

Disturbing Drifts: Deciphering Movement in Entangled Environments

Movements of a Semiaquatic Mammal

Anishinaabe World

“I want to share the **brilliance** of my **relative**, the beaver.”

-Leanne Betasamoksake Simpson

- **What makes the beaver brilliant?**
- **How do we understand this kinship claim?**



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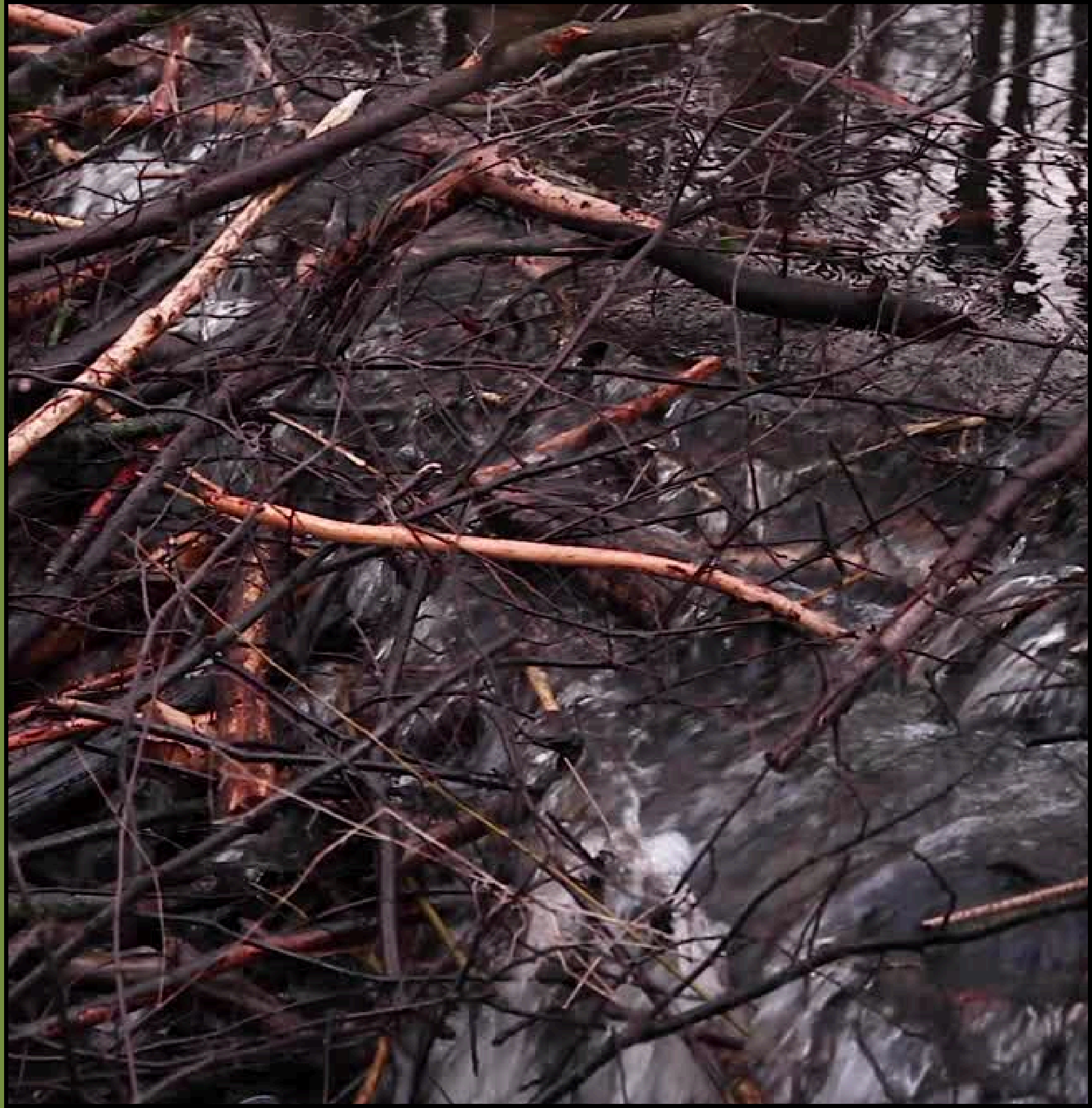
Beavers

The beaver (*Amik*) represents knowledge, wisdom, and industriousness.



