Automated Extraction

Tactics of Surveillance and Targeting Indigenous Peoples at the US-Mexico Border

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Tiara Roxanne is a scholar and performance artist whose work rethinks the ethics of AI through an anticolonial, eco-feminist, and cyberfeminist lens. Their research critiques how digital technologies rely on the extraction of resources from Indigenous lands and examines how these infrastructures carry colonial legacies inscribed in land, bodies, and memory. They are the author of the forthcoming book with University of California Press (2027), which develops their concepts of *digital attunement* and *the technological haunt*. Tiara has presented at ARS Electronica (Linz), Images Festival (Toronto), Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center (NY), Trinity Square Video (Toronto), Leuphana University (Lüneberg), European Media Art Festival (Osnabrück), University of Applied Arts (Vienna), SOAS (London), SLU (Madrid), Transmediale (Berlin), Duke University (NC), Cambridge University (UK), among others.

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Dr. Tiara Roxanne

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This paper argues that automated extraction is a manifestation of settler colonialism depicted through AI-driven surveillance infrastructures. While data colonialism has long participated in the extraction and erasure of Indigenous peoples, contemporary AI-driven surveillance systems intensify these conditions through entangled modalities that continuously aggregate, classify, monitor, and intervene Indigenous, Mestizx, and migrant communities.

The danger does not lie within a singular technology itself, but within the automation granted to unstable human-technological systems to make decisions about movement, visibility, and belonging. At the US-Mexico border, these dangers become site-specific, as surveillance infrastructures intensify existing settler colonial conditions of dispossession, removal, and erasure.

She has this fear that she has no names that she has many names that she doesn't know her names she has this fear that she's an image that comes and goes clearing and darkening the fear that she's the dreamwork inside someone else's skull She has this fear that if she takes off her clothes shoves her brain aside peels off her skin that if she drains the blood vessels strips the flesh from the bone flushes out the marrow She has this fear that when she does reach herself turn around to embrace herself a lion's or witch's or serpent's head will turn around swallow her and grin She has this fear that if she digs into herself she won't find anyone that when she gets "there" she won't find notches on the trees the birds will have eaten all the crumbs she has this fear that she won't find the way back.

Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands /
La Frontera: The New Mestiza, 1987, p. 43

1. Introduction

As a Mestiza who was born on the border of Texas and Mexico, where I have never been Indigenous enough or "American" enough, I feel as though the border runs through me. And, what I mean by that, is the border is not only a line that separates territories, but also a condition that runs through the body—*through my body*. Being Mestiza is its own kind of technology and, consequently, its own kind of ceremony. This *border sensation* has always been active from a young age, and the introduction of artificial intelligence has reawakened it, leaving me to ask myself a familiar question once more: *where do I belong, but this time, within the dataset?* I begin writing about how data mining, data extraction, and thus, erasure were reinforcing colonial modalities regarding Indigenous communities in North America. When I began researching data mining and data collection practices, I continued to encounter the same pattern: the absence of Indigenous and Mestizx peoples within these frameworks.

When obtaining information from and about Indigenous communities in North America, including Mexican Indians, indios, and Indians, a term used by Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (Indian Given, 2016) to describe Indigenous peoples born on or near the border, where geography and landscape inherently influence identity and culture, the information gathered is often generalized or difficult to find. This is a subtle act of erasure in motion. For example, the U.S. census began in 1790 but excluded Indigenous peoples (Native Americans) until 1850 and did not count those who were forced to live on reservations until 1900 (Echo-Hawk, in Wade, 2020). This practice of exclusion from the census is ongoing. American Indians and Alaska Natives living on reservations continue experience being undercounted by approximately 5.64% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). This is not including those who identify as Mestizx who are not included in datasets more generally.

Due to the fact that persistent structural inequalities are embedded within digital technologies and surveillance systems, it is crucial to ask questions about accessibility and resources. What kind of technology is viable in Indigenous communities, including rural and border communities, and do most people have internet access, smartphones, and other digital resources? What epistemological resources are provided that will help them take agency over their own data and, more broadly, understand the ways in which their data is being mined and used? Do these epistemological resources support their agency within health contexts in ways that benefit health and wellbeing?

These questions are the first steps toward building modes of epistemological resistance while enabling the sovereignty of Indigenous and Mestizx peoples. This move, however, must be articulated with caution owing to the embeddedness of colonialism within digital platforms, as data mining and surveillance technologies

continue to marginalize Indigenous / Mestizx peoples. The agency of these marginalized groups is an important concern when their data is distributed online, how it is used, what it is used for, especially with regard to the growing use of surveillance technologies now.

This paper argues that automated extraction is a manifestation of settler colonialism enacted through technological surveillance infrastructures, specifically at the US-Mexico border. While data colonialism has long participated in the extraction and erasure of Indigenous peoples, surveillance systems intensify these conditions through entangled modalities that continuously aggregate, classify, monitor, and intervene upon movement, visibility, belonging and overall livelihood.

Therefore, I ask two questions: how do AI-driven surveillance systems reinforce settler colonial logics at the US-Mexico border? And how might artistic and embodied methodologies expose and challenge these systems?

2. No One Is Illegal on Stolen Land

Indigenous, First Nations, Aztecas del Norte, Atakapa, Aboriginal, Indian, American Indian, Mexican Indian, Mexican Indigenous, Mexican, Mesoamerican, Mestizo, Mestiza, Mestizx, Muscogee, Chicano, Chickasaw, Latinx, Tarascan, Tequesta, Patiri, Mayan, Purépecha, Pueblo Indian, Hasinai, Apache, Indigenous Native American, Sioux, Native, Walla Walla, Pawnee, Cheyenne, Chacato, Iñupiat, Inupiaq, Inuit, Hispanic, Saponi, Lakota, Kadohadacho, Nabedache, Nabiti, Nacogdoche, Neche, Yatasi, Chine, and Alaskan are all and only a few terms that reference pre-colonial peoples as well as those who have long-term ancestry within the North Canadian Arctic region, Canada, North and Central America. This is not to claim that the term Indigenous and the listed referential identities alongside are one and the same—it is to state that they are all pre-colonial beings with present-day long-term ancestry located within these regions. Thereafter, the individuals mentioned and referred to throughout this report using the term Indigenous people(s) are attributed to those who embody the pre-colonial existence belonging to these territories (Roxanne, 2021, pp. 147–158). This also extends to Indigenous people around the globe.

