey illustrates how the project interrogates the fraught technological debates surrounding VR as virtuous and empathy-driven alongside the more sociopolitical issues tied to settler and nation-state complacency in the face of Indigenous suffering. Far from embracing the celebratory pronouncements associated with VR as an emancipatory medium, Jackson harnesses the latter as a mechanism for transforming spectators into witnesses. For Jackson, MMIWG and reconciliation politics converge in an attempt to alienate and disrupt viewers just enough for them to sit uncomfortably with the notion that violence against Indigenous women and girls is inextricably linked to the "foundation of the settler colonial project of the Canadian nation-state" (p. 148). As Crey argues, *Highway* constitutes a bold vision for Indigenous media production through its centering of sovereignty, its concerted pushback against colonial ways of seeing, and its assertion that the work of reconciliation must also be shouldered by settlers and non-Indigenous people.

Producing Sovereignty insists that production contexts, funding bodies, training institutions, broadcasters, and policy frameworks play a decisive role in shaping both the form and circulation of Indigenous media. In the book's final nod to a hopeful future for Indigenous media, Crey points to the recent founding of the Indigenous Screen Office (2017–2018), an institution charged with advocating on behalf of Indigenous media practitioners and also preparing the way for Indigenous sovereignty principles and ethics to be incorporated in collaborations with Canadian media industries. If Crey's insights hold, these welcome shifts in the media landscape should serve to bolster greater Indigenous sovereignty.