Environmental Contribution

- Ecosystem engineering
- Hydrological impact
- Wetland creation
- landscape transformation
- Soil formation and nutrient cycling



Anishinaabe Epistemology

- Relational knowledge
- Intergenerational learning
- Oral traditions
- Spiritual connections
- Holistic understanding
- Experiential knowledge
- Reciprocal relationships
- knowledge passed through ceremony and practice
- **Recognition of nonhuman agency/personhood**



Environmental Contribution

“Justice emulates Beaver wisdom.”

-Leanne Betasamoksake Simpson

- **Justice for whom?**



A young woman holds a sign bearing Tina Fontaine's name during the Women's March in Vancouver, January 2019. The remains of Fontaine, a 15-year-old Indigenous girl, were found in Winnipeg's Red River eight days after she was reported missing in 2014. (Darryl Dyck/The Canadian Press)

Anishinaabe World



“My ancestors woke up each morning and created an Anishinaabe world...And they built their **economy** with the **consent** of plant and animal **nations.**”

-Leanne Betasamoksake Simpson

- **What *economic* structure?**
- **How is *consent* registered?**
- **How is *nation* defined?**

“The Mesh”



Anishinaabe

Beaver (*Amik*) as knowledge, wisdom, and industriousness



Nonhuman being

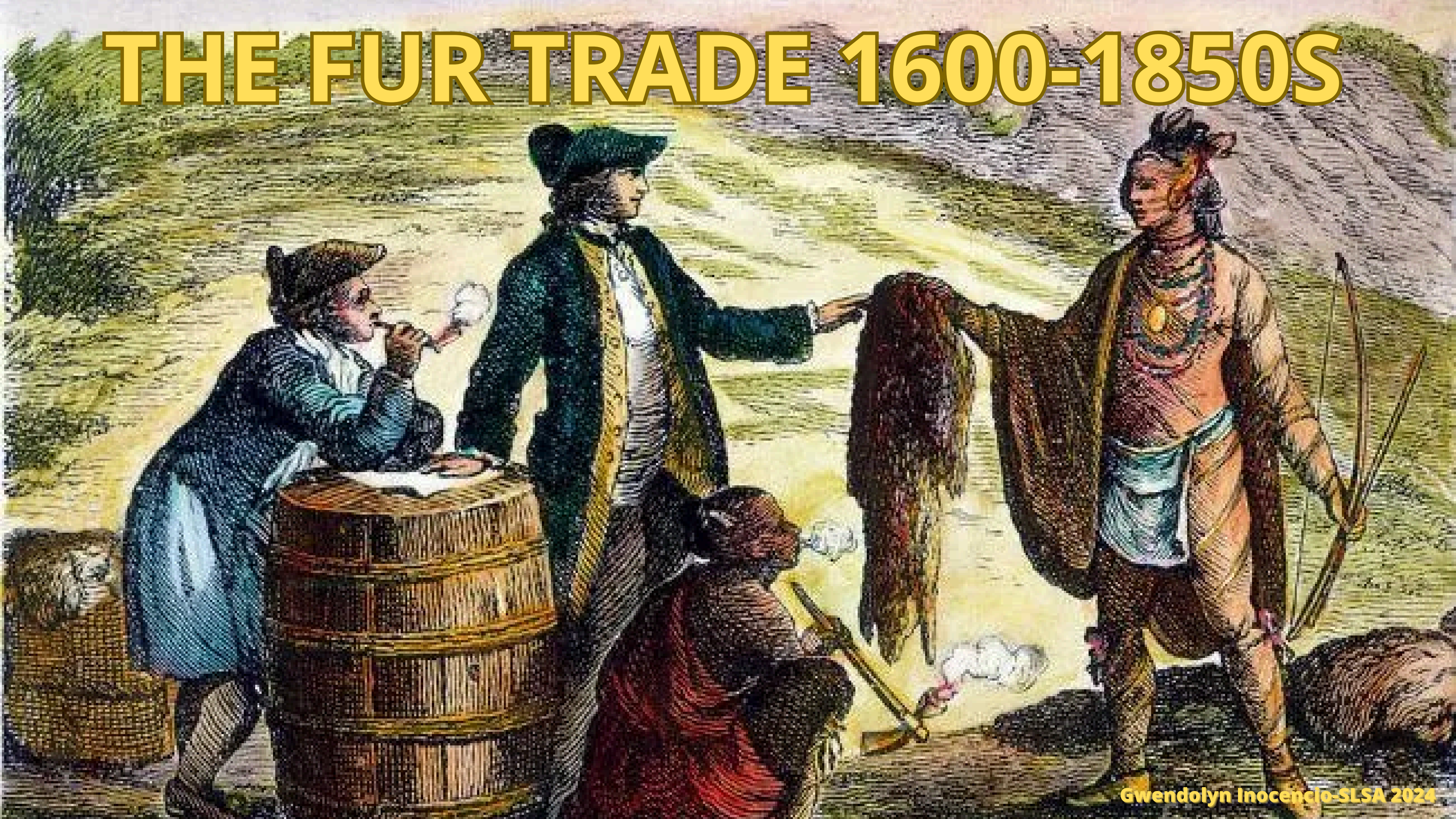
Beaver as “nation” or economic commodity?