The fight for Indigenous rights and justice is ongoing. As Audra Simpson (2014, pp. 6-7) states, “this is the political language game and largely state-driven performance art that attempts to move elements of history in order to ‘move on’ from the past, to transition out of one period of history into another, better one” which is a “historical injustice.” This transition capitalizes on the displacement and re-marginalization of Indigenous peoples by actively avoiding to recognize the violence therein which resituates them as colonized subjects.

3. Automated Extraction as Settler Colonialism

I wrote heavily about data colonialism between 2017 and 2019, and now the term has become flooded with over-exemplified interpretations from white cis-men and academics who are not inherently affected by it. Therefore, it is important to not only establish my personal experience with regard to its use as a borderlands Mestiza, but also to highlight the work that has been done by myself and other Indigenous and marginalized voices prior to its appropriation.

Data colonialism draws from settler colonial structures of oppression, dispossession, and control. It is a kind of data collection that monopolizes marginalized peoples, which is harmful and consequential to everyone, but especially those who already occupy the margins, such as BIPOC communities and immigrants currently living in the United States. As Abigail Echo-Hawk, who is a citizen of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma and director of the Urban Indian Health Institute, has argued, the erasure of Indigenous peoples from datasets is a form of "data genocide" (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2021, pp. 9-14). She had also previously stated in a 2020 interview, "If you eliminate us in the data, we no longer exist" (Echo-Hawk, quoted in Wade, 2020). Not including marginalized voices and vulnerable communities who identify as Mexican Indian, Indigenous, or First Nations is an effacement that mirrors settler colonial mechanisms: identify, occupy, and erase.

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012, p. 4) have taught us that Indigenous people are often marked as "at risk" or as asterisks and excluded from datasets concerning access to healthcare, clean running water, and other fundamental resources. This discrepancy was highlighted during the peak of COVID-19, where Indigenous groups lacked access to resources such as clean running water to wash their hands because they were not included in datasets regarding need and, frankly, are still fighting for this inclusion. Simpson (2017, p. 6) reminds us that "Indigenous peoples are grappling with the fiction of justice and its commingling with recognition while pushing for justice and its commingling with the failures of recognition."

This data genocide reinterprets settler colonialism in contemporary forms. According to the Guardian article, "Exclusive: indigenous Americans dying from Covid at twice the rate of white Americans" (Lakhani, 2021), in February 2021, at least one in 475 Native Americans died during the pandemic compared to one in 825 White Americans. This is only a small example of the settler colonial violence Indigenous peoples continue to endure across both offline and online spaces. Data colonialism utilizes data-mining tools to extract information about marginalized communities, removing sovereignty and, once again, mimicking settler colonial tactics of dispossession.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Indigenous Data Sovereignty is a notion that has swept through the United States, Canada, and Australia, where Indigenous-led organizations are creating workshops and developing protocols regarding Indigenous data. These principles have been defined, shaped, and shared by First Nations peoples in Ottawa, Canada, with aims to be inclusive of the diversity across nations. This framework is called "The First Nations Principles of OCAP",[1] which stands for ownership, control, access, and possession.

Each principle bolsters Indigenous Data Sovereignty by promoting ownership of data, access to data, control over how it is shared, how it is stored, where it is stored, and what protocols of care remain intact. There are many spaces supporting the work of Indigenous Data Sovereignty; however, I refer to the First Nations Principles of OCAP as a grounding framework because of its rigor and accessibility.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS), (Raine *et al.,* 2019) more specifically, refers to the governance of Indigenous data. Indigenous data encompass information and knowledge about Indigenous individuals, collectives, entities, lifeways, cultures, lands, and resources. By initiating sovereignty over Indigenous data, Tribal Nations are reasserting their agency, refusing modes of settler colonialism, and returning information back to their communities.

IDS is an ongoing global project. However, as mechanisms of digital surveillance continue to grow alongside ICE and the integration of the Kill Cloud, it is imperative to shed light on the interconnectedness between settler colonialism and surveillance technologies while also offering contemporary insights that move us toward resistance and solidarity.

From Data Colonialism to Automated Extraction

While data colonialism has largely focused on extraction through information gathering, categorization, and ownership, contemporary forms of surveillance have expanded these conditions significantly. Data no longer simply exists as an archive of information but continues to function as an oppressor. Through predictive systems, biometric technologies, geospatial mapping, and automated targeting systems, data is transformed into mechanisms of injustice.

Automated extraction therefore extends beyond data collection itself. It is settler colonialism enacted through AI-driven surveillance infrastructures that seek to capture, classify, monitor, and ultimately remove and erase vulnerable Indigenous and Mestizx communities from their land. This instance shows us that ongoing dispossession of these communities is not disappearing but are progressing due to the expansion and use of technological infrastructures of surveillance.

[1] OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training, 2025.

While Indigenous Data Sovereignty offers important modes of refusal, agency, and care, present-day surveillance infrastructures continue to swell alongside. My concern is therefore not what is entirely new about AI systems, but rather what existing conditions of settler colonialism are being amplified through surveillance infrastructures, particularly those targeting Indigenous, Mestizx, and overall vulnerable communities in the borderlands.

Automated extraction therefore differs from data colonialism because data colonialism is only one bracket of a much larger system. While data colonialism extracts and withholds information from marginalized communities, automated extraction transforms these data points into devices that disrupt, control and erase. It is no longer simply about data collection, but about tracking, predicting, capturing, normalizing violence and oppression even further.

Extraction now occurs continuously across multiple terrains of everyday life. We see it through social media platforms, location signals, health records, biometrics, and border surveillance technologies. Within the scope of this paper, however, I focus specifically on the US-Mexico borderlands, where digital technologies are implemented to track human movement, predict behavior, and facilitate capture, deportation and erasure.

