

2-15-2020

Indian Present, Indian Presence

Michael Rozendal

University of San Francisco, marozendal@usfca.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jips>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [Law Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Citation Information

Rozendal, Michael (2020) "Indian Present, Indian Presence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Scholarship*: Vol. 2 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jips/vol2/iss1/14>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Scholarship by an authorized editor of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact repository@usfca.edu.

Indian Present, Indian Presence

Michael Rozendal

Rhetoric and Language, College of Arts and Sciences, University of San Francisco

You can see that Oakland is Indian if you're looking for it, and Tommy Orange asks us to look for it. You can see it if you step out on a Telegraph Avenue sidewalk, you can see it if you hop onto a bike and head down Broadway, you can see it in [Ohlone-led East Oakland gardens](#) or [Berkeley parking lots covering shellmounds](#). Looking for Indian Oakland is a potent call to action that I hope will resonate through our research and in our classrooms.

Looking *Here*

Walking through the Temescal neighborhood, perhaps it is not surprising that people are too preoccupied with the fried chicken sandwiches from [Bakesale Betty's](#) or the wood fired bagels from [Beauty's](#) or the corduroy stout from [Roses' Taproom](#) to look down, to wonder about the ground, to roll the word Temescal around their mouths.

But this ground, this word resonates with *There There's* urban Indians deeply part of a city that seems to both erase and sustain native presence. This is indigenous right now, not in some past, some lost history. "Temescal" may be a migrant term from Nahuatl that Spanish colonizers brought north, but it points to Ohlone traditions that were here long before the word.

In Orange's novel, Oakland is a space crossed by intersecting Indian lives, lives that are shadowed by history in the massacres encapsulated in the Prologue, with alcoholism and violence framing so many of the characters. But these are also lives that resist erasure, that reject genocide, that call us to see native presence *here* and *now* in our Bay Area.

And looking at the Temescal pavement, there are fresh medicine wheels in the intersections:



And bike lanes around town announce urban Indian [survance \(survival + resistance\)](#), a term coined by Anishinaabe critic Gerald Vizenor an emeritus professor of UC Berkeley:



Medicine Wheels, most associated with Plains Indians rather than Ohlone or Miwok culture, are in many ways immigrants to the Bay Area, like Temescal, like Orange's characters. The "tags" in these images may be the work of [Zachary RunningWolf](#), [Blackfeet Elder](#), [four-time candidate for Berkeley Mayor](#) and [longtime "Stop Driving" Activist](#).

Everywhere is Indian Land

What Orange, inspiring Ohlone activism, [Idle No More SF Bay](#), and so much more all point to is that Indian Land is everywhere, and can suddenly emerge as a presence even in functional spaces that we were supposed to pass through unthinking, unnoticing our mobility in the bike lanes or sidewalks.

The [Sogorea Te' Land Trust](#) is already creating spaces for Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone lands to return to "indigenous stewardship," "rematriarching" the land. They are already collecting a voluntary [Shuumi Land Tax](#) on all non-indigenous residents of the East Bay, utopian action here and now, a type of reparations even without federal recognition. There's even [Cafe Ohlone](#) above University Press Books, a "pre-contact, contemporary Ohlone restaurant in the middle of xučyun" that is [revitalizing lifeways and language](#).

The living, indigenous present is one of the challenges that Orange's novel proposes; responding to that challenge requires some introspection in our own community. How much has USF engaged with our Indian history and Indian present? We are all on unceded native land here. Even more, how much have our disciplines and our courses responded? Have they replicated erasure of native knowledges, silencing of indigenous presence?

Fifty years ago, [one of the demands of the Indian Occupiers of Alcatraz](#) (1969-1971) was the creation of a type of Native American university on the island, with a center for Native American Studies, a Spiritual Center, an Ecology Center, and "A Great Indian Training School". I see this as a call for Indian presence in all of our courses—how can native knowledge inform and perhaps transform our disciplines? Tommy Orange points to the complexities of presence and violence, of history and resistance, and this is central to our here and now.

Michael Rozendal is an Associate Professor in the Rhetoric and Language Department and Academic Director of the Undergraduate Teacher Education Center. His research spans social movements and poetry, modernism and radicalism, composition and engaged pedagogy.