Colonial-Scientific

Beaver as ecosystem service

THE FUR TRADE 1600-1850S



Population Numbers

- Pre-colonization (1600s)
 - 60-400 million
- By mid-1800s
 - 100,000
 - 99% decline
- Currently
 - 10-15 million
 - 15-25%

"The Mesh"



Anishinaabe

Beaver (*Amik*) as knowledge, wisdom, and industriousness



Nonhuman being

Beaver as "nation" and economic commodity?



Colonial-Scientific

Beaver as ecosystem service

Colonial View

the knowledge system
that drove the fur trade
and continues to influence
resource management



Colonial-Scientific Epistemology

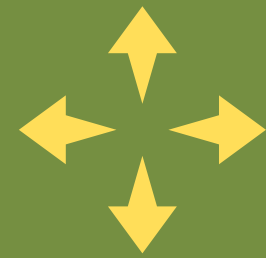
- Empirical observations
- Market-based valuation
- Scientific classification
- Written documentation
- Economic hierarchies
- Extraction-based relationships
- Nonhumans as resources/commodities



Contrasting Frameworks

Relationship to Beaver

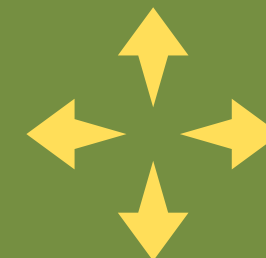
- Relative/teacher/spiritual being



- Resource/commodity/species

Knowledge Transfer

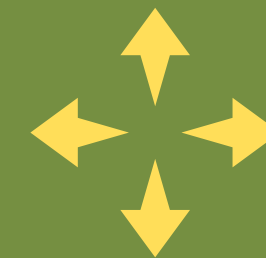
- oral tradition, lived experience



- Written documentation, scientific study, market data

Value System

- Integrated spiritual-material value



- Separated economic-scientific value

Time Perspective

- Cyclical, generational, traditional



- Linear, progressive, market driven

Environmental Contributions

- Ecosystem engineering
- Hydrological impact
- Wetland creation
- landscape transformation
- Soil formation and nutrient cycling
- **Climate change resilience**



Beavers

- Keystone species
- Temporal and spatial Scales



Shifting Beaver Legibility

- Material movement
- Ecological legibility
- Conceptual/Cultural movement
- Cultural legibility
- Scientific/Systemic movement
- Technical legibility



Disturbing Drifts



- Tension between world views
- Loss of integrated understanding
- Conflict between different forms of legibility
- Ongoing consequences of these disconnections

Future Directions

- multispecies ethnography
- biosemiotics (castorosemiotics)



Thank You!

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