Ultimately, what is at stake is not data itself, but sovereignty, agency, and belonging. While sovereignty represents political self-determination and agency, this diminishes for those communities whose identities have historically been shaped by the borderlands. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) establishes that the borderlands have always complicated notions of belonging. AI-driven surveillance intensifies this by rendering ancestral relationships to land increasingly invisible.

Normalizing erasure does not mean that surveillance itself is new or extraordinary. Rather, it refers to the ways in which settler colonial conditions become embedded within ordinary, everyday infrastructures. It didn't stop occurring in the 1800s, it just found its way through other paradigms of control. Now, we are observing it at the borderlands and the use of digital technologies. Although surveillance is used globally and daily, these mechanisms are strengthened at the borderlands, particularly for Indigenous and Mestizx communities whose ancestral relationships are ingrained in these territories. Erasure therefore becomes difficult to perceive precisely because it is treated as ordinary or even sight unseen. The dispossession of these communities increasingly occurs through administrative, digital, and bureaucratic systems that quietly perpetuate settler colonialism.

The danger of automated extraction is not just surveillance itself, but the convergence of multiple infrastructures that work together to predict, track, capture, and erase. It is this convergence of mechanisms that are attributed to the term *the Kill Cloud* (Ling and Westmoreland, 2021).

4. The Kill Cloud at the Borderlands

The Kill Cloud is a collection of human and digital technologies used collectively as a networked infrastructure to classify, surveil, and capture. In the case of my research, I state that the Kill Cloud is used to disappear Indigenous, Mestizx and vulnerable communities on Turtle Island and specifically in the borderlands. Drawing upon the writing of Lisa Ling and Cian Westmoreland, *the Kill Cloud* (2021, p. 132) extends beyond singular technologies and instead refers to an interconnected system of automated warfare that operates through political, economic, technical, scientific, military, commercial, and cultural entanglements.

The Kill Cloud therefore moves beyond weapons themselves. It includes drones, facial recognition technologies, biometric systems, predictive policing platforms, geospatial mapping, sensors, cameras, databases, and both human and algorithmic forms of decision-making. Rather than functioning as isolated tools, these technologies operate as knotted modalities of surveillance that increasingly shape movement, visibility, and belonging.

The Kill Cloud is not a singular technology, but a relational ecosystem of technologies that work together toward tracking, prediction, and capture, which bolsters the normalization of erasure. While the term originated from a military standpoint, this paper argues that it now extends into immigration enforcement. Through ICE and the implementation of technologies such as Palantir, ImmigrationOS, ELITE, Mobile Fortify, and biometric surveillance systems, contemporary warfare has expanded into everyday life at the US-Mexico border.

In this way, automated extraction continues to reinforce modes of settler colonialism. Historical projects of dispossession, removal, and erasure are intensified through woven human-technological systems that increasingly hold authority over who belongs, who moves, how one moves, and who becomes visible.

The US-Mexico borderlands have become one of the most visible sites through which these technologies are now being implemented. As of March 2026, the execution of a smart wall began near Big Bend National Park, close to my birthplace in Terlingua, Texas. Unlike other regions of the border where physical walls have already been constructed, the area of Big Bend is designated as protected land. The smart wall has therefore been proposed as an alternative to avoid building a physical barrier that would visibly disrupt the land and rather preserve it. According to *The Texas Tribune* (2026), "U.S. Customs and Border Protection was awarded a $1.7 billion federal contract listed for border wall construction in the Big Bend region." Instead of being a 'physical wall' like most of the US-Mexico border wall, the smart wall near Terlingua will consist of "technology like cameras and sensors, along with limited, low-profile, post-on-rail barriers in strategic areas designed to restrict vehicle access while leveraging the natural barriers that already exist in the area"

(Texas Tribune, 2026). However, this logic obscures another reality: surveillance infrastructures also infiltrate ecosystems and in particular, the area of Big Bend National Park. Meaning that the project carries material consequences that often remain invisible. Beyond data collection itself, these systems rely upon extensive extractive practices embedded within the technological supply chain.

Ecologies of Surveillance: Rare Earth Elements

Rare earth elements are used in the development and execution process of digital technologies used as defense technologies through modes of surveillance, detection and capture. The use of rare elements has significantly increased alongside the evolution of 'defense technologies' used for warfare, surveillance and automation, especially regarding border patrol at the US-Mexico border wall.

Rare earth elements refer to earth materials that carry features such as 'magnetic energy density' and 'thermal stability.' These features are praised within the scope of surveillance technologies due to their strength and longevity of life. "These properties make NdFeB and SmCo magnets indispensable to military hardware: Neodymium-Iron-Boron (NdFeB) and Samarium – Cobalt (SmCo). NdFeB magnets are used in radar systems and SmCO are corrosion resistant magnets that uphold under high temperatures. "If a system involves electric motion, sensing, or high-powered electromagnetic emission, rare earth magnets are likely at its core" (Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, 2026).

Sensors, infrared cameras, digital infrastructures, and border agents continue to forcefully reorganize relationships between humans, land, animals, insects, and ecosystems while simultaneously targeting populations living near the border. The ecological costs of border surveillance therefore remain underexamined. The question is no longer whether a wall exists, but how current surveillance infrastructures quietly reconfigure ecological life itself and how they co-exist.

The extraction of rare earth elements and of data should not be understood as separate processes. Rather, both take place simultaneously through the same settler colonial infrastructures. Automated extraction therefore depends not only upon the continuous collection of information about bodies, movement, and communities, but also upon the ongoing uprooting of land itself. The minerals required to manufacture sensors, surveillance technologies, radar systems, and AI-driven tools are products of material dispossession. Land is disseminated and rare earth elements are withdrawn in order to distill data. In other words, land is extracted in order to extract data about the people that come from this land in order to remove them. Ecology is manipulated and the Indigenous communities are displaced alongside; both are forms of colonialism in present-day.

