

Nancy Van Styvendale, J.D. McDougall, Robert Henry, and Robert Alexander Innes (eds.), *The Arts of Indigenous Health and Well-Being*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021. 272 pages. ISBN 978-0-88755-939-6. \$27.95 paperback.

*The Arts of Indigenous Health and Well-Being* is a well-researched book, published in 2021. Indigenous art-based pedagogy is based on traditional and ongoing development and adaptations that promote Indigenous good health and well-being. The book begins shortly with an acknowledgement that there is a fundamental connection between the arts and Indigenous health and well-being, as supported and endorsed by the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) in 1996.

This book is based on an idea that arose from the *Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* (NAISA) 2013 meeting held in Saskatoon at the University of Saskatchewan. NAISA is an international and interdisciplinary professional organization for scholars, graduate students, independent researchers, and community members interested in issues affecting Indigenous peoples. This book was built through the contributions of selected speciality members of NAISA. Hence, the book is organized into four sections: *Material Culture, Embodiment and Well-Being; Community Health and Wellness; Healing Land, Body and Tradition; and Resistance, Resurgence, and “Imagining Otherwise”*. This collection has many overlapping themes that bring together crucial insights into the relationship within the Indigenous arts, health, and well-being.

One such insight is that the arts engage Indigenous histories, cultures, and knowledges, where it deepens the relationality among individuals, communities, nations, and spaces: all of which are essential to holistic health and well-being. The arts thus impart and transfer knowledge across generations and geographies. They contribute to the cultural and economic health of communities and strengthen collective identities. The arts connect Indigenous communities to each other and to non-Indigenous communities, both locally and globally.

In *Material Culture, Embodiment and Well-Being*, the articles explore a variety of interactions between the body, material culture, and well-being. The chapters in this section highlight how material culture and embodied practices function to connect participants to the larger relational nexus, in which such practices are situated and invite participants to inhabit and enact Indigenous epistemologies of relationality. Relationality takes on a strong role in Indigenous health and well-being, as material culture reflects and contains the relationships that inform its making. It thus strengthens the various relationships that makers have with a range of ancestral, contemporary, and other-than-human beings, with their specialized artwork ranging from a beaded medicine pouch to a jingle dress, baskets, birchbark scrolls, and rock paintings. The handmaking of these items illustrates the focus on quality and the intrinsic connective meaning embedded into each unique item crafted.

The first section includes a model on how to make meaning of a cultural artifact through a detailed reading of its physical features and visual symbols. This model draws upon the principles of Anishinaabe pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of self-directed inquiry in meaning making. At the same time, it discusses how contemporary Indigenous art embodies the interconnectedness of individual, community, and environment necessary for good health and well-being. Later in this section, there are also critiques of colonial logics of fragmentation and

the dualistic divide of mind/body, approaches which are contrary to the Indigenous logics of the wholistic relationship of mind/body.

In *Community Health and Wellness*, the focus is on community expressions of health and well-being. It brings into focus the perspectives of the artists and arts program facilitators on the collective role of the arts, as well as turning to Indigenous literatures as models for community relations and development. Within this section, community-based research analyzes the importance of the arts to community cultural and economic resilience and youth empowerment, respectively. Social location is also mentioned in this section as an important part to understanding one's relationship with the community and its people. At the same time, there is a strong argument made for the need to view Indigenous resilience from a relational worldview, instead of the linear worldview dominant in Western societies.

This section also reminds readers that Indigenous art is often produced from events that an individual has experienced and attains a level of authority by depicting scenes and images based on Indigenous cultural practices. The knowledge of this lifestyle is passed onto, both, the world in general, and to the younger Indigenous generations. In addition, the chapter's author explores how the effects of colonization can be reduced and how the imaginations of Indigenous youth *can* be cultivated when youth are given safe spaces in which to explore their thoughts and imaginations through an artistic medium. This creative effort can help seed resilience in current, and later, Indigenous generations.

The focus of *Healing Land, Body and Tradition* is the role of artistic and cultural practices in the healing of individuals, nations, and the land: all of which have experienced forms of trauma and grief, particularly as a result of settler colonialism, but also as a result of inter-Indigenous conflicts. In addition, deeply rooted Indigenous concepts of health, wellness, and balance are explored through listening, sonic creation, and performance. This section discusses multidimensional concepts that are embodied in First Nation languages, such as, the interconnectedness of humans with other humans across generations, with non-humans, and with other aspects of Creation. This multidimensional understanding, as the chapter's author points out, is central to seeking and maintaining the balance of all these dimensions. Hence, the section's discussion concludes with an observation that the health of the Earth is related integrally to the health of life on the Earth.

In addition, Part 3 discusses that when the children were taken away from their families, some of them were keenly aware that connecting intergenerationally to their families and ancestors was essential for their well-being. Hence, as illustrated in this section, these children would listen to the birds, which in many First Nation traditions are viewed as the voices of ancestors. Furthermore, the discussion is extended towards interventions for Indigenous healing. For example, one case involves the transformation of a song, enabling the artist to name (call out) the abuse and voice the anger, which can be an important choice taken for some survivors, as a part of their healing journey.

The fourth part, *Resistance, Resurgence, and "Imagining Otherwise"*, looks at a range of artistic and cultural expressions, ranging from literature, ceremony, dance, to hip-hop, and games, that enact and model anticolonial, resurgent, and speculative orientations to identity, politics,

culture and land. Within this section, the discussion also draws upon the resistance and resurgence themes, focussing them into creating the “imagine otherwise” potential opportunities, by mobilizing the creation of worlds beyond the settler colonial present and pointing towards “Indigenous futurities of love, joy, and justice”.

At the same time, those values press the concept of a deep relationship between the land and body. The author in this section relates the intimate connection aptly named, *Kinstillatory* relations (a neologism that combines the words *kin* and *constellation*, as it is referencing the land’s celestial plane) between human and non-human entities. As the chapter author points out, the Indigenous peoples understand land as multi-scalar: that is, it exists not only on the fixed and flattened scale of colonial geographies, but also in multiple dimensions, from the celestial to the subterranean. Hence, in the cultural art productions, the multi-scalar concept can be used to identify and recognize multi-scalar (dimensional) relationships with the land, thereby, in the words of the chapter’s author “creating instead new worlds grounded in an ethic of love,” while mobilizing the possibility of “alternative modes of social organization” that can *intervene* in “the flow of continual forms of capitalistic, extractive, and harmful relationships to the land.” In essence, this concept espouses the hope for new, more healthy Indigenous lifestyles and relationships.

In conclusion, *The Arts of Indigenous Health and Well-Being* has a wide repertoire of art-based Indigenous pedagogy that promotes Indigenous good health and well-being. It would make an excellent addition to any post-secondary institutional library as a valuable resource for any Native Studies course specializing in Indigenous health and well-being.

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