This simultaneity reveals that automated extraction extends beyond digital systems alone. It is simultaneously geological, ecological, technological, and political.

The same infrastructures that extract rare earth elements from the earth subsequently enable the extraction of stories, movement, relations, and identities from it. Material and computational extraction are therefore mutually constitutive rather than separate processes.

Importantly, rare earth elements are not simply technical resources. Within Indigenous cosmologies, land is not an inert material waiting to become infrastructure. It is a teacher, an Elder, a relation, and a story. The minerals embedded within these surveillance technologies carry histories that precede their incorporation into military hardware. They materialize from lands already shaped by Indigenous knowledge, care, ceremony, and relationships that cannot be reduced to extractable resources. The fertility held within these landscapes–the generations of hands, practices, and cosmologies that have cared for them—is dissolved once the earth itself becomes infrastructure used for automated warfare.

The implementation of the Smart Wall demonstrates that ecological violence does not disappear simply because the physical wall doesn't cover the entire border between the US and Mexico. While digital infrastructures may appear less visually disruptive than physical barriers, they nevertheless negatively impact ecological life. Sensors, infrared cameras, communication towers, drones, and surveillance frameworks alter the movements of humans, animals, insects, and ecosystems alike. Species are displaced. Migration routes are interrupted. Habitats are fragmented. Stories once again are broken and erased.

Ecological life cannot be hierarchically separated according to human importance. Insects, animals, plants, waterways, minerals, and human communities exist within relational systems of mutual dependence. The disruption of one relation inevitably impacts others. Automated extraction therefore exceeds human surveillance alone. It transforms the conditions through which ecological relations themselves continue to exist.

The border therefore becomes more than a territorial line separating nation-states. It increasingly functions as infrastructure that forcibly reorganizes relationships between land, ecology, technology, and human life. Rather than understanding land as a living relation, digital surveillance technologies translate it into military forces capable of facilitating automated extraction. It is precisely through this simultaneous extraction of land, ecology, and people that the settler colonial logics underpinning AI-driven surveillance become most visible.

The ecological costs of the Kill Cloud cannot be separated from its social costs. The border is therefore no longer simply a territorial line. Rather, it has become an active participant within the Kill Cloud itself. It is a force that continuously changes relationships between humans, digital technologies, and ecology. Ultimately, the danger of the Kill Cloud is not the existence of individual technologies themselves, but the authority we increasingly grant entangled human-technological systems to

make decisions about life. These systems do not merely observe populations; they actively fracture them while continuing to normalize settler colonial paradigms of dispossession and erasure.

The same tools that monitor, track, and target Indigenous and Mestizx peoples concurrently reorganize relationships between land, animals, insects, minerals, and ecosystems. In this way, surveillance becomes an ecological rupture. The pursuit of these technologies shows us that the border is an active participant within contemporary warfare infrastructures. It always has been a tool of warfare but now, surveillance technologies only amplify it on multifarious levels. Surveillance, in this way, extends beyond the human and into ecological life itself, further showcasing the relation between all.

ICE and Everyday Warfare

The expansion of ICE surveillance technologies demonstrates that warfare must no longer be understood as something confined to distant battlefields. Rather, military infrastructures increasingly infiltrate the spaces of everyday life, where surveillance, biometric technologies, predictive systems, and drones become integrated into administrative practices of border enforcement. The significance of this shift lies not only in the technologies themselves, but in the normalization of military logics within civilian governance, i.e., humans making decisions about the erasure of other humans.

From the perspective of Indigenous and Mestizx communities, the US-Mexico borderlands have long functioned as a site of ongoing warfare, especially when state narratives continue to highlight cartel violence. Such perspectives overlook the everyday brutalities produced through surveillance, displacement, detention, deportation, and the continuous policing of ancestral lands. The border therefore cannot be understood simply as a territorial boundary. It is lived as an ongoing condition that simultaneously shapes internal and external worlds. Identity itself is continually negotiated through processes of becoming, arrival, departure, and survival within landscapes structured by settler colonialism.

The notion of everyday warfare therefore carries two interconnected meanings. First, warfare becomes normalized through the routine presence of surveillance infrastructures that impact daily life. Second, for many Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, this condition is not new. Settler colonialism has continued to practice occupation, removal, and dispossession. Now, surveillance tools do not soften this violence, they intensify it and automate it.

The deployment of military drones, predictive surveillance systems, and interconnected technologies (the Kill Cloud) also transforms the embodied experience. Living within conditions of continuous surveillance reshapes how individuals and communities relate to one another. Rather than fostering trust, relation increasingly

becomes constrained by the awareness of being watched, of being surveilled, with the possible outcome of deportation or disappearance. Community gatherings, movement across land, and the sharing of stories all become entangled with infrastructures of surveillance. Within Indigenous feminist methodologies, relation is central to the slow work of building trust, reciprocity, and collective care. Surveillance interrupts these processes by introducing uncertainty and control which continually reshapes how communities encounter one another. In this way, automated extraction not only monitors relation but actively interferes with its possibility.

The effects of these infrastructures are therefore both political and embodied. The persistent presence of drones and surveillance technologies contributes to ongoing conditions of fear, anticipation, and unresolved trauma that become woven into everyday life. Rather than existing as singular traumatic events, these infrastructures sustain environments in which settler colonial violence is continually renewed through technological means. Everyday becomes an ongoing condition of surviving or living under continued surveillance which is an open-ended trauma event.

Automated extraction belongs within this discussion because extraction itself has always functioned as a central tactic of settler colonialism. The extraction of land, resources, stories, movement, relations, and bodies occurs through interconnected infrastructures that increasingly operate simultaneously. The border consequently becomes more than a site of enforcement; it began to function as a laboratory through which surveillance technologies are normalized. It is through these everyday practices that these tools extend and boost settler colonial paradigms. Looking deeper at ICE's use of these technologies reveals how these processes operate alongside the settler colonial modes which further demonstrates that the Kill Cloud is violently shaping the lived experience throughout the borderlands and beyond.

One recent example of this occurred in June 2025, when ICE deployed MQ-9 Predator surveillance drones over Los Angeles during anti-ICE protests, marking the first documented use of these military drones on US soil since the 2020 George Floyd protests in Minneapolis (Fisher, 2025). The use of MQ-9 ('multi-use unmanned aerial vehicle') predators fly at around 20,000 feet and can stream live video feed to various government agencies including ICE (Fisher, 2025).

The predator has advanced surveillance technology beyond live stream video due to its integration of an artificial intelligence program called Vehicle and Dismount Exploitation Radar, or VaDER. VaDER is a radar sensor developed by Northrop Grumman for the U.S. military and Department of Homeland Security. VaDER functions in two modes Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) which provides high resolution images of stationary 'targets,' and Ground Moving Target Indicator (GMTI) which 'detects and tracks moving 'targets' by identifying the Doppler shift

in radar signals.' Both modes provide 'real-time' data to ground commanders. VaDER technology is designated as a 'defense' technology' that is used by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2025) to detect and track any 'suspected illegal activity across the U.S. Mexico border.'

While VaDER is frequently described as a radar system capable of detecting "moving targets" in real time, I argue that the implications of this terminology extend beyond technical functionality. Through AI surveillance infrastructures, mobility increasingly becomes evidence of potential "threat" rather than an ordinary condition of human life.

Movement is no longer neutral. Movement becomes evidence. Tracking movement becomes a form of control. It's important to note, however, that for Indigenous and nomadic communities, movement is and always has been relational. Seasonal migration, kinship networks, ceremonial practices, and relationships to land preceded the imposition of colonial borders. VaDER therefore does more than monitor movement, it criminalizes movement itself. In doing so, this technological surveillance amplifies settler colonial logics by redefining relational movement as suspicious or as evidence for capture. What has historically functioned as relation becomes detection, tracking, and capture.

Perhaps most significantly, VaDER transforms humans into signals. Within the borderlands, an Indigenous / Mestizx body is no longer encountered through its history, relationships, ancestral connection to land, or lineage. It becomes data. It becomes a signal. It becomes a moving target. It becomes a blip upon a surveillance interface. The Mestizx body is possessed through infrastructures of surveillance while simultaneously being dispossessed of its story. Along with that story is knowledge within the body: its memories, relations, ancestry, and belonging. Human bodies become increasingly legible to machines while simultaneously becoming less legible or cared for by other humans. This reduction, from body to data, displays how automated extraction extends settler colonial models into present-day surveillance tools.

Palantir

Other defense technologies used by ICE are specifically under the umbrella of Palantir, which is a military intelligence tool. Palantir, founded in 2003 by Peter Thiel, Alex Karp, Joe Lonsdale, and Stephen Cohen, has become one of the most influential military intelligence companies operating within contemporary surveillance infrastructures. It has numerous products and platforms that assist various government agencies, ICE included. The two main software platforms are Gotham, which is designed for government clientele and Foundry which is aimed at more health and finance-based agencies (Palantir, 2025).

Unlike VaDER, which uses movement for capture, Palantir extends automated extraction through the aggregation of data across multiple infrastructures. By combining biometric information, travel histories, communication records, family relationships, geospatial data, and institutional databases, Palantir creates the appearance that more data produces clarity, protection or even safety. Data is presented as mechanisms of safety, protection, and security while simultaneously becoming infrastructures through which surveillance, capture, and dispossession are intensified.

Foundry focuses on helping businesses use data to do things like manage inventory, monitor factory lines, and track orders. Gotham, meanwhile, is an investigative tool specifically for police and government clients, designed to connect people, places, and events of interest to law enforcement. There's also Apollo, which is like a control panel for shipping automatic software updates to Foundry or Gotham, and the Artificial Intelligence Platform, a suite of AI-powered tools that can be integrated into Gotham or Foundry (Wired). A former Palantir staffer who has used Gotham says that "in just minutes, a law enforcement official or government analyst can map out who may be in a person's network and see documents that link them together" (Haskins, 2025). The danger therefore lies not simply in the quantity of data being collected, but in the illusion that such collection exists for human protection.

Rather than protecting vulnerable communities, these infrastructures operate against them. They create the appearance of objectivity while concealing the political decisions embedded within their design. Automated extraction therefore functions not as neutral but as a continuation of settler colonial logics through computational means.

Perhaps most significantly, Palantir transforms relation into extraction. Within Indigenous and Mestizx communities, relationships are not merely social connections, but sacred practices grounded in ceremony, kinship, reciprocity, movement, seasonal knowledge, and collective care. Travel is not simply mobility but relation to land. Community is not simply a network but an ongoing practice of belonging. Palantir reinterprets these relational systems through entirely different epistemological terms. Kinship becomes network analysis. Ceremony becomes association. Travel becomes behavioral prediction. Community becomes a network of suspicion. For example, contact with family members, movement between ceremonial spaces, entering and leaving protected spaces, all within a network, which allows relational proximity to become a basis of surveillance.

In doing so, Palantir does more than collect information. It dispossesses identity while simultaneously reconstructing it through the settler colonial gaze. Stories become datasets. Relations become probabilities. Belonging becomes risk. Identity

itself is no longer understood through ancestry, community, ceremony, or lived experience, but through computational classifications that serve the political logics of the state. What once functioned as sacred knowledge becomes computational evidence capable of informing surveillance, intervention, and capture.

Importantly, Palantir also demonstrates that the border no longer exists solely at the wall itself. Rather, the border operates through distributed digital infrastructures that remain largely invisible to those who are not directly affected by them. While the Smart Wall materializes surveillance through sensors, cameras, and drones, Palantir extends these infrastructures into cloud-based systems that quietly organize, classify, and govern populations through data. The border therefore shifts from a territorial line into an infrastructural condition embedded within databases, algorithms, and predictive systems. It is specifically through these largely invisible infrastructures that automated extraction continues to normalize contemporary forms of settler colonial violence.

ELITE

Another surveillance platform used by ICE is "ImmigrationOS." In April 2025, Palantir developed the application particularly for ICE's use. Immigration OS is designed for three main functions: (1) to streamline the identification and apprehension of individuals prioritized for removal such as "violent criminals," gang members, and visa overstays; (2) to accurately track and report self-deportations with "near real-time visibility:" and (3) to make deportation logistics more efficient by improving how individuals are identified and removed from the U.S. Palantir is expected to deliver a prototype by September 2025 (Immigration Policy Tracking Project, 2025).

This surveillance platform enables the usage of the ELITE (Enhanced Lead Identification & Targeting for Enforcement) app which offers "real-time tracking." More specifically, ELITE is able to offer geospatial mapping, resembling that of Google Maps, this allows ICE agents to target neighborhoods and individuals by drawing on the map. ELITE also assigns "address confidence scores," which attribute a score to the person's address, indicating how likely it is that the person is currently living at that address (Cox, 2026). It also shows how many individuals with an "immigration nexus" are in the area. "A nexus could mean any history of contact with immigration officials," which obviously extends to anyone who is considered a naturalized citizen as well (Levin, 2026).

ELITE aggregates data from different government and commercial sources, including from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and CLEAR, a commercial investigative data platform operated by Thomson Reuters (Cox, 2026). The implementation of data

from the HHS, USCIS and commercial data socials is cross-referenced across various databases. The use of data across this terrain of Health data to social data raises significant concern around privacy.

While technologies such as VaDER and Palantir use movement and data, ELITE extends automated extraction through practices of classification. By combining facial recognition, relational analysis, biometric information, and migration data, ELITE does more than collect information about individuals. It categorizes them according to computational systems that increasingly determine who becomes visible, suspicious, or deportable.

Within the context of the US-Mexico borderlands, I argue that these systems are not simply collecting information about migrants but about Indigenous peoples whose ancestral relationships to these territories long predate the border itself. Unlike community knowledge, which understands identity through relation, ancestry, ceremony, and lived experience, ELITE translates identity into administrative categories. Stories dissolve into classifications. Complexity dissolves into computational categories. For example, ELITE's "immigration nexus" reduces one's complex history, movement and relation into a single bureaucratic classification. The heart of lived experience is diluted and removed, leaving only the administrative identity required by the state or governing force. Identity is not narrated by communities but increasingly reconstructed through settler colonial systems of classification embedded within digital technologies.

Importantly, these systems simultaneously create the appearance of technological neutrality while reproducing colonial forms of categorization. Facial recognition systems remain deeply contested for their documented inaccuracies, yet their classifications increasingly inform decisions with profound consequences. Rather than correcting historical injustices, these technologies assert them by inlaying colonial assumptions within computational infrastructures that appear objective only because they are automated.

ELITE's architecture requires identity to fit within predefined boxes (Cox, 2026). And within Indigenous cosmologies, identity emerges through stories, relationships, ancestry, ceremony, and community. One asks individuals to become categories. The other understands them as living relations. It is this conflict that demonstrates how automated extraction continues to reproduce settler colonial violence through these surveillance systems which is also represented in the app called Mobile Fortify currently being used by ICE.

Mobile Fortify

Mobile Fortify is used to scan faces without consent and create a match of the photographed person. The output shows a match of who the person might be according to its database scan which lists details such as date of entry and exit in the

US. The 'Super Query' (Cox, 2025) of data extends to immigration status, address, HHS and IRS information. It functions by expanding photos and biometric data that DHS collects at the ports of entry as well as ICE 'encounters,' which also includes fingerprints.

This technology is not bound to distance and can initiate facial capture hundreds of miles from the US border, providing DHS access to nonconsensual facial prints of people not within the US border territory. Though this technology has been used by ICE to identify faces of people in order to verify their immigration status, it does not actually verify the identity of people—rather, it generates matches, not confirmations. Fortify converts a photo of someone's face into a 'mathematical template' and returns identities of people who score high enough to match.

Take into consideration, when ICE not only racialized a woman because "she was speaking Spanish," and in the presence of others "who appeared to be non-citizens," they took one photo of her, which did not produce a match. And after calling the name, "Maria, Maria," to which she did not respond, they forced her into another position in order to take the photo from a different angle which made her scream in pain, and once again, it did not get a match but rather produced a "maybe." It operates at a massive scale under "imperfect conditions" (Cameron and Varner, 2026).

Another recent occurrence using ELITE, according to a Guardian report (Levin, 2026), an ICE agent identified as JB followed a van from the home of someone in a 'nexus' area. According to the report, "JB found it suspicious that the driver was making multiple stops, saying: "You don't know if it's human trafficking or smuggling (...) the fact that the occupants were only speaking Spanish during stop seemed to confirm there as smuggling or harboring of people that were not supposed to be in the United States," JB said.

In the same raid, another ICE agent, arrested MJMA who had entered the US with a valid visa. They ran her face through Mobile Fortify and though it produced a "match," the ICE agent testified, "I wasn't sure if it was her or not." Even though MJMA had entered the US legally, JB's team inaccurately recorded otherwise: that she had entered the US unlawfully. She was later released without explanation and left to find her own way home back to Oregon from Washington State (Levin, 2026).

This instance is not the first nor the last. Reporting across platforms has shown that ICE agents are taking photos of civilians which are added to a database without any consent (Cameron and Varner, 2026). Other reports illustrate racialization at play, where ICE agents are using accent, perceived ethnicity, or skin color to not only escalate encounters but to also initiate face scanning, which has later led to many raids and unlawful detentions (Ulloa, 2026). The reinforcement of settler colonial tactics of dispossession therefore continues in practice, illustrating how the Kill Cloud operationalizes forms of erasure through apps like Mobile Fortify.

Mobile Fortify also extends automated extraction through facial recognition technologies that claim certainty. However, rather than producing definitive forms of identification, these systems frequently generate probabilistic assessments resulting in detrimental and violent mistakes. Within the context of border enforcement, "maybe" is not enough. Uncertainty is dangerous when it is permitted to shape decisions surrounding human life, deportation, and overall belonging.

The violence of probability therefore lies not only in technological inaccuracy but in the unequal distribution of its consequences. The uncertainty belongs to the algorithm, yet the consequences belong to the person standing before it. Individuals who are already in profoundly vulnerable positions absorb the risks generated by computational systems, while the infrastructures producing those risks hold zero accountability. Probability becomes another mechanism through which automated extraction reproduces racialization, dispossession, and settler colonial violence.

Importantly, Mobile Fortify demonstrates that facial recognition does not simply identify individuals; it reconstructs them through biometric calculation. The face no longer functions as a site of relation, recognition, ancestry, or identity. Instead, it becomes a biometric key through which systems of automated extraction estimate the probability of deportation. Identity, belonging, and community are increasingly translated into mathematical outputs whose uncertainty is often obscured by the appearance of technological precision.

In many areas of public life, decisions carrying profound consequences demand rigorous standards of evidence and accountability. Yet within border surveillance infrastructures, probabilistic outputs increasingly inform decisions that may fundamentally alter a person's life.

Ultimately, Mobile Fortify displays that automated extraction does not merely classify or surveil bodies. It redistributes uncertainty and thus normalizes it too. Computational systems predict ambivalently while Indigenous peoples and vulnerable communities bear the ongoing trauma event of uncertainty.

5. The Decolonial Gesture and Artistic Practice Methodologies

> Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content.
>
> Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, p. 45

Not only does the integration of automation and digital surveillance technologies underline and contemporize settler colonialism, but it also awakens lineages of intergenerational trauma that Indigenous peoples have carried since what many of my Elders refer to as the apocalypse—the arrival of settlers on Turtle Island. I use this term intentionally, distinguishing it from contemporary political rhetoric that deploys the idea of an impending apocalypse to justify further militarization and violence. For in Indigenous communities, the apocalypse has already occurred.

Bringing forth my work on intergenerational trauma, I argue that the colonized body—and more specifically the Indigenous and Mestizx body—not only carries the trauma of previous generations but also continues to experience its reactivation. Trauma is not a singular historical event (Levine, 2015). It is ongoing. The trauma of settler colonialism lives in the body, and contemporary infrastructures of surveillance, automated extraction, and digital erasure become mechanisms through which these histories are repeatedly reactivated. The body remembers what digital systems often refuse to acknowledge.

The Decolonial Gesture

Frantz Fanon (1963) reminds us that decolonization "is a historical process." It cannot emerge through magical thinking, symbolic declarations, or simple gestures of inclusion. Rather, it requires a fundamental transformation of colonial relations. This understanding remains central to my work.

Following Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's (2012) insistence that decolonization is not a metaphor, I therefore understand artistic research not as a mechanism for achieving decolonization itself, but as an embodied anti-colonial gesture that creates spaces of collective reckoning with ongoing settler colonial conditions. This

distinction is particularly important within contemporary institutions that increasingly deploy the language of "decolonizing" museums, technologies, or AI while leaving colonial structures of land, sovereignty, and power intact.

I use the term *gesture* intentionally. A gesture does not claim completion, nor does it claim to have achieved decolonization. Rather, it describes an orientation—a movement toward anti-colonial futures through embodied practice. Drawing upon Walter Mignolo's understanding of epistemic disobedience and the decolonial gesture (Mignolo, 2011), artistic research becomes a practice of refusal that interrupts dominant epistemological systems while creating alternative spaces through which embodied, relational, and situated forms of knowledge may emerge.

Within the context of automated extraction and AI-driven surveillance technologies operating throughout the US-Mexico borderlands, artistic research therefore becomes a mode of responding to ongoing settler colonial conditions. It creates collective spaces of reckoning, refusal, and response grounded not in solving colonialism, but in making its contemporary manifestations visible, embodied, and impossible to ignore. Such responses become practices of what I understand as *haunting back*: collective refusals of disappearance that reassert relationships between bodies, land, memory, and community.

Artistic research therefore becomes not simply a methodology for communicating research findings, but a methodology for producing knowledge itself. By expanding what counts as knowledge through imagination, embodiment, witnessing, and relationality, it creates possibilities for acknowledging ongoing settler colonial conditions while gesturing toward anti-colonial futures that remain unfinished.

Artistic Research Practice

Artistic research takes center stage for me when it comes to working within heavy topics that especially affect me personally. It allows me to softly work between the scientific and the creative, it’s a space where I get to imagine and expand.

Scientific research offers room to think through various methodologies for understanding social, political, and technological systems, and artistic research expands these inquiries through imagination, embodiment, and relational ways of knowing. Rather than opposing science, artistic research, for me, enables forms of knowledge production that conventional academic methodologies often overlook. It creates space for critical imaginaries, embodied reflection, and collective inquiry while positioning the body not simply as an object of research, but as a site through which knowledge itself is produced.

For me, artistic research is also a practice of expanding the sacred imagination. Working through my own origin story, birth story, data story, and ongoing questions of belonging within the borderlands, artistic practice becomes a space through which I remain in relation with ancestors, future generations, and forms of

knowledge that exceed computational systems. As Ruha Benjamin (2024) asks, "What if imagination is not only a muscle we can stretch and strengthen, or a skill we can practice and hone? What if our imagination is also a sacred space where we can connect with ourselves, our ancestors, even future generations... a place where poetic knowledge can emerge?" Artistic research therefore challenges not only what we already may know, but it asks us what actually counts as knowledge.

My own artistic practice emerges through Indigenous feminist methodologies, practice-led research, and community-based approaches grounded in relationality and care. Working across film, textile, sound, movement, breath, and performance, I investigate the entanglements between settler colonialism, surveillance infrastructures, ecological disruption, and intergenerational trauma. These methodologies do not seek to illustrate theory after it has been produced elsewhere. Rather, they generate knowledge through the creative process itself.

The body remains central to this methodology because I understand it as the first technology. Within digital infrastructures, data provides information about movement, behavior, navigation, and use. Data tells stories about individuals and populations. The body, however, is not simply another dataset. The body is a story. It carries memory, sensation, relation, trauma, joy, and ancestral knowledge that exceed computational forms of measurement. In this way, the body itself becomes a living archive composed of multiple forms of knowledge that cannot be fully translated through quantitative systems alone.

My artistic practice does not just simply communicate research findings; it creates the conditions through which research may be experienced relationally. While my academic writing is about conceptual analysis, my artistic research invites participants into embodied forms of knowing that cannot be accessed through language alone, especially because language fails us, all the time. Rather than positioning audiences as distant observers, my installations, performances, and films ask them to become witnesses who encounter surveillance through their own bodies.

Each encounter therefore begins with the senses. In my installations, participants first come across textiles that evoke bodies, bloodlines, borders, and lineages. Red fabric functions multifariously, as material and as an embodied archive carrying histories of relation, rupture, and survival. Sound compositions generated through the sonification of publicly available Smart Wall data create another mode of encounter. This aims to translate surveillance infrastructures into frequencies that are no longer simply visual but bodily, sensated, embodied. Instead of explaining the violence of automated extraction, these materials invite participants to inhabit its affective dimensions within their own bodies, with their senses, with touch, smell, sight, etc.

Similarly, my film practice begins before the screen itself. Participants are first invited to smell and touch sweetgrass or corn, returning attention to their own bodies through scent and touch before encountering moving images. This gesture is intentionally simple. Sweetgrass and corn both evoke fertility, relation, reciprocity, and care while simultaneously unsettling assumptions that violence must always appear visually spectacular. A place may smell fertile, feel alive, and remain profoundly shaped by ongoing warfare. The borderlands therefore become perceptible not only through what is seen, but through what is sensed.

The body is the first technology (Roxanne, 2026). Breath therefore occupies a central place throughout my methodology. As I often state during my performances, breath functions as a comma to the body. It interrupts continuous cognitive attention and gently returns participants to embodied awareness. Becoming conscious of one's own breathing is not an escape from surveillance but a reorientation toward the body as the first technology. From this place of embodied attention, participants may begin to recognize not only the infrastructures surrounding them but also their own relationships to fear, trauma, relation, and care, etc.

I also like to think about witnessing as part of the encounter I invite participants to experience. Watching often maintains distance between observer and observed. Witnessing, by contrast, is an ethical practice grounded in acknowledgment, reciprocity, and care. To witness another is to remain present with what is difficult without reducing it to spectacle. Throughout my artistic practice, witnessing becomes an Indigenous feminist methodology through which relation is slowly rebuilt rather than extracted. It asks participants not simply to consume representations of surveillance but to recognize themselves as already entangled within its relational conditions, they are also part of the surveillance.

Ultimately, for me, artistic research produces forms of relational knowledge that cannot emerge through academic language alone. It does not replace theory but expands the imaginary and future possibilities by creating encounters through which bodies, land, memory, and community become active participants in knowledge production. It is through these embodied encounters that witnessing becomes possible, where relationality grows, where care continues, where space is held rather than destroyed or extracted. Since automated extraction translates relational ways of being into computational systems of governance, control, violence and erasure, my artistic practice attempts to create the conditions through which those relational worlds may once again be felt, witnessed, and remembered.

Whether working through film, performance, keynote lectures, textiles, sound, breath, or movement, I invite participants to first witness themselves. This witnessing does not necessarily require active participation with others. Instead, it begins by asking participants to notice their own breathing, bodily sensations, listening, and presence. Anchoring participants within their own bodies creates conditions

through which they may access knowledge that is not solely intellectual, but embodied. Witnessing therefore becomes an act of relation. It builds trust, care, reciprocity, and acknowledgment while remaining grounded within Indigenous feminist methodologies.

Within my artistic practice I might therefore ask: *How do we encounter embodied experiences in digital space? How does the body become data? What knowledges and memories inform our movement through digital space? What kinds of collective experience and encounter are possible through data visualization? What gestures of togetherness become possible in digital space without appropriating Indigenous traditions or ceremony? Also, what gestures of colonization do our existing digital systems continue to reinforce?*

The intention is not simply to communicate information about surveillance technologies or settler colonialism. Rather, it is to create embodied encounters that remain with participants long after the experience has ended. I understand this as another form of attunement. When participants experience an embodied response, the body stores that encounter and remembers it. Knowledge therefore becomes something lived rather than merely understood. Empathy, acknowledgment, relation, and care emerge not simply through representation, but through embodied experience itself.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that automated extraction is a contemporary manifestation of settler colonialism enacted through surveillance infrastructures. Rather than functioning as isolated technologies, contemporary systems of automation operate through entangled human and digital infrastructures that increasingly shape movement, visibility, belonging, and sovereignty. Through the concept of the Kill Cloud, I have declared that surveillance extends beyond observation alone. It becomes a relational infrastructure through which historical projects of dispossession, extraction, and erasure continue to be reproduced within the US-Mexico borderlands.

At the same time, this paper has stated that artistic research offers another way of producing knowledge about these systems. By expanding scientific inquiry through imagination, embodiment, relationality, and witnessing, artistic research creates possibilities for understanding forms of violence that exceed computational systems alone. The Indigenous / Mestizx body (and the human body more generally) is not simply another dataset to be interpreted. It is a living archive through which histories of settler colonialism, surveillance, and intergenerational trauma continue to be experienced, remembered, and transformed.

I therefore understand artistic research not as a mechanism for achieving decolonization itself, but as a way of accessing embodied anti-colonial gestures that create spaces of collective reckoning with ongoing settler colonial conditions. Such gestures do not resolve colonial violence, nor do they replace the material work of land restitution, sovereignty, or Indigenous self-determination. Rather, they create embodied conditions through which participants may witness, acknowledge, and respond to the contemporary manifestations of colonial power.

Ultimately, automated extraction seeks to render bodies increasingly predictable, governable, and erasable through these infrastructures. Artistic research responds differently. It insists that bodies remain as sites of memory, relation, imagination, and refusal. If automated extraction seeks to erase, artistic research insists upon remembering. It is through this ongoing gesture that I bolster possibilities for anti-colonial futures that remain unfinished.

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